



**WOMEN'S ALLIANCES
IN MUNICIPAL COUNCILS
AND THE NATIONAL ALLIANCE OF
MUNICIPAL WOMEN COUNCILORS**

The representation of women and girls in local government in Albania has experienced an increase in historical levels thanks to the essential amendments and changes of the Electoral Code in 2015. These amendments and changes conditioned women's representation of 50% of the council's candidacy lists through a "zebra" system and CEC disapproval of the list if these quotas were not met. Another factor that has affected representation at historical levels is the Administrative Territorial Reform, which changed the number of local government units from 365 municipalities and communes to 61 municipalities. As a result, in the local elections of 2015 a record figure of 35% of women in municipal councils (previously 14% of them) and 15% of mayors (previously only 1%) was achieved. Such a historical achievement is very important for the country, and it is also important to continue supporting the empowerment of municipal women councilors as the initiators of change.

Inclusion of women at these levels in the municipal councils was followed by an

initiative that turns out to be truly positive and effective. For the first time, despite the political affiliation, female members of municipal councils in various municipalities of the country joined informal and voluntary groups in order to advocate for the rights of the community they represent but at the same time aiming to raise the capacities of the women councilors themselves and strengthening their role in the municipal councils. These Alliances began to emerge in the middle of this mandate obtained in 2015, and as this catalogue is being published, their number may continue to grow as women's efforts to influence the improvement of favorable policies for women and vulnerable communities, continue day after day. Since their foundation, alliances have been supported to organize their function based on work plans and in supporting the implementation of local programs in support of women. "UN Women", as one of the first and most important alliance supporters, has helped them strengthen their capacity to build

networks of cooperation, fostering knowledge sharing and supporting the creation of a shared vision of cross-party coordination and cooperation at the local and central level. Many alliances have also been created and continue to be created with the contribution of Swiss Cooperation through Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation through the dldp program up until 2018 and now by Bashki të Forta program. It is also important to mention that other partners have supported alliances and have often been the ones that have served as promoters and facilitators for the creation of alliances in other municipalities of the respective regions (qarks).

By May 2019, 33 Alliances were created in 61 municipalities with a population of more than 1 million voters covering nearly 77% of the population. Women and girls engaged in the Alliance represent 60% of all women and girls councilors in Albania. More than 250 women and girls are involved in this process, representing the entire Albanian political spectrum.

Regardless of support from various donors, work to achieve the objectives for which these Alliances are created and continue to be created is being carried out with a common agenda. A number of regional meetings have been organized, such as those in Korçë, Gjirokastër, Elbasan and Shkodër, to bring together all the Alliances. More than 60% of municipal women councilors have this role for the first time. From a detailed questionnaire and from the above-mentioned meetings, it was understood that they needed to increase their capacities in order to perform the new task in a more complete form and to serve as a factor of change.

This preparatory work confronted the alliances with some of the best practices and encouraged cooperation opportunities. As a result, the creation of the National Network of Municipal Women Councilors Alliance which was formalized on 8 March 2018, was enabled.

The National Network adopted its statute on November 14, 2018. Its vision and

strategy is to raise issues from the local level to high-level decision-making, strengthening cooperation with key groups such as the Municipal Women Councilors Alliance in various municipalities. For this purpose, two meetings with women deputies have been organized to designate a common agenda regarding issues affecting women and girls. The Women Deputies Alliance has also expressed interest in cooperating to set a common agenda with municipal women councilors.

All this makes cooperation between alliances indispensable for exchange of experiences and this catalogue you have in your hands today is a modest contribution to this purpose. The Best Practices Catalogue aims to testify about some positive results achieved by alliances with very little support. Through it, you can also get acquainted with the story of some of the members of these alliances, their efforts with modest financial support, but with a lot of goodwill.

The National Network and Alliances at local level should be supported as drivers of

change by increasing their capacity to build strong local and central agendas to support women's empowerment and gender equality. There are several opportunities to utilize the achievements so far, aiming for a higher impact of empowering women at the local and central level.

The best practices of the Women Councilors Alliances in the various municipalities of Albania are brought to the attention all concerned people in an electoral year for the new local leaders. The 2019 elections are essential to support women, to ensure the sustainability of the achieved gender quota, and to build a public discussion on gender equality. Testifying concrete examples of the results achieved by municipal women councilors, support for women and girls candidates to run and to re-run as candidates for municipal councils and mayor positions will be encouraged.



A few words on the National Women Councilors Alliance

The National Women Councilors Alliance was established on March 8, 2018, following the launch of Women Councilors Alliances establishment process in various municipalities of the country. The Alliance was born as a natural will to function as inter-party grouping with the aim of creating a supportive climate for women and girls issues in all municipalities, as well as strengthening the self-functioning of municipal councils.

After more than a year since its establishment, the National Women Councilors Alliance has carried out its mission very well, providing an excellent spirit of cooperation, beyond the political schisms, a spirit which has been translated into specific initiatives for solving problems affecting the community in general and vulnerable groups in particular.

Thanks to the unreserved support of some international institutions such as Bashki të Forta (BtF) Program of Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation, UN Women, and the

benevolent will of local institutions, the National Women Councilors Alliance has been part of many activities where women councilors have become acquainted with legislation, have become even more aware of their role as municipal councilors, have been trained and have become part of the initiatives they have taken in their respective municipalities.

The National Women Councilors Alliance has strongly advocated women and girls issues and insists that lawmaking and law enforcement institutions guarantee gender equality in representation at both local and central level.

The National Women Councilors Alliance believes there is still much to be done to improve the quality of life of Albanian citizens.

As President of the National Women Councilors Alliance, I am confident that our mission in fulfilling our obligations to women and girls in particular and to all Albanian citizens will continue.

#NjëZëPërTy#


Kryetare e AKK

Prof.Dr. Klodeta Dibra

FUND DEDICATED TO WOMEN IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP



Tirana Municipality




"Establishment of the fund is a successful and encouraging initiative that supports not only women, but also their families and communities, part of which they are. Women's economic empowerment is an essential factor that helps women become powerful decision-makers at different levels and our alliance will continue to develop similar projects that have empowering women in need to their core".

