

TAKING ACTION, CHANGING LIVES

THE SUCCESS STORIES OF THE
PROFESSIONAL FELLOWS OF THE GLC
SHAPING PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY PROGRAM 2019

ALBANIA



Shaping Participatory Democracy is an international exchange initiative of the Great Lakes Consortium for International Training and Development (GLC). GLC is a program of the Great Lakes Community Action Partnership (GLCAP), formerly known as the WSOS Community Action Commission.



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Tirana, Albania, 2021



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INTRODUCTION

Esmerina Hidri and Aida Ciro

*Coordinators of the GLC program
in Albania at Co-PLAN, Institute
for Habitat Development*



Over the past 25 years, Co-PLAN has built significant experience and has naturally matured transiting from a bottom-up start, to development projects, later to policy making and policy influencing. The organizational maturity, extensive portfolio, and very good knowledge of the local context, dynamics and stakeholders, enables Co-PLAN to assume a director's role for the young local organisations and activists, shown to be effective and a welcome development since 2017 with our first experience with GLCAP on PFP. Co-PLAN believes and focuses its work on a strengthened activism and advocacy scene among civil society organisations and activists, which we find crucial to a healthy democracy and the successful undertaking and implementation of the reform processes in Albania.

For the duration of this program, we are proud to say that for us as an organization is an added value to coordinate and provide a professional development opportunity for mid-level emerging leaders and build a national network of professionals able to work effectively in an interconnected environment towards a global network. Last year posed a challenge, and the impact of the pandemic and all the challenges that we faced with as part of our communities resulted in us shifting to remote work, exploring innovative approaches to spark changes, while also taking care of one another. In this framework, the Professional Fellows Program came with innovative ways of keeping up the hard work and mentoring our fellows and here we can mention online trainings/series (Long Road Ahead; ReCLAIM; ReTHINK; ReCONNECT) and also the online internship "Shaping Participatory Democracy" virtual coursework and internship from Albania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia between August 31, 2020 and May 27, 2021. All of the above were a success and had an impact on our Alumni and Fellows to understand better the fundamental concepts of community organizing and paved a road that is helping them to improve their community and seek change for a better world.

We have already witnessed that such program contributes to already established partnership with the U.S. Embassy in Tirana, as well as the partnership within Europe and will open new opportunity for U.S. professionals to share experience and develop mutually beneficial collaboration between civil society organizations focusing on citizen engagement and advocacy with special focus on minority and marginalized populations.

This program has and will give an opportunity for us to share our experience with our counterparts from Europe and in the United States, compare our methods and develop new ideas and in implementing new programs to benefit our communities and expand our international collaborations.

“PRO PAK ADVISORY BOARD”



Down Syndrome
Albania

Bordi Këshillimor PRO PAK



The Board is a structure composed of parents of children and individuals with disabilities, family members and person with disabilities who will work as a connection between the community and the municipal council for the rights and implementation of social plans of the city and as an monitoring structure for the implementations of the rights and needs of this community.

MIRELA JUKA



DELEGATION

SPRING 2019

CURRENT ORGANIZATION

DOWN SYNDROME ALBANIA
FOUNDATION

HOSTING U.S. ORGANIZATION

GLOBAL DOWN SYNDROME
FOUNDATION, DENVER, COLORADO

US MENTOR

BRYN GELARO

As a result of lack of information and little advocacy capacities to raise the voice of person with disabilities in Albania, the participation of this target group and their voice has not been heard by polity and decision-makers. Also, the lack of financial sustainability of NGOs, is not sustainable which makes it difficult the representation of this community. In these circumstances, my project aims to raise the capacities through training and spreading information on disability rights by empowering disabled persons themselves and their family members and concluding with establishing an Advisory Board, which will play an active role on representing the disabled community and be a bridge with public institutions, service providers and policymakers. This project will contribute to keeping accountable institutions and improve the social inclusion of vulnerable groups.

The objective of my project was to raise advocacy and self-advocacy capacities for person with disabilities and their families.

While working with Down Syndrome Albania Foundation I started to provide training for parents of the center regarding their rights and also gave legal support when needed. This was all free of charge so it would not be consistent due to time and the resources.

