
LevizAlbania (LA)

External Review of Phase 1

Final

15.11.2018

Mandated by:

SDC Tirana
Swiss Embassy of Albania
Debora Kern and Sokol Haxhiu

Authors:

Dieter Zürcher
zuercher@kek.ch

Artan Rroji
arroji01@yahoo.com

Contents

List of Abbreviations	II
Summary	1
1 Introduction	3
1.1 Context of the Civil Society in Albania	3
1.2 The LevizAlbania project	6
1.3 Purpose of the review	8
2 Methodology applied for the review	8
2.1 Methods applied	8
2.2 Limitations	9
3 Findings of the Review	9
3.1 Relevance	9
3.2 Achievements and Effectiveness	11
3.3 Project Management and Efficiency	19
3.4 Sustainability	23
3.5 Lessons learnt and conclusions	23
4 Recommendations	25
Annex 1 Terms of Reference	28
Annex 2 Mission Itinerary and People Met	40
Annex 3 Context data and indicators	43
Annex 4 LevizAlbania project data	45
Annex 5 Bibliography	49

List of Tables

Table 1: Overview on achievements in LevizAlbania	14
Table 2: Democratisation progress in Albania based on NIT scorings	43
Table 3: Trends for the “Democracy Status” in Albania according to the BTI	43
Table 4: CSO Sustainability Index Albania	43
Table 5: Overview about the regional distribution of grants in the selected case study regions) .	45
Table 6: Overview about financial allocations per instrument and Calls	48
Table 7: Statistics about the success rates during the various LA decision making filters	48

List of Figures

Figure 1: Types of grants contracted during the various calls	16
Figure 2: Size of grants (CSOs, individual and Rapid Response grants, N=164):.....	17
Figure 3: Disaggregation of money flow (overall total is CHF 4.1m).....	18
Figure 4: Overview on procedure from concept notes to financed grants	20

List of Abbreviations

AB	Advisory Board
ASCS	Agency for the Support to the Civil Society
BIRN	Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (Albania)
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CBO	Community Based Organisation
DCM	Decision of the Council of Ministers of Albania
DDLGN	Democratisation, Decentralization and Local Governance Network
EC	European Commission
ERA	European Reform Agenda
EU	European Union
GFB	Grant and Fellowship Board
GoA	Government of Albania
IDM	Institute for Democracy and Mediation
INCL	International Center for Not-for-Profit Law
LA	LevizAlbania
LGU	Local Government Unit
m	million
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NALAS	Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NPO	Not-for-Profit Organisation
NCCS	National Council for Civil Society
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
OSFA	Open Society Foundation Albania
ProDoc	Project Document
PwD	People with Disabilities
ReLOAD	Regional Local Democracy Programme
SAA	Stabilisation and Association Agreement
SCO-A	Swiss Cooperation Office - Albania
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SECO	State Secretariat for Economic Development
SEI	Strategic Enabling Instrument
Sida	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
TAR	Territorial Administrative Reform
ToC	Theory of Change
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Summary

Background:

Switzerland has been supporting the civil society in Albania as part of its democratic governance domain, for some time. In this regard, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) has awarded the implementation of the LevizAlbania (LA) project to a consortium of three Albanian partners: Open Society Foundation Albania as lead agency, PartnersAlbania and Co-PLAN. The project started in July 2015 runs until June 2019 and it has a revised a budget of CHF 6.5 m for this Phase 1.

In view of planning a new Phase, SDC has mandated this external evaluation. The evaluation used a mix of methods and conducted a total of 54 interviews with various stakeholders (incl. 26 with CSOs and 5 with individual grantees) as well as 6 interviews with partly or non-successful grantees and two with local government representatives. For the interviews, five regions in Albania were selected.

Findings and conclusions:

Context: Albania has made some progress in establishing an enabling framework for the civil society as required by the EU accession process. In 2015 the Government of Albania approved a road map towards a more enabling environment for civil society. In the meantime, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) are still concentrated in Tirana and heavily depend on donor financing, since there are no tax incentives for donations from companies or individual donors. Laws for the procurement of CSO services by municipalities is also lacking.

There are nine key donors supporting the civil society and they apply quite complementary support tools and instruments. They coordinate their activities in a Civil Society Sector Working Group which meets regularly.

Relevance: The LA project is highly relevant and well complements the other donors as well as the other Swiss projects in Albania. The LA is well recognised by the donor community and some of its innovative approaches are admired by them, like the Idea Competition which is live-streamed on the LA website and facebook. Thus, LA instruments and experiences are used as model for other granting schemes as they represent best practice in terms of transparency.

Applied instruments: LA applied a mix of demand-driven grants as well as Strategic Enabling Initiatives (SEIs) as supply-side offers

by the consortium members to the CSOs and other users. In the 5 calls conducted so far, a total of 156 grants were awarded, 108 to organisations and 48 to individuals throughout Albania. Additionally, 8 Rapid Response grants were awarded and 5 SEIs were launched. LA so far organized two “LevizAlbania Democracy weeks” with various activities in 8 different cities.

LA applied a well-balanced mix of instruments. It especially promoted CSOs, informal groups and individuals outside of Tirana. This enabled LA to reach out to peripheral areas and new actors and young CSOs. This could be even further promoted because Tirana-based organisations try to also cover such areas and they are usually more competitive compared to local ones.

Project Achievements: There is evidence that the various grants and instruments have brought tangible change at local but also at national level. New monitoring tools were introduced and municipalities were held accountable for their activities (or lack of them). Most of the Rapid Response grants were used to address urgent environment issues (construction of hydropower projects or resorts). The utilization of the SEIs is difficult to judge as they address a broader audience and the number of webpage clicks does not tell much about the outcome.

Set-up and management:

LA is implemented by the consortium in a collaborative, competent and efficient manner based on relevant and updated granting documents. Coaching and support by LA were appreciated by grantees as being on time and professional.

However, the analysis of the filters that reduce the high number of proposals submitted until the contracting stage, reveals the important role that the project staff plays. The LA staff in average sorts out 68% of project ideas (applications) at the very beginning of the application process; in the first filter from the concept note (1'294 applications) to the qualification for the Idea Competition (419 proposals). This stage of the process is perceived less transparent than the following stage, the public Idea competition. For the public Idea Competition the Grant and Fellowship Board (GFB) – where independent members have a majority – plays the decisive role. Later, the negotiations after submission of the final project is not easily understood by

applicants who fail at this final stage (66 applications).

The VAT issue emerged as a constant problem in all the interviews with grantees since they have to pay the VAT which is not reimbursed / covered by the grants. Thus, the VAT obviously remains an important issue, mainly for smaller CSOs.

LA has a very good branding and visibility strategy. It is well known by all stakeholders and has a big outreach (mostly through social media, TV, etc.).

There is a risk in overpromoting the uniqueness and innovativeness of the selected grant projects, especially since many grantees have received the support of other donors, often in parallel to the LA grant. Thus, it is not always easy for the grantees to demonstrate the complementarity of support, especially if it is offered with different modalities (e.g. long-term institutional support versus short-term project grants as in the case of LA).

Compared to other Swiss projects supporting the civil society in the region, the LA grants are relatively small and have a short duration. Despite the demonstrated effectiveness in terms of reported impacts and outcomes, there remain concerns that such short-term interventions cannot change deeply rooted mindsets, or bad public organisational cultures quickly.

LA has applied an agile management style and adopted granting instruments to the context by changing the thematic directions of calls and the size of grants. For individuals the maximum amount was reduced from initially CHF 20'000 per grant to CHF 10'000 after Call 4. The duration of grants was increased to 15 months compared to 12 months initially.

The logframe was revised twice since the project start. However, it still remains difficult to aggregate results since open and competitive calls bring a high diversity of supported issues and initiatives and the choice of meaningful indicators remains challenging.

Recommendations:

Strategic orientation and instruments:

- (1) SDC: Conduct a tracer study in 2019 in order to assess the role of individual grants in order to validate the assumption that the fellowships sustainably increase the activism level in the Albanian civil society.
- (2) SDC: Complementary to individual grants (provided the results of the tracer study are

positive) democracy awards could be allocated annually for organisations and individuals.

- (3) SDC: The concept of the SEIs should be reviewed and replaced by bigger strategic projects (e.g. for the strengthening independent media).
- (4) SDC and LA: Although the outreach achieved in Phase 1 to CSOs outside of Tirana was commendable, and this could even be fostered in a next phase (e.g. by earmarking funds for CS actors outside of Tirana).

Steering mechanisms and transparency

- (5) SDC: In order to increase grant allocation transparency, the dependency from LA staff assessment during the evaluation of the project ideas should be reduced. An independent member should be added at this stage. On the other side the representation of the three consortium members in the GFB should be reduced from two to one member in the Idea Competition stage
- (6) SDC: All publications of grantees should be available on the website and the latter needs to become more user friendly.
- (7) SDC: The grant size and duration are to be further reviewed to cater for the specific need of the diverse applicants (individual/small and big CSOs).
- (8) SDC: The approach of providing directions for the calls should be maintained and adjusted to contextual developments and opportunities.
- (9) SDC and LA: SDC / LA project: For smaller CSOs and CBOs the VAT is to be covered by LA.

Administrative issues:

- (10) LA: Review the administrative restrictions for eligible costs (ceiling of salary, per diem, etc.) and offering better justifications if applicants fail at the latest stage.
- (11) LA: Cutting of budget lines is legitimate but tricky: a) Because most of the grantees fully depend on the grant, and b) Costs might be shifted to other sources of income of the grantee.

1 Introduction

1.1 Context of the Civil Society in Albania

Background

Albania's transition to democracy and a market economy has been turbulent. Even after 27 years of transition, the state of democracy is precarious at both national and local levels. There is a comprehensive politicization of public institutions. The judiciary system is considered as corrupt and not able to deliver justice. The absence of the rule of law has a considerable impact in nearly every citizen's life. The corruption levels are still very high but have decreased somewhat.¹ Until now, there is no concrete and effective action to address the causes of corruption. At local level, the democratic deficiencies are even more pronounced. This is particularly problematic since citizens have close interactions with local public authorities and are directly affected by the deficiencies.

Albania has been an official candidate for accession to the European Union since 2014. In November 2016, the European Commission (EC) recommended the opening of accession negotiations subject to credible and tangible progress in the implementation of the justice reform. Since then it monitors thoroughly the developments in the context of the five key priorities: (1) Professionalisation and de-politization of the public administration, (2) Reinforce independence, efficiency and accountability of judicial institutions, (3) Reinforce fight against corruption, (4) Further efforts to fight against organised crime, and (5) Take effective measures for the protection of human rights.

The EC report on Albania (2018) highlights the following shortcoming concerning local government: Despite progress in the area of accessing public information additional efforts are needed to increase the capacity of Local Government Units (LGUs) to carry out their expanded responsibilities and manage their finances more efficiently. Furthermore, a recent study assessed the effects of the decentralization reforms and Territorial Administrative Reform critically (Co-PLAN 2018). It concluded that there is a lack of vertical decentralization with a high financial dependency of LGUs from central government as well as a high level of inequalities.

Democratic understanding is still hindered by the mind-set of the former communist regime, and citizens' apathy widespread. Citizen's activism and participation are developing slowly but are still insufficient to guarantee the required checks and balances. Media and especially the social media have emerged as a powerful tool in demanding more accountability and responsiveness at all levels of governance, and at the same time Albania made some progress in terms of media freedom in the last years (Reporters Without Borders 2018).

The civil society

The civil society (CS) has developed substantially since the 1990s, but it continues to be fragile in capacity and fragmented in cooperation. It consists of well-established Civil Society Organisations and think tanks (CSOs), more informal Community Based Organisations (CBOs) and active citizens. Around 12'000 registered CSOs, of which 3'724 are registered with the tax office (USAID 2017)², while Tirana Court of First Instance reports to have registered 7'383 CSOs, of which 4'136 are registered with tax authorities.³ These data inconsistencies illustrate the need for a consolidate database for CSOs. CSOs are mostly involved in policy making, monitoring, lobby, advocacy and watch-dog for

¹ See section 3.2 for data

² https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/CSOSI_Report_7-28-17.pdf

³ Partners Albania (2017): Monitoring Matrix on Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development, Country Report for Albania 2017

service delivery, local democracy, governance, women and children rights, environment, public budgeting and education. The very few CSOs that are directly involved in public service delivery, concentrate mainly on social services for vulnerable groups. Most CSOs are working in central Albania (mainly in Tirana), and few in other big cities like Shkodra (North) and Korça, Fier and Vlora (South). There are a couple of networks of CSOs (mainly on women's rights), but their effectiveness is partly hindered by short-time project grants and sporadic funding for institutional support.

However, there are currently also some developments raising optimism. The trust in CSOs has increased and stands at 57% (which is higher than for most government institutions as well as the media (IDM 2018)). The central government has initiated a set of reforms (ranging from newly structured local government units to citizen access to public information) that are reshaping the ways in which citizens and public authorities interact. Social media platforms have mushroomed and CS and citizens are increasingly using social media platforms for their causes and are well linked to international actors.

