

# Voluntary Local Review – City of Bijeljina

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## Abbreviations

BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
FBiH	Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina
CBPR	Community-based Participatory Research
CePSuD	Centre for Promotion of Sustainable Development <sup>7</sup>
ICLD	Swedish International Centre for Local Democracy
LED	Local Economic Development
LGAP	Local Gender Action Plan
LRGs	Local and Regional Governments
MAPS	Mainstreaming, Acceleration and Policy Support
MiPRO	Methodology for Integrated Local Development Planning
MZs	Sub-municipal Local Communities (mjesne zajednice)
NALAS	Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South East Europe
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
RS	Republika Srpska
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
UCLG	United Cities and Local Governments
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UN-Habitat	United Nations Human Settlements Programme
VLR	Voluntary Local Review
VNR	Voluntary National Review

## Abstract

This report looks into the localisation of SDGs in the City of Bijeljina, which is an SDG pioneer in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It reviews three SDGs – SDG5 (gender equality), SDG10 (inclusion), and SDG17 (partnerships towards goals) – through the lens of Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) which is based on an immersion of researchers into the communities to seek active involvement of participants. The City of Bijeljina being a very heterogeneous community, this research has sought to address asymmetries in each of the three prioritised SDGs by looking into the institutional mechanisms for localisation of SDGs, specifically mechanisms and approaches for engagement of civil society, citizens and local communities in that process. It identifies some level of citizen engagement in setting priorities, marking the planning stage of the localization of SDG as participatory. However, the implementation and monitoring of results still lacks strong community ownership, as integration of SDGs into local processes still rests with the formal structures of the City administration. As such, the report concludes that the City of Bijeljina has been very successful in the initial stages of localisation of SDGs through systematic engagement of civil society in different aspects of designing and implementing the local Development Strategy, but recommends the City to enable and promote participatory monitoring that would more closely reflect citizens' views on the process of localising SDGs.

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## Preface



### By Johan Lilja, Secretary General, Swedish International Centre for Local Democracy

The mission of the Swedish International Centre for Local Democracy (ICLD) is to contribute to poverty reduction by promoting local democracy. In order to fulfil this, we promote and encourage decentralised cooperation through municipal partnerships programme; adding capacity-building through our international training programmes; and investing in relevant research and creating important research networks. ICLD documents and publishes key lessons learned from our ongoing activities, initiates and funds relevant research, engages in scholarly networks, connects relevant researchers with practitioners, and organises conferences and workshops.

We support the localization and implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, including the development of Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) to trace progress at the local level. Sustainable development is only possible if it is just and equitable. Therefore, to make the greatest possible contribution to Agenda 2030, ICLD supports VLRs conducted with Community-based Participatory Research (CBPR), which assume specific methodologies to advance a bottom-up perspective and uplift the voices of marginalized groups. The reports – developed by researchers and local governments together – aim at simultaneously strengthening local governments' capacity to engage citizens and implement Agenda2030, while innovating monitoring mechanisms to be more qualitative and capture the voice of the people they concern.

This report traces how Bijeljina has stepped up as a local frontrunner in SDG localization; the creative and communicative measures put in place, as well as the

challenges remaining. But perhaps the most important result is that communities were asked, listened to, and empowered to participate in shaping their local reality.

My genuine opinion is, to fight poverty and reach the ambitious goals set out by Agenda 2030, change must be anchored at the local level by means of equity, participation, transparency, and accountability – and leave no one behind. I hope that this study can help the City of Bijeljina to improve their work as well as inspire others to explore participatory methods in research and policy-making.

Visby, Sweden

Johan Lilja,  
Secretary General, ICLD  
June 2023

## About the Authors

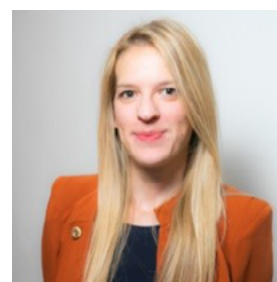
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## Executive summary

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by 193 Member States of the United Nations in 2015, aimed to eradicate poverty, reduce multiple and intersecting inequalities, address climate change, end conflict and sustain peace by the year 2030. Though adopting the 2030 Agenda is a state responsibility, its implementation rests on all levels of governance and in particular at the local level (Björkdahl and Somun-Krupalija 2018).

Municipalities and cities are places where the implementation of sustainable development strategies is put into practice (Meschede and Mainka 2020). A growing body of research is focused on advancing SDG integration at local level, and local governance is often at the centre of the debate as one of the key drivers for effective localisation processes. With that in mind, along with the identified need for more inclusive and qualitative reporting mechanisms, the Swedish International Centre for Local Democracy (ICLD) engaged in supporting the assessment of progress in localising Sustainable Development Goals in different parts of the world, using a participatory approach. ICLD partnered with SKRIPTA consultancy from Bosnia and Herzegovina in conducting a Voluntary Local Review in Bosnia and Herzegovina by looking into localisation of three SDGs in the City of Bijeljina. By standing as a pioneer of SDG localisation in BiH, the City of Bijeljina has served as a positive example and an epitome for localisation of SDGs. This is particularly significant having in mind the challenges and difficulties posed by a complex governance structure in the country, which often results in distancing authorities from citizens and their needs. By using the Community-based Participatory Research (CBPR) to immerse into the local community, our research assessed different dimensions of the localisation of SDGs in the City of Bijeljina toward three goals: SDG 5 (gender equality), SDG 10 (reduced inequalities), and SDG 17 (partnerships for the goals), as summarised below.

**Structures** for localising the SDGs: Localisation of SDGs requires strong and committed leadership by the Mayor, and in the case of the City of Bijeljina,

this was provided by the previous and current mayors. Localisation of SDGs was institutionalised in a Local Economic Development and European Integration (LED) unit of the City Administration, which has been crucial for institutionalizing SDGs in Bijeljina as part of the official development agenda. Therefore, strong foundations for enabling conditions for SDG localisation are in place and the uneven implementation can be partly attributed to a lack of awareness and motivation for mainstreaming SDGs in all areas under the jurisdiction of the city. There is still an evident need for greater synergy within the City administration to mainstream SDGs further as some evidence points to a disbalance in leadership on SDGs between LED and other city departments. Coordination and mainstreaming of SDGs can also accelerate initiatives that have been made at the grassroots level.



Photo credit: VLR research team

**Process** for localisation of SDGs: The City of Bijeljina can be considered very successful in the initial stages of localisation of SDGs, i.e. making a political decision to engage in SDG localisation, in setting up the institutional mechanisms within the City Administration, by providing and dedicating the necessary technical capacities through skilled and agile LED management and staff, and by integrating the SDG principles in the City's Development Strategy. The commitment and dedication expressed primarily by the LED management has been matched by the support from international projects and donors. However, evaluation and monitoring of localisation



of SDGs is an equally complex process that can help mainstream localisation across the city administration, and it needs to be given more attention to better integrate into the overall process. Evaluation and monitoring can also help raise awareness about the responsibility of different parts of administration, and to assess contribution to SDG mainstreaming by different stakeholders.

**Capacities** for localisation of SDGs: Although some efforts have been invested in training and education of all departments in SDG implementation, this research has identified a clear need for better integration of SDGs across the administration, and more focused measures aimed at raising awareness and training of staff as key preconditions for further implementation of SDGs.

**Engagement of stakeholders** in localisation of SDGs: The LED unit has systematically engaged the civil society sector in different aspects of designing and implementing the Development Strategy. Localisation of SDGs has also been an integral part of decisions on funding civil society efforts, and in allocation of funds to different parts of the City. The civil society organisations active in the City of Bijeljina are leaders in the area of gender equality, and that has influenced a perception that civil society should remain in lead on gender equality. Given the fact that mainstreaming gender is a complex and transformative process that requires cross-cutting engagement of multiple stakeholders, it is essential that the city authorities take a stronger lead in that direction and cooperate more closely with civil society, and seek support and guidance from higher levels of government, especially the entity Gender Center.

Citizens who are active in Mjesne zajednice (MZs – sub-municipal local communities), partnership groups, public consultations, and civil society, understand the importance of localisation of SDGs and the effects it has on their communities. However, those efforts are not necessarily attributed to the city administration, because of a widespread perception that the LED unit is independent of the city.

Finally, the process of localising the SDGs requires time, effort, and patience. Introducing SDGs to the public, and raising awareness and understanding about the importance of SDGs, does not happen overnight. The LED unit has worked intensively and resourcefully through surveys with companies and citizens, engagement with media and civil society, engagement with citizens and MZs in order to create a basic recognition about what SDGs represent, how they can be used and why they are important. Citizens and civil society representatives are involved in development of the city's strategic documents, including localisation of SDGs, but there is room for improvement of participatory monitoring, which would reflect more clearly citizens' views on the process of localising SDGs. This research was designed to complement the process of developing the City's own VLR by engaging citizens in the process of monitoring and collecting data, and empowering community members to have their voice heard on the progress in achieving Agenda2030 in the City of Bijeljina. Data collected through this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how local communities and citizens benefit directly from the initiatives seeking to implement measures towards the achievement of SDGs.

## Introduction

The key objective of this VLR research is to enable and empower community members to have their voice heard on the progress in achieving SDG in the City of Bijeljina, Republika Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina. The purpose of the report is to contribute to a deeper understanding of how local communities and citizens benefit directly from the initiatives seeking to implement measures towards the achievement of SDGs.

