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THESIS:

**Donor funded project management practices and  
challenges in the Polog region of North  
Macedonia**

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## Abstract

This thesis provides an in-depth analysis of the management practices and challenges associated with donor-funded projects in the Polog region of North Macedonia. It investigates how these projects are planned, implemented, and evaluated, with a particular focus on identifying systemic obstacles and areas for improvement. The study explores common challenges faced by project managers and stakeholders, including limited coordination among institutions, cultural and political complexities, insufficient local capacity, issues of sustainability, and concerns around financial accountability.

The central aim of the research is to understand the role of diverse stakeholders—such as international donors, local government authorities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and community members—in shaping the effectiveness and sustainability of development initiatives. The thesis emphasizes the importance of collaboration, communication, and participatory decision-making in achieving project success. It also assesses the strengths and limitations of current monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems used to track progress, measure outcomes, and ensure accountability. The findings point to significant gaps in these systems, which limit their ability to support adaptive project management and long-term planning.

The research is based on primary data collected through surveys and interviews with the donor community and all relevant stakeholders involved in donor-funded projects in the Polog region. The responses reflect a nuanced perspective: while many participants express satisfaction with the positive changes brought about by such projects, they also highlight recurring issues that hinder effectiveness, particularly in areas of coordination, local ownership, and financial sustainability.

The study concludes that while donor-funded projects have played a vital role in regional development, their long-term impact depends on more context-sensitive and inclusive approaches to project design and management. Strengthening local institutional capacity, improving stakeholder coordination, and enhancing the adaptability and sustainability of interventions are key to maximizing project outcomes.

This research offers practical recommendations for policymakers, donors, and development practitioners working in similar contexts and suggests areas for future research, particularly on measuring long-term impact and resilience of donor interventions.

**Key terms:** Donor-funded project, Polog region, project management, stakeholders, community, ownership, challenges, municipalities, donors, organization, sustainability, decision-making, planning, monitoring, evaluation, coordination, communication, project implementation, financial constraints, co-financing, human resource limitation.

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*The true success lies not only in achievement, but in the courage to keep going, the strength to evolve, and the belief that growth begins where comfort ends!*

## List of Abbreviations

UNDP-United Nations Development Programme

USAID-United States Agency for International Development

SDC-Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation

SECO-State Secretariat for Economic Affairs

EBRD-European Bank for Reconstruction and Development

EIB-European Investment Bank

OSCE-Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

ReSPA – Regional School of Public Administration

NGOs- Non-governmental organizations

EU-European Union

DFID-Department for International Development

GIZ-Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit-German Agency for International Cooperation.

SIDA– Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency

ADA-Austrian Development Agency

SMEs-Small and medium-sized enterprises

IPA-Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance

UNICEF-United Nations Children's Fund

UNHCR- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

IMF-International Monetary Fund

RCC-Regional Cooperation Council

ToC- Theory of Change

LFA- Logical Framework Approach

M&E- Monitoring and Evaluation

SELDI-Southeast European Leadership for Development and Integrity

CBC-Cross-Border Cooperation

CSOs-Civil Society Organizations

JTS- Joint Technical Secretariat

TAGC-Technical Assistance Grant Contract

PCM-Project Cycle Management

LFA-Logical Framework Approach

SME-Subject Matter Expert

SMART- Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Time-based

URBACT-European Territorial Cooperation program fostering sustainable integrated urban development in cities across Europe

LED-Local Economic Development

PONT-Prespa Ohrid Nature Trust

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# 1. Chapter I. Introduction

## 1.1 Background and Context

### 1.1.1 Brief overview of the Polog region and donor-funded projects

#### **Administrative and Regional Division of North Macedonia**

Officially, North Macedonia is divided into eight planning regions, which serve statistical, economic, and administrative purposes. These regions were formally adopted by the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia on 29 September 2009. In addition to the planning regions, the first-level administrative units are the municipalities (Bureau for Regional Development, 2025).

The Pelagonija Region is the largest by area, encompassing approximately 4,717 square kilometers and comprising around 343 settlements. Despite its size, it has a relatively low population density of 50 inhabitants per square kilometer. In contrast, the Skopje Region—the smallest in area—has a very high population density of 319 inhabitants per square kilometer and is home to over a quarter of the country's total population (Bureau for Regional Development, n.d.).

While rural municipalities are widespread across all regions, population concentration is significantly higher in larger urban centers. The Polog and Southwestern Regions are exceptions, with a considerable portion of the population residing in rural areas. (MDPI, 2025) (World Bank, 2019).

#### **Regional Overview and Municipal Composition**

1. Skopje Region: Covers the Skopje Valley, 1,812 km<sup>2</sup> (7.3% of total area), with 17 municipalities including Aerodrom, Butel, Centar, and others.
2. Eastern Region: Covers 3,537 km<sup>2</sup> (14.2%), with 11 municipalities, including municipalities such as Shtip, Kochani, and Berovo.
3. Southeast Region: Spans 2,739 km<sup>2</sup> (11%), with 10 municipalities, including Gevgelija, Strumica, and Radovis.

4. Northeastern Region: Covers 2,310 km<sup>2</sup> (9.3%), with 6 municipalities, including Kumanovo and Kriva Palanka.
5. Pelagonija Region: The largest, at 4,717 km<sup>2</sup> (18.9%), with 9 municipalities, includes Bitola, Prilep, and Resen.
6. Vardar Region: Central Macedonia, 4,042 km<sup>2</sup> (16.2%), with 9 municipalities, includes Kavadarci and Veles.
7. Southwestern Region: Covers 3,340 km<sup>2</sup> (13.4%), with 13 municipalities, including Ohrid, Struga, and Debar.
8. Polog Region: Spans 2,416 km<sup>2</sup> (9.7%) and includes nine municipalities such as Tetovo, Gostivar, Bogovinje, Mavrovo Rostushe, Vrapcishte, Zhelino, Jegunovce, Tearce and Brvenica.

### **The Polog Region: Socioeconomic Characteristics**

The Polog Region, located in the northwestern part of the country, is known for its diverse ethnic makeup, natural beauty, and economic potential. Tetovo, the region's largest city, serves as an economic and educational hub. Agriculture, trade, and small-scale manufacturing are key economic activities. The mountainous terrain, including the Shar Mountains, offers strong potential for eco-tourism and sustainable development initiatives.

Despite these strengths, the region faces ongoing challenges in economic diversification, infrastructure development, and environmental protection. Social inclusion issues, particularly for marginalized communities, remain a concern. These disparities underscore the importance of targeted donor-funded interventions focused on inclusive growth, environmental resilience, and improved access to public services (Bureau for Regional Development, n.d.).

### **Donor-Funded Projects in the Polog Region**

International organizations, development agencies, and bilateral donors have played a vital role in supporting the Polog region's development across multiple sectors. Their efforts focus on

boosting economic growth, fostering social cohesion, and promoting environmental sustainability.

In the area of economic development and employment, initiatives have centered on empowering youth and women through entrepreneurship support, small business grants, and vocational training programs. Additionally, projects have aimed at strengthening local agricultural value chains to enhance agribusiness opportunities.

Infrastructure and environmental sustainability have also been priorities, with investments directed towards improving water supply and wastewater management systems, upgrading urban infrastructure to support sustainable mobility, and implementing renewable energy and climate adaptation measures.

Social inclusion and governance have received considerable attention through programs designed to promote harmony among diverse ethnic communities, strengthen local governance structures, and enhance civic participation. Efforts have also focused on improving access to education and healthcare services, especially for vulnerable groups.

Cross-border and regional cooperation initiatives, many funded by the European Union, have encouraged collaboration to boost tourism, trade, and cultural exchange, contributing to regional integration and economic diversification.

Key international donors such as the European Union, UNDP, USAID, SDC, SECO, EBRD, EIB, the World Bank, and OSCE have been instrumental in implementing these projects. Their support aligns with national and regional development strategies, aiming to foster inclusive growth, improve living standards, and increase the resilience of the Polog region in the face of economic and environmental challenges.

## 1.2 Research Problem

Managing donor-funded projects in the Polog region comes with various challenges, ranging from administrative and governance issues to socio-economic and environmental factors. These challenges can impact project effectiveness, sustainability, and long-term impact. Some of the key challenges include (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2020):

The Polog region faces several administrative and governance challenges that affect the successful management of donor-funded projects. A key issue is the weak institutional capacity of many local institutions and municipalities, which often lack the necessary expertise and resources to handle complex project requirements effectively. This limitation frequently causes delays and difficulties in meeting donor expectations. Additionally, bureaucratic hurdles such as lengthy administrative procedures, slow decision-making processes, and regulatory obstacles further impede efficient project execution. Coordination among stakeholders remains limited, with poor collaboration between municipalities, local organizations, and national institutions often resulting in overlapping initiatives, inefficiencies, and misallocation of resources.

Financial and resource management issues also present significant obstacles. Many projects require co-financing from local governments or beneficiaries, a demand that can be challenging due to budgetary constraints. Furthermore, weak financial oversight and transparency raise concerns about potential mismanagement or corruption, which can undermine project impact. A heavy dependence on donor funding, often without clear long-term sustainability plans, exacerbates the problem, as maintaining project outcomes after donor support ends remains uncertain.

Socio-economic challenges further complicate project success in the region. High youth unemployment and ongoing migration contribute to a brain drain, making it difficult to retain skilled professionals essential for project implementation. The region's diverse ethnic composition occasionally fuels social tensions that hinder collaboration on joint initiatives, negatively impacting project outcomes. Additionally, resistance to change among some local

communities slows the adoption of new technologies, practices, or policies introduced by donor-funded projects.

Environmental and infrastructure limitations also pose significant barriers. Inadequate infrastructure—including poor road networks, insufficient water supply, and a lack of waste management systems—creates practical difficulties for infrastructure-related projects. The region’s vulnerability to environmental risks such as deforestation, soil erosion, and pollution threatens the sustainability of development efforts.

Finally, compliance and monitoring challenges affect project effectiveness. Donors typically require detailed financial and impact reporting, which local institutions may struggle to produce due to limited experience in project monitoring and evaluation. Moreover, many projects lack robust mechanisms to measure long-term impact, making it difficult to assess their effectiveness and scalability over time. These combined challenges highlight the complexity of donor-funded project management in the Polog region and underscore the need for strengthened institutional capacity and coordinated efforts.

### **Addressing the Challenges** (ReSPA – Regional School of Public Administration, 2020)

To overcome these challenges, it is crucial to:

- ✓ Strengthen the capacity of local institutions through training and technical support.
- ✓ Improve coordination among stakeholders to ensure alignment and efficiency.
- ✓ Develop sustainable financing models to reduce dependence on donor funding.
- ✓ Enhance transparency and accountability in project implementation.
- ✓ Foster community engagement and awareness to ensure project acceptance and long-term success.

By addressing these issues, donor-funded projects in Polog can have a greater and more sustainable impact on regional development.

### 1.3 Research Objectives and Structure of the Thesis

#### **Study Objectives: Understanding the Effectiveness of Donor-Funded Projects in Polog**

The study is designed to examine the impact, challenges, and sustainability of donor-funded projects in the Polog region, with the ultimate goal of informing and improving future development efforts. At its core, the research aims to evaluate how effectively these projects have achieved their objectives, particularly in areas such as economic development, social inclusion, infrastructure improvement, and environmental sustainability. By identifying successful examples and best practices, the study seeks to highlight models that could be replicated in other contexts.

In addition to effectiveness, the study delves into the challenges and gaps that hinder the success of such projects. It explores the administrative, financial, and social obstacles that limit outcomes, while also assessing the institutional and stakeholder capacities required to manage and sustain these interventions. Particular attention is paid to systemic issues such as bureaucracy, governance inefficiencies, and levels of community involvement that may impact implementation.

Another important focus of the study is on the long-term sustainability of donor-funded projects. It examines whether the positive outcomes of these initiatives are maintained once donor funding concludes and seeks to identify the key factors that either support or undermine long-term impact.

Understanding the perspectives of various stakeholders is a central component of the research. The study incorporates insights from local government representatives, community members, business leaders, and donor organizations to capture a comprehensive view of how these projects are experienced on the ground. It also aims to identify critical community needs that may currently be overlooked by ongoing or past initiatives.

Finally, the study aspires to contribute to the improvement of future donor-funded development efforts in the region. It will offer practical, evidence-based recommendations on how to enhance project design, implementation, and coordination. Additionally, it will propose strategic policy changes and mechanisms to strengthen cooperation among donors, government bodies, and local communities.

Through this research, the intention is to generate meaningful knowledge that can drive more effective, inclusive, and sustainable development outcomes in the Polog region.

## 2. Chapter II. Literature Review

### 2.1. Donor-Funded Projects Overview

#### *2.1.1 Global Context of Donor-Funded Projects*

Donor-funded projects serve as vital instruments in tackling development challenges across the globe. These initiatives are predominantly supported by international organizations, bilateral and multilateral donors, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and private sector actors. Their core mission is to stimulate positive change in key sectors by targeting critical issues such as poverty reduction, economic growth, and the promotion of inclusive, sustainable development.

Typically, the objectives of donor-funded projects encompass a wide range of priorities. These include alleviating poverty and promoting economic development, upgrading vital infrastructure such as transport systems, energy networks, water supply, and sanitation services, and enhancing resilience to environmental and climate-related risks. In addition, donor initiatives often aim to improve access to education, healthcare, and social welfare services, while also strengthening governance, democracy, and the protection of human rights.

A wide spectrum of donors supports these efforts through various funding mechanisms. Among the major multilateral donors are the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Bank, the European Union (EU), and regional development institutions such as the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and the European Investment Bank (EIB). Financial support is also provided through loans and grants issued by relevant ministries and agencies within North Macedonia. Bilateral donors—such as USAID from the United States, DFID from the United Kingdom, Germany’s GIZ, Sweden’s SIDA, and Austria’s ADA—also play a significant role through direct development aid programs.

In parallel, private foundations and international NGOs, including the Gates Foundation and Oxfam, contribute to development efforts by implementing targeted projects and providing

specialized assistance. These projects are supported through a variety of financing models, including grants, concessional loans, and technical assistance packages.

The success and impact of donor-funded initiatives are heavily influenced by local conditions, particularly the quality of governance, the extent of stakeholder participation, and the degree to which project objectives align with national development policies and strategies. Effective coordination, transparent implementation, and active community involvement are essential to ensuring that donor support translates into meaningful, long-term development outcomes.

### *2.1.2. Regional Context: Donor-Funded Projects in the Western Balkans*

The Western Balkans region, including North Macedonia, has been a significant beneficiary of international donor assistance over the past two decades. This support has been crucial in addressing the complex challenges of post-conflict recovery, economic transformation, and alignment with European Union standards and practices as part of the EU accession process. Donor-funded interventions in the region have spanned a wide range of priority areas, reflecting both immediate needs and long-term development goals.

One of the core areas of donor engagement has been governance and public sector reform. Through targeted assistance, donors have helped strengthen public institutions, advance anti-corruption efforts, and support judicial reforms aimed at building more transparent, accountable, and efficient governance systems. Parallel to this, significant investments have been directed toward infrastructure development, including the modernization of transportation networks, improvements in energy efficiency, and initiatives focused on environmental sustainability and climate resilience.

Economic growth and employment generation have also been central to donor strategies in the region. Programs supporting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), vocational training, and entrepreneurship have aimed to stimulate job creation and enhance economic competitiveness. At the same time, social cohesion and the promotion of minority rights have been addressed

through initiatives targeting vulnerable and marginalized groups. These efforts have placed a strong emphasis on youth empowerment, gender equality, and inclusive development.

Among the major donors in the Western Balkans, the European Union plays a leading role, primarily through the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA), which supports reforms aligned with EU integration. United Nations agencies such as UNDP, UNICEF, and UNHCR have been active in implementing humanitarian, development, environmental and social protection programs. Additionally, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have contributed to economic stability through support for financial sector reform and infrastructure development.

Regional cooperation has also been encouraged through the efforts of bodies such as the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) and the Western Balkans Fund, which promote cross-border collaboration and joint initiatives among neighboring countries. Collectively, these donor activities have played a transformative role in the development trajectory of the Western Balkans, laying the foundation for more stable, prosperous, and integrated societies.

### *2.1.3. Donor-Funded Projects in the Polog Region*

The Polog region in North Macedonia has been the focus of numerous donor-funded initiatives designed to support its development across multiple sectors. These interventions have played an important role in addressing local needs and advancing the region's social and economic progress. In terms of economic development, donor projects have supported local businesses, encouraged entrepreneurship, and invested in workforce development, helping to stimulate job creation and strengthen the regional economy.

Significant efforts have also been made to improve infrastructure, particularly through investments in road networks, access to clean water, and the promotion of renewable energy sources. Environmental protection has emerged as another priority, with donor-funded projects promoting sustainable land use, eco-tourism, and enhanced resilience to climate-related risks

such as flooding. These initiatives reflect a growing awareness of the need to balance development with environmental sustainability.

Social inclusion has likewise been a key focus area, with programs specifically targeting ethnic minorities, youth, and other vulnerable populations. These projects aim to reduce social disparities, promote equality, and strengthen community cohesion in a region characterized by ethnic and cultural diversity.

However, despite the wide range of donor support, the Polog region continues to face persistent challenges. Weak institutional capacity at the local level, limited coordination among stakeholders, and ongoing concerns about the sustainability of project outcomes often hinder the long-term effectiveness of these initiatives. These structural issues highlight the need for more integrated planning, stronger local ownership, and better alignment between donor priorities and community needs.

By situating the Polog region within the broader context of global and regional donor practices, we can more accurately assess the true impact of these interventions. This understanding is essential for identifying areas where improvements are needed and for developing strategies to enhance the overall effectiveness, coordination, and sustainability of future donor-funded efforts in the region.

#### *2.1.4. Project Management in Developing Regions: Key theories and challenges*

##### **Previous Research: What has been studied about donor-funded projects in North Macedonia and similar regions?**

In understanding the design, implementation, and challenges of donor-funded projects—particularly in contexts like the Polog region—it is essential to draw from key theoretical frameworks that guide development practice.

One foundational model is the Theory of Change (ToC), which provides a roadmap for achieving long-term development goals. This theory emphasizes working backward from the desired

outcomes, identifying the necessary preconditions, activities, and inputs needed to bring about sustainable change. It encourages strategic planning and helps articulate the assumptions behind each step in the change process.

Closely related is the Logical Framework Approach (LFA), a widely used planning and evaluation tool in donor-funded projects. It structures project components into a clear matrix, organizing objectives, outputs, outcomes, indicators, and underlying assumptions. This method enhances transparency, simplifies reporting, and facilitates better monitoring of project progress.

Another critical perspective is offered by Participatory Development Theory, which stresses the involvement of local stakeholders—such as communities, civil society, and local institutions—in the planning and decision-making processes. Participation increases the relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability of development interventions by ensuring that projects reflect local priorities and gain community ownership.

The Capacity Development Framework underlines the importance of building both institutional and human capacity in regions receiving donor support. Strengthening the skills, systems, and structures of local actors is fundamental for ensuring that the benefits of donor-funded projects can be sustained beyond the duration of external assistance.

In addition, Stakeholder Theory provides valuable insight into the dynamics of donor-funded development. It recognizes the roles and interests of all actors involved—donors, implementing agencies, governments, and communities—and stresses the importance of balancing these interests to manage expectations, improve accountability, and ensure that projects respond to real needs.

Despite the usefulness of these frameworks, donor-funded projects commonly face several persistent challenges. Weak institutional and governance structures often lead to poor coordination, delays in implementation, and limited accountability. A lack of local ownership and participation can result in project designs that do not align with actual community needs, reducing the chances of sustainability. Moreover, many projects are hampered by inadequate

technical, financial, and human capacity, making it difficult to manage complex interventions effectively.

Dependency on donor agendas presents another challenge, as externally-driven priorities may not always reflect long-term local development goals. Many projects also suffer from gaps in Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E), which weakens their ability to assess impact, learn from results, and adapt over time. Finally, cultural and language barriers can hinder effective communication and engagement, further complicating project implementation and stakeholder collaboration.

Together, these theories and challenges offer a comprehensive lens through which to analyze and improve the planning and delivery of donor-funded initiatives, particularly in complex, multi-ethnic, and resource-constrained regions like Polog.

Previous research on donor-funded projects in North Macedonia and similar regions provides valuable insights into both the achievements and persistent challenges of development assistance in these contexts. Over the years, international donors such as the UNDP, World Bank, and the European Union have implemented a wide range of projects across the country, with a particular focus on improving infrastructure, promoting environmental protection, strengthening local governance, and supporting economic development.

Findings from regional studies indicate a mixed level of project effectiveness. While many interventions have led to improvements in service delivery and institutional capacity, a recurring issue has been the lack of sustainability once donor support ends. In several cases, the absence of clear exit strategies or long-term follow-up mechanisms has limited the enduring impact of these efforts.

One critical factor influencing project success has been the degree of community engagement. Projects that actively involved local stakeholders in planning and implementation tended to produce more meaningful and lasting outcomes. In contrast, top-down approaches with minimal local input often failed to generate long-term benefits or local ownership.

Another recurring theme is the weak coordination among donors. In many instances, overlapping initiatives, fragmented planning, and a lack of harmonization between donor strategies have led to duplication of efforts and reduced overall effectiveness. This underscores the need for improved alignment and information-sharing among donor agencies and implementing partners.

Local government capacity has also emerged as a significant bottleneck. Many municipalities in North Macedonia struggle with limited human and technical resources, which hampers their ability to effectively manage and absorb donor funds. This capacity gap often results in delays, inefficiencies, and underutilized funding opportunities.

Broader literature supports these findings. Reports from institutions such as the European Commission, the Southeast European Leadership for Development and Integrity (SELDI), and the Regional School of Public Administration (ReSPA) consistently highlight governance and administrative weaknesses in the Western Balkans. Additionally, academic studies from regional universities and think tanks have explored the influence of donor agendas on policymaking, the impact of development assistance on local outcomes, and the factors affecting project sustainability.

Together, this body of research underscores the complexity of donor-funded development in North Macedonia and similar regions, pointing to both the opportunities and structural limitations that shape project outcomes. These findings provide a useful foundation for assessing current initiatives and identifying ways to strengthen future donor engagement in regions like Polog.

## 3. Chapter III: Overview of Donor-Funded Projects in the Polog Region

### 3.1. Overview of Key Donor-Funded Projects in the Region

The Polog region of North Macedonia, characterized by ethnic diversity, rural settlements, and economic underdevelopment, has been the focus of several donor-funded initiatives aimed at improving local infrastructure, governance, environmental sustainability, flood resilience and social inclusion. The following section provides an overview of key donor-supported projects that have made significant contributions to the region's development.

