

## **Case Study: Structure of functioning, most important services, information and communication on Puka Municipality-ALBANIA**

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### **Background**

#### **What is a Bashkia (municipality)?**

Local government in Albania is experiencing a large transition. In the past, the central government dictated all actions in the country. The local governments acted as enforcement agencies of the central party. Now, local governments are being given the potential and the duty to better serve their communities. Bashkias and communes have already begun independent service delivery, and will soon be responsible for providing water and electricity as well.

The principle behind the decentralization process is that local governments are better informed and more responsive to the real needs of their constituents. In addition, citizens play a greater role in local government decisions because they are more involved in the governance process. Furthermore, governance at the local level provides more flexibility within the administration and ensures a greater level of transparency. Although the central government still retains many obligations, the local government should take the lead in determining how to allocate funds and investments.

Local government consists of two parts, the community council and the bashkia. Local government, including both the council and the bashkia, performs three functions for the community: it acts as a **service provider**, as a **developer**, and as a **regulator**.

As a **service provider**, a bashkia provides basic maintenance of the roads, the drinking and sewage canals, public parks, and other public spaces. In addition, it establishes a place for vendors to sell their goods, removes waste, and provides electricity and water for its citizens. Finally, it provides basic protection through a police force.

As a **developer**, the bashkia is responsible for providing an atmosphere in which its citizens can work and live. The government should plan for the growth or shrinking over time of the city. The city promotes an environment conducive to business growth, assists with agricultural development, and strengthens the potential for large firms or heavy industry to come to the region.

And as a **regulator**, the bashkia protects the citizens and ensures that land is being used in the most effective and efficient manner. The bashkia oversees the registration of local businesses, the building of new businesses or residential areas. The bashkia ensures that no one builds a new house in the market nor does anyone build a new hotel in a residential neighborhood. The bashkia protects property rights and defines

the manner in which the city can and should develop throughout the next 10, 20 and 50 years.

### **What is Bashkia Puka?**

Puka is a small community in northern Albania consisting of only 15,000 citizens, 70% living in the city proper and the others in 2 surrounding villages. The local public health, education and government administrations are the largest employers in the municipal region. Most of the citizens in the villages are farmers. As of 2003, there were 218 businesses; Puka does face many limitations today. The Puka district is one of the poorest regions in all of Albania, and has negative population growth, as many individuals are leaving for better work opportunities in Tirana, Durres, and abroad.

Given both the limitations and the opportunities facing Puka, the bashkia and the local community council must lead the community in moving forward. The simplicity of the town is a great advantage in mobilizing and motivating individuals and groups to help with development and service provision. Puka really only consists of a few businesses, a few schools, a post office, the church, the bank, and the local phone and energy companies. Those organizations have neither the ability nor the power to guide the progress of the city. That responsibility falls squarely on the local government.

### **Limitations on Bashkia Puka's Service Delivery**

Bashkia Puka is still learning how to best provide services for its constituents. The bashkia is not only still in the early stages of decentralization, it is also learning the democratic process – something still new to Albania. Just as the bashkia still behaves somewhat like a delegated piece of the central government, the citizens still have old notions about the government and how the government should behave. In order to improve service delivery, the bashkia must address both of these difficulties. This puts the bashkia in a position of leadership. It must not only take responsibility for its own actions, but also for educating the community that it serves.

#### *Problems with information before the intervention*

Information was not readily available, not shared, not valued, and not used for planning purposes. Every single office in the bashkia was still using paper records, and these records were not stored in any meaningful order. The civil status office had over 70 different books containing all the names and addresses of the region's civilians. Any attempt to locate and update that information became impossibly time consuming and difficult. In a similar example, the agriculture office had a paper list of every land-owning family. The lists, though just updated, could be much more easily maintained and used in a computer. The social assistance office was filled with individual dossiers, stacked on shelves in no particular order. Simple alphabetizing could help a great deal.

No one had collected the information. We did not have an accurate accounting of how many citizens are working abroad, of how much trash on average a family produces in a year, or of how many families have only one family member working.

