



Report of the Social Audit Team in Suhareka

Monitored project “Construction of the hiking trail and construction of the Mushtisht - Guri i Matozit road and Topliqan - Gjinoc road - RE-TENDER”

This report was prepared by the DEMOS project, implemented by Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation Kosovo.

Disclaimer: The findings and conclusions expressed in this report do not necessarily represent the views of the European Union, Switzerland, Sweden and Norway.

DEMOS and the Purpose of the Project

The Decentralisation and Municipal Support (DEMOS) Project supports the 38 municipalities of the Republic of Kosovo in achieving more democratic local governance and better municipal management. The DEMOS also supports the Government of Kosovo in the development of policies, which are more conducive to rule-based financing of municipalities.

DEMOS is currently in its third phase (2022-2025) building on the successes achieved since the start of the project in 2014. The project is co-financed by the European Union in Kosovo, Switzerland, Sweden, and Norway and is implemented by Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation Kosovo.

DEMOS's support for the municipalities of Kosovo is within the framework of the Performance Grant as one of the tools that guarantees support for municipalities with good performance.

Municipal performance is assessed through the Municipal Performance Management System (MPMS) of the Ministry of Local Government Administration (MLGA).

With the aim of increasing performance in certain indicators, DEMOS also provides technical assistance to municipalities. A special focus of the project is also support for the central government where DEMOS is focused on providing assistance in building policies for a more favorable framework for decentralized governance.

Under the first component of the project, DEMOS III aims to open the data for wider public review of municipal performance and initiate social audits to monitor the impact of Municipal Performance Grant (MPG) projects on citizens. The purpose of this intervention is to involve civil society organizations and citizens in conducting social audits to monitor Municipal Performance Grant (MPG) projects implemented by municipalities.

To mitigate the reliability risks of Performance Grant funds, and at the same time to monitor the impact of projects on citizens, DEMOS has established social audits within the Municipal Performance Grant (in the system). Social audits will also include performance monitoring and project planning processes at the municipal level. The project will support the development of sampling tools and methodologies, including training to successfully conduct such social audits. The aforementioned social audits will be financed by part of the Municipal Performance Grant funds and will be developed by civil society organizations. For this, DEMOS will partner with key CSOs.

BIRN Kosovo is an independent, non-governmental organisation, whose goals are providing information to the citizens and contributing to the democratic transition process in the country, promoting accountability, rule of law and policy reform. BIRN Kosovo in particular aims to serve as a watchdog of public institutions, monitoring the work of governing and public institutions. In addition, through the production of quality and impartial TV debates and training of youth on argumentation and debating skills, BIRN aims to promote and encourage a culture of debate in Kosovo. BIRN's vision is to secure its position as the premier Kosovo's investigative journalism organisation, addressing the need for objective, quality, sustainable reporting on the country's many challenges. BIRN Kosova has been engaged by DEMOS to facilitate the Social Audit process in the five selected projects in Drenas, Suhareka, Kaçanik, Hani i Elezit, and Vitia.

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Executive Summary

In 2022, the DEMOS project team implemented a capacity-building program for a group of civil society activists to enhance their capabilities to facilitate the Social Audit process in the community.

As a new concept in Kosovo, Social Auditing began to be implemented by DEMOS and Civil Society Organizations in 2022, and the first reports published during that year enabled concrete changes in the audited projects.

Who finances the Social Audit?

The Social Audit is a voluntary program that doesn't require financial compensation for its team members. However, teams can seek financial support from independent donors to cover expenses related to travel or visits.

In mid-2023, the BIRN team, trained by DEMOS, initiated the creation of five Social Audit teams across five different municipalities.

Suhareka was one of the municipalities that benefited from this program. In June, BIRN contacted and selected the members of the Social Audit team in Suhareka. After two days of training, they embarked on a 7-month Social Audit process.

The Social Audit Team

Social Audit teams are citizen groups that come together with the aim to enhance transparency and accountability in public institutions. These volunteer groups analyze processes with the goal of providing recommendations and fostering greater citizen involvement in decision-making.

In July 2023, following a predetermined methodology and recommendations from BIRN, the team began data collection to analyze and oversee a construction project in the Municipality of Suhareka. This project involved the construction of a hiking trail and the public discussion process.

