



**PROJECT 'MODERNIZATION OF LOCAL PUBLIC SERVICES IN
THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA'**

Participatory planning: Water Supply and Sanitation
Lessons Learned

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Abbreviations

GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
MLPS	Modernisation of Local Public Services
NGO	Non-governmental organization
LPA	Local Public Authority
RDA	Regional Development Agency
SEDS	Socio Economic Development Strategy
WGSP	Working Group for Strategic Planning
WSS	Water Supply and Sanitation

Executive summary

The paper looks at experiences of Water Supply and Sanitation (WSS) sector planning in seven rayons from three development regions in Moldova to identify lessons learned and provide recommendations based on the key findings. The planning exercise took place in 2018 to update the WSS component of the Socio-Economic Development Strategy (SEDS). The planning process was supported by the project “Modernisation of local public services” implemented by German Development Cooperation through GIZ. The main actors involved in the process were Local Public Authorities (LPA) on the first and second level, service providers in the WSS sector and civil society. Their work was supported by a team of experts. The formal process for elaborating the WSS chapter was done through a Working Group for Strategic Planning (WGSP).

The key findings are the following:

Relevance. The sector planning was an important and necessary initiative. It met its objectives and was welcomed by the stakeholders involved in the process. The WSS component is strongly linked to the regional policy framework and the planning approach is consistent with the actions of other development partners.

Effectiveness. The WSS chapters present a clear, coherent and critical path to prioritise the needs of the sector. The analysis of the sector needs is deep, detailed and comprehensive and the prioritisation of future investments is based on evidence.

Efficiency. The development of the WSS chapter of the SEDS was conducted by the LPA. The time allocated for this was enough and it allowed delivering specific outputs. Although it was difficult to engage civil society in consultations due to the lack of previous experience, this was an important step as it strengthened the capacities of the involved actors, raised awareness about the water quality and the need of sanitation system and facilitated the direct communication between various stakeholders and the citizens.

Sustainability. The action plan of the WSS component is quite ambitious and the interviewed actors expressed their worry about the implementation of the document. The risk of having a low degree of carried actions remains high due to the LPA’ weak financial capacity and the rather ambitious action plan.

The present paper comes with **several recommendations**: The ownership of the planning process and of the plan should be clear and should belong exclusively to the LPA. The civil society should be involved in all stages of the strategic planning process to ensure the participatory principle and to give them the opportunity to express their voices for the sector development. Besides its role in the planning phase, the WGSP should also be involved in monitoring and implementation of the WSS chapters and meetings with certain regularity are necessary. The capacities of the members of the working groups should be further strengthened to improve the participatory planning process.

Overall, the WSS sector planning process has been useful and relevant to local public authorities and communities and has been a good practice regarding the professionalism, dedication and expertise required for such an exercise.

1 Introduction

The Socio-Economic Development Strategy (SEDS) is a planning tool at the local level that connects local priorities and needs with objectives and targets on the national and regional level. Improved local governance for the provision of adequate public services was expected to result from the participatory formulation of SEDS at rayon level as part of a transparent mid-term strategic planning.

MLPS supported seven LPA second level – Drochia, Edinet, Falesti, Riscani (RDA North), Calarasi and Ungheni (RDA Centre) and Cahul (RDA South) – in updating/elaborating the water supply and sanitation (WSS) chapters from the SEDS through a participatory process. This was the next step after the conduction of feasibility studies in WSS sector for the above-mentioned LPA, which was also supported by GIZ. An improved planning of the WSS sector allows the LPA and rayons to access funds for investments and to extend the services provided to the population. In addition, the regionalisation of the service, according to the national policy¹, optimises the public spending for its management and quality improvement.

Before starting the WSS planning process, the respective sector chapter lacked a coherent, transparent prioritisation of infrastructure investments as well as specific, realistic and measurable targets. The objective was to improve local governance, the access to and provision of qualitative WSS services that meet the needs of the local population. Consequently, the strategic planning document on WSS represents the vision of the LPA regarding the development directions of the sector for a certain rayon/LPA. The provisions of this document constitute the basis and is supposed to guide all the decisions, actions and investments of the LPA, service providers, donors and private sector. Updating/improving the WSS chapters of the SEDS was based on participatory principle, thus making the entire process more transparent and inclusive.

The paper contains six chapters. Chapter one and two present general information about the WSS component, the objectives and the methodology of the review. Chapter three of the report looks at the key stakeholders and details the steps involved in WSS sector planning. Chapter four describes the key findings of the strategic planning exercise according to the analytical criteria: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability. Chapter five captures lessons learned and develops recommendations based on the findings summarised in the previous chapter. In the final chapter, general conclusions are drawn.

2 Objectives and methodology of the review

The objective of this paper is to analyse the progress to date with the WSS sector approach aiming to draw conclusions that can be applied to the further roll out of sector planning to other LPA and rayons and to share them with other relevant projects and programmes.