My fellowship in Global Down Syndrome Foundation helped me to rearrange my priorities and equipped me with knowledge and best practices to make this project come in life.

In September 2020 I started the project with the support of a small grant from UNDP. We offered 9 training sessions to 30 parents, family members and PWD. The trainings were focused on learning the rights of person with disabilities and participatory budget.

In the end, 16 persons signed the creation of the Pro Pak Advisory Board and build an Action Plan to put their request forward.

In the meantime the Board is working on its activity to achieve its objectives through petition and official request toward the public institution regarding:

- support of social services for their children
- increasing the number of assistant teachers in school
- financial support for families with children with disabilities impacted by Covid19

Difficulties encountered during implementation was the situation with Covid19. Due to the measures, the activity changed to online. In addition to the change from meeting in site to online situation also affected the number of participants as for health reasons some could not participate. One of the reasons that affects the number of participants is the lack of technology / internet.



LOCATION OF THE
PROJECT
NATIONAL LEVEL -
ALBANIA

50

PEOPLE INVOLVED IN
THE PROJECT

30

PEOPLE IMPACTED BY
THE PROJECT

ADVANCING LGBTI RIGHTS IN ALBANIA



The people that I worked with include: young journalists, media practitioners and also police officers. Over the two past years PRO LGBT has carried out a series of 6 training with young journalists and has taken part in 3 training with police officers and governmental officials.

SIDITA ZAJA



DELEGATION

FALL 2019

CURRENT ORGANIZATION

UNITED PRO LGBT CAUSE IN
ALBANIA

HOSTING U.S. ORGANIZATION

HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGN
WASHINGTON DC

US MENTOR

JAY GILLIAM AND TAYLOR BROWN

In recent years, especially after the fellowship in Washington DC I was empowered with practical tools and a different fluency in expressing the needs of the LGBTI community in Albania. I took that possibility and especially when the Mentor Mr. Taylor Brown came to visit Albania together we thought about ways to use both our knowledge to better help our community.

Taylor's impression and thoughts on Albania:

"While Albania decriminalized same-sex sexual relations and adopted some protections against hate crimes and discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, there are significant challenges to enforcement. For many LGBTQ activists, despite often low levels of public acceptance and difficult economic conditions, there are immediate opportunities to achieve progress, build support and make a real difference in the lives of LGBTQ people. In my visit, I saw a close-knit community that was committed to making change and remarkably united in its goals. Meeting with Sidita and other LGBTQ advocates, I shared the history of the LGBTQ movement in the U.S. and the lessons we've learned.

I met with HRC's allies and institutional partners. I toured the facilities of Albania's first shelter exclusively for LGBTQ people and showed HRC's support at this year's Miss Trans Albania 2020 contest.

HRC is focused on strengthening global equality movements, and collaborations like this (through HRC's Global Fellows Program) are a big part of that effort. The Fellows Program facilitates knowledge-sharing, meaningful relationships and on-going dialogue among fellows, HRC Global staff and other innovative thinkers across equality movements.

It is through this kind of work, when we are on the ground and engaging firsthand with community members, that HRC Global connects movements across borders. Through this all, we are providing support and guidance for LGBTQ advocates and learning, too. Our time working together, strengthens our collective movements and gives me great hope for the future."



Endi i ditës TpT i avancuar
olicimi i Krimeve me bazë
rrejten kundër Personave
LGBTI



Dita 1
7+18 Shtator 2020

- **09:30** – Fjala e mirëseardhjes
 - Prezantimi/mirëseardhja nga z. Ilir Mandro
 - Aktualizim i shkurtër mbi projektin nga znj. Hester van Ommeren
 - Prezantim i shkurtër i Tpt-së së avancuar nga z. Amin Michel
- **09:50** Çështje praktike/logjistike dhe disa rregulla mbarëvajtjeje
- **10:00** Prezantimi i trajnuesit dhe i pjesëmarrësve
- **10:10** Rregulla mbarëvajtjeje dhe kujtesa miqësore
- **10:15** Moduli 1: Ushtrim rifreskues i kujtesës, Kuici i ylberit dhe Figurinës së xhendërbredit
- **11:15** Moduli 2: Një qasje bazuar tek të drejtat e njeriut – ndikimi paragjykimet dhe diskriminimit
- **12:20 – 13:00 Pushimi i drekës**
- **13:00** Moduli 3: Identifikimi i treguesve të anshmërisë
- **14:00** Përmbledhje e ditës 1
- **14:15** Moduli 4: Detyrë shtëpie (dita 2)
- **14:30** Fundi i ditës 1

After my mentor’s visit in February of 2020, I had a clear work plan, to engage with LGBTI community and to establish bridges with those that affect the general public thoughts being the media practitioners but also work closely with police officers to provide protection to the LGBTI community.