The data presented in this report was collected by the team between July and November 2023. Monitored project "Construction of the hiking trail and construction of the Mushtisht - Guri Matozit road and Topliqan - Gjinoc road - RE-TENDER" Using the specified methodology, this Social Audit group came to the conclusion that:

- The construction project of the path was a request of the residents of the area and offers development opportunities.
- The municipality faced challenges in tendering this project, leading to its cancellation once. In retendering the process was finalized and the contract was signed.
- The Municipality of Suhareka had an project idea for the construction of the hiking trail and the road, but this was not considered during the preparation of the bill of quantities.
- The project envisaged the placement of the side rails of the hiking trail at a different level from the road, but this was not also included in the bill of quantities.
- Changes in the project led to landslides and the need for additional investments. This led to a temporary halt in the works.
- The construction project of the hiking trail is not expected to be accessible to people with disabilities.
- The group found that the works started without a work plan.
- The contract management plan was prepared more than two months after the start of the works.
- The group found on the ground that the company had not taken measures to secure the construction site.
- After analyzing the project, the group concluded that the project does not guarantee protection for pedestrians in the area.

What should a Social Audit team know?

Social Audit teams do not need to be strictly professional. Teams need civic will and courage and are recommended to have basic knowledge in:

- The functioning of the municipality;
- Access to public documents;
- The public consultation process, especially during budget and investment planning in the municipality;
- The public procurement process;

Another focus is transparency in relation to citizens. The team found that:

- The Municipality of Suhareka did not hold a separate public discussion for the construction of the path; instead, it was discussed in general discussions.
- The municipality had published the contract signed between the municipality and the construction company in E-procurement.
- The municipality had not proactively published other documents, such as oversight reports or payment invoices, on the municipality's website.
- The executive project for the construction of the hiking trail was not published in E-procurement or on the municipality's website.
- The municipality has not placed an announcement board on the ground to inform citizens about the investors and the project supervisor and his contacts.

Transparency towards the public in public discussions:

- The Municipality of Suhareka is very active in organizing public discussions, and the materials from them were published on the official website.
- The team found that the materials are handwritten in the form of minutes and are not easily searchable on the Internet.
- The public meetings were documented through short records, which do not fully represent the content of the meeting.
- The demands of the residents were mainly for infrastructure, sewage, and maintenance.
- The municipality had not managed to ensure gender representation in public discussions.

Methodology

This report presents data collected from interviews, requests for access to public documents, field visits, and discussion with community. In the beginning of May, a team from DEMOS and BIRN selected five projects across five municipalities in Kosovo, based on predetermined standards to be included in the Social Audit process.

Who establishes the Social Audit team?

Social Audit teams are established independently of institutions and can be formed by community representatives or other groups. They operate autonomously from the government and do not require approval from public institutions for their formation.

In 2022, the Municipal Performance Grant financed 57 projects across 14 municipalities. At the start of the evaluation, four municipalities were excluded from the selection as they were included in a similar Social Audit project the previous year. Field visits were conducted in the remaining 11 municipalities by BIRN to assess the situation and request information about the project stages. After receiving the report from the field, the DEMOS and BIRN team evaluated the projects based on these criteria:

- The status of the project (completed, over 50% of the works completed, or in the initial phase);
- Targeting and high or low impact of projects for marginalized groups such as women, youth, the elderly, persons with disabilities, and non-majority communities;
- The nature of the project and the area of impact with priority in the fields of education, health, and the environment;
- The value of the grant allocated for the implementation of the capital project.

Based on these criteria, it was decided to audit the following projects: the construction of the “Isa Berisha” park in the municipality of Hani i Elezit; the construction of the wastewater collector in the municipality of Drenas; the construction of the firefighters’ building in Kaçanik; the construction of the hiking trail and the Mushtisht - Guri i Matozit road and Topliqan - Gjinoc road in Suhareka; the renovation and expansion of the “Kongresi i Manastirit” road in the Municipality of Vitia.

Who established the Social Audit group in Suhareka?

Using a predetermined methodology, BIRN created a list of representatives and professions that should be included in the Social Audit teams. The selection criteria require that the group shall include women and marginalized categories. It also aims that the group should also include a variety of professions and ages.

BIRN submitted to DEMOS the tentative list with professions. After coordination, BIRN contacted the citizens of Suhareka to ensure that the specified categories were included in the team.

Following the selection of the projects, DEMOS and BIRN received letters of support from the mayors of the five municipalities, marking the kick start of the Social Audit process for the project. The established Social Audit team used several techniques to collect data for this report.

They searched online for the municipality's public data, compiled a list of over 50 questions about the project, sought information from the municipality, sent requests for access to public documents, and analyzed the documents received from the Municipality. To document the findings, the team conducted field visits and held meetings with officials of the Municipality of Suhareka.