**The Women's Alliance in Tirana Municipal Council
was established in February 2016.**

Women make up 51% of the council, with 31 seats out of 61.






The Alliance's most successful practice in Tirana Municipality aims at women's economic empowerment through a dedicated fund.

"The Fund for Empowerment and Initiatives of Entrepreneurial Women" supports self-employment, further growth and the sustainability of their economic activities. Beneficiaries are mostly women in difficult conditions, such as those coming from rural areas, heads of households (single mothers), women with special needs or women belonging to ethnic minorities. Women's economic empowerment has been part of the Alliance's work plan. Initially, the Alliance had the mayor's support and cooperated with the deputy mayor. Further, they strongly advocated with the municipal administration and with male colleagues. They also called for support from international partners such as the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and local businesses. As a result, the fund was established in 2017 and has been funding women's economic activities for three years. The source of the fund was mainly the municipal budget and various donors, such as UNDP.

The fund is allocated to women entrepreneurs in the form of small grants.






During the first year the total budget of the fund was 6 million ALL, providing grants from 280,000 to 420,000 ALL for each successful business plan. After a long process of selection and training, 18 women entrepreneurs benefited from the fund and 16 new jobs were created for women and girls. In the second year, the fund reached 7.7 million ALL, including 2.7 million ALL from UNDP. Allocated grants ranged from 200,000 to 400,000 ALL. 17 women entrepreneurs were supported and 22 new jobs were created. With the support of UN Women, a detailed guide documenting the process and application standards and business plans was developed.


Entrepreneurial women applying for these small grants submitted their business plans to set up a new enterprise, or to strengthen and enhance an existing one. They have been trained in entrepreneurial skills and have benefited from technical assistance in implementing their business plan. In conclusion, this initiative has not only assisted women entrepreneurs and their families but, supporting small-scale entrepreneurs run by women and girls, has helped create new jobs.

Supported businesses operate in various fields such as technology, agriculture, trade, manufacturing and various services. The Fund was implemented in the period 2016-2018 with a total budget of 13.7 million ALL, from the budget of the Tirana Municipality. During this process, 42 women entrepreneurs were trained to draft a business plan; 35 businesses were selected with a very rigorous evaluation system and benefited from the fund; of these, 19 new businesses were set up, while 14 existing businesses grew further. Thanks to the fund, 38 women were employed in these businesses.






*Në studion fotografike të Adës,
përfutuese e grantit nga bashkia Tiranë*



The Alliance Initiative in Tirana Municipality is a success story thanks to the commitment of female members of the municipal council to engage and communicate with women entrepreneurs in order to increase their trust in the justice and meritocracy of the selection process.

Also, the support of local and international actors has been a key factor in providing the necessary resources and making the fund effective. The main challenge for the future is to maintain current donors and identify new donors in order for the fund to grow.

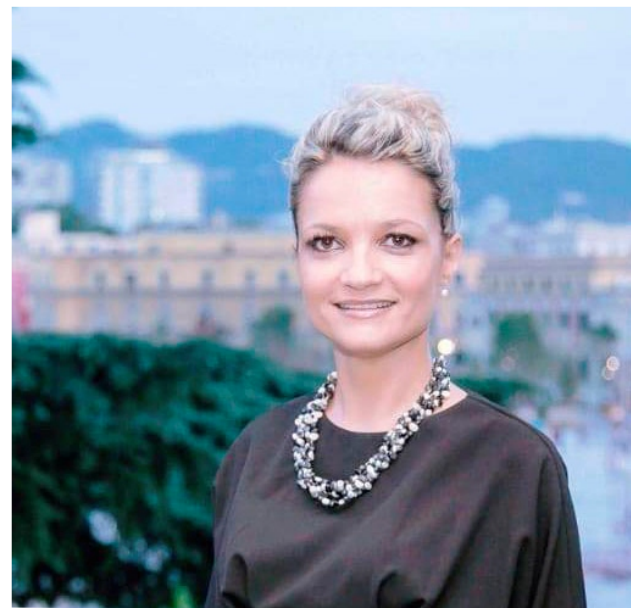
"The Fund for Empowerment and Initiatives of Women Entrepreneurs" is a sustainable practice implemented by Tirana Municipality as the procedural and management skills have been enhanced in the administration of the Municipality. Also, the Municipal Council has dedicated to this initiative funds from the municipal budget for three consecutive years and has already plans for the future. The municipality intends to allocate 10 million ALL with 500,000 ALL grants to the initiative in the period 2019-2020. However, support from external donors is welcome to ensure sustainability and increase the budget, so that it can be more beneficial. The practice may inspire other municipalities in the country to undertake similar initiatives to support women in entrepreneurship. Although the municipalities have a low budget to support this initiative, Tirana's practice proves that resources can be raised by other donors and partners in support of the municipality's financial resources.



"In politics, if you want something said, seek a man, if you want something done, seek a woman." We have 50% women and girls in the municipal council; it is high time we had 50% representation of women in parliament. The example of the municipal council should be followed at all levels of government. Women support women! The key to success is communication, teamwork, and vision for the future. Nothing is achieved unless you have the spirit of cooperation. In every activity I have undertaken, I have paid maximum attention to every collaborator. Group work has always proved successful.

The advice I would give to all women is to never stop being themselves and passionately pursuing the goal they have set themselves, regardless of the obstacles that may arise."

Adjusting infrastructure to make the city more accessible to people with special needs and children in strollers.



Dorina Kuka

Chair of the Alliance, Municipality of Tirana



Lezhë Municipality

"An initiative that can inspire other municipalities, and not only!"

The Women's Alliance in Lezhë Municipal Council has been active since 2017, undertaking several initiatives in the municipal council, but was formalized in December 2018.

The Women's Alliance in Lezhë Municipal Council has undertaken several initiatives that address the needs and problems of women and girls. The best practice is to increase access to the city for people with special needs and children in strollers. The Alliance undertook the initiative to improve accessibility in Lezhë and Shëngjin by setting ramps in public space. The starting point was the inclination of members of the alliance to help families, especially mothers, with small children in strollers to move around in the city. This initiative also helps disabled people to move around. The Alliance advocated and insured

the support of the municipal council. Cooperation with the Public Service Department in Lezhë Municipality has been key to ensuring the success of this initiative, as this department was responsible for the physical implementation of the project. The funds were provided by the annual budget for construction and maintenance of the city, so the municipality did not have to allocate a special budget for this initiative.