Partnerships were established with Police officers we have had together with other LGBTi NGOs 3 training of trainers to address hate crimes and hate speech in Albania through practical examples and sometimes examples from our own LGBTI community. In these trainings at least 15 police officers have been trained. Further with the media element in the past 2 years the work has been very focused. We have developed now tools to train future media practitioners online and self passed, Covid has helped shape our future and we wanted to use to our advantage the situation created.

So first we held 6 online training with 15 people each training amounting to approximately 90 people trained over 2 years on Media Ethics and reporting on LGBTI issues. We learned that the journalists needed this training so now is available <https://mooc.historiaime.al/leskione/standardet-etike/> for everyone interested.

The internship in the US served me as a chance to rethink my work and how to improve it and always strive for creative ideas to implement.

LOCATION OF THE
PROJECT
ALBANIA

5

PEOPLE INVOLVED IN
THE PROJECT

115

PEOPLE IMPACTED BY
THE PROJECT

EMPOWERMENT OF VULNERABLE GROUPS

My story is about the empowerment of vulnerable groups like Roma and Egyptian community in the media.

COMMUNITY REPORTERS AI

BREJDON XHAVARA



DELEGATION

SPRING 2019

CURRENT ORGANIZATION

COMMUNITY REPORTERS
ALBANIA (CRA)