One notable initiative is the Improving Municipal Services project, implemented by UNDP with funding from the SDC. Operating in municipalities that are approved for the second phase of fiscal decentralization and which, according to the Law on financing of local self-government units and the Guideline on the borrowing method and the procedure of the municipalities and the public enterprises in the Republic of Macedonia, issued by the Ministry of Finance, fulfill entirely the conditions for long term borrowing., the project aimed to enhance the accessibility and quality of local government services. It established Citizen Service Centers, digitized administrative processes, and provided capacity-building for municipal staff. These interventions led to improved transparency, reduced bureaucracy, and stronger municipal planning and budgeting capacities. According to UNDP (2020), the project also contributed to increased citizen trust in local institutions.

Environmental concerns were addressed through the Municipal Environmental Action Programme, funded by the EU under the IPA framework. This initiative focused on enhancing solid waste management in municipalities including Bogovinje, Tearce, and Brvenica. The project introduced primary waste separation, organized public awareness campaigns, and provided technical support and equipment for waste collection and disposal. It significantly improved environmental practices and infrastructure in the region, setting the stage for future recycling efforts.

To address rural connectivity, the World Bank's Local Roads Connectivity Project was launched, targeting road rehabilitation and maintenance in remote municipalities such as Zhelino, Jegunovce, and Tearce. The project incorporated climate-resilient infrastructure standards and supported municipalities in developing road maintenance plans. These efforts improved access to essential services and economic opportunities for rural populations.

In response to youth unemployment, GIZ implemented the Youth Empowerment and Employment Support project. Training centers in Tetovo and Gostivar offered vocational education, entrepreneurship support, and mentorship. As a result, many young people—especially women and ethnic minorities—initiated small businesses with the help of micro-grants. The project also fostered stronger links between local governments and private sector employers.

The EU and OSCE collaborated on the Support to Roma Inclusion initiative, focusing on improving the living conditions and social integration of Roma communities in and around Tetovo. Key achievements included housing renovations, enhanced access to healthcare and education, and legal assistance for securing personal documentation. The project aligned with EU priorities on human rights and social inclusion.

Given the region's vulnerability to climate change, UNDP and SDC also launched the Improving Resilience to Floods in the Polog Region project. It involved all nine municipalities and featured a combination of infrastructure works—such as embankments and drainage systems—and ecosystem-based solutions like landslide stabilization. Early warning systems were installed, and awareness campaigns targeted all community segments, including women and marginalized groups. The project culminated in the establishment of a regional unit for water risk management and was cited as a model for integrated disaster resilience in mountainous areas.

In parallel, the EU's Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) has provided funding for Local Infrastructure Development, enabling several Polog municipalities to modernize roads, water

supply systems, and waste management services. However, implementation has been slowed by bureaucratic hurdles and co-financing requirements.

IPA also facilitated Cross-Border Cooperation (CBC) projects between North Macedonia and neighboring countries such as Albania and Kosovo. These projects—implemented during the 2007–2013 and 2014–2020 periods—focused on local economic development, cultural heritage, rural tourism, and environmental management. Municipalities such as Tetovo, Gostivar, and Brvenica collaborated with Albanian and Kosovar partners, including municipalities like Elbasan, Korça, and Dragash, and universities such as the State University of Tetovo and the University of Prishtina. Civil society organizations like ALKA, Ceprosard, and Bash Vardar played active roles in implementing joint initiatives aimed at strengthening local governance and academic cooperation.

Overall, these donor-funded projects illustrate the breadth of development interventions in the Polog region, with varying degrees of success. While many initiatives have improved services, infrastructure, and community well-being, challenges such as limited municipal capacity, slow implementation, and sustainability concerns remain. Nonetheless, the experience gained provides a valuable foundation for designing more effective and inclusive development strategies moving forward.

### 3.2. Donor Organizations

#### **Who are the main donors involved?**

A wide range of international donors have supported development efforts in the Polog region of North Macedonia, including the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), European Union (EU), World Bank, German Development Cooperation (GIZ), and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).

### 3.3. Focus Areas

#### **What sectors (education, infrastructure, etc.) do these projects focus on?**

The above-mentioned projects have targeted multiple dimensions of development in the Polog region, with a strong emphasis on strengthening municipal services through the establishment of Citizen Service Centers, digitalization of administrative processes, and capacity-building for local government staff to enhance efficiency, transparency, and citizen engagement. In terms of infrastructure, the projects have invested significantly in upgrading local and rural road networks, modernizing water supply systems, improving waste management infrastructure, and integrating climate-resilient standards into public works.

Environmental protection has been addressed through initiatives promoting sustainable waste disposal practices, primary waste separation, flood resilience infrastructure such as river embankments and drainage systems, and the adoption of ecosystem-based approaches to natural disaster risk reduction. Efforts to advance social inclusion have targeted marginalized groups—especially Roma communities, youth, women, and ethnic minorities—by improving access to education, healthcare, legal documentation, housing, and employment opportunities. Finally, economic empowerment has been promoted through vocational training programs, entrepreneurship support, the creation of youth-led businesses via micro-grants, and the strengthening of local economic partnerships between municipalities, civil society, and the private sector.

Together, these initiatives represent a comprehensive and multi-sectoral approach to sustainable development, tailored to the specific needs and challenges of the Polog region.

A comparative analysis of IPA Cross-Border Cooperation (CBC) projects between North Macedonia–Albania and North Macedonia–Kosovo reveals both shared goals and distinct approaches shaped by partner priorities and sectoral focus.

The Macedonia–Albania cooperation has been characterized by a strong emphasis on tourism, cultural heritage, youth engagement, and regional branding. These projects typically brought together local municipalities and civil society organizations (CSOs) to promote civic participation, cultural preservation, and local economic development. Most initiatives were implemented during the 2007–2013 programming period, with project durations ranging from 12 to 20 months. Funding allocated to North Macedonian partners ranged between €50,000 and €245,000, with total project budgets reaching up to €780,000. A notable strength of these projects lies in their high visibility, strong community outreach, and targeted youth involvement, reflecting a governance-oriented and community-driven development model.

In contrast, the Macedonia–Kosovo cross-border partnerships have shown a different focus, leaning more towards environmental protection, rural and eco-tourism, and academic collaboration. These projects often involved universities and research institutions alongside local governments, emphasizing knowledge exchange, environmental sustainability, and capacity-building in education. Implemented over two IPA periods—2007–2013 and 2014–2020—these projects had slightly longer average durations of 18 to 24 months. Funding for North Macedonian partners typically ranged from €140,000 to €275,000, with total project budgets of up to €495,000. The key distinguishing feature of this cooperation track has been its focus on academic and research-based collaboration, including partnerships between the State University of Tetovo and the University of Prishtina.

Both cooperation tracks show strong and consistent involvement of Tetovo and Gostivar municipalities, underlining their role as regional hubs for cross-border engagement. These cities have served as key implementing and coordinating actors, facilitating cross-sectoral collaboration with neighboring regions.

An important takeaway from this comparison is the potential for future synergy. Upcoming IPA CBC projects could benefit from merging the civic and youth-oriented focus of the Macedonia–Albania track with the academic and environmental strengths of the Macedonia–Kosovo initiatives. This integrated approach could harness university partnerships not only for research

and education but also to amplify community-level impact and evidence-based policy advocacy across both borders. Such hybrid models would not only strengthen regional cooperation but also ensure that project outcomes are inclusive, sustainable, and responsive to local needs.

During the research, the IPA-CBC office was contacted to obtain relevant documents for the analysis. They responded by sharing the 2022 Annual Implementation Report (AIR). A summary of this report is provided below:

### **IPA II Cross-Border Cooperation Programme Kosovo – North Macedonia**

The 2022 Annual Implementation Report outlines the progress and achievements of the IPA II Cross-Border Cooperation Programme between Kosovo and North Macedonia, covering the period from January 1 to December 31, 2022. Implemented under the direct management of the EU Office in Kosovo and coordinated by the Ministries of Local Government in Kosovo and North Macedonia, the programme supports cooperation across borders to foster economic development, environmental protection, and cultural integration.

Throughout 2022, the programme continued to operate across its three core thematic priorities—tourism and cultural heritage, environmental protection, and technical assistance. By the end of the reporting year, 15 projects had been contracted in total. Of these, 12 had completed their implementation, while three remained ongoing under the fourth Call for Proposals (CfP). The fifth CfP was launched in July 2022 to address remaining gaps and introduce new project opportunities.

A major emphasis in 2022 was placed on supporting project implementation through technical assistance and capacity building. The Joint Technical Secretariat (JTS), with offices in Pristina and the newly relocated Antenna Office in Skopje, played a central role in coordinating activities, delivering support, and ensuring visibility. Despite administrative challenges, including the loss of funds allocated in 2020 due to missed contracting deadlines, the technical assistance grant contract (TAGC) was extended through an addendum, allowing its implementation to continue

until December 2023. As of December 2022, 64% of the planned TAGC activities were completed, with 12% carried forward and 24% annulled.

The year also saw the active engagement of the Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC), which convened twice to oversee programme implementation, endorse strategic documents, and review the progress of the fifth CfP. Capacity-building activities were a key component of programme support, with over 300 potential applicants and grant beneficiaries participating in training sessions, info days, and partner search forums. These efforts helped enhance the administrative and project management capacities of local authorities and civil society organizations in the eligible programme areas.

The quantitative achievements of the programme were significant, especially in the tourism and environmental sectors. Under the thematic priority of tourism, 98 new tourism products and services were introduced, and cultural and natural sites recorded a marked increase in visitors. The programme also contributed to the development of handicraft products and improved visibility for local traditions and skills. In terms of environmental impact, interventions resulted in increased waste collection services for 1,450 households, installation of containers across municipalities, and implementation of flood prevention measures.

Despite these accomplishments, the report identifies several areas requiring improvement. The programme's impact in the field of economic competitiveness and SME development (TP1) was limited, mainly due to fewer projects being financed under this priority. Additionally, the absence of strong "people-to-people" components and the overreliance of local institutions on external expertise for project preparation were noted as obstacles to deeper cross-border integration. The monitoring and evaluation framework also revealed that some key indicators remained unaddressed, pointing to the need for a more strategic and focused approach in future programming cycles.

Nonetheless, the programme's qualitative achievements were also evident in improved coordination between regional stakeholders, enhanced cooperation between municipalities, and

more inclusive engagement of civil society actors. The shift of the Antenna Office to Skopje significantly improved access and communication with North Macedonian stakeholders.

The 2022 implementation year demonstrated steady progress in cross-border cooperation between Kosovo and North Macedonia. The programme's activities contributed to cultural exchange, environmental improvements, and community-level development. Moving forward, recommendations highlight the importance of streamlining priorities, increasing local ownership, and ensuring stronger linkages between projects and the overarching objectives of the CBC programme. These steps are crucial as the region transitions into the IPA III programming phase.

### 3.4 Concluding remarks

The donor-funded projects implemented across the Polog region illustrate a diverse and multidimensional approach to regional development. From enhancing municipal service delivery and infrastructure to addressing social inclusion, environmental sustainability, and disaster resilience, these initiatives reflect the priorities of both local stakeholders and international development partners. Projects such as the UNDP-SDC municipal services reform and flood resilience program have strengthened governance and community preparedness, while others—like the GIZ youth employment initiative and EU-supported Roma inclusion efforts—have directly targeted socio-economic disparities in this ethnically diverse region.

Infrastructure modernization, a recurring theme, has been supported by World Bank and IPA funds, though challenges in implementation—particularly related to co-financing and administrative capacity—persist. Cross-border IPA cooperation with Albania and Kosovo has added a valuable dimension of regional integration, focusing on tourism, education, civil society, and environmental protection.

Collectively, these projects underscore the importance of donor coordination, local ownership, and sustainability planning. While many have yielded visible benefits, long-term success will depend on the capacity of local institutions to maintain outcomes, secure follow-up funding, and

adapt to emerging challenges such as climate change and youth migration. These findings provide the foundation for a more detailed examination of project effectiveness, stakeholder engagement, and sustainability in the chapters that follow.

From above, we can conclude that donor-funded projects have built crucial foundations in the Polog region—future sustainability will depend on local capacity, integration, and shared governance.

## 4. Chapter IV. Project Management Practices

### 4.1. Planning and Implementation

#### 4.1.1 How are projects planned and managed?

Planning is generally understood as the determination of actions, tasks, and all the other resources that are necessary to achieve the objectives. Tucker has defined planning as the method of monitoring, directing, communicating, and cooperating between the stakeholders, whereas project planning is the formulation of goals and objectives that explain the work that has to be done, the timeline for the project, and the necessary resources that are required to accomplish the objectives of the project. Furthermore, projects are a result of strategic objectives that are set by the top management, while project planning is the determination of the procedure, policies, and programs to achieve those objectives. In another instance, project planning is defined as the establishment of a predetermined course of action for the forecasted environment. According to the Project Management Institute, the planning process is the defining and refining of project objectives and the selection of the best alternatives to achieve these objectives (Dov Vir, Tzvi Raz&Aaron Shenhar, 2003).

Similarly, at the European level, project cycle management (PCM) is commonly used to assign and monitor financial funds. Additionally, PCM can be used in organizations that need a well-balanced mechanism to plan and manage projects. An essential element of PCM is the logical framework approach (LFA). Following the guidelines of LFA, it is possible for project managers to distinguish the principal elements of a project, as follows: from one side, resources and activities; and from the other side, products, outcomes and goals.

Moreover, the purpose of project planning is to develop a guideline for the project with sufficient detail to inform the project team about the necessary work packages that have to be executed and when the work has to be done, as well as keeping track of the overall progress of the project and maintaining the record of the project for future use. Another reason for project planning is to ensure that the stakeholders involved understand all the activities and aspects of the project

with sufficient details, along with the time, quality, and cost constraints. Furthermore, the purpose of project planning is to determine that the plan is realistic and that planning involves processes that will convert the “should be done work packages” into tasks that can be completed. The planning process in a project proceeds from the conceptualization phase of a project and continues until the project is closed.

However, it is debated in the literature that in the planning phase of every project, the important considerations are technical skills, project management knowledge, and organizational approach. In the planning stage, initial designs are formulated, the risks of the project are analyzed, the execution approach is defined and critical decisions are made. Moreover, during the planning phase, these five mandatory areas for a project are explored: (i) clarifying outputs, (ii) determining stakeholders, (iii) defining the scope of the project, (iv) determining the schedule, cost, and quality criteria of the project, and (v) identifying the communication channels and risks associated with the project. A similar pattern for project planning was proposed by the Project Management Institute ([www.pmi.org](http://www.pmi.org)). The differences between traditional planning and project planning are given below in Figure 1 and Figure 2. It can be observed from figures that project planning requires the extensive detailing of the processes that are involved in projects.

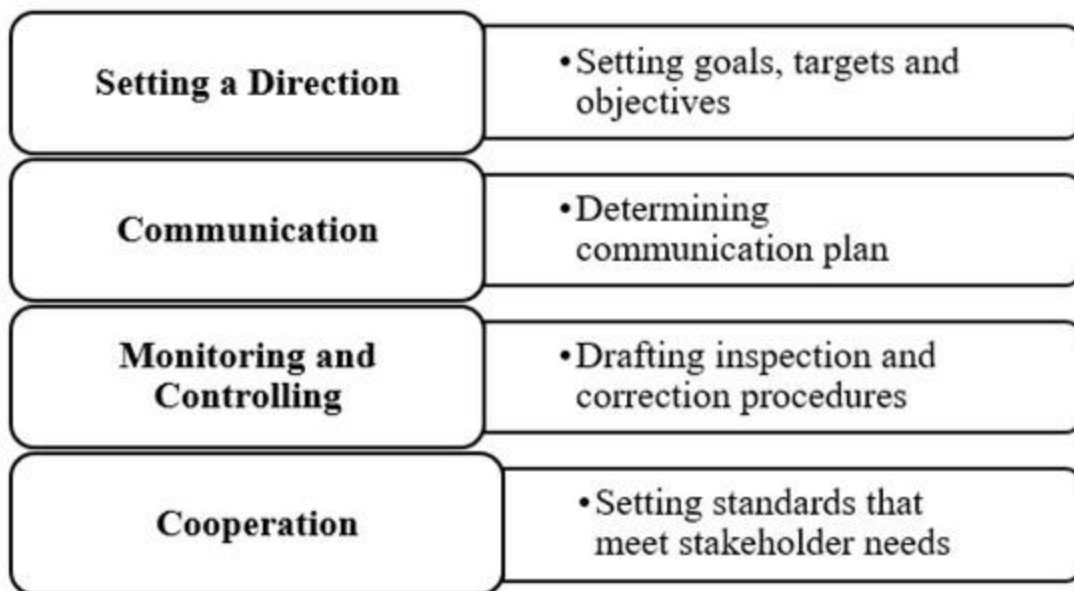


Figure 1: Traditional Planning

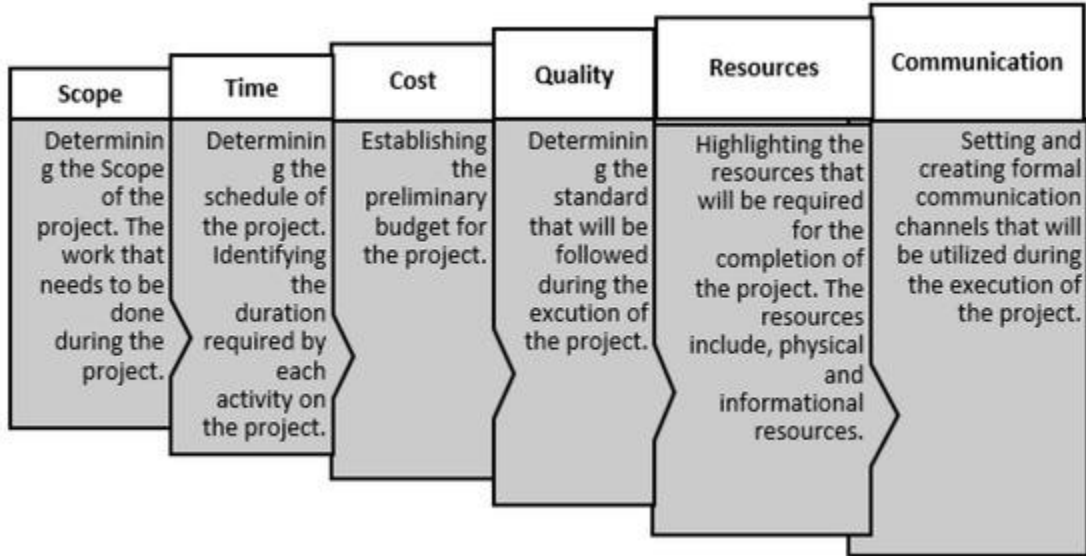


Figure 2: Project management planning

Similarly, Kerzner identified nine different modules of the planning phase: the goals of the project, time for project completion, future forecast, program, budget, organization, procedures, and standards. Alternatively, the Project Management Institute mentioned the scope of the project, time for completion, budget, specifications, project team, mode of communication, risks involved in the project, and methods of procurement as the basic components of planning.

A recent study determined the six components of the planning phase that greatly affect the project's success as schedule development, defining activities of the projects in detail, team management, mode of communication, project plan development by the planning team and organizational planning of the project. Furthermore, in another study, it was stated that in the planning phase, the scope of the project should be well-defined. Scope definition is the process of preparing projects for execution. As such, it can be observed from the above discussion that for a project to be successful, comprehensive planning is necessary.

Besides this, it can be clearly noted from the available literature on project planning that the emphasis of the academicians has been primarily on the private sector, neglecting the role of

planning in the public sector. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the role of planning as an antecedent to success in public sector projects.

#### 4.1.2 Planning for Project Success

After a thorough examination of the literature, the evidence for planning as an antecedent to project success seems to be prevalent. Moreover, it can also be observed from the available literature that planning is not only one of the key factors for managing projects, but it is vital for the successful delivery of the project. Additionally, it is firmly believed by the majority of the researchers that extensive and thorough preliminary planning results in the successful management of projects. Furthermore, a good project plan does not guarantee project success, yet poor project planning would surely cause projects to fail. Similarly, the planning and scheduling of projects plays a vital role in the implementation of successful infrastructure projects. Likewise, it is suggested that project managers need to make proper inception planning to achieve project goals.

Recently, Dvir described the advantages that are associated with planning for a project. He believes that by maintaining consistency between various stages of planning, it is easier to manage and control the project, diminish the project risks and vulnerabilities, and also improve the proficiency of the project manager. Likewise, Ref. posits that effective planning not only enables the project managers to make efficient use of their infrastructure, i.e., land and buildings, but also generates economic benefits for the stakeholders.

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**Hypothesis 1:** *There is a positive relationship between planning and public project success.*

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#### 4.1.3 Project Managers Competencies

Generally, the term “competency” refers to the abilities, knowledge, and skills of an individual. Moreover, the concept is also understood as a person’s technical and motivational drive to be successful at work. Experience, efficiency, efficacy, and effectiveness are all considered as limbs

of competency at any workplace. However, from an employer's perspective, competency is a potential trait that an individual must display in order to achieve organizational strategic objectives.

In this currently progressive and more demanding working environment, an employee must always strive to enhance his or her competencies. Employee competencies are mostly associated with the business goals and strategies of the organizations. Additionally, the competencies of employees or team members are enhanced because of the development of existing human resources in organizations or projects. Simply stated, human resource competency development is a process of improving employee expertise by providing training, upgrading skill base sets, and inculcating technological skills.

The project manager's competency is the measurement of their ability to making quick decisions, and their having knowledge regarding the responsibilities and roles of the project team involved. Competency involves enacting activities to increase others' abilities to perform the design work of the project, and increase the aptitude, experience, and skills of the team. The workforce should not only be technical experts and highly skilled, but should adapt to change, learn quickly, communicate effectively, and develop interpersonal relationships.

In terms of projects, a project manager needs to have a certain set of competencies that will allow them to plan and execute projects effectively. Moreover, it is suggested that not only the project manager, but also the whole project team, must have a certain level of competency in order to complete the project. Furthermore, it is argued in the literature that competency and personality traits potentially produce significant results in projects. Additionally, they posit that the true determinant of the success of any project is the competencies, and not the project manager. Therefore, competencies should be prioritized when hiring individuals for projects.

However, the competencies of project managers in public sector projects seem to have received little or no attention from academia in the prior research, whereas the number of public sector projects is growing significantly around the world, and thus requires attention. Additionally, it is becoming essential to investigate further if the competencies required of a project manager in

other sectors are similar to the ones in public sector projects. Therefore, it has become vital to understand the relationship between the two factors in the public sector.

#### 4.1.4 Project Managers Competencies as a Driver to Project Success

While a number of variables are critical to achieving success in projects, the role of certain key factors such as the project manager's abilities and competency cannot be ignored. Depending on the nature and size of the project, the competencies required from the project manager may differ. Competencies are important for achieving organizational objectives as well as project targets. In a correlational study, a strong association between the project manager's competencies and project success was determined. In contrast, recent studies related to information technology have determined that choosing merely advanced project management methodologies does not ensure the attainment of project objectives' success in projects, as this profoundly depends on the capabilities of a project manager. Moreover, the link between the two constructs has been thoroughly examined and verified by several studies.

