



The *Local First* Initiative

The OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina implements the *Local First* initiative in efforts to deepen citizens' engagement with municipalities to ensure an equitable and accountable allocation of public goods and services.

In March 2009, the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina launched the *Local First* initiative. The project was developed by the Mission in partnership with municipalities and civil society organizations. The project is based on the premise that strengthening democracy begins at the local level by increasing the influence of local communities, ensuring that political power is fairly distributed across the whole society and by helping people to set and meet their own priorities. This requires increased citizens' engagement and the increased capacity and willingness of local government to address citizens' demands in an efficient, even-handed and transparent manner.

While *Local First* contains many new features, focus is also placed on ensuring that the project complements previous Mission programmes and promotes long term local sustainability of processes and procedures that have been introduced. *Local First* builds on several programmes that the Mission has implemented in the past – namely the Municipal Administration Reform Programme (MAP) and UGOVOR – and contains new components geared to build stronger, more inclusive and responsive local government.

Local First provides a flexible programme of support that can be tailored to meet the different needs of both civil society and municipalities. The programme places particular attention on strengthening the effectiveness of municipal assemblies and councils, supporting those municipal administrations in need of additional assistance,

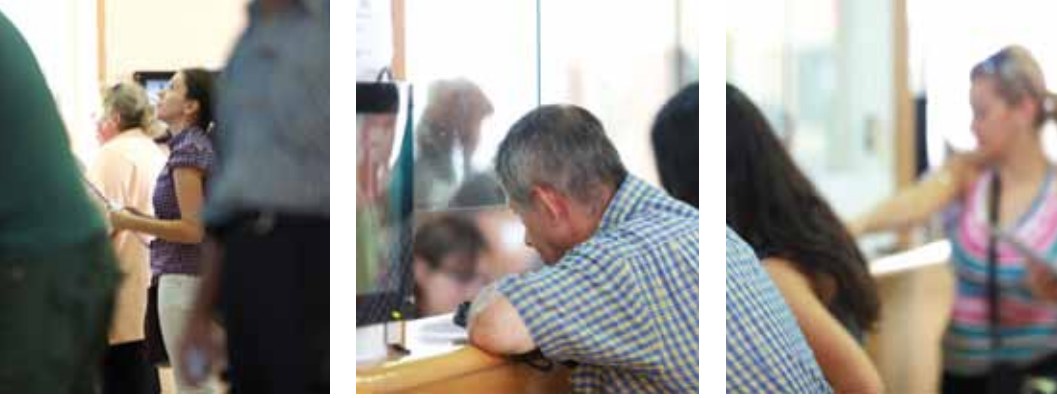
and helping municipalities assist each other in identifying their own development needs. Promoting employment for hard to reach groups, building partnerships and improving communications between citizens and local government with the help of media are also core components of *Local First*.

Local First contains seven distinct components which participants are able to select from to best meet their development needs. These components are:

- Municipal Assembly/Council Support
- Municipal Management and Accountability
- Community Engagement
- Inter-Municipal Learning and Support
- Media and Communication
- Youth Access to Employment
- Project Management

The aim of the **Municipal Assembly/Council Support** component is to develop the effectiveness of municipal assemblies/councils in representing citizens' interests. Twenty-two municipalities are currently engaged in implementing this component to strengthen the management of MA/MCs, increase the accountability of the mayor's office and executive branch and improve communication with citizens.

An additional fourteen municipalities are working with the Mission as part of the **Municipal Management and Accountability** component. The Mission pays particular



attention to introducing core good governance standards to improve participatory strategic planning capacities and strengthen management capacities, including municipal budgeting and human resources management. Attention is directed towards raising the level of accountability and transparency in municipal governments by developing mechanisms for enabling greater citizen participation and establishing and implementing municipal codes of ethics for elected officials.

The **Inter-Municipal Learning and Support** component encourages municipalities to jointly address common governance needs and concerns. More than two-thirds of BiH's 143 units of local government are working within these activities designed to improve municipalities' abilities to identify and meet their own development needs and to decrease the need for external assistance. Since 2009, the Mission has supported the development of 22 inter-municipal learning networks which address topics such as human resource management, municipal ethics, public finance, strategy and planning, partnership and resources, process and change management and the work of municipal assemblies/councils.

As part of the **Media and Communication** component, the Mission works with selected municipalities to improve their internal and external communication practices. Public outreach and the development and implementation of communication strategies are key areas of this component. The Mission also works with local media, citizens, and municipal administrations to improve their

co-operation and to strengthen the role of local media as a vehicle of communication between citizens and local governments and as a forum for the expression of citizens' views.

The **Community Engagement** component focuses on improving the capacities of citizens to take action to benefit their communities and to make demands on municipalities to hold them accountable for their performance. As part of this component, the Mission is currently implementing more than 70 projects throughout BiH. Rural communities and underrepresented groups – including youth, women, national minorities, returnees, and others – are specifically targeted.

The **Youth Access to Employment** component was originally envisioned to develop the capacity of young people to take advantage of employment and business opportunities. The component primarily consisted of supporting youth entrepreneurship through training and job fairs. As of 2011, the component has been extended to support the economic participation of all vulnerable groups.

The purpose of the **Project Management Component** is to strengthen the capacity of municipalities and citizens to jointly identify issues of common interest and concern and to plan, implement and evaluate projects in response.

The OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina assists BiH in meeting its OSCE commitments and in progressing towards its stated goal of Euro-Atlantic integration by strengthening security and stability through completion of peace-building within the Dayton framework and developing inclusive political discourse and democratically accountable institutions that respect diversity, promote consensus and respect the rule of law. The Mission takes a comprehensive and integrated approach through its field presence, reflecting an emphasis on developing cohesive communities and on the timely identification of obstacles to progress.