



# Initial assessment report for Zabljak and Cetinje





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# INTRO- DUCTI- ON

On a national level, Montenegro first became member of Open government partnership (OGP) in 2012, but now, for the first time ever, cities and municipalities from our country have the opportunity to be part of this initiative. More specifically four municipalities: Bar, Cetinje, Plav and Zabljak are in the process of application for membership in OGP Local.

That process puts obligation, but also gives opportunity and motivation to these municipalities to implement principals of OGP and, more broadly, good governance in general. Those principals are in this context particularly applied to five areas. Those are: digitalization, citizen participation, gender equality, anticorruption and environment protection.

Active Zone in this process acts as a local monitoring body for Cetinje and Zabljak. Therefore, we are actively involved in the attempt of these municipalities to become members of OGP Local from the very beginning and we will continue to support their aspirations in this regard until the finalization of the whole process. As a local monitoring body our main role is to provide independent and impartial look regarding adoption and implementation of Local Action Plans during

the whole flow of this process and also to give recommendations and provide support for improvement if necessary.

In that sense this report is intended to be an overview of the current progress of Zabljak municipality and Old Royal Capital Cetinje towards their membership in Open Government Partnership (OGP) Local. With this report we will provide summary of what has been done so far, main obstacles and challenges with which they face and what lies ahead.

For both Cetinje and Zabljak we focused our analysis on several aspects of creation and implementation of Local Action Plans. We analyzed current progress, inclusivity and transparency of the process, sustainability of the proposed LAPs, collaboration with other institutions and stakeholders, communication of the whole process with broader public as well as next planned activities.

In the final part of this report we will provide recommendations for improvement in the implementations of LAPs as well as for better alignment of Zabljak and Cetinje with values and principles of OGP in general.

# METHO- DOLO- GY

Our preparation for making of this report began with a desk research which was dominantly focused on thorough analysis of Local Action Plans of both Cetinje and Zabljak. Also we analyzed web sites of these municipalities as well as their social network accounts in order to familiarize ourselves with all activities they have taken and promoted that are related to the process of the adoption and implementation of their respective LAPs.

Besides that, we also analyzed other aspects of their work that are related to this process and OGP principles in general. In this regard we focused on their cooperation with local civil society organizations, inclusion of citizens in decision making on local level, transparency of work of these municipalities, etc.

Next step was organization of on interview meetings/focus groups with representatives of local self-governments and local NGOs involved in this process. We sent letters to leaders of multi-sector forums in both municipalities about our intent to organize these meetings and asked them to inform about them all local stakeholders involved in the process. We received positive response in a very short notice from both Cetinje and Zabljak.

Based on desk research, but also on our previous knowledge about requirements and goals of this process, we created a questionnaire that would guide us through these meetings/focus groups.

**Questionnaire was dived in 10 clusters designed to provide semi-structured group interviews. Clusters of questions are reflective of our intention to get responses to 10 sub-areas related to adoption and implementation of LAPs in two municipalities. Those areas are: Current Progress and Challenges; Prioritization and Alignment with other local strategic documents; Inclusivity and Participation; Transparency and Accountability; Capacity and Resources for implementation; Sustainability and Long-Term Impact; Collaboration and Partnership; Communication and Public Awareness; Lessons Learned and Best Practices from other local self-governments which already went or are currently going through a same process; Next Steps and Timeline.**

We conducted planned group interviews in both municipalities which gave us invaluable inputs for this report, but also for our future involvement in this process in general. Unfortunately, in both Zabljak and Cetinje there were no interested local NGOs to discuss this issue with us. About reasons for that, but

also possible solutions to prevent that from happening in similar occasions in the future we will deal below throughout this report.

However, information we gained from representatives of local self-governments involved in this process, combined with findings from desk research, provided sufficient inputs and enabled us to create comprehensive and substantial initial assessment report.

# ASSESSMENTS FOR MUNICIPALITIES



## **ZABLJAK**

The Municipality of Zabljak, as one of the pioneering local governments in Montenegro, has, along with three other municipalities, joined the Open Government Partnership (OGP) initiative to enhance its decision-making processes and strengthen citizen participation in five above mentioned areas.

In this context, the adoption and implementation process of the Local Action Plan (LAP) for OGP Local represents a crucial step towards achieving these objectives. This section will provide a detailed analysis of each segment of this process, identification of key challenges, and in general abroad assessment of the whole process. As we already mentioned in section dedicated to the methodology of this report, methods we used were desk research and group meetings. When it comes to Zabljak, part related to the desk research required more time and effort because of the design of the official municipal website which is hard to browse and not user friendly.