Local government has changed drastically since Parliament of Albania approved in July 2014 the Territorial Administrative Reform (TAR) reduced the number of local level units (municipal and commune) from 373 to 61 only. The reform aimed to strengthen municipal capacities in order to improve service delivery to citizens, local authorities' fiscal capacities and local democracy.

With regard to public participation in local decision making, further progress has been made in the area of access to information: An increasing number of municipalities have disclosed public information and nominated a local coordinator responsible for the right to information. This process has been substantially facilitated by three laws, namely the Law 139/2015 'On Local Self –Government', the Law 119/2014 'On Right to Information', and the Law 146/2014 'On Notification and Public Consultation', which lays down the procedural norms for transparency and public participation in decision-making in line with European standards.⁴ All three laws are enhancing the role of CS and citizens to influence public policy and decision making at local and national level.

The approach to CS of the Government of Albania

The Government of Albania (GoA) has approved a Road Map towards more enabling environment for CS development and the plan of action is currently being updated with the support of the EU Delegation in Albania. GoA has developed a web platform⁵ to enable public consultation which, however, is not yet intensively used. Thematic CSOs are invited in the parliamentary commissions for consultation on proposed legislation. The Parliament encouraged this process with the adoption of the Civil Society Charter in 2014.

Some progress has been made towards improving the functioning of the National Council for Civil Society (NCCS), established in 2015, which has the mission '*to ensure the institutional cooperation with civil society organizations in favour and in function of the expansion of the democracy*'⁶ and aiming to strengthen CS's role in policy dialogue. The Agency for the Support of Civil Society (ASCS) was established in 2009 and has the mission to '*encourage, through financial assistance, a sustainable development of civil society and the creation of favourable conditions for civil initiatives to the benefit of public*'. With the establishment of the NCCS and ASCS Albania has established the institutional framework, but both institutions are underfunded, and the latter is viewed as favouring selected CSOs for funding because of GoA dependency. The consultation of civil society by state institutions is not done in a systematic way, and there is limited systematic follow-up on the CS proposed recommendations. GoA has also established the unit for Policy

⁴ European Commission Staff Working Document (2018): Albania 2018 Report, <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20180417-albania-report.pdf>

⁵ <http://www.konsultimipublik.gov.al/Konsultime/>

⁶ <http://www.amshc.gov.al/kkshc/?lang=en>

Coordination with SC, as part of the Prime-minister's Department for Programming Development, Funding and Foreign Assistance, as well as the national Economic Council, a forum to consult business community and social partners.

The CS monitoring report (Partners Albania 2017) as well as the statements from the interviews indicate that implementation is slow and that many actions did not happen.

Donor landscape

The CS in Albania is heavily dependent on donor funding. Most CSOs struggle for funds and survival due to short-term nature of most project funding. Most funds come from donor sources, namely EU Delegation in Albania, Open Society Foundation Albania (OSFA), Switzerland (through LevizAlbania) and the embassies of Sweden, United States, Netherlands (NL), Austria, Italy, UNDP (through Regional Local Democracy Programme - ReLOaD) and the OSCE. These nine donors are the key funders and actors supporting CS in Albania. The biggest are the EU with € 3m/y, OSFA € 2m/y and Sweden € 2m/y, followed by Switzerland and US with € 1-2m/y. The donors provide support to Albanian CSOs by diverse funding instruments and approaches, and they coordinate and exchange their views in the CS sector working group on a regular basis under the chairmanship of EU and OSCE.

Hereafter a few exemplary programmes are presented in more detail. UNDP/ReLOaD programme supports CSOs in their cooperation with municipal governments by funding projects that bring CSOs closer to the priorities and needs of LGUs. Municipal governments are directly involved in the decision for grant giving and they co-fund the project with 20%. Sweden is mainly supporting CSOs through sub-granting and capacity development by four intermediary organisations.⁷ It has recently evaluated its support to the Albanian civil society (Sida 2018), which covered grants for 72 CSOs. The overall assessment was very positive and also highlighted the generosity and flexibility of the Swedish approach in supporting the CS in Albania from which other donors benefit. EU is running a sub-granting programme in which 22 Albanian CSOs sub-contract also smaller CSOs (up to 150) with small grants. The current sub-granting is considered as administratively burdensome. EU is also considering establishing a training centre for CSOs to enable them to build-up further institutional and organisational capacities for project writing and implementation, communication, networking and coalition building, lobbying, advocacy and policy dialogue.

Challenges with the CS sector

Consultation of civil society in legislative and executive processes has increased but is still considered as not reaching the expectations. It needs to be established in a more systematic, comprehensive and transparent manner and with adequate time frames for consultations at the central and local levels. So far, civil society participation still remains occasional. Substantial efforts are needed to ensure meaningful consultations with civil society actors as part of an inclusive policy dialogue.

The financial sustainability of civil society organisations remains a challenge due to the fiscal and legal framework (Karlstedt 2017). The regulatory framework of the tax regime for CSOs is problematic as most CSOs have to pay for the Value Added Tax (VAT) being a significant financial burden for CSOs. Furthermore, the current legal environment does not support alternative funding sources. The tax regime for corporate donations does not stimulate donations to CSOs, while individual donations are not recognised. Public funding for CSOs remains limited and is not yet legally regulated at central and local level. As far as environment protection and climate change, Albania has taken some steps to improve

⁷ Albanian Women's Empowerment Network (AWEN), the international organization Regional Environmental Centre (REC), and the two Swedish CSOs Civil Right Defenders and Olof Palme Centre.

cooperation with CSOs but more work is needed to achieve effective public participation and consultation in the decision-making process, particularly at the local level.⁸

Overall, the CS is still weak, fragmented and in the rural and remote areas it is almost non-existent or emerging. The same can be said about the low number of active informal community groups. Most CSOs and CBOs follow donor agendas and this often undermines their legitimacy and contribution in the policy dialogue. It also puts them in an unfavourable situation vis-à-vis government agencies. The young, small CBOs as well as medium size CSOs are in desperate need of institutional funds that enable them to be more strategic in order to address the issues of their scope of work, as well as attract, retain and develop professional staff. Currently they tend to try to transfer staff from one project to the other. In this process they lose trained people which hampers their institutional capacity. CSOs' constituencies and volunteerism are still weak, but is being used by some CSOs in project implementation.

Networking and alliance building among CSOs and between them and the community groups, to address local challenges and issues, appear to be growing due to donor conditionalities (see Karlstedt 2017 and LA experience). However, these activities remain still weak, because of competition, mistrust and lack of legitimacy. CSOs and CBOs find it difficult to identify and establish new partnerships, especially in rural and remote areas, in order to expand their coverage. Lack of trust among and sustainable linkage with community members and government agencies hinder the needed outreach. On the other side some big and consolidated CSOs have the risk of being viewed as following political agendas, especially when their board members or key staff are prominent active or former politicians at local or national level. There has been a lot of shift of political figures from the CS sector to the political arena and vice versa.

1.2 The LevizAlbania project

Against this background, the LevizAlbania (LA) project was set-up in July 2015 to strengthen the democratic culture in Albania. It aims to build demand for better governance through fostering civic engagement and empowering citizen groups. Primary target groups are drivers of change (organisations and individuals) and especially also media in order to influence and decision-making at local level. LA complements SDC's extensive past and present work in the governance domain which focuses more on strengthening the responsiveness and delivery capacity of the public sector at local level.

LA project has a special focus on strengthening the civil society actors to positively influence local democracy and good local governance. It aims to encourage a more active and responsive citizenry by supporting small and medium size CSOs, and informal groups (e.g. CBOs), but also individuals through fellowships. It harnesses media organisations and journalists as drivers of change in order to expand outreach and impact on power relations between CSOs, citizens and local governments.

In this context, the goal of the project is that the Albanian population benefits from an improved democracy at local level. The project document stipulates two outcomes:

- Outcome 1: Civic actors influence local priority setting, decision-making and oversight of local authorities.
- Outcome 2: Civil society actors initiate and support targeted structural changes to improve democracy at local level.

LA project started officially on September 1st, 2014 and by December the LA team was fully completed and operational. The project is implemented by a consortium of three Albanian organizations based in Tirana: OSFA Albania (lead organization), Partners

⁸ EC 2018 Report on Albania

Albania and Co-PLAN. The budget of the project is CHF 6.0 m for an initial period of 4 years (phase 1). The budget was increased by CHF 0.5 m in 2017.

LA developed various instruments and mechanisms for grant giving. It deployed two key categories of instruments: Demand-driven grants, and the Strategic Enabling Instruments (SEI). The demand-driven grants comprise of four types:

1. Organisational grants (up to one year)
2. Individual grants, fellowships (up to one year)
3. Rapid Response grants in order to address urgent demands from CS or citizens within a short timeframe
4. Upscaling grants (up to 15 months). This mechanism was introduced aiming to build on and consolidate the successful results implemented by the previous grants. They are considered as strategic mechanism to reach national impact.

The SEIs were designed to tap into the consortium's internal thematic competences and strengths. They were designed as: (1) Driver and enabler of reform, (2) Builder of local civic capacities, and (3) Strategic advocates for broader change. This instrument aims at building capacities of CSOs, CBOs and individuals in evidence-based interventions and advocacy. A total of five Strategic Enabling Instruments (SEIs) were financed by LA so far.

The project team developed a Grant Strategy and a Grant Manual, a Grant Management System, a Gender Mainstreaming Protocol and a Communication Strategy in order to regulate its grant-giving activities. The Grant Manual allowed for some flexibility to empower different types of actors and the involvement of CBOs and individuals as "champions of democracy". It guarantees procedural standards, transparency, openness and competitiveness, based on innovative ideas for enhancing local democracy. LA designed a dynamic process of application to respond to society and applicants' needs.

LA has already concluded five calls for applications and has used three thematic pillars for the distribution of grants, namely: transparency, accountability and participation. With Call 4 the project introduced on-line application possibility and implemented it fully in Call 5. It is the only grant giving project in Albania that currently applies a full online application approach.

Capacity building was a continuous subsidiary activity of LA. It elaborated a training outline for all grantees. The training component aims to offer value-added services to its grantees in order to maximize their potential. The objectives of the trainings and online offers were to improve the capacities of civic actors in order to implement LA supported projects aimed at improving local democracy and to enhance capacities related to local governance issues. Capacity building for grantees was provided through online and onsite training and coaching mainly by Partners Albania.

LA has so far organized two "Leviz Democracy Week" events, consisting of a week packed with activities dedicated to local democracy topics for broader audiences. This included, among others, high level meetings, exhibitions, street art and debates. These events provided platforms where the grantees could share their promising experiences in other localities. The events so far covered eight different cities.

The internal Mid-Term Review, organised in June 2017 (LevizAlbania 2017b), recognised the progress made and framed the design for the remaining two years of LA Phase 1 to achieve the overall project goal.

1.3 Purpose of the review

The Terms of Reference (see Annex 1) defines the overall objective of the external review of the LevizAlbania project. The review is:

- to assess the achievements of the current project phase (2015-2018) and highlight lessons learnt;
- to support the Embassy of Switzerland and the LA project with strategic recommendations for the design of the forthcoming second project phase, covering the period 2019-2023.

The specific objectives of the external review are to assess the project based on the DAC / OECD evaluation criteria, such as the project's relevance in the current transition context and donor landscape of Albania, effectiveness at the various results levels, efficiency of the project set-up and the project steering, the likelihood of changes at the impact level and the sustainability of activities. Additionally, it should also address the cooperation with other Swiss supported projects and explore scaling-up potentials.

Based on its finding, the review shall make recommendations to adjust the design for a next phase in terms of target groups (especially on how to integrate media), mix of instruments, thematic focus of the calls, evaluation procedures and steering of the project.

The review should also be designed in a way that fosters learning among the involved stakeholders.

2 Methods and limitations of the review

2.1 Methods applied

The review applied a multi-method approach in order to triangulate the findings. The approach included the following:

- (1) Desk research and document review: This included the review of project related documents and websites as well as documents from the Government of Albania and other donors or secondary data. The most important sources are given in the bibliography in Annex 5.
- (2) Briefing and debriefing workshops were conducted with the Embassy of Switzerland.
- (3) 16 interviews were conducted with the three consortium members, LA project staff, members of the Grant and Fellowship Board (GFB), representatives of the government as well as from donor agencies.⁹ The itinerary in Annex 2 provides a comprehensive overview about the people met and interviewed.
- (4) Interviews with grantees and unsuccessful applicants. The grantees were selected from the list of 156 grantees and 8 rapid response grants. The sampling was done on the basis of an analysis of the regional distribution of the grantees (see Table 5 in Annex 4). The interviews included five regions: A) Interviews were conducted with Tirana based CSOs and fellows (15 in total) representing all five calls and the Rapid Response grants. Additional 20 interviews were conducted in four regions outside of Tirana. B) The evaluation team selected Shkodra and Dibër in the North of Albania and Korça and Vlora in the South as case study regions to conduct a

⁹ An interview could include several persons of the covered organization.

series of interviews. This included organisations, fellows and unsuccessful grantees. Additionally, interviews were conducted with a Mayor (Shkodra) and a deputy Mayor (Korça).