Previously, Pinto and Slevin pointed out that when choosing a project manager, an organization must consider administrative competencies along with technical proficiency. Furthermore, they determined that an individual with such managerial and technical competencies can only enhance the chance of the successful completion of projects. Moreover, it is suggested that apart from the methodologies adopted on projects, cross-disciplinary competencies are essential for project managers, in order to end the projects in line with customer expectations. However, it is argued that the success of projects is reliant on many key factors, such as the project manager's competencies. Additionally, they stressed that the development of such competencies through certifications and training can increase the probability of completing the project successfully.

In another study, it was determined that along with technical competencies, soft skills, i.e., the human element of the project, should also receive adequate attention, and it is suggested that it is the combination of these competencies that will result in beneficial results in projects. In another instance, it is believed that the human factor, such as project manager competencies

(critical thinking, communication, leadership, flexibility, documentation, and conflict resolution), will ensure success in projects. Consequently, based on the arguments presented earlier, it is determined that project performance can be enhanced by the competencies of the project manager, and thus we can hypothesize the following:

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**Hypothesis 2:** *There is a positive relationship between project manager competencies and public project success*

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Based on the evidence from the literature, a model that reflects the association between project planning, competencies, and project success has been developed. The relationship between project planning, project manager's competencies, and project success is illustrated schematically in Figure 3. It can be observed from the figure that both planning and competencies can behave as antecedents to project success.

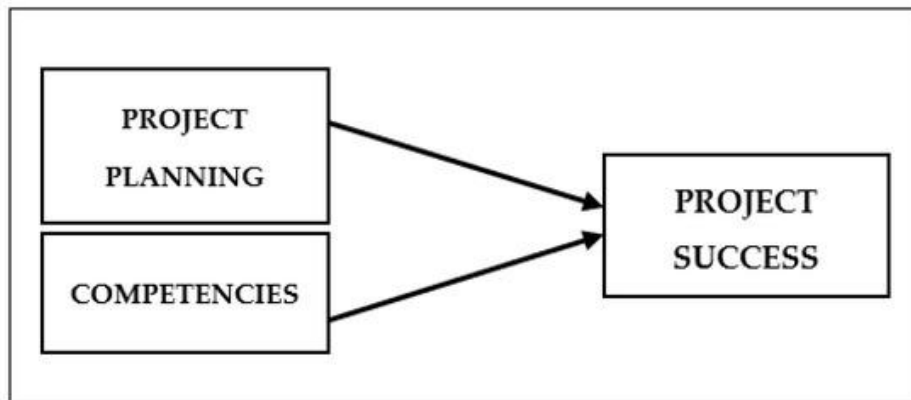


Figure 3: Proposed research model

A project is considered successful when the expected outcomes are of the predetermined standards, sustainable, achieved within the stipulated time and come under the umbrella of the preliminary budget. Moreover, success is a multidimensional concept that ensures project efficiency, organizational and business success, customer satisfaction, and preparing for the future. Success in projects enhances the social, economic, and environmental wellbeing of various stakeholders involved. Furthermore, the development of the national economy is directly affected by the success of public sector construction projects. Many construction projects directly affect the public's quality of life, such as roads, bridges, buildings, and irrigation facilities.

Additionally, it is believed that every 1% of government investment in infrastructure developmental projects will cause an increase in the gross domestic product (GDP) equivalent to 1%.

However, it has been observed that construction projects have been failing both in developed and developing countries. Additionally, the complex nature, dynamics, and uncertainties of the construction projects create difficulties for project managers and organizations in completing their projects as per the schedule, within the approved cost and specifications. The issue of delayed, over-budgeted, poor quality and insufficiently beneficial projects is becoming epidemic worldwide due to improper planning, poor mechanisms of monitoring and control and a lack of human resource competencies.

## 4.2. Coordination and Stakeholder Roles

### *4.2.1 Who is involved in managing these projects?*

A project is successful when it achieves its objectives and meets or exceeds the expectations of the stakeholders. But who are the stakeholders? Stakeholders are individuals who either care about or have a vested interest in your project. They are the people who are actively involved with the work of the project or have something to either gain or lose as a result of the project. When you manage a project to add lanes to a highway, motorists are stakeholders who are positively affected. However, you negatively affect residents who live near the highway during your project (with construction noise) and after your project with far-reaching implications (increased traffic noise and pollution) (Solera, J. 2009).

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**NOTE:** Key stakeholders can make or break the success of a project. Even if all the deliverables are met and the objectives are satisfied, if your key stakeholders aren't happy, nobody's happy.

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The project sponsor, generally an executive in the organization with the authority to assign resources and enforce decisions regarding the project, is a stakeholder. The customer, subcontractors, suppliers, and sometimes even the government are stakeholders. The project

manager, project team members, and the managers from other departments in the organization are stakeholders as well. It's important to identify all the stakeholders in your project upfront. Leaving out important stakeholders or their department's function and not discovering the error until well into the project could be a project killer.

Figure 4, below, shows a sample of the project environment featuring the different kinds of stakeholders involved on a typical project. A study of this diagram confronts us with a couple of interesting facts.

First, the number of stakeholders that project managers must deal with ensures that they will have a complex job guiding their project through the lifecycle. Problems with any of these members can derail the project.

Second, the diagram shows that project managers have to deal with people external to the organization as well as the internal environment, certainly more complex than what a manager in an internal environment faces. For example, suppliers who are late in delivering crucial parts may blow the project schedule. To compound the problem, project managers generally have little or no direct control over any of these individuals.

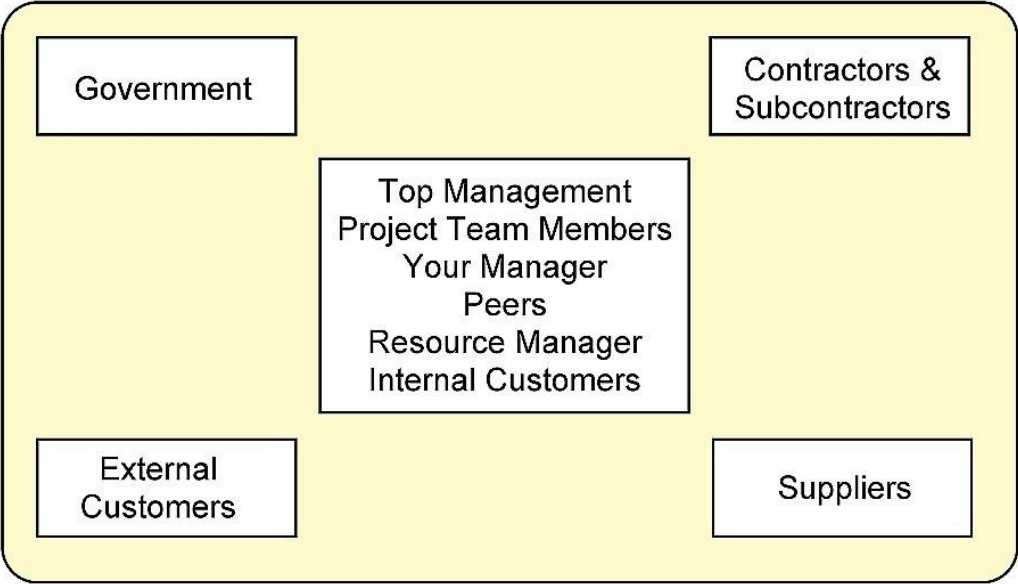


Figure 4: Project stakeholders

In a project, there are both internal and external stakeholders. Internal stakeholders may include top management, project team members, your manager, peers, resource manager, and internal customers. External stakeholders may include external customers, government, contractors and subcontractors, and suppliers.

#### *4.2.2 Project Stakeholders*

##### ***Top Management***

Top management may include the president of the company, vice-presidents, directors, division managers, the corporate operating committee, and others. These people direct the strategy and development of the organization.

On the plus side, you are likely to have top management support, which means it will be easier to recruit the best staff to carry out the project, and acquire needed material and resources; also visibility can enhance a project manager's professional standing in the company.

On the minus side, failure can be quite dramatic and visible to all, and if the project is large and expensive (most are), the cost of failure will be more substantial than for a smaller, less visible project.

When engaging with top management, several strategic approaches can help ensure effective communication and support throughout the project lifecycle. First, it is important to develop detailed plans and clearly define major milestones during the project's planning and design phases, securing formal approval from top management to establish shared expectations and accountability. Additionally, proactively consulting with senior leaders about their specific information needs and preferred reporting frequency allows the project team to tailor updates accordingly, ensuring relevance and timeliness.

Establishing a consistent status reporting methodology is also crucial, as it provides a structured and predictable flow of information that keeps management regularly informed of progress.

Equally important is maintaining transparency about project risks and potential impacts; by keeping top management continuously aware of emerging challenges, the team can foster trust and enable timely decision-making to mitigate issues before they escalate. Together, these practices promote strong alignment and engagement with leadership, which is vital for project success.

### **The Project Team**

The project team is made up of those people dedicated to the project or borrowed on a part-time basis. As project manager, you need to provide leadership, direction, and above all, the support to team members as they go about accomplishing their tasks. Working closely with the team to solve problems can help you learn from the team and build rapport. Showing your support for the project team and for each member will help you get their support and cooperation.

Working with project team members can present a variety of challenges, particularly because these individuals are often borrowed from other departments and do not directly report to the project manager. As a result, their priorities may lie elsewhere, which can affect their availability and commitment. Additionally, team members frequently juggle multiple projects alongside their regular job responsibilities, making it difficult for them to consistently meet deadlines.

Personality conflicts may also emerge within the team. These tensions can stem from differences in communication styles, personal values, or previous negative experiences working together. Sometimes, missed deadlines or performance issues only become apparent too late, limiting the ability to address them effectively.

Successful management of project teams therefore requires strong interpersonal skills and proactive engagement. Involving team members early in project planning helps build ownership and commitment. Regular, informal one-on-one meetings—such as over lunch or coffee—provide opportunities to discuss concerns and strengthen relationships. Maintaining an open-

door approach encourages team members to share issues as they arise. Fostering a collaborative environment where members support one another can also improve overall performance. Finally, conducting formal project performance reviews ensures that contributions are acknowledged and areas for improvement are identified, helping to keep the team aligned and motivated throughout the project.

### **Your Manager**

Typically, “the boss” decides what the assignment is and who can work with the project manager on projects. Keeping your manager informed will help ensure that you get the necessary resources to complete your project.

If things go wrong on a project, it is nice to have an understanding and supportive boss to go to bat for you if necessary. By supporting your manager, you will find your manager will support you more often.

- Find out exactly how your performance will be measured.
- When unclear about directions, ask for clarification.
- Develop a reporting schedule that is acceptable to your boss.
- Communicate frequently.

### **Peers**

Peers are people who are at the same level in the organization as you and may or may not be on the project team. These people will also have a vested interest in the product. However, they will have neither the leadership responsibilities nor the accountability for the success or failure of the project that you have.

Your relationship with peers can be impeded by:

- Inadequate control over peers

- Political maneuvering or sabotage
- Personality conflicts or technical conflicts
- Envy because your peer may have wanted to lead the project
- Conflicting instructions from your manager and your peer's manager

Peer support is essential. Because most of us serve our self-interest first, use some investigating, selling, influencing, and politicking skills here. To ensure you have cooperation and support from your peers:

- Get the support of your project sponsor or top management to empower you as the project manager with as much authority as possible. It's important that the sponsor makes it clear to the other team members that their cooperation on project activities is expected.
- Confront your peer if you notice a behavior that seems dysfunctional, such as bad-mouthing the project.
- Be explicit in asking for full support from your peers. Arrange for frequent review meetings.
- Establish goals and standards of performance for all team members.

### **Resource Managers**

Because project managers are in the position of borrowing resources, other managers control their resources. So their relationships with people are especially important. If their relationship is good, they may be able to consistently acquire the best staff and the best equipment for their projects. If relationships aren't good, they may find themselves not able to get good people or equipment needed on the project.

## **Government**

Project managers working in certain heavily regulated environments (e.g., pharmaceutical, banking, or military industries) will have to deal with government regulators and departments. These can include all or some levels of government from municipal, provincial, federal, to international.

## **Contractors, subcontractors, and suppliers**

There are times when organizations don't have the expertise or resources available in-house, and work is farmed out to contractors or subcontractors. This can be a construction management foreman, network consultant, electrician, carpenter, architect, or anyone who is not an employee. Managing contractors or suppliers requires many of the skills needed to manage full-time project team members.

Any number of problems can arise with contractors or subcontractors:

- Quality of the work
- Cost overruns
- Schedule slippage

Many projects depend on goods provided by outside suppliers. This is true for example of construction projects where lumber, nails, bricks, and mortar come from outside suppliers. If the supplied goods are delivered late or are in short supply or of poor quality or if the price is greater than originally quoted, the project may suffer.

Depending on the project, managing contractor and supplier relationships can consume more than half of the project manager's time. It is not purely intuitive; it involves a sophisticated skill set that includes managing conflicts, negotiating, and other interpersonal skills.

## Politics of Projects

Many times, project stakeholders have conflicting interests. It's the project manager's responsibility to understand these conflicts and try to resolve them. It's also the project manager's responsibility to manage stakeholder expectations. Be certain to identify and meet with all key stakeholders early in the project to understand all their needs and constraints.

Project managers are somewhat like politicians. Typically, they are not inherently powerful or capable of imposing their will directly on coworkers, subcontractors, and suppliers. Like politicians, if they are to get their way, they have to exercise influence effectively over others. On projects, project managers have direct control over very few things; therefore, their ability to influence others – to be a good politician – may be very important

Here are a few steps a good project politician should follow. However, a good rule is that when in doubt, stakeholder conflicts should always be resolved in favor of the customer.

When managing a project, it is crucial first to assess the environment by identifying all relevant stakeholders. Each stakeholder holds a unique interest in the project, and understanding these interests is essential because any one of them could potentially influence or even derail the project. After identifying all stakeholders, it becomes important to analyze where the real power lies—determining who among the many actors has the greatest influence and whose actions will most significantly impact the project's success.

Following this, the next step is to clearly identify the goals of each stakeholder. This involves asking what motivates them, what outcomes they seek, and whether there are any hidden or unspoken agendas that might affect their behavior. Special attention should be given to the goals of the most powerful stakeholders, as their priorities often shape project direction and decision-making.

Defining the problem accurately is also fundamental. This requires isolating the core facts and continuously questioning what the real situation is, ensuring that assumptions do not cloud the understanding of the challenges that need to be addressed.

Another important consideration is the cultural diversity among stakeholders. When project participants come from different cultural backgrounds, project management must adapt its organizational practices and work processes to accommodate these differences. Three major cultural aspects that often affect projects are communication styles, negotiation approaches, and decision-making processes. Recognizing and effectively managing these differences can greatly enhance collaboration and contribute to the project's overall success

Communication is perhaps the most visible manifestation of culture. Project managers encounter cultural differences in communication in language, context, and candor.

Language is clearly the greatest barrier to communication. When project stakeholders do not share the same language, communication slows down and is often filtered to share only information that is deemed critical.

The barrier to communication can influence project execution where quick and accurate exchange of ideas and information is critical.

The interpretation of information reflects the extent that context and candor influence cultural expressions of ideas and understanding of information. In some cultures, an affirmative answer to a question does not always mean yes. The cultural influence can create confusion on a project where project stakeholders represent more than one culture.

### **Managing Stakeholders**

Often there is more than one major stakeholder in the project. An increase in the number of stakeholders adds stress to the project and influences the project's complexity level. The business or emotional investment of the stakeholder in the project and the ability of the stakeholder to

influence the project outcomes or execution approach will also influence the stakeholder complexity of the project. In addition to the number of stakeholders and their level of investment, the degree to which the project stakeholders agree or disagree influences the project's complexity.

A small commercial construction project will typically have several stakeholders. All the building permitting agencies, environmental agencies, and labor and safety agencies have an interest in the project and can influence the execution plan of the project. The neighbors will have an interest in the architectural appeal, the noise, and the purpose of the building.

### **Relationship Building Tips**

Take the time to identify all stakeholders before starting a new project. Include those who are impacted by the project, as well as groups with the ability to impact the project. Then, begin the process of building strong relationships with each one using the following method.

- **Analyze stakeholders:** Conduct a stakeholder analysis, or an assessment of a project's key participants, and how the project will affect their problems and needs. Identify their individual characteristics and interests. Find out what motivates them, as well as what provokes them. Define roles and level of participation, and determine if there are conflicts of interest among groups of stakeholders.
- **Assess influence:** Measure the degree to which stakeholders can influence the project. The more influential a stakeholder is, the more a project manager will need their support. Think about the question, "What's in it for them?" when considering stakeholders. Knowing what each stakeholder needs or wants from the project will enable the project manager to gauge his or her level of support. And remember to balance support against influence. Is it more important to have strong support from a stakeholder with little influence, or lukewarm support from one with a high level of influence?

- Understand their expectations: Nail down stakeholders' specific expectations. Ask for clarification when needed to be sure they are completely understood.
- Define "success": Every stakeholder may have a different idea of what project success looks like. Discovering this at the end of the project is a formula for failure. Gather definitions up front and include them in the objectives to help ensure that all stakeholders will be supportive of the final outcomes.
- Keep stakeholders involved: Don't just report to stakeholders. Ask for their input. Get to know them better by scheduling time for coffee, lunch, or quick meetings. Measure each stakeholder's capacity to participate and honor time constraints.
- Keep stakeholders informed: Send regular status updates. Daily may be too much; monthly is not enough. One update per week is usually about right. Hold project meetings as required, but don't let too much time pass between meetings. Be sure to answer stakeholders' questions and emails promptly. Regular communication is always appreciated – and may even soften the blow when you have bad news to share.

These are the basics of building strong stakeholder relationships. But as in any relationship, there are subtleties that every successful project manager understands – such as learning the differences between and relating well to different types stakeholders.

### **How to Relate to Different Types of Stakeholders**

By conducting a stakeholder analysis, project managers can gather enough information on which to build strong relationships – regardless of the differences between them. For example, the needs and wants of a director of marketing will be different from those of a chief information officer. Therefore, the project manager's engagement with each will need to be different as well.

Stakeholders with financial concerns will need to know the potential return of the project's outcomes. Others will support projects if there is sound evidence of their value to improving operations, boosting market share, increasing production, or meeting other company objectives.

Keep each stakeholder's expectations and needs in mind throughout each conversation, report or email, no matter how casual or formal the communication may be. Remember that the company's interests are more important than any individual's – yours or a stakeholder's. When forced to choose between them, put the company's needs first.

No matter what their needs or wants, all stakeholders will respect the project manager who:

- Is always honest, even when telling them something they don't want to hear
- Takes ownership of the project
- Is predictable and reliable
- Stands by his or her decisions
- Takes accountability for mistakes

### **Supportive Stakeholders are Essential to Project Success**

Achieving a project's objectives takes a focused, well-organized project manager who can engage with a committed team and gain the support of all stakeholders. Building strong, trusting relationships with interested parties from the start can make the difference between project success and failure.

### **Tools to Help Stakeholder Management**

There are many project decelerators, among them lack of stakeholder support. Whether the stakeholders support your project or not, if they are important to your project, you must secure their support. How do you do that?

First, you must identify who your stakeholders are. Just because they are important in the organization does not necessarily mean they are important to your project. Just because they think they are important does not mean they are. Just because they don't think they need to be involved does not mean they do not have to be. The typical suspects: your manager, your

manager’s manager, your client, your client’s manager, any SME (subject matter expert) whose involvement you need, and the board reviewing and approving your project. Note that in some situations there are people who think they are stakeholders. From your perspective they may not be, but be careful how you handle them. They could be influential with those who have the power to impact your project. Do not dismiss them out of hand.

Second, you need to determine what power they have and what their intentions toward your project are. Do they have the power to have an impact on your project? Do they support or oppose you? What strategies do you follow with them?

Third, what’s the relationship among stakeholders? Can you improve your project’s chances by working with those who support you to improve the views of those who oppose you? Table 1 summarizes the options based on an assessment of your stakeholders’ potential for cooperation and potential for threat, whereas Table 2 is a template used for the analysis.

Table 1: Stakeholder Analysis (Solera, 2009)

	<b>Low threat potential</b>	<b>High threat potential</b>
<b>Low potential for cooperation</b>	Type: Marginal Strategy: Monitor	Type: Non-supportive Strategy: Defend
<b>High potential for cooperation</b>	Type: Supportive Strategy: Involve	Type: Mixed blessing Strategy: Collaborative

Table 2: Stakeholder Analysis Template (Solera, 2009)

Stakeholder Names and Roles	How important? (Low – Med – High)	Current level of support? (Low – Med – High)	What do you want from stakeholders?	What is important to stakeholders?	How could stakeholders block your efforts?	What is your strategy for enhancing stakeholder support?

Finally, a key piece of your stakeholder management efforts is constant communication to your stakeholders (see Figure 5). Using the information developed above, you should develop a communications plan that secures your stakeholders’ support.

Project Scope:

Key Messages:

Communication Goals:

Communication Team:

Project Team:

Other stakeholders:

Communication Date	Deliverable	Audience	Message	Action Item or FYI (Info?)	Plans	Status

Figure 5: Stakeholder Communication Template

### 4.3. Challenges in Management

#### **What issues do project managers face?**

Project management is a multifaceted process that encompasses multiple phases—initiation, planning, execution, closure and monitoring. Challenges may arise at any point in the process, and finding solutions to such problems is one of the primary roles of the project manager. Below are described some common project management challenges and what is necessary to do, to resolve each of them (Indeed Editorial Team, 2025):

#### **1. Scope creep**

Scope creep occurs when a project's scope grows beyond its original definition or goals.

It typically happens when stakeholders ask for changes to the project. Any alteration to a project's plan can cause confusion, increase the cost of resources and make it difficult to meet deadlines. If you can avoid scope creep, you can improve your chances of completing a project on time and within budget.

To effectively prevent or manage scope creep in a project, several key strategies should be employed. First and foremost, it is essential to clearly define the project requirements and goals from the outset, ensuring that all parties have a shared understanding of what the project is intended to achieve. Developing a detailed schedule that outlines every step of the process helps maintain focus and provides a roadmap for progress.

Involving clients and stakeholders early in the project planning phase fosters collaboration and helps align expectations, reducing the likelihood of unforeseen changes later on. Utilizing project management tools such as Gantt charts allows for efficient planning, tracking, and visualization of tasks, timelines, and dependencies, which aids in identifying potential deviations promptly.

Clear and ongoing communication with stakeholders is vital, particularly regarding how any proposed changes to the project scope could impact deadlines, budgets, and overall deliverables.

Where scope changes risk causing significant delays or unreasonable costs, it is important to firmly refuse such modifications or negotiate alternative solutions. By applying these strategies, project managers can maintain control over scope, minimize disruptions, and enhance the likelihood of successful project completion

## **2. Unclear goals**

Projects can be successful only if the team has well defined and measurable goals to work toward. Ideally, every member of the team is aware of each project objective and the stakeholder's exact expectations concern each. Otherwise, they may spend undue time and resources trying to accomplish something that doesn't provide the desired time and resources trying to accomplish something that doesn't provide the desired value.

