

The mission of NDI Civic Forum Albania

The mission of Civic Forum Albania is to support the development, expansion and further strengthening of democratic principles and processes in the county. Through participation in Civic Forum discussion groups, citizens in rural and urban areas work to become more aware and engaged in cooperating with each other by organizing to address common problems for the benefit of the communities in which they live. Through Civic Forum, citizens' increase their role and participation to ensure more political and governmental transparency and constitutional strengthening of institutions for the good of the community.

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Civic Forum Albania Expands its Work to Kavaja

In June Civic Forum Albania expanded its work to the district of Kavaja. Civic Forum Albania and its funder, USAID, agreed that given the positive impact Civic Forum Albania is having in communities in the districts of Tirana and Durrës, that it would be beneficial to involve others in the program.

In May Civic Forum Albania staff conducted a site assessment to determine where to expand. They traveled to the regions on the boarder with Tirana and Durrës and talked with representatives of local government, local and international NGOs, and residents of these areas. During the discussion Civic Forum assessed the level of need and interest in the regions for the kind of democratic education and community organizing skill development that Civic Forum Albania provides. Despite the high level of need and positive interest expressed in all regions, some regions had to be eliminated at this time because of the poor transportation and communication systems and difficulty reaching the more rural communities. Kavaja has the benefit of an easy link to Durrës, where Civic Forum opened a satellite office in August. Recruitment for new staff began in Kavaja in May. After interviewing several candidates, six were asked back for a second interview and then the final four were

selected for the position of field coordinator. The Kavaja field coordinators began their new jobs in mid-June by participating in the Civic Forum Albania/Kosovo joint retreat. (See Retreat article) They also spent nearly two weeks in intensive training to improve their knowledge of democracy and to develop skills as discussion facilitators.

In July they began their work together



Map of Kavaja District

in teams of two with their team driver by going into the communities of Kavaja and inviting people to participate in Civic Forum Albania to gain more knowledge about their government, their rights and their responsibilities in improving their communities. Each team will be working with 20 different citizen groups throughout the district of Kavaja to guide them into being more active in their communities.

Participants in Civic Forum get trained in Bulgaria



The school in Rrubjeka rehabilitated by the Civic Forum citizens

In April a group of Civic Forum citizens from different areas of Tirana and Durrës traveled to Bulgaria to participate in a community organizing training organized and funded by World Learning. The group participated in theoretical training such as: how to compile projects and proposals and developing communication skills. The citizens received additional knowledge that will help them as community organizers. In meetings with the local government of villages of Bulgaria, the participants in the training learned about methods which are used to make their work more transparent in the eyes of the public. These methods inform the public about everything that is happening and to give them the possibility to share their opinions in the meetings of local government. Civic Forum citizens saw concrete results that active communities in Bulgaria achieved in collaboration with local governments and indigenous businesses. The citizens also visited different communities that had different economic development levels. These communities have had great results in the building of Economy Development Centers, in paving the villages' roads and in the development of traditional artisanship.

At the end of the training, citizens' compiled action plans in order to plan and implement a community project and to organize training with other members of their communities in Durrës and Tirana. After the examination of the projects presented by the citizens, World Learning decided to fund three of them: a project for the rehabilitation of the roof in the school of Petrela, a project for the rehabilitation of the school in Rrubjekë and the building of an economic development office at the municipality of Manëz.

The coordinator of the group in Rrubjekë, Arjan Kodra says: "We worked to compile the project and after we got the funds, we began the work to finish the rehabilitation on time. In the beginning we had difficulties to convince people about the good aim of this project and to raise its credibility. But they saw by their own eyes that the funds did go where they were supposed. We had a lot of meetings with the community and this was the first time that they were not disappointed because they saw the concrete result. During all this process the community helped with funding and with volunteer work". People in the village were very pleased about the rehabilitation of the school. Beqir Bregu, teacher in this school, said: "I think that the work that

the discussion group Civic Forum has done is wonderful. I am glad that this new scholastic year we will have a more suitable venue for our pupils". Myslym Uruçi, elder of the village says: "I liked this project and we will continue to work with the discussion group of Civic Forum for other issues".

