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Kosovo: Grassroots local initiatives – an overview, chances and challenges

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Prishtina, 29 September 2018; citizens protesting against the President's initiative of "border correction" with Serbia

Photo courtesy of Hazir Reka

I **Executive Summary:**

The civic sector, as generally agreed among practitioners, constitutes the third sector within a society which serves as a bridge between citizens, public and private sector for the purpose of reorienting economic development centered around citizens. As such the mission of civic sector is vital to any society and can surely and strongly contribute to the development of a healthy and participatory democracy.

Being the “third sector”, civil society represents a strong actor which is not officially part of the state, not distributing profits to shareholders, self-governing and in control of its own affairs where voluntarism takes a great importance.

Civil society organizations can surely demand for transparency, hold governments accountable and facilitate or advocate for citizen’s needs and demands to be in the center of policy-making of local and central governments (through structured community dialogue meetings, advocacy strategies, education and empowerment of local citizens, or even through mobilizations of citizens and resources.)

As such civil society in general and grassroots in particular are believed to be able to enforce political efficacy that among academics has been defined as the ability to influence the political process and community decision making.

Key words: community development; grassroots, decentralization; decision-making; political efficacy; psychological empowerment; external efficacy;

I. Introduction:

Kosovo has a unique history of civic activism where citizens engagement in general, managed to influence the social, educational and political system in former Yugoslavia by developing and implementing the well-known strategy of “parallel system”¹ during the 1990’s. The system in itself proved to be the highest form of self-organizing in order to achieve a common goal that of fighting occupation, ensuring self-survival of Albanian institutions, language, and identity during the occupation of Serbia. Right after the fall of the Berlin wall, the waves of collapse of communist regimes caught Yugoslavia as well. Serbia tried to stop other federal units to declare independence and used force and brutality. In order to present this as defending south Slavic interest, Serbia started with Kosovo where the majority of the population was ethnic Albanian. Yugoslav institutions declared an extraordinary security situation and deployed special units from across Yugoslavia as they said to protect constitutional order. Later on, in 1990, Serbia revoked the autonomous status of Kosovo and dismantled all institutions and dismissed around 260,000 Albanians working in public administration, socially and publicly owned enterprises, schools and hospitals and replaced them with Serbs that were brought from Croatia and Bosnia.

Initially, this was met with protests and demonstrations in the streets, which the Albanian majority, constituting over 90% of the total population living in Kosovo, was organizing to reject the Serbian rule.

Serbian authorities were constantly sending more troops to crush demonstrations and started with terror among the civilian population including night raids and intimidation, violence against Albanians while even walking in the streets. The cases of murder in police stations, disappearance and extreme use of torture became a daily routine.

As Yugoslav army was the fourth strongest army in the world, Kosovars stood no chance to win in case of starting a clash with the Yugoslav forces. Instead, Ibrahim Rugova², a prominent writer and intellectual, created the Democratic League of Kosovo and started mobilizing people to create a parallel system, that was unique in the world, and organized schools, clinics, media, humanitarian

¹ Abazi Haki, President of the Emerging Democracies Institute; a strategist of Civic Sector in the Western Balkans and East Asia

² I have no magic solutions to offer you, no magic bullet for peace! Ibrahim Rugova, Former President of Kosovo, Leader of LDK and the strategist of the peaceful civic resistant of Albanian population during the Balkan Wars in the 90s.

network, and an information and reporting structure throughout Kosovo. Essentially *the entire nation became a grassroots movement* supporting de facto the findings of Zimmerman and Rappaport (1998) which claimed that “*greater participation in community activities and organizations is associated with psychological empowerment*” as every single citizen had a role to play in a system that was supported by so-called 3% fund which collected funds from citizens and a large diaspora all over the world. This continued to run effectively as a system for ten years and made Kosovo appear in the map of the world as this system, the citizens’ engagement and the speed of information provided all over the media was fascinating and never seen before.

The entire nation became a grassroots movement reaching a high level of psychological empowerment

As Rappaport (1998) suggests, *empowerment* is not only self-perception of competence and control but includes a concern for the common good and a sense of connectedness to others around the same cause. As such the grassroots movement of the 1990’s represents the big picture of how CSO’s can organize themselves around a particular cause, develop internal organizational and advocacy capacities to form coalitions to influence decision making processes and to even protests in streets in order to bring changes within a particular sector of development, or change the entire political system of Kosovo.