Clear project goals can be effectively devised and communicated through a structured and collaborative approach. One proven method is applying the SMART criteria—ensuring that goals are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-based. This framework helps create well-defined objectives that are easier to understand, track, and achieve.

Before the project begins, it is important to establish detailed specifications, including a realistic timeline, to set clear expectations. Engaging the project team in dedicated meetings to define and discuss these goals fosters shared understanding and commitment across all members.

Utilizing project planning software further enhances clarity by outlining specific goals and clearly assigning roles and responsibilities to each team member. This not only improves coordination but also helps everyone see how their contributions fit into the larger picture. Additionally, incorporating monitoring mechanisms such as milestones enables continuous tracking of progress, providing timely feedback and allowing for adjustments as needed to keep the project on course.

### **3. Poor budgeting**

Smart financial planning and skillful cost management are essential for ensuring that you use funding appropriately. In contrast, poor budgeting may result in undesirable outcomes. Without a strong handle on money matters, you may find your team facing cost overruns, which is likely to displease the stakeholders and prevent the successful completion of the project.

To avoid budgeting issues in a project, it is essential to take a proactive and informed approach. This begins with careful budget planning well in advance, relying on realistic and accurate cost estimations rather than optimistic guesses. Reviewing budgets from similar past projects can provide valuable benchmarks and help identify potential cost drivers or pitfalls.

Seeking input from experts—such as software developers, quality assurance specialists, or other professionals familiar with the specific type of project—adds depth to cost and time estimates, enhancing their reliability. Throughout the project lifecycle, flexibility is important; resources may need to be reassigned, or suppliers, services, and vendors adjusted to optimize costs and stay within budget. By following these steps, project managers can better anticipate financial requirements, reduce unexpected expenses, and ensure more effective budget control.

### **4. Skill gaps**

During project implementation, you may find that the skill levels of some of the team members aren't enough to satisfy the required competencies to realize project goals. This situation is known as a skill gap. If someone is incapable of performing the duties of their role, then you can expect a corresponding gap between your project goals and project outcomes.

To ensure that team members possess the necessary skills for a project, a systematic approach should be followed. The first step involves clearly identifying and listing the specific skills and knowledge required to successfully complete the project. Once these requirements are established, an assessment of the current team's competencies should be conducted to identify any gaps.

Where skill deficiencies are found, targeted training and development opportunities should be provided to equip employees with the capabilities they need. Assigning team members to tasks that align with their strengths and experience helps optimize performance and efficiency. In cases where specialized expertise is lacking within the existing team, outsourcing or hiring additional staff can fill these gaps, ensuring that all aspects of the project are handled competently. This approach promotes a well-prepared team capable of meeting project demands effectively

### **5. Insufficient risk analysis**

Risk analysis is the process of predicting the potential factors that may arise that can jeopardize the success of a project. It's a vital part of the project life cycle, but the process itself is susceptible to certain risks. Rushing the analysis, for example, can lead to oversights that fail to foresee major obstacles. This in turn, can result in flaws in the project plan, financial issues or unknown variables.

Risk analysis can be significantly enhanced through a thorough and proactive approach. This begins with researching and identifying potential issues that the project or team might face at each stage of the project lifecycle. Understanding these risks early allows for the development of effective control measures aimed at preventing or mitigating their impact.

In addition, creating contingency or replacement plans prepares the team to respond quickly and effectively if changes or challenges arise during the project. Equally important is having a clear understanding of the available resources—whether personnel, technology, or budget—that can be mobilized to minimize or control risks. By combining careful risk identification, preventive strategies, contingency planning, and resource awareness, project managers can strengthen their ability to navigate uncertainties and keep the project on track.

### **6. Lack of accountability**

Accountability means taking ownership of actions and their outcomes, particularly when it comes to mistakes. Thus, an accountable person is willing to face the consequences of what they've done and make every effort to resolve the subsequent issues that have arisen. When leaders and

team members lack accountability, they can impede progress in a couple of ways. One is by damaging the morale of the team, which may absorb the consequences of a particular person's mistakes. The other is by showing productivity when project resources channel into the effort to identify the cause of a problem.

Accountability within a project team can be strengthened through several intentional practices. First, it is important to assign each team member clear and specific tasks, ensuring that everyone understands exactly what is expected of them. Establishing a common goal helps unite the team around a shared purpose and motivates collective effort toward successful project completion.

Integrating accountability into the project's workflow makes roles and responsibilities transparent, so team members are fully aware of their individual contributions and how they impact the broader project. Leading by example is equally vital; when leaders demonstrate openness about their own mistakes and take responsibility, it creates a culture where team members feel safe to do the same without fear of blame.

Finally, building trust among team members fosters honest communication and collaboration, enabling everyone to openly share challenges and hold one another accountable in a supportive environment. Together, these strategies create a foundation for a responsible, committed, and high-performing team.

## **7. Stakeholder disengagement**

Stakeholder disengagement is the process by which a project's stakeholders-those who have a vested interest in the project, such as clients, institutions, NGO-s, Government, municipalities, local community, private sector etc.-communicate and collaborate with the team. The involvement of the stakeholders is important because they can provide input that guides the project toward the best possible outcome. Several of the other challenges that projects face, such as unclear goals, and insufficient risk analysis, arise when stakeholders aren't sufficiently engaged.

In order to ensure stakeholder's engagement, projects must:

- Involve stakeholders in the project planning process
- Communicate with stakeholders frequently, and give them regular project updates
- Directly ask stakeholders for their feedback on every project phase

## **8. Unrealistic deadlines**

An unrealistic deadline is a project due date that is impossible or unreasonable to meet given specifications and requirements. When a team faces unrealistic deadlines, they find themselves forced to condense their activities in such a way that compromises the quality of their works. As a result, the finished state of the project is likely to fall short of stakeholder's expectations.

The realistic deadlines should be set by:

- Prioritizing tasks
- Building extra time into the deadlines to account for potential obstacles
- Finalizing deadlines with relevant team members
- Discussing deadline concerns with stakeholders before starting the project
- Using a project calendar to plan and manage schedules and deadlines.

## **9. Technological shortcomings**

Nowadays, project management software is essential for planning, organizing and managing project progress. It's not uncommon for project teams to encounter issues with the software and other tech tools they've chosen to help manage the project life cycle. Being forced to use insufficient technology, they may encounter delays arising from frustration, slowed communication and the additional learning required to devise workarounds.

To avoid or address technological shortcomings and select an effective program that meets specific project needs, several key criteria should be considered. The chosen software should have robust time-tracking capabilities to monitor progress and resource use accurately. It must

offer seamless functionality across multiple devices, enabling team members to access and update information from desktops, laptops, tablets, or smartphones.

Customization options are important so the program can be tailored to fit the unique workflows and requirements of the project. Additionally, the ability to integrate smoothly with existing tools and software ensures compatibility and prevents disruptions to established processes. Effective scheduling features help organize tasks and deadlines, while notifications and alerts keep the team informed about upcoming milestones, changes, or issues.

The program should be user-friendly and intuitive, minimizing the learning curve and encouraging widespread adoption among team members. By prioritizing these features, project managers can select technological solutions that enhance productivity, communication, and overall project success.

#### **10. Scheduling conflicts**

A scheduling conflict is a situation in which two or more priorities compete for your time and attention. If your team or company is working on multiple projects at once, you might experience scheduling conflicts. As a result, one or several projects may face delays and difficulties concerning resource allocation. Project resources can be shared effectively and also keeping the project on schedule by:

- Coordinating the project schedule and needs with other project managers
- Checking members vacation and time-off schedules to avoid unexpected absences
- Using an online calendar planner to organize multiple projects and their resources simultaneously.

#### **11. Uncertainty**

Uncertainty is a condition in which stakeholder, including the members of the team are unsure about any aspect of the project on which they're working. They may feel unconfident about the team's ability to meet goals, the potential impact of the project when complete or the use of

resources associated with the project. When uncertainty arises, it can affect the morale of everyone involved, which can lead to poor project outcomes. Uncertainty can be reduced by monitoring progress and tracking metrics such as:

- Burn rate, or how quickly you are spending your budgeted resources
- Estimated hours and costs versus actual hours and costs
- Employee workload to ensure each team member has a balanced number of tasks

## 5. Chapter V. Challenges in Donor-Funded Projects

### 5.1. Coordination and Communication

#### **Problems in working with different stakeholders**

One of the most significant challenges in the implementation of donor-funded projects in the Polog region is effective coordination and communication among stakeholders. Projects often involve multiple actors—donor agencies, central and local governments, civil society organizations, and community groups—with differing expectations, capacities, and timelines (UNDP, 2024).

Lack of early engagement with municipal authorities has led to project designs that do not fully align with local priorities or conditions. In several municipalities, officials reported limited involvement during the planning phases, resulting in poor ownership and reduced motivation for implementation.

Communication gaps between donor agencies and implementing partners also affect project efficiency. For example, mismatches in reporting standards and procurement procedures have caused delays and confusion, particularly in municipalities with limited administrative capacity.

Donor-funded projects in the Polog region also face a range of complex challenges that impact their effectiveness, sustainability, and long-term success. A significant issue lies in limited stakeholder involvement, particularly the frequent exclusion of municipalities from early project planning stages. This results in weak local ownership and reduced commitment to achieving project goals. Compounding this is fragmented communication among donors, local authorities, and civil society organizations, who often operate according to different timelines, reporting protocols, and priorities. This misalignment hampers effective coordination and leads to inefficiencies or duplication of efforts.

Smaller municipalities, in particular, struggle with administrative gaps, as they often lack the capacity to manage complex donor requirements such as reporting, procurement, and

compliance, causing delays and operational strain. Additionally, language and inclusion barriers prevent full participation by Albanian- and Roma-speaking communities, as consultations and materials are not always accessible in their languages, undermining social inclusion efforts. The absence of a regional coordination platform further fragments the landscape, limiting opportunities for municipalities to collaborate strategically, share best practices, and jointly address common challenges.

Beyond these coordination and communication issues, the region confronts other pressing obstacles. Sustainability concerns are paramount, as many projects struggle to maintain benefits after donor funding ends due to insufficient local ownership, weak institutional frameworks, and lack of ongoing financing mechanisms. The donor environment itself is often fragmented, with multiple donors pursuing overlapping or disconnected objectives, which can lead to inefficiencies and resource wastage.

Limited local capacity remains a critical challenge, with municipalities frequently lacking the technical expertise and trained personnel necessary to manage complex projects effectively. Additionally, political dynamics and instability at the local level can disrupt project continuity and influence priorities, sometimes resulting in biased implementation. Weak monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems restrict the ability to accurately track progress, assess impact, and make timely adjustments to improve outcomes.

Community engagement is also affected by low levels of public awareness about donor initiatives, which reduces participation and local support. The region's infrastructure and geographic constraints, particularly its mountainous terrain and remote areas, increase the complexity and cost of project logistics. Finally, persistent challenges in advancing gender equality and social inclusion underscore the need for donor projects to more effectively address the needs of marginalized groups.

Addressing these multifaceted challenges requires a concerted effort to enhance inclusive stakeholder engagement, harmonize donor and local processes, build institutional and technical

capacity, promote transparent communication, and establish strong regional cooperation platforms. Tailoring development approaches to the unique social, political, and geographic context of the Polog region is essential to maximize the impact and sustainability of donor-funded projects.

## 5.2. Resource Management: Issues with finances, staffing, and other resources

Donor-funded projects in the Polog region frequently encounter resource management challenges that hinder smooth implementation and long-term sustainability. These issues span financial limitations, human resource constraints, and logistical gaps.

### **Financial Constraints and Co-Financing Issues**

Many donor projects require co-financing from local municipalities, which often struggle to allocate the necessary funds due to limited budgets and fiscal decentralization challenges. In interviews, municipal staff from Bogovinje noted delays in project implementation due to slow disbursement or lack of co-funding from the central government. Budget planning at the municipal level is often rigid, making it difficult to respond to donor deadlines or project adjustments.

### **Staffing Limitations**

Municipalities in the Polog region, particularly smaller and rural ones, frequently lack qualified staff to manage and implement complex donor-funded projects. Project officers are often assigned multiple roles, leading to burnout, reduced oversight, and insufficient time for proper monitoring and reporting. Furthermore, high staff turnover disrupts institutional memory and affects the continuity of project activities.

### **Technical and Operational Capacity Gaps**

Resource limitations also extend to equipment, technology, and infrastructure. Several municipalities reported lacking basic IT infrastructure needed to support digital project

components or administrative reforms introduced by donors. In addition, outdated procurement practices and insufficient technical expertise in areas like environmental engineering, disaster resilience, or data analysis further complicate project execution.

### **Dependence on External Consultants**

Due to these capacity gaps, municipalities often rely heavily on external consultants funded by donors. While this can improve short-term delivery, it limits opportunities for knowledge transfer and local capacity-building, undermining sustainability once project funding ends.

Resource management challenges significantly hinder the ability of municipalities in the Polog region to effectively and independently implement donor-funded projects. Financial constraints, including limited municipal budgets, often delay required co-financing and slow down project execution. Staffing shortages exacerbate these issues, as municipal personnel are frequently overburdened and lack sufficient qualified staff to adequately handle essential tasks such as monitoring and reporting.

Technical limitations further restrict project performance, with many municipalities operating with outdated equipment and weak IT infrastructure, impeding the adoption of modern project management and implementation techniques. Additionally, a high dependence on external consultants and experts has developed, which while providing short-term support, undermines the growth of local capacity and the sustainability of project outcomes.

To overcome these obstacles, it is crucial to strengthen municipal resource planning and invest in building human capital, enabling local institutions to take greater ownership and manage projects more effectively over the long term.

### **5.3 Sustainability: Challenges Beyond Donor Funding**

One of the most persistent issues facing donor-funded projects in the Polog region is ensuring sustainability after donor support ends. Despite significant investment and short-term impact,

many initiatives struggle to maintain their outcomes once external funding and technical assistance are withdrawn.

### **Lack of Local Ownership**

Sustainability often hinges on the commitment and capacity of local actors. However, several projects in the region have been designed with limited municipal or community input, leading to weak local ownership. Without strong local engagement from the outset, there is often little incentive or ability to maintain infrastructure, services, or practices initiated by donors.

### **Insufficient Budget Allocation**

Many municipalities do not allocate funds in their annual budgets to sustain project outcomes—such as maintaining digital systems, equipment, or staffing. This has led to cases where Citizen Service Centers fall into disuse or environmental infrastructure is not properly maintained.

### **Dependence on External Expertise**

A recurring challenge is the heavy reliance on donor-funded consultants. While they contribute valuable knowledge, little effort is sometimes made to build internal capacities within local institutions. As a result, once external advisors exit, local governments are often unprepared to manage or adapt project elements independently.

### **Missing Institutional Mechanisms**

Sustainability is also hampered by the lack of policies, legal frameworks, or operational guidelines to embed project results into existing systems. For example, flood resilience plans or waste management strategies are not always integrated into municipal planning documents or regulations.

## **Community Disengagement**

In some cases, public participation fades after project completion, particularly when there are no follow-up activities or feedback mechanisms. This reduces the long-term impact of awareness campaigns, social inclusion efforts, or training programs aimed at youth and vulnerable groups.

Many donor-funded initiatives in the Polog region face significant sustainability challenges, primarily due to a lack of strategic planning for continuity beyond the project's lifespan. Without deliberate efforts to strengthen local ownership, secure ongoing budgeting, and build institutional capacity, these projects risk remaining isolated, short-term interventions with limited lasting impact.

A major obstacle is low local ownership, where insufficient engagement from municipalities and communities results in weak long-term commitment to maintaining project benefits. This is compounded by the frequent absence of dedicated budgets for continuation, leaving municipalities unable to finance essential ongoing activities such as maintenance or staffing once donor support ends.

Furthermore, a heavy reliance on external consultants contributes to external dependency, with little internal capacity retained within local institutions to sustain initiatives independently. Often, project outcomes are not fully integrated into municipal plans or supported by legal frameworks, leading to missing institutional support that further jeopardizes long-term success.

Additionally, community engagement tends to fade after projects conclude, as there are rarely mechanisms in place for follow-up or continued involvement. Addressing these sustainability challenges requires focused efforts to embed projects into local governance structures, ensure dedicated funding streams, foster genuine ownership, and maintain active community participation to preserve and build on the gains achieved through donor-funded initiatives.

## 6. Chapter VI. Findings and Analysis

### 6.1. Key Findings

#### Summary the results from interviews, surveys, and document analysis

##### *Comparative Narrative Summary of the interviews*

*(Including municipalities: Gostivar, Jegunovce, Mavrovo-Rostushe, Bogovinje, Brvenica, Tetovo, Tearce, Zhelino, and Vrapchishte)*

#### I. Roles and Responsibilities of Municipalities in Donor-Funded Projects

All municipalities share a fundamental role in initiating, managing, and overseeing donor-funded projects, but their internal structures and capacities vary considerably.

- **Gostivar:** The municipality manages donor relations predominantly through the Information Center, which functions as a hub for project coordination and communication. The representatives emphasize their role in linking the donors with municipal needs, facilitating documentation, and maintaining ongoing contact throughout the project cycle. The municipality's approach is highly centralized, with the mayor's office playing an active role in providing political support and leadership to secure project approvals and ensure implementation continuity.
- **Jegunovce:** The municipality adopts a hands-on approach by focusing on legal and property issues related to project sites, providing critical problem-solving to eliminate implementation bottlenecks. Engagement with the community is prioritized through transparent information sharing and involvement at all stages, thus ensuring local ownership and acceptance. The municipal team maintains consistent partnerships with donors and external stakeholders to ensure alignment with local development priorities.
- **Mavrovo-Rostuse:** This municipality places a strong emphasis on aligning donor projects with the municipality's strategic priorities, particularly economic development. Project teams here function flexibly, often overcoming gaps in technical documentation by

relying on their experience and practical problem-solving skills. While limited by the lack of an updated urban plan, the municipality effectively prioritizes projects that can enhance infrastructure and cultural assets, showing adaptability in project management.

- **Bogovinje:** The Sector for Public Affairs takes the lead role in coordinating donor-funded initiatives, working closely with communities, donors, and municipal departments. Their approach stresses careful needs assessment, involving local stakeholders in early planning phases. A notable strength lies in their communication practices, facilitating transparent information flow and feedback loops between all parties involved. Bogovinje maintains active partnerships with international donors such as the EU Delegation, UNDP, and Swiss Cooperation, which provide a broad resource base.
- **Brvenica:** The municipal office is responsible for identifying projects, drafting proposals, securing donor financing, and implementing activities, with a special focus on collaboration with NGOs and civil society. Brvenica's staff highlights the importance of continuous dialogue with donors and transparent communication channels to ensure smooth project execution. Given its rural character, the municipality faces staffing limitations, making multitasking common among project managers.
- **Tetovo:** Tetovo stands out for its institutionalized project management under the Department for Local Economic Development. The municipality actively participates in national and EU-funded programs such as IPA and URBACT. The department's capacity includes co-financing management, donor liaison, and detailed project monitoring and reporting. Tetovo benefits from relatively larger staff and budget resources, enabling more complex and cross-border projects, including partnerships with Kosovo and Albania.
- **Tearce:** The LED office has managed donor projects since 2005, overseeing the full project cycle from needs assessment to final monitoring. Tearce's approach is characterized by strategic alignment with municipal development plans and cross-sector collaboration. A critical role is played by the LED office head who coordinates internal departments and external partners, ensuring timely delivery and adherence to donor requirements. Despite limited resources, Tearce has successfully implemented a wide range of projects covering infrastructure, environmental protection, and social inclusion.

- **Zhelino:** Municipal officials describe their roles as multifaceted, encompassing strategic planning, community outreach, and donor coordination. Due to limited human resources, staff often juggle multiple responsibilities, including drafting project proposals, facilitating community consultations, and assisting with technical and administrative tasks. Despite these challenges, the municipality benefits from strong leadership support and high levels of community trust, which enhance project acceptance and sustainability. Efforts are underway to improve technical documentation and integrate donor projects into municipal strategic frameworks.
- **Vrapchishte:** The municipality's approach is similarly hands-on, with staff playing a direct role in all stages of project management. Leadership involvement is emphasized as critical to overcoming resource constraints and ensuring project continuity. Vrapchishte focuses on practical coordination with donors, local stakeholders, and other municipalities. Staff capacity remains a challenge, but adaptability and community engagement help mitigate limitations. The municipality has begun investing in staff training and development to improve technical project skills and compliance with donor requirements.

## II. Types and Sectors of Donor-Funded Projects

The Polog region municipalities implement a diverse range of donor-funded projects spanning infrastructure, education, environment, social welfare, and cross-border cooperation, with some common priorities and local variations:

- **Gostivar:** The municipality focuses heavily on education projects (renovation of schools, installation of heating systems), environmental protection initiatives, social policy interventions, flood prevention infrastructure, and enforcement-related projects through the inspectorate. These projects target vulnerable populations and aim at long-term community resilience.
- **Jegunovce:** Infrastructure projects dominate, including road construction and sewage systems, complemented by cultural and social initiatives such as library refurbishments, sports field construction, and school improvements. Environmental projects like river

regulation also feature prominently, emphasizing sustainable management of natural resources.

- **Mavrovo-Rostushe:** Infrastructure remains the largest sector, supplemented by projects supporting cultural heritage, education facilities, and environmental conservation. The municipality's project portfolio balances these sectors, reflecting the need to preserve natural and cultural assets while improving basic infrastructure.
- **Bogovinje:** Projects here include water supply system upgrades, environmental awareness campaigns, and small-scale economic development programs targeting rural communities. Support primarily comes from EU Delegation, UNDP, and Swiss Cooperation, enabling a mix of infrastructural and social projects.
- **Brvenica:** The municipality undertakes school reconstruction, park and public space development, road network improvements, equipment donations for education and health facilities, and disaster preparedness programs. Emphasis is placed on projects that directly improve community well-being and local resilience.
- **Tetovo:** Tetovo's portfolio includes extensive infrastructure projects focusing on road rehabilitation and urban mobility improvements, tourism development initiatives, environmental protection measures, digitalization projects, and active cross-border cooperation with neighboring Kosovo and Albania. The municipality also prioritizes projects enhancing local economic development and innovation.
- **Tearce:** This municipality has implemented over 25 projects covering water and sanitation infrastructure, renewable energy installations, social service enhancements, road improvements, heritage conservation, and waste management programs. Tearce benefits from donor diversity, including EU, USAID, GIZ, and UNDP, allowing a wide scope of interventions.
- **Zhelino:** Projects focus on upgrading basic infrastructure (water supply, sewage systems, street lighting), improving educational facilities, environmental protection programs, and community-led initiatives in energy efficiency and waste management. The municipality has been developing local capacities for implementing energy-saving technologies and raising environmental awareness.