This VLR research has been conducted in cooperation with the City of Bijeljina and their **Unit for Local Economic Development and European Integration (LED)**, which is primarily working on localisation of SDGs. LED is an administrative unit that was part of the Mayor's cabinet until 2018, when a separate department was formed, located in the building for spatial planning and separate from the main offices of the City Administration.

The innovative research cooperation between SKRIPTA and City of Bijeljina was agreed and formalised through a letter of support signed by the Mayor of Bijeljina, Mr. Ljubisa Petrovic, on February 7th, 2023, in which the City of Bijeljina agreed to provide all necessary support and information about localisation of SDGs and their integration in the Development Strategy of the City of Bijeljina, and to provide necessary contacts with key stakeholders for the purpose of this research.

The experience of the City of Bijeljina in localisation of SDGs has not been replicated in the same way or to the same extent in other local governments in BiH. During 2023, the UNDP has begun to implement the SDG2BiH Project, which will support three cantons (mid-level governments) and eight municipalities to actively contribute to implementing the SDG framework in BiH. Although the Associations of Cities and Municipalities have been engaged in UNDP's SDG2BiH project, they have not yet engaged sufficiently in exchanging this good practice and replicating it elsewhere, but plan to do so in future. The City of Bijeljina is planning to conduct a more comprehensive VLR across the entire SDG framework over the next year, based on

the indicators that they had developed previously. That research will be based mainly on data collected, and in some cases produced, by the City of Bijeljina. Some level of community-based participatory input will be sought, but it is not envisaged to be at the level of participation applied in this research. This is mainly due to a lack of capacities and resources. One practical lesson learned of this research project is that the necessary capacities to conduct a highly participatory VLRs is labour-intensive and requires advanced research skills, which may not be available in all local governments. It was thus agreed with the City of Bijeljina that the input on the three SDGs collected through this VLR research would feed into the assessment which the City of Bijeljina plans to conduct subsequently. The City of Bijeljina has supported this research by providing the contacts in communities targeted by previous interventions aimed at localising SDGs, and served as a sounding board for findings and recommendations. They also provided data and information, and generously shared their insights during interviews and workshops.

### What are the SDGs?

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are part of a universal declaration that sets specific objectives for all nations in the world to end poverty, ensure the protection of our planet, and create peace and prosperity.<sup>2</sup> They make up a group of 17 goals contained in the Agenda 2030 declaration. The overall goal of sustainable development requires integration and acknowledgement of economic, environmental, and social concerns by multiple actors in our society.<sup>3</sup> The agenda has a big focus on achieving development within the environmental boundaries of our planet and on the principle of 'leave no one behind'.

The scope of the research is limited to three SDGs selected based on the agreement with the City of Bijeljina and ICLD. It covers the following goals:



### SDG 5 – Gender Equality.

Institutionalisation of gender equality in Bosnia and Herzegovina started in early 2000s with the development of legal and policy frameworks and establishment of gender mainstreaming mechanisms. However, the localisation of SDG 5 has been hampered by numerous obstacles, with dozens of different local mechanisms developed and tested with limited effects and weak sustainability. Lives of women and girls have not significantly improved since the process of localising SDGs started, even though there is a strong legal and policy framework and numerous local initiatives. Local governments in Bosnia and Herzegovina require support in identifying and implementing the most effective tools for implementation of SDG 5 into municipal policies and practices.<sup>1</sup> The aim of this research is to understand the processes of integration of previously developed gender institutional mechanisms, policies and practices into SDG localisation initiatives.



### SDG 10 – Reduced Inequalities.

Given the fact that the City of Bijeljina is a very heterogeneous community (there are different ethnic communities living in Bijeljina, a significant Roma minority, populations of ‘returnee’ communities, etc.), this research has sought to address different asymmetries in each of the three prioritised SDGs by looking into the institutional mechanisms for localisation of SDGs, and mechanisms and approaches for the engagement of civil society, citizens and local communities in that process.



### SDG 17 – Partnerships for the goals.

Local partnerships and partner groups established under the SDG localisation initiative in the City of Bijeljina, has been recognized by the local administration as one of the key mechanisms for community participation. With an aim to explore the effectiveness of home-grown solutions and showcase the local mechanisms for localisation of SDGs, this research particularly focuses on exploration of partnerships among different stakeholders.

The three goals were selected through a discussion with ICLD and the City of Bijeljina. SDG 5 is a priority for ICLD as an indispensable dimension, both intrinsically and instrumentally, of sustainable development, even if not a top priority by the local administration which relies on powerful civil society organizations advocating for women’s rights. Reducing inequalities (SDG 10) is a priority of the local government particularly since Bijeljina is a very heterogeneous community, which the city administration pays significant attention to. SDG 17 is also a priority of the local government; it is significant for all Strategic Development Goals and in the context of participatory analysis and inclusion of different stakeholders in the process of localising SDGs.

This research has sought to find answers to the following questions:

- How has the City of Bijeljina advanced the localisation of Agenda2030? What data is available? What have been key priorities?
- How are citizens and other social actors perceiving the implementation of the SDGs and how are they involved in defining project initiatives, and generally in having continuous dialogue with the City administration?
- How are citizens and other social actors experiencing the progress on localising and measures taken to implement SDGs?

<sup>1</sup> Based on the experiences in development and implementation of municipal policies in three municipalities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, ICLD developed a Toolbox for Local Governments to implement SDG 5 on Gender Equality. Björkdahl, Somun-Krupalija (2018).

- Do citizens and other social actors agree with the SDG priorities selected by the City of Bijeljina administration? Were they involved and how in setting priorities?
- Do citizens and other social actors agree with the assessment of the progress on measures taken to implement SDG? Do they see this process becoming more participatory? How to build strong ownership of the process by the community?

## Data collection methodology and processing

This research uses a human-centred method, which relies on engagement of key stakeholders and immersion into the local context in order to enrich the understanding of local factors and collect context-specific evidence. It puts citizens and local communities at the forefront of research in order to get a good grasp of real-life problems or solutions which have been already implemented with the aim of improving the lives of a community or a specific demographic through the localisation of SDGs.

To the largest extent possible, Community-based Participatory Research (CBPR) applied in this VLR research has avoided a gap between the researcher and the participant by immersing researchers into the communities and seeking active involvement of participants. As described by Gutberlet (2019), “the inclusion of local knowledge contributes to a better understanding of local interactions, allowing to diagnose the linkages or missing links in the community”. Using that as a key feature of our research, we have sought to engage with the community as participants and co-owners of the research through design of research, collection of data, analysis and development of recommendations, and through knowledge mobilisation. We have reached out to communities through a three-pronged approach in collecting necessary data and information:

- By engaging with policy makers at the very outset of research to increase their understanding of using CBPR as their asset that can help raise their awareness about community demands and challenges they face. Through that, and as

suggested by Strand et al. (2003b), we “try to establish a connection among all stakeholders in the project to build durable relationships that result in a better understanding of the thematic challenges and the power dynamics that affect the research”.

- Immersing ourselves into different communities by spending time with targeted groups and engaging in informal discussions and talks through which we gathered information related to the experience in localising the 3 SDGs, their views on the priorities, approaches, actors, stakeholders, and the impact these initiatives have had.
- By talking to “well-informed community members as partners whose wisdom and experiential knowledge particularly on local issues are valuable and complementary scientific data” (Amauchi et al 2021). For this, we talked to representatives of Mjesne Zajednice (MZ). MZs are sub-municipal organisations of citizens who live in close proximities (villages, neighbourhoods). They are citizen-driven and elected on 4-year bases by their local communities. While apolitical in principle, those bodies of citizens seek to represent a variety of views, while prioritising the interests of the community as a whole. The leaders of MZ represent the interest of their fellow citizens in dialogues with the city administration on priorities in developing the city budget, infrastructure projects, social care, needs of vulnerable groups, youth projects, etc.

To avoid the risk of raising expectations through this approach, we took mitigation measures through greater transparency, confidentiality, ethical research procedures, clarity about the desired goals and results, knowledge-mobilisation and providing feedback to the engaged communities and individuals. There are many complexities that exist in such a diverse and heterogeneous community, and this research accounted for the specificities of the local context, uncertainties that exist, interconnectedness of different parts of the community, their existing relationships and local environment. It was thus designed as “research that is community-based, rather than merely community-placed” (Hall and Tandon 2017). We applied

community mapping with representatives of different groups of stakeholders through participative research, framing questions in accordance with local community needs, and in collaboration with the local stakeholders (Hall and Tandon 2017).

To the extent possible, we sought equality in contribution to the research both by researchers and participants by including local actors who co-owned the information and research results. In practical terms, this meant structured and regular interactions with city administration, civil society, MZs in four steps:

1. Mapping of key players and processes based on information collected through desk research, with a goal to determine which community systems or structures were most important to engage with for successful implementation of SDGs.
2. Interviews with key stakeholders:
  - UNDP project “Localising SDGs in BiH”
  - Head of the Unit for Local Economic Development in the City of Bijeljina and SDG coordinator
  - Interviews with UNDP MZ Projects on citizens participation in the City of Bijeljina
3. Through two participatory interactions/meetings in local communities:
  - public servants, politicians, city councillors, mid-level administration management,
  - civil society organisations
4. By immersing into local communities:
  - Meeting with representatives of 2 MZs, conducting semi-structured interviews followed up by an informal socializing and talking focused on the research topics but also on everyday lives in their local sub-communities.
  - Spending a day with 2 target groups and engaging in informal discussions and talks through which we gathered information related to the experience in localising the 3 SDGs, their views on the priorities, approaches, actors, stakeholders, and the impact these initiatives have had.