Who are the members of the Social Audit team?

Members of the Social Audit teams are community members who are not in conflict of interest with the project. Officers of the institution directly related to the project and the official oversight process of the project cannot be on the teams.

The data in the report were collected by the 14 members of the Social Audit team and the report was prepared with the assistance and support of BIRN. The report was made public after addressing the comments received from the Municipality of Suhareka.

Team composition: 14 members



5 women or 35.7%

- Pensioners
- Police officers
- Economists
- Journalists
- School principal
- Representatives from the Parents' Council
- Pedagogue
- Civil Society
- Teachers
- Residents



9 men or 64.3%

Work map

Jun 2023

- Field visit
- Targeting and identifying profiles that will be part of the team
- Preparation of the list with the profiles of the members of the Social Audit team
- Selection of team members of the Social Audit team

Jul 2023

- Two-day training for Social Audit
- Create the group on the Viber communication platform
- Signing of the Memorandum of Understanding with the Municipality of Suhareka
- Field visits of the Social Audit team
- Prepare the applications for access to public documents
- Appointment of persons within the team for sending requests to the Municipality
- Looking for accessible materials on open platforms

August 2023

- Group meetings and document analysis
- Analysis of materials from public consultations
- Team meeting to analyze the records of public consultations
- Discussion with the group about the project documents that have been acquired online
- Resubmission of applications for access to public documents in the municipality

September 2023

- Field visit of the team
- Resubmission of applications for access to public documents
- Receipt of documents from the Municipality
- Discussion and analysis of the documents received from the Municipality

October 2023

- Team meeting with the contract manager
- Team meeting with the Director of Finance and the Mayor's Chief of Cabinet
- Field visit of the Social Audit team
- Meeting of the Social Audit team to record the findings
- Meeting of the team with the Mayor of the Municipality of Suhareka, Bali Muharremaj
- Addressing the request for resumption of works on the project
- Recording of findings by the Social Audit team
- Division of duties for the team members in drafting the report
- Setting the structure and determining the points of writing the report
- Delineate the duties for writing the report

November 2023

- Field visit on the occasion of the resumption of works on the project
- Meeting of the Social Audit team for writing the report Drafting the report on the findings and recommendations of the Social Audit report
- Editing the report
- Addressing comments and suggestions

December 2023

- Send the report to the municipality for validation
- Presentation of the report to municipal officials
- Implementation of the media campaign to promote the report

The environment in which the Social Audit process takes place

Municipality of Suhareka is home to 88,126 residents. The municipality has a budget for capital investments amounting to 4,433,187 Euros. In terms of overall performance, the Municipality of Suhareka was ranked 19th according to the Municipal Performance Grant for 2021. The value of the grant received by the Municipality of Suhareka for 2021 was 216,308 euros.

In the 2022 report of the Municipal Performance Grant, the Municipality of Suhareka is ranked 14th. The value of the grant received by the Municipality of Suhareka for 2022 was 519,507 Euros.

Municipal Performance Grant

The Municipal Performance Grant is a fund that rewards well-governed municipalities. In 2022, 14 municipalities benefited from this grant due to their good governance. The grant is financed by the EU, the Government of Switzerland, Sweden, and Norway. In 2022, municipalities received about 8 million Euros from the Municipal Performance Grant. The project is managed by Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation Kosovo.

One of the projects selected for implementation through the Municipal Performance Grant was the “Construction of the hiking trail and construction of the Mushtisht - Guri i Matozit road and Topliqan - Gjinoc - Ritender road” in the Municipality of Suhareka. The budget allocated for this project is 384,609 Euros. The tender for this project was opened on December 17, 2022, and the contract was signed on February 27, 2023, with the company “SEFERI-CO” SHPK for a total contract price of 309,768 Euros. The duration of the project according to the contract notice is 90 working days from the date of signing the contract. For the design of this project, the Municipality of Suhareka hired a private company. The project manager, appointed by the mayor, is Visar Kuçi, who also serves as the director of Urbanism in the Municipality of Suhareka.

The project is considered important for the area as it offers development opportunities and creates new recreational spaces for the citizens.

Main findings

During the Social Audit process in Suhareka, the team addressed a range of topics that were uncovered during the analysis of documents and field visits. The team found problems in the preparatory phase of the tender, especially in the design of the project, and in the implementation phase of the project during which some delays and postponements of the project were found.



What is the impact of Social Auditing?