Definition of Grassroots

Smith (2000) defines grassroots to be locally based in geographical terms that range from a single multiple family building or compound to a metropolitan area or a single country. As such, he suggests that more and more grassroots, because of their wider connections to social, economic and political structures in their respective localities, are considered to be an important nexus for understanding larger societies.

Schofer and Longhofer (2011) and Smith and Shen (2002) argue that there is strong evidence that grassroots are growing in global prevalence, based on broader, ongoing processes such as population growth, increasing education level, economic development, civil liberties, and long-term global trends.

Furthermore, grassroots are closely linked to a number of processes and their initiatives are able

to construct, develop and promote the relationship between empowerment and participation. Indeed, the essence of grassroots is the construction and nurture of this relationship. Empowering individuals, communities and societies mean getting involved in decisions that affect communities' lives. Empowerment in itself as Zimmerman and Rappaport (1998) define it, is a construct that links individual strength, competencies, natural helping system, proactive behaviors to matters of social, policy and social change.

Finally, it is precisely the relationship between empowerment and participation that enables us to understand the configuration of grassroots initiatives in Kosovo

II. Current genesis, focus and scope of activities, organizational characteristics (size, members, ethnic background) of most grassroots initiatives

Genesis of grassroots in Kosovo.

The examination objective of this paper was to capture the existing situation of grassroots initiatives in Kosovo, the chances and challenges. As such this paper strived to capture the snapshot of the situation (size, capacities, sector) where the researchers enter a subject area with a set of own experiences and perspectives, wishing to contribute and add value to the existing academic literature of the researched area.

CSOs in Kosovo operate in a dynamic system where other stakeholders (local and international) do or do not interact with each other, and as such *in principle* CSOs play a crucial role in giving voice to citizens, articulating their needs, demands and engaging in initiatives that foster pluralism and further participatory democracy



Local community of Hade village protesting against “Kosova e Re” coal power to be constructed in their properties (2017) Photo courtesy of FIQ

In a complex environment with almost non-existing external efficacy, that according to Zimmerman and Rappaport (1998) defines the level of responsiveness of the political system to change efforts, grassroots in Kosovo find it quite challenging to operate or even survive for the common good. In a way, complexity of the operating environment for grassroots in Kosovo has become one of the main reasons for donor driven agendas to dominate in Kosovo.

With the immense foreign aid supporting post-conflict Kosovo (including aid for civil society development) the level of direct impact and efficient influence of local CSO's in changing or democratizing power forces in the country remains fairly modest, with the exception of a few well-established organizations, mostly think tanks operating in Prishtina, that have certain credibility and power to influence policy development.

Post-conflict Kosovo faced a shifted role of CSO's from peace-building oriented CSO's to organizations dealing with the democratization process and state consolidation that in principle should correspond with stages of development of the State of Kosovo.

The immense foreign aid in post-conflict Kosovo affected/changed the landscape of civic activism in Kosovo. Typical grassroots movement seeking for independence of Kosovo slowly transformed into regular think tanks, CSO's working on project based strategies that later on was defined as donor driven agenda.

Thus, the empowerment and participation relationship of Zimmerman & Rappaport (1998) that described the importance of the link between individual strength, competencies, natural helping system, proactive behaviors to matter of social, policy and social change became less relevant to CSO's due to the change of country's priorities and donor's agenda.

Kosovo now has good reporters that produce reports, but little changes on the ground

Decentralization the road to local empowerment

Given the premises that the process of decentralization (of power, resources, finances) can equip citizens with the means to demand transparency and hold governments accountable and on the other side empower local leaders with additional power to respond to citizens needs and aspirations, makes the process in itself powerful and gives it a strong political dimension if decentralization goes beyond technical and administrative dimensions.

However, the decentralization process proves that there is absolute no interest in sharing responsibilities, such as planning and implementing development projects in local level between two levels of the governance.

In this context, infrastructure development projects in post-conflict countries, especially those related to privatization processes, water access and -distribution, property rights, waste management, and decision-making processes must be effectively consulted and communicated to citizens in an open and transparent way. Removing citizens increasingly far from the decision-making process causes fragmentation that can easily degrade any governance in a chaotic one with corruption and criminalized structures controlling any segment of it, mastering their networks, controlling and installing political nepotism as the means to capture the state and contaminate every cell of the society.