HOSTING U.S. ORGANIZATION

UNITED GLOBAL OUTREACH

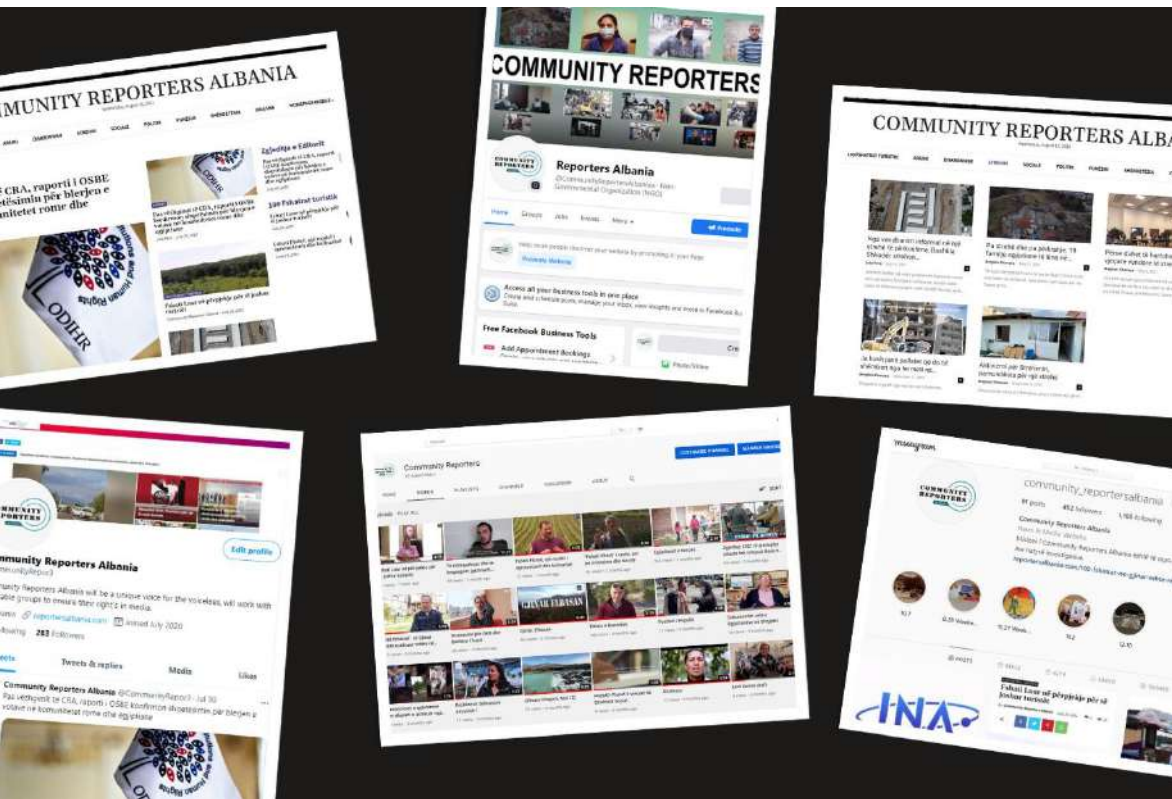
US MENTOR

TIMOTHY MCKINNEY

In 2014, I started to be a volunteer in various campaigns for Roma and Egyptians in Tirana, at that time it was the issue of housing for 120 Roma families in the headquarters area, Tirana.

The municipality and the government wanted to demolish their homes as a public project of interest to the entire population would take place there, but the municipality had not yet carried out a reassessment of the families, where they would go and where they would be housed. After 3 years later in 2017 their apartments collapsed and they received government subsidized rent until today.

My work consists of photographs, videos and news about Roma and Egyptians in that period. After this experience I attended higher studies in journalism and communication which helped me even more with my formation as a journalist as I had experience in the field and community and as such I had a lot of resources and could cover an issue in the media as best I could.



LOCATION OF THE
PROJECT
ALBANIA

6

During these years in this field, I became more capable of leading and initiating various initiatives in the community and the media, ie as a community organizer. Fellowship I did in the USA was for the Community Fellowship Community Organizing Program for 6 weeks in Bithlo, Florida. The experience I gained there helped me a lot to expand my contacts with the outside world, to be formed even more in my direction as a journalist and community organizer to win as many strategic issues in the media and in the community.

When I returned to Albania, I had many new ideas to initiate and change in the community, so I gathered a group of young people motivated to change different situations in the community and we started working systematically with the community and the media.

In October 2020, together with some other colleagues of the media and the community, we founded the media organization Community Reporters Albania, which today marks 1 year since its creation.

This organization aims to promote civic journalism in Albania and empower members of the Roma and Egyptian minorities to become responsible voices, we have been implementing 3 projects for a year related to media empowerment and capacity building of our staff. We have solved some strategic issues in the media which not only have to do with the Roma and Egyptian community because we have deepened in the investigative writings that affect the lives of Albanian citizens.

These initiatives have their source from the Fellowship in the USA. The ideas and experiences I gained there helped me a lot to take these big steps for a closer future to be more active in society.

PEOPLE INVOLVED IN
THE PROJECT

2000

PEOPLE IMPACTED BY
THE PROJECT

RAISE AWARENESS ON ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

My story is about the success of 'Sadi Nuri' high school students that engaged to raise awareness on environmental issues in the local Administrative Unit of Ndroq.



MARINELA SPAHIU



DELEGATION

SPRING 2019

CURRENT ORGANIZATION

URBAN RESEARCH INSTITUTE

HOSTING U.S. ORGANIZATION

RURAL COMMUNITY ASSISTANCE
CORPORATION - RCAC

US MENTOR

BLANCA SURGEON

Environment is a challenging topic in Albania, with poor public services such as waste management, water supply chains, roads, and other infrastructure.

Efforts to raise environmental awareness are still low, in particular outside the city center. As a result local communities are not generally well informed on the risks of pollution, the relationship between the environment and public health, and the benefits of a clean environment for the economy and society as a whole.

At the same time, environmental education today is poorly funded and it seems that schools are not actively promoting environmental education through environmental projects or similar activities. There is a great need to improve environmental awareness and education at all levels of society.

I started to work with the local community in the Administrative Unit of Ndroq after returning from the US in June 2019, aiming to engage 'Sadi Nuri' high school students to raise the awareness of their community on environmental issues, and tend to engage local officials in interacting with people. People living in this area are mostly low income and rural communities, exposed to environmental dangers - related to waste discharges in rivers, contaminating drinking water and air, which have impact on their health and safety. This community lack capacities to advocate in the local institutions for solutions and their own rights. At the same time, being indifferent towards decision-making processes, resulted as a lack of confidence toward local and national public authorities. The recent Local Government Mapping for Tirana Municipality, part of which is the Administrative Unit of Ndroq, shows that only 34% of the citizens get engaged in the process of decision-making.



