

**THROUGH BIGGER OPENNESS AND  
ACCOUNTABILITY - TOWARDS PROACTIVE  
CITIZENSHIP**

**- STRENGTHENING THE INTEGRITY OF THE UNITS OF LOCAL SELF-  
GOVERNMENTS -**

December, 2017

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The project “With Bigger Municipal Openness and Transparency – towards Proactive Citizenship” is aimed at contributing to the efforts made towards identifying the level of openness and accountability of municipalities, as a precondition for reducing the risks of corruption. The project was designed so as to provide citizens and municipalities with information on the mechanisms used by municipalities for ensuring transparency, accountability and citizens’ participation in the processes of decision making, as well as decision implementation.

The idea of the project was to make analysis and give recommendations that will contribute to strengthening awareness for the need for transparency and accountability of local self-governments and citizens’ participation on local level, towards promotion and creation of conditions for the good governance principles and support for the process of decentralisation. The openness of municipalities, access to information on the municipal work and the public services within the scope of the units of local self-government, as well as the accountability on the decision made and implemented – represent key mobilising factors aimed at supporting the citizens’ participation in the design and implementation of the local policies.

The project was implemented in the period July 2017 – December 2017, by the Association Public Administration Trainers (PAT) Skopje, supported by Civica Mobilitas.

For the purposes of the project implementation, PAT established communication with municipalities and civil organisations aimed at collecting information relevant for the analysis as envisaged in the project.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The project included 41 municipalities from all the regions in the Republic of Macedonia, as well as 33 civil society organisations (CSO's) that are active locally in the Republic of Macedonia. The initial step within the project was to identify the current situation by analysing the current practices in the municipalities. This was based on the data received by municipal representatives and CSOs. The following stage was to develop recommendations for concrete measures aimed at increasing transparency, accountability and openness of the municipalities. Concurrently, analysis of the web pages of the municipalities that were included in the research was also conducted, along with analysis of the legal framework in the Republic of Macedonia as well as of recommendations and guidance given within international framework that set the foundation of the analysis and the majority of the recommendations aimed at better transparency and openness of democratic and citizen-oriented institutions.

The analysis includes the data received from the research that was conducted within the period before the local elections in Macedonia, in September and October 2017.

The research within this project was based on previously elaborated methodology and structured questionnaires:

1. Questionnaire for municipal representatives;
2. Questionnaire for CSO representatives;
3. Identification of 40+ target municipalities (representative sample, based on municipalities size / number of citizens, geographic region, urban / rural municipality) and of CSOs;
4. Survey including municipal and CSO representatives;
5. Analysis of the web pages of the municipalities as one of the mechanisms for promoting municipal transparency and accountability;
6. Analysis of data and the current situation, and recommendations elaboration.

The analysis of the situation and the recommendations refer to both the current situation, as well as the causes that influence the degree of municipal transparency and accountability and the overall cooperation with the CSOs<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> For the needs of the data analysis, the analysis of the legal framework in the Republic of Macedonia, as well as the elaboration of proposed guidance and recommendation, the project included team of professionals that developed the analysis and gave their recommendations for future action towards improved municipal transparency, openness and accountability

## 2.1. Research Instruments

### 2.1.1. Data Processing and Presentation

The research included representatives from municipal authorities and CSOs as representatives of the civil sector that gave their assessment of the situation with regards to the municipal transparency and accountability.

The research made an attempt to analyse the situation via a comprehensive analysis that included:

1. The perceptions of the citizen sector through the level of:
  - information they have on the municipal work;
  - involvement in the decision making;
  - possibility to point out to weaknesses in the work of the municipality and the municipal administration performance and;
  - municipal accountability.
2. Assessment of the situation regarding the efficacy in provision of information relevant for citizens made by municipal representatives.

The research results served, among other, to establish the following:

- Are the citizens informed in timely and proper manner by the municipalities?
- In what manner and how often are citizens involved in the decision making processes?
- In what way, for what questions and how often do municipalities cooperate with CSOs??

The results presented are based on the information processed via analysis of data available on internet, as well as the information gained from the municipalities and CSOs collected via survey questionnaires.

In addition, analysis of the legal framework in Macedonia was made. Particular attention was given to the 'active transparency' – i.e. the publication of information upon municipalities own initiative.

At the beginning attempt was made to gain information from identified 40 target municipalities that were chosen as representative sample based on the municipal size, population, regional representation, as well as equal representation of urban and rural municipalities. However, due to the lack of success in the attempt to receive the needed information from the selected municipalities, and with a view to acquire data from minimum of 50% - i.e. 40 municipalities, a non-selective approach was also undertaken. After the conducted survey, data from 41 municipalities was provided, namely, from 16 rural municipalities or 39% and 25 urban municipalities or 61%. From the civil sector processed was data receives from 33 CSOs among which the biggest number (75%) are active in more than one municipality in Republic of Macedonia.

### 3. ANALYSIS

#### 3.1. Legal Framework

The system of local self-government in Republic of Macedonia is based on the principles of the European Charter for Local Self-government<sup>2</sup> and the good practices of the European Union (EU) member states.

The first international obligatory contract that guarantees the rights of the communities and their elected authorities and introduces the principle of subsidiary is the European Charter for Local Self-Government that was elaborated within the Council of Europe and was ratified by the Macedonian Parliament in 1997. The signatory states committed to respect the basic principles, the right of citizens to participate in public work governance.

In July 2015 R. Macedonia ratified also the Additional Protocol of the European Charter for Local Self-government that is aimed at introducing, within the European Charter for Local Self-government the right to each individual to participate in the work of the local authorities.

The Strategy for Innovative and Good Governance on Local Level also calls for implementation of the legal obligations and the promotion of possibilities for easier access to information and support to the citizens' participation, with the use of new technologies.

One of the objectives of the good governance principles is strengthening of the municipal integrity, as well decrease of the risks to corruption that leads to quality, efficient and effective provision of public services, as well as increase in the trust towards local authorities.

The corrupt practices in the public sector undermine the trust needed for support and development of stable local communities that would function based on the principles of good governance. Corrupt behaviour erodes the rule of law, democracy and human rights by inhibiting good governance, fair approach and social justice, destroying competition, economic growth and stability of the democratic institutions and undermining moral foundations of a society.