- **Vrapchishte:** Water and sewer infrastructure projects dominate, alongside road rehabilitation and environmental awareness campaigns. The municipality also targets local economic development through rural tourism and agricultural modernization, often partnering with NGOs to enhance community participation and sustainability.

### III. Municipal Participation in Project Cycle Phases

Across all municipalities, involvement spans from early-stage needs identification and proposal drafting to implementation coordination, technical oversight, and monitoring with reporting to donors:

- **Planning:** Most municipalities engage in comprehensive local needs assessments, stakeholder consultations, and drafting of project proposals. Tearce and Tetovo integrate donor projects into their strategic and annual municipal plans, ensuring alignment with long-term development goals. Zhelino and Vrapchishte emphasize community consultations to tailor projects to local priorities.
- **Implementation:** Municipal staff coordinate permitting processes, manage procurement, oversee contractors, and ensure compliance with donor requirements. Many report challenges in timely acquisition of technical documentation, especially in smaller municipalities like Zhelino and Brvenica. Cooperation between departments and external partners is essential for smooth execution.
- **Monitoring:** Regular project progress tracking and financial reporting are conducted, sometimes involving external monitoring agencies. Tetovo applies rigorous national and EU monitoring frameworks. Smaller municipalities often combine formal monitoring with informal on-site supervision by staff, adjusting project activities dynamically to emerging challenges.

#### IV. Institutional Strengths

- **Leadership and Political Will:** Strong mayors and municipal leadership in Gostivar, Tetovo, Zhelino, and Vrapchishte provide decisive support and foster trust among donors and citizens.
- **Community Trust:** In Bogovinje, Zhelino, and Vrapchishte, deep-rooted community engagement strengthens project acceptance and sustainability.
- **Experience and Capacity:** Tetovo and Tearce benefit from experienced technical teams and strategic project management offices. Brvenica and Jegunovce, despite smaller size, maintain solid relationships with donors through transparent and participatory processes.
- **Inter-institutional Cooperation:** Coordination among municipal departments and with NGOs facilitates integrated approaches and resource sharing.

#### V. Challenges and Constraints

- **Human Resource Limitations:** Most municipalities report staff shortages and multitasking pressures, notably in Brvenica, Zhelino, and Vrapchishte, which limit specialization and technical capacity.
- **Technical Documentation:** Many struggle with outdated or incomplete urban plans and lack of detailed technical designs, causing delays (Mavrovo-Rostushe, Zhelino, Tearce).
- **Funding and Co-financing:** Restrictions on municipal co-financing, limited access to certain donor funds, and the impact of legal and political changes create uncertainty and reduce project scope (Tetovo, Tearce).
- **Administrative Bottlenecks:** Bureaucratic procedures, slow procurement, and complex reporting requirements pose significant hurdles.
- **Legal and Regulatory Issues:** Changing national laws and regulations on project implementation and donor contracting complicate compliance (Tearce, Vrapchishte).

## VI. Lessons Learned and Best Practices

- **Early and Ongoing Community Engagement:** Involving citizens from project conception through monitoring improves relevance, transparency, and ownership (Bogovinje, Zhelino, Tearce, Vrapchishte).
- **Capacity Building:** Continuous training and technical assistance are vital, especially in smaller and rural municipalities (Brvenica, Jegunovce, Zhelino).
- **Strategic Integration:** Aligning donor projects with municipal development strategies enhances sustainability and facilitates access to diverse funding sources (Tetovo, Tearce).
- **Clear Communication and Role Definition:** Establishing transparent coordination mechanisms among municipal departments, donors, and partners reduces duplication and enhances efficiency (Bogovinje, Tetovo, Zhelino).
- **Leadership Integrity and Political Neutrality:** Maintaining neutral and transparent project management fosters political stability and citizen trust (Tearce, Zhelino).
- **Flexibility and Adaptability:** Municipalities that adapt to changing conditions and donor requirements, while leveraging long-term partnerships, maximize project impact (Gostivar, Tetovo, Zhelino, Vrapchishte).

### 6.1 Executive Conclusion of the realized interviews

Municipalities in the region play an integral role throughout the project cycle—starting from needs assessment and proposal writing to implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. While in larger municipalities like Tetovo and Gostivar, project management is typically centralized in departments or info centers, smaller and rural municipalities (e.g., Jegunovce, Brvenica, Tearce) often rely on multifunctional staff and close collaboration between sectoral units (more details depicted in Table 3). Most municipalities act as facilitators—linking community needs with donor priorities—and serve as coordinators across internal departments, donors, and civil society.

Over the past two decades, donor-funded projects have spanned a wide range of sectors. Infrastructure remains the most dominant area, particularly in water supply, sewage, and road construction. Education is also a key sector, with investments in school infrastructure, equipment, and kindergartens. Environmental protection and waste management projects are common, especially in Bogovinje, Tetovo, and Tearce. Some municipalities have also benefited from digital transformation, social inclusion initiatives, and cross-border cooperation (notably Tetovo and Tearce). Tearce stands out with over 25 completed or ongoing donor-supported initiatives, covering nearly all local development sectors.

Most municipalities cite interdepartmental cooperation, experienced staff (especially in local economic development), and community trust as institutional strengths. Larger urban municipalities have more experience with EU-funded programs and are better equipped for co-financing and reporting obligations. Rural municipalities compensate for limited human resources by fostering strong relationships with local communities and maintaining flexibility in project coordination. Tearce, for instance, demonstrates strong internal organization, detailed technical documentation, and a culture of proactive stakeholder engagement.

Despite these strengths, several challenges persist. Limited technical and administrative capacities, especially in rural areas, often lead to overburdened staff and fragmented execution. Inadequate or outdated technical project documentation is a common issue that causes implementation delays or increased costs. Urban planning deficiencies (as seen in Mavrovo-Rostushe) hinder timely permit approvals. Budget constraints affect co-financing capabilities across all municipalities. Additionally, frequent changes in national laws, political instability, and donor-specific compliance requirements introduce layers of complexity that municipal teams must continuously navigate.

The Polog region's municipalities exhibit a shared commitment to leveraging donor-funded projects for local development, each adapting their institutional capacities and strategies to local realities. While larger urban centers benefit from more robust administrative structures and

diversified donor portfolios, smaller municipalities compensate with close community ties and flexible management approaches.

The donor-funded project landscape in the Polog region reflects diversity in institutional capacities, project focus, and challenges, balanced by shared strategies and lessons. Larger municipalities like Tetovo and Gostivar show institutionalized project management with greater access to EU and national donor programs, while smaller municipalities—Zhelino, Vrapchishte, Brvenica, and Jegunovce—rely on multifunctional staff, strong community links, and leadership commitment to manage projects effectively despite limited resources.

Infrastructure remains the dominant sector, supplemented by education, environmental protection, social inclusion, and cross-border cooperation. Institutional strengths include leadership engagement, community trust, and interdepartmental collaboration. Persistent challenges include limited staffing, inadequate technical documentation, funding constraints, and bureaucratic complexity.

Persistent challenges in staffing, documentation, co-financing, and regulatory compliance underline the need for targeted capacity development and streamlined administrative procedures. Best practices across municipalities highlight early community engagement, continuous capacity building, clear communication, and leadership integrity as vital to success — such as community participation, strategic project alignment, and transparent communication— provide a strong foundation for improving the effectiveness and sustainability of donor interventions.

Supporting municipalities with tailored technical and administrative assistance would enhance regional equity and unlock greater developmental potential across the entire Polog region and significantly enhance project outcomes and sustainability, helping the entire Polog region leverage donor investments more effectively.

In conclusion, while donor-funded projects play a critical role in addressing local development needs across the Polog region, their success heavily depends on municipal capacity, strategic

vision, community engagement, and sustained cooperation with donors. These findings point to the need for targeted investment in institutional strengthening and technical assistance to ensure that municipalities—especially in rural areas—can fully leverage donor support for long-term impact.

Table 3: Executive Conclusion of the interviews realized

Category	Gostivar	Jegunovce	Mavrovo-Rostushe	Bogovinje	Brvenica	Tetovo	Tearce	Zhelino	Vrapchishte
<b>Role in Projects</b>	Info center coordination, donor liaison	Legal/property issue resolution, local engagement	Strategy-focused, economic dev.	Public affairs sector, coordination	Project planning & implementation	LED Dept., national/EU programs	LED head, project lifecycle coordinator	Strategic planning, community outreach	Hands-on project management, multitasking
<b>Types of Projects</b>	Education, social policy, environment	Water, roads, education, culture	Infrastructure, culture, environment	Water supply, environment, small economic projects	Schools, parks, roads, disaster management	Roads, tourism, environment, digitalization, cross-border	Wide portfolio: water, sanitation, education, heritage	Infrastructure upgrades, education, environment	Water/sewer, road rehab, environment, rural dev.
<b>Participation Phases</b>	Full cycle: planning to monitoring	Full cycle, real-time monitoring	Full cycle, problem-solving	Full cycle: planning, implementation, monitoring	Full cycle: planning to evaluation	Full cycle: planning, implementation, monitoring	Full cycle: idea to monitoring	Full cycle, with stakeholder consultations	Full cycle, adaptive management
<b>Strengths</b>	Strong leadership, experienced staff	Community relations, trusted partner	Adaptive team, problem-solving	Strong stakeholder communication	Experienced team, inter-institutional cooperation	Co-financing experience, donor links	Skilled LED staff, strategic vision	Community trust, leadership, flexibility	Local engagement, leadership support
<b>Challenges</b>	Varying readiness, coordination issues	Staffing shortages, multitasking	No urban plan, activity deviations	Technical gaps, admin bottlenecks	Small staff, workload overload	Funding, legal restrictions, access limits	Legal changes, incomplete docs, budgeting	Staff shortages, documentation issues	Technical capacity, legal complexity,

A total of 34 institutions participated in the survey focused on the implementation, impact, and sustainability of donor-funded projects in the Polog region. These included local, regional and central government units, civil society organizations, international agencies and embassies, and national institutions. The participating institutions are:

1. UNDP (5 representatives)
2. UNOPS
3. Embassy of Switzerland
4. Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning (MOEPP) (2 representatives)
5. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)
6. Territorial Firefighting Unit – Tetovo
7. Protection and Rescue Directorate
8. Association for Democratic Initiatives
9. Center for Education and Development (CED)
10. Municipality of Tetovo
11. Crisis Management Center
12. Frontlogix
13. Polog Planning Region Development Center
14. Foundation Egalite (2 representatives)
15. NGO ETIKA – Gostivar
16. Youth Council of Municipality of Bogovinje
17. ZELS/BNJVL
18. Municipality of Bogovinje
19. Municipality of Tearce
20. Municipality of Vrapčište
21. Municipality of Jegunovce
22. Municipality of Zhelino
23. Municipality of Gostivar
24. Municipality of Mavrovo and Rostushe

25. Municipality of Brvenica
26. MDC Net / BIOM Skopje
27. Sharr Mountain National Park
28. IPA CBC Programme Kosovo – North Macedonia
29. Regional Development Bureau
30. Ministry of Local Self-Government
31. Red Cross – Gostivar
32. CNVP Skopje
33. BIOM Skopje
34. *(One institution did not specify its name.)*

## 6.2. Interpretation of Results

### **Summary of Institutional Participation and Key Findings from the Survey on Donor-Funded Projects in the Polog Region**

The collected responses from local stakeholders in the Polog region present a nuanced and multifaceted view of donor-funded projects. Overall, there is a general sense of satisfaction and recognition of the positive impact these projects have had on communities. However, the feedback also highlights systemic challenges and opportunities for improvement, particularly regarding local ownership, financial sustainability, and coordination between institutions.

Most respondents expressed satisfaction with the implementation of donor-funded initiatives in their municipalities or organizations. Positive feedback centered on the tangible benefits to community well-being and the successful delivery of planned outcomes, especially in areas such as infrastructure, environmental protection, and education. Projects that addressed specific local needs and improved municipal services were particularly praised. Yet, some stakeholders voiced concerns about projects being overly donor-driven with limited input from beneficiaries or local institutions. Delays in implementation and misalignment with evolving community needs

sometimes undermined project effectiveness. Additionally, a recurring worry was the lack of mechanisms to sustain benefits after project completion.

Cooperation and communication with donor organizations were generally described as open and collaborative. Stakeholders appreciated transparent communication channels, the responsiveness of donor staff to emerging challenges, and a shared commitment to project goals. Despite this, there were calls for better coordination among multiple donor agencies to avoid overlaps and inefficiencies. Many respondents stressed the importance of more inclusive planning processes that engage citizens, civil society, and local government from the outset. Simplifying administrative and bureaucratic procedures was another frequently mentioned area for improvement, as complex requirements often delayed progress.

Financial management was viewed positively in terms of transparency and accountability measures introduced by donors. Best practices included clear financial tracking systems, regular budget reviews, and early involvement of finance teams during project planning to ensure compliance and efficiency. Nonetheless, stakeholders identified persistent challenges such as delays in fund disbursement that disrupted timelines, rigid budget structures that hindered adaptability, and a scarcity of local co-financing partners, particularly in economically weaker or rural municipalities. Differences between donor and national financial systems further complicated reporting and compliance efforts.

To strengthen local project management capacity, respondents recommended targeted and ongoing training for municipal staff and project teams, focusing on financial planning, monitoring, and results-based management. They also advocated for peer-to-peer exchanges to share best practices across municipalities and institutions. The assignment or hiring of dedicated project officers within municipalities was suggested to maintain continuity and institutional memory.

When reflecting on ways to improve project implementation in the Polog region, respondents emphasized the need for enhanced inter-institutional coordination at both local and regional levels. Establishing mechanisms for meaningful citizen participation in planning and monitoring

was seen as critical for fostering ownership and sustainability. Greater transparency and accountability—such as regular public reporting on project results—were also deemed essential. Additionally, speeding up project execution to respond more effectively to the dynamic needs of communities was encouraged. Integrating awareness-raising and educational components into projects was highlighted as a way to boost public understanding and engagement.

Further insights underscored the importance of ensuring local communities play a meaningful role throughout both project design and implementation to better address genuine needs and priorities. Flexibility within project plans was recommended to allow for adaptive management in response to changing conditions. Incorporating post-project support mechanisms—such as follow-up evaluations, maintenance funding, and capacity-building initiatives—was seen as vital for promoting sustainability. Respondents advocated for a longer-term strategic approach that fosters regional development rather than isolated, one-off interventions.

One stakeholder noted that some projects missed the opportunity to include critical awareness and behavior-change elements, particularly in sectors like waste management and environmental protection. Another emphasized the need for stronger synergy between local government, donors, and civil society organizations, suggesting that such partnerships would yield more resilient and impactful outcomes.

In conclusion, the feedback reflects the tangible successes of donor-funded projects in improving community well-being while simultaneously revealing critical areas needing attention—especially in sustainability, coordination, financial flexibility, and local capacity development. These insights provide a valuable roadmap for enhancing the effectiveness, inclusiveness, and lasting impact of future donor initiatives in the Polog region.

In the section below are presented in details the answers of each question of the survey:

On the question for the experience in project management, the data on years of experience in project management reveals that most respondents possess substantial professional backgrounds in this field. Out of a total of 41 participants, none reported having less than one

year of experience, indicating that all respondents have at least some familiarity with project management practices.

A small portion, approximately 7.3%, reported having between one to three years of experience, suggesting they are still in the early stages of building their project management careers. A larger group, comprising 19.5% of the respondents, indicated they have between four to seven years of experience, placing them in the mid-career range.

Most notably, 73.2% of respondents—nearly three out of every four—reported having more than eight years of experience in project management. This overwhelming majority highlights a highly experienced respondent pool, suggesting a strong foundation of expertise and long-term engagement in managing donor-funded or development-oriented projects. (see Figure 6).

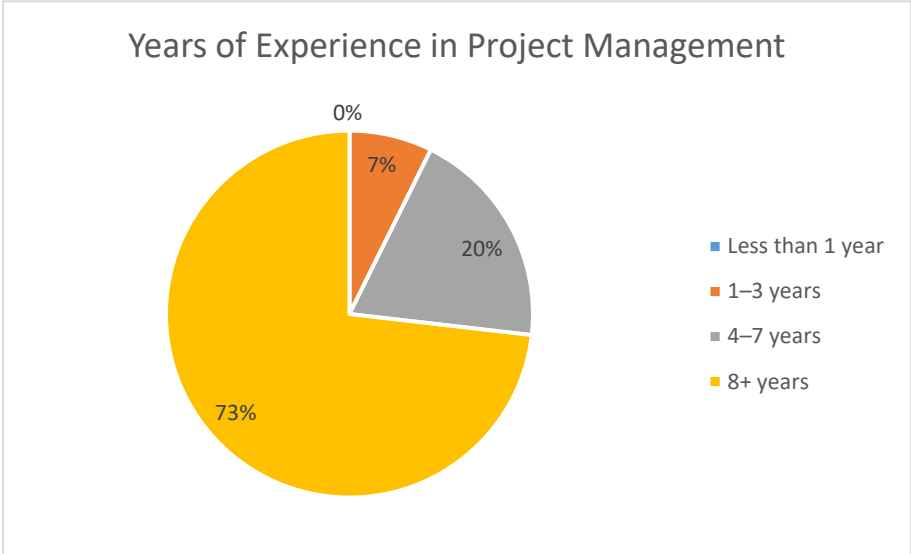


Figure 6: Years of experience in Project Management

The majority of surveyed institutions on the question Number of Donor-Funded Projects Your Organization Has Implemented in the Polog Region (in the last 20 years) reported having implemented a significant number of donor-funded projects in the Polog region within the past two decades. Responses varied considerably, ranging from single project engagements to well over 100 projects. Several respondents specified implementing more than 30 or even more than 40 projects, indicating long-term and consistent donor engagement in the region. A notable

number of organizations indicated between 10 and 30 projects, while a few mentioned modest involvement with only 1 to 6 projects.

At least one institution clarified that, although it did not directly implement projects, it supported or facilitated over 30 donor-funded initiatives. Only one respondent stated that no donor-funded projects had been implemented in Polog through their organization. Overall, the data reflects a strong presence of donor activity across various sectors in the Polog region, though the scale and frequency of implementation varies significantly between organizations.

The responses to the question “Do you use any project management software?” indicate that the use of such tools is relatively limited among participants. Out of 41 respondents, only 9 individuals (22%) reported that they currently use project management software. In contrast, a significant majority of 32 respondents (78%) indicated that they do not use any project management tools in their work.

This suggests that while a small portion of respondents are integrating digital tools into their project management practices, the majority still rely on traditional or manual methods. The low adoption rate may point to limited access to resources, lack of training, or organizational preferences that do not prioritize digital project management solutions. (see Figure 7).

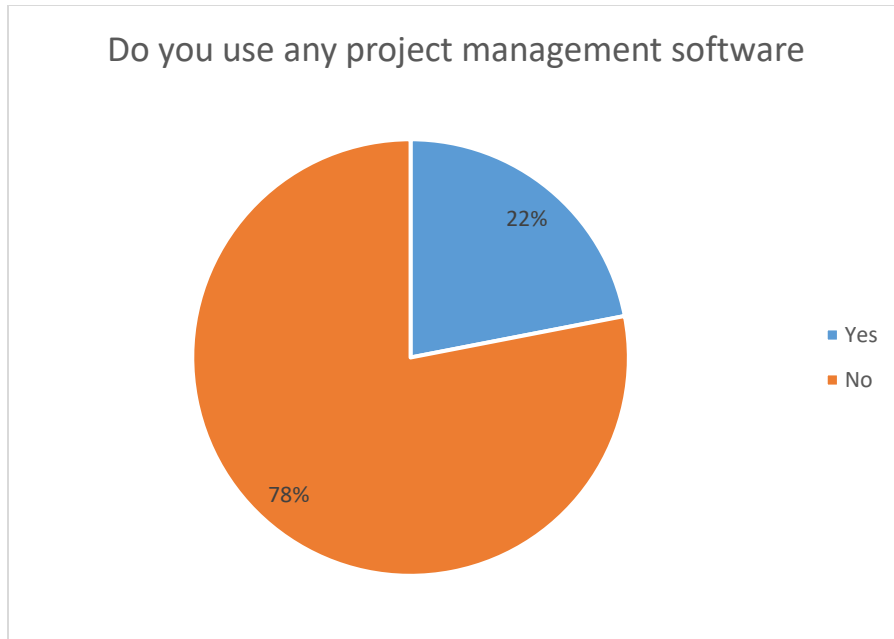


Figure 7: Use of project management software

The analysis of donor types involved in project implementation reveals a diverse range of contributors. The European Union (EU) stands out as the most frequently cited donor, accounting for 24% of the responses. Close behind, the United Nations (UN) represents 22%, indicating a strong presence in donor-funded initiatives.

National funds contribute significantly as well, with a share of 20%, reflecting notable government involvement in project financing. Bilateral donors are also prominently featured, making up 17% of the total, suggesting the importance of country-to-country support mechanisms.

International NGOs account for 12%, emphasizing the role of non-governmental organizations in providing technical and financial assistance. Meanwhile, other donors such as USAID, SDC, Development Banks, PONT each represent 1% respectively, showing that while present, their contribution is relatively minimal in comparison.

This distribution underscores the dominant role of multilateral institutions (EU and UN), followed by national and bilateral support, in shaping the donor landscape for development projects (see Figure 8)

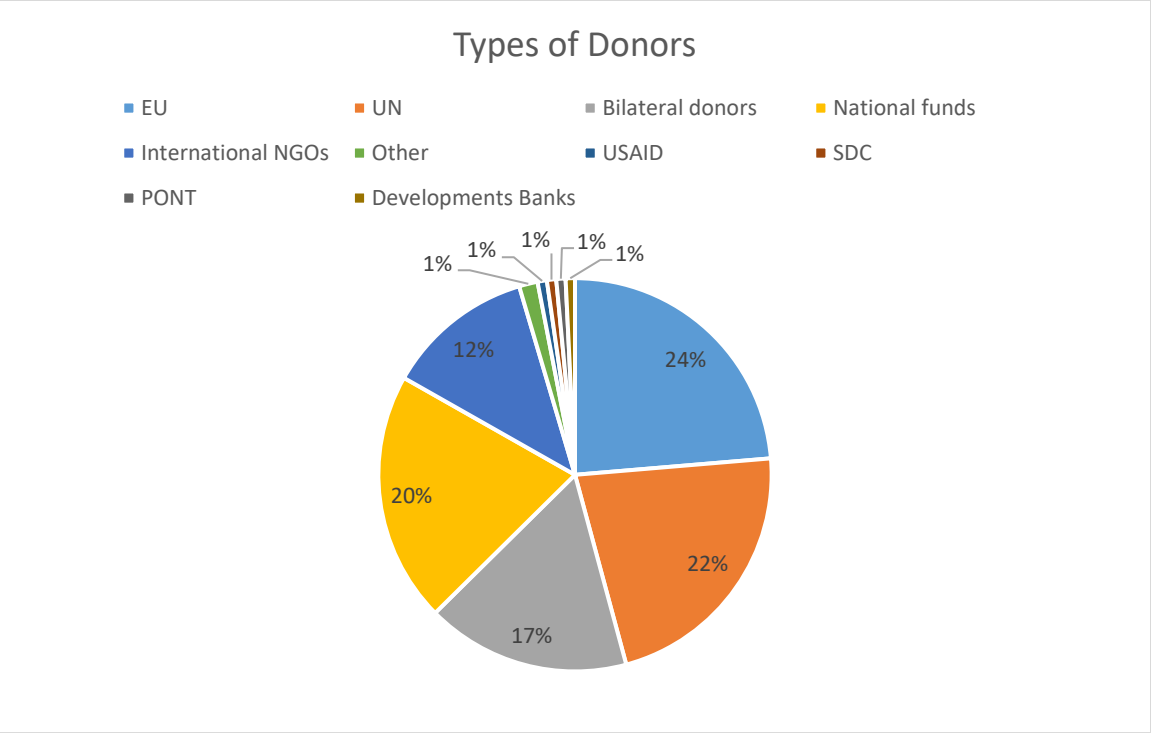


Figure 8. Types of Donors

The data shows that the Environment sector is the most frequently targeted, receiving 22% of project focus. This is closely followed by Local Economic Development at 20% and Infrastructure with 19%, indicating strong donor interest in sustainable development, economic resilience, and public service enhancement.