## Localisation of SDGs

Local municipalities and cities are places where the implementation of sustainable development strategies is put into practice (Meschede and Mainka 2020). A growing number of research is focused on advancing SDG integration at national and local levels, and a broad discussion on operational approaches to SDG integration is still taking place globally. Without any doubt, local government is often at the centre of the debate, as one of the key drivers for effective localisation processes. The necessity for the proper engagement of local governments is most evidently argued with the OECD’s claim that 105 of the 169 targets behind the 17 SDGs need to be coordinated by the local governments (Fox and Macleod 2021). The importance of local governments became even more evident during the Covid-19 pandemic when the health emergency had to be addressed and sustainable recovery plans prepared. It further pushed the requirements for SDG localisation, such as providing local and regional governments (LRGs) with funding, improving subnational accountability mechanisms and performance incentives, developing ways to improve capacities (Agostinucci 2022).

Even though the SDGs were conceived as an intergovernmental framework, as stated in the 2022 report on the implementation of the SDGs in Sweden, “so many of the Agenda’s objectives are only achievable with full commitment of local level governments and communities” (Ciambra and Martinez 2022). In 2015, the Cities Alliance stated “that up to 65% of the SDG targets are at risk should local urban stakeholders not be assigned a clear mandate and role in the implementation process.” (Cities Alliance 2015)<sup>2</sup>. By engaging citizens, local governments can develop their sustainable development initiatives, learn from citizens, build trust and make better informed decisions, while citizens can obtain advantages such as education and democratic skill, to a certain extent gain control of policy processes (Meschede and Mainka, 2020). Democratic governance also involves bottom-up approaches and open government should be based on transparency, participation and collaboration (Meschede and Mainka 2020). Governments around the world, with the support

<sup>2</sup> Statement from a paper that discusses how the UN Urban Agenda could build on the 2030 Agenda.



of international agencies like UN Habitat, UCLG and others, have started to review their progress in localising SDGs using relatively standardised methodologies and reporting formats. However, there are still challenges to lift the issues with localisation of SDGs to the global level and to learn from different experiences, especially in contexts where the need for and challenges of sustainable development is particularly acute (Croese et al. 2021). Rich scholarly debate has also evolved recently around discussions on localisation of SDGs, and two slightly different schools of thought can be distinguished. Some researchers tend to be more sceptical about the language and approach provided by international agencies, criticising that it privileges global economic over local social and political interest (Weber 2017 in Croese et al. 2021) or by criticising the top-down agenda in “awareness, advocacy, implementation and monitoring framework” provided by UCLG as a four-step process of localisation arguing that local voices and priorities that are advocated for are often missed out completely (Fox and Macleod 2021). The debate sparked more thinking on exploring further the multilayered approach using the methodology of “multi-level governance framework”. Despite the challenges of “multi-level” approach, reflected often in the lack of coordination among different levels of government, further research endeavours are focused on finding the ways for its integration with “home-grown solutions adapted to local needs and contexts” (Croese et al. 2021)

Research shows that the integration of SDGs can go both ways, including multilevel coordination and direct support to SDG localisation processes. However, at the national level, local and regional governments (LRGs) are not systematically engaged in the policy debate and in key levers for implementation and monitoring. Only 34% of countries that reported to the HLPF between 2016 and 2019 have engaged LRGs in national coordination mechanisms. For all other countries, such an engagement is either very weak (15%) or inexistent (43%) (UCLG, 2019).

A group of authors analysing the level of national guidance and collaboration between different levels of government in African cities finds that multi-level governance frameworks are also often not strong, with

varying levels of institutional capacity, mandates and resources across different tiers of government and little collaboration between them. This situation “hampers the kind of coherent and integrated policy and decision making required for the local level planning, monitoring and implementation of global, but also related continental development goals and policies” (Croese, et al 2021). In general, there is an evident acknowledgement of all actors, including national governments, that the local governments play an essential role in localisation of SDGs - regardless of the level of higher-level political support toward localisation of SDGs, the methods used, the nature of a multi-governance framework, or the political context in the country.

In essence, Agenda2030 demonstrates the importance of multi-stakeholder partnerships. To support the achievement of sustainable development goals in all countries, and particularly in developing countries, one of the targets is to “enhance the global partnership for sustainable development, complemented by multi-stakeholder partnerships that mobilise and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources” (17.7). Agenda2030 is based on the principle of “leaving no one behind” and in order to promote peaceful and inclusive societies, its goal is to ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels (16.7) and involve vulnerable groups such as women (5.5).

### **Involving citizens: The community-based participatory approach and stakeholder mobilisation**

Consulting and involving citizens in localisation and implementation of the SDGs can be done using a wide variety of methods and approaches. Particularly important is the promotion of their communities and citizens’ direct participation in that process (Hepp et al 2019). For example, promoting women’s participation in the labour market contributes to SDG 5 (gender quality), SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth) and SDG 11 (make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable), but this has not always been branded as SDG work and understood through an SDG lens. A large number of research studies related to citizen

participation in SDGs stress the importance of citizen science and how it can fill in the missing data for the monitoring of progress at the local level and thus contribute to overall implementation of SDGs (Ozaki 2022).

Local governments around the world are involving citizens in localisation and implementation of SDGs, but with different degrees of success. A number of research studies have investigated citizens participation in sustainable development programs, such as a study on the citizen involvement in environmental assessment in Canada, where citizens were able to develop policies and regulatory recommendations and concluded that “increased citizen participation in follow-up activities such as monitoring could help to improve the quality and local relevance of environmental assessment” (Hunsberger et al 2005). Other studies point to a lack of citizen participation as being problematic, with only a few cases leading towards actual influence on decision-making (Eckerberg and Mineur 2003; Abel and Stephan 2000). Most approaches aimed at sharing information on the sustainable development strategy with the broad public and only to some extent citizens were invited to share their ideas in order to include them in the local government plans (Meschede 2020). Most municipalities count on citizen participation mainly in the implementation phase of the strategy, less during developing it (Meschede 2020). One of the factors hindering participation of citizens are information gaps and promoting participation and information sharing not only from the top-down process but among citizens is necessary (Ozaki 2022). Some local governments, as other VRLs have shown, do not have enough financial and technical resources to mobilize citizen participation.

Drawing on that research and lessons learned, this research explores the community participation and the role of local government from the perspective of local needs and contexts, exploring the “home-grown” solutions and contributing to the wider debate on integration of multi-governance framework with local needs and contexts, especially in the area of developing countries, weak democracies and complex

political and administrative systems - where the need for and challenges of sustainable development is particularly high. Citizen science, scientific research conducted with the participation from the public, has considerable potential to interact with the fast-evolving SDG process. “Citizen science provides the public with the means to inform policy, which could raise trust, credibility and ultimately accountability in the SDG monitoring process. Moreover, engaging with citizens in the data collection process, and in research more generally, could create opportunities to stimulate citizen action.” (Fraisl, 2020).

This research attempts to provide insights into how and to what extent were citizens and other social actors involved in setting priorities selected by the City of Bijeljina in Bosnia and Herzegovina, whether they see the process becoming more participatory, and how to build strong ownership of the process by the community. The research can add to a growing literature about citizen participation and community based participatory research.

## Context analysis – Sustainable Development Goal prioritisation in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Democracy-building in Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH) began after the end of the four-year violent conflict in 1995. The transition to democracy and market economy in BiH has been significantly perturbed by post-conflict political agendas and animosities. BiH's constitution (Annex IV of the Dayton Agreement) was designed to end the war by reconciling competing visions of statehood, borders and self-determination rights through the establishment of a highly decentralised, fragmented state with weak central institutions and two sub-state entities: Republika Srpska (RS) and Federation of BiH and one autonomous region of Brčko District, with a weak federal centre and strong cantons (mid-level of government). There are weak and unclear guarantees to institutional functionality, and strong decision-making mechanisms based on ethnic consent, as well as strong ethnic veto mechanisms. There are 144 local governments in BiH, 80 in FBiH and 64 in RS and Brčko District. However, most reform processes have focused on changes at higher levels of government, while the local level is often self-reliant, but without strong self-governance mandates. Nonetheless, it is the level of government which serves citizens directly and addresses most of their problems.

With such a divisive context in mind, finding a common and universal development agenda is immensely important, so the alignment of the country's strategic agenda and documents with SDGs provides a much-needed sense of direction for future reform efforts. Broad stakeholder, citizen- focused consultations on Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were initiated in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2016 under the umbrella of the 'Imagine2030' initiative. This was conceptualised by the United Nations in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which has to date informed and engaged over 3,000 people and continues to be the main force of advocacy and engagement on SDGs in the country. The official launch of Agenda 2030/SDGs was in April 2017. A high-level conference on Agenda 2030 was organised

under the auspices of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, followed by the official nomination of the institutions responsible for spearheading key efforts for each area<sup>3</sup>.

The first Voluntary National Review at the central level was published in 2019<sup>4</sup>, recognizing that BiH achieved relatively modest results in implementation of the Millennium Development Goals, but that it began preparations for SDGs Agenda 2030 "in a far more comprehensive manner". However, it is important to note that the first VNR has been prepared with more than 30 months of pending institutional ownership of the process, while United Nations in BiH had a leading role of engaging all related parties by applying Mainstreaming, Acceleration and Policy Support (MAPS) engagement<sup>5</sup>. BiH's Voluntary National Review is not focused on the progress of SDG implementation, but is rather descriptive and focused on the process of initial activities to promote SDGs.