Good governance includes building and nourishing of the spirit of integrity on personal and institutional level that would ensure independence professionalism and accountability in the implementation of the responsibilities as envisaged by the domestic and international law. The implementation of the Integrity Policy by the municipalities in Macedonia would reaffirm the principles of the rule of law and would clearly demonstrate zero tolerance to corruption.

One of the instruments in the fight against corruption and strengthening of integrity is transparency and accountability, as well as increased citizens' participation in the decision making processes, in particular on local level.

In this context noteworthy is the need for municipalities to create conditions for proactive approach in the provision of public information, above all in relation to information that is directly linked to the work of administration, in line with citizens' interests. This includes complete and regular publication of the information that ensure accountability in the local authorities work, but also to all other information that are useful to and of interest for the

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<sup>2</sup> <http://mls.gov.mk/images/laws/Evropska%20povelba%20za%20lokalnata%20samouprava.pdf>

citizens, such as the information on the services provided by the municipality and the access to them.

Transparency above all represents a way to access information that in municipal context can among other be most efficiently ensured by publishing the information on the municipal web page, in a clear and accessible manner. The Law on free access to public information defines the information that citizens should have access to via the institutional (in this case, municipal) web page, including the laws and by laws of the institution; the information for the public on matters implemented by the institution, in line with its legal powers; the statistical data on its work; the reports on its work that it submits to the control and supervision bodies - as well as to make them accessible on other ways envisaged by laws; the draft programs, programs, strategies, opinions, studies and other similar documents; to publish other information that emanates from their work. Given the formulation that stipulates that 'it is needed that the information is published' the local transparency would be significantly improved by a concrete bylaw that would commit municipalities to a more uniformed approach in publishing the relevant information relevant for the citizens.

In this context noteworthy is also the implementation of the Law on the use of the public sector data that sets forth the obligation for the public bodies and institutions to publish 'in an open format' the data they produce when implementing their duties and responsibilities, as set by law. At the same time, the implementation of this Law requires bigger preparation and technical preconditions.

The Law on local self-government has defined in a precise manner the municipal obligation to enable citizens with access to the basic information on the provided services in a way and under conditions determined by law. It also insists on informing the public on the municipal bodies work (including the mayors and councils), the council committees, as well as the organisations for public service delivery.

What is missing is more precise guidance for all municipalities that would ensure unified format in the publication of the information as determined by law, but also in a broader consultation with the civic sector. In this way, the access to information will be simplified, but this will also create possibility for their easier processing and comparison that is of particular importance for the citizens and the organisations that make research on the municipal work in various areas.

The easier access to information and increased accountability increases also the citizens' trust in the local authorities and motivates their interest for participation in the policy making processes that have direct impact on the life within the local community.

With regards to the citizens' participation in the municipal decision making and decision implementation processes, the Macedonian Constitution, the Law on referendums and other forms of direct citizen participation, set the legal frame that ensures normative conditions for citizens' participation on local level.

According to the Code of ethics of the local officials<sup>3</sup> (mayor and members of councils) in Republic of Macedonia, the communication is regular and obligatory aspect in their work. Article 24 'Publicity of the decision making' demonstrates that the official is obligated to give detailed justification for the decisions and actions, except for those that according to law are declared as

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.zels.org.mk/Upload/Content/Documents/Izdanija/Publikacii/MK/20Eticki\\_Code\\_MKD.pdf](http://www.zels.org.mk/Upload/Content/Documents/Izdanija/Publikacii/MK/20Eticki_Code_MKD.pdf)



confidential, with due attention to the facts that confirm that such actions are in line with the regulations and are of public interest.

### 3.2. Analysis of the Situation in R. Macedonia

The conciseness of information, their publicity and easy access and constant data update contribute to informing the citizens in better and timely manner. The citizens' active participation in these processes needs two-way communication that will not be based only on informing – occasional or continuous, by the municipalities, but will also promote proactive relation with the citizens and the civic sector public consultation and its continuous involvement in decision making and implementation processes.

The analysis that was conducted within this project enabled processing of data that was collected via questionnaire designed for the municipalities and CSOs, as well as by municipal web page analysis.

For the purposes of an objective analysis of the research question, some of the questions that were addressed to the municipalities were also addressed to the CSOs that were included in the research. In relation to some questions, the respondents had the possibility to give more than one answer.

The findings from the analysis are grouped as per the type of the questions concerned and the description of the situation in the given area.

#### ❖ Internal communication within the municipalities

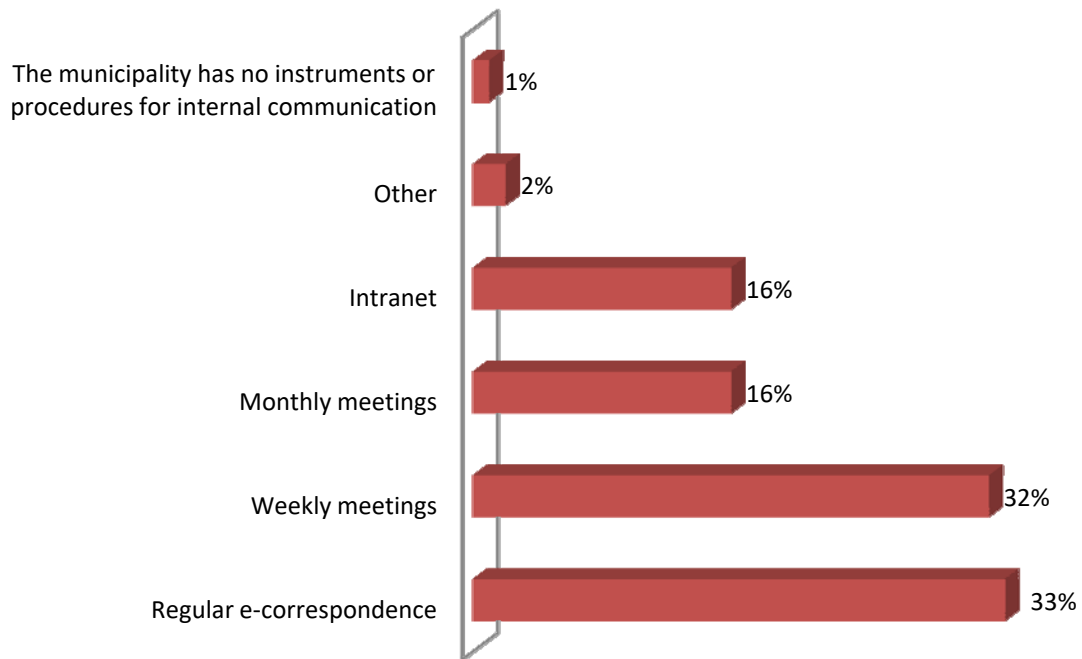
Continuous, timely and regular communication among the municipal administrative staff represents priority for every local self government. The efficient work and effective functioning of the local authorities needs permanent exchange of information and cooperation on all levels within the municipality: mayor, heads of departments and units, officials and council (both horizontal and vertical). This is why it is necessary for every municipality to define the channels, forms and tools for internal communication.

