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Project on Civic Engagement in Local Governance "MĂ IMPLIC": achievements and impact

Phase I / 2019-2023



The project on civic engagement in local governance “MĂ IMPLIC” aims at ensuring that the rural population of Moldova has equitable access to quality public service provision.

MĂ IMPLIC

Project on civic engagement in local governance

At the local level, the project has provided support to local public administrations (LPAs) in 30 partner communities / group of communities of LPAs, to manage service provision in a participatory, efficient, inclusive and sustainable manner, by:



Identifying and satisfying LPAs' strategic needs in service planning, budgeting, and service management;



Identifying and satisfying Service Providers' (SPs) organizational development needs in effective service operation and maintenance;



Supporting LPAs and SPs in the implementation of their service improvement and Operation and Maintenance (O&M) plans through resource mobilization and cofinancing. More specifically, this entailed capital investments amounting to a minimum of 65,000 Swiss francs, along with a local contribution constituting at least 20% of the grant's total value;

“MĂ IMPLIC” Project is funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC and implemented by Skat Consulting (Switzerland).

The first phase of the project was implemented in 2019-2023 with a budget of 5'896'658 CHF.



Engaging citizens, including vulnerable, in local decision-making processes and monitoring of service delivery in the targeted communities, those leading to the improvement of the local policy frameworks and establishing processes for people's engagement in public service provision;



Making service users (citizens) engaged in service planning and delivery.

At the national level, the project aimed to contribute to the establishment of a favourable policy, legal and financial framework for the provision of quality public services and the implementation of the decentralization reform by:

✔ *supporting national authorities in strengthening policy dialogue and informed policy-making related to the provision of public services;*

✔ *strengthening the capacity of the Congress of Local Authorities of Moldova to represent, participate in policy dialogue and provide support services to its members;*

✔ *ensuring that State Chancellery steers the Local Self-Government & de-centralization reform.*

The project encouraged innovative approaches to improve public services, cooperation between communities/LPAs and actions that will allow better operation and maintenance of public services. Citizens were/are more involved in local decision-making and monitoring of service provision in partner communities.

The sustainability of the project was secured through:

- *capacity building, provided technical assistance and peer exchange;*
- *comprehensive and multi-level work at different levels;*
- *drawing on the country systems ; application of flexible approach to*
- *capacity building and decentralization reform;*
- *supporting coordination and ensuring leverage;*
- *use of existing potential in the targeted partner communities.*



Matthias MORGNER

*team leader of
MA IMPLIC project*

„We follow a collaborative approach involving various stakeholders, including citizens, local politicians, local administration staff, and sometimes private entities. Our role as a project team is to create an enabling environment for these stakeholders to actively engage. The project name, “Mă Implic”, which means “I engage”, also captures this objective. Effective communication with relevant stakeholders has been a key success factor for the project overall.”

The strategic cross-cutting aspects addressed in the project **are gender equality, inclusion, and anti-corruption.**

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT - A KEY ELEMENT IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PUBLIC SERVICE DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

Civic engagement is the starting point for all project activities. All 30 communities/ group of communities participating in the MĂ IMPLIC Project were encouraged to create partnerships between local authorities, service operators and citizens. Projects on developing public services can only be effective and sustainable with the participation and support of citizens. Whether it is water supply, sewerage, waste management or street lighting projects, engaging citizens in decision-making contributes to an inclusive process where their voices are heard.

One of the pillars of this process is the Community Initiative Team (CIT), made up of representatives of local authorities, service providers and active citizens. The Community Initiative Team informs citizens, collaborates with technical experts and facilitators, and the representation of various categories of citizens and their needs.

Community involvement is crucial: rural communities have specific needs, and the development of services must be adapted to these needs. Involvement of local people in the planning and implementation process is essential to ensure the relevance of services.



Lilian DANILOV

Civil society and civic engagement manager in the MĂ IMPLIC Project

"Infrastructure and local governance projects implemented by authorities are sustainable and successful when citizens are engaged and consulted. The more citizens are engaged, the faster communities develop".