The SDGs Rollout working group was established in 2018 and comprises the representatives of the Council of Ministers of BIH, entity governments and government of Brčko District and United Nations in BiH. The task of the SDG Rollout Working Group is to plan and coordinate joint activities of government institutions at all levels in the country and for the purposes of regional and international activities and reporting supported by the United Nations. In the description of their duties, support to local authorities in implementing SDGs at local level has been delegated to the UN in BiH<sup>6</sup>.

With a goal to create better preconditions for the implementation of SDGs in the country, a performance audit was conducted in 2019<sup>7</sup> providing recommendations to BiH Council of Ministers, BiH Parliamentary Assembly, BiH Directorate for Economic Planning and BiH Agency for Statistics. The audit findings concluded that after a four-year

3 Voluntary Review in BiH, 2019, p. 10

4 Voluntary Review in BiH, 2019, p. 10

5 Voluntary Review in BiH, 2019, p. 8

The overall support in the implementation process for Agenda 2030 in Bosnia and Herzegovina is provided by the United Nations (UN) and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), in cooperation with the Government of Sweden and its financial aid.

6 Voluntary Review in BiH, 2019, p. 32

7 The SDGs Framework in BiH, 2020.

period since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, basic preconditions for the implementation of the SDGs by the institutions of BiH have not been met, while most of the activities are being carried out within the UN project “SDGs Roll-out Support and Private Sector Engagement”. As stated in the Audit report “a more serious and efficient approach of the institutions of BiH to develop the preconditions for implementation of SDGs is necessary and it involves the establishment of a strategic and institutional framework for SDG implementation as well as putting in place a system of regular reporting and monitoring of such implementation”<sup>8</sup>. According to the VNR, one of the priorities in development of SDGs Framework for BiH should be in consulting CSOs and other stakeholders following the principles of “leave no one behind”.

Adoption of the SDGs Framework document in BiH<sup>9</sup> by the Council of Ministers (CoM) in 2021 has been the first step toward its integration in the strategic planning process. Even though the first years of the country’s commitment to the Agenda 2030 were mostly followed with scepticism, the adoption of the Framework increased its visibility, set up a Committee on SDGs and clearly mentioned the need for “localisation” and partnerships with municipalities. Nonetheless, the Framework refers to local governments less, compared to higher levels of government, and treats more on an equal footing as the civil society.

Following the adoption of the SDG Framework, efforts were made to integrate it into various development and strategic documents across all levels of government and to establish connections as stated in the second Voluntary Review published in 2023, recognizing the importance of localizing the SDGs and the role of local governments. The second VNR states that it became evident that the principle of “Leave No One Behind” could not be effectively implemented without localising the SDGs and that efforts and visits were conducted to local government

unites across the country. It also stresses that the country does not have sufficient funds for achieving 2030 Agenda and that an intergovernmental working group was established with the aim of providing recommendations to mobilize alternative resources.

***“Recognizing the complex nature of Agenda 2030, it became evident that relying solely on public funds would not be sufficient to achieve SDG implementation by the end of the decade. Consequently, efforts were initiated to explore new and innovative financing methods, aiming to foster the development of financial markets and strengthen public-private partnerships”<sup>10</sup>.***

The lack of institutional ownership was attributed to the complex administrative set-up of BiH

***“Given that the country has over 160 ministries and hundreds of specialised institutions at different administrative levels and 145 local administrations, the work done to date is considerable; however, a lot of advocacy work on the engagement and integration of Agenda 2030 into the regular institutional processes remains to be done”<sup>11</sup>.***

Development and adoption of the SDG Framework has been confirmed as a priority, and this is recognized as an opportunity to include a wider range of stakeholders, including CSOs and academia. Hence, in the first year of implementation, the focus has been on engaging the government and private sector.

<sup>8</sup> The SDGs Framework in BiH, 2020.

<sup>9</sup> The SDGs Framework in BiH, 2020.

<sup>10</sup> Voluntary Review in BiH, 2023.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

## Localising SDGs in the City of Bijeljina

### Institutional mechanisms and approaches (policy and institutional level)

BiH's VNR stated that the SDGs were to be formally integrated in accordance with the internal organisation through a chief coordinator, who will maintain direct communication with the ministries responsible for local authorities, the associations of municipalities and cities in the entities, and local departments. Even though a few local governments have considered an SDG localisation process (Tuzla, Živinice and Sarajevo), the City Administration of Bijeljina has advanced farthest in that process and were the first local government in Bosnia and Herzegovina to adjust and include relevant SDG targets and indicators into its development strategy. In 2018, a systematic approach to the localisation of Agenda 2030 and the SDGs began with the inclusion of SDGs into the revised Development Strategy of the City of Bijeljina for the period 2019–2023. In partnership with the local NGO 'Centre for Promotion of Sustainable Development' (CePSuD), the City of Bijeljina has raised awareness on SDGs in the private and banking sectors as well as in the media and the public sector. It emphasises partnership and mutual support in future actions as the only successful formula for a more human and sustainable way of life.

During the inception phase of the SDG localisation process in 2017 and 2018, Bijeljina City started with awareness-raising activities among local stakeholders, including:

- Surveys on knowledge about Agenda 2030 and SDGs conducted with 173 representatives of the public, private and civil sector.
- Consultations conducted with relevant International Organizations, including UN in BiH, on the approach of promotion and localisation of SDGs.
- Awareness raising training sessions with Partner groups on Bijeljina City level (composed of private, public, civil sector and Academia) and other stakeholders. In the first two years of implementation, 18 training sessions have been conducted with 190 representatives (113 female,

77 male) of the banking sector, private companies, NGO, entrepreneurs, City administration, Association of towns and cities of RS, Social Welfare Centres, Police, public institutions from 26 cities/municipalities in BiH.<sup>12</sup>



Photo credit: City of Bijeljina promotes and localises Agenda 2030 and SDGs, Open SDG Club in Berlin, 2019, LED Unit

In 2018, a systematic approach in localisation of Agenda 2030 and SDGs started with inclusion of SDGs into the revised Development Strategy of the City of Bijeljina for the period 2019 – 2023, as the first in BiH. The same year, the Unit for Local Economic Development and European integration (LED), an administrative unit that was part of the Mayor's cabinet became a separate and independent unit.

In terms of the introduction of institutional mechanisms for localisation of SDGs, the LED unit was assigned with coordination in planning and implementation of projects, and to actively cooperate with all Departments of the City Administration. The LED unit is also in charge of important aspects of community engagement and citizens' participation, and establishment of the public-private dialogue,<sup>13</sup> cooperation with international organisations, various agencies and donors, and delegating project proposals to different international donors. However, their key role concerns development of strategic documents – the City's Strategic Development Plan, the Plan of Sustainable Urban Mobility and Action Plan for Sustainable Energy and Combat Against Climate Change.<sup>14</sup> LED activities fall under a broader umbrella

<sup>12</sup> Annual plan for LED unit, 2022.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.



captured in the slogan “Bijeljina – The City of the Future”.

**“LED is the driver of sustainable development goals... LED is the bearer of the activities that the City Administration should implement. ...LED’s initiatives in the Assembly always receive support. ...We support everything that is positive in the City Assembly, and everything LED send into the procedure is positive. We have always adopted things that lead towards development of the city. There is an excellent team gathered around Ankica and they do their job well.”** (Focus group participant – member of the City Assembly)

The LED unit has been pivotal to the introduction and localisation of SDGs in the City of Bijeljina. They have initiated and led localisation efforts and continue to provide the crucial impetus to further integration of SDGs in all aspects of the local government’s work, functioning and engagement of citizens. However, our research shows that this effort has not been paralleled by a similar investment of effort and resources across the city administration. Moreover, there is an overwhelming perception that SDG localisation is the prerogative of the LED unit, resulting in some level of scepticism about SDGs among other representatives of the city administration, describing SDGs as “something that is not real and tangible”.<sup>15</sup> We have thus observed some level of imbalance in commitment to the localisation of SDGs between the LED unit and other departments of city administration, which indicates the lack of ownership outside the LED unit, and a need for greater integration of SDGs within the city administration overall. Some representatives of other city departments felt a need to stress greater commitment to the government’s legal framework regulating their work, as if the SDG framework was something that was not yet intrinsic to their work.

Focus group participants assessed the work of the LED unit during our discussion<sup>16</sup>, and believe that the process of localisation of sustainable development goals is participatory and transparent. They

particularly praise involvement and communication with LED, which is often expedient and regular, as well as the transparency of work and the posting of all important documents online. Participants expressed a view that their voices are heard and that the priorities of their organisations are included in the city’s strategic plans. They praise the work and engagement of the LED team to such an extent that they would like to have such a team in their organisations. They see the importance of localisation of SDGs, and cite systemic solutions and a multi-sector approach as the main advantages in that process.