Social Auditing in the Municipality of Suhareka led to the improvement of planning and implementation of works on the ground. The Social Audit team provided valuable suggestions and recommendations to the municipality, aiding in the further implementation of the project.

During the public consultation phase, the team identified that Suhareka needs to continue making advancements to increase citizen participation. The findings are organized into four chapters:

- Findings in the process of consultations with citizens
- Findings in the planning process
- Findings in the contracting phase
- Findings in contract implementation

Chapter I - Findings in the Process of Consultations with Citizens

Citizens play a crucial role in budget planning and community development. This is achieved through meetings and public consultations between the municipality and its citizens. The Social Audit team in the Municipality of Suhareka analyzed the materials produced during these meeting and consultation processes to understand citizen involvement in municipal decision-making.

For this purpose, the team has analyzed the processes developed between 2020-2022. In the materials received, the team found that the municipality has used a variety of methodologies to involve citizens in decision-making.

The data shows that Suhareka produced hundreds of pages of documents from these consultations, indicating a significant number of citizens participated in public consultations.

The team found that in these public debates in 2020, also known as the year of the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, the Municipality organized separate public meetings with various groups such as businesses, women, village leaders, and political entities. In 2021 and 2022, the municipality organized public meetings in villages.

The Challenge of Low Citizen Participation in Meetings

Citizen participation in public meetings is currently low and predominantly male. The data extracted for participation in public discussions shows the following participation rates: Savrovë - 33 participants; Samadraxhë - 30 participants; Sallagrazhde - 29 participants; Reshtan - 22 participants; Mushtisht - 19 participants. The primary concerns of the residents were infrastructure, public lighting, sewage, river maintenance, cemetery maintenance, and others.

According to the municipality's report on holding public hearings for KAB 2023-2025, the municipality held 29 public hearings in 2022. In smaller villages, meetings were organized by combining them into a joint meeting.

The Social Audit team, after analyzing the records of public hearings, concluded that the Municipality of Suhareka needs to improve the organization of public hearing meetings. According to the team, this improvement is necessary to ensure greater and more diverse participation in these meetings and to maximize citizen contributions. The team also suggests that the Municipality of Suhareka should develop a strategy for informing citizens about meetings for public hearings.

Lack of Data for Preliminary Meetings

From the up-to-date practice of public hearings, the team observed a lack of continuity in the information provided from year to year in public hearings. Citizens lack information about the outcomes of previous years' meetings, including which projects were rejected, processed, postponed for future years, or approved and included in the current year's budget. The team suggests that public discussion meetings should provide a summary of the projects discussed in previous years.

Low Performance of Moderators

The role of the moderator is crucial in a public hearing. The team suggests that moderators should be trained to stimulate debate and encourage active and constructive involvement of citizens in public discussions.

Currently, public hearings in the Municipality of Suhareka are held only in person. To increase participation and inclusiveness, the team recommends that the Municipality of Suhareka should also offer online opportunities for participation in public discussions. This would enable broader participation from various groups such as young people, women who may not feel comfortable participating in public discussions where the majority of participants are men, people with disabilities, and members of the diaspora.

The Role of Moderators in Public Discussions

Moderators play a crucial role in public discussions. Moderators should be more proactive, encouraging citizen involvement in discussions about municipal projects and budgets. They should stimulate debate and draw out ideas and proposals from participating citizens.

The Social Audit team noted that the participation of young people in public discussions is minimal. Therefore, it suggests that the Municipality of Suhareka should find ways to represent young people under 18 in public hearing meetings. This could be achieved through non-governmental organizations that represent the interests of young people, parents' councils, school councils, etc.



Consultation of the Project with Citizens

The Social Audit team found that the Municipality of Suhareka has held meetings with citizens to discuss the project and ascertain if it meets their demands. This consultation has had a positive effect, leading to improvements in the project during the meetings, which have served to make the project more suitable for citizens.

The team concludes that such a practice of discussing and informing citizens about projects should continue in the future.

Transparency about the Project

During the analysis of materials and documents about the project, the team found that no informative table has been placed in the area where the project is being implemented. Such a table would inform citizens about the implementer and the person who oversees the contract.

Contract Supervisor

The contract supervisor is a person or company engaged by the municipality. He is responsible for overseeing each phase of contract implementation. The supervisor prepares reports for each phase.

However, transparency issues were observed on the municipality's website, where the project tender and other materials, such as oversight reports or invoices for payments for work done, were not published.