Youth and social inclusion also receives significant attention, comprising 15% of the project focus, reflecting a commitment to inclusive community development. Education projects account for 14%, while Health is notably less emphasized at 7%.

Smaller proportions (1% each) are directed toward other unspecified or niche sectors, suggesting limited but diverse project engagements outside the primary focus areas.

Overall, the chart demonstrates that donor-funded projects in the surveyed area prioritize environmental sustainability, economic growth, and infrastructure, with complementary efforts in youth engagement and education. Health appears to be a relatively lower priority, indicating

potential gaps or the presence of separate funding channels for health-related initiatives (see Figure 9).

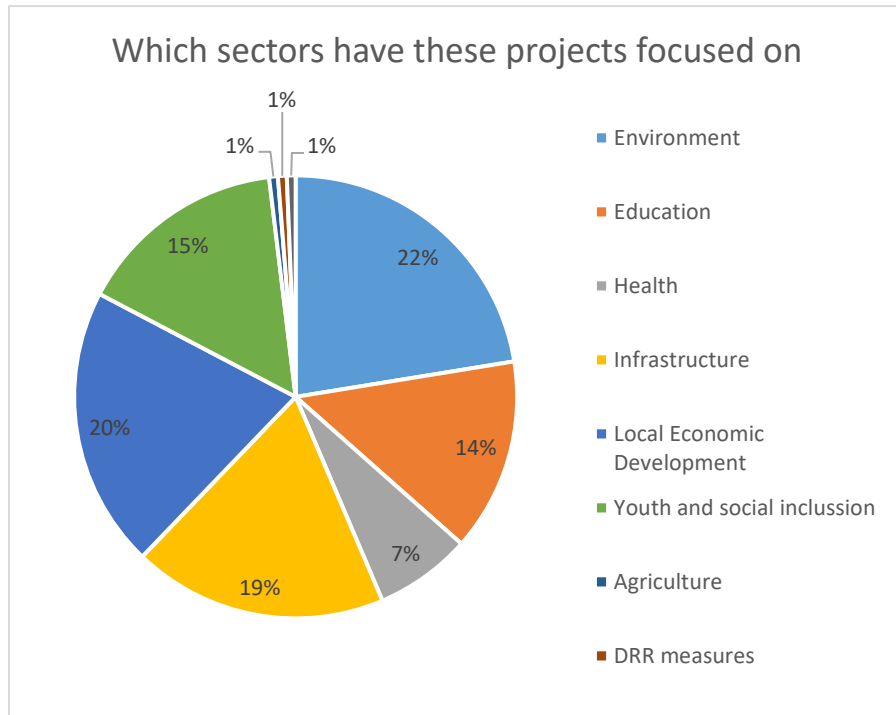


Figure 9: Sectors of the projects

The pie chart titled "Project Management Methodology Used" illustrates the types of methodologies applied in managing donor-funded projects.

The data indicates that Result-Based Management (RBM) is the most widely adopted approach, used in 37% of the projects. This is closely followed by the Logical Framework Approach (Log-Frame) at 36%, reflecting a strong preference for structured, results-oriented methodologies that emphasize planning, monitoring, and accountability.

Agile/Adaptive Approaches account for 13%, suggesting a growing but still limited use of flexible and iterative project management styles that allow for responsiveness to changing conditions. Meanwhile, 10% of respondents reported using no particular methodology, which could indicate either limited capacity or informal practices in some project settings.

Only 4% indicated using Other methodologies, suggesting that alternative or hybrid frameworks are rarely employed.

Overall, the chart demonstrates that traditional, structured methodologies like RBM and Log-Frame dominate project implementation practices, though there is some emerging openness to adaptive techniques. The presence of projects without any defined methodology may point to capacity-building needs in certain institutions or localities (see Figure 10).

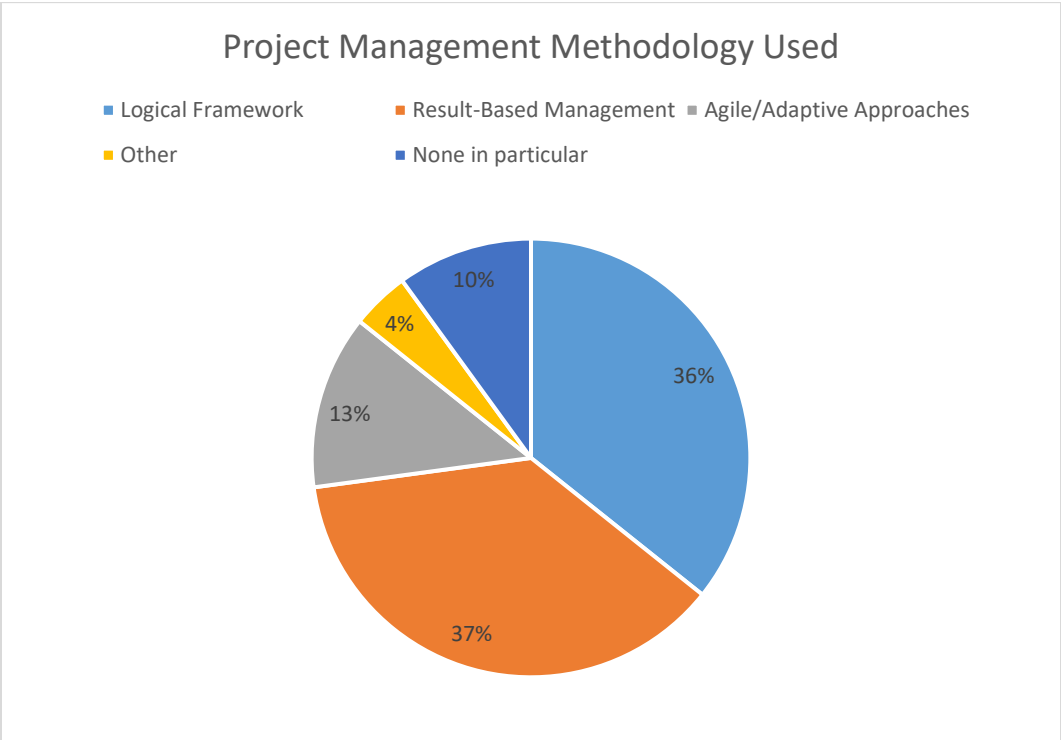


Figure 10: Project management methodology

The chart of the question “How many staff members from your municipality/organization have been involved in the implementation of donor-funded projects?” illustrates the distribution of staff involvement across various ranges.

The largest segment, comprising 34%, reported that 3 to 7 staff members had participated in implementing donor-funded projects. This suggests a moderate level of institutional engagement in such initiatives.

Following that, 25% indicated that more than 10 staff members were involved, reflecting a significant organizational commitment and possibly greater experience in handling donor-funded activities.

23% of respondents reported a lower level of involvement, with only 1 to 3 staff members engaged, pointing to limited internal capacity or sporadic project participation.

A smaller portion, 11%, stated that 8 to 10 staff members had been involved, while 7% were not sure, indicating either a lack of documentation or knowledge gaps about internal staffing in relation to donor-funded work.

Overall, the data suggests that while many municipalities and organizations have a modest level of staff engagement in donor projects, there is a notable portion with substantial participation, reflecting varied institutional capacities and levels of experience (see Figure 11).

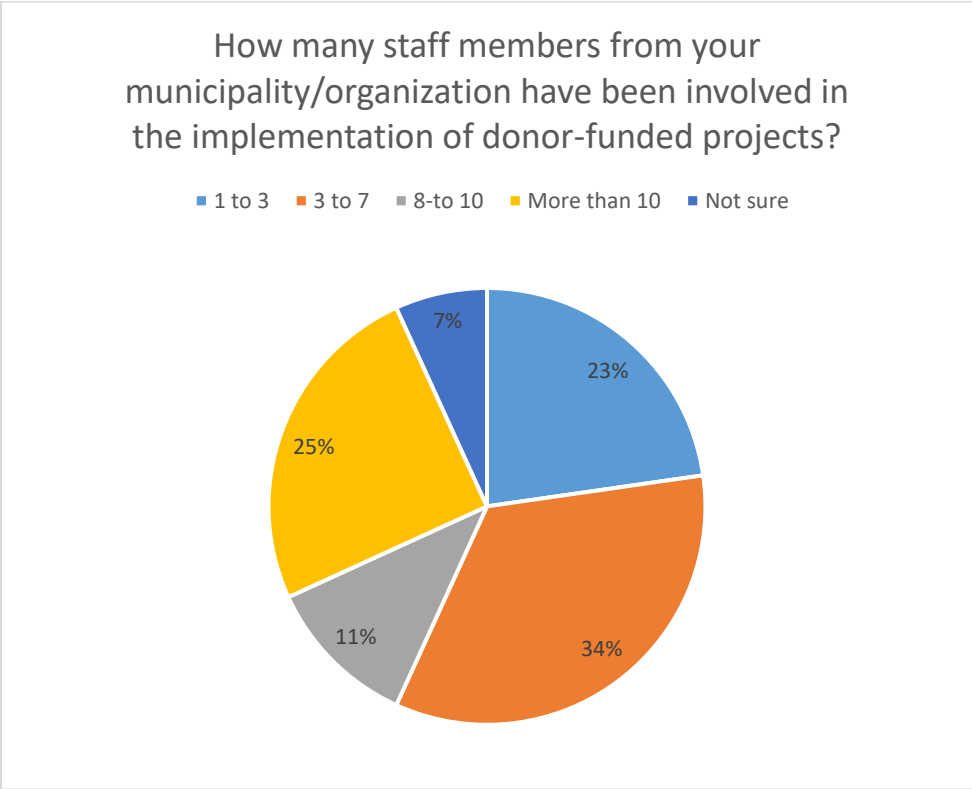


Figure 11: Staff members involved in the implementation of donor-funded projects

The figure below (Figure 12) “How often do you or your team receive training in project management?” reveals a strong trend toward infrequent training practices among respondents.

A dominant 76% reported receiving training occasionally, indicating that while training does happen, it is irregular and likely not part of a structured capacity-building plan.

Only 18% of respondents stated they receive training more than once per year, suggesting a smaller group benefits from consistent professional development in project management.

Meanwhile, 4% said they receive training annually, and a minimal 2% indicated they never receive any training in this area.

These findings highlight a need for more systematic and frequent training efforts to build and sustain project management competencies within teams, especially given the complexity of managing donor-funded initiatives.

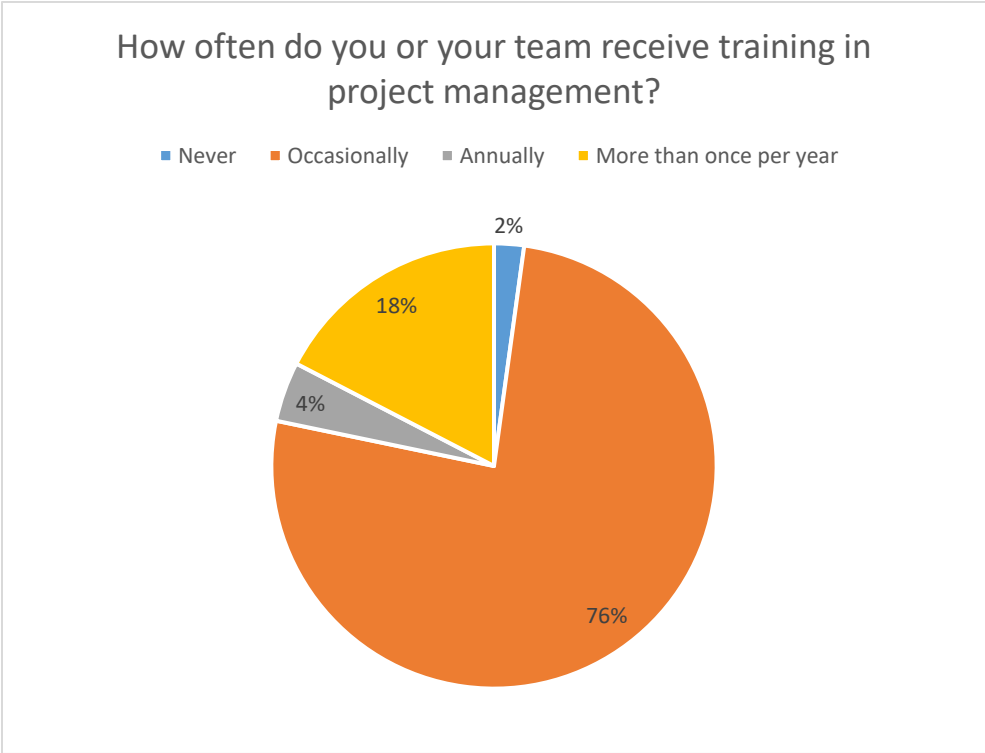


Figure 12: Received training in project management

The pie chart titled "Do you use any project management software?" illustrates the responses of participants regarding their use of project management tools. According to the chart:

- 78% of respondents reported that they do not use any project management software.
- Only 22% indicated that they do use such software.

This suggests that a significant majority of participants rely on alternative methods or manual processes for managing their projects, highlighting a potential area for capacity building or digital tool integration in project workflows (see Figure 13).

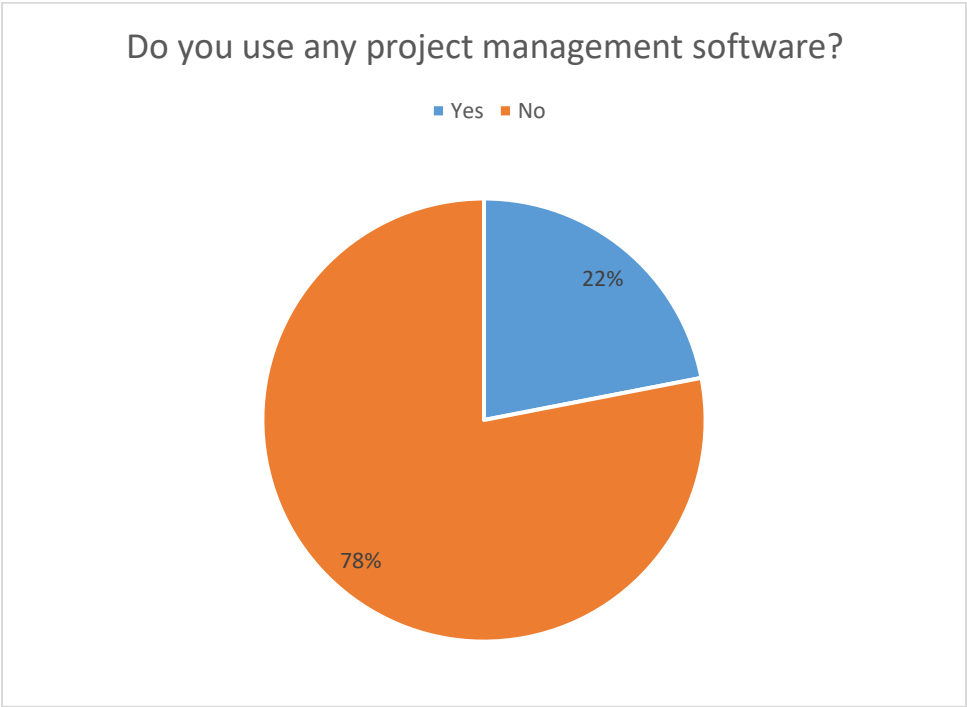


Figure 13: Use of project management software

The chart below (Figure 14) presents a breakdown of roles involved in monitoring and evaluation (M&E) processes. The data reveals the following:

- 48% of respondents stated that internal project staff are typically responsible for M&E activities.
- 31% reported that donor representatives play this role.
- 21% indicated reliance on external consultants.

- 0% selected the "Other" category, suggesting no significant deviation from the listed options.

This distribution shows that nearly half of the organizations prefer internal oversight for M&E functions, while a notable portion also relies on donor oversight and external expertise. The absence of responses in the "Other" category suggests a clear preference for conventional responsibility structures.

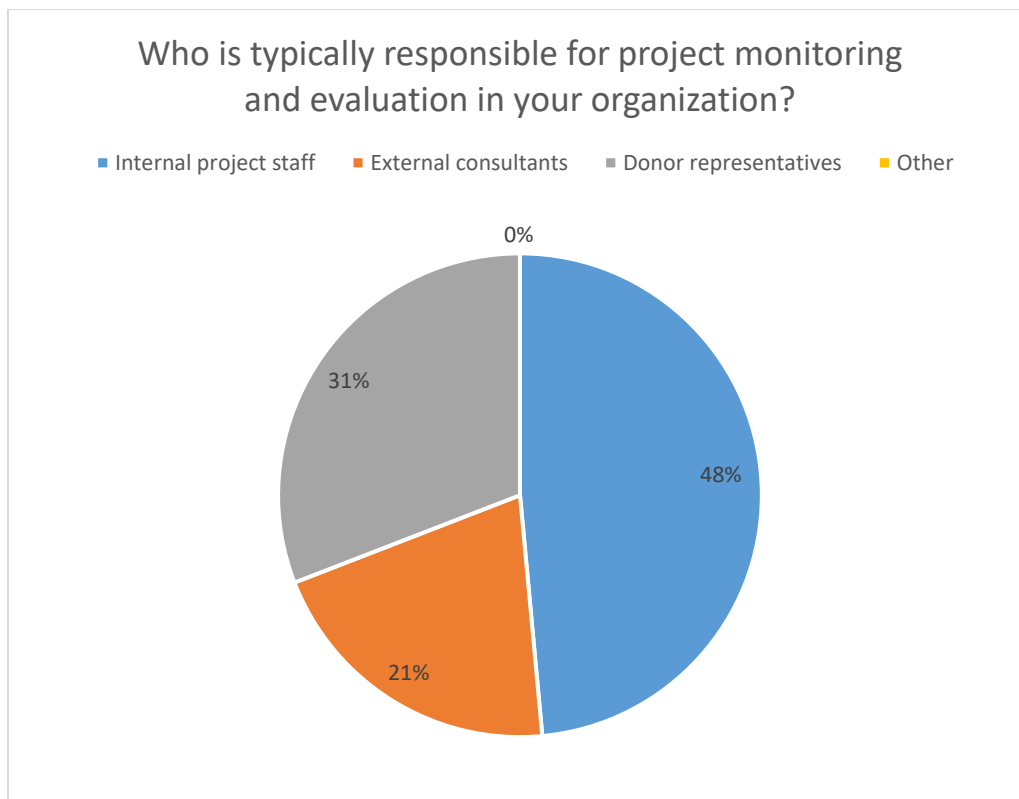


Figure 14: Project monitoring and evaluation

The pie chart titled "What are the most common challenges you face in donor-funded project implementation?" (Figure 15) highlights a range of obstacles encountered by organizations during project execution. The responses are distributed as follows:

- Bureaucratic hurdles were cited as the most common challenge, reported by 18% of respondents.

- Lack of stakeholder cooperation (17%) and insufficient staff capacity (16%) also ranked high among challenges.
- Delays in implementation and political interference each accounted for 14%.
- Communication barriers were noted by 11% of participants.
- Inadequate funding was identified by 9% as a key issue.
- A negligible 1% of responses fell into other unspecified categories.

This distribution suggests that procedural and institutional issues (bureaucratic delays, staffing, stakeholder cooperation) are more pressing than purely financial concerns in the context of donor-funded project implementation. It also indicates that resolving systemic and human capacity issues may be critical to improving project outcomes.

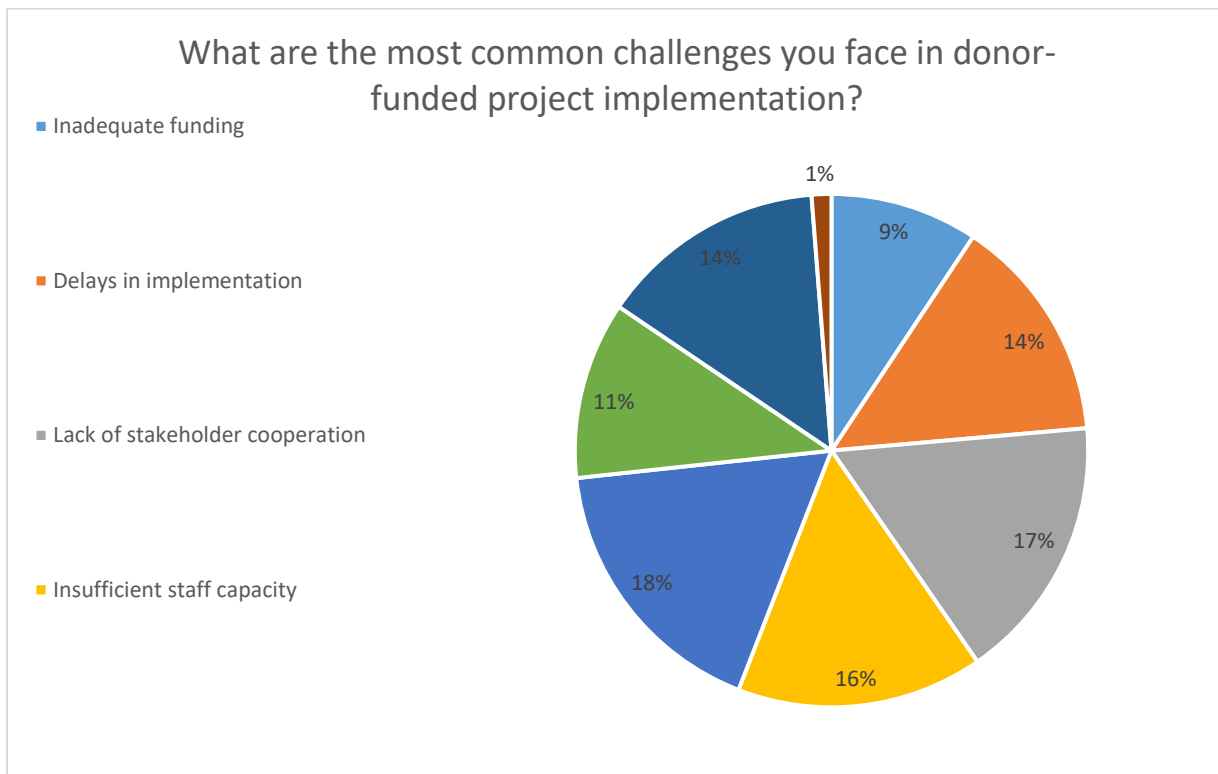


Figure 15: Challenges in donor funded project implementation

This chart illustrates the key factors that contribute to successful project implementation, based on stakeholder perceptions. Among the identified factors, clear project goals and planning stand

out as the most significant, accounting for 20%. This indicates that a well-structured and clearly defined plan is considered essential for guiding project activities and ensuring effective execution.