In each place 1-2 unsuccessful grantees were covered that have applied in at least two calls. These have been included in the above numbers.

To sum up, the evaluators conducted 54 interviews, covered 26 CSOs from all five calls, 5 fellows, 1 representative of a Rapid Response grant and 6 partly¹⁰ or not at all successful grantees.

At the end of the mission an internal validation workshop was conducted to present the preliminary findings and to brainstorm about the lessons learnt and potential conclusions for the design of a next Phase II of LA. The list of participants is attached in Annex 2.

2.2 Limitations

The applied methodology has the following major limitation: The impact and result measurements are constrained by the lack of exact baseline data and the absence of a counterfactual. This is not LA-specific but a general feature of CSO and democratisation programmes.

Given the complex interventions and the fact that various donors support the same organisations, either in sequence or sometimes even in parallel, makes a clear attribution of impacts to specific interventions (grants) challenging or impossible. Any impact assessment is therefore beyond the scope of this review approach.

The short duration of the field mission did not allow to conduct in-depth research about the use and value added of the so-called Strategic Enabling Instruments (SEIs) developed by LA. Therefore, the analysis about the SEIs is mainly built on the review of the websites and sporadic feedbacks obtained from grantees.

Due to the small number of cases it was also not possible to make a deeper analysis about difference in outcomes of grants provided to the different regions or between the size of organisation.

3 Findings of the Review

3.1 Relevance

General: An active civil society is at the heart of any democratic society and thus is a relevant pillar in most OECD as well as post-communist countries (e.g. the EU, Switzerland and other donors are still supporting the civil society in the (not so) new EU member countries in Eastern Europe). An active and empowered civil society is a crucial constituent of a functioning democracy. The civil society has the following roles in democratic societies: (1) Advocacy and lobbying towards changing politics and policies (including laws), while keeping the public agencies accountable; (2) Providing social services to marginalised groups; and/or (3) Serving the specific interests of the members of CSOs.

¹⁰ Some grantees applied several times until they were eventually successful. In one case the organization applied in four out of the five calls and succeeded then with an English concept note.

The precise role of the civil society and the extent to which it shall fill service gaps of the government or challenge the government, when transparency and accountability deficits exist, is constantly debated not only in EU and OECD countries but also in Albania. However, such (recurring) debates on the fundamental question 'what a good and effective overall balance is between the government, the private sector and the civil society' are inherent in democratic systems.

Policy of the Albanian Government: As outlined before (see Chapter 1.1), the Government of Albania has made some commendable efforts to improve the enabling framework for the civil society by creating the NCCS and the ASCS. The approval of the Law on Public consultation and the creation of a consultation platform¹¹ have established procedural norms for transparency and public participation in decision-making according to European norms. However, challenges remain because there is no possibility to deduct donations from taxes and there is a lack of sub-legal directives for the Laws on Volunteering as well as Social Enterprises). Furthermore, the use of the public consultation mechanisms seems to be low and far below expectations according to several interviews.

SDC: The LA project is part of the domain "Democratic Governance" of the Swiss Cooperation Strategy in Albania. The strategy 2018 - 2021 puts more emphasis on the promotion of democratic principles and the civil society than the previous strategies. Switzerland will support citizens, including vulnerable groups, the media and civil society organisations (CSOs) in order to achieve Outcome 3, which is "citizens and civil society engage in decision-making and hold the government accountable".

The SDC thematic network on Democratisation, Decentralisation and Local Governance (DDLGN) has issued a policy paper, which highlights the role of empowered citizens, CSOs and media to promote democratisation and good governance (SDC 2016). The open and constructive interaction between state and civil society as well as within the civil society are emphasised. Switzerland with its history and authentic experience with direct democracy and civic engagement seems well positioned to promote principles of good local governance, participation and diversity. Democratisation and human rights are also strategic objectives of the Federal Dispatch on International Cooperation 2017 - 2020 and the Swiss Foreign Policy 2016 - 2019.

Relevance of the project approach: The LA project is relevant for the support of the civil society in Albania and supports the promotion of activism contributing to a strengthened democratic society. It has a good and innovative mix of instruments (various demand-driven grants and SEIs) and all interviewed donors are aware of LA's unique and transparent approach by using an Idea Competition – a live-streamed debate of pre-selected proposals – enriching debate and learning. LA uses a good mix of grant instruments catering to various CSOs, CBOs and individuals. Especially, the fellowships for individuals are well recognised and unique among the donor projects.

The donors and grantees appreciate the explicit efforts of LA towards transparency in allocating the grants (public Idea Competition) and on the spot announcement of the result. Especially, the successful grantees find the public presentation of their idea with live-stream on the LA website and facebook quite thrilling and rewarding. The fact that these take place in different cities of Albania is also well received.

LA conducts info sessions and provides intensive coaching and counselling during all stages of application and grant implementation. Partners Albania is also providing networking services through events where applicants can exchange and enter partnerships with other grantees. However, the concept does not include full-fledged capacity development. This appears justified because several other donors focus on capacity development for CSOs (e.g. EU, Sweden, etc.).

¹¹ <http://www.konsultimipublik.gov.al/Konsultime/>

Themes and directions of calls: LA differentiates between three thematic pillars, namely accountability (77% of grants), promoting participation (18%) and increasing transparency (5%). This categorisation does, however, not reflect the sectors in which the grants are implemented (e.g. environment, public services, etc.). Based on various interviews it appears as if quite many grants were implemented to monitor public institutions at various levels (e.g. municipality councils, transparency of municipalities, etc.) by several CSOs. This raises the issue of complementarity between the grant activities as for example budgeting figures of Municipalities appear in various platforms and grants). Further, some interviewees reported that overlaps between grants (and other donor projects) exists when it comes to the monitoring of transparency of the functioning of municipalities.

The directions of the five calls (see Annex 4) focussed on promotion of civic participation, improved access to information, increased accountability of elected and appointed local officials and monitoring of local services. Call 1 had also a focus on media as advocacy tool and Call 4 looked for art and creative ideas to promote local democracy. These directions were gradually finetuned to the emerging context and were relevant.

The LA intends to harness **media organisations and journalists** as drivers of change (see LA project document 2015). LA has supported various journalists as individuals or media organisations in order to enhance transparency at national or local level through critical and investigative journalism. Such efforts have been promoted but often remained rather punctual – except the monitoring efforts conducted by the Balkan Investigative Research Network (BIRN) which covered all LGUs. The interviews with journalists confirmed the impression that there is self-censorship of journalists, especially at local level due to informal labour markets relations, fear from organised crime and different interests of media owners. Investigative journalists face harassments. In this regard, it was noted that BIRN (which got a grant under Call 1) withdrew from an awarded grant under Call 4 (upscale) because BIRN could not accept the additional rather ‘rigid’ inquiries by SDC requesting for more funding transparency as well the requests to change activities. The transparency issues for bigger organisations cannot be neglected but is complicated by the fact that these organisations are supported from various donors and through various instruments (e.g. some donors provide project related grants whereas others support them with institutional grants at the same time).

The SEIs, in form of the various open data portals, provide central services of the consortium for the Albanian civil society and media. Although conceptually they appear relevant (e.g. financial transparency and legal services for CSOs) the sporadic feedback obtained is that these are not always user friendly.

3.2 Achievements and Effectiveness

Impact

It is obviously difficult to make straight forward conclusions about impacts in such a diverse thematic and actor landscape as the LA project is operating. The indicators at the impact and outcome levels in the various logframe versions appear not very meaningful despite the reformulating efforts (see comments in Table 1).

Considering a few proxy-indicators, for which data are available, the following trend is noticeable: Whereas the Freedom House scoring for the civil society sub-indicator remained stable at 3.0 since 2015 (when 1 is the best and 7 the worst scoring), the overall democracy score for Albania marginally improved since 2014 (see Table 2 in Annex 3). The corruption perception index (CPI) slightly improved from 33 in 2014 to 38 in 2017 (when 0 is the worst and 100 the best).¹² The Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI) indicates an improvement for the democracy status which “increased” from 6.7 in 2014 to

¹² See: https://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption_perceptions_index_2017#table

7.1 in 2018 (when 10 is the best and 1 the worst scoring, for more information see Table 3 in Annex 3). The USAID sustainability index has remained fairly stable in the past years (see Table 4 in Annex 3).

There is evidence that some CSO and individual grants had direct impacts (e.g. change in Laws, protecting natural heritage and environment by stopping development projects or contributing to food security through closing cattle markets which do not meet hygiene standards). A few examples are illustrated under the outcome section. But there was also a general opinion expressed by many other donors and grantees that no miracles should be expected from such small and short duration grants, especially when it comes to creating an active citizenship, empowering CSOs and building responsive and accountable government agencies.

Outcome

Not surprisingly the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) information at outcome level makes references to successful grants which show a tangible outcome. There are numerous interview statements from the grantees, LA staff and staff of the Swiss Embassy that many grants have positively influenced priority setting and decision-making at local and national level. This is also confirmed by the external evaluation of the first three calls (Metaj 2017 and 2018). The consolidated report of results from Call 1 to 3 (Metaj 2018b) confirms improved access and quality of public services in 29 Municipalities as a result of the grants. From 15 petitions launched with LA grants 8 showed tangible improvements of services and one draft law was annulled due to an intervention of a grantee. LA grantees also have designed and implemented 5 public participation instruments and 9 monitoring tools with the potential to scale-up and develop into sustainable practices of work by civic actors.

The various monitoring efforts (councils, universities, municipality services) contribute to higher transparency and better service quality. In this regard, some outstanding examples from the interviewed grantees are:

- The 'Albanian Institute of Science' received two grants (Call 2 and 4 upscale, both times CHF 40'000) to create an open data platform. The portal¹³ provides information for more than 6'400 Albanian companies that are contracted by local governments. The platform uses various publicly available sources and is mainly used by students and journalists.
- The association for the 'Help of Children' has received a grant (Call 4, CHF 45'000) for the identification of families where the children suffer from parents with mental health problems. More than 130 families were identified and will be counselled in a second stage of the project.
- The 'Institute for Political Studies' received two grants. The latest grant (Call 5, CHF 38'000) conducts a monitoring of the Municipal Councils in five municipalities of Tirana county. The project analyses the perception of citizens regarding the councils, the presence and activity of the council members as well as the outcome of council meetings (which should take place on a monthly basis but have not met in the case of Tirana for half a year). The results are yet to be compiled and published.
- The 'Albanian River Rafting Association' received a Rapid Response Grant (CHF 13'000) in spring 2018 in order to stop the construction of three hydropower plants in protected zones on the Osumi river. Thanks to the support of a legal clinic in Tirana the court has stopped the projects. Now the issue goes to the appeal court and a new hydropower project is currently being planned.
- The journalist, Granit Sokolaj, received a fellowship grant (Call 4, CHF 9,000) to monitor the open cattle markets, which threaten the food security. 10 out of 33 total

¹³ See: www.opencorporates.al

open cattle markets in Albania were monitored. The monitoring findings were presented in an open letter to 10 Mayors, and the National Food Agency. A 20min documentary was broadcasted in 'Report TV' and some local TVs, and a TV programme was organised and broadcasted in 'Report TV'. As a result, three markets, that of Peqin, Gramsh and of Gostine (Cerrik), were closed, and three others had some infrastructure rehabilitations (Shkodra, VauDejes and Rogozhine).

- The local CSO 'Well-point' was created in 2015 and with its grant (Call 4, CHF 26'000) it is monitoring the hygienic standards in 38 schools in the municipality of Shkodra (incl. the administrative units) according to UNICEF/EU criteria,. They have done a survey and are now analysing the data in order to prepare a report.
- The 'North Green Association' received a grant (Call 4, CHF 14'800) to address the waste issue on the Drini River (Dibër municipality). The promotion of tourism and river rafting requires a clean environment and the association is – in cooperation with the municipality – addressing this important area in terms of setting the pre-conditions for tourism promotion.¹⁴
- 'Hope for Us' is a Vlora based CSO, established in 2014, and supporting people with disabilities (PwD). It received a grant (Call 1, CHF 16'000). The centre lobbied the Vlora municipality to build ramps, (of which 80% required by the centre were built) and provide social housing bonuses for PwD. Few services for people with disabilities were offered for the first time in the villages, while contributing to building more trust for the municipal government. As a result of the lobbying, a city council member provides free advice to PwD.
- The 'Centre for Research, Cooperation and Development' in Vlora received a grant (Call 4, CHF 30'000) to address the issue of a mercury hotspot, close to the seashore area. This was in operation during the communist regime. The centre has identified the number of people living within the hotspot area and informed those people about the serious health risks of the area. It advised the municipality to urgently move the citizens from the polluted area and urged the Ministry of Environment and the Vlora Regional Environment Agency to capsulate the area.
- The 'Institute for Democracy and Mediation' received a grant during Call 1 (CHF 31'745). Their project, 'LevizTirana' supported the establishment of community structures to promote citizens initiatives. The project raised awareness about the community structures through public meetings in six cities as well as through print and audio-visual media and TV debates. Further, it designed a regulatory manual on setting-up these structures. As a result, the municipality of Berat is the first one to approve the regulatory framework and set-up community councils in three of its neighbourhoods.