This paper aims to:

- Review and document the key experiences made;

¹ The concept on the regionalization of the public service on WSS, Order No.122 from 04.12.2015, Ministry of Environment

- Review the roles of key stakeholders involved in the process;
- Study the challenges encountered;
- Assess the effectiveness of both the working group that developed the WSS chapters and the consultation process;
- Identify strengths and weaknesses of the sector planning approach;
- Draw lessons learned;
- Propose recommendations to further improve the sector planning process.

The review process began in June 2019 when the methodology, action plan and a matrix of key review questions was defined. The criteria for the analysis included relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability². The next step was a desk research and analysis of guidelines, handbooks and relevant documents on participatory planning in WSS prepared under MLPS. In addition, the WSS chapters from SEDSs were reviewed in order to examine their scope and relevance. This was followed by a stakeholder mapping in order to identify key actors in the sector planning process. A list of open-ended questions for each category of stakeholders was developed for interviews and focus groups discussions.

The interviews were conducted with core members of the working group for strategic planning (WGSP), LPA representatives (city halls and rayon councils), service providers, local project managers, representatives of Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO), technical experts and strategic planning experts. In addition, MLPS project staff who were providing support to the stakeholders with respect to sector planning were interviewed. The interviews and focus groups involved a total of 30 people and included four out of seven supported rayons (Drochia, Edinet, Calarasi and Cahul).

3 Approach to WSS sector planning

The strategic planning undertaken by the LPA in the Republic of Moldova is based on a series of guidelines elaborated by the state central institutions, development partners and think tanks. The most commonly used guidelines are:

- Continuous training programme “Integrated strategic planning at local and regional level” (Baranceanu L., et al., 2013)³, GIZ
- Bridging the gap – Participatory district development planning in the Water Supply and Sanitation Sector of the Republic of Moldova (Fabian A. et al., 2011)⁴, SLE Publication Series

² These four criteria underpin most evaluation systems in international development, also known as DAC (Development Assistance Committee) evaluation criteria. They have been the most prominent and widely adopted criteria used for aid evaluation by most bilateral and multilateral donor agencies, as well as international NGOs.

³ <https://www.scribd.com/document/125467204/Planificarea-strategica-integrata-la-nivel-local-si-regional>

⁴ <https://edoc.hu-berlin.de/bitstream/handle/18452/3844/247.pdf?sequence=1>

- Guide on Strategic Planning for Local Socio-Economic Development incorporating gender equality and human rights principles⁵ (Vasilache A., Bunyan D., 2007), UNDP
- Practical guide for the elaboration of Rayon Socio Economic Development Strategies⁶ (Chiriac L., Secrieru A., Tornea I., 2014), IDIS Viitorul.

At the same time, GIZ provided methodological guidance on common rules for the content of WSS chapters, as a component part of the SEDS of the rayons and LPAs.

3.1 Key actors involved in the sector planning process

The Working Group for Strategic Planning (WGSP) was in charge of the development of the WSS chapter. In each of the seven analysed rayons, the working group was created through the decision of the mayor/president of the rayon council. Its role was to analyse the sector, to identify optimal solutions for WSS sector development, to establish the vision and objectives of the WSS sector, to set out the strategic directions of the sector, to participate in preparation activities and to look for external expertise when needed.

The WGSP included representatives of:

- *LPA 1st and 2nd level*, whose main role was to collect data for the WSS chapter and, later on, to analyse and verify the data and validate the information included in the draft document. LPA were the leading actor the sector planning process. They own the document, are responsible for its implementation and monitoring and are the ultimate beneficiaries of the respective chapter, developed though the planning process;
- The *service operator* responsible for the WSS delivery has the sector expertise and, together with the technical experts, performed the audit of the current situation in WSS sector (the quality of the services, the state of the infrastructure, the operational efficiency), collected and processed data, and contributed to draft the document;
- The *civil society*, including NGOs and the local citizens, participated in the process, its role was to communicate and share the information with the citizens.

Two types of *experts* assisted the LPA and rayons – strategic planning and technical experts. The scope of the experts' work was to support in elaboration or updating the Rayon and Local SEDS chapter on WSS. The experts also supported the organisation, coordination and the planning of all the activities of the Working Group and the conduction of the public consultations. The used tools for the elaboration of the document were: data collection and analysis, questionnaire, grassroots visits and discussions with stakeholders.