As a result of this initiative, 90 ramps were set up, covering 90% of the city's road network. Ramps were not only placed on the streets and sidewalks but also and at the entrance of the institutions to ensure that all

the buildings in the city were accessible to people with special needs.

Currently, Lezhë is one of the most accessible cities in the country, thanks to the Alliance's contribution.

One of the key factors behind the success of this initiative was the effective commitment and coordination of instances within the municipality involved in its planning and implementation. Also, the proactive approach that the Alliance has had since its establishment has played an important role in the successful implementation of the initiative.

The support this initiative obtained from the mayor, the municipal council and the municipal administration, beyond the political divisions, has been essential to its success and appreciation by the inhabitants of Lezhë.

The intervention raised as Alliance's initiative has become part of the municipal plans for the next steps in infrastructure, ensuring a systematic continuity. Also, the Alliance in cooperation with the Public

Service Department are looking for new ways to expand the initiative geographically and to respond to the accessibility needs of different groups, such as blind people. Considering the positive impact of this initiative, the Public Service Department has decided to continue with similar interventions in the tourist area of Shëngjin with the intention of completing before 2019, to further proceed to Shënkoll and Balldre in order to complete all urban centers within the next 5 years.

This positive practice of the Alliance in Lezhë can be replicated quite simply in other municipalities as well, being developed within the institutional framework of the municipality and implemented thanks to the active involvement of its administration. Also, the low costs of this initiative may be borne by other municipalities, even if they are smaller than Lezhë municipality.

SUPPORT OF VOCATIONAL TRAINING COURSES FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS IN RURAL AREAS



Vlorë Municipality

"Following the administrative-territorial reform, the municipality had the legal obligation to serve and provide with equal opportunities all its citizens wherever they lived, in the country or the city."

Starting in 2017, the Alliance of Women Councilors in Vlorë Municipality has encouraged support for the participation of women and girls from rural areas under its administration in vocational training courses. 46 women and girls from marginalized groups facing social and economic difficulties, heads of households (single mothers), divorced women or widows were supported during 2017 and 2018. The budget allocated by the municipality was 634,500 ALL each year. This budget has increased in 2019, amounting to 684,500 ALL, with a view to supporting a higher number of women and girls.

Enela Mone, coordinator of "Aulona" Center, Vlorë, branch of the Center for Population and Development

"During the implementation of the "Mobilizing Women for Community Development " project, we have set up independent women's forums in the four Administrative Units of the Municipality of Vlorë (Orikum, Novoselë, Qendër and Shushicë).

One of the concerns of women in these rural areas was, of course, unemployment. Most of them did not have an occupation but they did not even have the opportunity to attend a vocational training course because the courses were conducted only in Vlorë. Their economic opportunities could not afford the transportation costs for the course conducting period.



Enela Mone

Supporter and member of the Women Councilors Alliance

"We had the idea to request from the Municipality, exactly, the REIMBURSEMENT of TRANSPORTATION COSTS for these women and girls. Without delay, we wrote it down in the form of a project and once we discussed it with the mayor, he immediately supported our idea. Initially, the project was to support 40 women and girls (10 for each Administrative Unit) with reimbursement of

transportation costs throughout the course. We also contacted the Vocational Training Center for the list of courses they offered and about the registration procedures. With the Alliance's insistence, this project has been budgeted for three consecutive years in the city of Vlorë. "



Migena Balla
Chair of Women Councilors Alliance, Vlorë

"I am a woman, head of household (single mother), with two children. I live in Orikum, renting. I work where I can, usually during the summer. I had always liked to learn how to use the sewing machine, but I had not had the opportunity. As soon as we were informed of this municipal project, I was registered and attended the tailoring course. Today I feel better because I can work at home even during the winter period. This is one more opportunity for me and my children."

The contribution provided by civil society associations such as "Aulona Center", "World Vision" and "With the community for change" has been essential in providing support for an effective implementation of the initiative. These associations have provided the necessary support in coordinating and managing the implementation of the initiative. Moreover, 23% of the budget for coordination and logistics is covered by them.

The support of local administration institutions has been crucial in disseminating information to women and girls in need, in

promoting the initiative, in fostering participation and in coordinating with the municipality and partner organizations.

One of the key factors behind the success of this initiative was the bottom-up approach with which it was conceived, being born during consultations with women and girls of marginalized groups. Another positive



Fatmira Xhama

Women's Forum, Orikum

factor has been the partnership between the Women's Alliance in the Municipal Councils, the Administrative Units and civil society organizations, which guaranteed the come-together of the necessary resources under a good organization of role division to enable effective implementation of the initiative.

As far as the difficulties and challenges faced by the initiative are concerned, the social norms regarding women and girls who come from marginalized groups or rural areas remain the main ones. These norms stigmatize women and girls if they travel alone or engage in activities that give them economic and educational independence, away from their community. Furthermore, the distance from the areas where these women and girls came from and the lack of appropriate transport lines made it difficult for them to attend the courses organized in Vlorë city.

On the other hand, as this initiative is partially based on the contribution of civil society organizations, its sustainability is hampered if these organizations withdraw

from cooperation, or if their funding ends. For this reason, the Municipal Council should evaluate the possibility of full financial support of this initiative, even because it would be preferable for the management of the initiative to gradually go completely over to the municipal administration.

The work done by the Women's Alliance in Vlorë Municipal Council has created a model for supporting women and girls from rural areas, a model that has been implemented for three consecutive years by this municipality. This practice has generated the necessary practical and procedural administration knowledge that would be needed for its continuity. Moreover, all party forces represented in the Alliance have agreed to support the initiative, which may indicate that support to it will continue even if the council figures change after the 2019 elections. The actions undertaken by the Alliance in Vlorë may serve as an example for other municipalities that want to support the vocational training of women and girls from marginalized groups.