¹⁴ See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H2pN9HAsiw4&t=7s>

Table 1: Overview on achievements in LevizAlbania

Indicator	Baseline 2017	Target 2019	Comment
Impact: Albanian population benefits from an improved democracy at the local level			
Percentage of municipalities that reportedly offer better access to information and improved services to their citizens	Local government currently offers limited access to information on public services	More than 50% of municipalities in Albania benefiting from the project reportedly offer better access to information and improved services to their citizens	The indicator definition is extremely vague and not specific to LA activities and therefore does not allow for a meaningful tacking of changes. All municipalities will report better access since after the TAR (2015) all municipalities were completely restructured and most started from a rather low level. Other donor supported projects will possibly have made bigger contributions to such changes (e.g. dldp and STAR 2). The source for verification and availability of data is not clear.
Percentage of municipalities that reportedly engage in increasingly using participation and/or accountability-enhancing mechanisms	- There is limited transparency regarding consultation processes - Government officials lack structural approach and procedures to organize participatory processes	More than 50% of municipalities benefiting from the projects have reportedly engaged in increasingly using participation and/or accountability-enhancing mechanisms	
Outcome 1: Civic actors influence the local priority setting, decision making, and oversight of local authorities			
1.1 Number and type of action undertaken by civic actors to influence local priorities, including public services and increase transparency at the local level	Civil society makes limited efforts to understand local government resources, and hold actors accountable for their management of those resources	Civic actors (citizens, civic groups, media and public authorities) have taken action to influence local priorities and public services, in more than 50% of local governments.	These indicators (and their baselines as well as target values) are vague and do not indicate change in capacity (e.g. legislation, strength of organisation or quality of services). The baseline and targets are very vague and do hardly allow to monitor and qualify change over time. The annual reports of LA make reference to success stories of the various grants. According to Metaj (2018) LA improved access and quality of public services in 29 municipalities as a result of the grants and from 15 petitions launched with LA grants 8 showed tangible improvements of services and one draft law was annulled due to an intervention of a grantee from the completed grants under Call 1-3.
1.2 Type of actions CSO partnerships have engaged in	Partnerships between CSOs are fragmented and at local level limited to large urban centres.	CSO partnerships have successfully (1) demanded improvement of practices and procedures in local government, and (2) monitor the implementation of local government plans and reforms in more than 10% of LA supported grants	
Outcome 2: Civil society actors initiate and support selected structural changes to improve democracy at local level			
2.1 Use of SEI to bring about change at the local level	Demand for genuine local democracy is limited	By the end of the project, there are 5 best practices of bringing change at local level by using the SEIs	Except 2.1 the other indicators also do not indicate any outcome change. According to Metaj (2018) LA grantees have designed and implemented 5 public participation (PP) instruments and 9 monitoring tools with the potential to scale up and develop into sustainable practices of civic actors from the completed grants under Call 1-3.
2.2 Types of instruments and frameworks that facilitate the work of the democracy advocates at the local level	0	At least 4 new regulations, practices, and platforms are available for democracy advocates and public at large	
2.3 Percentage of projects that make use of media (including social media)	Engagement of CSOs with media is limited	Media has been engaged (directly or indirectly) in enhancing local democracy and promoting social accountability in 50% of the projects	

Source: LA and own observation

- The association 'Equal voice for Roma and Egyptians' in Vlora was established in 2015. It received a grant in Call 1 (CHF16'820). It supported both Roma and Egyptian communities with information on their legal benefits as well as lobbied Vlora municipality to provide those benefits, as is the case with economic aid. As a result, three youngsters and 4 women got scholarship from the municipality to follow school lessons. The municipality uses the association data on issues related to Roma and Egyptians. Thanks to the association's follow-up in 2018, 12 people from both communities attended the professional courses (e.g. hair dressing), and 11 families were included in the social housing bonus scheme.
- 'Refleksione' was established in 1992, first as a women club. It received a LA grant (Call 4, CHF 39'339) to monitor the local referral mechanisms for domestic violence. As a result, an Operational Monitoring Plan (POM) was established as an innovative instrument used for the first time in Albania, and piloted in three municipalities (Lushnja, Fier, Korça). The main aim of the POM is to find out and highlight the shortcomings in the efficient functioning of the referral mechanisms in the three municipalities.

LA, through financing 5 SEIs, supported the establishment of the following platforms and services that not only benefit the grantees but reach out to broader audiences of the Albanian CS:

(1) 'Open Municipal Financial Platform', (web-platform run by Co-PLAN) makes reliable and systematic data available on the financial performance and the fiscal situation of local governments in Albania (www.financatvendore.al) which is also accessible from the website of the Ministry of Finance¹⁵;

(2) 'Strengthening CSOs for effective inclusiveness and participation in policy-making and decision-making' (operated by Partners Albania) is designed to enhance the CSOs not only in project implementation but also in local democracy issues through training and coaching as well as networking. Different online and other tools and instruments are used for this purpose;

(3) 'Legal Clinics' (implemented by OSFA in Shkodra and Durres) are set-up to encourage legal actions against wrong doings and illegal actions of municipalities, to address the impunity of the executive, but also to provide legal advice to CSOs and citizens on municipality-related issues;

(4) 'Empowering Local Media: Multi-Functional Platform to support Local Democracy' was implemented by OSFA and includes a website www.portavendore.al;

(5) 'Civic Innovation Lab' is currently being built up by OSFA.

In the context of this review, it remains difficult for the evaluation team to assess the effects of these initiatives among LA grantees and wider audience, since evidence for the use (or non-use) is only sporadic, and no systematic data is collected and analysed. The main sources of evidence are website statistics. According to LA M&E data, the websites generate quite high number of clicks. Interviews with the grantees indicate that grantees use the SEIs. Especially the training platform operated by Partners Albania was mentioned by several grantees as useful for obtaining information and for networking with other grantees. The local financial web-platform was used by grantees whose project were related to local budgets monitoring or participation.

However, there remain some question marks of the evaluation team regarding the content, user-friendliness and up-dating of the various platforms (e.g. the financial platform, online training and civic innovation lab). These platforms aim to provide structured information to support more evidence-based SC initiatives and increase capacities for local actors to

¹⁵ <http://www.financa.gov.al/portali-financave-vendore/>

interact with local authorities. To better play this role, these platforms need to be more dynamic, informative and citizens friendly, so as to enlarge the audience and encourage more SC activism. The Open Municipal Financial Platform needs to provide more citizens focused analysis in order to generate public debate on local finances and fiscal policies, especially with the new local elections coming next year. The same can be said about www.portavendore.al. It could be, more citizens friendly and provide more complete information about cross-cutting issues, like human rights and gender and some improvements are needed to optimise its operation, e.g. the links of its OdaVendore need to be activated, the reports on the citizens complains need to be available in order to show results of the platform, and more links to the municipal government webpages could be added to the platform.

Other web-based platforms supported by LA, like the 'open corporates portal' (<http://opencorporates.al/sq>) need to complement or add more value to other existing platforms like: <http://openprocurement.al> (OSFA), <http://open.data.al> (NL, OSFA, USAID), <http://spending.data.al> (NL, OSFA, USAID), <http://ais.al/new/money-government-politics-2/> (NL, OSFA, USAID), as all provide data on expenses, tenders and companies of municipal governments procurements.

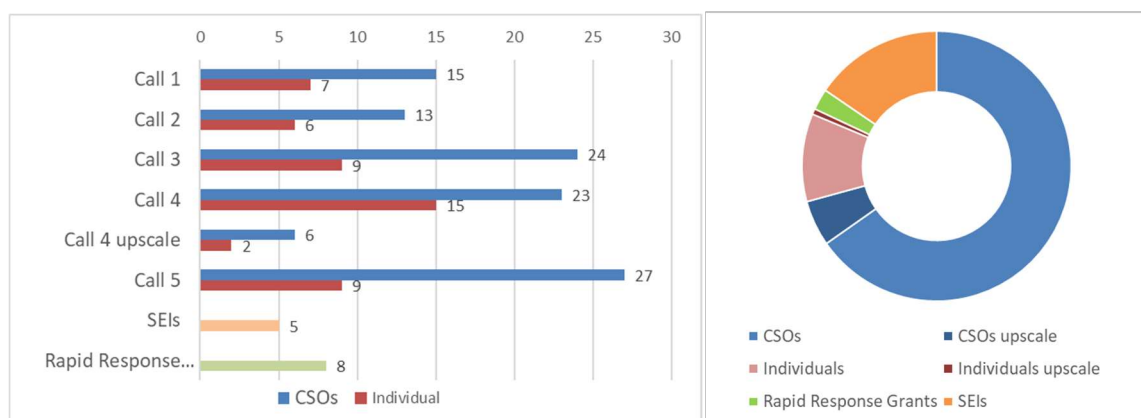
The project organised two "Leviz Democracy Weeks" in 2017 and in 2018 bringing together various stakeholders engaged in local democracy issues. In 2017 over 850 people attended the various activities and events in Tirana and three other cities and in 2018 more than 600 people participated in Tirana and four different cities (AR 2017 and LevizAlbania 2018a).

The recently conducted civil society sector study (Karlstedt 2018) noted that the civil society has broadened and became more mature as more CSOs understand the importance of joining forces. This was facilitated by LA but of course also other donors emphasize this in their calls.

Outputs

The following graphs illustrate the application of the granting instruments.

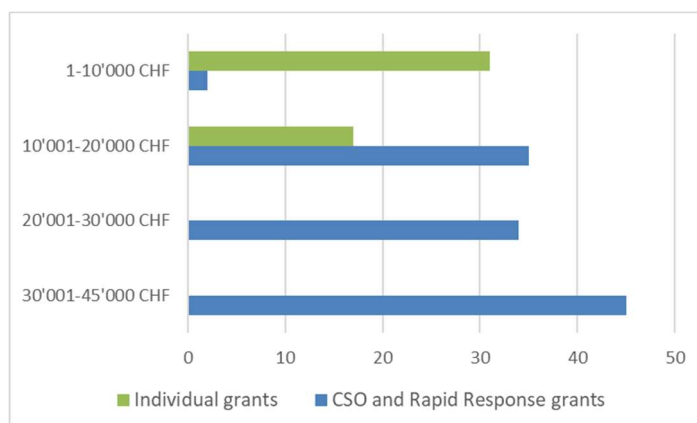
Figure 1: Types of grants contracted during the five calls until June 2018 (left) and distribution of the contracted grants of CHF 4.1 m (right).



Source: LA M&E

Roughly two thirds of the grants in terms of number and size were allocated to organisations. Since the size of the SEIs was higher (up to CHF 158'000) their financial share is higher compared to the individual grants.

Figure 2: Size of grants for all Calls (CSOs, individual and Rapid Response grants, N=164):



Source: LA M&E

The overall grants size is relatively small. The max. theoretical size for CSOs is CHF 50'000 and for individuals the max. amount was reduced from CHF 20'000 to 10'000 from the Call 4. This made sense because the fact that 19 CSOs received less than the highest individual overestimated the absorption capacity of individuals for such grants.

The following sections attempts to qualify the effectiveness of the various instruments based on the interviews as well as website consultations:

- A total of 108 grants (out of 798 applications) were allocated during the first five calls to established and young CSOs:
 - The evaluation team observes a good mixture between supporting established CSO and relatively young CSOs or CBOs.
 - The grantees outside of Tirana might be less experienced but showed a high level of commitment and connection to local issues and communities. There seems to be a certain rivalry to Tirana based CSOs. Several local organisations emphasised that they can provide better advocacy/services due to their access to local networks and better context knowledge.
 - Most of the supported well-established CSOs also receive support by other donors (like Oxfam Italia, InfoCIP, IDM, MJAFT, Agenda Institute, Milieukontakt Albania, BIRN, EuroPartners, REFLEKSIONE, Instituti i Studimeve Politike, Qendra Kombëtare për Studime Sociale, Instituti Shqiptar i Medias). In one case a donor felt that LA has captured the partner and sold the idea as new and innovative, although the other donors had supported that partner for years.
- A total of 48 individual grants (out of 495 applications) were supported:
 - This instrument is quite unique and none of the other donors has this flexibility.
 - The grantees interviewed during the evaluation were mostly representing media.
 - The issues addressed show a big diversity.
 - In several cases the added value did not seem to be obvious. Therefore, we conclude that the instrument offers a big potential to stimulate civic activism but that it is also seen critically by several CS observers.
 - Three grantees from Call 4 have withdrawn after having been contracted because of migration or taking up a job in the public administration.
- A total of 8 Rapid Response grants were provided until mid-2018:
 - These were mostly used to address urgent environmental issues and to intervene against the construction of hydropower plants and resorts in protected areas. However, the urgency requires good justifications and well-

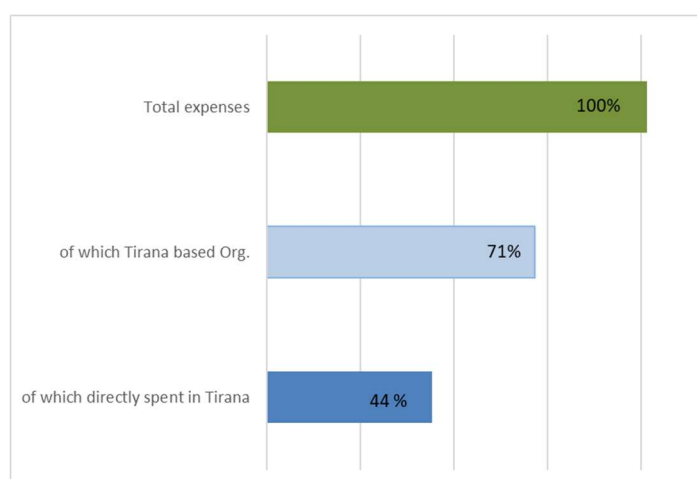
established criteria (e.g. Ecovolis case – cleaning of beaches – did not seem to justify an urgent action).