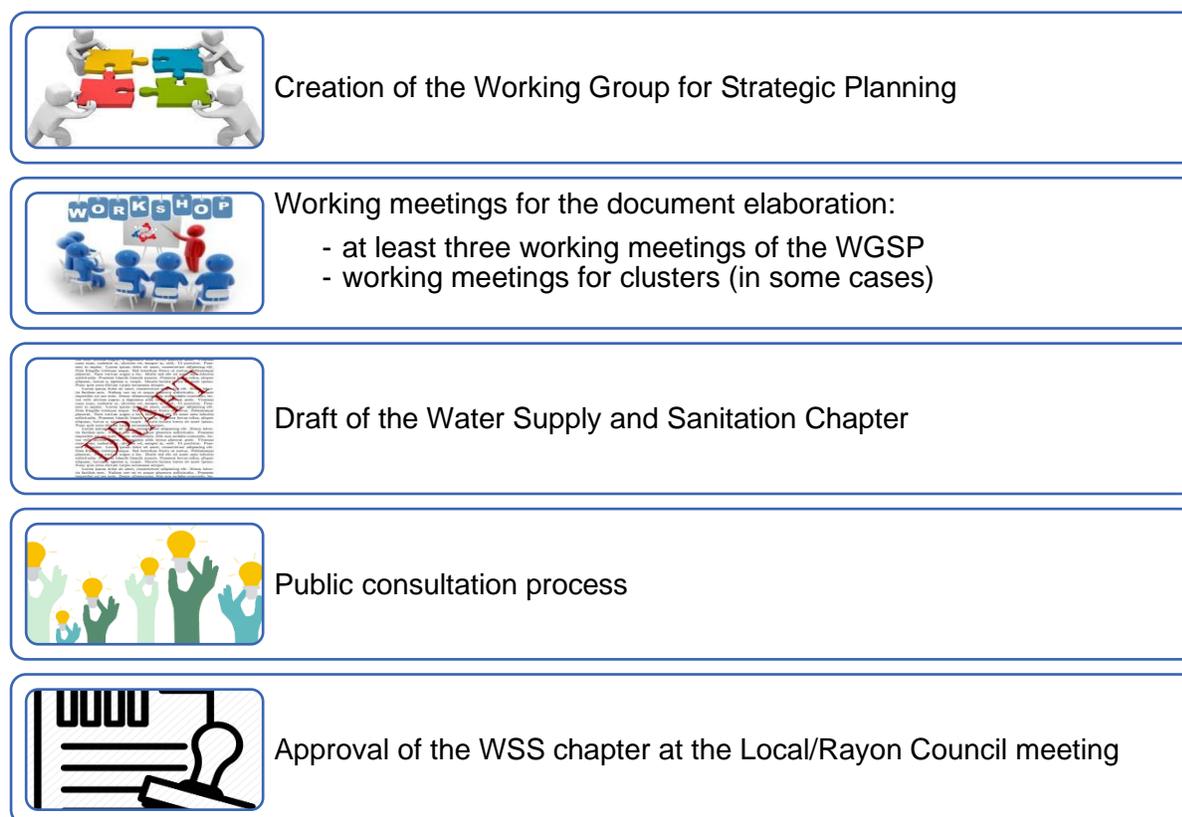
3.2 Steps of the participatory planning process

The entire process of participatory planning in the field of WSS included several steps, as presented in the below figure.

⁵<http://serviciilocale.md/doc.php?l=ro&idc=117&id=179&t=/Publicatii-i-resurse/Planificare-strategica/Ghid-de-planificare-strategica-pentru-dezvoltare-socio-economica-locala-bazata-pe-principiile-egalitatii-de-gen-si-ale-drepturilor-omului>

⁶<http://serviciilocale.md/doc.php?l=ro&idc=110&id=857&t=/Publications-and-Resources/Local-Public-Administration/Ghid-practic-de-elaborare-a-Strategiilor-raionale-de-dezvoltare-socio-economica/>

Figure 1 Elaboration process of WSS component



The first step was the creation of the Working Group for Strategic Planning (WGSP) in each of the LPA. The mayor/ president of the rayon council issued a decision regarding the creation of the WGSP on the elaboration/updating the WSS chapter from the SEDS⁷. The exact composition of the working group sometimes differed from one LPA/rayon to another, but always included the main decision makers, namely the mayor/president of the rayon, the service provider, local/rayon councillors, LPA staff (usually Economic and/or Construction Departments), and an NGO representative.

The second step was the collection of the needed information for elaborating the WSS chapter. This included:

- Revision and analyses of the relevance of each national and regional strategy/plan/concept with potential impact on the WSS sector development;
- Performance of a detailed analysis of the current situation in development of WSS sector;
- Collection and procession of the data based on a questionnaire regarding the current situation at the local level in all involved LPA to ground the decisions and the needed interventions;

⁷ SEDS of Cahul is until 2023. The other six WSS chapters are for the implementation period 2018-2025.

- Implementation of a comprehensive survey (based on questionnaires) related to the development of each LPA;
- Undertaking study visits to the key-WSS service operators from the rayons, as well as conduction of extended interviews with key stakeholders.

The third step was the elaboration of the first draft of the WSS chapter. This was based on three rounds of working meetings of the WGSP, assisted by a team of technical and planning experts. At the last working meeting, the working group endorsed the elaborated draft and took the decision to initiate a public consultation process lasting one month.