Dialog meetings and hosting a cleanup event were the approach used to get them involved. The objectives of the dialogue meetings included fostering effective communication among students on environmental issues, discussing and prioritizing challenges of upcoming cleanups, and establishing potential next steps to address future challenges in their community.

Through the 6 weeks program in the USA I learned new ways of connecting to people and interacting with them, not only trying to engage them in the community work, but trying to find the leaders in them. During the internship at Rural Community Assistance Corporation - RCAC, I had the possibility to work on designing strategic plans for two low income communities, on which environmental issues were one of the main elaborated topics. The strategic plans included action plans indicating awareness raising campaigns on environment issues, stakeholder meetings, cleanup events, etc. During the dialog meeting organized with students in Ndroq, my mentor, Blanca Surgeon, had a special contribution in sharing some of the best practices she had worked with and increasing students' knowledge on how to raise their voice and participate into decision-making in the sector.

Following the meetings, a cleanup event was planned; together with the students we carefully choose the area of focus for the neighborhood cleanup day. Among the students were identified inspiring leaders that could coordinate the event. It was nice to see them taking charge, focusing, and ensuring a productively cleanup. We were impressed to see some locals showing up to make a visible difference to the initiative as well.

The result of this initiative was a better cleaned area and people aware on the environmental issues. Leaders identified, some of the school students, the school director and inspiring teachers have committed to work continuously in this regard, by conducting recycling activities and planting trees in the area near them.



LOCATION OF THE PROJECT

ADMINISTRATIVE UNIT OF NDRQ, MUNICIPALITY OF TIRANA

35

PEOPLE INVOLVED IN THE PROJECT

5000

PEOPLE IMPACTED BY THE PROJECT

IMMEDIATE RESPONSE TO THE EARTHQUAKE

The project was born from the immediate response to the earthquake, activated in December 2019 to offer post-earthquake support with the general objective of improving the psychosocial well-being of the populations affected by the Covid19 emergency and the earthquake, in particular of minors and families living in Covid19 Emergency and post-traumatic stress due to the recent earthquake, or situations of material and social vulnerability.

BLERINA KURETA



DELEGATION

FALL 2019

CURRENT ORGANIZATION

HEALTH BEYOND BORDERS

HOSTING U.S. ORGANIZATION

PREFERRED FAMILY HELATHCARE

US MENTOR

LAUREN-ASHLEIGH WHITAKER

In November last year, Albania and mainly the areas where our project is concentrated, Lezha, Thumana and Tirana, were hit by a dangerous earthquake, which left consequences for people and material damage. Also at the beginning of 2020, Albania was hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, which officially began in China in December 2019 and which has progressively spread around the world from January 2020 until today. The COVID-19 epidemic, although declared a health emergency, has had and will continue to have not only serious short-term consequences, but also long-term socio-economic and psychological consequences, which will affect the future. In this extremely complex situation, local governments, being very close to citizens, can and must play an important role in emergency management and governance to ensure recovery and face the future. The Humanitarian emergencies, such as pandemics or natural disasters, create a wide range of problems that arise at the individual, family, community and social levels. At every level, these types of emergencies reduce protective factors, increase the risks of a variety of problems, and tend to amplify pre-existing problems related to social injustice, domestic violence, socio-economic problems and a number of closely related issues. , such as psychosocial and post-traumatic stress. An emergency can significantly affect the mental health and psychosocial well-being of a child or adult. Some groups are more at risk for social and / or psychological problems, such as children with disabilities, children without parental care, children unaccompanied or separated from their parents, adolescents, people with previous mental health problems, people who have undergone traumatic events etc. We have found all these characteristics, in all three areas in which we operate and with all the families involved in this project. Therefore, the main objective of this project is "To improve the psychosocial well-being of the Albanian populations, in particular of young people and their families who live in a phase of post-traumatic stress due to the recent earthquake and traumatic stress due to Covid-19, in situations of material and social vulnerability.