Removing citizens increasingly far from the decision-making process causes fragmentation that can easily degrade any governance

The big and worrying question for donors and all of us civil society practitioners remains – What went wrong? Why are citizens desperately seeking to leave the country? Why are citizens losing faith from everyone - politicians, international partners, partly from civil society as well? What can we all as a society do to bring back and restore faith, solidarity among citizens?

In an effort to scan the life cycle of grassroots in Kosovo, the researcher seeks to analyze the purpose of existence, external linkages, leadership, and management, power relations and impacts at the community level of existing grassroots initiatives.

The National Resource Center of Kosovo developed a questionnaire within a project funded by the European Union Office in Kosovo and implemented by the Forum for Civic Initiatives (FIQ) and the Institute for Development Policy (INDEP) in May 2018. The main objective of this online questionnaire was to identify the internal capacities of local grassroots initiatives and those thematic areas in Kosovo where the contribution of grassroots initiatives can obtain a sustainable impact. As such, the questionnaire in itself helped to understand and have a better picture of the profile and nature of work and engagement of 368 local CSO's in Kosovo focused primarily on internal capacities and thematic areas. All 368 local CSO's that took part in the research represent most municipalities and all ethnic groups as well as diverse areas of work (Prishtina, Peje, Mitrovica (South/North) Ferizaj, Prizren, Gjilan, Gjakove, Kamenice, Gracanice, Zubin Potok, Zvecan, Leposavic,) etc. Most of these CSO's have around 5-7 members within their organigram. Their boards of advisors consist of 3 members.

Findings from the online questionnaire combined with desk research:

Using the methodology of desk research combined with an online questionnaire resulted in the identification of *seven* top thematic areas in need for greater civic participation and for building strengths, competencies and proactive behavior towards the construction of participation and empowerment relationship at local level.

1. **Youth and Voluntarism** with 58% support constitute the top priority thematic area in desperate need for constructing the relationship between participation and empowerment. The identified problems include, among others, the lack of volunteering actions/projects and incentive policies which negatively affect the level of youth participation and the way young people in Kosovo perceive competence and their ability to influence the political process and community decision making. Left with almost no solutions through volunteerism, young people in Kosovo seek “individual and group empowerment” through affiliations with political parties which in the long run tends to increase political dilettantism rather than psychological empowerment of young people in Kosovo eager to belong to a group that empower de facto youth participation in Kosovo.

2. **Education** with 41% support is the second priority identified by CSO's for quality and infrastructure reforms, immediately following youth and volunteerism. With a youth unemployment rate up to 51.6%, the reality, in a stubborn way, clearly proves the mismatch between the needs of labor market and the education system outcomes.³ The education system continues to be a major concern both from the infrastructure perspective and more importantly from the quality and financial perspective. With the highest youth unemployment reaching up to 51.6%, Kosovo, unfortunately, remains one of the most isolated countries in Europe. The isolation consists of physical and psychological borders that often create misleading perceptions about the outside world and with a poor and very politicized education system where around 36% of young people receive no formal education, no vocational education, no training and no employment. Their need of belonging may be misused by certain agendas that not necessarily seek the development of communities. As such the need of young people for belonging gets lost while their efforts to be recognized in the society often get captured and misused by political agendas.
3. **Social Inclusion** with 34% support reported as one of the thematic areas with a lack of information on financial support, lack of mechanisms to facilitate cooperation between CSO's, the public and the private sector. Weak political willingness to support social inclusion is another indicator of a highly political influence on the formalization of social service providers meaning that the state institutions being highly politicized are unable to outsource certain services to local CSO's with relevant expertise. Lack of responsiveness attitude is typical for both levels of governance, central and local.
4. **Protection of Environment/Consumer and Health**, with 32.6%, constitutes an area of many problems, challenges, obstacles and at the same time an area where grassroots already mostly have been involved. Problems like mismanagement of waste, illegal landfills, lack of services and infrastructure for waste management, waste separation, lack of strategies to support solar and wind energy, or the diversification of energy sources, combined with an inefficient environmental justice system in Kosovo strongly affect livelihood of citizens thus constituting the premises for strong and coordinated grassroots movement around environmental issues.
5. **Democracy and Good Governance** (30%). This thematic area remains problematic due to lack of transparency and accountability and non-inclusion of CSO's in the local decision-making process. This thematic area also has brought light regarding the limited capacities of CSO's to be proactive at the local level. In some municipalities, there's no adequate legislation (lack of unified legislation ensuring citizens' involvement in public debates). There is no structured cooperation between local

³ <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20180417-kosovo-report.pdf>

government and local CSO's. However, there are individual organizations that strive to achieve cooperation with the municipal level. Even in those cases there is lack of capacity and lack of awareness on public consultations and their importance.