Chapter II - Findings in the Planning Process

The Social Audit team analyzed the documentation provided by the municipality, which revealed how the project was designed. Design challenges have led to consequences on the ground, including the interruption of works.

Findings in the Preparation of the Bill of Quantities

The Social Audit team found that the Municipality of Suhareka did not take into account its project idea for the construction of the hiking trail and road during the preparation of the bill of quantities.

The project envisaged the placement of the side rails of the hiking trail at a different level from the road, but this was not set in bill of quantities. As a result, the contract manager did not allow the works to be carried out according to the bill of quantities, considering it unprofessional. Instead, they asked the economic operator to carry out the works according to the project.

The company “Eng-Idea” SHPK, contracted by the Municipality of Suhareka, designed the project for the hiking trail. Specific project consultations were held with residents. The mayor of the village of Mushtisht, Reshat Selimi, along with a member of the Village Council, were present with the designers in the field.

For the construction of the Mushtisht - Guri i Matozit road, the municipality initially envisaged that the road would be 3 meters wide. At the request of the residents, the road was widened to 5 meters, with another 2 meters remaining a hiking trail.

When the project was tendered, the width of the road was 5 meters, but the amount of soil that had to be removed remained the same, resulting in the need for additional work during the implementation of the works.

The Social Audit team found that the hiking trail was placed on the side towards the mountains/hills, which was opposed by the residents. They have requested that the hiking trail be towards the river. The residents’ request was approved by the Municipality of Suhareka.

The team found that the Tender Dossier was not published in accordance with the project designed for this road. In the main project, it was envisaged that the hiking trail and the road would be separated by side rails, but this was not in the tender announced by the Municipality of Suhareka. However, the project manager has pledged to provide trail side rails or different levels, so as not to endanger pedestrians from cars.

Lack of Design for Accessibility

The Social Audit team found that the design of the hiking trail and the tender announced by the municipality did not include the placement of rest areas, which are essential for such trails.

The project also lacked a specific access plan for people with disabilities, including special parking spaces, signage, and orientation signs.

Additionally, the placement of trash cans for waste disposal along the road was not planned. These concerns were raised with the Mayor and the contract manager, who promised to include seats and trash cans in a new project.

Lack of Design for the Placement of Railings

During field visits, the group found that due to the mountainous environment, it was necessary to place railings in some parts as a protective measure for pedestrians. The Municipality of Suhareka stated that there was a contracted quantity of railings in the project, but they pledged to add more to ensure all points that pose a risk to pedestrians are covered.

The group concluded that the project has a positive impact on the environment and can contribute to the growth of mountain tourism in the entire village.



Chapter III - Findings in the Contracting Phase

The Social Audit team analyzed the contracting process of the project. They found that the process was smooth and did not receive any complaints to the contracting authorities. However, due to inadequate work planning, the municipality had to sign two additional contracts for this project.

On December 19, 2022, the Municipality of Suhareka published the contract notice for the project “Construction of the hiking trail and construction of the Mushtisht - Guri i Matozit road and Topliqan - Gjinoc - road” RE-TENDER.

This project had been tendered before, but due to issues related to the formulas in the price description by the Contracting Authority and the documentation of machinery, the economic operator “Fortesa” SHPK filed a complaint with the Procurement Review Body. Consequently, the tender was canceled on December 6, 2022.

For the construction of this hiking trail and road, 12 offers were received, 7 of which were considered responsive. Four of the bidders who were eliminated from the competition had offered a lower price than the company recommended for the contract.

Two companies that offered 27 thousand Euros cheaper did not respond to the municipality

Based on the documents published in “E-Procurement”, two bidders, the company “Shkembi” SHPK and “EdiBau - ing” were eliminated from the competition because they did not “respond to the standard letter sent by CA dated 01.02.2023”. The municipality contacts the operators who have offered the lowest responsible price through the standard letter. These two companies had offered a price of 27 thousand and 29 thousand Euros cheaper than the bidder who was recommended for the contract.

The company N.N.T. The company N.N.T. “Etniku” was eliminated from the competition because it lacked the “tender insurance”, while the company “GASHI ING” was eliminated because it lacked the “sworn statement, tender insurance, machinery, engineers, etc”. The company “AAB CONSTRUCTION” was eliminated because it “lacked a grader as required by the tender dossier”.

The municipality had recommended for the contract the company “Seferi-Co” SHPK, which had offered a value of 309,768 Euros. No complaint was filed against the decision of the Municipality of Suhareka to the municipality or the Procurement Review Body. Therefore, the municipality signed the contract on February 27, 2023.

