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OPEN GOVERNMENT FOR CLIMATE ACTION: Open Data and Participatory Policymaking in Macedonia

An open government approach can be instrumental to building public support for climate initiatives. Access to climate data contributes to increased public awareness of climate change and helps mainstream climate change strategies in sectoral policymaking. It can also favor more effective climate action through transparent and robust assessments of mitigation and adaptation capacity. In its most recent Open Government Partnership (OGP) National Action Plan, Macedonia committed to make climate data publicly available and hold public consultations on relevant policies.

THE OPPORTUNITY | As candidate to the European Union (EU), Macedonia has begun harmonizing its regulations with EU policies, including its commitments to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). In this context, the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning (MEPP) — responsible for coordinating climate policies — started making significant efforts to build national capacity to report climate impacts and actions. In 2016, MEPP took the new OGP National Action Plan as an opportunity to increase the visibility of national climate initiatives and strengthen coordination across government sectors.

THE COMMITMENT | In its 2016 National Action Plan, Macedonia committed to openly publish national and municipal greenhouse gas (GHG) inventories, improve the quality of data collected, raise public awareness of its Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) and hold stakeholder consultations in preparing the Biennial Update Report (BUR).





INITIAL INSIGHTS | In an interview, Pavlina Zdraveva, Project Manager at the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Macedonia and organizer of the public consultation workshops, noted that the commitment grew in ambition as a result of the workshops. By the end of the process, the commitment included one additional milestone and two more municipal inventories. The workshops also highlighted the need to raise public awareness and link the inventories to people's daily lives, to promote their reuse.

Participating in the OGP process had the additional effect of drawing the attention of government officials from other sectors and levels of government, raising influential decision-makers' awareness of climate action. International media attention on Macedonia's OGP climate pledges further increased government and civil society support of the commitments.

PERSPECTIVES ON IMPLEMENTATION | MEPP, UNDP and the Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts are leading the implementation process. This reflects a concerted effort to strengthen the partnership between science and policymaking to improve outcomes and continuity of the initiatives. Other civil society partners have contributed to implementation through the consultation workshops. In particular, they helped fill specific research and data needs, while local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) helped develop the municipal inventories.

By October 2017, MEPP and its partners had completed most of the activities outlined in the commitment. Both the national and municipal

inventories are now available online. MEPP has additionally undertaken a series of awareness-raising activities, including a newsletter and a widespread online survey on perceptions of climate change.

EARLY AND EXPECTED IMPACTS | The implementing partners expect that this commitment will help MEPP more accurately assess its capacity to take on further mitigation measures. Already, the implementation process has enabled the working group to identify areas where the NDC's ambition could be increased. Antonio Jovanovski, Executive Director of GoGreen, one of the NGOs that participated in the workshops, expects that the open inventories will also enable civil society to advocate for more ambitious climate action.

Another relevant impact comes not from the outcome of the commitment but its methodology. When developing the municipal inventories, the working group used a new tool called Foresight Explorer to gather and organize input from hundreds of stakeholders. MEPP has since then continued introducing new tools for data collection and public consultations. As Ms. Zdraveva pointed out, "Data is wealth. It is key for low-carbon development policy planning. We have tried and tested many innovative methods that helped us collect large data sets that are now open and accessible to all citizens."

Political instability in Macedonia remains a challenge to full implementation of its OGP commitments. The 2016 climate commitments reflect what the working group thought was feasible in the political context of the time. But Ms. Zdraveva indicated that more ambitious actions could be undertaken, including through OGP, once the political situation has stabilized.

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