**“People from LED lead the whole process, but the entire public is involved, people from the profession, it depends on the topic... LED has always led the activities, but people for certain areas and the public are involved.”** (Focus group participant – member of the City Assembly)

## Engagement of civil society

LED’s no. 1 goal in the 2022 annual plan is the alignment of projects and activities with the 2030 Agenda. Intensive participation of citizens is envisaged as an outcome of the LED annual goals, and it is linked to the Strategy and sector goal 2.4. “Improve the quality of the service and the participation of the citizens in the work of the City Administration”. One of the Development Strategy indicators seeks to achieve an “increased average number of the citizens participating in the public hearings on local decisions and policies by 15% in the year 2023 compared to the year 2017”.<sup>17</sup> Meetings with the private sector and partnering groups is an integral part of the Activity plan and the overall structures for localising SDGs, and citizens are regularly consulted through surveys. One of the Indicators is “Minimum 2000 citizens included in the process of the decision making through surveys”.

The LED unit has implemented numerous projects in partnership with the private, public and civil sector, and academia - e.g. enhancement of unemployed

<sup>15</sup> Statement by one interviewee from the City administration

<sup>16</sup> The focus group included representatives of local civil society organisations, municipal council, public services, academia, entrepreneurs and business community.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*

people skills in accordance with the need of private sector; establishment of inclusive playground for children with and without disabilities in partnership with private and civil sector, supported by International level; enhancement of practical classes for 7 deficient occupations needed at the labour market, in partnership with 3 vocational schools, private and civil sector; introduction of 2 new occupations in vocational schools, etc.

Our research showed that representatives of civil society organisations, the Social Welfare Center, women entrepreneurs, representatives of the academia and city councillors perceive the implementation of SDGs in Bijeljina positively. **Civil society organizations consider the localisation of SDGs as important for their local community, and regard it highly because of its systematic solutions and a multisectoral approach. They state that their priorities have been included in the process of the localisation of SDGs and in the City's strategic plans by involving them in defining project initiatives and in a continuous dialogue with the City administration.** They are especially satisfied with easy and constant communication with LED, which often is informal, and includes direct calls, visits and Viber messages and especially praise the transparency of the process. They stated that the whole process is proactively transparent and inclusive and that all the documents are available online. Participants state that the representatives of the LED unit listen to their needs, based on which they make decisions and are always open for dialogue. Some of the participants of focus groups were part of partner groups and have been included in drafting the City Strategy. Others were part of educational programs for SDGs or for entrepreneurs prepared within the localisation of SDGs.

#### Examples of CSO engagement in localisation of SDGs:

- **CSO Otaharin**, a local organisation dealing with minority rights and the rights of marginalised groups, initiated many actions and initiatives, including drafting of the Action Plan for the Improvement of Social Services in Bijeljina. This was preceded by several meetings between LED and CSO Otaharin, and the working group consisted of representatives of various institutions, who worked together on the development of an action plan. All potential target groups were included in development of the Action Plan, including persons with disabilities, women, women victims of violence, elderly people, Roma community. The Action Plan is seen as “an example to all other local governments”. Focus group participant
- **The Association of Women with Disabilities Impuls** contributed to the development of the city plans for urban mobility but also to the inclusion of marginalised groups in the health care and in the preparation of the city strategy. “We had the support of the City Administration and we were involved in every sense, the role of participating in various bodies and various commissions, in the preparation of various documents, that is the principle of open partnership, cooperation, respect for opinions, to incorporate the proposals of the vulnerable population of citizens.” Focus group participant
- **Foundation Impuls**, City Administration, Faculty of the Business Economy of Bijeljina organised a training course for entrepreneurship, where one female entrepreneur won a support scheme from the city and was able to start her own business.

## Engagement of local communities (Mjesne zajednice - MZs)

Mjesne zajednice (MZs) are sub-municipal organisations of citizens who live in close proximities (villages, neighbourhoods). They were introduced in all parts of the former Yugoslavia in early 1970s as a way to organise citizens and to improve local self-governance. From the 1990s, there have been mixed experiences with using MZs as citizens' associations, and many cities abandoned them. Over the past 10 years, there have been many initiatives to harmonise or regulate the status of MZs through the entity laws on local self-governance. One of the biggest impetuses to the strengthening of MZs has been an initiative funded by the Swiss and Swedish Embassies in BiH, and implemented by UNDP. It is a project that has worked directly with over 40 municipalities to improve the status and functionality of MZs in order to provide more favourable conditions for citizens' engagement at the local level and to act as intermediaries between citizens/ communities and local governments. MZs are citizen-driven and elected on 4-year bases by their local communities. While apolitical in principle (though in many places the leadership of MZs still have strong connections with local political parties), those bodies of citizens seek to represent a variety of views, while prioritising the interests of the community as a whole. The leaders of MZ represent the interest of their fellow citizens in dialogues with the city administration on priorities in developing the city budget, infrastructure projects, social care, needs of vulnerable groups, youth projects, etc.

Through their work with MZs, UNDP and local governments introduced a forum of citizens, neighbourhood gatherings in which citizens have the power to express their views on specific proposals from their municipal administration. In the case of the City of Bijeljina, MZs are visibly engaged in many aspects of the functioning of the local government, and they are systematically used for citizens' engagement and consultations. When it comes to localisation of SDGs in Bijeljina, citizens' forums in MZs were used to present SDGs directly to citizens, and new MZ members will be trained to use the methodology for the forum of citizens next year. The planned trainings will be another

opportunity for the LED unit to introduce SDGs to the new leadership and activities at MZ level. During our interview with LED, they expressed a view that they see cooperation with MZs as very practical, and as a channel to demonstrate through examples and case studies the benefits that citizens could have from localisation of SDGs.

On the other hand, MZ representatives that we interviewed agreed in principle that a level of cooperation and coordination with City administration is in place, but that further efforts need to be invested in order to have more meaningful participation at the level of citizens. Interviewees from MZs emphasise that they are invited for consultations with local government, and they provide proposals on behalf of their communities, but that does not always or necessarily translate into initiatives at the City level, nor do they receive satisfactory feedback and information on the status of their requests. Nonetheless, MZ representatives view cooperation with the LED unit as positive overall, and create an impression that they regard LED somewhat differently or even separate from the broader city administration. Because of that, we could not identify strong awareness or perception that SDGs localisation is led by the City Administration and that SDG localisation is a programmatic part of their Strategy. Hence, all the benefits of the City's efforts to localise SDGs are not that visible to citizens, while SDG localisation is more associated with the LED unit and its management (which are predominantly, however wrongly, viewed as not integral to the City administration). However, this lack of awareness among citizens about the link between SDGs and the city administration does not impact results so much. It is more a matter of a need for improved communication about the role of LED and a need for more strategic communication about the commitment of the City administration overall (Mayor and Council) to implementation of SDGs, including through MZs.

## Other mechanisms for localisation of SDGs introduced by the City of Bijeljina

In 2017, the City of Bijeljina established the advisory body “**Partnership for the Development of the City**” with the aim of more active involvement of citizens in the processes of management and decision-making related to the development of the City. So far, it has been a key mechanism of community participation in the improvement of local development, i.e. an instrument of communication between citizens and the City Administration. As such, partnerships were created to serve development of the City overall, but they were subsequently integrated to help with implementation of SDGs as well (especially when the processes of city development and SDGs localisation became better integrated). The partnership engages around fifty key actors of local life and development, and it consists of representatives of the City Administration, public institutions and companies, representatives of the business/private sector (companies and entrepreneurs) and civil society, who are engaged through a standardised methodology for integrated planning of local development in BiH (MiPRO).<sup>18</sup> The City of Bijeljina established three such groups: partner groups for social development, ecological development and economic development. In establishing partner groups, gender balance principle is respected and gender disaggregated data used in survey analysis. However, LED activities are not specifically focused on SDG 5.

The partner groups were engaged in the process of revising the local development strategy, which was the first step in integrating and localising SDGs in the City of Bijeljina. It also included preparation of the city’s plan of sustainable mobility. The City administration is currently in the process of revising the membership of partner groups,<sup>19</sup> but the overall Partnership for Development will remain one of the key mechanisms for localisation of SDGs in Bijeljina.

**Cooperation with academia.** Representatives of academic institutions with which the City of Bijeljina

cooperates see that partnership as very positive and energetic. The city administration and the LED unit in particular often initiate discussions and meetings to discuss various topics. Through their cooperation, the Faculty of Economics and City Administration emphasise entrepreneurship, seek to build “entrepreneurial spirit”, promote development and education of young people, which focus group participants see as very important for moving the city and country forward.

**Regular survey of citizens** is a practice which the LED unit uses consistently to gather the views of citizens and their position on different aspects of the City’s development. The survey is integrated in LED’s annual activity plan and it has been a fundamental element of localisation of SDGs at the outset of the process in 2017, when 173 citizens were surveyed. So far, 7 such surveys have been completed and used in the process of determining development priorities and assessing the needs of citizens. In 2022, the LED unit’s activity plan envisaged that at least 2000 citizens would be reached with the survey, and since its introduction, it has become a flagship mechanism for citizens’ consultations through LED, contributing to their image of a body that listens to citizens and communicates to citizens directly.

**“LED’s cooperation with the City Assembly is at a very high level, the reporting is transparent to councillors, the Assembly and citizens, which is very important.”** (Focus group participant)

Results of the survey are published and local radio stations read survey results during the morning programme, which has the largest audience reach-out. Results are also disseminated by other local media outlets. From LED’s point of view, publication of survey results and providing feedback to citizens is important in gaining their trust. Some citizens that were consulted during this process stated that they value the results of the survey, but feel that results do not necessarily lead towards changes of policy. This

<sup>18</sup> MiPRO was elaborated in 2013 within the Integrated Local Development Project (ILD), which was a joint initiative of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), implemented in partnership with the BiH Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees, RS Ministry for Administration and Local Self-Governance, Federal Ministry of Justice and the Associations of Municipalities and Cities in both entities.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with representative of LED Unit, 6.04.2023

could be due simply to a lack of transparency on how survey results are used, or insufficient communication on how the results are used to shape up policies of the city administration.