### **Logic of Intervention:**

The information we had was not effectively shared. The civil status office, the social assistance office, the tax office, the agriculture office, and the cashier's office all maintained separate databases of families, individuals, or businesses. This information could tell us much more if it were all combined. We could then see a real picture of how our citizens are living. We would know how much one family pays in taxes, what businesses they own, where their children work, how much land they own, and whether they have relatives collecting social assistance. The linking of information is crucial to be able to use the information effectively. Instead, there is an almost pathological secrecy and hiding of information. Workers in one office did not know what another office is doing, what projects they are attempting, or what problems they are having. The mayor controls the flow of information, which is one to one, instead of spread amongst the staff.

### **Goal of the intervention:**

Furthermore, we lacked a general value of the information itself. Complete, current, and correct information allows us to have a good understanding of the situation. Furthermore, it allows us to have concrete visions and goals. Information helps us to use our resources effectively and efficiently. It provides a measure for our progress, and can be used to herald the successes of the bashkia. As we see clear progress and change for the better, this provides inspiration and enhances teamwork and pride in our work. And perhaps most importantly, it prevents us from having to start over with the election of each new mayor.

### **Steps to be taken:**

**Objective: How to make citizens having a clear idea of how they can receive the best service.**

#### *The Information Office*

The bashkia's working relationship with its constituents relates closely to its service delivery. We can make many simple changes to improve the bashkia's interaction with the community that will have far reaching effects.

With the information office, the bashkia newspaper, and the use of citizen surveys, we have begun this process.

One of the biggest problems is that citizens do not know where to go when they arrive in the bashkia. They wander around asking for directions. We will install a sign

downstairs with a map. A map downstairs with each office name and the names of the workers allow citizens to discover immediately which floor they needed and where the office was.

We posted a sign downstairs at the information office that read: “Why am I here?” Then underneath it says:

“For social assistance, you need

1. A family certificate (Civil Status Office, First Floor)
2. A birth certificate (Civil Status Office, First Floor)
3. A land certificate (Services Office, Second Floor)
4. A tax verification (Tax Office, Second Floor)
5. A registration of wealth (Office of Wealth Registration, Second Floor)

“To pay taxes, go to the tax office, second floor”

“To receive your salary or social assistance, go to the cashier, second floor.”

This sign addresses not only the services that the bashkia offers, but also those of the prefecture, the ministries and other agencies.

The downstairs will be transformed into a waiting room – with a few couches and a copy of the day’s paper – so that the staff member they are requesting can be called by the receptionist. If the staff member accepts, then the citizen can go upstairs to meet with him. The movement of citizens around the office was distracting and often interrupts the workers. Centralizing services at the information office will enhance transparency and efficiency.

This office will also serve to provide information to the citizens and receive their feedback. It should maintain a public archive of the most recent community council decisions, the current year’s budget, any scheduled meetings or public forums, and all upcoming community council meetings. Once records were computerized, the information office could maintain all the necessary data to offer every certificate and form.

Many members of the administration staff have work responsibilities outside the bashkia. For instance, the agriculture and land office resolves land disputes among villagers. And the tax inspectors register all the new businesses and punish illegal builders. As a result of these duties, staff members often leave their offices unattended. This creates a problem when citizens need assistance and cannot contact the necessary individual.

*Step to be taken:* Each office, particularly those that distribute certificates and forms, should have the same block scheduled to deal only with this work. For example, if all staff members stayed in their offices from 9 AM until 11 AM, citizens could receive all the necessary documentation within a single day instead of spending several days attempting to resolve the issue.

The community council should have a fixed schedule for at least one meeting a month as well. Each month the council must deal with social assistance and other regular duties. Instead of meeting at a random time, it will meet at a fixed time (say, the third Thursday of every month). That way, citizens would know when and where they could meet the council. Any additional meetings could then also be posted in the information office. The mayor could also offer regular town-hall meetings with the community to discuss current actions being taken by the bashkia. These simple methods of standardizing work will make relations with the community more consistent, efficient, and productive. And the bashkia will encourage more participation in the governance process.

**Outcomes of the intervention:**

- Creation of databases for the Civil Status, Tax, Finance, Agriculture, and Social Assistance offices
- Placement of office names and staff names near the doors of each office
- Placement of a directory downstairs which explains where each office is located
- Placement of a sign downstairs “Why am I here?” (one for the bashkia and another for the other administrations)
- Publishing the bashkia newsletter once every two months
- Creation of an archive at the Information Office with all decisions of the council, bashkia newsletters, the current year’s budget, etc.
- Weekly meetings with the heads of each department; distribution of more responsibility to the heads of the departments