SUPPORT FOR WOMEN IN DIFFICULTY THROUGH THE PROVISION
OF SOCIAL HOUSING AND REDUCED TAXES



Fier Municipality

"We need a long-term strategy to support women in need"

The Women's Alliance in Fier Municipal Council was established in November 2017. It consists of 16 female members of the municipal council elected in 2015, representing all political parties, accounting for 40% of the council.

Since its inception, the Alliance has decided to give priority to supporting women in difficult conditions, especially mothers who are heads of households (single mothers) and victims of domestic violence. One of the best experiences of the Alliance is the initiative in "Supporting women in difficulty by providing them with social housing and reduced taxes". To achieve this goal, female members of the municipal council began identifying possible beneficiaries in the municipal territory and prioritized those who had the most urgent need for support. Subsequently, the Alliance

advocated with the Municipal Council, the Housing Office, the Legal Office and the Social Services Office of the municipality to benefit from their support.

As a result of the Alliance's efforts, in October 2018, the Housing Office approved the decision to grant social housing to 6 women who are heads of households (single mothers) and victims of domestic violence and assisted 15 women from the same vulnerable groups with the reduction of municipal taxes. The decision was unanimously approved by the municipal council.

Thanks to the perseverance and commitment of women councilors and their cooperation with the municipal administration, the Alliance's initiative in Fier has yielded tangible results and has found full support in the Municipal Council. Even in this case, all political forces represented in the Alliance have agreed to support this initiative, which could serve as a guarantee for its continuity even after the 2019 elections. This practice has generated practical knowledge and appropriate administration procedures that will be needed for continued implementation in the future. Such experience can serve as a model for replication in other municipalities.

The main challenge for the Alliance's future in Fier is to develop a strategic approach to addressing the needs and interests of women and girls in their municipality and providing social services to the entire population.



PROVIDE FINANCIAL SUPPORT TO WOMEN WHO ARE HEADS OF HOUSEHOLDS (SINGLE MOTHERS) IN POVERTY CONDITIONS



Mat Municipality

"Women come first!"

The Alliance in Mat was created in April 2017 and consists of 6 members of the Municipal Council.

In 2018, with the implementation of the new system of economic support/aid for the families in need, one out of four families that applied to the offices of the Mat Municipality was not selected. Among them, 72 were women, head of households (single mothers). The alliance members met these women who are heads of households (single mothers) who had not benefited from economic support/aid and understood the difficult conditions in which they lived. This prompted the Alliance to take some action.

Based on the legislation in force, the Municipal Council is entitled to use 6% of the designated fund for economic aid to be

allocated to households that are excluded from the electronic classification. The Alliance took the necessary steps to make the council use this fund and advocated to give priority to women who are heads of households (single mothers).

The women councilors identified the potential beneficiaries and collaborated with the Social Services Office in the municipality to estimate the necessary funds and to provide the necessary administrative steps.

Thanks to the Alliance's initiative and proposal, the Mat Municipal Council approved the criteria for allocating 6% of the fund, according to which women who are

heads of households (single mothers) were given priority. 72 women who are heads of households (single mothers) benefited from this decision and continue to receive aid from the municipality.

Cooperation of councilors, despite political affiliation, has been one of the major factors that has enabled them to speak up with one single voice and successfully advocate with the council and the various parties represented therein to achieve the necessary number of votes. The perseverance and the ability to argue their proposal have also played an important role in this achievement.

A challenge to the future of this initiative lies in the Council's ability to consistently use 6% of the economic assistance/aid fund, adding additional funding from the municipality in order to increase the number of beneficiaries. Another challenge of the Council and women councilors is to maintain the criterion set out in the alliance's proposal to give priority to women who are heads of households (single

mothers).

Mat Alliance's best practice has set up a model for interventions to support women who are heads of households (single mothers) by the Municipality. This practice has generated the necessary procedural knowledge of the administration that would be needed in case of continuation of the initiative in the future. Nonetheless, the continuity of this initiative will depend on the new council's political will, following the 2019 elections, to decide whether these women will continue to have a 6% fund allocation priority.

Actions undertaken by the Alliance Mat could serve as an example for other municipalities that would like to use the space provided in legislation to economically support/aid families in need and individuals in their communities.

SUPPORTING WOMEN AND GIRLS,
VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE



Korçë Municipality

**"There is still a lot to do, but the will is good
and the support is not lacking"**

The Alliance of Korçë Municipality was created on 26 May 2017. It consists of 17 female members of the Municipal Council, out of 41, representing 17% of the council.

The best practice selected in Korçë Municipality is the initiative undertaken by the Alliance to give its contribution to the implementation of the National Strategy for Gender Equality and the Action Plan. These practices aim at raising awareness of gender-based violence and strengthening legal and administrative protection as well as support services for victims of domestic violence.

Alliance's work is based on understanding that domestic violence is a widespread phenomenon in our society and that it has negative impacts on women, girls, children and their communities. The efforts of women councilors are appreciated and

supported by the Municipality's leadership. Within the framework of the cooperation agreement with the Albanian government, with the support of UNDP, Korçë Municipality was given the opportunity to implement a project whose goal is to support victims of domestic violence with services. This is performed relying on a multidisciplinary approach, promoting equal participation of victims in social life, and strengthening the capacity of municipal structures and local civil society to provide services and engage in the fight against domestic violence.

The municipality, schools and civil society have been coordinated to change the

grave situation of domestic violence in Albania, particularly in Korçë region. In general, the project involves women from groups in difficult situations who, because of the socio-cultural and economic situation, are victims of violence. The project has a focused approach toward certain women and children, aiming at solving the problems they face.

Although with small funds, unable to invest more, the Municipality has planned each year a special budget to assist women who are victims of domestic violence, providing victims of violence with housing access and awareness-raising campaigns. This budget is always growing, in support of victims of domestic violence.

The initiative of Korçë Alliance is a success story thanks to the commitment of women councilors to engage and contribute to projects aimed at supporting women and their children, victims of domestic violence, thus increasing the role of women councilors in the municipality, region and society.

On the other hand, this alliance has

focused on increasing the capacity of women and girls engaged, as well as facilitating the creation of other alliances in the municipalities of Korçë region.


Nga ana tjetër, kjo aleancë është fokusuar në rritjen e kapaciteteve të grave e vajzave të angazhuara,

Of course, there is still much work to be done in these areas, but the will is good and support is not lacking, so women councilors believe that their initiatives are a good way to address the problems and efforts to find the right solution.

