



Gender workshop with Women in Politics Network, Montenegro, January 2011.

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ONE NETWORK, MULTIPLE EFFECTS

CAPITALIZATION OF THE WOMEN IN POLITICS NETWORK

Since 2011, the Decentralization and Local Development Programme (dldp) has supported the Network “Women in Politics” (hereinafter WiPN). The Network was established with the initiative of the women local councilors of the Regions of Shkodra and Lezha and since 2015, has been expanded to the regions of Durres, Kukes and Diber comprising from 400 in 2015 to 468 members today.

The WiP is an informal network of women whom are part of political party's structures and represent them in decision making bodies such as Local Councils. Meanwhile, some of the members have been elected even on the national Parliament serving as drivers of change countrywide.



HELVETAS
Swiss Intercooperation

ALBANIA

The WiPN was born in a difficult context, taking into consideration the fierce conflict between political parties in Albania. Furthermore, the mentality regarding gender roles in society, kept women away from politics. Few women were elected in governance bodies such as municipal councils. With the introduction of 50% quotas for women in the Electoral Code on 2015, this number increased from 12% to 35% in national level. Meanwhile other challenges appeared: the Territorial Administrative Reform and a new legislative framework for local governance.

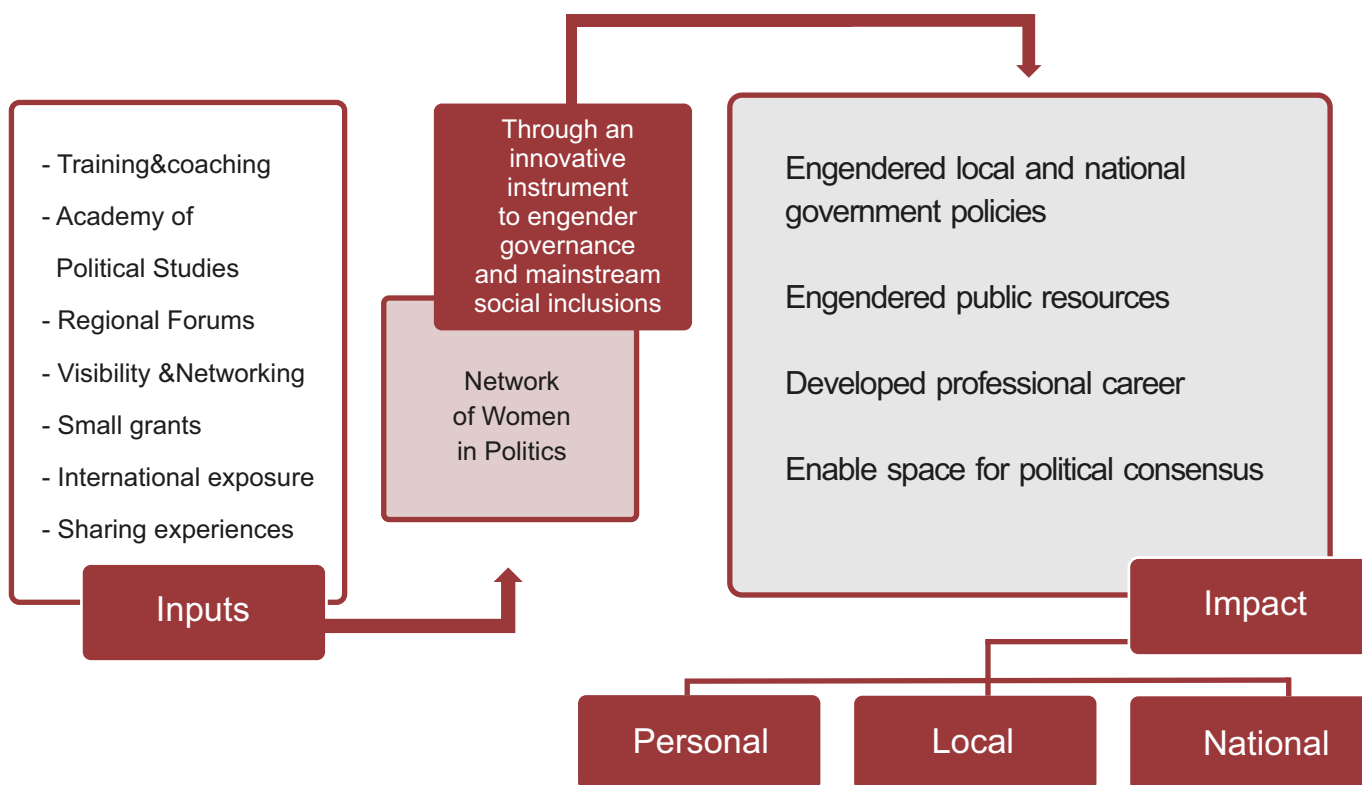


Exchange between MPs and WiP hosted from Swiss Embassy, June 23rd, 2016

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What makes the WiPN notable in the series of movements to increase women's participation in politics is dldp's innovative approach with the aim to build a model, which is self-sustainable and easily replicated. Dldp chose on purpose to establish a Network in order to mainstream gender not through projects, but through actors in the system.