Closely following is strong local stakeholder engagement at 19%, reflecting the importance of involving local actors, communities, and beneficiaries in all phases of the project. Their active participation helps build trust, relevance, and sustainability.

Competent and trained project staff represent 16% of the responses, emphasizing that skilled and knowledgeable personnel are fundamental to managing and delivering project outcomes effectively. Adequate funding and resource allocation, which makes up 15%, is also viewed as a crucial factor, as even the best-planned projects require sufficient resources to succeed.

Effective monitoring and evaluation and donor flexibility and support each account for 11%, highlighting the need for regular tracking of progress and adaptive donor approaches to address unforeseen challenges or opportunities during implementation.

Lastly, community ownership, although rated lowest at 8%, remains an important element. When communities feel a sense of responsibility and connection to a project, they are more likely to support and sustain it beyond its initial implementation phase.

In conclusion, successful project implementation is seen as the result of a combination of strategic planning, inclusive participation, adequate resources, skilled teams, adaptive support, and community involvement (see Figure 16).

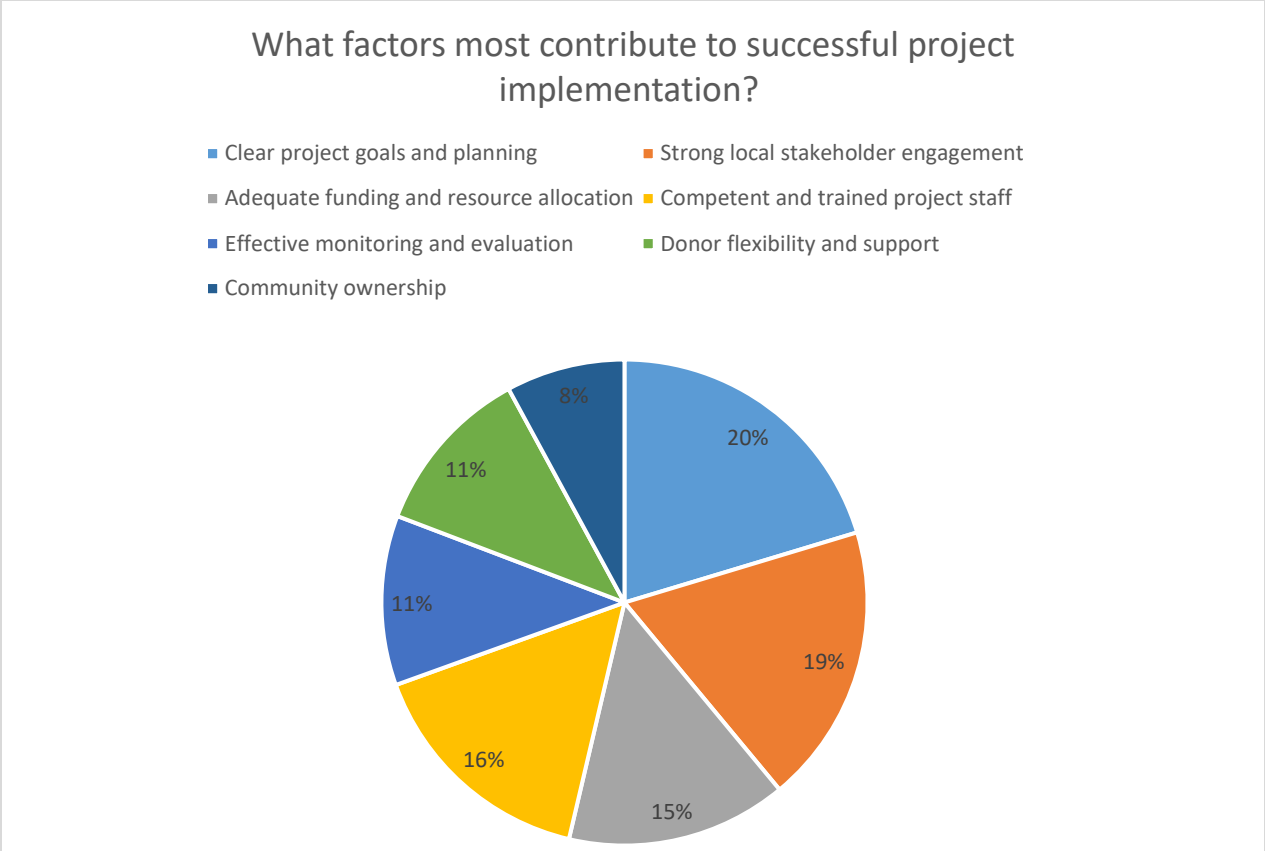


Figure 16: Factors to successful implementation

The pie chart titled “How could project implementation in the Polog region be improved?” presents respondents' views on the most needed improvements to enhance the effectiveness of project implementation in the region.

The highest percentage (20%) is attributed to better coordination between local institutions, indicating that collaboration and communication among municipalities, agencies, and stakeholders are viewed as the most critical area for improvement.

Capacity-building for local staff follows with 18%, reflecting a strong demand for training and skill development to improve the efficiency and professionalism of those involved in project execution.

Greater community involvement in planning accounts for 17%, showing that participatory planning is seen as key to ensuring that projects address real needs and gain local support.

Both improved monitoring systems and better donor-local alignment of priorities are tied at 16%, highlighting the need for stronger evaluation mechanisms and better synchronization between donor strategies and local development goals.

Finally, increased transparency and accountability is noted by 13% of respondents, suggesting that while important, this aspect is slightly less prioritized compared to the others, though still relevant to improving project outcomes.

In summary, the chart suggests that enhancing coordination, strengthening local capacities, involving communities, and improving monitoring and alignment with donors are all essential to improving project implementation in the Polog region (see Figure 17).

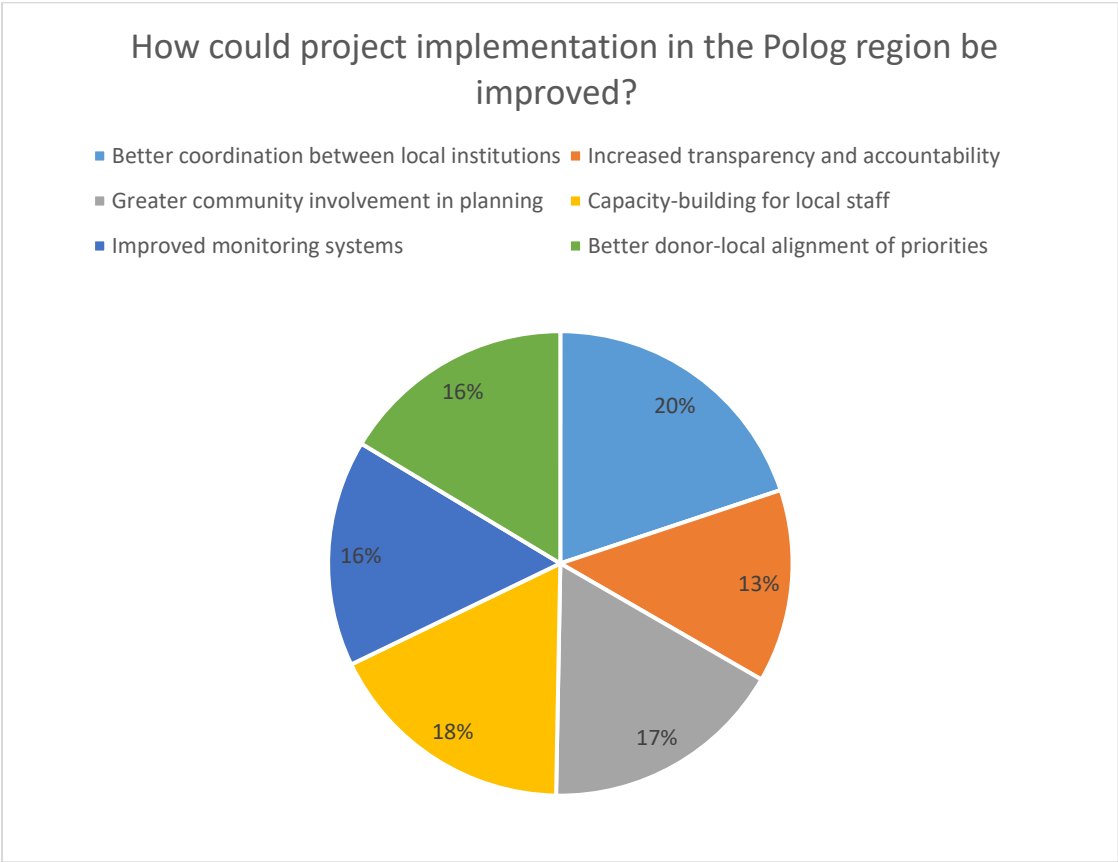


Figure 17: How can be improved project implementation

The pie chart titled “Suggestions for strengthening local project management capacity” presents various strategies recommended for enhancing the capabilities of local stakeholders in managing projects effectively.

Two suggestions emerged as the most prominent, each accounting for 20% of responses:

- Regular training/workshops, highlighting the need for continuous professional development;
- Creation of local project support units, reflecting the importance of having dedicated structures at the local level to support project implementation.

Following closely, Mentorship/partnerships with experienced organizations was suggested by 18% of respondents, emphasizing the value of learning from more established actors.

Two strategies—Peer-learning and knowledge exchange and Use of digital tools for planning and monitoring—were each selected by 15%, pointing to the need for improved collaboration and technology integration.

Lastly, Establishment of regional forums or working groups received 12%, suggesting some interest in regional cooperation, though to a lesser degree compared to other measures.

Overall, the chart reflects a balanced recognition of both capacity-building (training, mentorship) and structural support (local units, digital tools) as vital to strengthening project management at the local level (see Figure 18).

## Suggestions for strengthening local project management capacity

- Regular training/workshops
- Peer-learning and knowledge exchange
- Creation of local project support units
- Use of digital tools for planning and monitoring
- Mentorship/partnerships with experienced organizations
- Establishment of regional forums or working groups

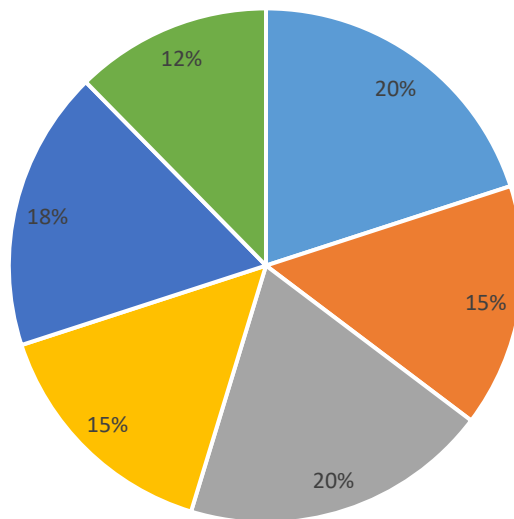


Figure 18: Suggestions for strengthening local project management capacity

The pie chart titled “How satisfied are you with the overall implementation of donor-funded projects in your municipality/organization?” provides insight into stakeholder perceptions regarding project outcomes and execution quality.

The majority of respondents, 42%, indicated they are satisfied with the implementation of donor-funded projects, suggesting that most projects are meeting expectations in terms of delivery and impact.

A notable 35% reported being very satisfied, reflecting a high level of approval and possibly indicating strong coordination, effective outcomes, or well-targeted interventions in several areas.

18% of respondents selected neutral, showing a moderate level of satisfaction or uncertainty—potentially signaling mixed experiences or a lack of sufficient information.

A smaller portion, 5%, expressed dissatisfaction, while 0% reported being very dissatisfied, suggesting that serious concerns are minimal or isolated.

In summary, the chart reflects an overall positive sentiment toward the implementation of donor-funded projects at the municipal or organizational level, with over three-quarters of respondents expressing satisfaction or high satisfaction (see Figure 19).

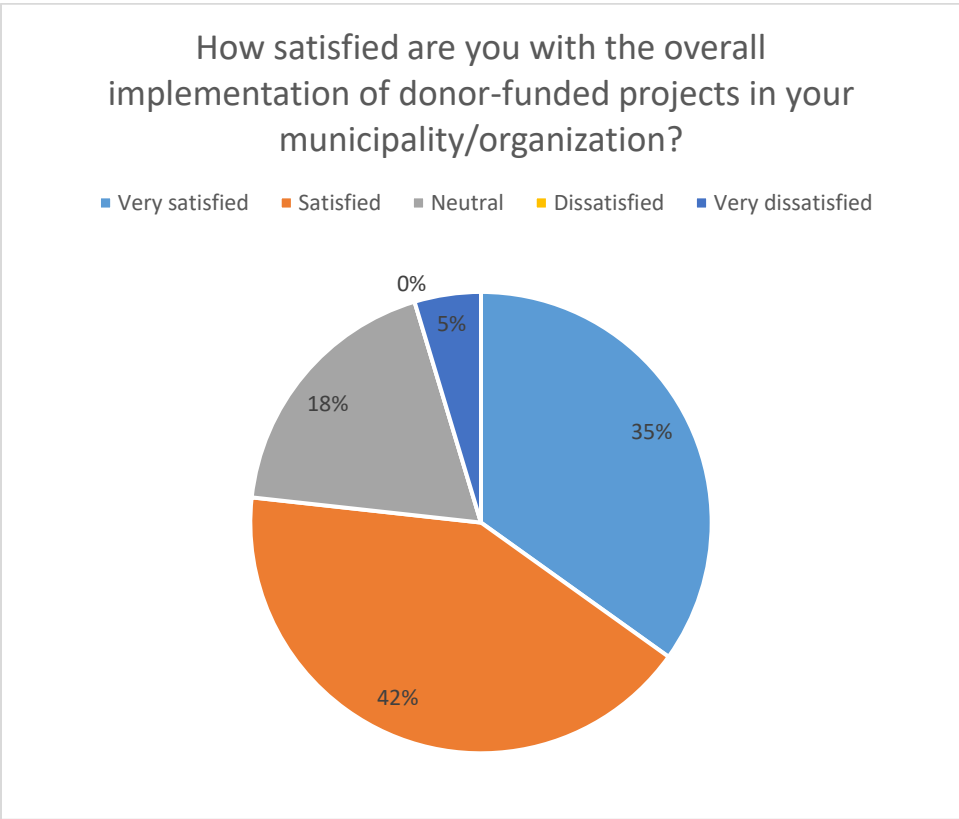


Figure 19: Satisfaction from implementation of donor funded project

The chart below (Figure 20) illustrates respondents' levels of satisfaction with the financial management and transparency in donor-funded projects. The majority of respondents, 43%, indicated that they are satisfied, while 33% reported being very satisfied. A smaller portion, 22%,

remained neutral, and a very minimal share of respondents expressed dissatisfaction (2%). Notably, no respondents reported being very dissatisfied.

Overall, the results reflect a generally positive perception, with more than three-quarters (76%) expressing satisfaction with financial management and transparency practices in donor-funded projects.

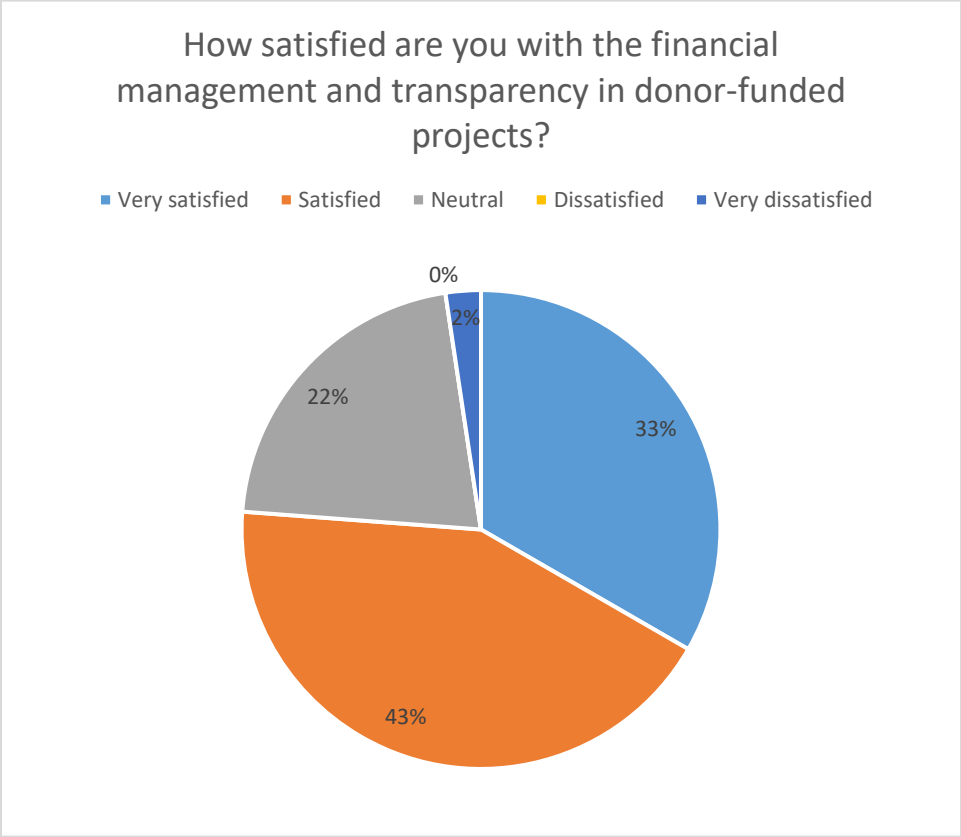


Figure 20: Satisfaction from financial management transparency in donor funded projects

The pie chart presents respondents' satisfaction levels regarding cooperation and communication with donor organizations during project implementation. Nearly half of the respondents (49%) reported being satisfied, while 35% expressed being very satisfied, indicating a strong overall positive experience. Additionally, 16% of respondents remained neutral, and notably, there were no reports of dissatisfaction or strong dissatisfaction.

These results suggest that communication and cooperation with donor organizations are perceived as highly effective by the vast majority of respondents (84% combined satisfaction), reflecting a solid foundation for successful project collaboration (see Figure 21).

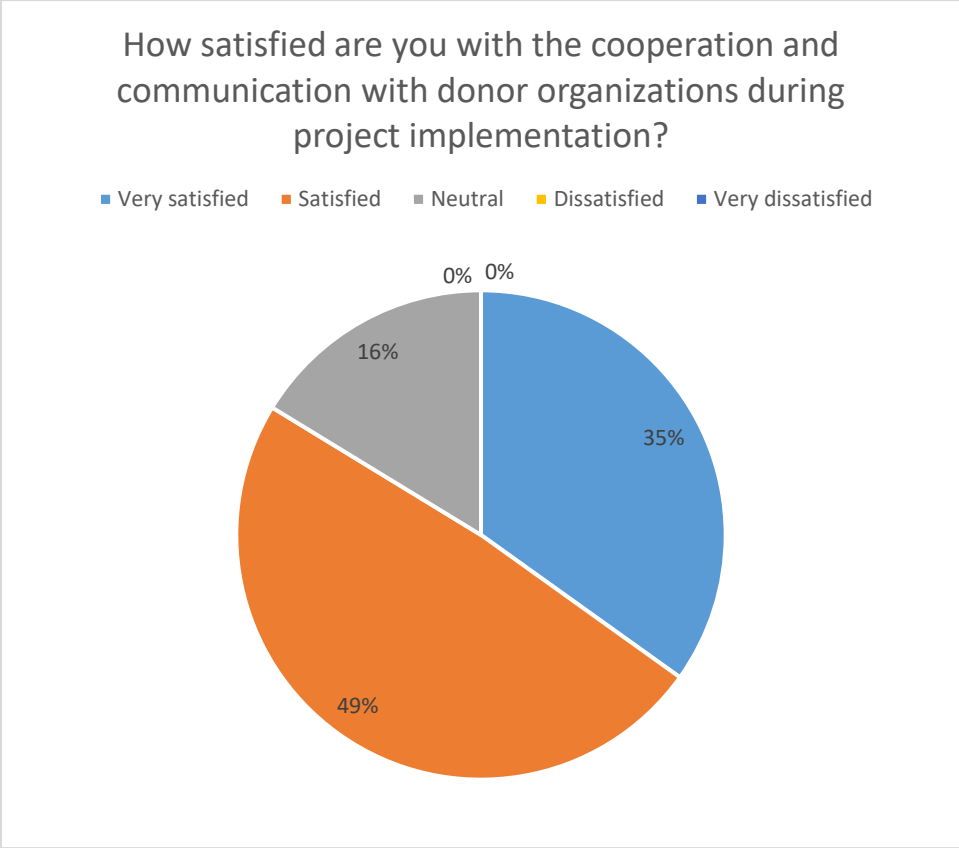


Figure 21: Satisfaction of the cooperation and communication with donor organization during project implementation

Related to question No. 20 What aspects of the cooperation have worked well, and where is there room for improvement most respondents agreed that cooperation with donors has been positive, especially in terms of open communication, technical support, and flexibility during implementation. Clear coordination, shared goals, and mutual respect also contributed to effective partnerships.

However, several areas for improvement were noted. These include the need for simpler administrative procedures, stronger involvement of local communities, and better sustainability

planning. Some also highlighted coordination gaps, limited staff capacity, and the importance of informing beneficiaries more effectively.

In general, while collaboration has worked well, there is room to improve efficiency, inclusiveness, and long-term impact.

On the answers of the question No. 21 many respondents on financial-related challenges and best practices reported delays in fund disbursement, lack of co-financing, and price fluctuations as the most common financial challenges. Complex procurement rules and budget inflexibility also posed obstacles, especially for local institutions with limited capacity.

On the positive side, best practices included transparent financial reporting, regular budget reviews, early financial planning, and involving finance teams from the start. Some also highlighted sub-granting schemes, joint planning with donors, and the use of risk margins in budgeting as effective tools for managing financial risks.