SUPPORTING WOMEN WHO ARE HEADS OF HOUSEHOLDS
(SINGLE MOTHERS) THROUGH REDUCED TAXES




Shkodër Municipality



"We know there are many women who are heads of households (single mothers) in difficult economic conditions, who need our help. We hope that this initiative will continue to support the neediest mothers and allow their children to continue schooling."

The Alliance in Shkodër was established in March 2016. It consists of 24 female members of the Municipal Council, out of 51, representing 47% of the council. The Alliance has enabled a 50% tax reduction for women who are heads of households (single mothers) in need, who have the custody of children less than 22 years of age. The initiative was implemented for the first time in 2017 and has so far supported 22 families. Women councilors believe that by helping mothers in economic difficulties, they allow their children to continue their schooling and not drop out of it because they need to work.



"Shkodër initiative was born as an idea in the first meetings of the Municipal Council held by a group of women councilors. In the public hearing on fiscal package 2016, we proposed that women who are heads of households (single mothers) with custody for at least one child up to 22 years old should pay only 50% of the municipal fee for cleaning, greening and lighting. This proposal was taken into account by the municipal administration and was finally settled in the 2016 fiscal package.

We felt very good, as we thought we did something good for this target group. When we organized joint meetings with other alliances, each representative of alliances in different municipalities began to tell about her own experiences. We presented this initiative that was liked and was taken as an example from other alliances as well. However, at the subsequent meetings of the Shkodër group, we noticed that few women had benefitted from this initiative. We think this happened for two reasons. First, we did not monitor the implementation of this decision to see how it was going on the field. Second, people

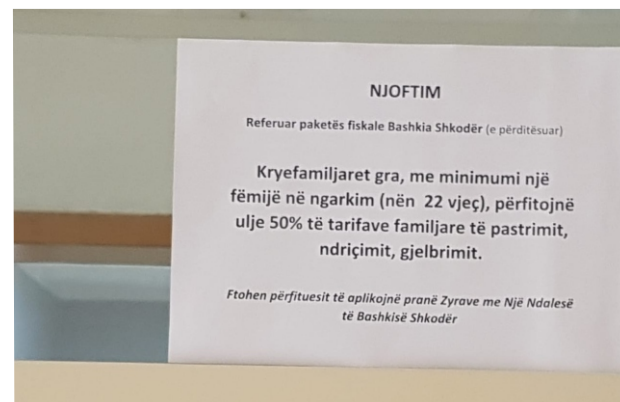


Vildana Gushta

Chair of Women Councilors Alliance, Shkodër Municipality.

belonging to this category do not have much time and opportunity to be informed by Municipal Council meetings, although they are always open to the public. So they did not know about this fiscal relief they are entitled to by decision of the municipal council. In 2016 there were no beneficiaries, in 2017, 12 families were beneficiaries, while in 2018 the number had gone up to 25 beneficiaries. This was confirmed by the meeting I had with the Director of the Revenue Department in Shkodër Municipality. In March 2019, I put two notices on a white sheet: one on the counter where the municipal taxes are paid and one at the door where family fees are paid. When citizens go there can see them and become aware of this fiscal relief they are entitled to. We are now trying to monitor it by the end of our mandate. We hope to have been somewhat useful as women councilors to our initiative."


The Alliance Initiative in Shkodër is in the third implementation year and the Alliance is working on its inclusion in the 2020 fiscal plan. The difficulties encountered during this period



in implementing the initiative encourage the Alliance to address them by requesting periodical by the administration. In the future, the Alliance intends to build a communication platform for all its initiatives in order to inform the public about its decisions and initiatives in their interest, and will also increase the number of meetings with citizens and the media to guarantee that initiatives be properly explained to those who may be potential beneficiaries. In order to guarantee the long-term sustainability of these initiatives, it may be necessary for the advocacy to continue with the new members of the Municipal Council after the elections of 2019.




Klos Municipality



**"We have very few financial opportunities,
but we will work to support women as much as we can"**

Established in August 2016, the Alliance of Klos Municipality has chosen the initiative to reduce the water and wood tax for women who are heads of households (single mothers) as the best practice. The initiative was driven by the difficult conditions in which these women and their families are and aims to increase the resources of the municipality allocated to meet their needs. To achieve their goal, Alliance female members advocated with the administration of the municipality and its mayor. Their efforts were successful and the Council approved the proposal unanimously. As a result, 15 families of women who are heads of households (single mothers) have benefited from tax reductions. This initiative was a novelty for the Klos Municipality. A key factor to its success was that, for the first time, women councilors from various political forces came together, unlike hard-line meetings, to propose a change in the fiscal plan that comes to the aid of women in need. Collaboration of women councilors from various political parties was a challenge that was successfully faced during the work for this initiative.



"Klos Municipality has very few financial opportunities, but initiatives have been supported by both the members of the Municipal Council and the Mayor. As an alliance we have proved active and cooperative in protecting the general interests of women in particular. Our efforts and proposals have been implemented in decision-making for removing the tax for drinking and irrigation water for women who are heads of households (single mothers), providing financial assistance to women who are victims of domestic violence and women with a protection order. We as an alliance have proposed and we have taken into consideration the construction of three houses where heads of households are women with minors and our proposal for the construction of three houses for the Egyptian community has been included in our 2019 budget".

The proactive approach of women councilors and the successful advocacy strategies used to involve the Mayor, Municipal Council and administration were

key factors in the success of the initiatives in Shkodër and Klos municipalities. The initiatives of these municipalities are replicated in other municipalities, given that the economic difficulties of women who are heads of households (single mothers) concern the entire country and all Municipal Councils have a legal mandate to determine the annual fiscal plan.



Drita Bala

Chair of Women Councilors Alliance in Klos Municipality

PROGRESS OF THE LOCAL AGENDA FOR GENDER EQUALITY



Durrës Municipality

“The road ahead is difficult, but if we continue to seek without stopping, we will make it.”

The Alliance in Durrës was established in December 2016. It consists of 27 female members of the Municipal Council, representing 52% of the council.

