

Tools for Human Rights and Gender for Local Development in Macedonia

Case study

1. Context

1.1. Poverty reduction processes in Macedonia

During the last decade, a profound and complex social transformation from socialism and centrally planned economy towards the establishment of market economy, democratic institutions and a vibrant civil society has been underway in Macedonia. The process of transition in Macedonia has been quite slow and widespread and growing poverty remains a serious problem in the country. The prolonged transition in Macedonia resulted in intensive changes in the socio-economic life and the social structure of the population which led to the impoverishment and social exclusion of a large portion of population. The human poverty index shows that, on average, 55.1 percent of the total population is suffering from various forms of human poverty. Unemployment is one of the main causes of poverty, and low level of education is common for unemployed in Macedonia. The unemployment rate reached 36.7 % in 2003, long-term unemployment is particularly high, about 85.1 percent of the total unemployed, which indicates the existence of structural causes of poverty. The analysis of data for the period of 1997-2003 indicates that the percentage of households living below the poverty line is in constant increase, reaching 30.2 percent in 2003. Data shows that 51.4 percent of the heads of poor households are with no education at all.

The indicators show a large extent of regional disparities which should be taken into account while elaborating social and economic policies at all levels.

Macedonia is not an IDA country and is not required to have PRSP, and there is no consistent and comprehensive poverty reduction programme in the country, which will offer an integrated and multi-sectoral approach to the problem.

Poverty, by its nature is a multidimensional phenomenon and, therefore, the reduction of poverty does not imply solely economic measures but rather complex and coordinated efforts in several areas, such as education, health, gender equality, environment etc. Consequently, there is a policy environment vacuum which is also reflected on the local level.

The Ministry of Finance, which was in charge of the Poverty Reduction Strategy, has the lead and coordination role in the MDG process. It was thus coordinating the production of the first baseline MDG Report, which was a participatory process aimed at identification of the national development goals and targets until 2015 and the necessary steps towards the achievement of the MDGs. Because of the multidimensional character of poverty and the need for a multisectorial approach to address poverty reduction, it is consistent that the Ministry of Finance which is responsible for budgeting has a lead role in poverty reduction as well.

In early May 2006 the Government of the Republic of Macedonia decided to prepare the National Development Plan (NDP) of the country for the 2007 – 2009 period. In contrast to the 2004 *National Strategy for European Integration of the Republic of Macedonia* that provides a vision for the long-term development of the country, the NDP

is a development investment “implementation” document focusing on the role of public investments that is needed to meet the stated development objectives of the *country*.

The NDP is of key importance for the country with respect to its medium-term planning of the all investments that are expected to be at least partially financed from public fund sources, domestic or foreign. The document therefore represents also a key ingredient for programming EU financial assistance Republic of Macedonia will be receiving from the EU budget via the *Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance* (IPA). This NDP will be followed by the national Strategy for Socio-economical development, which will be long term development document that contributes to Millennium Development goals.

A comprehensive approach to fight poverty and social exclusion points out that coherent development policies and coordination between different line ministries are key elements for successful sustainable development. Therefore, effective inter-ministerial coordination mechanisms would have to be an integral part of the policy development process.

1.2.MDG processes in Macedonia

The national MDG process resulting in the preparation of the MDG baseline report was timely in order to stress the multidimensional character of poverty and formulate concrete recommendations of a short-term and mid-term nature, which have to be followed and coordinated in different sectors in order to achieve poverty reduction goals for the country.

UNDP has been involved in and supported the MDG process in Macedonia through the project “Supporting the National MDG Process”, which aimed at building consensus on national development priorities with the meaningful participation of different stakeholders and preparation of the first MDG baseline report. The project aimed at supporting the Government of Macedonia to develop a national strategic development framework based on its commitment to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and the perspective of the country’s progress towards EU accession. Five working groups and three task forces composed of MDG Government focal points, experts, NGOs, UN agencies have been preparing the first draft of the MDGR and assuring broad consultation in the preparation process. A technical Support team of four consultants has been facilitating the consultation process and the production of the report. Collaboration with civil society organizations was pursued through the established Civic Platform, which facilitated the process of identification and selection of civil society representation in different thematic working groups and the dialogue among their own constituency. The National MDG Committee composed of high level representatives from Government and Parliament (from all major political parities), the State Statistical Office, NGOs, the media, the private sector and the UN RC guided the process and approved the MDGR. As one of the objectives was to promote a comprehensive understanding of MDGs and build consensus on national development priorities through a broad consultation process, a civil society MDG platform was established. Several forums were organized including discussion panels during the NGOs fair, broad public health and environmental forums with the representatives of the central government, local government, private sector, academia and civil society where agreement was reached on the national targets and indicators.