6. **Reconciliation and Cultural Dialogue** (27.9%). One of the main challenges identified for this thematic area remains lack of creativity and use of the “reconciliation concept” just to please donors without thinking in a visionary way and for the purpose of having direct impact in the local communities. Young people among different ethnic communities wishing to cooperate no longer speak their respective language but use English as the common working language. There are certain feelings of mistrust when discussions are held about identity and cooperation, as such topics to this day remain a sensitive issue and lead to lack of communication among ethnic communities.
7. **Social Economy**, with 26% support, is still considered an area of no political interest by the government. A new development in this area is the passing of the Law on Social Entrepreneurship that means a change of the landscape of social economy and NGO's operating as social enterprises will start to happen as of beginning of 2019. Nevertheless, the sector demands for strong development of internal capacities of CSO's to consider operating as social enterprises.

III Legal provisions, local and national structural frameworks of action / interaction with citizens / municipalities

The 2011 Law on Freedom of Association of NGO's is currently under revision and the provision on Governing of CSO's and Foundations in particular is under revision. Another important document regulating the Governing of CSO's in Kosovo is the Regulation of Ministry of Finance No. 04/2017 on the Criteria Standards and Procedures for public financing of NGO's.

The Annual Report on Public Financial Support for NGO's from the Public Institutions of the Republic of Kosovo in 2017⁴, for the 2015 and 2016 period, provides information about the type of financial support NGO's in Kosovo received from central and local government institutions. It also provides information about the criteria's as well as the number of institutions from the central and local level supporting local NGO's in Kosovo.

According to international and local reports of the situation, local governance in Kosovo faces social, political and economic challenges. Citizens are not included directly through public consultations, which are often held just for the sake of it. Local CSO from outside Prishtina face the challenge of financial

⁴ <http://kryeministri-ks.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Raporti-i-financimit-te-OJQve-2017-ENG.pdf>

insecurity, therefore they are not able to cover all citizens needs and make a change. On the other hand, CSOs from the capital receive more funds than those in the countryside due to their developed internal capacities to apply for funding.

“Principle of Subsidiary”- means that the public affairs shall be dealt with as closely as possible to the citizens of the municipality by the lowest level of government that is able to provide public services efficiently.

For this purpose, the Ministry of Local Governance Administration (MLGA), as the main institution on central level dealing with local governance, has developed some online tools and platforms to strengthen and advance transparency in municipalities: According to this online platform the following has been foreseen:

- An advanced system for monitoring the work of municipal assemblies using telepresence, which enables state officials, stakeholders, as well as citizens to access and observe municipal assembly meetings via live streams that are linked to the municipals website.
- All municipal acts must be announced in the digitalized official gazette published by the office of the Prime Minister and are entering in force after they are published there.
- The MLGA has implemented a digitalized reporting system for the procedures of reviewing the legality of municipal acts, which enables a quicker assessment and response from the central to the local level regarding the legality of municipal acts.
- An electronic procurement system should provide insights into local government spending and thus improve and strengthen civil society monitoring.
- Finally, the MLGA established an advanced performance management system to improve efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery in municipalities as well as to reinforce transparency and accountability.

Despite these useful online tools and platforms most municipalities do not publish their executive decisions or regulations in the web-pages and thus fail to provide full access to municipal information. Hereby, the reason is not on financial means but on the lack of will on the side of municipal officials. According to government officials, a legal basis to oblige municipalities to use these online tools will be created.

Under Article 73, of the **Law on Local Self Governance**, each municipality shall establish consultative committees within sectors for the purpose of enabling citizens participation in the decision-making process, as well as nongovernmental organizations⁵

Public Financing of CSOs in Kosovo has not been so far structured and in principle each public institution in the field of their activity can support the activities of civil society.