The internship in the US at Preferred Family Healthcare, St. Louis Mo equipped me with many tools and positive examples that I ongoingly applied in my community organizing work. The different experience and training organized by my mentor, LA while visiting different Organisations in St.Louis like, Faith Church Community, Step Up organization, Family Court St.Louis, etc increased and taught me knowledge on how to bring about social change for disadvantaged groups and improve community decision-making, improve safety and public health and new skills to bring community together to make a change.

We have provided specialized personnel to come to the aid of these communities in need, enabling their training and using the appropriate information provided by our Border Health Organization, Albania, citing here: Full rating, information suitable for the activities we need to develop , based on the problems and needs of the cases, etc. From the regular family visits that were carried out by the operators, but also by the operators accompanied by the Project Manager, from the various meetings that took place with the families, in the 3 areas, the psychological and social impacts that these types of emergencies have also emerged. created. . At first glance it may seem that the impact will only be temporary, but in fact, the impact will be long-term and, consequently, will threaten the peace of those affected and the right to development. Emergencies create a wide range of problems experienced by the individual, the family and the most vulnerable part of this figure, remain children. With this project we have followed young people in their growth, as well as parents to regain mastery of their skills, through material support, as well as reducing isolation from stress and psycho-social factors. We have also strengthened the socio-health and social services of the area to curb the spread of the virus and for integrated psycho-socio-health assistance. One of the priorities in emergencies, to protect and improve people's mental health and psychosocial well-being, is, therefore, to achieve mobilization and coordination during the movement between all humanitarian actors, governmental and non-governmental, operating in the areas where we are concentrated. .. However, one of the main shortcomings has been the lack of a cross-sectoral and intersectoral framework allowing for effective coordination as mentioned above. This is why Sanita di Frontiera has brought this project as an innovative idea, to help support marginalized groups and also the existing projects that operate in these 3 areas.

In an emergency, people are affected in different ways and seek different types of support. A key to organizing mental health and psychosocial support is developing a system with complementary levels of support that meets the needs of the different groups we work with. Achieving this priority requires coordinated action between all governmental and non-governmental humanitarian actors.

LOCATION OF THE
PROJECT

TIRANA; LEZHA;
THUMANA,
ALBANIA

713

PEOPLE INVOLVED IN
THE PROJECT

1202

PEOPLE IMPACTED BY
THE PROJECT

In most emergencies, specialists in areas such as food, health and housing provide basic services. For the realization of these services, the service of these actors was put into operation, referring to the cases with the respective problems.

As mentioned above, an important form of support and care for our beneficiaries is the mapping of social services in the areas affected by the earthquake. We have identified all the actors and other local realities operating in the territories where the project was located.

It is worth mentioning one of the main objectives of this project that was putting together all the actors in the area including community and making a change for the community.

It is worth remembering the difficult situation due to covid-19 that we continue to face, but we have tried in every way to be close to us through phone calls and activities proposed via WhatsApp. Or even psycho-emotional support for families in need.

ADVANCING “GENERATION EQUALITY”



The fragile status of women in the Albanian society calls for active acts to motivate the youngest generation to join forces and to stand up for gender equality.

GELDONA METAJ



DELEGATION

SPRING 2019

CURRENT ORGANIZATION

EQUALITY IN DECISION
MAKING NETWORK

HOSTING U.S. ORGANIZATION

OUR FUTURE WEST VIRGINIA

US MENTOR

CAREY JO GRACE

Throughout my studies and in my profession, I have been fully dedicated to support and empower those whose voices are less heard and represented. I have been able to share my expertise and gain more prospective about equal opportunities working at Equality in Decision Making Network in Albania since 2014. My field of work is focused on youth empowerment and social inclusion, and research projects that examine gender inequality in Albania.

My experience in Professional Fellows Program has being a unique opportunity to learn about leadership and civic engagements. During the fellowship, with the support of my American mentor Carey Joe Grace I development an initiative to foster local level democracy through promoting and supporting women and girls at local level. The activities provided a space for Albanian youth and women elected officials to build their capacities about leadership, community engagement and youth activism in local level.