The research on this issue in the municipalities in Macedonia showed that the internal communication within the municipalities, in most cases, relies on electronic communication and weekly staff meetings. Still, the general assessment is that regular e-correspondence does not represent regular practice and/or procedure for information sharing within the municipalities, which in absence of other communication mechanisms, could have negative effect on the efficiency in the work of the municipal representatives.

Along with these channels of communication, part of the respondents also indicated the monthly meetings, the Intranet platforms, as well as the daily meetings, direct communication, Skype and other forms of communication in the daily work with colleagues. Only one municipality reported absence of instruments and procedures for communication.

The question on the internal communication in the municipalities allowed for more than one answers (Graphic 1: Internal communication in municipalities)

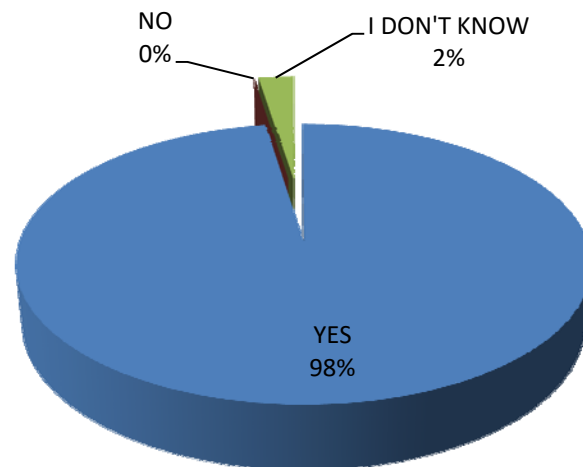
#### **Graphic 1: Internal communication in municipalities**



#### ❖ Transparency of municipal councils work

The sessions held by the municipal council, are – according to the Law on local self-government, public and citizens have the right to participate at the council sessions. Only in strictly determined cases can the public presence be restricted. However, in cases when the municipal council discusses the municipal budget, the annual budget account, as well as urban plans, the public can under no circumstances be excluded from these discussions. The municipal council meetings are usually announced at the municipal web page or the municipal announcement boards, 7 days before the day they are held. According to the Law on local self-government, the council must hold sessions at least once every three months.

The answers received from the municipalities showed that 40 municipalities had stated that the municipal council meetings are open for the public. One municipality did not answer this question, while none stated that the sessions are not open for the public (Graphic 2: Municipal council meetings).

**Grafic 2: Are municipal council meetings open to the public?**

Concurrently, the web pages analysis of the municipalities that were included in the research showed that most of the municipalities do not publish information on the planned municipal council sessions, the agenda or the minutes from the sessions held. Only 29% of the municipalities that were included in the research publish calls or announcements for the municipal council sessions. In addition, the municipal council decisions are published on the web page, however only within the Official Gazette that makes the search and accessibility of the related information complicated.

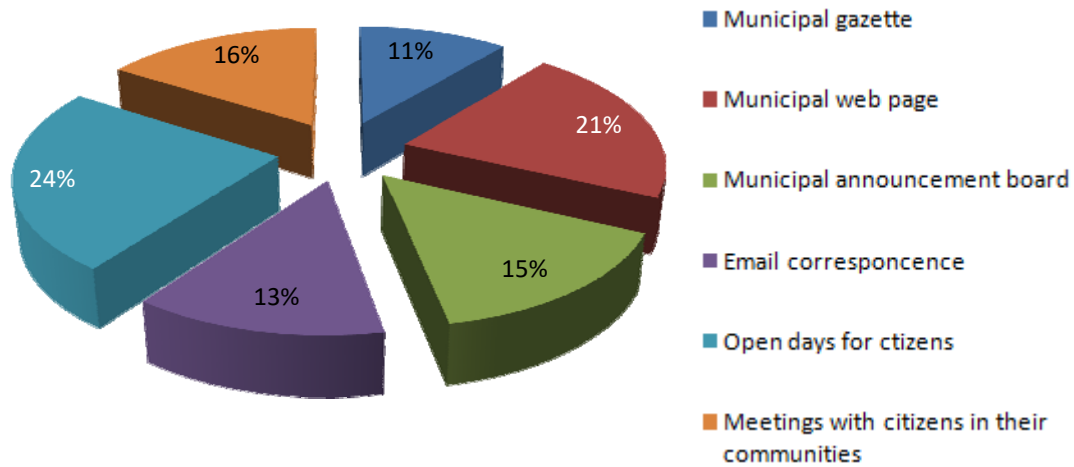
With regards to the publication of the minutes from the held sessions, only 15% of the analysed municipalities publish their records on the municipal web page. The way this information is published differs among the municipalities and most often the information is hard to find and access.

#### ❖ Municipalities communication with citizens

With a view to identify the most common instruments of communication and information between citizens and municipalities the questions asked were aimed at identifying similar as well as different approaches between the municipal authorities and CSOs with regards to the mechanisms of communication and exchange of information that would be most efficient for both – the municipalities and citizens.