⁵ <https://mapl.rks-gov.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Law-On-Local-Self-Government.pdf>

The National Strategy for cooperation with Civil Society 2013 – 2017 has already expired and the new draft Strategy for Cooperation of Government with Civil Society is under public discussion phase with CSO's interested in the process. Public consultations with regard to the new draft law emphasized the importance of changing the landscape of the civic sector in Kosovo with the aim of developing the capacities of small and medium CSO's operating outside Prishtina.

Governance and structures in place of grassroots in Kosovo

Governance remains the key aspect of CSO's operation and sector's sustainability, transparency and accountability as such. This constitutes the premises for long term survival of CSO's. While many organizations were established and operate as early as of 2000 their internal capacities remain modest to have an efficient impact at local level and are often overly dependent on international donors, or ad hoc and voluntary actions. What's common for most local grassroots in the country is lack of separation of duties at the level of internal governance, in spite of a voluntary approach often described as the drive behind certain actions. Most of CSO's in the country have between 5-7 members, some full time paid, some part time. In addition, Boards of CSO's are in most cases represented by 3 people (sometimes they are members of the organization, or friends of the organization). Therefore, grassroots lack a clear decision of internal duties and responsibilities.

IV Local grassroots initiatives and local civic engagement (examples, successes, shortcomings, constraints and challenges)

A: The case of KOSID

and the triangle approach to enhance citizens understanding and participation in the field of rights with regards to resettlement, no new coal investments.

One of the leading national civic actions known as KOSID is the Consortium of Kosovo's leading CSOs, from think tanks to independent media organizations to organizations that work with local communities. All member organizations of KOSID work toward Kosovo's sustainable development.

In 2007 a new innovative funding approach was developed by the Rockefeller Brothers Fund Pivotal Program for the Western Balkan which later became known as the triangle approach. In essence, the triangle approach aimed to support the creation of a strong, credible, knowledge based, accountable, and vivid civil society that would be strong and would have the full capacity to hold governments in the region accountable, tackle corruption and criminal power structures and drive

meaningful changes in an inclusive and bottom up approach. In particular the triangle approach consists of three components – think tanks that generate research, policy analyses, grassroots organizations that empower and engage citizens in democratic processes; and independent media organizations that conduct in-depth, investigative journalism on governance and matters of public interest.

The triangle approach supports the creation of a strong, credible, knowledge based, accountable, and vivid civil society that would be strong with full capacity to hold governments in the region accountable, tackle corruption and criminal power structures and drive meaningful changes in an inclusive and bottom up approach.

The success of the triangle approach was the creation on itself of Kosovo Civil Society Consortium on Sustainable Development (KOSID)⁶ but above all the causes for which KOSID works and that is Kosovo’s sustainable development.

The triangle approach⁷ strongly promotes the coming together under one umbrella of all organizations using the skills that each organization offered individually, for the purpose of being more efficient in raising important debates for Kosovo’s future.

From 2010 and onwards KOSID worked focused on monitoring, offering solutions, and raising the awareness level among citizens about the energy sector, the importance of having no more new coal investments but offering space, and diversifying the energy sources, insulating public and private buildings for decreasing demand for electricity, investing on renewable sources (mainly solar panels and wind). Using the triangle approach, KOSID counts around 11 organizations in its umbrella that coordinate on weekly basis to strategize work in accordance with developments in Kosovo. One of the biggest fights and at the same time the strongest victories of civil society in Kosovo is KOSID’s fight against KPP (Kosova e Re.)

Meanwhile the government of Kosovo from 2002 has been making plans for the construction of the ‘Kosova e Re’⁸ new coal power plant near residential areas. The strategy of KOSID against

⁶ <http://www.kosid.org/en/members>

⁷ <http://www.grantcraft.org/blog/using-the-triangle-approach-to-build-a-vibrant-civil-society-and-drive-mean>

⁸ https://kosid.org/file/repository/KOSID_Chronology_English.pdf

this project includes a number of national and international advocacy meetings, great coordination among national and international members (Urgewald from Germany, Sierra Club from USA, Bank Watch, etc.), a number of policy briefs and in-depth analyses offering policy solutions for the government of Kosovo to undertake, should the World Bank decide to withdraw from financial support of this project. A substantial part of KOSID's work opposing the KPP was the ability to mobilize local communities mostly affected by this project. Commissioned by KOSID, Dr. Ted Downing⁹, President of the International Network of Involuntary Resettlement, helped conduct a full report on the factual situation of local population affected by KPP. In result, after several meetings with the local population, the full report was produced and served as the guiding document in most advocacy meetings with members of the national parliament, officials of the World Bank in Washington DC (during spring and fall meetings from the year of 2010 till 2018) and with officials of EBRD, EIB, EU etc.