“The rise of youth: community organizing and social change”

The activity “The rise of youth: community organizing and social change” was organized as a learning opportunity through exchanging local experience about community organizing and mobilizing active young leaders. During the activity were introduced best practices to mobilize young people, foster community engagement to demand for social, economic and environmental rights.

“In every step we take, if we want to make a difference, we must be brave, support each other and fight tirelessly to make our community a better place to live.” The activity was organized at the University of Elbasan “Aleksandër Xhuvani” with the participation of 65 students and provided an opportunity to discuss about community led-youth initiatives and the importance of building trust between individuals and community groups to ask for change and progress in the community.



Moreover, the activity “Beyond resistance! Storytelling for social change!” brought together 15 young women activists from Tirana and Elbasan to share their stories about youth activism. The event was organized at the American Corner in Tirana. The activists shared their accomplishments and challenges young women face when they take a stand.

The discussion was focused on the resistance women activists experience from the community as a result of social and cultural norms that give little support to women. This activity gives to the young women activists the opportunity to hear stories similar to theirs, to explore ways to overcome challenges and become influencers and source of inspiration for young people.

Prior to meeting with women politicians, a meeting was organized at UNWomen Country Office in Albania. The meeting aimed to discuss the progress of gender equality and the status of women in Albania. The meeting was an opportunity to understand the work of UNWomen in Albania related to gender equality issues and the programmes that are being implemented.

To increase the representation and effective participation of women and girls in decision-making in local government were organized 2 sessions on best practices in local government with 40 women councillors in Tirana and in Kukës at the American Corner in Kukës. EDM plays a vital role to strengthen gender mainstreaming in the local governance life through building the capacities of women councillors, municipality councils and women alliances.



Thus, the sessions were an opportunity to exchange experiences from Albania and the US about the role of women in city council and women councilor overcome their challenges and connect with their community. During the activities, it was discussed the power building trust in the community through community organising tools and stories as ways to empower women to succeed in their political career.

Gender equality requires the involvement and cooperation of many stakeholders, but most importantly, the empowerment of young people for a society that is moving towards progress and democracy. The above activities are a contribution to improve the status of women in the Albanian society and I am committed to continue taking concrete actions to advance gender equality for women and girls in Albania.



LOCATION OF THE
PROJECT

TIRANA; ELBASAN;
KUKËS, ALBANIA

120

PEOPLE INVOLVED IN
THE PROJECT

1500

PEOPLE IMPACTED BY
THE PROJECT

THE EMPOWERMENT OF 25 YOUNG GIRLS AND BOYS



My success story is about the empowerment of 25 young girls and boys in the region of Gjirokastra, south of Albania who participated in trainings on how to become professional tourist guides and find hope in their city, by not choosing emigration as a solution to the problem.

DEA MILOTI



DELEGATION

FALL 2019

CURRENT ORGANIZATION

SOCIAL CONTRACT INSTITUTE

HOSTING U.S. ORGANIZATION

DETROIT ACTION

US MENTOR

JOANNA VELAZQUEZ

Emigration is a social phenomenon caused by a broad variety of reasons including the search for better economic or educational opportunities. The last years many young people decided to leave Albania and one of the reasons is the unemployment rate. Most of them find it really difficult to find a job in their profession after they graduate, however, this doesn't mean that somewhere else will be easier. The old town of Gjirokastra is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, also known as the Stone City. Gjirokastra lives by its historical tourism, as the main source of income for many who live there. Every time I visited, I met many students who felt demotivated, confused and scared what to expect for their future. But in my eyes, there was so much perspective of what this town could offer, especially in tourism considering its historic site. Meanwhile, SCI was established in 2016 and in 2019 we really wanted to deepen our scoop of work in other regions of Albania, since we mostly worked in the capital city, Tirana. That's why Gjirokastra felt the right place with the right cause, to "fight for". We organized meetings at the University of Gjirokastra, to interview all the students who had applied to participate in "Young Guides" project. We selected 25 girls and boys who were engaged in various trainings like; cultural heritage, communication skills and tourism in a 9-month period. Some of them had previous experience in working in this field, which made it very valuable for the rest of the group as they shared their experience. After a 9-month period of trainings, I am happy to say that some of the youngsters got employed and some of them work independently as tourist guides. My fellowship at Detroit Action in Detroit, Michigan was an eye-opening experience in many ways and it affected my point of view about the importance of community and the role they play in deciding the future. One of the reasons the young people of Gjirokastra didn't feel motivated was because the community there was absent. When I came from US, we organized meetings with the community and it really had an impact for the young girls and boys that their contribution was being noticed and appreciated. Today, we try to include the community in everything that we do, as they are my voice and your voice too.

