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## Citizens' Budget Requests Carry Weight in Kosovo

### Villagers get new school and road through activism

Active citizens are at the core of a vibrant democracy. With USAID support, municipalities are directly engaging with citizens in decision-making processes. Holding public hearings during municipal budget development is one of the main ways municipal officials are incorporating citizen input in a meaningful way.

USAID, through Democratic Effective Municipalities Initiative, has been helping Kosovo municipalities use various methods of information sharing such as bulletins, municipal newsletters, websites, public meetings to increase citizen participation in budget hearings. As a result, many requests were incorporated into municipal budgets. In 22 USAID partner municipalities, some 119 citizen requests, totaling approximately \$10.9 million were incorporated in the 2012 budgets.

Vushtrri/ Vucitrn [Vucitrn is the Serbian name of the town] municipality is an excellent example of this process. Several projects were implemented as a result of citizen requests made during public hearings, including a road paving in Bruzik village that benefitted 500 citizens and a new school in Zhilivodë village. The school construction made a huge impact in the lives and the economy of the villagers who will no longer have to send 120 children to nearby villages for education. The village is 21 kilometers away from the town of Vushtrri/Vucitrn, and it was difficult for the children to commute every day to nearby villages. Now they have their own school.

“If you want to see a benefit in your community, you only need to do one thing: Take initiative and be engaged. This is the first time that our village is benefiting through public hearings. We never had a municipal representative to present our village’s needs,” said Zekri Muzaqi, a citizen of Vushtrri/Vucitrn municipality who initiated the road paving project.

Skender Krasniqi, a villager who initiated the request for the school construction summed up the experience saying, “Being informed and



Photo: USAID Democratic Effective Municipalities Initiative

*Zekri Muzaqi requested that the main road in his village be asphalted during a public hearing on the municipal budget.*

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having your voice heard is democracy and this is what our municipality is doing. I am very happy that USAID is supporting municipal leadership to find ways to bring citizens in decision processes”.

USAID Democratic Effective Municipalities Initiative, which runs from August 2010 through August 2013, assists municipal government and officials to strengthen their skills, improve municipal service delivery, increase transparency, and improve cooperation with citizens. In addition the initiative promotes local economic development.