On the answers of the question No. 22 Respondents emphasized that early involvement of local communities and beneficiaries in project planning is key to ensuring ownership and long-term sustainability. Challenges include limited local capacities, delayed project implementation, and lack of awareness campaigns, which reduce the impact of donor interventions.

Best practices noted include strong coordination with municipalities and civil society, community engagement, and adaptability to local needs. Several called for more regional collaboration, increased financial support, and investment in local staff and youth to improve implementation and ensure lasting results.

## 7. Chapter VII. Conclusion and Recommendations

### 7.1. Summary of Findings

This research has explored the donor-funded project management practices and challenges in the Polog region of North Macedonia. Through a comprehensive analysis of various donor-funded initiatives, the study has highlighted the critical factors influencing the success and sustainability of these projects. By examining the practices of local project managers, stakeholders, and donor organizations, the research provides valuable insights into both the strengths and weaknesses inherent in the management of donor-funded projects in the region.

The findings suggest that while donor-funded projects play a crucial role in regional development, they face numerous challenges that impact their effectiveness. Issues such as coordination difficulties between stakeholders, lack of sufficient local capacity, and political and socio-economic barriers have been identified as significant obstacles to the successful implementation of these projects. Furthermore, the sustainability of these initiatives remains a major concern, as many projects struggle to maintain their impact after the donor funding ends.

One of the key challenges observed in the Polog region is the insufficient alignment between donor expectations and local realities. Donors often design projects based on global standards that do not always take into account the unique political, cultural, and economic conditions of the region. This misalignment leads to inefficiencies and, in some cases, project failure. Additionally, resource management and financial accountability continue to be persistent challenges, with local institutions struggling to effectively monitor and manage donor funds.

Despite these challenges, the research also highlights the efforts of local project managers and stakeholders in adapting to the constraints they face. Successful projects often involve strong stakeholder collaboration, local ownership, and a clear focus on addressing the region's most pressing development needs. Furthermore, the involvement of local communities in project

planning and implementation has proven to be a critical factor in ensuring the long-term sustainability of donor-funded projects.

## 7.2. Recommendations for Improving Project Management

Based on the identified challenges and observed project management practices in the Polog region, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the effectiveness, sustainability, and impact of future donor-funded interventions:

### 1. Enhance Local Ownership and Participation

One of the critical success factors for donor-funded projects is the genuine involvement of local stakeholders throughout the project cycle. In the Polog region, this requires:

- Inclusive project design: Local government units, civil society organizations, and beneficiary groups should be actively involved during the planning and design stages to ensure alignment with community needs and priorities.
- Capacity building: Strengthening the institutional and technical capacities of local authorities and community actors will enable more effective participation and project sustainability.
- Participatory approaches: Applying tools such as community consultations, public hearings, and participatory rural appraisal methods can improve transparency and relevance.

### 2. Improve Donor Coordination and Institutional Synergy

Fragmentation of donor activities and limited coordination with national and local institutions have led to inefficiencies and duplication of efforts.

- Establish coordination mechanisms: A regional coordination platform involving donors, municipalities, and central government representatives can ensure alignment, information sharing, and resource optimization.

- Create a shared knowledge base: Developing a centralized database of projects, results, and lessons learned would contribute to institutional memory and improve strategic planning.

### **3. Prioritize Sustainability and Exit Strategies**

Donor projects often face challenges in maintaining results once external funding ends. To address this:

- Integrate sustainability measures: Projects should include clear exit strategies and sustainability plans, such as institutional embedding, local financing mechanisms, or public-private partnerships.
- Encourage local resource mobilization: Support for local economic development initiatives can empower communities to sustain project outcomes independently.

### **4. Promote Transparency and Accountability**

To enhance trust and efficiency in project implementation:

- Institutionalize community oversight: Local monitoring committees or citizen review panels can be established to oversee implementation and spending.
- Use digital platforms for transparency: Public dashboards displaying project timelines, budgets, and progress indicators can promote accountability and community engagement.

### **5. Address Context-Specific Needs and Challenges**

Given the socio-economic and geographic diversity of the Polog region, projects should be tailored to local realities:

- Target marginalized groups: Special attention should be given to rural populations, women, youth, and ethnic minorities through targeted outreach and inclusive program design.
- Invest in enabling infrastructure: Projects should consider addressing structural issues such as poor road connectivity and limited digital access, which hinder participation and impact.

## **6. Mainstream Cross-Cutting Priorities**

Donor projects should integrate themes such as:

- Gender equality: Ensure gender-sensitive indicators, promote the participation of women in decision-making, and collect gender-disaggregated data to assess impact.
- Environmental sustainability: Environmental safeguards and climate resilience measures should be standard components of infrastructure and agricultural projects.

## **7. Scale Up Proven Practices and Embrace Adaptive Management**

Finally, future projects should:

- Replicate successful models: Build on pilot initiatives that demonstrated strong results, adapting them to other municipalities or sectors.
- Apply flexible and responsive approaches: Adaptive management practices allow project teams to respond to evolving local conditions, needs, or policy changes in real time.

### **7.3 Future Research Directions**

This study has provided a solid foundation for understanding the challenges and practices associated with donor-funded projects in the Polog region. However, further research is needed to explore the long-term impacts of these projects on the local economy, social development, and governance structures. Additionally, future studies could examine the role of specific donor

organizations and compare their approaches across different regions in North Macedonia or the broader Balkans.

In conclusion, while donor-funded projects remain a vital tool for regional development in North Macedonia, their success depends on improved project management practices, stronger local capacities, and better alignment with the region's specific needs and conditions. By addressing the challenges identified in this study, donor organizations and local stakeholders can work together to create more effective, sustainable, and impactful development initiatives in the Polog region.

Future research should focus not only on whether donor-funded projects deliver short-term outputs but also on how sustainable, inclusive, and adaptive these interventions are in the long run. Strengthening the evidence base on these aspects will help donors, policymakers, and local actors design better and more resilient development projects.

### **1. Long-Term Impact and Sustainability**

- Investigate the long-term effects of donor-funded projects after the funding period ends.
- Assess whether municipalities and communities maintain the benefits (e.g., infrastructure, skills, governance improvements) over time without external support.

### **2. Institutional Capacity and Local Ownership**

- Study how local governments and institutions are building internal capacities to manage and sustain projects independently.
- Analyze the level of local ownership during project design, implementation, and after completion.

### **3. Community Engagement and Social Inclusion**

- Explore the effectiveness of community engagement strategies in donor projects, particularly among marginalized groups (e.g., women, youth, rural populations).
- Examine whether projects contribute to greater citizen participation in governance and development planning.

#### **4. Climate Resilience and Environmental Sustainability**

- Focus on how donor-funded projects are adapting to the increasing risks posed by climate change, such as floods, droughts, and extreme weather events.
- Evaluate if projects like the flood resilience initiative have introduced adaptive practices that can evolve with changing climate patterns.

#### **5. Coordination Between Donors and Local Actors**

- Research how coordination mechanisms between different donors, municipalities, and national government agencies affect project outcomes.
- Identify gaps or overlaps in interventions and recommend models for better synergy and collaboration.

#### **6. Economic Development and Employment Effects**

- Study the impact of donor-funded initiatives on local economic development, including job creation, SME growth, and poverty reduction.
- Measure if economic benefits are sustained or short-lived after project completion.

#### **7. Monitoring and Evaluation Practices**

- Analyze the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems used in donor projects in the Polog region.
- Identify best practices and shortcomings in tracking project results, learning, and accountability.

## 8. Lessons Learned and Replicability

- Collect and synthesize lessons learned from successful and less successful projects.
- Research how best practices from Polog could be replicated in other regions facing similar development challenges.

Here are three specific research questions that should be considered:

**1. *How sustainable are the outcomes of donor-funded flood resilience projects in the Polog region after the withdrawal of external support?***

(Focus: Long-term impact, sustainability, local capacity)

**2. *To what extent have donor-funded projects in the Polog region strengthened local institutional capacities and fostered community ownership?***

(Focus: Governance, local ownership, capacity building)

**3. *How effective are current coordination mechanisms between international donors, national authorities, and local municipalities in ensuring the success and sustainability of projects in the Polog region?***

(Focus: Coordination, partnership effectiveness, efficiency)

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## Appendix A

Interviews / Questionnaire

### **Pyetje Interviste për Përfaqësuesit e komunave– Projekte të Financuara nga Donatorët në Rajonin e Pollogut**

1. A mund ta përshkruani rolin tuaj në komunë dhe përfshirjen tuaj në projekte të financuara nga donatorët?
2. Çfarë lloje projektesh të financuara nga donatorët janë zbatuar në komunën tuaj në 20 vitet e fundit dhe cilët sektorë synonin ato (p.sh., mjedis, infrastrukturë, arsim)?
3. Si merr pjesë zakonisht komuna në këto projekte — në planifikim, zbatim, monitorim ose në të gjitha fazat?
4. Cilat janë pikat e forta dhe sfidat kryesore me të cilat përballlet ekipi juaj në menaxhimin e këtyre projekteve?
5. Çfarë “mësimesh të nxjerra” ose praktikash më të mira nga projektet e mëparshme do të rekomandonit për iniciativat e ardhshme?

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### **Прашања за интервју за општински претставници – Проекти финансирани од донатори во Полошкиот регион**

1. Можете ли да ја опишете вашата улога во општината и вашата вклученост во проекти финансирани од донатори?
2. Какви видови проекти финансирани од донатори се спроведени во вашата општина во последните 20 години и кои сектори беа насочени кон нив (на пр., животна средина, инфраструктура, образование)?
3. Како општината вообичаено учествува во овие проекти — во планирањето, спроведувањето, следењето или во сите фази?
4. Кои се главните силни страни и предизвици со кои се соочува вашиот тим при управувањето со овие проекти?
5. Кои „научени лекции“ или најдобри практики од претходните проекти би ги препорачале за идните иницијативи?

## Appendix B

### Survey / Questionnaire

Section A: Respondent Information/ Seksioni A: Informacioni i të anketuarve/ Дел А: Информации за испитаникот

1. Organization Name/Emri i organizatës/Име на организацијата
2. Your position/Pozicioni juaj/Ваша позиција
3. Years of Experience in Project Management/Vitet e përvojës në menaxhim të projekteve/Години на искуство со работа со проекти
  - Less than 1 year/Më pak se 1 vit/Помалку од една година
  - 1–3 years/vite/години
  - 4–7 years/vite/години
  - 8+ years/vite/години
4. Number of Donor-Funded Projects Your Organization Has Implemented in the Polog Region (in the last 20 years)/Numri i projekteve të financuara nga donatorët që organizata juaj ka implementuar në Rajonin e Pollogut (në 20 vitet)/ Број на проекти финансирани од донатори што вашата организација ги има спроведено во Полошкиот регион (во последните 20 години)
5. Types of Donors (check all that apply)/Llojet e donatorëve (klikoni të gjitha që vlejnë)/
  - EU/BE
  - UN Agencies/Agjencionet e KB
  - Bilateral Donors/Donatorë bilateral
  - National Funds/Fonde kombëtare
  - International NGOs/ OJQ Ndërkombëtare
  - Other (please specify)/Tjera (ju lutem specifikoni)
6. Which sectors have these projects focused on? (check all that apply)/Në cilët sektorë këto projekte kanë qenë të fokusuara? (klini të gjitha që vlejnë)/ На кои сектори се фокусирани овие проекти? (селектирајте сè што се применува)
  - Environment/Mjedis jetësor/Животна средина
  - Education/Arsim/Образование
  - Health/Shëndetësi/Здравство
  - Infrastructure/Infrastrukturë/Инфраструктура
  - Local Economic Development/Zhvillim ekonomik local/Локален економски развој
  - Youth and Social Inclusion/Të rinjtë dhe inkluzion social/Млади и социјална инклузија
  - Other (please specify)/ Tjera (ju lutem specifikoni)/Други(ве молиме специфицирајте)

Section B: Project Management Practices/Seksioni B: Praktikrat e menaxhimit të projekteve/ Дел Б: Практики за управување со проекти

7. Project Management Methodology Used (check all that apply):/Методологија е shfrytëzuar për menaxhim të projekteve:/ 7. Користена методологија за управување со проекти (селектирајте сè што се применува)

- Logical Framework (LogFrame)/ Korniza Logjike (LogFrame)/Логичка рамка (LogFrame)
- Results-Based Management (RBM)/Menaxhimi i bazuar në rezultate (RBM)/Управување базирано на резултати (РБМ)
- Agile/Adaptive Approaches/Qasje të shkathëta/përshtatëse/Агилни/Адаптивни пристапи
- Other (please specify)/ Tjetër (ju lutemi specifikoni)/Друго (ве молиме наведете)
- None in particular/ Asnjë në veçanti/Ниту една посебно

8. How many staff members from your municipality/organization have been involved in the implementation of donor-funded projects? / Sa anëtarë të stafit nga komuna/organizata juaj janë përfshirë në zbatimin e projekteve të financuara nga donatorët? Колку вработени од вашата општина/организација се вклучени во спроведувањето на проекти финансирани од донатори?

- 1–3
- 4–7
- 8–10
- More than 10/Më tepër se 10/Повеќе од 10
- Not sure/Nuk jam i sigurt/Не сум сигурен/на

9. How often do you or your team receive training in project management?/Sa shpesh ju ose ekipi juaj ka marrë trajnime për menaxhim të projekteve?/Колку често вие или вашиот тим добивате обука за управување со проекти?

- Never/Asnjëherë/Никогаш
- Occasionally/Herë pas here/Повремено
- Annually/Një here në vit/Еднаш годишно
- More than once per year/Më shumë se njëherë në vit/Повеќе од еднаш во годината

10. Do you use any project management software?/A përdorni ndonjë lloj softueri për menaxhim të projekteve?/ Дали користите некој софтвер за управување со проекти?

- Yes (please specify)/Po (Ju lutemi specifikoni)/ Да (ве молиме наведете)
- No/Jo/Не

11. How would you rate the following aspects of project implementation in your organization (1 = Poor, 5 = Excellent)? Si do t'i vlerësonit aspektet e mëposhtme të zbatimit të projekteve në organizatën tuaj (1 = Dobët, 5 = Shkëlqyeshëm)?/ Како би ги оцениле следните аспекти од имплементацијата на проектот во вашата организација (1 = Слабо, 5 = Одлично)?

- a) Planning and goal-setting/Planifikimi dhe vendosja e qëllimeve/ Планирање и поставување цели
- b) Stakeholder involvement/Përfshirja e palëve të interesit/Вклучување на засегнати страни
- c) Risk management/Menaxhimi i riskut/Управување со ризици
- d) Budgeting and financial management/Buxhetimi dhe menaxhimi financiar/Буџетирање и финансиско управување
- e) Monitoring and evaluation/Monitorimi dhe vlerësimi/Мониторирање и евалуација
- f) Timely reporting/Raportimi në kohë/Навремено известување
- g) Adaptability to change/Përshtatshmëria ndaj ndryshimit/Прилагодливост на промени

12. Who is typically responsible for project monitoring and evaluation in your organization?/ Kush është zakonisht përgjegjës për monitorimin dhe vlerësimin e projektit në organizatën tuaj?/ Кој е вообичаено одговорен за следење и евалуација на проектот во вашата организација?

- Internal project staff/Stafi intern i projektit/Интерен стаф на проектот
- External consultants/Konsulentë të jashtëm/Надворешни консултанти
- Donor representatives/Përfaqësues të donatërove/Претставници од донатори
- Other (please specify)/Tjera(Ju lutemi specifikoni)/Друго(Ве молиме наведете)

Section C: Challenges and Solutions/Seksioni C: Sfidat dhe zgjidhjet/Дел Ц: Предизвици и решенија

13. What are the most common challenges you face in donor-funded project implementation? (check all that apply)/ Cilat janë sfidat më të zakonshme me të cilat përballeni në zbatimin e projektit të financuar nga donatorët? (kontrollo të gjitha ato që zbatohen)/ Кои се најчестите предизвици со кои се соочувате при спроведувањето на проектот финансиран од донатори? (проверете сè што се применува)?

- Inadequate funding/Financimi i papërshtatshëm/Несоодветно финансирање
- Delays in implementation/Vonesa në implementim/Доцнења во имплементација
- Lack of stakeholder cooperation/Mungesë e bashkëpunimit nga palët e interesit/Недостаток на соработка со засегнати страни
- Insufficient staff capacity/Kapacitet i pamjaftueshëm i stafit/Недоволен капацитет на персоналот

- Bureaucratic hurdles/ Pengesat burokratike/ Бирократски пречки
- Communication barriers/ Barrierat e komunikimit/ Комуникациски бариери
- Political interference/ Ndërhyrje politike/ Политички влијанија
- Other (please specify)/ Të tjera (ju lutemi specifikonit)/ Друго(Ве молиме наведете)

13. What factors most contribute to successful project implementation? (check 3)/ Cilët faktorë kontribuojnë më shumë në zbatimin e suksesshëm të projektit? (zgjidh 3)/ Кои фактори најмногу придонесуваат за успешна реализација на проектот? (бирајте 3)

- Clear project goals and planning/ Qëllime dhe planifikim të qartë/ Јасни цели и планирање на проектот
- Strong local stakeholder engagement/ Përfshirje e fortë e palëve të interesuara lokale/ Силен ангажман на локални чинители
- Adequate funding and resource allocation/ Financim adekuat dhe alokim adekuat i resurseve/ Соодветно финансирање и распределба на ресурси
- Competent and trained project staff/ Staf kompetent dhe i trajnuar/ Компетентен и обучен проектен персонал
- Effective monitoring and evaluation/ Monitorim dhe vlerësim efektiv/ Ефективно мониторирање и евалуација
- Donor flexibility and support/ Fleksibilitet dhe përkrahje nga donatorët/ Флексибилност и поддршка од донатори
- Community ownership/ "Pronësi" nga komuniteti/ Сопственост на заедницата

14. How could project implementation in the Polog region be improved? (check all that apply)/ Si mund të përmirësohet zbatimi i projektit në rajonin e Pollogut? (zgjidh të gjitha ato që zbatohen)/ Како може да се подобри имплементацијата на проектот во полошкиот регион? (селектирајте сè што се применува)

- Better coordination between local institutions/ Koordinim më i mirë ndërmjet institucioneve lokale/ Подобра координација помеѓу локалните институции
- Increased transparency and accountability/ Rritja e transparencës dhe llogaridhënies/ Зголемена транспарентност и отчетност
- Greater community involvement in planning/ Përfshirje më e madhe e komunitetit gjatë planifikimit/ Поголема вклученост на заедницата во планирањето
- Capacity-building for local staff/ Ngritje e kapaciteteve për stafin lokal/ Градење на капацитети за локалниот персонал
- Improved monitoring systems/ Sistem i përmirësuar i monitorimit/ Подобен систем за мониторирање
- Better donor-local alignment of priorities/ Harmonizimi më i mirë i prioriteteve donatorë-komunitet/ Подобро донаторско-локално усогласување на приоритетите

15. Suggestions for strengthening local project management capacity (check all that apply):/ Sugjerime për forcimin e kapaciteteve lokale të menaxhimit të projektit (zgjidh të gjitha ato që zbatohen):/Предлози за зајакнување на капацитетот за управување со локални проекти (проверете сè што се применува):

- Regular training/workshops/Trajnime të rregullta/punëtori/Редовни тренинзи/обуки
- Peer-learning and knowledge exchange/Të mësuarit nga kolegët dhe shkëmbimi i njohurive/Учење од kolegите и размена на знаења
- Creation of local project support units/ Krijimi i njësive lokale mbështetëse të projektit/Креирање на единици за поддршка на локални проекти
- Use of digital tools for planning and monitoring/ Përdorimi i mjeteve dixhitale për planifikim dhe monitorim/Употреба на дигитални алатки за планирање и мониторирање
- Mentorship/partnerships with experienced organizations/Mentorim/Partneritet me organizata me përvojë/Партнерство со искусни организации
- Establishment of regional forums or working groups/Krijimi i forumeve rajonale ose grupeve të punës/Креирање на регионални форуми или работни групи

16. How satisfied are you with the overall implementation of donor-funded projects in your municipality/organization?/ Sa jeni të kënaqur me zbatimin e përgjithshëm të projekteve të financuara nga donatorët në komunën/organizatën tuaj? Колку сте задоволни од целокупната реализација на проектите финансирани од donatori во вашата општина/организација?

Very satisfied/ Shumë i/e kënaqur/Многу здоволен/на

Satisfied/I/e kënaqur/Задоволен/на

Neutral/Neutral/Неутрален/на

Dissatisfied/I /e pakënaqur/Незадоволен/на

Very dissatisfied/Shumë i/e pakënaqur/Многу незадоволен/на

17. Please explain what contributes most to your satisfaction or dissatisfaction/Ju lutemi shpjegoni se çfarë kontribuon më shumë në kënaqësinë ose pakënaqësinë tuaj.

18. How satisfied are you with the financial management and transparency in donor-funded projects?/ Sa jeni të kënaqur me menaxhimin financiar dhe transparencën në projektet e financuara nga donatorët?/ Колку сте задоволни од финансиското управување и транспарентноста во проектите финансирани од donatori?

Very satisfied/ Shumë i/e kënaqur/Многу здоволен/на

Satisfied/I/e kënaqur/Задоволен/на

Neutral/Neutral/Неутрален/на

Dissatisfied/I /e pakënaqur/Незадоволен/на

Very dissatisfied/Shumë i/e pakënaqur/Многу незадоволен/на

19. How satisfied are you with the cooperation and communication with donor organizations during project implementation?/ Sa jeni të kënaqur me bashkëpunimin dhe komunikimin me organizatat donatore gjatë zbatimit të projektit?/Колку сте задоволни од соработката и комуникацијата со донаторските организации при спроведувањето на проектот?

Very satisfied/ Shumë i/e kënaqur/Многу здоволен/на

Satisfied/I/e kënaqur/Задоволен/на

Neutral/Neutral/Неутрален/на

Dissatisfied/I /e pakënaqur/Незадоволен/на

Very dissatisfied/Shumë i/e pakënaqur/Многу незадоволен/на

20. What aspects of the cooperation have worked well, and where is there room for improvement?/ Cilat aspekte të bashkëpunimit kanë funksionuar mirë dhe ku ka vend për përmirësim?/ Кои аспекти од соработката функционираа добро, и каде има простор за подобрување?

21. Can you describe any financial-related challenges or best practices you have experienced?/ A mund të përshkruani ndonjë sfidë financiare ose praktika më të mira që keni përjetuar? Можете ли да опишете какви било финансиски предизвици или најдобри практики што сте ги доживеале?

22. Any additional comments or insights you would like to share about managing donor-funded projects in the Polog region?/ Ndonjë koment apo njohuri shtesë që dëshironi të ndani në lidhje me menaxhimin e projekteve të financuara nga donatorët në rajonin e Pollogut? (me fund të hapur)/ Некој дополнителен коментар или увид што би сакале да споделите за управувањето со проекти финансирани од донатори во полошкиот регион?