One of the greatest achievements of this alliance is the inclusion of gender equality in the work mandate of the Commission on "Civil Protection, Public Safety and Health". As a result, on March 8, 2018, on the International Women's Day, the name of the Commission was officially changed to the Commission on "Civil Protection, Public Safety, Health and Gender Equality" (hereinafter referred to as the Gender Equality Committee).

Also, Alliance members have advocated and cooperated with the municipality to draft an Action Plan on Gender Equality 2018-2020, which identifies several priority areas where

the municipality should improve its impact to achieve gender equality. The first draft was implemented with the support of international partners, such as UN Women and members of civil society, such as the "Today for the future" association, the "Living hope" daily care center, the Regional Social Service, etc. At the same time, consultations with women and girls in difficult situations are important.

This work led to the adoption of the Gender Equality Action Plan by the Gender Equality Commission in March 2018, as well as the allocation of financial resources from the

municipal budget. Thanks to the Alliance's advocacy, the Office for Gender Equality has been established in the Municipality, which oversees the implementation of the Action Plan.

Durrës Alliance has played an important role in translating policies and plans addressing social issues such as poverty, unemployment and gender equality, into concrete actions with a designated budget, thanks to the decisions of the Municipal Council. These include decisions on:

- Reduction by 50% of the costs of

nurseries and kindergartens for children from families in poverty conditions, from families with twin children and families with more than one three-year-old children;

- Financial assistance from the municipal budget and inclusion of the social housing program for families with women who are heads of households (single mothers);

- Coverage of the cost of nursery and kindergarten services for children with special needs.

- Legal assistance and a counseling line for victims of domestic violence.



"With the creation of the Alliance of Municipal Women Councilors, I was elected chair and this increased my responsibility to do something at all costs, especially for those women who elected me. As an Alliance we have been persistently seeking tax reductions for women who are heads of households (single mothers) and we have achieved it. We asked to open green corners for children, more in suburb areas, and our voice has been heard. In this context, I can say that the women's alliance has helped me find the enthusiasm with which I entered politics. The main inspiration I had was the meetings and the exchange of experiences. We are a very compact alliance, no political color separates us. When we meet the women of the other Alliances, they tell us "Men councilors or mayors do not pay attention to us." I'm surprised; maybe this is because we are more women councilors in Durrës. When I say I will talk about the Alliance, the men councilors stop talking and listen to me and are the first to raise their hands. This is our good fortune, we are 27 women councilors out of 51

councilors in total, we possess 52% of the council, but I believe it's not just this. Our demands are grounded, we raise very sensitive issues and third, we are not afraid to propose something, providing that we do something good. Still, we are not where we are supposed to be. Despite the fact that we raise very acute issues in the Council, still the problems concerning the budget, streets and roads have a higher specific weight than the issues we put forward. There is still a lot to be done, but I am confident that women will succeed".



Nadire Kërtusha

*Chair of the Alliance, woman member of the Municipal Council,
Durrës Municipality*



Elbasan Municipality

"Elbasan Alliance is an important and well-known actor, considered by the community a mechanism to achieve gender equality and social inclusion."

The Alliance in Elbasan was established in May 2017. It consists of 23 female members of the Municipal Council, representing 43% of it.

Immediately after its creation, the Alliance began work on the establishment of the Gender Equality Commission as part of the Municipal Council. To this end, women councilors advocated with the council male colleagues of all political parties, and with the Social Services Department. Their efforts were successful and in December 2017, the Municipal Council approved the establishment of a Gender Equality Commission, consisting of 3 women councilors, representatives of three different

political parties.

The Commission has played an important role in enhancing the recognition and use of gender equality in the decisions and work of the Municipal Council. The decisions of the council were reviewed, making comments and recommendations on how they could address the needs of women and girls in the municipality of Elbasan.

The most important achievement of this

Commission is the adoption of the Action Plan on Gender Equality in April 2018. It identifies the five priority areas related to gender equality in the Municipality of Elbasan for the next 4 years: economic growth, violence against women, health, education, participation.

The Alliance has played an important role in advocating the adoption of this plan, as well as making some revisions to its drafts, including important areas such as domestic violence. The plan was set up through a

consultative process through which the voices of some marginalized groups were heard. The plan was drafted with the support of international actors and members of local civil society such as UN Women, Other Vision, Woman in the Family, etc. In addition to the municipal budget, the plan is funded by donor funds. The Municipality Administration has hired new staff that works only with domestic violence and gender equality issues, which will increase the institution's ability to identify and refer cases of domestic violence.



"I am a lawyer by profession and I have worked in the administration for nearly two decades, meanwhile I have been an active part of civil society too. I think that being a dignified citizen and representing them means being a socially concerned person for the problems of citizens. It is unacceptable for me to be indifferent to problems that concern the community.

During this mandate as a councilor, I contributed with the assistance of UN Women to the creation of the Women Councilors Alliance in Elbasan Municipality and in the other municipalities of the region and I am currently the chair of this Alliance. The establishment of these alliances has created a very positive cooperation climate between women councilors of the entire political spectrum. Numerous and highly effective workshops and meetings have been organized. All these have helped to exchange the best practices among municipal women councilors, and the Alliances were created by the municipalities of Elbasan, Librazhd, Prrerjas, Gramsh, Belsh and Cërrik, whereas



Luisa Popja

Chair of Women Councilors Alliance in Elbasan

Peqin's representation is still missing. There the Alliance was not created because of the scarce number of women and girls in the municipal council, so there is still much work to be done. Women Councilors Alliance in Elbasan is the second one after the one in Tirana that has established the Gender Equality Commission and the incentive for this was a workshop held in the city of Korça where we received valuable information and experience from the women councilors of the Municipality of Tirana. Meanwhile during the last year and onwards, Women Councilors Alliance in Elbasan has held meetings with women and girls in urban and rural areas to hear from them the problems and concerns they have in everyday life.

Despite the inabilities to address the problems raised by women and girls, we have deemed that it is very important to initiate and develop as many meetings as possible to listen to them with utmost attention. We as an Alliance of Women Councilors do not only feel as representatives of a political party but representatives of every woman in the

community. The cooperation among women councilors has been the guarantee of the successes achieved during this period.