Meanwhile the working group in Manëz composed of Mrika Hoxha, Vesel Kuci and Xhavit Farruku, members of three different villages, have rehabilitated a small venue in the municipality building. According to the project that they wrote after the training in Bulgaria, they have supplied it with a computer, printer, Internet, telephone, tables and chairs. This office called the Economic Development Office will be available for all the citizens to use. But the work of the discussion group will not finish here. They are developing a plan for the future, which has to do with compiling projects in this new office together with citizens to improve life in their community.

The discussion group in Petrela, led by Zija Mira and Endrit Rama concluded successfully their project with the realization of the rehabilitation of the school roof, windows and doors of the first floor. The working group organized the specific things that needed to be done, and the work progressed smoothly. The transparency group who held continuous open meetings to inform the community how the resource of funds was being managed monitored the entire process. The community participated in the evaluation of the project by going and seeing the work that the group was doing. The teachers and the pupils will help in cleaning, caring for and maintaining their school.

The cases mentioned show the importance of these trainings because the citizens see by their own eyes positive experiences of other communities in different countries. So when they come back, they will be more willing and more engaged to solve issues in their communities.



Citizens of Civic Forum in Manëz working in their economic development office.

A view of the rehabilitated roof by the Civic Forum group in Petrela



Civic Forum Programs in Albania and Kosovo Come Together

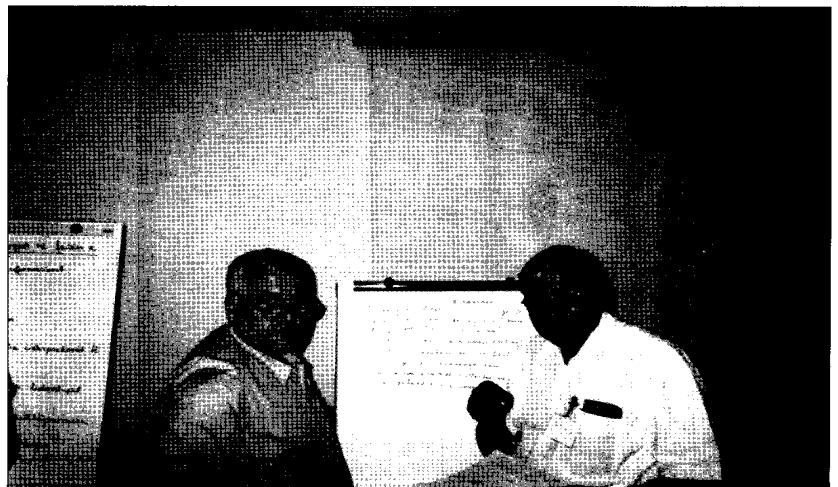
The staff of Civic Forum Albania hosted their colleagues from Civic Forum Kosovo for a joint retreat from June 14-18 at the Shalom Center in Tirana. NDI has been conducting a Civic Forum program in Kosovo since August 2000. The retreat was an opportunity for the staff of both programs, over 30 people, to exchange information about their work and to participate in formal training.

Howard Sumka, USAID Albania Mission Director, made opening comments for the event. He highlighted the importance of working with citizens at the grassroots level to build a strong foundation for democratic development and by continuing the momentum of small successes, step by step.

There were lively discussions among retreat participants about how to form Civic Forum citizen groups, how to maintain and support them and how to guide them to taking more responsibility and action in their communities. The field coordinators shared success stories from communities in which they work. In Albania, some members of different political parties now recognize that political affiliation should not be an obstacle to people working together to solve common problems. Kosovar Civic Forum participants are taking their responsibilities for working together to make changes in the communities more seriously and beginning to focus on how to organize their efforts.

Two Albanian NGOs provided training for the participants. Skuadra 2000 conducted a workshop on communication skills. Effective communication is a key element of the field coordinators' work. In the workshop they learned about various styles of communication, both verbal and non-verbal and about the importance of listening. The Albanian National Training and Technical Assistance Resource Center (ANTTARC) worked with the program staff on identifying the characteristics of a leader, since their work in the community involves helping citizens develop leadership skills and using them to move fellow citizens toward improving their lives.