- As long as it is cautiously applied it adds value.

Geographic coverage: LA has made efforts to reach out to peripheral and rural areas. The grantee data indicate that it reached out to remoter areas as well as young CSOs and CBOs. Also, fellowships were increasingly granted to individuals outside of the big cities. LA has encouraged the applicants to cooperate with other CSOs. Especially Tirana-based organisations were invited to engage with local organisations. This has generally worked well although some local CSOs were of the opinion that they know the local context better and that the Tirana-based CSOs are doing things that were already done by them before. Yet, the networking and cooperation among Tirana-based and the local CSOs need to be mutually benefiting. Creating artificial partnerships just for the sake of fulfilling the call requirement must be avoided.

The following figure indicates that local grantees (outside of Tirana) have received a remarkable share of grants (and budgets).

Figure 3: Disaggregation of money flow for all LA instruments (overall total is CHF 4.1m)



Source: LA M&E

A substantial part of the total fund allocation (44%) went to Tirana-based organisations either for grants that have a national outreach (in most cases) or that had their activities in Tirana county, respectively the Tirana municipality. However, the figure above also shows that around 66% of the demand-driven funds were allocated outside of Tirana of which around 29% were implemented by local organisations and individuals located outside of Tirana. The financial allocation outside of Tirana was also smaller because the grant size was in general smaller due to the reduced absorption capacity of CSOs outside of Tirana. Therefore, we conclude that LA was able to support grantees and projects with a good outreach beyond Tirana. LA overall supported grants in 55 out of 61 (90%) municipalities of Albania and especially the individual grants had an outreach to peripheral and small municipalities.

Transversal Issues

The gender issue was addressed in the project document (LevizAlbania 2015) and it can be noted that the LA project staff consists of mostly female. The representation of female in the individual grants is also good with (46%) of the individual grantees being female. LA has supported six women organisations, and several organisations with grants which address women issues (hotline for victims of domestic violence, monitoring of hygienic standards in schools has a gender dimension, human trafficking, etc.).

The majority of grantees interviewed during this evaluation were women and it can be positively noted that often women are executive directors of the organisations.

Several grants addressed minority issues, being it the LGBT community, disabled or the integration of Roma.

3.3 Project Management and Efficiency

Institutional set-up

The two main governing bodies of LA are the Advisory Board (AB) and the Grant and Fellowship Board (GFB).

The work of the AB, has been helpful for its links to the government and the other two donors (EU and OSCE) that are represented in the AB. Overall, it is judged as useful but not having been able to provide substantial contributions to project steering.

The GFB has seven members, three from the consortium, OSFA permanently chairing the board, with Partners Albania and Co-PLAN having a rotating membership, and four independent members, all well-known professionals¹⁶ with profound experience in the field of civil society, good governance and journalism. Thus, the GFB brings together a good mix of professional backgrounds and national as well as regional representation. The Swiss Embassy was actively involved in the selection of the external board members. On the one hand, this membership composition guarantees sound independence in the evaluation process and on the other hand, the involvement of the consortium is seen as a guarantee by the consortium members for the delivery of the LA results vis-à-vis the Swiss Embassy. Owing to their context knowledge the role of the Consortium in the GFB was quite strong as expressed in an interview.

LA has developed the guidelines for the calls, and developed a strategy for communication and a gender mainstreaming policy for all LA staff and grantees. These documents have contributed to transparency and were appreciated by the grantees as useful guidelines.

LA has eight professional staff, namely the executive director, two grant managers, the manager responsible for evaluation and monitoring of grantee projects and relations with CS, the media and communication expert, the finance manager, the office assistant and book-keeper, and one grant assistant. The grant management staff is intensively involved in coaching the applicants during the proposal writing process as well as during the project implementation phase, especially with individual grantees. The coaching of individual grantees absorbs considerable resources and an extra position had to be created for this. Coaching and technical as well as thematic support by LA were appreciated by grantees as being on time and professional.

LA reformulated its project logframe twice since the start and the latest version dates from December 2017. However, also the revised version appears to be more precise at output level but does not add value for the M&E system at outcome level. Given the fact that the grant scheme is demand driven this allows for little space for predicting the content of project proposals (although directions have been provided for each call). Even some of the SEIs emerged only during project implementation and the demand-driven character of the grants make the ex-ante formulation of indicators that can be aggregated an obvious challenge. The basic M&E system tracking the activities, however, is in place. Additionally, each call is (externally) evaluated by a consultant hired by LA, while the project conducts regular monitoring visits to see the grantees.

National Consortium

¹⁶ Two journalists, one from Albania and one from Macedonia, a representative of the civil society from Kosovo and the executive director of the Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe (NALAS).

LA is implemented by a consortium of OSFA (Open Society Foundation Albania), which has the lead and two Albanian CSOs (Partners Albania and Co-PLAN). All three are well consolidated CSOs with a lot of experience and expertise in working with CSOs, local governments and donor funded project implementation, grant making as well as training concepts. The consortium members are proud that an Albanian consortium was entrusted by SDC with the implementation of this project which includes a significant regrants scheme with a fairly big budget. The cooperation is evaluated by the members as well as by other stakeholders as smooth, cooperative and efficient. The good complementarity in terms of knowledge, expertise and scope of work of the three partners is an asset.

Granting procedures

LA made the application process easy for the applicants, mainly to attract also small and non-consolidated locally rooted organisations or individuals. The calls were promoted in national newspapers, online portals, as well as on the websites of LA and its three consortium members.

Applicants, CSOs, CBOs and individuals, were invited to submit a project idea of maximum 2 pages through a lean application procedure and easy templates in Albanian. This approach was considered very helpful by the applicants, especially by the new and small CSOs, CBOs and individuals. Applications for Call 4 were asked to be submitted electronically and/or on paper, while for Call 5 applications had to be submitted online. After launch of Call 2 LA prepared a promotional video to guide applicants and explain the call itself.

Evaluation procedure

The evaluation procedure for the applications went through a three-stage process and is illustrated in the following figure.

Figure 4: Overview on procedure from concept notes to financed grants (Call numbers: CSOs / individuals).

	1	2	3	
	Concept Notes	Idea Competition	Project Proposals	Financed Grants
Call 1	161 / 69	86 / 16	37 / 8	15 / 7
Call 2	163 / 67	33 / 17	21 / 8	13 / 6
Call 3	143 / 81	49 / 16	27 / 10	24 / 9
Call 4	181 / 165	55 / 43	26 / 19	23 / 15
Call 5	150 / 113	73 / 31	39 / 13	27 / 9
Total	798 / 495	296 / 123	150 / 58	102 / 48

Source: LA M&E data

Filter 1 Screening of concept notes: The shortlisting was done by LA staff, based mainly on the concept note / idea submitted by the applicant (SDC was involved with some oversight, starting from Call 2). The shortlist reduced the number of project ideas at an

average rate of 68%.¹⁷ The rate of successful applicants was therefore 32% only in average (*Call 1 - 44%, Call 2 - 22%, Call 3 - 29%, Call 4 - 28%, Call 5 - 40%*). Generally, applicants who failed in stage 1 did not find the process transparent. For the unsuccessful grantees, it was not always clear whether the disqualifying reasons were of administrative or/and content nature, or different LA priorities. Referring to the data above, LA staff has a great say in refusing most of the applications for the next stage.

Filter 2 Idea Competition: For the second stage, LA introduced an innovative, transparent and open-door event, where each shortlisted applicant (CSO, CBO or individual) presents the idea to the Grant and Fellowship Board (GFB). LA provides a live-stream of the entire Idea Competition process on its website and facebook. At the end of each regional Idea Competition event, the GFB announced the results and the conditionally approved applicants publicly. The proposals refused by GFB averaged to around 50% of ideas presented in the competition, and the other half were conditionally approved (*Call 1 - 44%, Call 2 - 58%, Call 3 - 57%, Call 4 - 46%, Call 5 - 50%*). The live-stream broadcasting of the Idea Competition served at the same time to provide feedbacks to the applicants in order to improve the proposal as well as a training session for applicants of the next calls.

In between the Idea Competition and evaluation of the full-fledged proposal, LA staff coached the applicant, mainly the individuals, to formulate reasonable and workable proposals and developing the narrative and the budget part of the proposal in line with LA objectives and standards.

Filter 3 Final evaluation of the full proposals: This is conducted by the LA staff and GFB. During this step 27% of the conditionally approved project proposals were rejected, and the remaining 73% were finally contracted (*Call 1 - 49%, Call 2 - 66%, Call 3 - 89%, Call 4 - 91%, Call 5 - 69%*). The final success rate for organisations was 12.7% and for the individuals 9.7%. During this final stage SDC has an oversight on the finally selected full proposals and it has a veto right before the contracts are signed. In two interviewed cases the selected projects were not contracted despite conditional approval after the Idea Competition. LA requested to review activities of the selected projects at that stage, which irritated the applicants. The refusal at this stage (where 27% of the remaining proposals fail) seems delicate and prone to misunderstandings. It brings risks as well as undermines trust.

Thus, the analysis of the filters that reduce the high number of proposals submitted until the contracting stage, reveals the important role that the project staff plays. Thus, filter **1** where most of the projects are sorted out, is perceived less transparent by the non-successful grantees and the overall claim of LA to be a very transparent project receives some critics. The arguments provided for non-selection did not convince the unsuccessful grantees interviewed during this evaluation. Some non-successful grantees at filter **3** also expressed dissatisfaction with the arguments provided. This draws attention to the need to submit clear justifications for not successful applicants.

The concept notes and the project proposals can be submitted in Albanian, and LA is one of few such donor schemes. This is highly appreciated especially by CSOs, CBOs and individuals located outside of Tirana. The duration between launching of the calls and contracting was reduced over time due to more efficient decision-making and now takes four months. This appears to be a very short period. Individual grants are quite resource intensive for LA staff and applicants, because of weak project writing capacities of individual applicants and often the LA staff must handle all their administrative issues during project implementation.

The Rapid Response evaluation procedure takes about 20 days from application to contracting. This short time makes it difficult for applicants to develop a well-thought full-fledged proposal, as well as to build the needed coalitions and/ or networks. LA staff, the

¹⁷ See Table 7 in Annex 4.

consortium and the Swiss Embassy closely coordinate the rapid assessment of the often sensitive proposals. This includes the check and mitigation of risks and the coaching of the applicants.

Project implementation

LA holds orientation sessions with grantees to inform them about contractual obligations, financial and narrative reporting requirements, communication with media and the gender perspective of LA. Partners Albania organizes individual coaching to the LA grantees, which were chosen in partnership with LA staff, to orientate and support them, based on their needs and challenges in implementing their project.

LA staff has attended various key events of the grantees, but still, more presence is required by grantees in their localities to provide support and facilitate work with government agencies.

The VAT issue emerged as a constant problem in all interviews with grantees. It obviously remains an important issue, mainly for smaller CSOs and CBOs. Since they have to pay the VAT and LA cannot reimburse it, this means an implicit co-financing requirement (of 20%). The grantees struggle to cover these costs and have to cover these by other funding sources.

Visibility and communication

LA has a very good branding and visibility strategy. It is well known by all stakeholders and has a big outreach (mostly through social media, TV, etc.). Most of the activities of LA and its grantees are presented in social media. In contrast, the LA webpage appears not to be comprehensive and updated with the media products and links, as well as with the publications of the grantees.

The project has made intensive use of social and traditional media, visual arts, video technology, investigative and traditional journalism with a high multiplier effect to advance local democracy issues, generate public debate and hold local government accountable. As a result, LA has got a lot of attention through the media and its online channel during the calls for applications, generating significant interest from key stakeholders across various communities.

Donor coordination

The donor coordination is organised around the sector working group consisting of the nine donors. The Swiss Embassy is participating in the regular meetings (2-4 times per year) of the working group for civil society, which appears to work better than in many other sectors. The working group does not only address strategic issues but also implementation modalities and shares lessons learnt. Since the LA Advisory Board (AB) was not only composed of consortium members and SDC but also the EU and OSCE, this also allowed for donor coordination.