That is why I am convinced that Women Councilors Alliances as voluntary groups will continue to increase their performance in front of the communities they represent, regardless of the fact whether we who created them will or will not be part of them in the new municipal councils to be constituted after the next local elections".



C rrik Municipality



"The Alliance's efforts have been aimed at influencing budget initiatives, with a view to ensuring sustainability."

The Alliance in Cërrik was created on May 16, 2018.
Alliance members represent 43% of the council.



The best-rated practice of the Municipality of Cërrik is the initiative to establish a Gender Equality Commission in the Municipal Council. Cërrik Alliance was inspired by the example of the municipality of Elbasan and has benefited from its support. In order to explain the advantages of having such a commission, the chair of the Elbasan Gender Equality Commission, who also co-chairs the National Network for Gender Equality, held a series of meetings with the women of the Municipal Council of Cërrik.

Further, council female members advocated and managed to secure the support of their male colleagues in the municipal council. The latter insisted to be included in the composition of the Commission, by the side of their female colleagues. As a result, the Commission was set up with 3 female members and 2 male members.

Since its establishment, the Commission has reviewed four Municipal Council decisions in order to address the needs and interests of women and girls in Cërrik. Of

these, 3 decisions have contributed to the improvement of the conditions of women who are heads of households (single mothers) with regard to financial assistance from the municipal fund, with priority for access to social housing and tax reductions by 20%. The fourth decision has benefited women or girls suffering from certain illnesses that compel them to use public transportation means to undergo therapy, providing them with free public transportation.

The Commission has also started work on drafting a Local Action Plan on Gender Equality and plans to strengthen partnerships with various stakeholders, such as UN Women, for supporting these plans.

"A meeting with two ladies with health issues from two different villages served as an incentive for the 2019 target, but this was more of a burden on the economic side for them. Being ill they could not work and could not generate income for their families. Ms. K.X with breast cancer, had had one breast removed and was undergoing therapy in Tirana, and the second lady A.M suffered from renal insufficiency and was receiving dialysis treatment in Elbasan. In addition to psychologically suffering from illness, they also suffered from the costs of therapies and transport.

Prompted by these two cases, I immediately organized a meeting with the women of the alliance where I expressed my opinion to make an analysis of the situation on the number of women suffering from specific illnesses. Following this meeting, we decided to cooperate with the Social Services Office to obtain some information on the situation and the number of women suffering from illnesses requiring therapy and, according to the diagnosis, the place where the therapies were performed. Based on the statistics according to

the documentation and field observations, after meeting and discussing closely with family members to see the real situation, this number amounted to 10 women. These data were gathered and became part of the discussions with the Gender Equality Commission, which would take part in preparing the draft budget to be submitted to the Municipal Council. Eventually, it was concluded that a small part of the budget allocated to social services would go to cover the transportation costs of these women who had therapy at clinics away from their residence. "




Gazmira Frakulli

Chair of Alliance in Cërrik Municipality




Lushnjë Municipality



"The Alliance's vision in Lushnjë Municipality is not only to increase women's participation in local politics and to share power equally with men, but to change social norms that hinder women's emancipation and bring about positive changes in society".

The Alliance in Lushnjë Municipality was created in May 2017. It consists of 21 female members of the Municipal Council, out of a total of 47 members, representing 44% of it.



Inspired by Alliance work in other municipalities, as well as consultations with women and girls of marginalized groups, the female members of the Alliance in Lushnjë Municipality decided to join forces and undertook concrete steps to advance with the gender equality agenda. By the end of 2018, Alliance in Lushnjë Municipality submitted a formal proposal to the Municipal Council to establish a Gender Equality Commission within the Council and to allocate a special budget to support women in difficult conditions. These were mostly women and girls from poor families, heads of households (single mothers) and young mothers.

To achieve this goal, Alliance female members advocated with male members of the council and the respective political groups to have full support for their initiative. They worked closely with the municipal administration to plan and implement the first draft decisions to be submitted to the Council. Also, a number of consultations were organized with potential beneficiaries of this initiative to listen to their opinion and to

better understand their needs.

These efforts made the desired outcome to be achieved. At the beginning of 2019, the Council approved the establishment of the Gender Equality Commission and the allocation of the 500,000 ALL fund for women in difficult conditions.

One of the elements that have enabled the Alliance's success in Durrës, Elbasan, Cërrik and Lushnjë to progress in the work on gender equality is to bring together all the women councilors in the Alliance, regardless of their political divisions, with the support of their male colleagues.

This has enabled the Alliances to work on a unified Gender Equality Agenda, which had the support of all parties and the majority of votes in the Municipal Councils. Also, in the case of Durrës, the Alliance has benefited from the fact that it constitutes the majority of the Municipal Council, facilitating decision-making processes related to the issues proposed by it.

Another factor that has positively impacted the cases of Durrës and Elbasan has been the support of local and international

actors who represent the interests of women and girls in difficult conditions. While in Cërrik, proximity to Elbasan has had a positive impact, giving women councilors positive examples to follow, in the case of Lushnjë, the perseverance of all women councilors, their strong advocacy with all actors and stakeholders and their involvement in all stages of planning and drafting the decision has had a very important impact. One of the main difficulties to work on in the future is capacity building at all levels (political, policy-making, executive, administrative etc.) in the area of gender equality, to ensure the effective implementation of strategies and action plans, and the generation of data on this topic, which will influence future strategies and policies at local level.

In the case of Cërrik Municipality, one of the main challenges faced by women councilors is the community's mindset about the role and potential impact of women's actions that women cannot do more than men or do things unlike men.

Two challenges for the future of the

Alliance in Lushnjë Municipality are the sustainability of the fund and its growth to enable the expansion of the number of beneficiaries.


The work carried out by the Alliances of these four municipalities is sustainable, being developed within the institutional organization of the Municipality. The Gender Equality Commission in all Municipalities and the Gender Equality Action Plan in Durrës and Elbasan, with the budget support of half the municipality's mandate, will likely survive the upcoming election changes and will serve as a basis for the continuous work of the municipal administration.