The representatives from Municipality of Žabljak highlighted good collaboration with the International Republican Institute (IRI) which has facilitated the creation of a framework for preparing and implementing the LAP for OGP Local. This collaboration not only ensured technical support but also contributed to raising awareness about the importance of openness, transparency, and inclusiveness in local governance.

Efforts were made in order to make the LAP adoption process as thorough and inclusive as possible. The multi-sector forum, composed of representatives from the local administration, and civil society organizations, actively participated in defining priorities and activities of the LAP. Through a series of meetings and consultations, from the first boot-camp to MSF meetings afterwards, key areas for enhancing openness and transparency in local governance were identified. Still, despite the fact that platform for participation was open and encouraging for broader community to participate, effects were very limited.

There was only one representative from local CSOs that was initially interested for participation in multi-sector forum, but even he attended only its initial meetings. Therefore, as the process of adoption and implementation went on participation of local CSOs was practically non-existent. Also, public debate about LAP was organized by Zabljak municipality, but there was no interest for participation in it from the local community. Through desk research and group interview

with representatives from local government we came to the conclusion that the most important reason behind this low interest from local civil society is underdevelopment of local NGO sector.

There are no organizations that focus on good governance and organizations whose work might be connected to some specific areas of LAP are not professional organizations and they do not have enough capacity to be a part of this process. Development of local civil sector is hampered by insufficient funds allocated for this purpose by local authorities. Also, municipal procedures and priorities in this field are designed in a way that funds which are allocated for local NGOs are only available to specific organizations that work with vulnerable groups like elderly and people with disabilities. Because of all of this, process of adoption and implementation of LAP in Zabljak is deprived of more substantial contribution from local civil and non-governmental sector.

The implementation of the LAP faces a range of challenges, with the most pronounced one being limited human resources and financial resources. This required changes from the original LAP that Zabljak intended to create, so that it is adjusted to available resources as well as specific local needs. Planned activities, particularly in the field of environmental protection, require adequate resources and expertise for their execution. Crucial activity in that area of LAP is inventory of illegal buildings on the territory of Zabljak municipality. Local government does not possess capacities

for such a major undertaking. However, we complement proposed solution for this issue presented to us by local officials. Local government provided funds for publication of public call on a national level on which private companies from entire country, those that have necessary capabilities and expertise for this kind of task, can apply. Company with best offer will be selected and this complex task will be outsourced to them.

If public call and realization of this activity end up successfully, that can be a good example of utilization of private sector capabilities and their involvement in achieving goals set out in LAPs. We emphasize that efforts need to be intensified to raise citizens' awareness of the OGP initiative and the importance of their participation in decision-making processes. Insufficient citizen awareness and knowledge about LAP, OGP Local in general and importance of it for everyday life of Zabljak residents potentially can represent an additional challenge. Local government through their existing channels of communication notifies citizens about all activities related to process, which is a good step in overcoming that potential challenge. At the same time local government is vary that more proactive measures can be taken to familiarize people of Zabljak with this process.

They also agree that mechanisms need to be established for actively involving citizens in monitoring the implementation of the local action plan, as well as collecting their feedback and suggestions, so that they can

make adjustments of LAP if necessary.

For Zabljak, additional value of LAP is that it has impact and significance even independently from the process of joining OGP Local initiative. To be more specific, most important document for every local government in Montenegro is multi-year Strategic Development Plan which defines priorities and activities of municipality in forthcoming 2-4 years. Zabljak currently does not have that plan. Previous one expired and new one was not approved by national authorities. Therefore, local authorities in Zabljak decided to use their LAP as a basis for creating a new local SDP. Also on a positive side, Zabljak has active local anticorruption plan. Measures from that plan are either complementary or overlapping with LAP measures in that area, which should be reaffirming commitment to completing obligations that are taken related to anticorruption.

The sustainability of implemented measures is crucial for the long-term success of the OGP Local initiative in the Municipality of Zabljak. LAP has several points which provide solid basis for long term sustainability. Direction for reporting corruption will be made during LAP implementation, but it will also remain in place after lap expires. Also, support for women's entrepreneurship proposed through LAP is planned, if it shows positive results, to become long-term program of local government. One of the aspects of this process in which there is significant room for improvement is involvement of vulnerable groups. Needs of



these groups were not prioritized during the creation of the LAP. There was no involvement of people with disabilities in creation of LAP and no measures directly target needs of that group. There is intention from local authorities to adapt new website to people with impaired vision, but is dependent on finances and is not guaranteed. It is also admitted that youth needs were insufficiently taken into account in the creation of this LAP, although some separate mechanisms aimed at supporting them exist on local level, such as Youth in business. Local women are targeted with this LAP. One of LAP priorities is gender equality, specifically supporting local women small businesses.