2. Project objectives and activities

While the nationalized MDG framework was a first step to identify and mobilize support for the country's development goals, an MDG-based National Programme for Socio-economical Development a broad social consensus and a comprehensive approach to development is needed in order to provide strategic orientation and point out how these goals could be reached.

As a follow-up to the recommendations of the MDG report, the Government and other major stakeholders will work on further nationalization of MDGs. Moreover, the "localization" of MDG targets and indicators is of crucial importance, especially taking into account the ongoing decentralization reform. UNDP will undoubtedly continue to support the efforts in this direction, and the project "Supporting the Elaboration of an MDG based National Development Programme 2005 – 2015" will make a specific contribution to this process and set the pace for future replications and similar initiatives. The project adopts the human rights based approach to MDG based local and national development planning and envisages the identification of the vulnerable groups and their special concerns which should be addressed with the local and national development strategies, as well as ensures pro-active participation of the vulnerable groups in all stages of the project.

In order to properly reflect the Macedonian reality, the project is being implemented in 3 pilot municipalities, with different size, ethnic composition and belonging to different statistical regions. The pilot municipalities are: Gostivar, Negotino and Strumica.

The project will benefit the representatives of the local-self governments in three municipalities (mayors, counsel members, members of gender equality commissions), local private sector, as well as civil society organisations and generally citizens living in three municipalities. The indirect beneficiaries are marginalised and vulnerable groups in Macedonia.

3. Tools for integration of HR and gender in local development

The methodology for incorporating human rights and gender perspective in local development planning was developed with the collaboration with the Ludwig Boltzman Institute for Human Rights, Vienna, Austria.,

According to the BIM Report: *The main features of a human rights approach to poverty reduction for Macedonia are the following:*

- *Identification of the poor*
- *Recognition of the relevant normative national and international human rights framework*
- *Equality and non-discrimination*
- *Progressive realisation of human rights*
- *Participation and empowerment*
- *Monitoring and Accountability*

To ensure this, it is important that (1) all vulnerable groups are identified during the data collection and situation and problem analysis; (2) initiatives are established to ensure social mobilization and participation with focused actions targeting those groups which are usually excluded and not actively participating in policy development processes; (3) establish a specific set of targets and indicators concerning the realization of human rights throughout the process, with short-term, mid-term and long-term objectives; (4) create effective monitoring and accountability mechanisms to ensure that

*duty-bearers can be held accountable, especially in case of misuse of allocation of resources. Every local development plan should have these elements firmly embedded in the planning and implementation stage. Although it may seem a difficult endeavour to include these criteria thoroughly, an inclusive local development plan will not be possible without them.*¹

The experts from BIM have been providing technical expertise during the development and implementation of the initiative. More concretely, with the BIM support 4 tools have been developed: 1) Methodology to identify the poor and vulnerable on local level, 2) Macedonian national and international relevant legal human rights framework as reference guide, 3) How to Make Local Development Work for All – A Human Rights-Based Approach to Local Development Planning and A Human Right Based Approach to regional Development.

As the first MDG baseline report revealed, gender based inequality persists in different fields, women are still underrepresented in the government, are in a more unfavourable position on the labour market, also 76.41% of the total number of illiterate people at the age of 15 and over are women and the drop out rates are higher among girls, especially from rural communities. The project adopts a gender-sensitive, human rights based approach from the outset. Gender issues are taken into account from the outset of the project.

The application of the tools in different stages of the project is demonstrated below:

3.1. Selection of municipalities

The process of selection of pilot municipalities, started with the first screening of the Macedonian municipalities. At this stage all available relevant documents, studies, publications, UNDP project documents were studied, as well as contacts were established with civil society organisations on national level, consultations were done with representatives of Ministry of Local self government, Ministry of Finance, and Ministry of labour and social policy.

In August and September 2005, 20 municipalities were visited .In order to obtain more detailed and specific information about the social and economic situation in the municipalities the meetings were held with the mayors and other relevant staff from the local self-government In each of the visited municipalities mapping of local stakeholders was made in order to assess the potential for identification of future partners. (CSOs, NGO support centres, representatives of business community).

The selection process was supported by the consultants mission from the Ludwig Boltzman Institute of Human Rights from Vienna, in the period of 12-22nd September 2005. The consultants visited several towns in Macedonia, held comprehensive interviews with relevant actors. Based on the findings of the mission, criteria for final selection of municipalities were finalized. During the mission new ideas were developed for further incorporation of the human rights based approach and gender perspectives in the planning process.