Nowadays, the WiP is one network but with multiple effects: at the personal, local and national level. Above all, it produced a model that can walk alone and be a factor in the reform's process. This capitalization report aims to show the process, the tools and the results of these efforts.



Rather than seeing political parties and politicization as something to be worked around, the initiative of WiP works within the political system to facilitate the social change: *“We dared to implement our social inclusion and gender mainstreaming objectives beyond classical models (ex. gender budgeting, leadership programmes, etc.): dldp empowered women and afterwards they were engaged in engendering public resources and politics with social inclusion as a final goal.”* – explains Mrs. Valbona Karakaçi (Programme Manager of dldp).

Nowadays WiP acts as a platform which has produced results beyond the programme objectives.

INPUTS

TRAININGS AND COACHING

During the first phase of the programme, 2011-2013, the support to WiP Network has been focused to the strengthening of the capacities of 54 local councillors in areas such as local governance functioning, budgeting, social inclusion, etc. The objective of these trainings was to professionalize the women councillors in order for them to be a strong voice in the Local Councils during the meetings where important decisions for the improvement of the citizens life, especially women, were taken. In 2015, 87 women councilors benefitted from trainings that were focused on the new legislation along with mainstreaming gender perspective in decision making. The WiPN played the role of watchdog for social inclusion on all programme initiatives – thus exercising the gained know-how.

ACADEMY OF POLITICAL STUDIES

Didp has supported 18 members of the WiP so far to follow the studies at the Academy of Political Studies. The Academy is an educational program established in 2007 in the framework of the Network of the Schools of Political Studies by the Council of Europe. The Academy aims at promoting the development of a new generation of politicians and leaders as committed citizens for the implementation of the democratic model of governance and development. Since 2010, the program is being supported by the Swiss Cooperation Office in Albania and Council of Europe. It has contributed as an exchange platform between young leaders and experienced women in politics: the papers delivered from WiP have been highly ranked in the performance of Academia index.



Albanian Academy of Political Studies, Strasbourg, France, November 2016.



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Public evaluation of projects for Function Area Program in Shijak, Albania, April 2015

REGIONAL FORUMS

The second phase of the WiP Network 2013-2015 started with the efforts to draft a common platform for women in the general elections of 2013. About 300 women and men attended 5 regional forums held in Shkoder, Lezhe, Rubik, Malesi e Madhe and Puka with the main aim to increase the representation of women in the regions of Lezha and Shkodra as candidates and voters in the general elections of that year. Both objectives were achieved: Lezha from 0 Member of Parliament had 3 women MPs, while Shkodra maintained the same number of women MPs. Right after the amendments to the Electoral Code in 2015 which made possible the increase of women representation in municipal councils due to the rule 1 man - 1 woman in the lists of candidates, 8 other local forums were held with a total number of 261 participants, women and men. The focus of these forums was encouraging women and men within party structures not only to speak up about the need to include more women in the lists of the candidates, but also making sure the candidates chosen were the best ones.

VISIBILITY & NETWORKING

Two catalogues of women candidates for local elections and NGO's active on gender issues were published and disseminated. In the eve of the local elections 2015, dldp facilitated TV debates at the biggest national channels, promoting women candidates as well as unique cases: Two women competed to lead

Shkodra municipality, while giving others space in TV programs about their experience and objectives. WiP Network expanded with MPs developing mutual interest especially on national reforms, but also with other local councilors from different municipalities.

SMALL GRANTS

At the beginning, dldp supported WiP Network with small grants for initiatives taken from women councilors. In this context, an awareness campaign for the screening of the breast cancer and cervical cancer was held in October 2013 with the initiative of the women councilors of Lezha and Rubik municipalities. Also in Shkodra, the group of women councilors in the Commission of Education proposed enriching the libraries of 10 schools- 8 secondary and 2 high schools- with new titles. The municipality matched funds with WiP to carry out the project.

INTERNATIONAL EXPOSURE

The WiP has been exposed to international good practices. Cooperation initiatives took place with Kosovo elected representatives. Members of the WiP which were students at the Academy of Political Studies, participated at the Global Forum for Democracy held in Strasbourg. They met also with the Deputy State Secretary of Switzerland and the Swiss MP.