The researcher, a founding member of KOSID, was regularly involved in meetings with Senior Officials of the World Bank regarding the involuntary resettlement of citizens affected by the coal power plant "Kosova e Re", arguing about the violation of own internal rules with regard to involuntary resettlement. Being the legal representative of local citizens, the researcher was able to file a complaint against the World Bank thereby inviting the Inspection Panel to investigate the situation on the ground. The World Bank's Inspection Panel¹⁰ is an independent panel established to investigate international projects of the World Bank where there have been allegations and factual evidence of harm caused to local population. The researcher used the opportunity to explain the position of civil society organizations and KOSID towards the energy sector in an interview for the Voice of America where she emphasized that countries of the Western Balkans need to focus on developing alternatives and the regional market.

⁹https://kosid.org/file/repository/Does_the_Kosovo_Power_Project_s_Proposed_Forced_Displacement_of_Kosovars_Comply_with_International_Involuntary_Resettlement_Standards.pdf

¹⁰ <https://inspectionpanel.org/panel-cases/proposed-kosovo-power-project-and-second-additional-financing-energy-sector-clean-and>



Founders of KOSID meeting with senior officials of the World Bank in Washington DC – April 2017

B: The case of ERA Group

ERA group¹¹ - a positive example of local grassroots initiatives to enhance citizens participation in fights against small hydro power plants in Kosovo for which the group has developed an advocacy strategy.

ERA Group is a local grassroots initiative formally recognized as Environmental Responsible Action Group established in 2003 and operating in Peja municipality and Dukagjini region. ERA's mission is to promote and increase environmental consciousness, responsibility, and awareness; provide quality environmental education, outdoor and awareness activities; Increase participation in nature exploration and ecotourism; protect, conserve and promote the region's natural and

¹¹ <http://www.cnpv-eu.org/eng/new.php?mv=12&id=984>

cultural heritage, and landscape and biological diversity; stimulate positive cross-border cooperation with Kosovo's neighbors; increase trans-boundary integrated mountain sustainable development; improve the livelihoods of local communities.

ERA Group is one of those positive/fragile examples of a local, grassroots initiative in Kosovo working around environmental issues.¹²

ERA Group's most problematic issues concern its internal capacity development: strengthening strategic planning and implementation process; Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) mechanisms; and developing strategies for Public Relations (PR), communication, advocacy and fundraising (training and coaching staff to implement these at all organizational levels);

C: The case of Community Building *Mitrovica* (CBM)

The CBM¹³ is operating in the field of peace and community building in the wider region of Mitrovica for the purpose of facilitating contact and dialogue between citizens in the entire municipality of Mitrovica. CBM is an interethnic grassroots initiative the staff of which consists of devoted Serbian and Albanian citizens who grew up in this area and want to restore the previous trust and friendship that war and politics have destroyed.

E: The case of FIQ/Hade¹⁴

acting against the involuntary resettlement of citizens from Hade village in the frame of the new Kosovo e Re Coal Power Plant.

The Forum for Civic Initiatives, known by its acronym as FIQ, grew out of the ashes of the Kosovo War. Faced with death, destruction, displacement and the ethnic focus that divided so many communities, FIQ's founders came together, agreeing that citizens would need to be central to future decision-making in order to rebuild the social fabric of communities. More than 17 years after its founding, FIQ continues to work with the mission of mobilizing citizens and empowering

¹² <https://www.euronatur.org/aktuell/detail/news/vorbildlicher-naturschutz-am-gruenen-band-europa/>

¹³ <http://www.cbmitrovica.org/>

¹⁴ <https://www.fiq-fci.org/en/about-us/>

them to demand transparency, challenge and hold authorities to account. What does this look like in practice?