The fourth step were the public consultations. The draft document was posted on the web pages of the beneficiaries, on social networks pages and sent by emails to the interested actors. Some of the local NGOs and active citizens disseminated the document further through social media. A month later, the LPA organised public hearings to present and consult the document with all the relevant and interested stakeholders. The event was conducted according to the law on transparency in the decisional process⁸.

The fifth and the last step was the final approval of the document. After the public consultations, the document was adjusted by the working group according to the relevant recommendations and suggestions and was approved at the local/rayon councils meetings.

4 Key findings of the strategic planning exercise

In this section, key findings with respect to the questions listed in the review matrix (Annex 1) from the semi-structured interviews with the main stakeholders are presented. The findings focus on the stakeholders involved, the process and the sustainability of the actions.

The strategic planning process in the WSS sector in the analysed rayons met its goal – elaboration and updating of the WSS chapters and the respondents shared their thoughts about this. In general, the process of elaborating and/or updating the chapters was considered professionally organised and LPA at both levels – the main beneficiaries - were involved, especially in the data collection, coordination of the WGSP members and with the technical team. On the other hand, the technical knowledge for strategic planning is still low and LPA had to contract external consultancy for a proper planning. In addition, motivation and dedication from the side of the public institutions is needed, as well as involvement and communication from the side of the citizens.

4.1 Relevance

The strategic planning is a systematic process through which the LPA/rayon can visualise the future, by undertaking the essential steps forward, depending on the local resources available to reach that future. Through the strategic planning process, both the LPA and rayons are thinking how to achieve the intended goals by splitting the responsibilities, learning, researching and interacting with relevant stakeholders.

⁸ The public consultations took place in accordance with the Law no.239 from 13.11.2008 on transparency in the decisional process

There was a widespread view from interviewees that the sector planning process was an important and necessary initiative. It is a complex way of influencing the future of the sector, based on the available resources and all the interventions must be undertaken according to the Action Plan of the WSS Chapter. The objective of sector planning, as originally conceived, was relevant and welcomed by the institutions involved in the process.

Regarding the consistency of the approach with the regional development strategies, the WSS component was strongly linked to the regional policy framework – the Regional Development Strategies and Regional Sector Programmes on Water Supply and Sanitation⁹. With respect to alignment with the national strategy in WSS¹⁰, the documents elaborated within the process were consistent and provided the strategic directions to reform the WSS sector.

The relevance of the strategic planning falls within the current context. Taking into account that the LPA lack sector capacities and human resources, the WGSP allowed covering this gap, by gathering specialists in WSS and strategic planning from various institutions, thus improving the transparency and involvement of the actors.

The planning approach is consistent with the actions of other development partners. Taking into account the amount of investments done in the past and planned for the near future without a clear prioritisation of the actions, the current process was a needed one and expected by all involved institutions, development partners and private investors. This hope is that this may lead to more coherent implementation strategies for the sector as well as a higher quality approach to development priorities and planned actions.

4.2 Effectiveness

WGSP – an appropriate method to plan strategically the WSS sector

The WGSP was the mechanism that supported the development and updating of the WSS chapters and it proved to be an effective one. All interviewees consider the composition of the working groups as the right one. In all cases, there were more participants invited to attend the meetings of the working group, depending on the discussed topics. In some rayons/LPA, after the first meeting, other relevant actors were included in the working group, mainly from the LPA that were covered by the sector planning and intervention measures. Rayons like Edinet and Cahul created working groups for each cluster¹¹, thus facilitating the planning process and involving more key actors from the beneficiary LPA/rayons. The participants in the meetings of the clusters said that

⁹ http://admord.md/public/files/prs_aac_2014/2013_09_17_PRS_RDN_RO.pdf;
<http://adrcentru.md/pageview.php?l=ro&idc=542&id=2372&t=/Planificare-i-programare-regionala/Programare-regionale-sectoriale-PRS/Programul-Regional-Sectorial-de-Alimentare-cu-Apa-i-de-Canalizare-pentru-Regiunea-de-Dezvoltare-Centru/>;
<http://adrsud.md/libview.php?l=ro&idc=654&id=2679&t=/Planificare-i-programare-regionala/Strategii-i-programare-regionale-sectoriale-PRS/Program-Regional-Sectorial-de-Alimentare-cu-Apa-i-de-Canalizare-pentru-Regiunea-de-Dezvoltare-Sud>

¹⁰ <http://lex.justice.md/md/352311/>

¹¹ The cluster is an agglomerations of LPA where an efficient and sustainable joint WSS service management can be organised

“the work there proved to be more productive than in the classic group, because of the higher number of participants and interest to get involved. The interest was higher because the planning and the investment measures were affecting directly the LPA involved”.