The risk of overlapping of funding from various donors for the same CSOs, is present and was noticed in certain interviews with grantees, especially when they received parallel funding from different donors. The limited size of the overall funding available for CSOs reflects the limited role that the civil society has so far had in government strategies in Albania. The lack of a unified and regularly maintained database of CSOs, the projects they implement and the respective donors, has hindered the effective coordination. The issue should mainly be addressed by establishing mutual transparency between the grantee and the donors since outdated or partial data-bases are also not too helpful in grant coordination.

3.4 Sustainability

Sustainability of the project results of LA grantees remains a priority for both, the Swiss Embassy and LA. Therefore, in the second part of Phase 1 LA shifted towards the up-scaling of successful projects. One of the call directions under Call 4 for applications was dedicated to up-scaling of previously supported projects aiming to capitalize on the positive results achieved. Simplified procedures were applied for the up-scaling call. Since most projects are still on-going the effect on sustainability is yet to be seen.

The financial sustainability remains the most critical aspect. In this regard, many of the interviewed donors and grantees expressed their concern that with small projects and short grant durations the sustainability of the civil society in Albania will remain critical. The interviews also revealed the significant risk of individual grantees to sustain the results: They are mostly involved in other job-related activities, are not easily available during office time and there is no clear approach from LA on how to follow up results of the fellows. It appears also difficult to judge whether the activism level can be sustainably increased by LA individual grantees, an opinion that was expressed quite widely in the interviews. There remains also a risk that the promotion of such activism may contribute to (further) fragmentation of the civil society as it is expressed in the recent sector study (Karlstedt 2017).

Given the small grants and the short grant durations, mostly less than one year, many of the interviewees expressed doubts about the results or outcomes that can be achieved in the change of mind-set. The transition history has illustrated that changing the mind-set of the Albanian society towards transparency and accountability of government agencies needs a longer-term approach. Furthermore, the resources allocated to this change agenda seem small compared to all government wrongdoings and the still massive illegal activities in Albania.

Yet, many of the positive outcomes and examples reported here and in the LA monitoring reports and evaluations, like the improved practices, tools and the instruments developed by the grantees for the public participation, the monitoring, as well as the web-based platforms have a potential to become standard practices. The ownership and the maintenance of all the web-based platforms, however, are concerns to be addressed by LA. The project has contributed to establishing good practices of monitoring, analyzing the procedures and organizing community mobilization against public concessions, e.g. for hydropower plants, incinerators and seaside resorts, and if some of those and other LA practices are institutionalised through national legislation, the results can well be sustained.

3.5 Lessons learnt and conclusions

The most important lessons learnt by the consortium, the LA staff and SCO-A can be summarised as follows:

- It was an asset to emphasise on organisations and individuals outside of Tirana. This has mobilised new actors and brought tangible change, at local outside of Tirana and even at national level.
- The many relatively small grants on the one side, and the few larger SEIs implemented by the three consortium members on the other side, raises the question about how to deal with bigger and well-established CSOs as well as the exact criteria that should be applied for the development and allocation of SEIs. Such demand-driven platforms supporting the CSOs and other potential users could also be provided by other actors than the consortium members.

- Upscaling of good practices and networking among the CSOs is an important strategic granting approach to increase sustainability. However, many CSOs show some resistance to partnering because of the competition for limited funds.
- The synergies with existing Swiss projects at local level should be exploited through a strategic alignment with other Swiss projects, e.g. when defining the directions of the calls.
- The project development capacity of many applicants is still rather weak.

The evaluators draw the following conclusions from the findings of the review:

- The LA project is well recognised by the donor community and the approach is admired. It has an excellent branding and developed an innovative approach (live-streaming of the Idea Competition on the LA website and facebook). It complements granting schemes of other donors.
- LA granting instruments and experiences are used as model for other granting schemes. The risk-based approach considering the absorption capacity of the applicants has worked.
- There is a risk in overpromoting the uniqueness and innovativeness of the selected grant projects by LA especially because many grantees have received support of other donors, often in parallel to the LA grant. Thus, it is not always easy for the grantees to demonstrate the complementarity of support, especially if it is offered with different modalities (e.g. long-term institutional support versus short term project grants as in the case of LA).
- LA has a good mix of instruments to enable outreach to peripheral areas. This could be even further promoted because Tirana-based organisations try to also cover such areas and they are usually more experienced, better funded and more competitive. But local organisations or individuals are often better informed and better linked to the local context.
- Compared to other Swiss projects supporting the civil society in this region, the LA grants are relatively small and have short durations. Despite the demonstrated effectiveness in terms of reported impacts and outcomes there remain concerns that such short-term interventions cannot change deeply rooted mindsets so quickly.
- LA has applied an agile management style and is responsive to its context. It adjusted the thematic directions of calls and the grant size to make it context-specific. For individuals, the maximum amount was reduced from initially CHF 20'000 per grant to CHF 10'000 after Call 4. The duration of grants was increased to 15 months compared to 12 months initially.
- The logframe was revised twice since the project start. However, it still remains difficult to aggregate results because open and competitive calls bring a high diversity of supported issues and initiatives and the choice of meaningful, concrete indicators remains challenging.

5 Recommendations

Overall, no drastic changes are required as the LA project is well on track and well managed. In view of a Phase 2, the following recommendations are structured according to three themes: (1) Strategic orientation; (2) Steering mechanisms and transparency; and (3) Administrative issues.

Strategic orientation and instruments

1. SDC: Conduct a tracer study in 2019 in order to assess the role of individual grants in order to validate the assumption that the fellowships sustainably increase the activism level in the Albanian civil society

Although some individual grants have shown remarkable success, the instrument brings a lot of uncertainties and requires a lot of coaching of the individual grantees by LA staff. Not in all cases the outcome was convincing to the evaluators. The interviews also identified some problems (e.g. difficulties in combining grant activities with job requirements and in three cases the individuals withdrew from contracts). Therefore, it is proposed to make a tracer study of all the 48 fellowship grantees so far in order to assess the relevance and the sustainability of this instrument.

2. SDC: Complementary to individual grants (provided the results of the tracer study are positive) democracy awards could be allocated annually for organisations and individuals

An alternative or complementary approach to reward individuals or CSOs and CBOs for outstanding civic engagement or impact would be the annual distribution of awards (e.g. the award ceremony could take place during the LA Democracy Week). This would have the advantage of awarding already achieved changes and proven relevance to the LA priorities.

In Kosovo this has proven to be a good communication platform for the project and in addressing specific civil society or local democracy issues.

3. SDC: The concept of the SEIs should be reviewed and replaced by bigger strategic projects (e.g. for strengthening independent media).

The five SEIs were a strategic element to bring in the competence of the consortium partners and included budgets of up to CHF 160'000. Owing to their online character of most instruments it is difficult to judge the real value added in this review. The comprehensiveness of contents and the user friendliness of some of the web-platforms appears to offer room for improvement.

Therefore, the current SEIs should be maintained (and improved) in a next phase. However, new SEIs could be replaced by strategic projects – that have a longer duration and the character of an institutional grant – of a similar financial volume and these could also be launched with other CSO partners. There seems to be a need to especially strengthen and support investigative journalism at local as well as at national level.

4. SDC and LA: Although the outreach achieved in Phase 1 to CSOs outside of Tirana was commendable and this could even be fostered in a next phase (e.g. by earmarking funds for CS actors outside of Tirana).

Local organisations and individuals have better context knowledge but obviously also a lower absorption capacity than Tirana-based organisations.

The partnering approach already applied in LA Phase 1 should be emphasised but at the same time artificial partnerships will have to be avoided.

Steering mechanisms and transparency

5. SDC: In order to increase grant allocation transparency, the dependency from LA staff assessment during the evaluation of the project ideas should be reduced. An independent member should be added at this stage. On the other side the representation of the three consortium members in the Grant and Fellowship Board should be reduced from two to one member in the Idea Competition stage.

The first level evaluation (project ideas) is currently mainly conducted by the LA staff. The consortium partners and SDC are mainly involved at the end of this stage and the latter has a veto right. This screening stage should be supplemented by at least one external evaluator (neither from the consortium nor from SDC) in order to reduce the dependency from LA staff.

During the idea competition the weight of the consortium (currently 2 out of 5 members) should be reduced to one representative. The chair of the board could be organised as a rotating scheme among the three consortium partners.

6. LA: All publications of grantees should be available on the website and the latter needs to become more user friendly.

The LA website contains a lot of information but many guides, reports, documents or articles cannot be found easily (e.g. news from the grantees looks not updated and info about the democracy week is not easily found). Furthermore, the search function is not working. A lot of grantees publications are found on their webpages. Having them uploaded, in a structured and user-friendly way, on the LA webpage, would make a more powerful information engine for CSOs and local and national government agencies.

7. SDC: The grant size and duration are to be further reviewed to cater for the specific need of the diverse applicants (individual/small and big CSOs).

The size for individual grants was already reduced. For strategic projects bigger sized grants and possibly with a longer duration (up to 2 years) should be envisaged. However, this requires a validation of the grantee's absorption capacity and close coordination with other donors supporting the selected organisations.

8. SDC: The approach of providing directions for the calls should be maintained and adjusted to contextual developments.

LA has established 2-3 thematic directions for each call providing guidance to the applicants. The call directions were adjusted and fine-tuned to the context (e.g. reforms, local elections etc.). This should be maintained and the calls should be rather thematically broad as long as they contribute to the purpose of the project, namely to promote democracy, civil society and activism of citizens at the local level.

Administrative issues

9. SDC and LA: For smaller CSOs and CBOs the VAT is to be covered by LA.

The grantees had to cover the VAT from other income sources, and often, it was actually paid from contributions of other donors. SDC should review its policy and either request for a clear co-financing by the partner or covering the VAT (unless it is reimbursed to the CSO at a later stage).

10. LA: Review the administrative restrictions for eligible costs (ceiling of salary, per diem, etc.) and offering better justifications if applicants fail at the latest stage.

The administrative restriction that only 20% of the grant can be used for salaries has posed a tough condition on many CSOs in using their staff. A higher allocation of the grants' budget to staff should be considered in future (30% - 40%). This would also reduce the incentive to pay staff through tax-free per diems instead of salaries.

The letter for non-successful grantees at this stage should provide the details where the applicant failed to consider the conditions of the GFB.

11. LA: Cutting of budget lines is legitimate but tricky: a) Because most of the grantees fully depend on the grant, and b) Costs might be shifted to other sources of income of the grantee.

The negotiation of budgets during the stage of the final project proposal is important but many grantees felt that the resources were cut in strategic areas without reducing the scope of activities. This has resulted in unrealistic budgets in some cases.

Annex 1 Terms of Reference

for

External Review

of

Project: “LevizAlbania” Phase 1

in

Albania

(7F-00952.01)

List of Contents

- 1 Context**
- 2 Project’s Objective**
- 3 Project achievements and challenges**
- 4 Objectives of the Mandate**
- 5 Scope and Method of Work**
- 6 Deliverables / Reporting**
- 7 Schedule**
- 8 Duration and Implementation Arrangement**
- 9 Evaluation Team / Qualifications**

Annexes I: List of Documents

The Embassy of Switzerland in Albania is soliciting the services of an experienced consultant (s) to conduct an external review of the LevizAlbania project, which is financed by SDC. This external review is mandated by SDC as a donor. These terms of reference outline the framework upon which the prospective consultant (s) shall provide their services to the Embassy of Switzerland in Albania.

1. Context

1.1 Background

Albania's transition to democracy and a market economy has been turbulent. Even after 27 years of transition, the state of democracy is precarious at both national and local levels. There is an important politicization of public institutions. In recent years, there has been a tendency for centralization of powers into the hands of the executive. The opposition is weak and the judiciary system is considered as corrupt and not able to deliver justice, the absence of the rule of law has a considerable impact in nearly every citizen's life. The corruption levels are very high and until now, there is no concrete action to address the root causes of corruption. Check and balance system does not function. At local level, these democratic deficiencies are even more pronounced. This is particularly problematic since it is here where citizens interface most closely with public authorities, and where the outcomes most directly affects their lives. Indeed, the state of local democracy plays a formative role in shaping citizen perceptions about the overall democratic nature of their country.

The civil society sector (CS) has developed substantially since the 1990s, but it continues to be fragile in capacity and fragmented in cooperation. Overall trust between citizens and government is low with only 37% of citizens trusting the government. Democratic understanding is at an early stage and citizens' apathy widespread. Citizen's activism and participation is developing slowly but is still insufficient to guarantee the required checks and balances. Media and especially the social media have emerged as a powerful tool in demanding more accountability and responsiveness at all levels of governance, at the same time Albania made some steps back in terms of media freedom. The heavy political polarization of the country has negatively influenced the role and function of civil society in Albania.

On the other hand, however, there is currently space for optimism. A new central government has initiated a set of legislative and policy reforms (ranging from newly structured local government units to citizen access to public information) that are reshaping the country's democratic architecture and the ways in which citizens and public authorities interact. Social media platforms have mushroomed and genuine voices of CS and citizens are increasingly using social media platforms for their causes and are well linked to international actors. There are some good signs of independent investigative journalism being developed in country. There have been also sporadic cases of self-organization and mobilization of citizens especially for environmental issues.