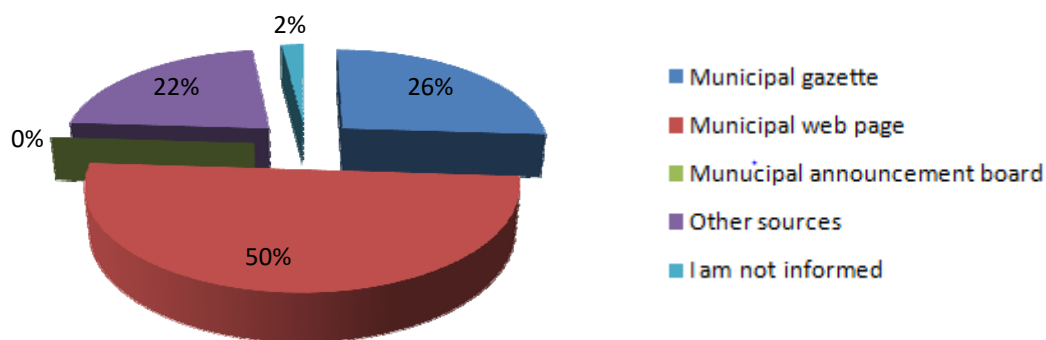
Answering the question: "What mechanism of communication between your municipality and the citizens is mostly used?" most of the municipalities said that the most used way to communicate with the citizens is the open days when citizens are received in the local communities (Graphic 3: Mechanisms for communication of the municipality with citizens). Although for this question there was not option for multiple answers, most responded with more than one option.

**Graphic 3: Communication of municipalities with citizens**



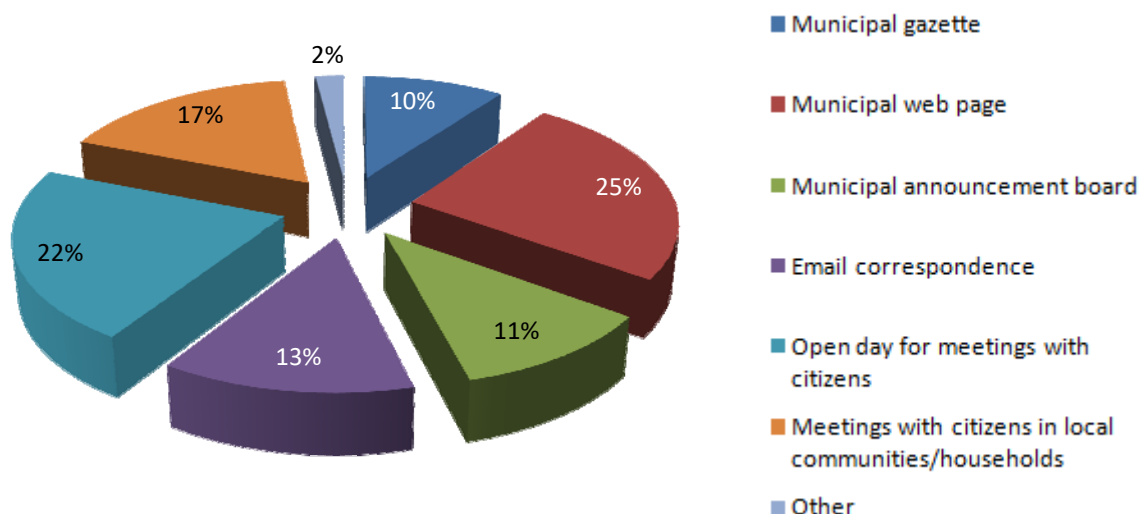
Unlike the municipalities that in biggest number believe that the open days for citizens are the most common way that gives information to citizens, the CSOs recognised the municipal web pages as most appropriate source of information. Namely, they have indicated as most used source of information the municipal web page, followed by the municipal gazette, as well as other sources of information, such as: free access to public information, direct meetings with municipal representatives, trainings, e-media, as well as social media. It is interesting that the announcement boards that were indicated by the municipalities among the common mechanisms for informing the citizens are not mentioned by any of the CSOs in their answers (Graphic 3.1: Mechanisms to inform citizens/CSOs about the municipal work).

**Graphic 3.1: Mechanisms to inform citizens/CSOs about the municipal work**



In relation to the question: “What way of communication do you think would be most suitable for your municipality, given the size of the municipality, the citizen’ technical possibilities, the population structure?” most of the municipalities included in the survey (31 municipalities) chose the municipal web page (Graphic 4: Most suitable way of communication with citizens, according to municipalities).

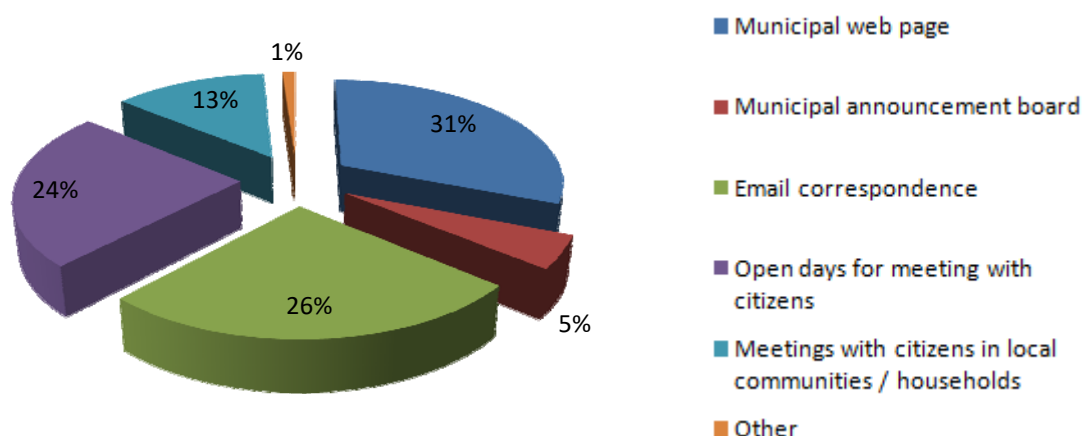
**Graphic 4: Most suitable way of communication with citizens, according to municipalities**



Among the proposals that the municipalities themselves gave as possible ways to improve the communication with the citizens are also the local media, questionnaires on specific topics, as well as social networks: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Youtube, Scribd, LinkedIn.

It is interesting to note that according to the CSOs, also, the electronic communication (web pages and e-correspondence) as well as direct meetings with municipal representatives are chosen as most adequate mechanisms for communication with the municipal authorities (Graph 4.1: Most suitable mechanisms for communication with the municipalities, according to CSOs).

**Graphic 4.1: Most suitable mechanisms for communication with the municipalities, according to CSOs**



One CSO answered that possible way for efficient communication between municipalities and citizens could also be organising thematic fora.

At the same time, it can be noted that the usage of the announcement board as means of communication for the CSOs is in decline.