In practice, the level of involvement of LPA in the strategic planning process varied from case to case. In some cases, the rayon councils were more involved, in others, the LPA Level 1. The same conclusion can be derived for the service providers. Some of the service provider worked on the document and identified priority actions together with the team of experts, while others perceived the document and the implementation of the action plan just as an additional workload. The entire process of strategic planning is supposed to become a knowledge transfer process from the expert team to the beneficiary institutions, building thus the capacities in planning, analysis, creation of vision, setting up the action plan and identifying technical solutions for the sector. This can be done through a close cooperation and work between expert-beneficiary in documents writing and sector analysis.

Although the agendas of the first round of working meetings included the discussion of the roles of the stakeholders, most of the working group members mentioned that the tasks among them were not clearly divided. This diminished the efficiency of the WGSP and, in some cases, its members saw their role as being limited and passive. They were mainly receivers of information instead of working actively and closely with the experts on the elaboration of the document. Thus, they were confined to validating the experts' work and clarifying questions. As a result, their capacities were not strengthened enough, which may become a risk for the documents' implementation in the future.

During the participatory process of working on the WSS chapter, both the LPA and the service provider noticed **the need of support from external specialists** (legal adviser, engineer, accountant, financial expert, etc.) **in order to overcome the existing constraints and to meet the continuously increasing demands** from the side of beneficiaries.

Some of the successful practices are mainly related to the development of the **action plans for each cluster**. A number of LPA decided to organise the planning process at two levels: one at the rayon level and the second one per cluster (there could be 5-6 clusters for a rayon). This allowed identifying different situations in the clusters, thus facilitating the elaboration of some specific action plans through an easier participatory process, progress monitoring and evaluation based on the established priorities. The planning per clusters was done in the region at joint meetings of the LPA representatives (mayors and local councillors), with local service providers and its beneficiaries. Clustering, in the opinion of the respondents, was the best solution proposed for improving the WSS services.

One of the encountered challenges was that in the process of setting up the working groups, due to the lack of technical, financial and human capacities and contradictory conceptual views, the LPA were limited to a narrow and unrepresentative list of people who in most cases respected and obeyed the current policy without much interest or active involvement. Moreover, during the strategic planning process, there was a **low level of knowledge and experience** of local elected people, civil servants and citizens **with regard to strategic planning exercise**. However, due to the involvement and approach in organising the strategic planning process, the discussed topics

and the expertise of the experts increased the capacities of the institutions and the involved staff, according to the respondents' saying. One member of the working group stated:

*"I understood the planning process and the need to prioritise actions, the availability of funds and I gained confidence in the feasibility of the actions. In their turn, the mayors understood the solidarity principle: the inter-municipal cooperation and regionalisation need and **learned to cooperate**. According to the opinion poll undertaken by the expert team during the WSS chapters writing in 2018, most of the mayors are for regionalisation because of economic and solidarity reasons. Moreover, they lack human and financial resources, as well as capacities in their LPA/rayons".*

Quality of WSS chapters

Overall, the prepared WSS chapters are well written and of a **good quality**. The analysis of the sector needs is deep (based on data collected with the support and consultation of the involved experts), detailed and comprehensive and the prioritisation of future investments is based on evidence. The whole planning was a learning and researching process and, in the end, the document was well organised, useful and relevant.

At the current stage, the WGSP, although it gathered the local specialists in the sector, still lacks certain skills in planning and technical expertise. That is why the involved external experts had a high contribution in the elaboration of the document. Gradually, it is supposed that the local institutions will take the workload in the sector planning to a higher extent. The purpose is that local staff becomes stronger and more capacitated through knowledge transfer so that only some technical support needs to be outsourced.

The main support was needed in the elaboration of the questionnaires, data collection and processing as well as prioritisation of the intervention measures based on the current situation analysis. Some of the used techniques in the sector planning were case studies and comparative analysis with other rayons, as well as the experience of other countries, which led to a better understanding of the process and to strengthening the capacities of the members of the WGSP.

To sum up, there was a strong feeling that the updated WSS chapters were elaborated through a constructive and cooperative manner and were appreciated by the stakeholders and citizens as coherent, presenting a clear, critical path to prioritising the needs of the sector. Nevertheless, the LPA should pay more attention to knowledge and practices transfer and institutional capacity building and decrease the dependency of external support for future similar exercises.

4.3 Efficiency

The LPA led the development of the WSS chapter of the SEDS. Although the **planning process was well organised**, some felt that it was mainly driven by the external experts. The respondents consider that for future planning exercises, the WG members should participate to a greater extent and take over more responsibilities from the experts. This could improve their capacities and strengthen their knowledge in the sector.

The time allocated for the strategic planning process was enough and it allowed delivering specific outputs. The most difficult and time-consuming step was the data collection. It took around one month for the LPA representatives to gather the necessary data. This was due to the multiple

tasks and responsibilities that the civil servants have as well as due to the lack of knowledge and experience in collecting and using the data. Moreover, the lack of a database with primary data, useful for any type of planning further delayed the process.