*More than **10 000 citizens** were directly engaged in the planning, implementation and monitoring of development actions.*

Project approach: Inclusive governance - promoter of change at local level

Inclusive governance is a process of community management that promotes active citizen participation in decision-making, accountability, and equity in the management of local services. This process takes time and effort. The process of identifying technical solutions has been easier in communities where teams are more experienced in implementing infrastructure projects. The mobilization and planning process was a learning process. Working groups, meetings and public consultations allowed citizens to express their views and concerns about local development needs. Systematic monitoring ensured greater transparency and accountability. Collaboration with civil society organizations has mobilized more resources and expertise to develop services. Learning and exchange activities have contributed to a better understanding of the processes and generated impacts.

INCLUSIVE GOVERNANCE - COMMUNITY IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE

1 Community engagement

The local authority's ability to be open, motivated, and willing to learn from their community and some level of technical background is helpful to be able to monitor the work and ensure greater success. Step by step the local authorities realise that community engagement makes projects more sustainable and the results are long-lasting and include increased trust.

1



2



2 Community Initiative Team

A working group that involves both local authorities and citizens is instrumental and a driver of the project. Citizens bring an outside perspective that feeds into the work of local authorities.

6 Will for a change

This project shows that the size of the village does not matter, as long as there is a will to get the communal service up and running.

6



Elements for inclusive governance projects
How to do it in your community

3



3 Technical support

Technical support from experts and project teams, support from facilitators and frequent visits to communities has been highlighted as tremendously helpful and motivating. Facilitators are actively involved and serve as a source for mayors and community initiative teams.

5 Public communication

Information and awareness raising is an important element - the better people understand the project, the more involved and active they are.

5



4



4 Good practice visits

Exchanges, including field visits, between villages that have the services running show that it is possible to have projects implemented and help avoid mistakes.

PARTICIPATORY AND EFFECTIVE PLANNING OF PUBLIC SERVICES

The MĂ IMPLIC Project supported all partner LPAs in developing a **Service Improvement Plan (SIP)**, a document that plans public service improvements and mobilizes investment. The plan includes the steps required to create the service, the people responsible and their tasks. The document was drafted by the Community Initiative Team (CIT), publicly consulted with citizens, and approved by local councils.

"The quality of public services is not just the concern of the LPA but also of the community."

SIP provides the LPA, the service provider, and the citizens with practical solutions to improve public services. The proposed solutions consider local development conditions (state of the infrastructure, process organization, consumers' attitudes towards the service) as well as environmental concerns, so that they can be implemented as efficiently as possible. SIP aims to improve a common public service, but in addition to construction or renovating the infrastructure, it also provides for actions to develop the operator's capacities. In particular, the plan aims to optimize the way the operator works, establish local regulations (including approval of the tariff for the provision of the service), communicate continuously and effec-

tively with customers to ensure that the public service is provided in a transparent manner.

Anatol BUCATCA

Manager in public administration and public services in the MĂ IMPLIC Project



"The most difficult service to set up in rural areas is waste management. What also makes the process more difficult is that people do not understand why they must pay for waste disposal, because they think they do not produce it. The best thing to do is to talk to people as much as possible about a problem until they start to become aware of it."