A PLAYGROUND FOR CHILDREN IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD OF THE ROMA/EGYPTIAN COMMUNITY

My story is about the success of establishment of a playground for children in the neighborhood of the Roma/Egyptian community in Lana Bregas.



ANA MAJKO



DELEGATION

FALL 2019

CURRENT ORGANIZATION

**INITIATIVE FOR SOCIAL
CHANGE ARSIS**

HOSTING U.S. ORGANIZATION

ALEANCE FOR QUALITY EDUCATION

US MENTOR

MARIA BAUTISTA

The minority community selected for the intervention in the frame of this program is Roma/Egyptian Community placed in the settlement of Lana Bregas, in informal neighborhood in the Municipality of Tirana, Albania. The community members live in social houses supported by the Municipality of Tirana but still lack basic social services and live in poor conditions. More than 60 families are placed in the settlement and 115 children. 35 children are enrolled in schools and the other group for children stay in the community and take care of other siblings or home works. Most of the parents work informally, selling or recycling. My organization started working on education issues with the community members on the end of 2018.

I worked together with the identified leaders of the community and team of the organization in supporting the community with health issues (vaccination) and education issues, through enrolling children in schools and connect with their parents. In 2020 in the Pademic context of COVID-19 the process of education support and connection with the community members was limited and decreased the level of interaction for making possible the progress of the advocacy efforts.

Even there were identified great interest and need for support from the community members in these difficult times, the process of community engagement was somehow impacted by the extreme living conditions of the community members increased by the consequences of the crisis caused by the COVID-19. The community members were contacted door to door in the community settlement individual meetings, meetings in the placement were the community members work and live.



LOCATION OF THE
PROJECT
TIRANA MUNICIPALITY,
COMMUNITY OF LANA
BREGAS

4

PEOPLE INVOLVED IN
THE PROJECT

125

PEOPLE IMPACTED BY
THE PROJECT

The presence of me and my colleagues every day in the community was helpful to share and address their needs but in the same time to impact their attitudes for being more active for reporting their needs in local level. The internship in US at the Alliance for Quality Education in New York City, highlighted the framework for how to conceptualise a meaningful campaign for different causes in community level with focus on civic engagement.

My involvement in the campaign for underfunding schools in New York city for children with special focus on mobilizing communities across the state to keep New York true to its promise of ensuring a high quality public education to all students regardless of zip code. The approach how to reach community engagement and commitment was quite the same used in the community of Lana Bregas for mobilizing members to carry out some actions for addressing their needs.

In the settlement of Lana Bregas were developed group meetings and individual meetings. during this first meeting was discussed informally about their living in their settlement, conditions of living, employment, education of their children. During the discussions the some of the community members were more active and structured in their requests and expression of their needs to be addressed in the Municipality level. The community members who were more active and identified as potential to activity follow the issues were contacted individually. The most immediate interventions addressed during the meetings and followed up with the Municipality were water sanitation, school transport, employment issues, playground for children, etc.



There were identified so much effort to keep the group active and meet them in order to make them feel secure and supported until formalizing their actions and addressing their needs in the Municipality level. There were organized several meetings within the project with me and other colleagues from the organization and it was reached to prepare a letter to the Municipality level for two main actions:

- Transportation of children from the community settlement to school;
- Playground for children in order to reduce their involvement and playing on the street.

There were held several meetings of the representatives from the community and with the representatives of the Municipalities in a meaningful and constructive way, starting from sending official communication and referring specific efforts. The first milestone for reaching out one of the main most needed intervention started to be a reality is the playground for children though the active engagement of the voice of the leaders, children and their mothers. There were identified potential individual and company donors to ensure some small contribution and in cooperation with the Directory of Social Services to start the procedures for the establishment of the kindergarden.

The campaign in itself reached out to support thinking of the community members that their voice matter and can reach more and more...

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