The selection criteria for pilot municipalities were:

- *Geographical balance: to comprise municipalities from different statistical regions (of 8 statistical regions in Macedonia); to cover the western, eastern and central part of Macedonia;*
- *to include both rural and urban municipalities;*

¹ How to make Local Development Work for All – A human Rights-based Approach to Local Development Planning (BIM Tool 3), Karin Lukas, Barbara Kuhhas, Ludwig Boltzman Institute of Human Rights

- to include at least one municipality with mixed ethnic composition;
- to include municipalities with significant number of Roma inhabitants;
- to include at least one municipality which has significantly changed due to the decentralization process in 2004 in terms of territory, ethnic composition, etc.
- to include three different municipalities according to the number of inhabitants: "large" municipality (over 60.000 inhabitants), medium municipality (30.000-60.000 inhabitants) and "small" municipality (under 30.000 inhabitants);
- to include municipalities which have high rate of unemployment;
- to take into account needs for improving position of women;
- to include municipalities that have satisfactory technical, material and human capacities;
- to include municipalities with well developed civil society sector;
- to include municipalities which are collaborating with neighbouring municipalities in Macedonia and cross border (implementation of common projects is an asset);
- taking into account synergy with existing UNDP projects It is recommended to considered as "not eligible" municipalities which already passed through participatory planning processes and already have developed strategic documents.

During the first meeting of the Advisory Board ²three pilot municipalities were selected, in which project activities are implemented i.e. Strumica, Negotino and Gostivar.

The selected municipalities are typical representatives of the Macedonian socio-economic reality. Pilot municipalities are geographically located in three different regions, and have different size, ethnic composition and there is a possibility for creating synergies with other UNDP projects.

3.2. Raising awareness on human rights principles

The **Advisory Board** of the project consists of the representatives of the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Local Self-governments, OHCHR, Civic Platform and UNDP.

The main role of Advisory Board is to serve as the main body to provide strategic advice in the implementation and coordination of project activities. The Advisory Board ensures that the agreed objectives of the projects are met while maintaining high standards of work and participation. The Advisory Board provides strategic policy guidance and recommendations regarding project strategies and project objectives and facilitate and support the institutional arrangements that are necessary for effective project implementation. Apart of it's management function, the representative composition of Advisory Board serve as a link between local and national initiatives.

The networking among stakeholders on local level is very important for the project achievements. This can be also considered as a tool for implementing HRBA and gender perspective in planning process. The numerous conversations and interviews with the representatives of local self government, civil society organisations, specially those which are working with vulnerable groups (handicapped, women, poor people, Roma etc), prominent local individuals, businessman were conducted. The support from the local structures, formal and non-formal is valuable instrument to implement project activities.

² The role of the Advisory Board is explained in section 3.2.

In order to promote partnerships and ensure meaningful participation, the **Local Leadership Groups** were established in three pilot municipalities. The LLGs consist of representatives of business, civil society and local government sectors. The local leadership group in Gostivar has 25 members, in Strumica 23 and in Negotino 20 members. The number of members in LLG is proportionate to the number of inhabitants in the pilot municipalities. The main role of LLG is to serve as a main body in the process of identification of local priorities and their integration in local and national development strategies and be a driving force for initiatives that improve the quality of life of people on local and national level.

Representatives of citizen's organisations working with vulnerable and marginalized groups are part of Local leadership groups.

In order to provide better coordination of the project activities on local level, a **contact person** was appointed in each of the pilot municipalities. The contact person undertakes the role of communication point among local self government, including the mayor, Local leadership group, local trainers and UNDP project staff and the role of local coordinator of project activities and facilitator in the MDG processes. The contact person is responsible to support all activities on local level including assistance in establishment of Local Leadership Group (LLG).

Due to the limited budget the project is connected with UNDP project Building capacities of Local Governments, CSOs and the Domestic Business Sector to participate in the national PRS and MDG processes in Macedonia. Therefore, both projects are implemented in the same 3 municipalities. The projects are logically interconnected and the expectation is that merging the activities of the both projects will have larger positive impact in the local communities. The pool of 30 **Local trainers – MDG facilitators**, established in the MDG Capacity building project, is a local structure that enhances implementation of HR activities. The Local leadership group has been participate in 5 training courses in: Participatory planning; Skills for monitoring and analysis (indicators), Methods and techniques for determination the needs in municipalities with focus on vulnerable groups; Techniques, tools and mechanisms for monitoring of national and local programs based on MDGs and Advocacy and campaigning.

To improve the quality of UNDP interventions the **workshop** on human rights based approach in local planning was organised on 20th and 21st of December in Skopje. The workshop has a title "Building bridges –Elements of human Rights based approach to local development planning and poverty reduction". The BIM experts delivered two one-day workshops for UNDP staff and stakeholders in the municipalities where UNDP implements the projects. The workshops have aimed to raise awareness on the human rights based approach, human rights standards and principles

3.3. Base line study about vulnerabilities in pilot municipalities

Identification and representation of the poor and vulnerable is an essential condition in the local development planning process. The baseline study aims to identify the vulnerable groups and assess their situation in pilot municipalities in order to ensure that specific needs of the vulnerable are properly considered during the policy making at national and local level.