❖ Transparency and accessibility of information concerning municipal work

As in the case with the CSOs, the municipalities, also, consider that web pages are among the most beneficial tools for information sharing in timely manner and for providing transparency and accessibility of the information.

The web analysis still found that the information and data on the web pages is not updated in a timely and efficient manner. There is also need for more proactive approach by the municipalities in relation to the publication of the public information that is of interest to the citizens and CSOs.

The general image from the web analysis of the municipalities that were included in the survey showed that the municipal web pages offer very limited content, the information search is difficult, the pages do not offer consultation tools, nor do they offer e-services. In most of the analyzed municipalities the web pages mainly serve for promotional purposes, i.e. publishing information on affirmative activities implemented in the municipality. In addition, part of the municipalities where, along with the Macedonian language, the language of the community that is represented with more than 20% is used, very often the content presented in one of the languages is insufficient and in the case of some municipalities (5 municipalities) the information is either not published in Macedonian or only very limited information is available in Macedonian language – although the web pages do seem to offer the option to chose the Macedonian language option.

In this context it is interesting to see the comparison of the answers given by municipalities and the CSOs in relation to the question *whether the information published by the municipality is regularly updated, clear and easy to understand for the citizens*.

While most of the municipalities (83%) consider the information published by the municipalities to be clear and easy to understand, only 6 CSOs or 20% of the organisations expressed their satisfaction from the level of clarity and comprehensibility of the information. 40% of the CSOs believe the information that is published by the municipalities is not updated regularly, and as many as 40% responded with "I don't know" which indicates that quite a significant number of CSOs do not follow the work or lack information about the work of the municipality.

With regards to the question on the *publication of information on the municipal services and the guidance on how they can be received* most of the municipalities (32 municipalities) said they publish the lists of services, including clear guidance for the citizens. Most often the municipalities publish this information on the municipal web pages (40%), the municipal announcement boards (23%) as well as via information for the public/press releases (22%). For this question, municipalities could give more than one answer.

It is noteworthy that concerning the transparency of the municipalities as much as 70% of the municipalities that were involved in the survey stated they did not have enough human and technical resources needed for better transparency of information on the municipal web page.

- Finance work of the municipalities

It is important for the citizens to know that the different taxes on local level represent direct participation of the citizens in the municipal budget. Therefore, the citizens have the right to

direct participation in the process of budgeting, above all in the process of annual planning and priorities setting within the municipality, as well as in the process of the monitoring of their implementation.

Of particular importance for this research was the question related with the *transparency of the municipal budget for the current fiscal year, but also information related to the degree and the way it is implemented.*

The received data shows that 76% of the municipalities involved in the survey publish the draft budget on regular basis, while 92 municipalities regularly publish the municipal adopted budget. On the other hand, the web analysis showed that the reports are often not clear, they are hard to find and access online, and are not published in continuity.

Although large number of the municipalities (76%) answered that they publish the draft budget, none of the municipalities that were subject to the survey had published the draft budgets on their web pages – mechanism that the municipalities themselves indicated as one of the most used instruments for communication and informing citizens and that is used mainly by the CSOs as source of information about the municipal work.

The analysis of the municipal web pages showed also absence of unified approach for publishing the municipal finance reports that can also be influencing factor over the access to information and the visibility of data.

Table 1 gives overview of the answers received by the municipalities in relation to the transparency and public character of the municipal budgeting and finance work, including also public procurement:

**Table 1: Overview of documents and information published and updated by municipalities:**

Documents and information	% of municipalities
Draft budget	76%
Adopted budget	93%
Citizen budget	24%
End-year account	85%
Quartile and annual finance reports	93%
Program finance reports	73%
Public procurement plan	54%
Report on procurement realisation	51%

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**State Audit Office Report**
**51%**


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**Finance reports of the public enterprises and institutions**
**51%**

- **Municipal public procurement**

The need to publish information related to public procurement is a way of minimizing the doubts and accusations on improper expenditure of citizens' money. In this context it is not enough to only meet the legal obligations in relation to the information on procurement that needs to be published. It is also necessary to make available the information on the most successful and selected bidder for the procurement, the size of the contract, the timeframe for the implementation of the duties envisaged in the contract, as well as the compliance mechanism for the duties envisaged in the contract.

Prevention of corruption in public procurement is one of the key preconditions for improving the efficacy of the public policies. With a view to increase the level of transparency and accountability, the Public Procurement Bureau gave recommendations that all contracting bodies, starting 01 January 2016 should publish on their web pages to the following data from the procurement contracting procedures:

- The procurement plans, as well as the amendments and annexes to the Plan;
- The call for procurement – i.e. the link to the call on the Electronic portal for public procurement;
- The notification on the contract granting decision – i.e. the link to the announcement on Electronic portal for public procurement;
- The notification on implemented contract.

Table 1 shows that almost half of the municipalities answered that they do not publish the documents and information related to the procurement in their municipalities. The municipal web pages analysis showed that in most cases (83%) municipalities do not publish on their web pages the procurement plans, or the calls for procurement, and there is no link to the announcement published on the Electronic portal for public procurement. The information on the concluded procurement contracts and the conditions included in the contracts, as well as the information on the very implementation of the contracts is also missing.

The analysis showed that very small number of municipalities can serve as an example for publishing information referred to by the Public Procurement Bureau. Hence, while 54% of the municipalities said they publish and update the procurement plan, and 51% of the municipalities said they publish the concluded contracts, (Table 1), the web analysis of the municipalities gave different image. According to the municipal web analysis only 17% of the municipalities publish the procurement plan on their web page, while none of the analysed municipalities publishes the concluded contracts.

With regards to the question on the *free access to public information* the research data shows that from the CSOs who submitted request, most of them received answers. 27% said they did not receive answers and 23% that they had not submitted such request to the municipalities.