An evaluation consultant, hired by NDI also worked with staff during the retreat. He presented information



Ilia Josifi, Civic Forum field coordinator in Albania and Hasan Tmava, Civic Forum field coordinator in Kosovo during the retreat.

about the evaluation that Civic Forum Albania and Kosovo are developing to use this autumn to monitor their work and find areas for improvement. He conducted training sessions to define evaluation, evaluation methods, why should evaluations be undertaken and how to follow-up.

Several Civic Forum Albania field coordinators lead discussions with colleagues to analyze real life case studies from citizen groups with which they work to identify best practices. Others used various written articles on democracy to facilitate discussions with the newly hired Civic Forum Albania and Kosovo field coordinators.

The participants reported that they were pleased with the experience and benefited from both the formal training and the informal exchanges with colleagues. The programs will continue to share information and support each other in their challenging task of helping their compatriots become more engaged in the democratic process.

The women of Fushas in action



Woman's group in Fushas/Baldushk

After a year of work with Civic Forum, the citizens in Fushas took concrete actions to solve some of their community issues. The discussion group in the village of Fushas is in the commune of Baldushk, of Tirana city. Young women and girls who have few possibilities to go out of the village compose this group. In the beginning, they had no knowledge about democratic government and needed to develop skills to be active members of the community, but now they are informed and ready to solve problems.

Mrs. Flora Gjana, coordinator of the group, has worked hard to keep the rest of the group active. Their achievements are great considering the opinions of other members of the village who don't believe in what these women are doing. They participated regularly in the first phase of education where they discussed a series of themes about the functioning of democracy, structure of government and what is in the Albanian Constitution. During these meetings they developed the ability to exercise their active role as citizens in democracy such as: to get information of what is happening in their communities, to hold elected representatives accountable for their activities and to try and change their community. After all this activity the group passed to the second phase. This phase has to do with implementing all the knowledge, the abilities and the values to improve their community.

In October of last year, the women began to identify the main problems of their community and chose an issue, which was most important to them. They chose the lack of drinking water. The village of Fushas has

had no water for 3 years because of the deterioration of the distribution system. The group thought to build a water depository for their village and to rehabilitate the pipe system. They compiled a strategic plan with the help of the elder of the village to begin to solve the issue of the water. The collaboration of the group with the commune mayor by presenting him with the group's activity and their objective to change their community was very important. Despite the barriers and the prejudices of the other community members, this small group took the initiative to sensitize other members of the community in relation to this issue. They compiled a petition in relation to the water issue, directed to the Minister of Public Works in Tirana, which was signed by the heads of the households in the village. In January of this year, the petition was presented to the Secretary of the Minister of Public Works who was very excited about this initiative coming from the citizens. But the ministry had no funds for this village. Since there was no financial support from the government, the group led the work to compile an estimate for the rehabilitation of the water issue with the help of the commune engineer. The total amount for this rehabilitation was very big and still needs the support from a possible donor organization in order to complete it.

The water issue was not solved due to lack of funding, not lack of responsibility or initiative on the part of the citizens. However the group didn't walk away but began to work for the solution of another issue. Considering the bad condition of the health center of the village, which has no windows, no doors and no equipment for the ill people of the village, the group came up with the idea to compile a plan for the rehabilitation of the health center. In February of this year Netherlands Development Organization (SNV) called for proposal for projects in rural areas. The women of Fushas took advantage of this possibility and began to compile a proposal. The objective was to get funds for the rehabilitation of their health center. Mrs. Gjana and the group organized the process, including many people in the village to help such as the commune engineer, the doctor, the nurse of the village and the commune mayor. After they got all the necessary data from the health workers and after they realized the technical aspects with the help of the engineer, another member of the commune and a very supportive person for the group, typed the project on the only typewriter that exists in the whole commune. The project was delivered on time to SNV and the citizens of Fushas are eagerly waiting the response.