***“We believe this can be one of the ways to return the trust. If we ask them – we accept it and do it – but this is long-term, a process. With the aim to convince people that they are respected”.***  
(Representative of the LED Unit)

Continuous surveys and consultations with citizens resulted in the opening of the first pedestrian-only street in the central part of the city, the street of Patrijarh Pavle.

***“During the last three years we asked if citizens are in favour of closing the street Patrijarha Pavla – we have repeated the question for three years in a row. And then provided results back to citizens”***  
(Representative of the LED Unit)

**Focus groups** are used in the process of preparation/revision of the City’s development of strategy. Focus groups are conducted among members of partner groups as well as with additional, sector-based representatives. For example, when discussing the area of sports, all representatives of sport associations are invited to discuss and present their priorities.

## Progress on selected goals and targets

### SDG 5 – Gender Equality

Perceived progress on relevant goals and targets by the local government, and by stakeholder communities

The process of institutionalisation of gender equality measures at the local level of the City of Bijeljina is still in progress. While some of the most prominent tools for the implementation of SDG 5 are being active and utilised such as the Municipal Council Committees for Gender Equality <sup>20</sup>, the strategic approach through the Local Gender Action Plan (LGAP) is still not in place, despite the strong commitment of the relevant department and the support from the city leadership, reflected in the establishment and approval of the Working group for the development of LGAP in 2021 (Mišić, 2022). The process of the LGAP development and adoption is also recognized as the priority by the representative of the relevant Department for Education and Non-governmental Organisations, Youth and Family Protection under which jurisdiction is also gender equality. <sup>21</sup> However, having gender equality under such a broad portfolio of duties and responsibilities may potentially affect prioritisation of the issues and in general, coordination and monitoring of gender equality activities. This is very often the practice of many other local municipalities in the country, with few exceptions where a specific unit is nominated as gender focal point with bigger number of staff working specifically in gender mainstreaming. <sup>22</sup>

Our research noted the absence of a systemic approach that would enable more precise assessment of gender equality, more concrete activities, and inclusion of relevant funds in the budget of the city to reduce gender-based discrimination. However, the City of Bijeljina needs to be given credit for several innovative and unique approaches in mainstreaming gender, such

<sup>20</sup> A toolbox for Local Governments to implement SDG#5 on Gender Equality, ICLD: 2018. The study conducted in the municipalities in BiH shows that the most efficient tools for localisation of SDG 5 in municipalities in BiH could be: Local Gender Action Plans, Disaggregating municipal data by gender and Municipal Council Committees for gender equality

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Department representative, 7.04.2023.

<sup>22</sup> See Bjorkdal, Somun Krupalija. pg. 18.



as the “Gender-responsive waste management service delivery in the City of Bijeljina” (NALAS, 2022) which was successfully piloted as part of the NALAS (Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South East Europe) project. It showcases the benefits of improving quality of the overall waste management services by involving gender mainstreaming in the planning process and identification of the needs of men and women. Local administration also recognises that their biggest achievement in the area of women visibility and empowerment is the “Meritorious Woman” award that was introduced in 2015, and is repeated every year on the International Women’s Day.

During interviews with citizens and other stakeholders, the partnership of local administration with the local women’s rights organisations was praised, especially in the area of prevention and combating violence against women. The City of Bijeljina adopted the “Local action plan for preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence 2021-2025” and coordinated the work of the multi-sectoral team for the prevention of VAW and DV consisting of all relevant institutions including CSOs, Center for Social Work, judiciary, police and other. Relevant municipal department implements its activities by following national and entity legislative framework (e.g. Gender Action Plan of BiH, entity Strategy to Combat Domestic Violence in Republika Srpska) and reporting to respective Ministry and entity Gender Centre. However, it has to be noted that those activities are implemented by departments other than LED, which do not necessarily view it from the perspective of localisation of SDG 5. Although we could not identify specific evidence towards this, it has been indicated that the LED unit out is not part of discussions on preventing violence against women.

The LED unit recognised the importance of gender equality by integrating it into all other SDGs and their activities, especially in terms of ensuring and collecting gender disaggregated data. However, more focused programmatic work on improving gender equality is given less attention, and it is rather seen as the responsibility of well-established women’s rights organisations in Bijeljina, such as Foundation “Lara”, a safe house and a CSO service provider for the survivors of violence. *“We don’t*

*work on gender equality separately, it is rather integrated in all other activities. We have strong CSOs in this area and our priorities are also other marginalised groups”* - LED Unit coordinator

#### **Example of positive practices:**

The Tourism Organization of the City of Bijeljina enabled the sale of products created by the organisation working with women with disabilities in the Ethno-village Stanišić, which is popular with tourists visiting that area. Their products such as woven products, belts, and bags are on display and available for purchase.

Integration of gender principles in the work of LED is also recognized by other community actors, especially related to economic empowerment activities.

***“We recently had a website development training, I was able to create my own website thanks to that training and it brings me new clients. We also had a women’s entrepreneurship fair”*** (Focus group participant)

Women’s entrepreneurship is supported through a partnership between the Bijeljina Faculty of Economic and City Administration through the IMPAC Foundation. Business plan proposals from female entrepreneurs are given extra points in order to boost the number of businesses led by women, and it also includes positive measures that advantage women over 50. One of the participants in the scheme reported to have had an excellent mentor and emphasised the sustainability of projects. According to LED, the number of women who start their own businesses is increasing.<sup>23</sup> The female entrepreneur that participated in this research is a representative of the Board of the Association of Enterprises, which she believes is the result of her participation in the entrepreneurship scheme supported by the City Administration.

<sup>23</sup> We could not substantiate this information with additional data, but it is certainly an indicator to be monitored when conducting the comprehensive VLR.

## Remaining challenges and needs

Although work in the area of improving gender equality in the City of Bijeljina can be seen in several successful initiatives, there is an evident need for the ongoing analysis of the state of gender equality in Bijeljina, as well as the consolidated activities of the work of the key stakeholders. Even though examples as the ones described here are achieved by both the LED Unit and respective municipal departments responsible for gender equality, there seems to be more focus on the economic aspects of gender equality, and less so on social aspects such as family planning, childcare, equal access to education, safety and security. We thus point to a need to use SDG 5 as a tool to mainstream gender more broadly, including its social aspects, and to pay more attention to other issues prioritised by citizens in the upcoming period. The process of development of LGAP can be successfully utilised to engage all relevant actors, including municipal departments and units, but also CSOs, MZs and other communities to understand the SDG 5 objectives and how those relate to existing policies and practices at the municipal level as well as with other levels of government.

## Vision by the local government

All relevant municipal departments recognize and understand the gender equality principles and work jointly in addressing inequalities. In order to improve the lives of women and girls in the City of Bijeljina, local administration will continue to monitor and analyse municipal services and its effects on the quality of lives of both, women and man. In order to do so, city administration will continue to cooperate with all relevant actors, including civil society, entity gender mechanisms and higher level of government.

## SDG 10 – Reduced Inequalities

### Perceived progress on relevant goals and targets by the local government and stakeholder communities

Inclusion is one of the guiding principles in the development strategy of the city of Bijeljina. The principle of social inclusion is defined as equal opportunities for all and fairness in terms of identifying the needs and interests of marginalised and socially excluded groups<sup>24</sup>. The work of the LED unit in the localisation of SDGs started with a school inclusion project in cooperation with the German twin city Langenhagen in 2016. Since then, reduced inequalities and partnerships with different stakeholders and organisations, especially those working with marginalised groups, have been some of the main priorities recognized by LED. The representatives of the LED unit consider the sustainable development goal of reducing inequalities to be part of all other strategic plans and they highly value their work with local civil society organisations. The goal is part of the revised development strategy of the City of Bijeljina in 2019-2023, especially in terms of access to public services and economic empowerment.

The city of Bijeljina has a number of strong and active civil society organisations working with marginalised and vulnerable groups that contribute to the goal of reducing inequalities. Often they propose initiatives that are supported by the City Administration. The LED unit has also partnered with civil society organisations on projects aimed to improve the status of marginalised groups and reduce inequalities – some of them focus on better access to public services and better economic opportunities. The City allocates some funds, but also helps find additional funding from donors and projects by international agencies to support organisations working with marginalised groups. For example, the City provided funds to the local organisations to purchase a gynaecological examination table adapted for women with physical disabilities in the local hospital.

Representatives of civil society organisations working with marginalised groups state that the priorities of

<sup>24</sup> Revised Strategy 2019-2023.

their organisations are included in the city’s strategic plans and that LED is open to their project proposals and initiatives<sup>25</sup>. They consider the process of SDG localisation as enabling a systematic and multisectoral approach to social inclusion, and they especially value the communication with the LED unit and the transparency of their work. Research participants particularly emphasised a good example of the employees in the Citizens Service Centre in the City Administration, who have learned sign language in order to be able to communicate with persons with hearing difficulties.