In 2004, when Kosovo was under the UNMIK¹⁵, 7,000 residents in the village of Hade faced involuntary resettlement to make way for a mine, which would supply coal to a new power station. FIQ sprang into action by launching an awareness raising campaign about the mine's potential impact, targeted at local residents. Pulling together different parts of the community, including concerned citizens and institutions, FIQ acted as a vehicle and voice-piece to ensure that the relevant decision-makers understood the risks to the village of Hade. With the sense that their concerns were being heard, volunteer activists took up the cause and assisted, together with the leadership of FIQ, in mobilizing local resources (in the form of both funds and volunteer time) to be dedicated to the fight.

On March 8, 2018, women and girls of Hade village in cooperation with the Forum for Civic Initiatives - FIQ protested in front of the World Bank Representation in Kosovo on the failure of the Kosovo Institutions and the World Bank for years to carry out a resettlement with dignity and all standards drafted by the World Bank itself and approved by the Government of Kosovo.



March 8th 2017 Kosovar women affected by involuntary resettlement protesting in front of local premises of World Bank against KPP

¹⁵ <https://unmik.unmissions.org/>

The threat to Hade village was ultimately raised at the Assembly of Kosovo and with the World Bank, who had been involved by providing technical finance to the Government of Kosovo for developing a resettlement policy framework. In an epic legal battle spanning more than a decade, FIQ formally demanded that the World Bank investigate¹⁶ its own investments in the country for not complying with its own internal safeguards with regard to involuntary resettlement, local employment, public procurement and above failing to bring development into the zone. Not tying itself to typical development project cycles but rather taking the long view, allowed FIQ to stay on the course, and to make the case for Hade.

The screenshot shows the top navigation bar of the ICIJ website with the text "The World's Best Cross-Border Investigative Team" on the left, the ICIJ logo in the center, and "A PROJECT OF THE CENTER FOR PUBLIC INTEGRITY" on the right. Below the navigation bar is a breadcrumb trail: "Home > Projects > Evicted and Abandoned: The World Bank's Broken Promise to the Poor > War-Torn Village Faces New Threat As World Bank Considers Power Plant". The main heading of the article is "EVICTED AND ABANDONED: THE WORLD BANK'S BROKEN PROMISE TO THE POOR". The article title is "War-Torn Village Faces New Threat As World Bank Considers Power Plant", with social media sharing buttons for Facebook (29 likes) and Twitter (21 tweets). The article text begins with: "Dajana Berisha, executive director of the Forum for Civic Initiatives, a local group that has worked on behalf of Hade's evictees, says authorities recently put in a paved road at the new site, but other promised improvements that would make the relocation site a real community – including a school, a mosque, a medical clinic and stores – haven't been built." A quote follows: "They showed people lots of pictures of how nice New Hade would look," Berisha says. "But almost none of what they promised is there in the field."

Many international investigative media like the International Consortium of Investigative Journalism (ICIJ) wrote stories about the resettlement issue of Hade village, thus internationalizing a local issue of a small village in Kosovo. Right after the ICIJ other international media followed such as the Guardians, Bloomberg etc.

¹⁶ <http://www.inspectionpanel.org/panel-cases/proposed-kosovo-power-project-and-second-additional-financing-energy-sector-clean-and>

While other organizations may have moved on, grown weary, or changed strategic direction in the meantime, the Forum for Civic Initiatives continues to be there to fight for the communities it serves. Building on the grassroots movement of the 1990's, the Forum for Civic Initiatives encourages local residents of different communities to give what they have to give - whether it is time, money or expertise, because this is the right path for citizens themselves to have a stake in this long-term work, too. And this is the empowerment of local communities.

Conclusions:

Kosovo continues to suffer from opaque and unaccountable government, corruption, weak public institutions, poor governance standards, lack of an impartial judiciary and an underperforming economy.

The concern for the common good and a sense of connectedness to others around the same cause has been transformed into the concern for economic survival of citizens who in despair and lack of perspective seek to leave the country.

The society's fragmentation is one of the worst outcomes of a corrupt government that in its efforts to survive politically keeps producing new crises, so citizens get more and more distant from the main common good - that is Kosovo's path towards European Union integration.

A Council of Cooperation between Government and Civil Society (29 members) was established in March 2012. The main goal of this joint council is ensuring the participation of the civil society in decision-making processes, informing about services and public funding from the government to CSOs, developing a new system, or criteria for financing CSOs and encouraging and developing voluntarism and civic participation. Despite some progress made in the framework of promoting the cooperation between government and civil society at the central level, much more serious efforts and work should be invested in promoting constructive and visionary cooperation between government at the local level and local CSOs¹⁷.