Citizens of Muçaj organize to improve their community

Since February 2001, the discussion group in Muçaj, has been involved in solving the issue of drinking water in their village. This village has about 2000 inhabitants and there has not been water in their taps for a long time. This group has been discussing democratic issues in theory with Civic Forum for more than 6 months. As time passed, citizens became more aware that the issue of water, as all other issues, would be solved only if they actively participate in their solution.

First, citizens decided to make people of the village aware about the issue of the lack of water. To achieve this they organized many meetings with the community and with the representatives of their village in the local government, so their issue was well known not only in the community but also in the larger municipality. The representatives of the discussion group had several meetings with the elder of the village Osman Hasrama and he became an important ally, and also a regular member of the discussion group. As time went by the elder became one of the representative members of the group for solving the issue. The final goal of the group is the construction of a water depository in the highest point of the village. But since the municipality has no funds, the group wrote a proposal to Netherlands Development Organization (SNV) to get money for the depository.

By the end of the February the discussion group compiled a strategic plan about how to make a proposal for the depository. After this they met the Municipality Mayor to have his support on the project. Three members of the group Sadik Hasrama, Osman Hasrama and Hamdi Alvora, together with others from of the municipality, went to the Water Directory in Tirana, for an estimate and wrote the proposal for the water depository. This was the preparation phase that led to the delivery of project proposal to SNV.

As the weeks passed by the drinking water became a real emergency for the village of Muçaj. Since they had no positive response from SNV at the time they thought to try another approach for the issue. For this they made the necessary changes on the strategic plan and at the end of March, they asked the Municipality and Water Directory to get the water

pump for their village. After weeks of collaboration with them, the village got a water pump in April and after some days the municipality workers installed it. This was such an important event that one of the group members Lili, said, "After all these efforts finally our village will get water. Now it's time to sell the horses and donkeys that used to transport the water drums."

For a period of about one month, everything seemed to be fine. But after this, the quantity of the water available diminished from day to day, until there was no water in the village. And Lili with humor and sadness said: "We have to buy the donkeys back".

The discussion group and their representatives have presented this situation with persistence to the Municipality of Vora and Water Directory putting pressure on them to solve the issue. But according to the research that they have done and after meetings with the above mentioned, the area of Vora Municipality is suffering from difficulties shortages of drinking water. When asked what the group would do next, Hamdi said: "We are part of core group of the citizens who will follow up and coordinate work to solve the issue. After all this work we have done so far we can't stop in the middle of the road. We hope that this issue goes on the right path despite the many difficulties that encountered in the main pipe of the water. The final solution will be the construction of the water depository".



Hamdi Alvora member of Civic Forum group in Muçaj

Civic Forum expands its activity to Kavaja

Two new teams begin work with citizens

In June of this year our team began the implementation of the Civic Forum program in the Kavaja region. Civic Forum is going to be well known in the communes of Golem, Synej, Kryevidh and Helmas.

We have had several meetings with elected representatives, active people who enjoy the respect of the community, teachers, administrative workers and citizens in the villages of the above-mentioned communes. Many citizens in Synej, Zhabjak, and Vilë-Bashtovë think that the mission at the CF program is very useful. They have expressed their commitment to participate in the discussion groups to gain basic knowledge about democracy and to make common decisions. But citizens, who are disillusioned by the promises from politicians that have gone with the wind, say: *Civic Forum can do what none of the deputies can.* Very hard work needs to be done in order to change mentalities, to make known to the citizens their rights and responsibilities and to engage them in the democratic process.

The expansion of Civic Forum in Kavaja gives a possibility to the citizens to participate regularly in the group discussions and to read additional materials for enriching their knowledge on the democratic process. Thus they will be able to practice the collaboration based on democratic values and to improve qualities that are necessary to participate actively in the democratic processes of the country.

Because people have lost faith in their abilities to make changes and they are disappointed from the long transition, we will work closely with them to change their mentalities, give them different ideas and improve their knowledge about democracy.

For more than one month Civic Forum has begun working in the rural and urban areas of Kavaja for the engagement of the citizens in democratic processes.

We work specifically in the south and south – east of Kavaja, in the municipality of Rrogozhina and in the communes of Luzi i Vogël, Lekaj and Gosë.