As it states in the most recent 2018 Report on Albania issued by the European Commission "Some progress was made towards improving the functioning of the National Council for Civil Society. Additional efforts are needed to better embed civil society organizations as part of an inclusive policy dialogue."

In response to this outlook, the Leviz Albania project was set-up in July 2015 to strengthen the democratic culture in Albania. It fosters civic engagement and empowers citizen groups, drivers of change and media to increase their influence and decision making at local level. It complements SDC's extensive past and present work which focuses more on strengthening the responsiveness and delivery capacity of the public sector at local level.

1.2 Information on the current SDC portfolio

The Swiss Cooperation Strategy with Albania (2018-2021) is aligned with the National Strategy for Development and Integration (2015-2020) and consists of four domains: (1) Democratic Governance; (2) Economic Development, (3) Infrastructure and energy; and (4) Health.

The democratic governance domain represents Switzerland's largest programme portfolio, co-financed by the SDC and SECO. The main goal of the Democratic Governance (DG) domain is as follows: People benefit from inclusive, effective and democratic institutions.

The main expected results of DG domain are the followings:

- High-performing executive institutions: Responsible sub-national executive institutions offer inclusive and efficient services
- Legislative bodies: National parliament and municipal councils perform their oversight and representative functions.
- Citizen engagement: Citizens and civil society engage in decision-making and hold the government accountable.

The lines of activity under Citizen Engagement are the followings; Strengthen democracy by supporting drivers of change in demanding integration into decision-making, accountability and transparency of governmental institutions. Support the empowerment of vulnerable people to enjoy equal access of opportunities and have a voice in decisions that affect their lives. Foster mobilization of citizens through civic education activities. Support the capacity and willingness of municipalities to become accountable towards their citizen and to involve them in decision-making processes. In addition, strengthen interlinkages and co-operation between supply and demand side accountability actors.

This project is in line with the new Swiss Cooperation Strategy for Albania 2018-2021, and its objective "People benefit from inclusive, effective and democratic institutions" and its Impact Hypothesis of "Supporting local governments, legislative powers at national and local levels as well as civil society and targeted vulnerable groups, brings decision-making processes closer to the people and enhances their participation".

SDC has a long track record in strengthening municipalities in better service provision to citizens and good governance. Several projects are currently working on these issues and the Swiss Embassy is coordinating the development partners in the decentralization sector. LevizAlbania focuses — in a complementary way- on increasing the interaction and engagement of citizens, through their demand for more responsiveness, accountability and transparency from the respective local government units (the demand side of accountability).

2 Project's objective

In this context, the goal of LevizAlbania project is that Albanian population benefits from an improved democracy at local level. It has two outcomes;

1. Outcome 1: Civic actors influence local priority setting, decision-making and oversight of local authorities.
2. Outcome 2: Civil society actors initiate and support targeted structural changes to improve democracy at local level. The main instrument of the project is the demand driven grants that is open for applications from civil society organizations and individuals. The project has also the Rapid Response instrument in order to address within a short timeframe the urgent demands from Civil Society or citizens. The third instrument is the Strategic Enabling Instrument that enables the consortium partners of LA to propose

project proposals that they can implement in function of improving the enabling environment for Civil Society and addressing issues at national level.

LA has introduced the up-scaling mechanism aiming to build on and consolidate the successful results implemented by the previous grants. The project has made use of multimedia, video technology, investigative and traditional journalism with a high multiplier effect to advance local democracy issues, generate public debate and hold local government accountable.

The Internal Mid Term Review, organised in June 2017, recognised the progress made and framed the guide for the coming two years to achieve the overall project goal.

The target group for LA project are civil society organizations, individuals, associations, schools, and universities throughout the country.

The project is implemented by a consortium of three organizations based in Albania, OSFA Albania (lead organization), PartnersAlbania and Co-PLAN. The budget of the project is 5.9 million CHF and the implementation has started in July 2015 for an initial period of 4 years (phase 1).

3 Project achievements and challenges

LevizAlbania has received in total 1230 applications in 5 Calls. 454 applications have been from individuals. Out of these, the Project has supported 39 individuals and 81 NPOs in 4 Calls for Applications. There are 7 Rapid Response Assistance awarded to 7 NPOs and NPOs coalitions.

Up to now, LA has covered 54 municipalities out of 61, although three projects have covered all the 61 municipalities of Albania

LevizAlbania has created five Strategic Enabling Instruments as follows:

- 1) The Municipal Financial Data Portal: Open Governance is Accountable Governance", Financatvendore.al-implemented by Co-Plan
- 2) Strengthening Civil Society for Effective Inclusiveness and Participation in Policy and Decision Making – implemented by PartnersAlbania
- 3) Establishment of two Local Law Centers- implemented by OSFA
- 4) Empowering Local Media : Multi-Functional Platform to support Local Democracy, Portavendore.al –implemented by OSFA
- 5) Civic Innovation Lab Center / OFICINA"-implemented by OSFA

In total, 1229 civil society actors have benefited from capacity building sessions, mentoring and coaching provided by LA and SEI projects up to now.

For more on the concrete results of funded project, please refer to Progress Reports annexes to this document.

4 Objective of the Mandate

This is a forward-looking external review with a strong learning component. The review should be also seen as a learning exercise rather than a formal evaluation.

The **overall objective** of the external review, to be conducted about at least 6-months before the end of the first project phase, is as follows:

- To assess the achievements of the current project phase and highlight lessons learnt;

- To support the Embassy of Switzerland and LA Project with strategic recommendations for the design of the next second project phase, covering the period 2019-2023.

The **specific objective** of the external review is to assess the project based on the *Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) evaluation criteria*:

1. *Relevance* of the project's approaches and strategic orientation in the given development/transition context, including perception of the implementer by relevant stakeholders (CSOs, different layers of governance, donor landscape);
2. *Effectiveness* of project implementation towards reaching the set objectives and goals;
3. *Efficiency* of the project implementation set-up and project steering;
4. *Impact*, i.e. assessment of the likelihood of impact change; complementarity of other Swiss projects and within the Swiss Cooperation Strategy 2018-22;
5. *Sustainability* issues, cooperation with other Swiss supported projects and outlook for the future; assess the scale and sustainability to achieve bigger impact;
6. To provide *recommendations* on the 5 above-mentioned criteria of the OECD to be used mostly for the design of the next second phase.

Based on the review of the project, the team shall provide **recommendations** for the:

- 1) Evaluate the achievements so far in view of the five mentioned evaluation criteria and the strategic positioning of the project.
- 2) **Design of the next second phase** of the project. These include but are not limited to the following questions:
 - Whether to continue with the same instruments of the project? Any new suggestions?
 - How to deal with local and investigative Media specifically?
 - Whether the target group has to be focused or broad?
 - Whether the topics for the calls should be focused or broad?
 - Should the project invest in Capacity Development dimension of actors or focus only in mobilization and activism?
 - Whether the set-up of the project, including the Evaluation Board and evaluation processes are the right ones that guarantee efficiency, effectiveness and transparency?
 - Whether risks were adequately identified and managed, whether the M&E framework is adequate given the considerable number of grantees and to what extent it would make sense for the project to work at the national policy level (i.e. enabling environment for CSO/citizen engagement)?
 - What should the role of Swiss Embassy vis-a-vi evaluation processes?
 - How to best coordinate and synchronize with other similar interventions in the country?
 - How to best utilize the implementing partners and projects comparative advantage?
 - How to balance and use different approaches in terms of reaching a critical number of genuine local movements, vulnerable groups, and at the same time aiming at leverage, scale (i.e. vertical integration by alliance building, national level activities etc.)?

5 Scope and Method of Work

The review team will consist of an international consultant acting as team leader and a local expert.¹⁸ A translator and driver could be subcontracted by the local expert.

The team will make use of information given by LevizAlbania project, Embassy of Switzerland, beneficiaries, local government units and international organizations,

The main tasks of the assignment are as follows:

- a) Desk Research (information collection and analysis).
Relevant documentation, to be provided, are specified in the Annex I.
- b) A briefing at the Embassy of Switzerland in Tirana at the beginning of the field mission.
- c) Conducting interviews with management and all staff of LevizAlbania in charge of project implementation. Conducting meetings/interview with three heads of consortium members of LevizAlbania project. Conducting meetings/interviews with members of the Evaluation Board (previous members and current ones).
- d) Field trip to the sites of funded project:
Part 1) conducting individual and/or group discussions (e.g. Focus Group Discussions) with the key partners/beneficiaries from at least 5 regions in the country. Conducting interviews with a sample of organizations and individuals that have applied but not benefitting from LA grant fund scheme.
Part 2) conducting interviews with representatives of the partner organizations and other development projects/agencies, inclusive Swiss projects on local level
Part 3) discussing with local government units
- f) A debriefing at the Embassy of Switzerland in Tirana 3 parts:
Part 1) Presentation of the preliminary findings and recommendations of the review team.
Part 2) Wrap-up for lessons learned and discussion for project development for the second phase.

The above list of steps is not exhaustive and the consultant may suggest other activities deemed important for accomplishing this mandate.

6 Deliverables / Reporting

The International Consultant is expected to produce the following deliverables:

- 1) Presentation of the findings and recommendations to be discussed during a debriefing session at the Embassy of Switzerland in Albania. This document can be presented also with staff and implementers of LA Project.
- 2) Draft review report to be submitted electronically within 15 working days after the mission to the Swiss Embassy in Tirana i.e. not later than 15.10.2018.
- 3) Final Report, revised based on comments and remarks of the Embassy of Switzerland in Albania and the implementing partner shall be submitted by 15.11.2018. It shall be written in English (Arial 11) and not exceed 25 pages. The report shall comprise the following chapters: a) Executive summary (max 2 pages). b) Background and rationale for the assessment (max 1 page). c) Findings (based on the ToR) and conclusions (max 12 pages). d) Main recommendations for

¹⁸ The present TOR are valid both for the International Consultant (team leader) and the Local Consultant.

improvement (max 5 pages). e) Annexes. Electronic copies of the final operational report must be submitted to Embassy of Switzerland in Albania.

Note: "Upon request, the results of this evaluation will be made available to any interested third parties".

7 Schedule

The evaluation will take place from September to October 2018. The tentative evaluation schedule is the following:

- A) Beginning of September preparatory activities by consultants.
- B) Mid-September: field mission undertaken in Albania.
- C) 15 October: submission of the draft external report by the evaluators.
- D) 15 November: submission of the final external report by the evaluators.
- E) December: finalization of the management response (by Embassy of Switzerland in Albania and the project and its consortium partners).

The exact work schedule and time allocation is subject to negotiations between Embassy of Switzerland in Albania and the selected consultants when concluding the contract.

8 Duration and Implementation Arrangement

The assessment mission shall be tentatively conducted in Albania during September 2018. A more detailed mission programme shall be elaborated by the consultant in cooperation with the Embassy of Switzerland in Albania, LA Project and the consultants.

Swiss Embassy the local Consultant will provide all logistical support for the mission in Albania (hotel booking, transport, interpretation services, scheduling meetings in Albania, etc).

Activities (Consultants)	International Consultant
<i>Relevant desk review</i>	3 days
<i>Briefings/debriefings to Embassy of Switzerland in Albania</i>	1 day (2 X 0.5 at the beginning and at the end of the mission)
<i>Work with LA project team, interviews in Albania</i>	10
<i>Report Writing (4 days for the draft report and 2 days to consolidate comments and finalize the report)</i>	6 days
<i>Travel from home to Albania and return</i>	Maximum 2 days
Total	22 days

9 Evaluation Team / Qualifications

The review team will consist of an international consultant acting as team leader and a local expert. The present ToRs are valid both for the International Consultant (team leader) and the Local Consultant.

The selected international consultant should have extensive evaluation experience with development programs. This includes, but is not limited to:

- a) Extensive experience regarding evaluation of projects.
- b) Extensive experience as team leader of project evaluations.

- c) Expertise in assessing project impact, relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability.
- d) Extensive experience in civil society and media projects and local governance.
- e) Excellent analytical expertise, ability to propose recommendations.
- f) Expertise in the design and implementation of results-oriented evaluation processes.
- g) Outstanding report writing skills, and capacity to write independent and objective analyses.
- h) Knowledge of the context in the Balkans region and Albania is an asset.

The following documents are requested for this offer:

- 1) *Technical proposal* (max. 3 pages), which shall include:
 - Understanding of the consultancy:
 - Proposed approach and methodology to complete the task
 - Proposed timeframe
 - Annexes:
 - Curricula vitae of the proposed consultant
 - Relevant reference projects from previous successful mandates
- 2) *Financial proposal*: the financial proposal shall be submitted using the standard form that is sent together with these Terms of References.