Obstacles for Kosovar grassroots to operate freely and independently for the purpose of ensuring participation and empowerment of citizens, that can play an assertive role in controlling resources and

¹⁷ <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20180417-kosovo-report.pdf>

decision-making processes, need to be overpassed in order to ensure empowerment of citizens and communities.

It is often difficult to coordinate local CSO's and self-organize for a particular issue due to a number of reasons:

- Misperception by local CSO's of relevant constituencies (basically whom are they representing, not in political terms, but work, sector, ethnic and geographical terms).
- Financial survival constitutes the biggest threat to many local grassroots in Kosovo.
- Strong competition over government grants (given that EU or other international donors require strong capacities to be able to compete for EU funding).
- Weakness of certain CSO's credibility due to association with the government or simply lack of deliverance of their promises towards their constituency affecting the trust level and contributing to the increase of apathy of the population in Kosovo.
- Weak internal organizational development undermines their level of influence at the local level.
- Lack of participating in networking (national, or international ones) weakens CSO's advocacy capacities.
- There's an immense need for capacity development of CSO's in the area of policy formulation for local government.
- An *ad hoc approach* that in some cases may be a sign of flexibility and adaptability may also constitute the lack of a strategic and visionary thinking by leaders of local CSO's.
- Kosovo struggles with lack of any external efficacy that has managed to silence most of the grassroots, or misguide their actions due to the creation of a political system that acts in an unresponsive manner towards any changing efforts arising from bottom up.
- Many Kosovar local grassroots struggle with internal issues that include: financial survival, strategic management, operation management, external relations and advocacy efforts, summarizing this way internal capacities in need of multidimensional support to be able to become the agents of political efficacy.

There is unassertive dialogue and cooperation between CSOs, local and central authorities in policy and decision-making process with the exception of certain well-established think tanks operating in Prishtina.

The timing is perfect for grassroots to address these challenges, and gather citizens' concerns around the "common good". In Kosovo, the involvement of local CSOs in policy and decision-making processes is significantly lacking and the important role that they play in civil society is faced with many challenges and constraints, such as the lack of strategies and mechanisms in place to support more structured, coordinated, and participatory dialogue and cooperation between local CSOs and public institutions. As EC Kosovo Report (2016)¹⁸ notes that "An empowered civil society is a crucial component of any democratic system and should be recognized and treated as such by institutions in Kosovo. Civil society needs to continue to play a crucial role in the democratic debate and in participating in the design and implementation of public policy". The latest effort by the Kosovo Government in this regard is the Strategy for Cooperation with Civil Society 2013-2017, which marked a positive step in this regard, though little effort was made by respective institutions to implement the consequent action plan in practice.

However, the 2018 EC Country Report (2018) acknowledges little improvement with regard to the cooperation between the Government and Civil Society, but immediately the report calls for serious efforts to be put on the cooperation at local level.¹⁹

¹⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/pdf/key_documents/2016/20161109_report_kosovo.pdf

¹⁹ https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/pdf/key_documents/2016/20161109_report_kosovo.pdf

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Questionary developed in the context of developing National Resource Center of Civil Society Organizations in Kosovo

1. Name and Surname
2. Organization
3. Where is your organization located?
4. How many people are part of your organization? In terms of staff, volunteers, members.
 -
5. Is your organization part of any network, coalition or informal group of Civil Society Organizations (please specify which one)?
 - a. Local network
 - b. National network
 - c. International network
6. Please select up to five thematic areas you consider relevant for the mission and current activities of the organization you represent.
 - Environment protection/ fighting environmental damage/ water and air quality, waste management, industrial pollution control and risk management
 - Sustainable Energy efficiency, transport and mobility
 - Consumers and Health protection
 - Health and safety at work
 - Gender equality, budgeting, mainstreaming, political representation
 - Fighting Gender based violence
 - Volunteering
 - Social inclusion/social protection/decentralization of social services
 - Rule of law/fight against corruption
 - Reconciliation and intercommunity relations and Cultural dialogue
 - PAR and Open government
 - Economic Development, eco. Governance (PFM)
 - Strengthening of the electoral process and democracy
 - Education
 - Social economy/social entrepreneurship
 - Child protection
 - Youth (participation, integration, cooperation in culture and sport)