Creating discussion groups in an area begins by making presentations to the municipality and commune mayors, as well as elders and with people we already know which makes it possible to meet with groups of citizens in the schools and cafés. Some of these people welcomed the Civic Forum program, stressing that the Civic Forum mission related to improving democratic knowledge in rural areas is very important and it helps the collaboration between citizens and elected representatives. The commune mayor in Lekaj said: *“The themes that will be discussed with citizens are very useful because personally I have so many cases where citizens come to me to solve problems which are not in the competence of the local government”*. But we must stress that the confidence of the citizens in relation to what they can do to change their community is very small. One of the citizens said: *“We are working so hard for the democracy but with this kind of mentality that exists in Albania there is no democracy”*.

During our experiences in different villages we noticed that citizens are willing to engage themselves in democratic processes and to improve something in their community. This was more evident in the small villages such as: Beden, Harizaj, Kalush, Vorrozen, Gosë e Vogël, Mamzotaj, Gërmenj and Okshtun. This fact was not so evident in the villages with a bigger number of the population because the citizens of the smaller villages are more connected with each other and more engaged to participate and to organize. Meanwhile there is a spirit of indifference and a lack of organization in bigger villages.

In spite of these challenges, we will work closely with the citizens to increase confidence and participation in the new democracy. The beginning is always difficult and citizens have expressed this. But they have the desire to organize themselves and to act. They have stressed that improving democratic culture and the organizing abilities is the first step of their integration in the much-desired democracy for every one.

In the hot days of June, when in addition to the heat of the sun the temperature was high because of the electoral campaign, the citizens of Manëz came together in their municipality to compile a plan to organize a common meeting with the candidates for deputy and the citizens. In this meeting the candidates would have the possibility to express their point of view on different community problems. This also would help citizens to make the best choice for their representative.

Civic Forum suggested the idea for this activity and the citizens of this area embraced it immediately. So, participants in Civic Forum such as Agimi, Shpresa, Mrika, Xhaviti, Veseli, Qemali and Vlashi began to organize the meeting. The municipality of Manza was set as the place for the meeting. The participants of Civic Forum in Harmath, Hamallaj, Manëz and Radaj decided the time of meeting and questions that would be directed to the candidates that related to the problems of the communities. The person that would facilitate the meeting and a person who would keep record on everything that would be said were chosen among the other citizens of Civic Forum. They compiled the invitations for

Citizens invite candidates to debate

the candidates and chose the people who would be responsible for distributing them. Despite the great organization and the good work, the meeting didn't take place. This happened because the candidates didn't come. The citizens thought that maybe the candidates were not ready to face each other.

So citizens understood that they have a lot of work to do together with their elected representatives, so they understand the responsibilities they have to the citizens.

Collaboration of Civic Forum with NGOs

In the past three months participants in Civic Forum have benefited from collaboration with different organizations by receiving accurate information and materials, and participating in events to help them become more engaged in the democratic process. Some of these organizations are: American Bar Association / Central and Eastern European Law Initiative (ABA-CEELI), International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES), Albanian Helsinki Committee (AHC), Society for Democratic Culture (SDC), Management Systems International (MSI), Netherlands Development Organization (SNV) and World Learning (WL).

ABA-CEELI organized an open discussion on Vision TV for Law Day. Law Day is the National Day of Justice for Albania in memory of the first "Kanuni i Zhurise" (Judges' Code) of the first Albanian government led by Ismail Qemali. The Minister of Justice, judges, professors from the Magistrate school, Women's Judges Association participated in this discussion as well as citizens from Civic Forum groups (Sauk, Petrela, Zall Mnerr, in Tirana and Commune 5 in Durres) and asked questions about laws. MSI also organized a TV event with the theme "Characteristics of a Good Parliamentary Deputy". Civic Forum participants from Petrela and Sauk took part in this televised discussion. Civic Forum is also a member of the Anti - Corruption Coalition, a new initiative organized by MSI. The coalition involves different national and international organizations and citizens to come together in order to fight corruption in Albania.