The **public consultation process** which was organised according to the existing legal provisions did not contribute much to the improvement of the WSS chapters due to the low number of received ideas and proposals. The participants (both citizens and other stakeholders) of the public consultations were not so active and the proposals and recommendations for improving strategic plans were seen as being not too relevant. Nevertheless, there were active citizens in the regions and their willingness to contribute to the whole process was evident. Asked about the motivation and interest to get involved, one of them, member of the working group, answered:

“I want to understand what is going on and not just to stay aside and accuse the LPA. I try to understand why the complete planning process takes so much time and I want to find out as much information as possible about the water quality and the truth behind it. More involvement is better. Through involvement, situations and information are clarified and the stereotype that the LPA is stealing, disappears. I myself get involved and I see why things are going that or another way. And in my turn, I can explain this to other citizens.”

The entire public consultation process took one month, and it followed the law on transparency in the decisional process. The WSS chapter was published on the LPA website and social networks and it was available for every interested citizen or institution. The public consultation period was finalised with the public hearings event. A widely held view was that **although the public hearings were well-organised and the main actors attended the event, it was a rather formal and passive process**. According to the respondents, the low number of recommendations submitted was determined by several reasons:

- Not all members of the WGSP were motivated and dedicated (both representatives of the public sector and especially of the civil society);
- The document is rather technical and hence difficult to understand, if one does not have a sector background;
- Most of the participants did not read the document in advance;
- The citizens and other involved actors did not believe that the document will be implemented. This is a consequence of previous practices, when a low percentage of the action plan from the local strategic documents has been implemented;
- The citizens lacked interest in the activity. Even though the WSS service is very important for the LPA/rayons, people see it as being the task of the LPA;
- The process from the beginning of the planning till the implementation of the first actions from the strategy lasted too long in the perception of people and they somehow lost the interest along the way.

Therefore, all the above-mentioned reasons lead to very few proposals and recommendations on further improvement of the strategic documents as well as a low degree of participation and dissemination. Nevertheless, although in many cases the public hearings did not result in more recommendations or critics from the population to improve the content, it generally contributed to

visibility of the document and awareness of the need of qualitative WSS services. Moreover, the consultations included good information, allowed for participation and involvement.

4.4 Sustainability

The main concern in the implementation of the WSS chapter is linked to the LPA's financial capacity. The action plan of the WSS component is quite ambitious and the risk of having a low degree of carried actions remains high. Here, a major role could be played by the WGSP that should function on a permanent basis and bring to discussion important issues, including the identification of additional financial resources. Still, some of the LPA are confident to implement most of it and have already identified several funding sources. Others instead, are not aware yet that it is their task to find investments, which reduces dramatically the chances of the Action Plan execution.

The second concern refers to the capacities of the LPA to deal with the implementation phase of the document - to update, revise and follow up the WSS component. That is why further training and workshops in sector planning and capacity building should be a continuous priority for the staff of the involved institutions in order to ensure a smooth execution of the actions, together with other relevant stakeholders.

The involvement of the local citizens in meetings and decision making should be preserved and continued. Raising citizens' awareness about the quality of the services, the necessity to connect to the only existing source of drinkable water, increasing the connection rate to WSS system, local contribution to the construction and rehabilitation of the WSS system are important topics to be approached. Here it is the role of the LPA to communicate with and inform the local population regarding these services and the current implementation stage of the document. Moreover, active involvement of citizens in development, implementation and monitoring of the document has a positive impact on sustainability of the intervention measures.

The LPA could also ensure the sustainability of the knowledge and skills obtained during the documents elaboration, by replicating and transferring the experience gained to other LPA that are going through similar strategic planning processes. This can be done through staff exchange missions or just guiding the beneficiary authority through the whole stages, by involving also the civil society/local citizens.

The sustainability of strategic planning documents is also linked to the commitment of the Government and other national and high-level authorities in continuing the implementation of the EU Association Agreement, achieving the sustainable development goals and other undertaken commitments. An implemented strategy requires stability and continuity of the policies at the national level and no political interferences in the local government matters.

5 Lessons learned and recommendations

1) It is the task of the LPA to initiate and lead the strategic planning exercise in order to visualise the future of the sector, to implement the intervention measures according to the action plan and to achieve the strategic objectives.

The LPA, together with the service providers are responsible for the elaboration and implementation of the SEDS for the WSS sector and service delivery. The ownership of the planning process and of the implementation of the document should be clear and belongs exclusively to the LPA. The LPA should take this role and understand that the involvement starts with them and with the professionals from the relevant public institutions.