No.	Economic Operator	Bid Price
1	SEFERI-CO SHPK	309,768.70 €
2	Naim Sopaj B.I.	366,666.00 €
3	Kab Holding SHPK & ISEFERI SHPK	350,238.17 €
4	FORTESA SHPK	369,751.30 €
5	THERACOM SHPK & N.P. Victoria Invest International SHPK	337,554.50 €
6	N.P.T.Bamirs	332,733.00 €
7	SKY - GROUP SHPK & EL- BAU SHPK	338,335.90 €
8	N.N.T. Etniku	294,698.90 €
9	GASHI ING SHPK	625,265.75 €
10	EdiBau-ing SHPK	282,849.80 €
11	Shkembali SHPK	280,113.19 €
12	AAB CONSTRUCTION SHPK. & Bujar Shabani B.I.	298,652.50 €

Chapter IV - Findings in Contract Implementation

Project management is a crucial phase in the implementation of works in an investment contract. The Social Audit team analyzed whether the works were carried out according to the contract and the set deadlines.

The contract for the project “Co-financed project - Construction of hiking trail in rural areas in the Municipality of Suhareka - Construction of the hiking trail and construction of the Mushtisht - Guri i Matozit road and Topliqan - Gjinoc - RITENDER road” was signed on February 27, 2023, with the company “SEFERI-CO” Sh.P.K. for an amount of 309,768.70 Euros.

The Municipality of Suhareka appointed the contract manager and timely notified the Village Council about this appointment. The first phase involves the contract manager preparing a contract management plan. The contract management plan must be prepared before the start of contract implementation and in agreement with the contract manager by the economic operator, and the plan is documented with the signatures of the two managers of the contracting parties.

Delay in preparing the management plan

After analyzing the documentation of this contract, the team found that the Contract Management Plan was prepared on July 11, 2023, or about 4 months after the signing of the contract.

There was a discrepancy regarding the start date of the works. While the municipality's documents marked the beginning of May as the start date, the Social Audit team stated that the works started on March 13, 2023. The mayor of the village of Mushtisht, Reshat Selimi, confirmed the latter date, saying he was present on the day the works started, on March 13, 2023.

Initially, intensive work was carried out for a considerable time, which included the opening and expansion of the track, paving with gravel of the entire opened track, opening of the side channel envisaged in the project, and placement of layers.

The only change accepted so far is the transition of the hiking trail from the mountain side to the side along the “Lumi i Bardhe” bank. Changes to the project were made at the request of the Village Council, referring to the reasonable demands of the residents.

Delay in contract implementation

The works continued until the beginning of the collapse of the earth in some parts of the track. From this moment, according to the information gathered by the Social Audit team, the economic operator has requested additional items. These requests were initially not accepted by the Municipality and this caused the works to be interrupted.

On October 4, 2023, the Social Audit Group, supported by BIRN and DEMOS, organized a meeting with the Director of Urbanism and at the same time the contract manager, Visar Kuçi; Director for Finance and Budget, Labinot Halitjaha; and the Chief of Staff of the Mayor of the Municipality of Suhareka, Ibrahim Thaçi. At this meeting, residents were informed about the progress of the works, and the reason for the stagnation of the works.

The contract manager explained the reason for the stagnation of the works due to some additional items, such as the collapse of the earth, lighting, etc. A commitment was made at the meeting that the works will be completed within the deadline.

The Procurement Law and the signed contract give the right to the Municipality to have the possibility to terminate the contract with an economic operator in case of delays in the implementation of the works. Neither the municipality nor the contract manager has informed the Social Audit group that it has fined the contractor for delaying the works. The contract manager has informed that he has sent letters to the economic operator and has forced him to continue the insurance of the offer.

Resumption of Works

From the field visit, the Social Audit team found that the works had not started. In addition, a crack in the earth was observed in a part where the hiking trail in Mushtisht - Guri i Matozit is expected to be.

Later, on October 25, 2023, the Social Audit Group, supported by BIRN and DEMOS, held a meeting with the Mayor of the Municipality of Suhareka, Bali Muharremaj. At this meeting, concerns were raised by the group about the blocking of works on this project and the risk of losing the performance grant. The mayor assured that he is doing everything possible within legal boundaries to implement this project and not risk losing the co-financing grant.

The works on the project resumed after a week, on November 1, 2023. The Social Audit Group visited the work site and observed machinery and staff working. They also noticed that a channel was opened and a cable for public lighting was installed in another part of this project in the village of Topliqan.