During parliamentary elections this spring citizens took the initiative to distribute materials and posters from IFES to raise the awareness about the verification of the voters list and voting process. On Election Day two Civic Forum staff members volunteered as election monitors for the Society for Democratic Culture.

In February SNV expressed interest in funding projects initiated, implemented and monitored by citizens. Eight of Civic Forum citizens' groups responded, by presenting community rehabilitation projects for possible funding. SNV is also part of an initiative in Durres providing resources to NGO's and has offered Civic Forum a meeting space for citizens' groups.

In the continuation of acquisition of knowledge, sixteen Civic Forum citizens participated in a training organized in Bulgaria by World Learning. The citizens learned about new ways of collaborating with the local government and different initiatives that the citizens in Bulgaria have undertaken.

Civic Forum collaboration with national and international organizations resulted in many positive results for citizens in Albania. Civic Forum continues to welcome all suggestions and ideas from citizens, readers and organizations, who feel the responsibility and are willing to do something good for their communities.

**Excerpts from the law
“FOR THE ORGANIZATION AND FUNCTIONING
OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT”**

Nr. 8652

Date: 31.07.2000

Chapter VI

The Composition, the Creation, the Organization, the Competences and the Duties of the Municipality and Commune Council

Article 34

Open meetings

1. Council meetings are open for the public. Every citizen is allowed to attend council meetings, as determined in the council regulation
2. The announcement of council meetings is made public in exact location by the council and in media. The announcement contains the date, the place, the time and the agenda of the meeting.

Article 35

Consultation meetings with the municipality and the right to be informed

The consultation with the municipality in each

case is made as determined in the council regulation, using one of the necessary ways such as open meetings with the inhabitants, meetings with specialists, with interested institutions and non-governmental organizations or through taking initiatives to organize local referendums.

Article 56

Open meetings, consultations meetings and the right of the public to be informed

The Qark (the biggest local administrative division) council holds open meetings for the public, holds consultations with the representatives and executive organs of communes and municipalities and with respective community member's, and respects the right of the public to be informed according to the definitions of the article 34 and 35 of this law.

Vocabulary

(Compiled by Civic Forum staff)

POWER

The ability of individuals or members of a group to achieve their objectives through action.

AUTHORITY

The legitimate use of power.

STATE

A political apparatus (governmental and official institutions of civil services), which in a specific territory, the authority of which is supported by law.

GOVERNMENT

The organization through which political authority is used.

ORGANIZATION

A structured group of individuals working toward the same goal.

POLITICAL PARTY

An organization oriented toward getting the legal control of the government through an electoral process.

ECONOMY

The production and trade system that provides goods and services to the individuals who live in a specific society.

VALUES

Individual or group ideas about what is good, appropriate or bad.

CONSENSUS

An agreement reached through compromise by the members of a community, group or society.

Civic Forum Staff

- Blerina Tahiraj** – Field Coordinator II, Tiranë
- Brunilda Hylviu** – Field Coordinator I, Kavajë
- Durim Xhahysa** - Driver, Kavajë
- Edlira Pajuni** – Field Coordinator II, Durrës
- Elior Kulla** – Office Coordinator
- Eliona Lloja** – Field Coordinator II, Tiranë
- Elton Islamaj** – Field Coordinator II, Durrës
- Enton Dimni** – Field Coordinator I, Kavajë
- Ermir Metalla** – Driver, Durrës
- Edmond Sadiku** – Office Driver
- Gladiola Basha** – Field Coordinator II, Tiranë
- Haxhi Murati** – Driver, Tiranë
- Ilia Josifi** – Field Coordinator II, Tiranë

- Kristi Vander Berg** – Assistant Program Director
- Mary Margaret Dineen** – Civic Forum Albania Director
- Refat Hoxha** - Field Coordinator I, Kavajë
- Rovena Sorra** - Field Coordinator I, Kavajë
- Sami Qerushi** – Driver, Tiranë
- Shpresa Ohri** – Information Coordinator
- Xhevdet Çurumi** - Driver, Kavajë

NEWSLETTER STAFF

Shpresa Ohri
Blerina Tahiraj

Gladiola Basha
Eliona Lloja