There was no concrete cooperation with other possibly relevant stakeholders in the country, such as government institutors, prominent NGOs etc., but some good models have been noted and seen as examples that can be used by those who implement LAP. For instance, we have been told that national parliament is one of the institutions they look up to when it comes to transparency of work. Also good practices from more developed cities that are already part of OGP Local are used as models of what Zabljak would want to achieve. Most prominent example is using Madrid as a role-model in the area of digitalization.

As implementation of the LAP has not yet officially begun, there is no detailed plan of implementation. Specific monitoring plan also does not exist at the time, which is also another point for improvement in the next

stages of this process. However, we have been informed about specific next steps that will be taken in LAP implementation in short term. Main focus will be on creation of the new website, which will also be modified to serve as a substitute to non-existent local media. At the same time a public tender call will be published for conducting inventory of illegal buildings, related to area of environment protection as well as creation directions for protection of whistleblowers.

To conclude, the adoption and implementation process of the LAP for OGP Local in the Municipality of Zabljak represents a significant step towards enhancing openness, transparency, and citizen participation in local decision-making processes in various areas. Although evident challenges have been identified, there is a clear vision and willingness for further improvement. It is crucial to continue to empower and engage all relevant stakeholders and ensure continuous support and resources for further plan implementation. This will ensure that the Municipality of Zabljak remains on a path of fulfilling its obligations on a way towards the membership in OGP Local, but also that values and principles that this process carries will continue to be adopted and implemented in a longer term.

## **CETINJE**

The accession process of Cetinje, Old Royal Capital of Montenegro, to the Open Government Partnership (OGP) Local Initiative

signifies a profound commitment to advancing transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement within its governance framework. In this section of the assessment report we will provide thorough examination of Cetinje's endeavors in adopting and implementing the Local Action Plan (LAP) for OGP Local, clarifying key challenges encountered along the way and create general overview of the whole process in Cetinje. Findings in this section are, as for the whole report, based on desk research and group interviews.

Cetinje's decision to participate in the OGP Local Initiative stems from a broader aspiration to modernize governance practices and strengthen civic participation at the local level.

By aligning with international partners and engaging local stakeholders, Cetinje seeks to harness the OGP platform to streamline administrative processes, enhance service delivery, and foster a culture of openness and collaboration in governance.

While Cetinje expresses overall satisfaction with the LAP creation and implementation process, several challenges persist, warranting attention. Foremost among these challenges is the issue of legalization, where impending amendments to the legal framework pose complexities in executing legalization procedures for illegal constructions. Additionally, the limited participation of local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and citizens in public consultations, aside from

this process, underscores the imperative for heightened awareness-raising and community engagement initiatives.

Despite notable progress, Cetinje faces implementation hurdles that demand concerted efforts for resolution. One prominent challenge is the limited engagement of broader local community in the process, raising concerns about sustained collaboration and stakeholder involvement. The lack of diverse NGOs, particularly in the sphere of culture, which has a significant potential in Cetinje, poses a significant impediment to comprehensive community engagement.

When it comes concretely to cooperation between local government and local NGOs in the process of LAP development, it is on a satisfactory level. Two active local NGOs, 'Active Zone' and 'Razvitak' are members of multi-sector forum with two members each and have actively contributed to the creation of Local Action Plan for Cetinje. At the very beginning of the process even more NGOs participated, but they did not have time and resources to follow through next stages of the process. However, as MSF is an open body, there is possibility that some of them return if they show interest.

Furthermore, commendable side of LAP creation and adoption in Cetinje is that attention was paid to the needs of marginalized groups, particularly of people with disabilities. Best testimony of inclusive approach regarding that issue is that one of two NGOs that are

part of MSF is actually organization dedicated to that vulnerable group. Also, in the early stages of this process, such as initial boot camp, people with disabilities were also active and gave some useful inputs for that stages of LAP creation. Support to women and gender equality is also treated as a one of five LAP goals.

One important challenge that is recognized is the absence of funds specifically dedicated for LAP implementation within the city's budget underscores the financial constraints that could be potentially hampering progress in realizing LAP objectives. However there is political willingness to allocate funds necessary for implementation of LAP activities through local sectorial policies. On the other side, local government possess sufficient in-house human resources for realization of goals from LAP.

In Cetinje there is no conflicts between LAP measures and other strategic plans, signifying a coherent approach towards governance reform. There are however complementary activities with other local documents. Most notably in the area of digitalization, which can accelerate implementation in that area. Digitalization is priority, among all proposed goals in LAP, for local government. There is visible motivation and desire in its representatives to enhance services that local government offers.