Recommendation: The LPA should initiate and manage the entire strategic planning in WSS sector by gathering on regular basis the relevant sector stakeholders. The participation of the decision makers (mayor or president of the council) in all meetings is highly important. This increases the responsibility of the other working group members and the importance given to the process itself. In addition, the rayon/local councils should periodically discuss during their meetings the implementation steps and status of the elaborated strategies, thus involving the WGSP members in drafting the report to further increase the transparency of the process.

2) The roles of the WGSP members need to be clearly defined and understood by all involved actors before starting the planning process.

Clarifications were needed with regard to the composition and the relevance of each member of the working group. Based on experience, not all members of the WGSP were active and understood their role in the process. This influenced the identification with their work and motivation to contribute to the process.

Recommendation: An inception meeting should be organised for the WG members before the process of the document elaboration starts. The meeting should aim to (i) stimulate active involvement of members, (ii) help them to understand their role and the scope of work, the need of planning and the main directions for the future of the sector; (iii) to underline their role in identifying funds for the implementation of the action plan; and, (iv) to capacitate them to absorb funds. Besides this, the LPA should inform the members in time and have a higher involvement in the creation of the working group. The WGSP, at its turn, should work closely with the team of experts.

3) Specific technical expertise on the local level is needed for a successful planning exercise of the WSS chapters.

The WSS planning process in the supported LPA proved to be a challenging effort, especially with regard to the sector analysis, data collection and processing, establishing the strategic vision and identifying the action plan. Although the WGSP members attended various trainings on strategic planning, they still lacked the technical expertise. The identification of additional needed technical expertise remains responsibility of the LPA.

Recommendation: Documents like the WSS chapters require specific technical expertise. The LPA should ensure that these capacities are available at local level. In case external expertise is involved, it is recommended that the capacities of the members of the working groups should be built and strengthened and not substituted by the external experts. For this reason, the external experts and beneficiary institution should work together when elaborating the document.

4) The participation of citizens in the planning process should be further increased to receive more input in the elaboration of the strategic documents and ensure that it is targeted at the needs of the local population.

Regardless of the fact that a big emphasis was put on ensuring the participatory approach, it proved to be difficult to engage citizens in the strategic planning process. Their involvement was rather passive and formal. However, even though the consultation process did not contribute much to improving the WSS chapter content, this is an important step for the citizens' engagement. It allows the citizens to participate, to make its voice heard and to find out information related to the specifics of the sector. Well-informed citizens ask for better and more qualitative service provision, a better planning of the service and a higher involvement in problem solving which will make the authorities more accountable for the implementation of the elaborated documents. The participation of the citizens in the elaboration of the strategic documents needs to become a tradition.

Recommendation: A good and in time information, communication and involvement of the citizens is important in order to have a good input. This could be achieved by using different means of communication (e.g. announcements on notice boards in public areas, TV, radio, social media) to include as many citizens and stakeholders as possible in the planning process.

5) The data collection process needs more time in the sector planning process than other steps of the process.

The experience shows that data collection is the most difficult and time-consuming activity in the document elaboration due to its complexity, lack of required skills and involvement of the staff to operate the process. Ongoing data collection and/or update of data would ease the work in future planning activities and would allow every LPA to provide and process quicker the information for the current situation analysis.

Recommendation: Each LPA should create a database with primary information and update it regularly. In addition, institutional capacities should be built in order to collect and process data on permanent bases.

6) The WGSP is an important and appropriate tool for the elaboration of the strategic planning documents and should be kept for the implementation and monitoring phase as well.

The WGSP gathered relevant professionals from public institutions and civil society, ensuring thus a participatory approach to the planning process and involving all interested stakeholders at the local/rayon level. Its members are keen to continue their participation and play a role in monitoring the implementation of the WSS chapters. Analysis-strategy-implementation is a continuous process and the working group should take part in it. WG meetings with a certain regularity are necessary.

Recommendation: The specific activities for the WGSP in the implementation of the WSS chapter should include: (i) revise, monitor and evaluate the implementation of the planned actions; (ii) attract investments in the sector; (iii) extend the WSS services for other LPA and ensuring more connections to the water and sewage system; (iv) become a knowledge base for the sector in the region (disseminate information on new calls for proposals, new technologies, learn and share best practices etc.).

7) The WSS planning process does not end with the approval of the document. Attention should also be paid to the implementation of the document.

The implementation phase requires certain skills and competences, as well as a good communication with the citizens and cooperation with relevant stakeholders. The experience shows that, if the above is missing, the strategic planning documents have a very low degree of implementation. The role of the LPA, citizens and other stakeholders is to agree on best implementation measures and approaches and to identify and explore all available financial resources.

Recommendation: Members of the working group play their role in implementation and participate in the monitoring of the WSS planning documents' execution. Follow up capacity building is strongly recommended in line with the training needs, which resulted from the interviewed stakeholders: (i) strategic planning and project management cycle; (ii) planning and organising the WSS service (iii) economic analysis and prognosis; (iv) awareness campaigns on the necessity to connect to the only existing drinkable water source and the impact of the used waters on the environment; (v) specific for the WSS sector: elaboration of a regional services post-quality report; establishment of the service tariff and reorganisation of the operator, new technologies in the sector; (vi) funds accession and elaboration of investment projects.