After the resumption of works on November 1 and 9, 2023, the Social Audit team conducted another visit to this part of the project. They found that the contractor had opened the channel and installed the cable for public lighting in the channel, and then continued with the works in other items for the functionalization of lighting.

On December 11, 2023, the team closely monitored the works and found that the asphalt paving of the road had begun. The Social Audit team also monitored the second part of the project: the construction of the Topliqan - Gjinoc road. In this part of the project, hiking trail are not foreseen.



Technical Acceptance Commission

The Technical Acceptance Commission, a professional team of the municipality, inspects the works at the end of the project. Based on the commission's report, the works are accepted and payments are made.

From a meeting held on October 4, 2023, with the contract manager, the Social Audit team learned that 90 percent of the asphalt had been laid. According to the contract manager, the contractor hesitated to open the channel for public lighting, but it was a condition from the contract manager to also work on public lighting in order to be allowed to continue with the works.

The Social Audit team requested from the contract manager the manager's report and other documents by sending a request for access to documents.

On October 18, 2023, the Social Audit team visited the Topliqan - Gjinoc road and based on field measurements found that the width of the Topliqan - Gjinoc road is 5 meters. The group also found that the sewer manholes have been installed and they are functional.

Lack of Safety Measures at the Workplace

Work safety is also provided for in the LPP Law and regulations derived from it. Work safety is provided for in the LPP Law and its derived regulations. Article 28 of this law states that technical specifications for works contracts must indicate work safety and safety measures, including terminology, symbols, testing methods, and their implementation plan, where applicable.

The Social Audit team finds that safety measures are also provided for in the contract for the project “Co-financed project - Construction of hiking trail+ in rural areas in the Municipality of Suhareka - Construction of the hiking trail and construction of the Mushtisht - Guri i Matozit road and Topliqan - Gjinoc - RITENDER road”.

The part where providing for safety at the workplace, determines that the contractor will have the right to stop access to the workplace for any person who is not involved in the implementation of the contract, except for persons authorized by the contracting authority.

In the next paragraph of the following article, it is emphasized that the contractor must ensure safety at the workplace throughout the execution period. And that he will be responsible for taking the necessary steps, in the interest of his workers, the contracting authority, and third parties, to prevent any loss or accident, which may result from the performance of the works.

However, from the analysis of the legal basis and the contract on one hand and the bill of quantities used for calculating the supplies, the Social Audit team finds that the contractor has not respected the terms of the contract and has not taken measures for the information and safety of people moving towards the workplace.

In the bill of quantities, the mobilization of the company for activity, the placement of a hut for workers, and a hut for staff, the placement of a table worth 35 Euros, in which the project data should be written, were foreseen. However, the placement of this informative table has not been evidenced in the field.

Also, in another item, it is foreseen the placement of signs for securing communication for work activity on the road, in cooperation with the project manager, with a total price of 168 Euros or 0.10 Euros for 1,680 meters. While for the length of 1,700 meters for “Mushtisht to Guri i Matozit”, with a price of 0.12 Euros and a total price of 204 Euros. The Social Audit Group has been out in the field several times but it has not been found that road safety signs have also been placed. But according to the Social Audit Group in the part “Mushtisht to Guri Matozit” it is not so necessary due to the more mountainous terrain and smaller human circulation.

Conclusions/Recommendations

After several months of work, the Social Audit team at the end of the project has managed to draw some conclusions:

- As a result of the work of the Social Audit team and citizen activism, after several months of stagnation, the works on the construction of the path have resumed. On December 11, 2023, the asphalt paving of the road had begun.
- The team has received promises that the project will be completed according to the main project.
- The Social Audit team has received promises that the request for the placement of the protective network will be addressed.
- The Social Audit team received promises for the placement of seats in the future.

What happens with the recommendations?

The recommendations of the Social Audit groups serve to improve governance. The recommendations will be used to improve future projects and to improve the current project.

The team has concluded that the Municipality of Suhareka and Mayor Bali Muharremaj have had the will and have shown readiness to cooperate and meet with the team for the resumption of works.

Also, the Social Audit team has drawn up a list of recommendations for citizen participation:

- The municipality is recommended to develop a strategy for informing citizens about public hearing meetings.
- The municipality is recommended that in the future the announcement for public hearing meetings be made according to the deadlines set.
- The municipality is recommended that in the future a standard form of keeping minutes be used, which contains all the data of the public meeting.
- The team recommends that the moderator encourage debate for discussion and provoke new topics.
- The municipality is recommended that at public discussion meetings a summary be made of the projects discussed at meetings in previous years.
- The municipality is recommended to find alternative forms of women's participation in public discussions.