However, challenges persist in achieving transparency. Moreover, efforts to engage

citizens in decision-making processes encounter apathy, highlighting the need for innovative outreach strategies to foster active participation and inclusivity. Local authorities do inform about activities related to LAP in a standard way in which they inform about other activities. However, there need to be communication strategy related specifically to this process.

Recognizing the imperative of sustaining OGP efforts beyond LAP implementation, Cetinje underscores the importance of integrating open government principles into long-term governance strategies. The city aims to showcase successful initiatives to national and international stakeholders. Digitalization of local services is expected to be most important contribution to long term sustainability of LAP as well as acquirement of measuring station planned through a measure related to environment protection

There is continuous communication with other municipalities in Montenegro that are currently in the same process as Cetinje and exchange of experiences between them, especially with Bar. There was not more intensive cooperation with national government and its agencies related to OGP process so far. Same is with established national NGOs, except in a sense that some representatives of those organizations were involved as experts in MSF meetings. Cetinje also draws insights from successful international role models like Madrid.

# CON- CLUSI- ON

There is still no official monitoring plan for LAP implementation, but it is positive that there is, although still informal, plan that people who are part of MSF meet regularly to discuss what has been achieved in each individual activity. First next concrete step that will be taken in LAP implementation is conducting comprehensive analyses of citizen needs regarding digital services which represents a proactive step towards enhancing service delivery and fostering citizen engagement.

In conclusion, while Cetinje has made commendable strides in embracing OGP principles, persistent challenges underscore the need for sustained efforts in fostering transparency, inclusivity, and citizen participation in local governance processes. By addressing these challenges and capitalizing on opportunities for collaboration and innovation, Cetinje can further advance its journey towards becoming a model city for open government practices in Montenegro.

In summary, the assessment conducted on the progress and challenges encountered by Zabljak and Cetinje in their pursuit of OGP Local membership offers a comprehensive understanding of their efforts and the broader implications for local governance in Montenegro.

Zabljak's initiation into the OGP Local initiative, while commendable, faces notable obstacles. Despite collaborative endeavors with the International Republican Institute (IRI) and the establishment of open multi-sector forum, Zabljak struggles to fully engage local civil society organizations (CSOs) and citizens. Limited resources and capacity could possibly hinder the effective implementation of LAP measures, particularly in crucial areas such as environmental protection. However, there is evident willingness to overcome these challenges and to find solutions that can be effective and work in local context. Zabljak's commitment to sustainability by integrating LAP objectives into long-term strategic plans underscores a positive trajectory toward fostering transparency and citizen engagement.

On the other hand, Cetinje demonstrates robust collaboration with local NGOs and a proactive approach to inclusivity. Despite

obvious challenges in financial constraints and citizen engagement, Cetinje's dedication to integrating open government principles into long-term governance strategies signifies a promising commitment to transparency and accountability. Furthermore, evident dedication of local authorities to this process provides optimism that LAP measures will be implemented independently of whether Cetinje will become or not member of OGP Local.

As both municipalities navigate their paths toward OGP Local membership, critical priorities emerge. Enhancing citizen participation, addressing financial constraints, and fostering transparent communication channels are paramount. By leveraging lessons learned, forging stronger partnerships, and aligning with OGP principles, Zabljak and Cetinje can catalyze meaningful governance reform and foster inclusive decision-making processes at the local level. Through these concerted efforts, they can not only meet the requirements for OGP Local membership but also cultivate a culture of openness and collaboration that is necessary in governance on local level in Montenegro for years to come.

## **RECOMME- NDATI- ONS**

Although Cetinje and Zabljak have specific challenges, majority of the challenges ahead of them are at least partially overlapping. Therefore we decided to create joint recommendations whether they apply for one or both municipalities.

- 1. Strengthen collaboration with local Civil Society Organizations and create programs and funding mechanisms that will empower them to participate in OGP related activities in the future.**
- 2. Allocate resources specifically for LAP implementation**
- 3. Create monitoring plans with specific benchmarks**
- 4. Organize MSF meetings on regular basis in order to effectively monitor LAP implementation progress**
- 5. Integrate other local plans and strategies with LAP**
- 6. Enhance communication between all 4 municipalities involved in this process**

**7. Establish cooperation with government agencies that can help in fulfilling LAP goals**

**8. Increase Inclusivity, particularly of marginalized groups (PWD, Women, Youth...)**

**9. When applicable, cooperate with private sector and utilize their capacities**

**10. Adapt and redefine implementation plans when necessary**