One participant representing an NGO working with women with disabilities emphasised the close partnership between their organisation and the local government/LED in addressing the needs of their target groups through localisation and realisation of SDGs. In her words, *“we are on the same page, we offer proposals, solutions and they are accepted”*.<sup>26</sup>

The Day Centre for Children at Risk of the Social Welfare Center also cooperates with the LED unit, especially in encouraging physical activity in children and promotion of healthy lifestyles. On the occasion of the European Mobility Week, children from vulnerable categories participated in activities in the city park and, as stated by a focus group participant, they felt important because they were “children who did not (otherwise) have such opportunities”.<sup>27</sup>

One of the most recent cooperation projects between civil society organisations working with marginalised groups and the city administration is the Action Plan for the Achievement of Social Inclusion through the Improvement of Social Services of the City of Bijeljina, whose aim is achieving better quality of life for marginalised and vulnerable groups led by the Agenda 2030 principle of – leave no one behind. The Action plan, supported by Caritas Switzerland, Care International Balkans and IRIS network, and initiated by the civil society organisation Otaharin<sup>28</sup> was designed by experts and a working group comprised

of representatives of civil society organisations, the LED unit, the Social Welfare Centre, Ombudsperson for Children, other organisations and institutions and was presented to the public at the end of March 2023. The plan recognises five marginalised groups: Roma, persons with disabilities, elderly, women who suffered violence, and women and three areas, economic empowerment, social and health services. It aims to improve the quality of life of marginalised groups with better transportation, personal assistance services, various learning support services, teaching assistants and professional rehabilitation. Representatives of the LED unit stated that the aim is to establish a centre for healthy ageing and psychological counselling centre available for families and women victims of violence. Representatives of civil society organisations consider the Action Plan as a systematic solution that can lead towards the improvement of the quality of life of marginalised and vulnerable groups.<sup>29</sup> The impact of this initiative on community members that would benefit from the services thus provided, will not be visible until further down in the implementation. Although it is too early to assess the effects of this initiative on citizens, the process itself can be viewed as inclusive and is highly valued by organisations representing different groups of citizens.

#### Examples and positive practices:

- LED enabled adaptation of a children’s playground in the Day Center, which was previously used as a passage, the fence was broken, passers-by jumped over it, it was constantly damaged and could not be used by children. The Day Center got cherry laurel seedlings to enclose the yard with a hedge, they worked together with the children to plant trees, and each child now has their own tree.
- On the World Day of Persons with Autism an event was organised at the Cultural

<sup>25</sup> Focus group participants.

<sup>26</sup> Focus group participant.

<sup>27</sup> Views expressed by a participant in the focus group.

<sup>28</sup> OTAHARIN Center for Integrative inclusion of Roma men and women The Citizens’ Association for the Promotion of Roma Education

<sup>29</sup> Focus group participants.

Center in which children from both the Center for Children with Developmental Disabilities and the Day Center for Children at Risk participated. Their engagement gives visibility and prominence to the issues children with disabilities face on a daily basis.

### Remaining challenges and needs

The process of reducing inequalities in Bijeljina is still in progress as many of its strategic goals have to be met. Representatives of civil society organisations state that there is a lack of evaluation and monitoring of the localisation of SDGs, as well as inefficient and limited implementation. One of the civil society representatives stated that many of the planned strategic goals are not implemented. For example, the city helped introduce adapted public transportation services in 2020, but, according to one focus group representative, it does not function properly. The Rulebook on the Functioning of Adapted Transportation Services was adopted by the City Administration, but according to the focus group participants, it needs to be improved and its implementation needs to be more consistent.

Economic empowerment of vulnerable groups and persons with disabilities also remains a challenge. The City's LED unit and Employment Agency implement self-employment programs, and so do non-governmental organisations which target specific groups through projects. Those are mostly short-term initiatives, with one-off funding and not sustainable solutions. Although work is being done on the economic empowerment of marginalised groups, focus group participants believe that it is not enough because often marginalised groups are excluded from the process and economic empowerment is short-term. A big challenge is the general poverty and poor education generally. Focus group participants consider that local communities and marginalised groups should be included more, that more should be done in empowering, educating marginalised groups and eradicating poverty. They also believe that different stakeholders, civil society representatives, and local communities need to network and work together more.

Participants in the focus groups emphasised that cooperation between MZs and the non-governmental sector needs to be further improved, particularly so that MZs could use the non-governmental sector as a resource (e.g. in the area of work with persons with disabilities). There is a need for persons representing MZs to receive further training in ways and methods for meeting the needs of all citizens, especially persons with disabilities and other vulnerable and marginalised groups. The need to create a database of citizens with disabilities, persons at risk, and vulnerable categories was also emphasised. Although MZ representatives engage in addressing the needs of vulnerable groups, that support is unevenly spread because some MZ are more functional and better organised than others. For example, some MZs merely submit initiatives to local councillors without any further follow up by either side. When it comes to the City administration, participants believe that is evidence more towards the lack of political will and interest, rather than a lack of funds. This sometimes results in disappointment among organisations and individuals who work on a voluntary basis.

They also see other challenges in their work, i.e. exclusion of local communities and that local communities do not use the non-governmental sector as a resource sufficiently or adequately. One participant who took part in this research works with children with behavioural problems, most of whom are from socially vulnerable families, or are at risk of separation and need help with learning and socialisation. She expressed concern about a large number of parents not knowing their rights, and lacking basic skills in order to access the necessary services and get support.

When it comes to specific challenges in the areas such as education and inclusion, there are still many prerequisites that need to be met. The legal framework is often good, in particular the RS Law on Professional Rehabilitation, Training and Employment of Disabled Persons and the RS Law on Social Entrepreneurship. Therefore, certain prerequisites have been met and many inclusive practices introduced such as customised transportation for persons with disabilities, support services, etc. Nonetheless, interviewees still see a need

for systemic, better implementation of laws which are in place, and a more consistent multi-sectoral approach in addressing different problems and issues, and implementing those laws.

### Example of a positive practice of economic empowerment of vulnerable groups:

In 2017, the Center for Integrative Inclusion of Roma "Otaharin", established a social enterprise Agro-plan, guided by the goal of creating economic stability for women from marginalised groups. In the enterprise, women from marginalised groups produce and sell organic vegetables. The organisation received the agricultural land from the City of Bijeljina, while the training on agricultural production was organised by the German Development Agency GIZ.

## Vision

The vision set in the city of Bijeljina's development plans are equal opportunities for all, and fairness in terms of identifying the needs and interests of marginalised and socially excluded groups. The LED unit and local civil society organisations are particularly focused on achieving better quality of life for marginalised and vulnerable groups in the area of economic empowerment, social services and health services. Representatives of civil society organisations consider that health care services should be adapted and accessible for people with disabilities and that public transportation services need to be improved. As set in the Action Plan for the Achievement of Social Inclusion through the Improvement of Social Services of the City of Bijeljina, the aim is to provide better opportunities for Roma, persons with disabilities, elderly, women who suffered violence, and women. Representatives of civil society organisations consider that it is important to include all marginalised groups, especially poor rural families, and to provide to them sustainable educational and employment opportunities.

## SDG 17 – Partnerships for the goals

### Perceived progress on relevant goals and targets by the local government and stakeholder communities

The City Administration has opened numerous and diverse channels for cooperation and partnership with stakeholders who operate in Bijeljina. One example which was emphasised during the focus group discussion is cooperation between the City and academic institutions based in Bijeljina, specifically the Faculty of Business Economics. The Faculty together with the IMPAK Foundation provide training courses on the development of business plans and the city allocates funds for the best business plans selected by a jury.<sup>30</sup> Such opportunities, as emphasised by a focus group participant, are particularly important for students who learn to use the entrepreneurship methodologies developed by the IMPAK Foundation and are able to apply for projects funded by the City administration. Through such projects, students gain self-confidence, and can enter the labour market in a more competitive way. The grant scheme includes positive measures in favour of women, vulnerable groups for whom it is more difficult to find employment, such as women over 50 years. The process of selecting business plans is considered transparent, the selection board members are external, and all the participants gain knowledge and skills through training courses. According to the LED unit, the sustainability of those projects is more than 90 percent. One female entrepreneur, who participated in the focus group, received funding for her business plan and opened a shop for the production of natural cosmetics. Later, she participated in a course for web site creation and was able to open her own website, which, brought new clients.

Some participants in the focus groups expressed satisfaction with mainstreaming the quality of education as one of the goals of sustainable development. In establishing the cooperation between faculties and City administration, the key was the common goal of achieving sustainability of companies which operate in the city. University

<sup>30</sup> IMPAKT incubator of business ideas has been implemented in Bijeljina for the fourth year. Business ideas are developed as part of an integral program to support the development of entrepreneurship, and it includes training in writing business plans. The committee selects the best business ideas that receive funds of 5000 BAM from the city budget.



professors and experts shared their knowledge and educated entrepreneurs about digital economy, website creation, digital marketing, entrepreneurship, management in order to support the sustainability of their businesses. In order to answer to the needs of the labour market, a new course on mechanical engineering was opened in the Technical High School, providing better opportunities for employment.