- The Municipality of Suhareka is recommended to also offer online opportunities for participation in public discussions.
- The municipality is recommended to offer an online platform through which one of the officers collects the requests of all residents not only during public discussions but throughout the year.
- The municipality is recommended to inform the community about major projects and discuss them before the start of works.
- The municipality is recommended to inform the community about the names and contacts of public contract managers.

Recommendations for the project planning process:

- The municipality is recommended that municipal projects be accessible and public to citizens.
- The municipality is recommended to continue consulting residents during the drafting of specific projects.
- In drafting projects, the municipality should draft more professional bill of quantities, in order to avoid the identified problems.

Recommendations for the project management process:

- The contract manager should prepare the Contract Management Plan before the start of works.
- The municipality is recommended to publish the manager's report.
- The municipality is recommended that the contractor secure the workplace throughout the execution period.
- It should be assessed whether the collapse of the earth could endanger the project in the future.

The team has also discussed the needs for the municipality to intervene with other investments in improving the project. As a result, the team has recommended to the municipality that:

- The project should be adapted for people with disabilities.
- Design parking lots and easy access for people with disabilities, including the blind.
- Designate and arrange places for the placement of seats and garbage bins, along the entire length of the “Hiking Trail”.
- Re-evaluate the quantity of protective fences that will be placed in parts by the river, with the aim of increasing safety for visitors.
- The placement of safety nets in some parts is foreseen, which would prevent the risk from the possible rolling of stones.
- Assess the necessity of constructing a new bridge over the “Lumi i Bardhe”. This new bridge would replace the outdated one that currently links this project with the rest of the settlement.
- Additionally, facilitate the installation of side rails. This measure would enhance the physical separation and address the difference in elevation between the road track and the hiking trail.

Letter from the Mayor of the Municipality of Suhareka

Firstly, I extend my best wishes for your continued good work. I am also grateful for your dedication and contribution to collaborating with the Municipality of Suhareka.

Having thoroughly reviewed the draft report of the Social Audit for the project monitored in the Municipality of Suhareka - "Construction of the hiking trail and construction of the Mushtisht - Guri i Matozit road and Topliqan - Gjinoc - RITENDER road," along with the feedback from the involved parties in various capacities, it is evident that we have successfully addressed and identified obstacles and difficulties together.

The Social Audit team in the Municipality of Suhareka, with the support of BIRN within the DEMOS project, has meticulously examined each step of the actions taken during the implementation of different phases.

I express my gratitude to the citizens who actively participated in this audit and commend. Also the BIRN team for their accurate, professional, and fair reporting.

According to the project manager's report, I am informed that the project is now in its final phase.

Once again, thank you all. I look forward to continued collaborations in the future.

Respectfully,

*Bali Muharremaj
Mayor of the Municipality of Suhareka*



Letter from the Social Audit Team in the Municipality of Suhareka

The Social Audit Team in Suhareka learned valuable lessons from organizers of this initiative, approaching this project with the utmost proficiency. The wealth of experience they bring to this field has been instrumental in shaping our understanding and approach.

The Social Audit process implemented in our municipality has not only fostered connections between our group and municipal bodies but has also amplified our collective voice on specific issues.

We take pride in the fact that the efforts of our team have had a positive impact, contributing to the enhancement of the monitored project.

Through this several-month process, spanning training sessions, field visits, meetings with municipal officials, and document analysis, we have gained valuable insights. We are confident that the lessons learned will empower our group to influence improvements and provide recommendations for future projects.



Social Audit Team in Suhareka

No	Name and Surname	Occupation/Function
1	Reshat Selimi	Mayor of the village of Mushtisht [Economist]
2	Feim Behluli	Principal of PLSS “Edi Durham”
3	Myrvete Morina	Parents’ Council, President
4	Emrush Bytyçi	Association “Yjet”, President
5	Kapllan Halitjaha	“Pensioners” Association
6	Sadik Avdylaga	Polic
7	Arsim Zeqiri	Teacher of Physical Education
8	Valentina Ndrecaj	Informatics
9	Buqe Gashi	Pedagogue
10	Erolinda Zenelaj	Journalist of Suhareka Online
11	Margaritë Daka	Journalist of Suhareka Online
12	Valdrin Halitjaha	Economist
13	Zenel Halitjaha	Pensioner
14	Ahmet Tahiri	Activist of nature hiking



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