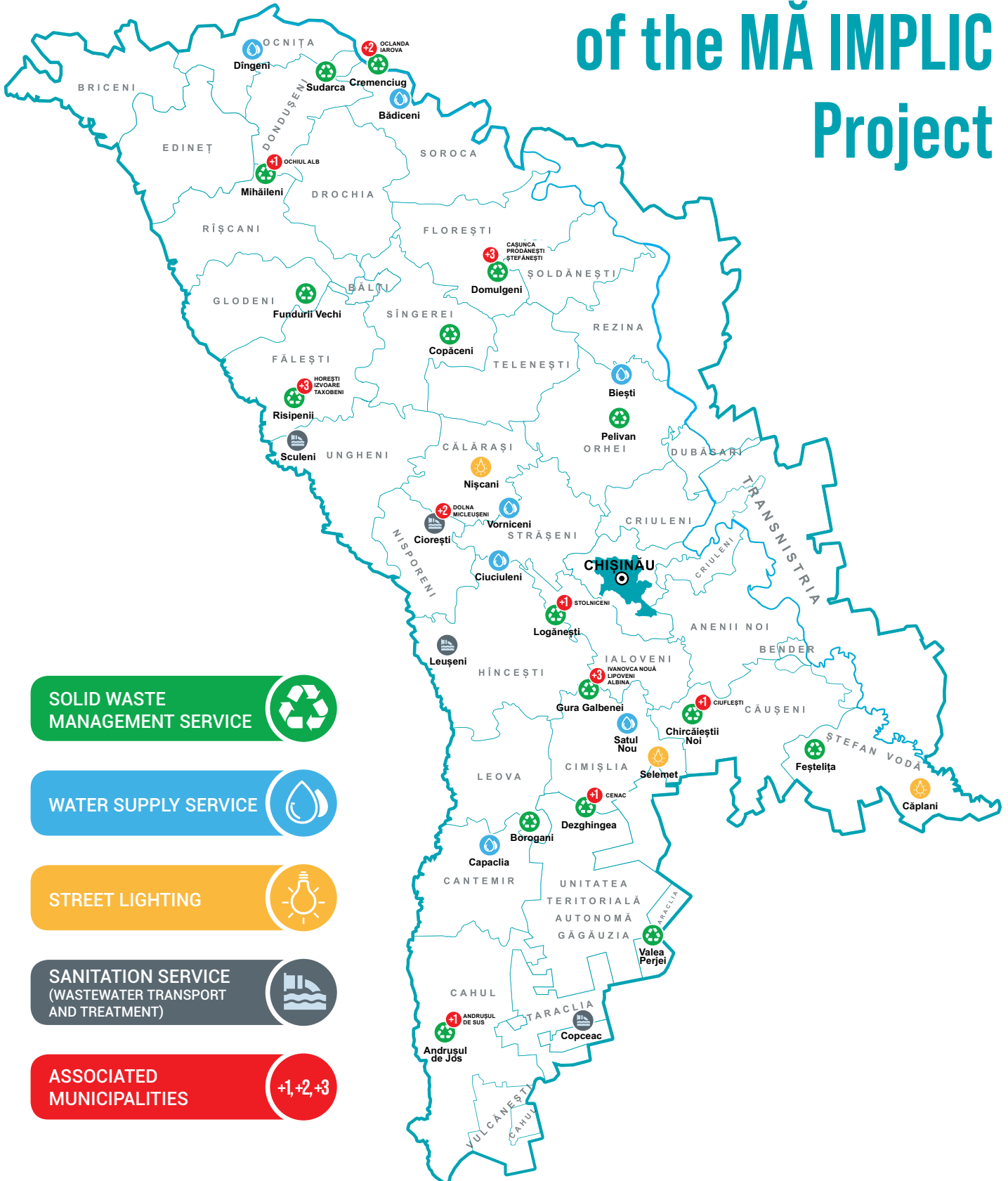


"A very good document, as it is detailed, complex, well structured, understandable and includes everything necessary for the proper operation of a public service".

(Quote CIT members)



Partner communities of the MĂ IMPLIC Project



CONTENT OF THE SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN



STATUS-QUO ANALYSIS OF SERVICE PROVISION

- Stakeholder mapping
- Survey on citizen perception
- Self-assessment of the communal service



SOLUTION

- Infrastructure
- Service provider performance
- Consumer relations
- Regulatory framework



VISION

- Concrete
- Realistic
- Accepted by all



ACTION PLAN

- Activities
- Resources
- Distribution of roles



MONITORING + EVALUATION

- Collection of information
- Communication of results and progress
- Publication of the evaluation

Planning the development of the service was one of the biggest challenges and took approximately 12 months. The creation of the Community Initiative Team was among the first steps in planning the service improvement and played an important role throughout the process. This team was the 'core of the community mobilization process'. It was the team that collected information, ideas, solutions, grievances from the citizens and together with the LPA outlined a plan for an efficient public service. The team regularly informed citizens by organising local information and awareness campaigns, ensuring that citizens participated in all stages of the project implementation.