SHARING EXPERIENCES

WiP interacted with other networks and initiatives like those supported from NDI and OSCE. Also the Ambassador of Switzerland in Albania facilitated an inspiring exchange between national MP and Ministers with WiP, which concluded with concrete projects for improving employment of women at local level taken up by RISI project.

IMPACT

Due to innovation and empowerment, the network became the space where the members felt free to flourish their full potential. By improving confidence of women on socially sensitive politics and investing in their personal development career, members of the Network were able to impact national and local governance by engendering policies and public resources. Last but not least, the Network had a considerable impact on the political consensus space: 3 of 9 Women in Politics Alliances established at local level belong to WiPN. Qualitative statements below are evidence of this impact on each of the three levels.

IMPACT OF THE WIPN AT THE PERSONAL LEVEL



"The Network gives you a new horizon, it guides you, it reveals on you some potential that you don't know you have it. There are many women with great potential, but they should be able to work it out."

Jolanda Mustafaraj,
Member of the Municipal Council,
Durrës, 2015



"For me, the network of the Women in Politics is like a toddler who is learning to walk. Not that we didn't know how to walk, but the Network taught us to walk hand by hand."

Lindita Doda,
Member of the Municipality Council,
Burrel, 2015



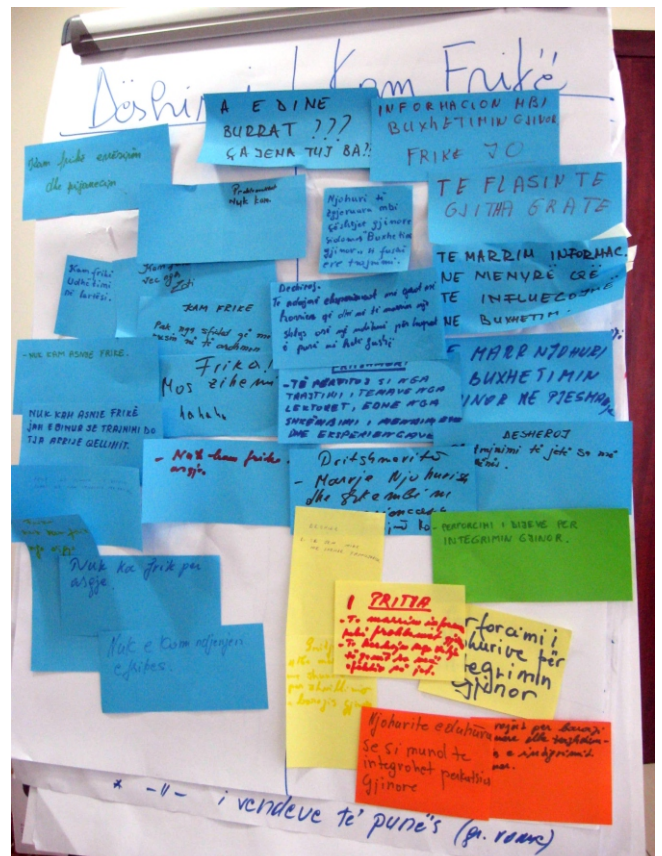
"Now, after about a year and a half in this position, I feel better, stronger and more prepared to carry out all the projects mainly at the benefit of women. I feel part of every step, we have undertaken together."

Zana Elezi,
Head of Municipal Council,
Klos, 2016



"Being member of the local council and part of the decision-making process, gives you the possibility to watch in practice how the law is implemented, how the support is gained to realize our ideas. Now it is easier for me to be an active member of the Albanian Parliament."

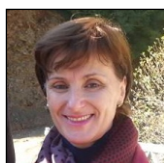
Irma Koplaku,
MP - Shkodra region, former member
of the Municipal Council, Shkodër
2015



Gender workshop for Women in Politics Network, Montenegro, December 2010.

IMPACT OF THE WIPN AT LOCAL LEVEL

Approximately 450 women, half of them from rural areas of Lezha and Rubik municipalities, carried out controls and screening tests free of charge in the capital Tirana. 20% of them which resulted positive in the tests took appropriate treatment protecting their lives. 10 thousand women were sensibilized regarding the early prevention of the breast and cervical cancer.

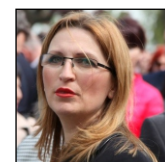


"I am proud! I saved lives of other women thanks to the awareness campaign. That's why now I'm more self-aware on the role of politics in our life and that together we could do much more."