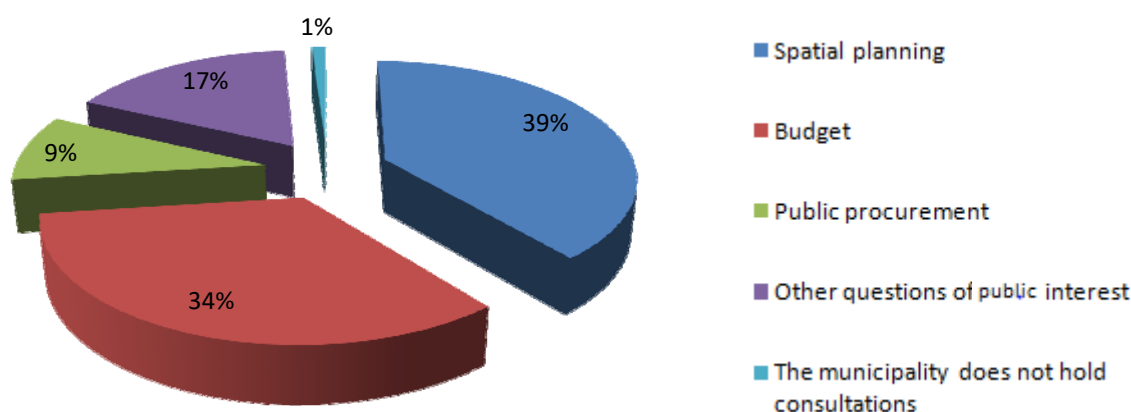


Active transparency has the objective to provide as much information as possible that would be relevant and easy to understand for the citizens. It also has additional effect on the citizens and their perception on the openness of the municipalities. The active transparency represents one of the mechanisms for confidence building among citizens that also incites bigger interest and proactive participation by the citizens in the processes of local decision making and their implementation.

#### ❖ Citizen participation and consultation

In relation to the research question on *whether the municipality organises consultations with citizens and other stakeholders when discussing important decisions*, only one of the municipalities said that it did not organise such consultations. All the other municipalities answered that they conduct consultations with the citizens. Most municipalities answered this question by giving more than one answer about the questions discussed on the consultations (Graphic 5: Organised consultations with citizens – according to municipalities)

**Graphic 5: Consultations of municipalities with citizens – according to municipalities**



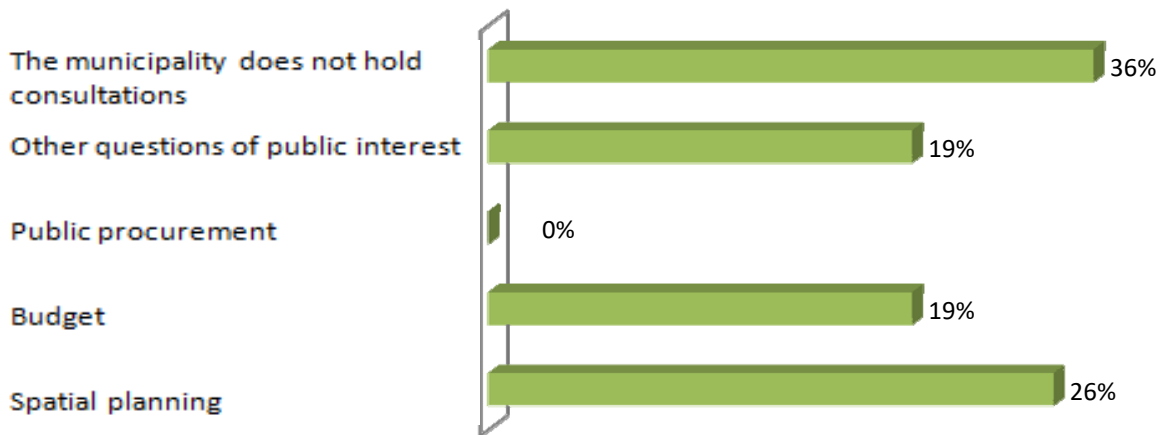
As indicated from the results, most of the municipalities that took part in the survey hold consultations mainly on issues related with spatial planning and budgeting. The percentage of municipalities that said that they consult citizens in the procurement planning stage is low (9%) while 17% of the municipalities said they conduct consultations on other issues of interest to the citizens, such as: environment, water supply, road infrastructure, sewage system, local economic development, education, culture, sport, as well as consultations on determining priority projects, in preparation of strategic and program documents.

According to the answers received from the CSOs, the municipalities organise most frequently the consultations on issues related to spatial planning and budgeting. CSOs mentioned also other questions of interest to the citizens that were subject to consultations, such as the local economic development, and culture, inclusiveness of vulnerable groups and other issues emanating from citizens requests.

It is interesting that none CSO mentioned the procurement plan as question for consultations organised by municipalities.

Noteworthy is also that part of the CSOs believed that there are no consultations with municipalities whatsoever, or that they do not know if such consultations take place. Also on this question CSOs could give more than one answer (Graphic 5.1. Organised consultations with citizens – according to CSOs)

**Graphic 5.1 Organised consultations with citizens – according to CSOs**

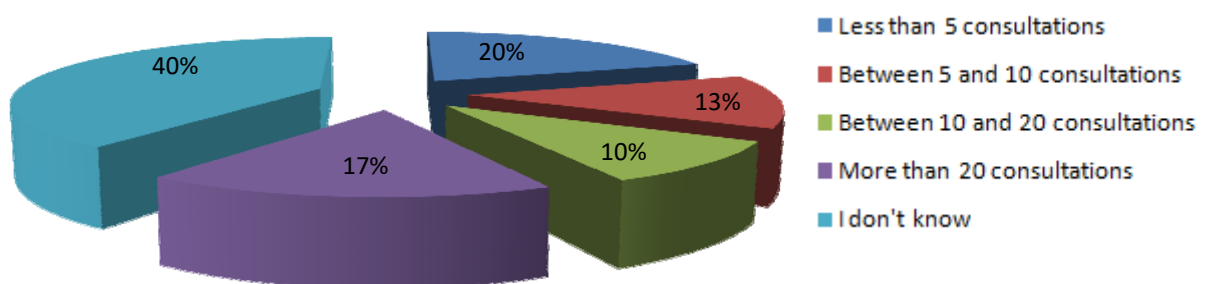


Concerning the question on *the number of consultations that had been held in 2016* out of 41 municipalities, answers were received from 30 municipalities.

Most of the municipalities (40%) did not know the answer to this question.