The methodology for preparation of base line study is developed by the experts from Ludwig Boltzman Institute for Human rights (BIM) from Vienna, Austria. BIM has

developed a questionnaire for the structured interviews with stakeholders in the pilot municipalities and questionnaire for survey on local level.³

The base line study is conducted by BIM experts and a local expert. The added value of the baseline study is contribution towards strengthening local capacities in human rights based approach, through exchanging experience between international and local experts, as well as involving local people in its preparation.

The local trainers – MDG facilitators are also involved in the preparation of base line study. In each of the pilot municipalities 150 surveys were conducted or 450 surveys in total. The target group of the survey were vulnerable and marginalised households. During the identification of the households and later in approaching them, support has been provided by the local NGOs, particularly those which are members of Local leadership groups. The identification process also was supported by the local Centres for social welfare, NGO support centres, LLG members, contact person in the municipality and other structures.

The questionnaires are gender sensitive, and allow revealing the different situation that women/girls and men/boys are facing in the municipalities.

3.4. National and International legislation framework

A local development plan must be consistent with and informed by the State's national and international human rights commitments because this enhances the plan's effectiveness and prevents that elements of the plan are unlawful. The legislation framework document identifies domestic and international laws relevant to major human rights in the context of MDGs, and thus provides for the international human rights and domestic legal framework checklists. The legal framework document is produced by international and local legal expert.

The legislation checklist will support further activities related with human rights and human rights based approach in planning processes.

The study of international and domestic legal framework is a very comprehensive document consisting of 200 pages. The extract for the study (30-40 pages) is currently being prepared. The extract will be published and distributed, as a guide for current and future activities on local and national level.

4. Lessons learned

At this stage of project implementation it is quite early to draw major conclusions. Still some obstacles and their consequences can be mentioned.

The main obstacle during the implementation was limited capacities at local level, especially among local authorities and business community.

In Macedonia there is a gap in the levels of capacities of civil society sector from one side, and public and business sector form the other side. Since early 90's in the past century, civil society sector has been targeted by many international agencies that has positively influenced its technical, financial and, most importantly, human capacities. That was not the case with public and business sectors, which are, accordingly, in a weaker position

At this phase of the project implementation the largest obstacles are as follows:

³ The questionnaire for the structured interview is in Annex 1. The questionnaire for the survey is in Annex 2.

- low awareness of local officials about the needs of different groups of citizens (minorities, vulnerable and marginalized groups)

The local officials are not aware about the needs and rights of all citizens in their municipalities. In Gostivar for example, the first draft of LLG list, didn't include proportionately women and ethnic Macedonians (which are minority, 19% of total population). In, as well the first draft of LLG list Strumica, in the LLG the representatives from the private business sector were missing. The weaknesses were overcome easily, that shows the readiness of LSG authorities to start changing their attitude.

The impression is that LSG officials don't have enough information about the situation with vulnerable groups, so they can not develop an appropriate "behaviour" to support and integrate these citizens in the community.

- insufficient knowledge and commitment of local self government (LSG) to the participatory planning processes

Some of the representatives of the Local self government are unaware about the concept of participatory planning. They neglect the participation during the planning processes, which leads to complications during the implementation phase. Citizens are not informed on the planning process in their municipalities and being excluded from the planning stage, do not support the implementation of strategic plans. Majority of the mayors prefer to work on infrastructural projects rather than development projects which include broader participation.

There is no coherent "methodology" for participatory planning to be used by the municipalities. Each municipality that went through the strategic planning processes used a different approach. Some strategic documents do not provide relevant information for the municipal development and are based on inadequate and inaccurate data and information. For example, in many cases only SWOT analyses were used as a technique to develop a strategic plan. There is a lack of skills in strategic planning and project cycle management.

- systems and procedures in LSG do not support the planning processes, including the organizational structure

The communication and coordination among different project activities is not supported by institutionalised mechanisms such as regular coordinative meetings, monitoring, clear reporting procedures etc. So there is overlapping and many gaps existing in the development processes at local level.

The mechanisms for citizens' participation are either poor or inefficient. The municipal council is a part of LSG and represents different political parties. Meetings of the city council are open for the public, but in practice citizens are not attending these meetings. In some towns, local media are broadcasting the discussion during the city council meetings. Public discussions and debates are not regular practice as a part of decision making processes on the municipal level.

UNDP together with other development agencies are putting a lot of efforts to strengthen capacities on local level. The local self government's officials are target group for many capacity building activities, such as in house training, coaching, information exchange, etc. Fortunately, these initiatives are bringing substantive changes in attitude towards development issues among local stakeholders.