Rodica BREGA

Manager in charge of organising the activities of the Community Initiative Team in Copaceni village.

"We also learned lots of new ideas from the people, which we adopted and incorporated in a plan".

73.56% is the progress rate of implementing the Communal Service Improvement Plans by partner LPAs.
(According to data collected in August 2023)



Valeriu TABUNȘCIC

The mayor of Căplani village

"The whole village decides, the mayor acts, but teamwork and the involvement of a large number of citizens are necessary. This is the principle by which I have been guided all the years".

Inter-community partnerships are the main pillars of the MĂ IMPLIC Project,

in addition to local initiative groups, co-participation and learning. The smaller the communities, the fewer chances they have to create a waste management service.

"Thus, out of the total of 48 partner communities, 28 of them have formed 10 INTERCOMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS to jointly develop solid waste management services."



Mariana STRECHI

CIT member, from Izvoare village.

"We've become a strong team, we've become friends and we want to continue this partnership. Our cooperation won't end here and we believe that projects can only be sustainable if they are implemented through partnership and collaboration".

The MĂ IMPLIC Project provided financial support for a series of investments in infrastructure and management of identified public services. The project included a co-financing element, amounting to at least 20% of the project support, provided by the partner LPAs from the local budget, the state budget and donor support. Citizens, including those from the diaspora, also made a significant contribution."

The partner communities of the project have benefited from increased resources/ investments through grant agreements with the MĂ IMPLIC project worth over

42 000 000 lei

over

20 000 000 lei

constituted the contribution of the communities in the implementation of the projects.

"Furthermore, Partner Local Public Authorities received support from the 'MĂ IMPLIC' project team for capacity building in order to access additional funds required for the development of public services."

Approximately

73 000 000 lei

represents the additional funding attracted by the project partners in the implementation of the Service Improvement Plans.

The funding sources are diverse: National Fund for Regional and Local Development, National Fund for Agriculture and Rural Development, National Fund for Environment, European Union (EU4Moldova), DAR 3+1, etc

The specialized training provided to representatives of the LPAs and public service operators within the "MĂ IMPLIC" project played a crucial role in strengthening their knowledge and skills. By empowering LPAs and public service operators, the project has contributed to the improvement of public services, promoting sustainable development within communities.

The strong focus on capacity building and sustainable practices reflects the project's commitment to achieving long-term benefits for partner communities. Through continued collaboration and investment in public services, the project aims to create lasting positive impacts on the life quality in partner communities.



IMPROVING THE REGULATORY, LEGISLATIVE AND FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE DEVELOPMENT AND PROVISION OF QUALITY PUBLIC SERVICES

The main objective of the project at national level was to contribute to the establishment of a policy, legal and financial framework that fosters the provision of high-quality public services and facilitates the decentralization reform. To achieve this objective, several significant actions were undertaken, including:



Diana TOMA

National Policy and Reforms Manager in the MĂ IMPLIC Project

„Through the barometer we aim to contribute to ensuring an adequate policy, legal and financial framework for the delivery of quality public services and the implementation of LPA reform. Furthermore, we aim to foster a viable, efficient, and ongoing policy dialogue between central and local authorities on these matters.”

Barometer of the main gaps, contradictions and constraints in the regulatory framework for public services:

A tool for mapping and systemic analysis of the legal and regulatory framework for public services has been developed. Through this tool, the project team contributed to the identification, in a participatory way, of the most relevant existing problems and trends in the regulatory framework for public services, as well as to the promotion of the dialogue between representatives of central and local public authorities, experts and practitioners. In addition, support and technical assistance were provided to address some of the issues identified in the three editions of the Barometer (2021-2023).