Flora Jushi,

Head of Municipal Council Rubik,
2014

"In 2016, the Municipality undertook some initiatives focused on women, families in need. We reduced the fiscal load for women head of families taking into consideration their difficult economic situation. I personally think that these initiatives which had positive impact in the community, were made possible by the fact that in the Municipal Council, we have women who are sensitive, experienced and know very well their duty. The WiP Network has been very active offering arguments and support for these initiatives."



Voltana Ademi,

Mayor of Shkodra Municipality,
2017



"When in 2013, we proposed for the first time a special fund of 1,870,000 ALL under the section of social services, we wanted to trigger the interest of women councilors to be more active in monitoring our social policies, but also to propose mini-projects based on citizen's needs. Women councilors, empowered by dldp, not only fulfilled our expectation, but they surpassed it bringing real impact in the community life."

Lorenc Luka,

Former Mayor of Shkodra Municipality,
2017



Women councilors of Shkodra Municipality Council, November 2016.

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In Klos, the Alliance of Women Councilors proposed and voted to abolish the water irrigation tariff for the women who are heads of families.

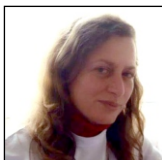


"Life for a woman head of family is very difficult. For example, myself, I have three children, my economic condition is not good, I am unemployed, I have nothing. This year the Municipality abolished the irrigation water tariff. I thank the municipality for it. I use that money for my children and their living."

Emine Menga, Bershi village, Klos, 2016

ALLIANCES OF WOMEN COUNCILORS

With the initiative of WiP members, Alliances of Women Councilors were established in Klos and Durrës municipality. In the latest, women constitute 51% of the Council. In March 2017, the Alliance of Women Councilors of Shkodra municipality is established, where the women constitute 43% of the Council's members.

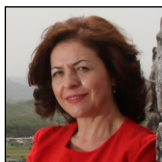


"In February 2017, the municipal council in Klos approved the proposal of the Alliance of Women Councilors to include a special fund of 400.000 ALL (2857 Euro) for women victims of domestic violence in the municipal budget. This is our first victory as an Alliance."

Zana Elezi, Head of Municipal Council, Klos, 2016

IMPACT OF THE WiPN AT NATIONAL LEVEL

Two former members of the WiP Network were elected members of the Parliament. The WiPN has also established links with the (non-party political) Alliance of Parliamentary Women in the Albanian Parliament.



Personally, I felt myself the impact of WiP as MP of Shkodra when together with the Mayor of Shkodra, although representing different political parties, we found the way of cooperation to address problems of citizens or promoting the cooperation among women in the local council.

Mimoza Hafizi, Member of the Albanian Parliament, 2016

The WiP members took part actively in the consultation processes of two important laws for local governance. Due to their recommendations the new Law on Organization and Functioning of Local Government was enriched with provisions that legitimate gender representation in all municipal bodies and communities structures with at least 30% of the members.

The draft-law on Local Finances took into consideration two other suggestions from WiP Network. Thanks to them, the law now foresees: first, in the midterm budgeting program objectives, one of the objectives should be connected to gender equality; and secondly, the management program team should have at least 30% of women.



"At the Ministry of Finance, we have a long experience in law drafting, but in the case of Local Finance Law, the value of the consultations facilitated by dldp was special. We can say that this law has an added value, because it has taken into consideration the majority of the proposals, requests and problems raised at local level. Especially, local councilors who are members of the WiP network have been extremely active and productive in suggesting two cardinal improvements at the procedures and mechanisms that ensure better engendered policies at local level."

Fran Brahimi, Director at the Ministry of Finance, 2016

SUSTAINABILITY

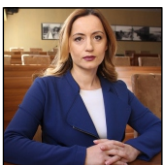
The WiP Network represents a model that is self-sustainable. While at the beginning, dldp provided small grants for members of the WiPN to realize their ideas, nowadays women councilors are convincing municipal councils to invest more in gender related projects or design fiscal packages and budgets that work for all citizens. On the other hand, the experience learned at dldp Forums for overcoming parties' differences is leading to the establishment of Alliances of women councilors in some municipalities.



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Working together, women councilors of Municipality Council of Shkodra, November 2012.

THE WAY FORWARD



“What we have achieved so far might sound simple, for you who are listening to it, but it is not at all as such. It requires work, reading, lobbying, communicating and above all being attentive to details and insisting on something. Only persistence and commitment made it possible for three mini-projects to be carried out, if I can call them as such. I don’t know how many others are waiting for us, but I definitely believe that with insistence and commitment, everything can be carried out.”

Senida Mesj,
Councilor at Shkodra Municipality,
2016

WiP IN FIGURES & ACTION

(2011-2017)





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