The actions undertaken by the Alliances of these four municipalities can serve as examples for other municipalities wishing to undertake changes in the area of Gender Equality by intervening at all levels: legislative (Gender Equality Commission), policy-making (Gender Equality Action Plan), the budget (Municipal Council decisions) and executive (Gender Equality/Domestic Violence Office staff).

MOBILIZING WOMEN
IN COMMUNITY'S INTERESTS




Malësi e Madhe Municipality



"Preserving national identity and natural assets is a topic that goes beyond political parties, belongs to everyone, especially to future generations".

Even though it is not formally established, women councilors' initiatives in Malësi e Madhe Municipality have not been missing. Their best practice is the history of mobilizing women councilors to protect the interests of the region and its residents despite the government's decision to allow the construction of a power plant in Kelmend.



Malësi e Madhe Municipality was informed of this decision and was asked to approve the start of works for a power plant along the river Cem. This news made all women councilors feel that the decision was against the interests of the region's residents. This intervention would not only damage the wonderful nature of the area by hindering the development of mountain tourism but would also directly harm residents who lived in the areas foreseen for the construction of the power plant, who had inherited common land but without legally recognized property rights.

The women councilors mobilized other actors in the region, such as civil society organizations, namely "For the Future of Kelmend" and "Earth", members of parliament representing the area, even a foreign anthropologist who has been living for a long time in Kelmend. They also organized several consultative meetings with residents of Kelmend, residing along the river Cem and those involved in the tourism industry. The media was also invited to echo

the issue on a wider national scale.

Women councilors advocated with other members of the Municipal Council to oppose the construction of the power plant, which resulted in a unanimous vote against it. Thanks to this decision, the construction of the plant was stopped. Women councilors continue their work on advocacy at regional and national level with media involvement in order to reach the final ban on these types of constructions in their municipality.

**ALEANCA
KOMBËTARE
E KËSHILLTAREVE**



Municipalities of Kukës, Has and Tropojë

"In the municipalities of our region (qark) the number of women councilors in the Municipal Councils is low, and most importantly, representatives in rural areas do not represent the capacities of women in these areas, capacities that are lacking but are not be stimulated by the political entities, not even the civic society. It should be stressed that even so, the effort of these women has increased the credibility, efficiency and integrity of the council. This was seen during discussions and decision-making at council meetings. Women have a good performance, are correct, assess community problems, discuss the quality of service delivery by the community administration, are determined to achieve the best for solving social issues. Women in municipal councils have worked hard to support women who are heads of households (single mothers), introducing orphans' certificates for free online applications, allocating scholarships according to the law, services in nurseries, kindergartens and schools, neighborhood lighting, cleaning, hygiene of service units, expired products in the shops and stores and if

the best practice is to be distinguished, it is obviously the one related to the major problem we had in terms of the "Nation's Road" toll.

In 2018, the government decided to set a new tax (toll) on the road linking the Kukës region to the rest of the country, which faced strong opposition from the local community. Women councilors believed that a road toll would be a heavy burden on the poor families of the Kukës region and especially women. They had found out the general opposition among the inhabitants of



Tatjana Kërshaliu

Woman councilor

the area during community meetings.

All Alliance members of these three municipalities unanimously agreed to be involved in this movement and signed a petition addressed to the government.

We women councilors analyzed the situation and supported the request based on logical reasoning. Unlike the political forces that demanded a 0 toll, we asked the Government to cooperate with the people of this region and necessarily review this fee, so that it would be affordable by the households, but also to review other tariffs such as business-related ones.

After raising the awareness of the residents, where the main role as always was played by the media, following repeatedly interviews by alliance members, who were always careful, without displaying any frustration or irritation signs, insults or unethical actions, demanding unstoppably the review of tariffs, and when we saw nothing happened and the implementation of the tariff approved by the Government started, we thought to organize the protest, about which we consulted the police.

We fully supported the Municipal Councils of Kukës Region, of Municipalities of Kukës, Tropojë and Has and we assisted in the peaceful protest.

Women councilors unanimously appealed in the media that this protest was peaceful, we distanced ourselves from and strongly condemned the violence employed by some people that were not part of us, as the property is sacred and is protected by the constitution.

Though we belonged to different sides of the political spectrum, a wise alliance was made in the common interest of the community, and we came up with the decision to become not only a driving force but also to fulfill the demand of all the people of the Kukës region.

After the protest where the residents' participation was considerable and we categorically distanced ourselves from the perpetrators, the government started negotiations to review the fee.

A united voice brought a solution to the problem that for two years was not heading toward the right direction for everyone".

Women councilors took part in this anti-toll movement regardless of their political affiliation. Women councilors united forces and acted in unison beyond party divisions, including women councilors representing the ruling party. This was the first time the women in the region were active in a public protest. This practice is a model of how women councilors can be mobilized to protect the interests of their community when they are under threat from policy initiatives at the central level. Also, this case shows how the Alliance can achieve greater results by merging forces with the Alliances of other municipalities under a common goal.

As in the case of Malësi e Madhe Municipality, and in that of the municipalities of Kukës region, the union constitutes the strength of the initiatives undertaken by the women councilors and was the key to their success. Although the Alliance in Malësi e Madhe Municipality has not been formally established yet, the practice of this municipality shows that women councilors can achieve significant results if they join

forces on behalf of the public interest.

Another factor that played an important role in amplifying the impact of alliance actions and in the success of the initiatives was coordination at the regional level. Bringing local issues to the attention of the central level through the media has resulted to have a positive role in both cases.

Challenges are certainly numerous; in the case of Malësi e Madhe Municipality the construction ban should become final rather than a temporary suspension of it, while in Kukës, it remains a challenge for women councilors to oppose central government decisions when they come from the same political party.

Another challenge lies in the clear division of roles between central and local government and the need for the latter to have full rights over projects that are developed in its territory so that they can protect both natural and cultural heritage, as well as residents' interests.

Although the actions of women councilors are related to specific concrete

cases, they form the basis of a stronger coordination and cooperation between women councilors from different political parties for the protection of their community's interests in the future. This may result in a valuable platform for supporting other issues in the future.

The best practices of the alliances in Kukës, Has, Tropojë and Malësi e Madhe can inspire the political mobilization of Alliances in other regions, in defense of the interests of the community beyond political divisions, even against central government policies.





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HELVETAS
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