From those who answered the question, most of the municipalities (20%) held less than 5 consultations with citizens in 2016, while 17% said they held more than 20 consultations (Graphic 6: Number of consultations with citizens in 2016)

**Graphic 6: Number of held consultations with citizens in 2016 \***

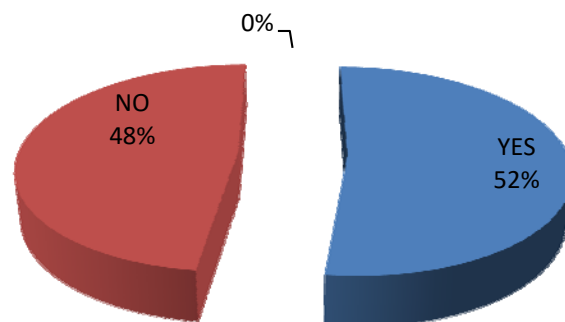


\*Answers from municipalities

In this context the CSOs were asked *if they had participated at some consultation held by the municipalities in 2016*. The answers received are presented in Graphic 6.1 and they show that more than half of the CSOs (52%) used the opportunity to participate at the consultations. However, at the same time, the percentage of the CSOs who did not use the possibility is also high – 48% of the CSOs answered that they did not attend any consultation organised by the

municipality in 2016.

**Graphic 6.1: CSO participation on consultations in 2016\***



\*Answers from CSOs

The cumulative data received from the CSOs and municipalities shows that there is still space for bigger citizen involvement in the consultative processes of the municipal authorities. As mentioned above, one of the more successful mechanisms is the active transparency of the municipalities that would lead to increase in citizen interest and participation in the consultative processes. For illustration, the web analysis showed that it is strongly recommended that municipalities publish on their web pages the reports and results from the conducted consultations with citizens or make the information related with the consultations more accessible.

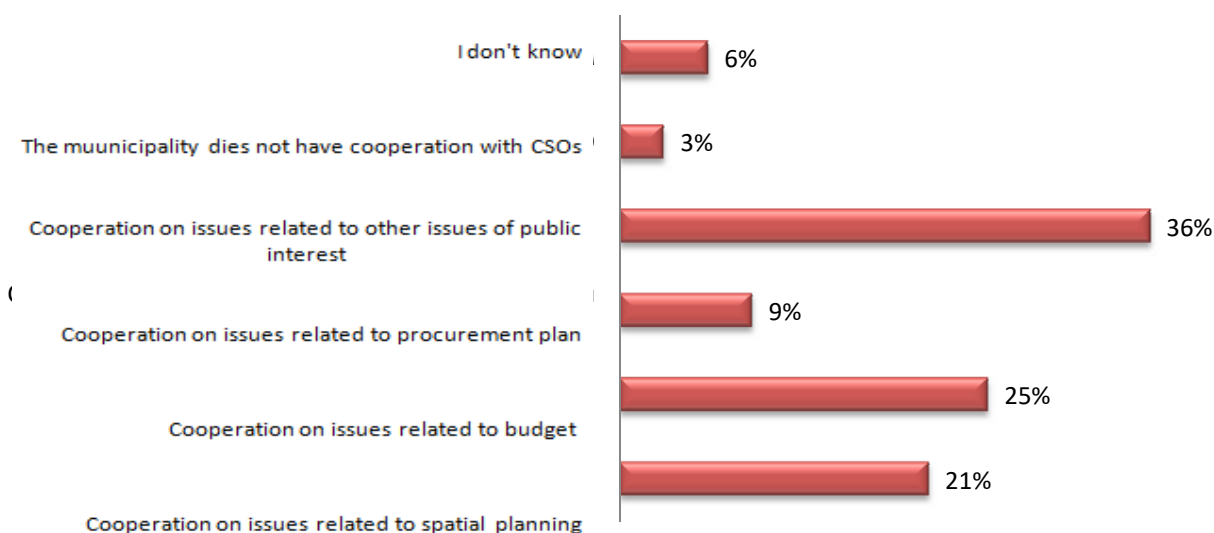
#### ❖ Cooperation among municipalities and CSOs

In addition to information sharing, in order to ensure transparency and accountability the two way communication represents not only possibility for communication and information sharing by the municipalities, but also possibility for the citizens to communicate with the municipalities in relation to the service delivery but also as watchdog over the municipality work and results.

The continuous cooperation between the local authorities and citizens is mechanism to promote citizen participation and decision making in line with the needs and priorities of the citizens. Effective citizen involvement is among the crucial conditions for good governance. Only continuous two way channel of communication can give quality decisions on local level and high degree of cooperation and democracy thus improving the quality of life for all citizens.

In relation to the *cooperation established between CSOs and municipalities*, municipal representatives indicated that they have certain degree of cooperation with CSOs mainly concerning issues related to budget, spatial planning, public procurement planning and other questions of public interest (in this category mentioned were questions related to environment, agriculture, culture, sport, education). 3% of the municipalities do not cooperate with CSOs, while 6% could not give answer to this question. (Graph 7: Municipal cooperation with CSOs).

**Graphic 7: Municipal cooperation with CSOs**

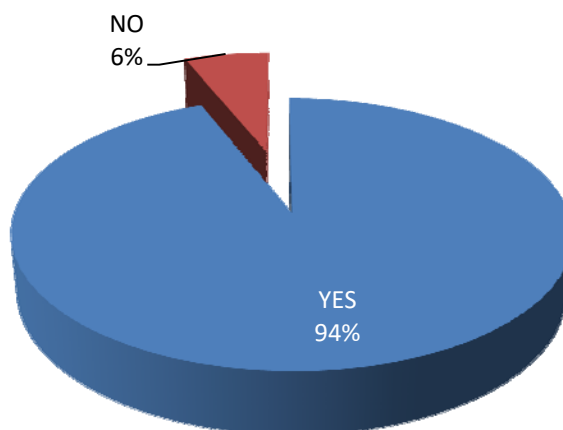


Although many of the municipalities indicated that they consult the citizens on many issues (Graphic 6) and that they have cooperation with CSOs (Graphic 7) more than 66 % gave positive answer to the question *whether there is space/need for involving CSOs in securing bigger transparency and accountability*.

To the same question, all 33 CSOs (100%) answered that there is need for their bigger involvement in order to ensure bigger transparency and accountability.

Most of the CSOs (94%) also believe that there is *information that is of interest to the citizens and that should be shared with the citizens, but is not published by the local authorities* (Graphic 8: Is there information that is of interest to the citizens and that should be shared with the citizens, but is not published by the local authorities?)