### Remaining challenges and needs

The LED unit has partnered with different stakeholders in the process of localisation of SDGs. It has been actively working with civil society organisations, educational institutions and social welfare centres. Despite the LED's efforts in promoting SDGs at the local level, there are still many misconceptions about the benefits of their localisation among different stakeholders. The representatives of LED stated that initially they faced challenges to include the private sector and gain their interest, and many potential stakeholders are still not part of the process. Participants of the focus group stated that better communication should be established between different stakeholders and that more marginalised groups should be included. Better communication should be established between different departments in the City administration overall. Given the limitations of this research, it had not been possible to assess the promotion of partnerships for the goals in a broader sense. The City of Bijeljina does participate in international fora, such as the regional projects led by NALAS, and their results have been promoted in some international events and exchanges. It is however difficult to identify broader partnerships beyond the engagement of the city of administration, such opportunities for students for study exchanges related to development, or partnerships between university and civil society. Some partnerships between the University and local businesses and civil society have been noted in previous sections, as well as those between businesses and civil society, but due to the limitations of our research we were not able to assess those relations in a deeper sense.

### Vision

The vision of the LED unit and different stakeholders is to establish and strengthen partnerships with different actors in the localisation of SDGs. The aim is to include different stakeholders in the process, particularly vulnerable groups and to encourage better cooperation between different stakeholders.

## Conclusions and recommendations: Local democracy and the SDGs

The conclusions and recommendations provided in this section are our critical reflections on enabling factors and the role city administration has taken in the implementation of the SDGs; of the structure and nature of the process, ways of engaging citizens and civil society, promotion of SDGs to the public, and the impact localisation of SDGs has had on everyday life in Bijeljina. Our recommendations include some topics of improvement identified through the research, through our assessment of city policies, through statements from citizens and key stakeholders knowledgeable about the SDG localisation process.

- **Principles of local democracy are important in the fulfilment of the SDGs.** These research results have shown that accountability and participation are important elements that the administration of the City of Bijeljina has recognised from the beginning. It has designed the process of localisation of SDGs in a way that enables participation, accountability and transparency through the engagement of a broad palette of local stakeholders and creating formal partnerships with them for the purpose of local development. To strengthen the accountability and contribute to greater ownership of the localisation of SDGs by citizens, the provision of feedback to citizens on the opinions and proposals they provide during the public consultations should be better integrated.
  - **Political will and leadership is required.** Based on the views of several participants interviewed during this research, localisation of SDGs requires strong and committed leadership by the Mayor, and in the case of the City of Bijeljina, this was provided by the previous and current mayor.
  - **Technical leadership and management of the process must be enthusiastic and committed.** In addition to the support and leadership by the Mayor, the guidance and steering provided by the management of the LED unit has been crucial, if not essential, for initiating and implementing localisation of SDGs in Bijeljina. The enthusiasm, commitment and motivation of the LED management is the key contributing factor to Bijeljina becoming a pioneer
- local government in implementation of SDGs, and to integration of SDGs in the City's Development Strategy.
- **Bijeljina is showing the way.** By standing as a pioneer of SDG localisation in BiH, the City of Bijeljina has served as a positive example and an epitome for localisation of SDGs. This is particularly significant having in mind the challenges and difficulties posed by a very complex governance structure in the country, which often results in distancing authorities from citizens and their needs. It is important to note that at least 8 new local governments are following the suit of Bijeljina in deciding to engage in localisation of SDGs, and Bijeljina's experience will be a much needed and valuable model to learn from.
  - **Successful initial institutionalisation.** Our assessment is that the City of Bijeljina has been very successful in the initial stages of localisation of SDGs, i.e. making a political decision to engage in SDG localisation, in setting up the institutional mechanisms within the City Administration, by providing and dedicating the necessary technical capacities through skilled and agile LED management and staff, and by integrating the SDG principles in the City's Development Strategy. That has by no means been an easy task, and getting from their baseline position to the integration of SDGs in the Strategy has taken years, and a significant investment in resources. However, the commitment and dedication expressed primarily by the LED management, and by both mayors, has also secured that this effort receives significant support from the international projects and donors. One finding of this research has been that the engagement of other parts of the city administration (and their priorities) in localisation of SDGs is not as clear. **It is thus recommended that links between SDGs and annual plans, priorities and reports are better integrated, and that there is more clarity in attributing the roles of different departments in mainstreaming SDGs across all aspects of the work of city administration.**

- **External communication must connect SDGs to people's daily lives.** The initial efforts by the City of Bijeljina and LED unit to communicate their commitment to SDGs have positioned them as a pioneer of SDG localisation in BiH. SDG logos and posters are visible on the streets of Bijeljina, in the offices of the City Administration, their documents, and even on lapels of city representatives. This has certainly been helpful in building a constituency behind this effort and in getting the CSO sector, academia, media and others onboard this initiative. Based on discussions with citizens, we noted some level of unclarity about substance of SDGs and how that impacts their daily lives. It is recommended that further communication efforts take into account a need for communicating to citizens more precisely how SDGs are linked to them.
  - **Internal coordination and communication must be strengthened.** There is an evident need for greater synergy among individual departments within the City administration. This research detected that apart from the LED unit, ownership of SDG localisation in other city departments is not very strong. The reasons for that are multiple, but some evidence points to a disbalance in leadership on SDGs between LED and other departments, which creates an impression that SDGs are not mainstreamed equally across the administration. Although the City's Development Strategy is implemented by all departments, the motivation to contribute to implementation SDGs in that manner is not equal across the board.
  - **Coordination and ownership is scattered.** The primary functions of the LED unit are environmental protection, energy efficiency, urban and special planning. Taking into account our finding that SDG localisation is not evenly owned across the administration, there is a risk that SDG localisation could be most visible in those three thematic areas where LED is in lead, while progress may be less visible in the areas under the responsibility of other departments. We have noted particularly weak ownership within
- some departments of the city administration of implementation of SDG 5 on gender equality. The civil society organisations active in the City of Bijeljina are leaders in this area, and that fact has influenced a perception that civil society can remain in lead on gender equality. Given the fact that mainstreaming gender is a complex and transformative process that requires cross-cutting engagement of multiple stakeholders, it is essential that the city authorities take a stronger lead in that direction.
- **Targeted education and training can strengthen implementation.** At the same time, the fact that SDGs are strongly anchored in the City's institutional system and strategic documents, it can be said the strong foundations for SDG localisation are in place, but that the uneven implementation is more due to the lack of awareness and motivation to mainstream it in all areas under the jurisdiction of the city. Although some efforts have been invested in training, education and integration of all departments in SDG implementation, there is a clear need for introduction of more focused measures aimed at raising awareness and training of staff across the city administration as a key precondition for further implementation of SDGs.
  - **CSO engagement plays an important role.** Implementation of SDGs beyond this initial stage has been even more challenging, and more resource-intensive, with somewhat mixed results. This research has shown that the LED unit has systematically engaged the civil society sector in different aspects of designing and implementing the Development Strategy. This relates to design and introduction of measures for localisation of SDGs, in creating partnerships, and in positioning CSOs to lead efforts on gender equality and inclusion of marginalised groups. Localisation of SDGs has also been an integral part of decisions on funding civil society efforts, and in allocation of funds to different parts of the City.

- **Citizens and community engagement is crucial.** Localisation of SDGs has a prominent consultation of citizens through MZ, partnership groups, public consultations, and civil society. However, those efforts are not necessarily attributed to the city administration, because of a widespread perception that the LED unit is independent of the city. Participants of focus groups pointed to some challenges, which result in insufficient inclusion of MZs in the process of localisation of SDGs, and a lack of communication between different stakeholders.

- **Evaluation and monitoring can help mainstream localisation across the city administration.** It can raise awareness about the responsibility of different parts of administration, and assess differences in contribution to SDG mainstreaming by different stakeholders. Because the city administration has not been in position to formally assess progress in implementation of SDGs yet, that creates difficulties in allocating responsibilities to specific actors which could lead towards more efficient and comprehensive implementation. Participants of focus groups suggested that more work in localisation of SDGs is needed, especially in implementation, while in their view the planning phase was conducted successfully. One of the participants of a focus group expressed a view that only ten percent of the strategic goals are being implemented. This is hard to justify without empirical evidence that would be provided by a structured and institutionalised evaluation process, but it points to a risk of growing prejudices against the localisation process, which could be prevented by providing empirical evidence of more successful implementation through monitoring and evaluation.

- During focus groups, a view was expressed that surveys and mailing lists potentially reach out to the same people, and there was also some scepticism about the quality of survey results. While addressing the same people or groups of people may provide some consistency in monitoring results and trends over time, there seems to be a need to critically assess the

survey methodologies, sampling methods, and quality of analyses. It is particularly important to pay greater attention to the ways in which feedback is provided to citizens and to justify how the survey is used to inform the choices of priorities by the city administration. Survey fatigue is another risk that repetitive and frequent surveys could bring.

- **SDG localisation is time-intensive.** Many respondents emphasised that the process of localisation of SDGs requires time and patience. Introducing SDGs to the public, raising awareness and understanding about the importance of SDGs, does not happen overnight. The LED unit worked intensively and resourcefully through surveys with companies and citizens, engagement with media and civil society, engagement with citizens and MZ in order to create a basic recognition about what SDGs represent, how they can be used and why they are important. Some interviewees expressed a view that at the beginning it was difficult to explain to people what SDGs are, but some actors, especially NGOs are now integrating SDGs in their own work.

To integrate these recommendations is the continued work towards Agenda2030, as agreed with representatives of the City of Bijeljina, i.e. the LED unit, the findings from this research will feed into the reporting system of the City of Bijeljina when it reports to the City Council about the localisation of SDGs. This report will be presented to the LED unit and other representatives of city administration who participated in this research. This research will also provide the basis for reviewing and developing practices for more participatory monitoring of progress toward the SDGs at the local level.

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# **THE GLOBAL GOALS**

For Sustainable Development