I EDITION (2021)



II EDITION (2022)



III EDITION (2023)



Public Administration Reform Strategy for 2023-2030:

As a strategic partner of the MĂ IMPLIC Project, the State Chancellery benefited from support and technical assistance from the project team during the process of conceptualization, elaboration, and consultation of the Public Administration Reform Strategy for 2023-2030, approved by the Government on 15 March 2023.



Guido BELTRANI

Director of the Swiss Cooperation Office in the Republic of Moldova

"Decentralisation and administrative-territorial reform are necessary not only for citizens - given the fragmentation and limited fiscal capacities of local public authorities. It is especially necessary for local public authorities. Fragmented local authorities have limited capacities to provide quality services to citizens. Local democracy, local self-government is not only about being close to the people, but also about having the power to change realities. As for the allocation of resources from central to local level, this should be done based on strict and transparent criteria, to avoid inequalities and tensions."



Law on the Voluntary Amalgamation of Administrative-Territorial Units:

The MĂ IMPLIC Project team provided technical assistance to the State Chancellery in the preparation and consultation of the draft Law on the Voluntary Amalgamation of Administrative-Territorial Units. It was adopted by Parliament on 31 July 2023 and sets out the principles, criteria, conditions, and procedure for the voluntary amalgamation of first level administrative-territorial units (ATUs). Additionally, the 'MĂ IMPLIC' project team continues to support and provide expertise in the development of the regulatory framework necessary for the implementation of this law.



Nicolae TUDOREANU

Mayor of the village of Feștelita in Ștefan Vodă

"If we delay any longer in reforming public administration, we will have villages without people but with mayors. Even the population we have in the Republic of Moldova, the GDP, and the revenue collected, it is impossible to sustain an army made up of so many administrations. 898 LPAs is an excessive number. For me it is important that local revenues grow and do not depend on general transfers from the state budget."

Law on Inter-Community Development Associations:

Expertise and technical assistance were provided to the Parliamentary Committee on Public Administration in the process of drafting, consultation and approval of the Law on Inter-Community Development Associations (No. 17 of 02.02.2023). This law, adopted in February 2023, provides new opportunities and cooperation tools for LPAs in the provision of public services and creates conditions for attracting and absorbing external funds for investment in local infrastructure.

E-Platform for Local Governance (e-platforma.calm.md):

As a result of cooperation with the Congress of Local Authorities of Moldova, the E-Platform for Local Governance was developed and launched. This platform provides training courses and online support services for LPA representatives and service operators at local level. It also provides a range of structured resources such as normative acts, guides, and reports, as well as other online tools relevant to LPAs.



www.e-platforma.calm.md



Viorel FURDUI

CALM Executive Director

“Through this platform we can reach a much larger number of LPA representatives, councilors, public servants, etc. We can inform them in useful terms about changes in legislation, provide training for those who need it, so that as a result of this cooperation, people in our communities receive better services and rural communities have more opportunities from development.”

900

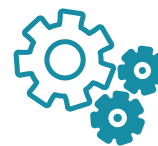
beneficiaries from approx. 450 LPAs

6

online training courses organized with the participation of approx. 200 LPA representatives and officials

10

more than 10 webinars/training sessions held with more than 1000 LPA participants



83120 people from 27,947 households in partner communities benefit from improved access and quality of services resulting from project investments.

93% of the targeted partner service providers have policies and implement tools for the systematic involvement of service users in service delivery.

83120

93%

84%

10 000

41%



84% of the targeted partner LPAs have adopted inclusive and gender-sensitive regulations regarding people's involvement.



Over 10,000 people, including vulnerable, were directly involved in the planning, implementation, and monitoring of communal service development activities.



An average of 41% of citizens from partner communities have contacted the LPA regarding communal service provision, and an average of 78% are satisfied with the solution/response received (according to surveys conducted in communities).