**Graphic 8: Is there other data that municipalities should publish?**

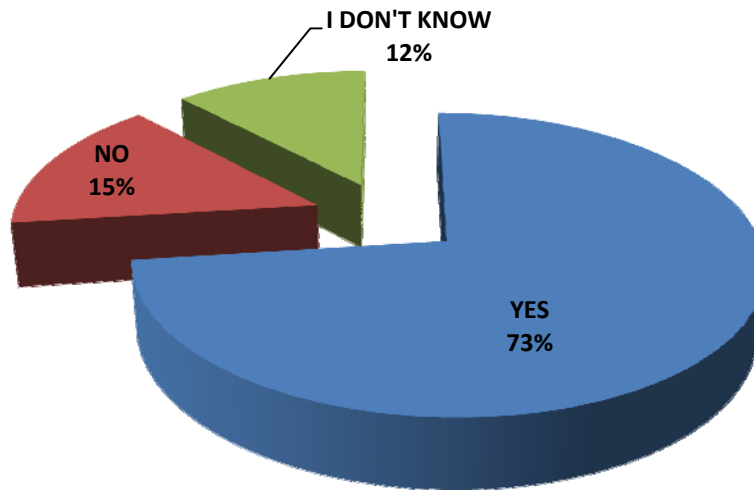


Having this in mind, it is recommended that the municipalities consult citizens also on what information would be useful for the citizens to be published. That will certainly contribute to the increase in the citizens’ participation in the decision making on local level.

In this context it is interesting to also see the perception on the *general involvement of CSOs and citizens in the local policy making*.

73% of the municipalities believe that the level of citizens' participation in the processes of local policy making is on satisfactory level. (Graphic 9: Are citizens and CSOs included enough in the municipal policy making – answers from the municipalities).

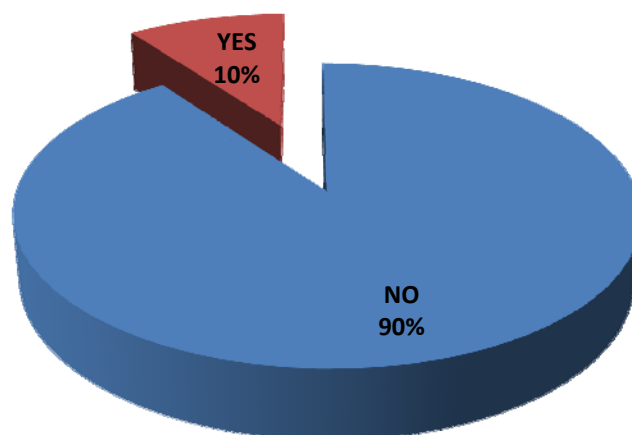
**Graphic 9: Are citizens included enough in the policy making?\***



\*Answers from municipalities

Unlike the municipalities, CSOs came out with quite a different position – 90% of the CSOs believe that there is need of bigger involvement of citizens in the local policy making processes. (Graph 9.1: Are citizens and CSO included enough in the municipal policy making – answers from CSOs).

**Graph 9.1: Are citizens included enough in the municipal policy making – answers from the CSOs? \***



\* Answers from CSOs

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*According to the received answers, it can be concluded that in most of the municipalities the citizens are still not enough included in the processes of decision and policies making on local level. At the same time, there is also still space for improvement of the active transparency and accountability by the municipal authorities. In addition, there is need for citizens to be more informed about the work performed by the municipalities, as well as about the way the citizens can exercise their rights for access to the services provided by the municipality.*

#### 4. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Having in mind the fact that 70% of the municipalities answered that they are faced with lack of human resources and technical support to enable better transparency and accountability, by timely and regular publishing and update of data, it is necessary to make a functional analysis of the capacities of the municipalities in order to determine, in the systematisation and organisational acts, a responsible unit/person, as well as the needed technical support for publishing the information on the work of the municipal bodies and the services it provides, in accordance with the Law on local self-government, the Law on free access to public information, as well as in line with the citizens' needs.
2. In order to ensure systemic approach in informing and communication with citizens it is recommended that the municipalities prepare a communication document (strategy, program or plan) together with all the target groups, including the CSOs, business sector and citizens as broadest target group, in a way to enable local authorities identify all target groups and all relevant channels for communication. Considering the fact that none of the CSOs recognised the municipal announcements board as tool for information and communication it is recommended that the municipal web page is introduced more actively among the main channels of information and communication with the wider public where all relevant information will be published, along with the other channels of informing and communication with citizens that do not have (regular) access to internet.
3. With a view to build a long term organisational work culture, it is necessary that the municipalities develop document/procedure for internal communication setting forth the channels for official exchange of information on different levels and in a way established in the document/procedure. It is the employees who are the first rather than the last target group to be enabled to provide the transparency of the municipality. Without solid internal cooperation, continuous flow of information it is impossible for the municipality to secure transparency and accountability.
4. Having in mind the fact that it is difficult to use the same approach to find the same information on two different municipal web pages, it is evident that there is a need for unified approach in publishing information i.e. unified structure of the web pages of all municipalities and publishing of the information in line with the Law on free access to public information.
5. For the purposes of enabling regular consultation with the citizens in the processes of local policy making, as well as in relation to the services provided by the municipalities, it is necessary to work towards development of innovative ways for consultations with citizens that will envisage proactive approach in informing the public, a consultative process on the issues of interest for the citizens, as well as clear structure and content of the report/s from the conducted consultation/s, including timeframe for all the envisaged activities.
6. Based on the needs assessment for the municipalities, depending on their respective capacities and resources, the acts for systematisation and organisation of the respective municipalities should identify structure/person in charge of the consultation processes. It is recommended that the local authorities take into consideration that are some introduced already on local level by some of the municipalities, and to also take into account the potential of the local and urban communities in the processes of consultation.

7. In order to ensure proactive approach by the municipalities in providing and publishing public information it is necessary to prepare and adopt document, in broader consultation with the civic sector, that will introduce the commitment for the municipalities to use a unified approach in publishing information that is related to the municipal work and is of interest for the citizens. In such a way municipalities will enable free and continuous access to public information of interest to citizens, thus demonstrating the willingness and openness of municipalities to have continuous consultation and cooperation with the civic sector in the policy making on local level. This will open up possibilities for increased interest and proactive participation of citizens, who - having the access to clear, comprehensible and updated information, will be able to offer constructive proposals and informed solutions for sustainable development.



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