8) A potential administrative territorial reform could strengthen the role of the LPA in the service planning and provision.

Such a reform could strengthen the LPA and provide clear competences in the service planning and provision. If the LPA level 1 would have a larger territory, more population and a bigger local budget, a genuine strategic planning could be ensured. In any case, for sectors like WSS, an inter-municipal cooperation at regional and sub-regional level is advisable, despite the size of the LPA.

Recommendation: Until such a reform is undertaken, the Rayon Council should facilitate and ensure a general coordination of all interested parties in the regionalisation of the service. It must have the vision of how to reorganise the service and bring to discussion the issues in achieving the vision and objectives and how to make a good use of the available resources.

6 Conclusions

The planning documents were drawn up in a way that was consistent with national and sector strategies. The strategic planning exercise resulted in good, useful and professional plans with which the involved stakeholders are satisfied with. The WSS chapters contain the vision on the regionalisation of the service and the priority projects that will allow them to justify the request for funding. The rayons and the LPA have a clear vision on the water quality, on the water pipeline and sewage system development and on the need to amalgamate the service. This vision will lead the future actions of the LPA.

The need of technical assistance in strategic planning exercises, as well as in the implementation phase remains high at the local and rayon level, despite the training and capacity building undertaken in the past. Thus, the participants in the planning processes would appreciate further support from the side of the development partners. Even though the new financial system of LPA ensures a larger autonomy, most of the local budgets do not have resources for infrastructure

development and cannot ensure the implementation of the action plan of the WSS chapter. That is why, the role of the WGSP is essential in attracting funds.

This knowledge paper on lessons learned from the WSS sector planning reflects the fieldwork findings and recommendations to be taken into account in the future sector strategic planning process and stakeholders' engagement – actions that can be undertaken by the LPA and development partners in order to improve the process and increase the degree of their implementation.

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Annex 1: Questions for the interview

Criteria	Questions	Methods
Relevance	<p>What were the objectives of sector planning?</p> <p>Was the approach consistent with the regional development strategies and national sector strategies?</p> <p>Is the approach consistent with the actions of other development partners?</p>	<p>Interviews</p> <p>Focus group discussions</p> <p>Review of documents</p>
Effectiveness	<p>Was the use of the WGs an appropriate method for developing the WSS chapter?</p> <p>What was the role of your institutions in this process?</p> <p>Was the WG composition appropriate? (More or less people? Other institutions to be included?)</p> <p>Were there enough meetings of the WG? (Need of more, less or there were enough?)</p> <p>Was the institution that has the ownership of the document active enough?</p> <p>How appropriate was the formal process (i.e. the series of working groups) for developing WSS chapter?</p> <p>Did the approach provide sufficient opportunities for the local/rayon council, municipal enterprise, city halls to participate?</p> <p>Was the approach gender sensitive? Were the needs of the social vulnerable groups and men & women' taken into account?</p> <p>Was the method of consultation appropriate?</p> <p>What are the strengths and weaknesses of the approach?</p> <p>What was the quality of WSS chapter, including their use of evidence, links to national strategies, and the logic of the proposed interventions?</p> <p>Was the process participative? Did the WG members involve to the same extent?</p> <p>Did the TA team take into account the proposals of the WG members?</p>	<p>Interviews</p> <p>Focus group discussions</p> <p>Review of documents</p> <p>Questionnaire survey of WG participants</p> <p>Questionnaire survey of participants at final consultation event</p>

Efficiency	<p>How well was the planning process organised?</p> <p>Did it deliver specific out-puts on time?</p> <p>Was the time allocated for the strategic planning process enough?</p> <p>Was the sector planning process an efficient way of identifying actions for the Action Plan?</p> <p>Did the public consultations improve the quality of the document? How many recommendations/comments were received and how many of them were accepted?</p>	<p>Interviews</p> <p>Focus group discussions</p> <p>Review of documents</p>
Sustainability	<p>To what extent have the local/rayon council been enabled to facilitate sector planning?</p> <p>What did you learn from the planning process?</p> <p>What changed since the approval of the WSS chapters from SEDS? Is there any monitoring in place?</p> <p>Can the local/rayon council elaborate this chapter in the future without the help of the technical assistance team and experts?</p> <p>To what extent have the local/rayon council been enabled to support the elaboration of the Action Plan?</p> <p>What is the future role of the sector working groups?</p> <p>To what extent has sector planning improved sector governance in WSS?</p> <p>What are the lessons for the roll out of sectoral planning to other sectors?</p>	<p>Interviews</p> <p>Focus group discussions</p> <p>Review of documents</p>