Tirana, Date:

List of Documents *(to be provided to the selected consultants)*

- Key Questions on the five dimensions of the evaluation
- Swiss Cooperation Strategy for Albania 2014 – 2017 / 2018 - 2022
- LA Project Document
- Entry Proposal and Credit Proposal for phase 1
- Log-frame
- Yearly Plans of Operations for 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018
- Interim and Annual Progress Reports for 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018
- Management Responses to Annual Reports
- Mid-term review conclusions
- Grant Fund Manual
- Evaluation Procedures and outcomes in last years
- Evaluation Report mandated by LA
- Publication of Results of Project
- Others....

The Key Questions related to the specific objective:

- 2) **Relevance** of the project's approaches and strategic orientation in the given development/transition context, perception of the implementer by relevant stakeholders?
 - a) To what extent do the project's instruments, strategies and interventions respond to identified gaps and needs and the context?
 - b) How are the interventions' strategies supported / facilitated by the project?
 - c) How do CSOs/individuals/LGUs perceive the project strategies and interventions and the results achieved?
 - d) What have been the major challenges during the implementation of first phase? How has the project team addressed those challenges? What are the lessons learnt? What are the potentials and opportunities that the project has not been able to address?
 - e) Who are the main actors of change that the project is currently working with? What are their characteristics? Where do they come from, size of organizations, type of organizations etc.? Are they the relevant target group?
 - f) To what extent have the project implementers taken into consideration the evolving transition and changing context in Albania during project implementation and redefined project objectives and/or approach accordingly?
 - g) To what extent has the project reached its target group, directly and indirectly?
 - h) To what extent the activities of the project are complementary and not overlapping with other donors' intervention in this sector?
 - i) What has been the added-value the project has brought (comparative advantages, etc.)?
 - j) Relevance of approaches/instruments in regard to the current context and the SDC portfolio, and in regard to the needs/demands of different target groups/beneficiaries (CSOs, initiatives, women, vulnerable groups, media etc.)

- 3) **Effectiveness** of project implementation towards reaching the set objectives and goals?
 - a) To which extent has the project contributed to the likelihood of achieving goals as set in the Credit Proposal and Project Document, which have been translated into results and intervention strategies for the inception phase and throughout the implementation phase?
 - b) To what extent has the corresponding Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) system followed?
 - c) Is the project working in the right directions and are the strategies and related interventions starting to show its effects and potential to scale-up?

- d) How is the transversal theme of gender mainstreamed by the project team in the project intervention? What was achieved in terms of gender equality so far?
- e) Has there been any consideration for social inclusion and possibly conflict-sensitive program management?
- f) How have the project set-up and its steering mechanisms contributed to achieving the objective of the project?
- g) How has the consortium set-up contributed to achieving the objectives of the project? What has been the contribution of the consortium partners?
- h) How the Evaluation Board has functioned? Is the current set-up the best one? How is the entire evaluation process perceived by the target groups and actors outside of LA?
- i) What are the main results achieved at output, outcome and impact level, lessons learnt and their implications and measures for the next second phase?
- j) To what extent different theories of change/assumptions behind the different strategic approaches and instruments and to see how far they came true, what worked, why, for whom, what did not work and why?

4) **Efficiency** of the project implementation set-up and project steering?

- a) Is the management model/project set-up adequate for achieving the set objectives?
- b) Have the staff changes/re-organizations helped the efficiency of the project?
- c) Have the financial and human resources been efficiently allocated?
- d) Are the project management and steering mechanisms in place and adequate for the efficient implementation of project activities?
- e) Is there an established results-oriented monitoring system?
- f) How the risk management, and conflict sensitive management has taken place? The dimension of politically informed management and adaptive learning i.e. does the programme systematically in build learning and allow for learning, and does it promote shared learning among the grantees? What (if needed) could be improved?

5) **Impact**

- a) Are the interventions designed to allowing change and scale? At what level is the change more likely to happen under the current frame? What is the likelihood for achieving scale? Potentials for scale, leverage?

6) **Sustainability**

- a) What is the strategy for improving sustainability and opportunities for up scaling? To what extent the philosophy of LA has been understood or well-perceived by target group.
- b) Will the results of the implemented project components last beyond the end of funding? What are the indications for this?

- c) Which results are likely not to be sustainable? Are there options to increase the chance of sustainability within the remaining project period?
 - d) How do project components interact with other Swiss supported projects and what are their sustainable impacts taken in a joint analysis?
 - e) What is the cost-benefit of the project's interventions as an evidence of sustainability of the interventions during and beyond the project?
- 7) **What are the recommendations with regard to findings under main questions 1-5?**

Annex 2 Mission Itinerary and People Met

Itinerary of the mandate	
Time	Activity / People met
Sunday, 16.9	
00:50	Arrival Dieter Zürcher
Monday, 17.9	
09:00	Briefing with Artan Roji, mission planning
11:30	Meeting with Valbona Kuko (Executive Director LevizAlbania)
12:30	Meeting with Elda Kalaja (M&E and Civil Society Manager LevizAlbania) and Orjada Tare (Grants Programme Manager LevizAlbania)
14:00	Meeting with Debora Kern (Head of Governance and Health Sector Swiss Embassy) and Sokol Haxhiu (National Programme Officer SCO)
16:30	Discussion with driver on travel logistics
17:00	Meeting with Armand Mero, Journalist Voice of America and LA GFB member
Tuesday, 18.9	
09:00	Document review
12:30	Meeting with Enkelejda Bregu (Civil Society Programme Manager, European Union Delegation to Albania)
13:30	Meeting with Elga Mitre (Senior Political Adviser, Embassy of the Netherlands)
14:30	Meeting with Rezarta Katuci (Swedish Embassy, Civil Society and Gender Equality)
16:00	Meeting with Jacques Merat and Valbona Karakaci (Strong Municipalities projects, SDC)
17:30	Meeting with Dritan Strutina (Executive Director Co-PLAN)
18:30	Meeting with Edona Shkenza (Director of 'Shoqata per Zhvillim Informim dhe Barazi Gjinore'-DIGE, Call 2)
Wednesday, 19.9	
08:45	Meeting with Iris Luarasi (Linja e Keshillimit per Gra dhe Vajza, LKGV, Call 3)
10:00	Meeting with Claudia Vollmer (OSCE, Head of Democratisation Department)
11:30	Meeting with Angelina Pistoli (Embassy of the USA, Programme Director)
12:45	Meeting with Kristina Voko and one staff (Rrjeti ballkanik per Gazetari Investigative, Shqiperi – BIRN, Call 1)
14:00	Meeting with Jolanda Trebicka (Executive Director Europartners, Call 3)
16:30	Meeting with Aranita Brahaj (Executive Director Instituti Shqiptar i Shkencave, Call 3) and Besjana Hysa (General Assistant Instituti Shqiptar i Shkencave) and with Gentian Elezi (Qendra AGENDA, Call 3 and 4 upscale)
18:00 (DZ)	Meeting with Karolina Rista (Executive Director Inifit+, Call 2)
18:00 (AR)	Meeting with Arnisa Hoxha (Individual grant, Call 1)
Thursday, 20.9	
08:45	Meeting with Ogarta Ujkashi (Individual grant, Call 4)
10:00	Meeting with Juliana Hoxha (Executive Director PartnersAlbania)
12:00	Meeting with Andi Dobrush (Executive Director OSFA) and Klodjan Seferaj (Programme Manager OSFA)
14:00 (DZ)	Meeting with Edmira Kanani (Project Manager Albanian River Rafting Association)

14:00 (AR)	Meeting Sotiraq Hroni and one staff (Director of IDM, Call 1)
15:15	Meeting with Mentor Kikia and two staff (Director Forumi i Mendimit të Lirë, Call 4 upscale)
18:00	Meeting with Aldo Merkoci and a group of activists (Executive Director of Mjaft)
Friday, 21.9 (Dieter Zürcher)	
06:30	Travel to Shkodra
09:00	Meeting with Blendi Dibra (Deputy Chairperson NCCS and Executive Director Young Intellectuals, Hope – IRSH)
10:00	Meeting with Alfred Haxhari (Qendra per Zhvillim te Qendrueshem & te Integruar, Call 3)
11:00	Meeting with Sorinel Ghetau (Oxfam Italia, Call 2)
12:00	Meeting with Bepin Kolvataj (Individual grant, Call 4)
13:00	Meeting with Aurora Zylaj (Executive Director Well-Point, Call 4) and her colleagues Amela Bushati, Sokol Haliti and Gyzela Piroviq
14:30	Meeting with Ardi Hoti (Individual grant, Call 4)
15:00	Meeting with Violeta Neziri (Executive Director Qendra e Gruas Hapa te Lehte, Call 1) and her colleagues Kujzime Nuzje and Denada Shpura
Friday, 21.9 (ArtanRroji)	
06:30	Travel to Vlora
09:00	Meeting with Rozina Kormuzi and Andi Aliu (Director of Equal voice of Roma and Egyptians in Vlora, Call 1)
10:00	Meeting with Harilla Koci ((Individual, journalist, Call 1)
11:00	Meeting with Elidon Lamani and two staff (Director of Vlora Youth Centre, Call 3)
12:30	Meeting with Dorina Shehaj, finance, and technical staff (Gjelbërimi 2000, Call 4)
14:00	Meeting with Alba Naci and two staff (Director of Centre for Research, Cooperation and Development, Vlora – CRCDD, Call 4)
15:30	Meeting with Majlinda Driza and two staff (Director of Hope for Us, Call 4)
17:00	Meeting with Blerim Ribaj (Individual grant, taxi driver, Call 4)
18:30	Meeting with Simo Ribaj (Director of Green Vizion, Call 3)
Saturday, 22.9	
12:00	Lunch with Voltana Ademi (Mayor municipality of Shkodra)
Sunday 23.9	
14:00	Travel to Dibër (Dieter)
16:00	Travel to Korça (Artan)
Monday 24.9 (Dieter Zürcher)	
08:45	Meeting with Halil Goreci (non-successful grantee)
09:30	Meeting with Shkelzen Qoka (Director Shoqata "RUNJA", Call 3)
10:30	Meeting with Kimete Mazari (Director Grupi Lokal I Veprimit Integrimi, Call 4)
11:30	Meeting with Edi Truka (Director North Green Association, Call 4)
13:00	Travel to Tirana
17:45	Meeting with Ingrid Jones (Director Partnere per Femijet) and Alda Kondakciu (Call 1)
Monday 24.9 (Artan Rroji)	
09:45	Meeting with Jola Lena and two staff (Association for Value Conservation and Development - AVCD, Call 4)

11:00	Meeting with Benila Themeli (Deputy Mayor of Korça municipality)
11:50	Meeting with Aurel Grabocka (Director of Regional Development Agency of Korça, non-grantee)
15:30	Meeting with Ani Ruci and to staff (Director of Refleksione, Call 3)
17:00	Meeting with Ariana Çela (Fellowship, Call 3)
Tuesday 25.9	
08:30	Meeting with Marjela Zajmi (Soroptimist) and Genc Permeti (film maker)
10:00	Meeting with Afrim Krasniqi (Executive Director ISP, Albanian Institute of Public Studies, Call 1 and 4 upscale)
12:00	Meeting with Anita Pilika (Director Qendra Fokus "Ne ndihme te femijeve") and her team (Call 4)
13:15	Meeting with Vjola Thoma (non-grantee, Aeomaninpoeer, Vlora)
pm	Preparation of validation workshop
Wednesday 26.9	
09:00	Meeting with Kleina Kasanai (Adviser to the Dy. Prime Minister, Prime Minister's Office)
10:00	Validation workshop with: Debora Kern (Head of Governance and Health Sector, Regional Health Advisor, Embassy of Switzerland in Albania), Sokol Haxhiu (National Programme Officer, Political Affairs and Democracy, Embassy of Switzerland in Albania), Andi Dobrushu (Executive Director OSFA) and Klodjan Seferaj (Programme Manager OSFA), Juliana Hoxha (Executive Director PartnersAlbania), Dritan Strutina (Executive Director Co-PLAN), Valbona Kuko (Executive Director LevizAlbania), Elda Kalaja (M&E and Civil Society Manager LevizAlbania) and Orjada Tare (Grants Programme Manager LevizAlbania), Saranda Cana (National Programme Officer, Governance and Democracy, Embassy of Switzerland in Kosovo)
15:00	Meeting with Eglantina Gollaj and her staff, (Project manager UNDP/ ReLoad)
16:00	Debriefing with Debora Kern (Head of Governance and Health Sector, Regional Health Advisor, Embassy of Switzerland in Albania), Sokol Haxhiu (National Programme Officer, Political Affairs and Democracy, Embassy of Switzerland in Albania)
Thursday, 27.9	
04.25	Departure Dieter
Wednesday, 7.11	
10:00	Skype discussion with Nazim Rashidi (GFB member, journalist from Macedonia)
Thursday, 8.11	
15:00	Skype discussion with Kelmend Zajasi (GFB member, Executive Director NALAS, Macedonia)

Annex 3 Context data and indicators

Table 2: Democratisation progress in Albania based on NIT scorings (1 = highest level, 7 = lowest level)

Nations in Transit Ratings and Averaged Scores										
NIT Edition	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
National Democratic Governance	4.25	4.50	4.75	4.75	5.00	4.75	4.50	4.50	4.50	4.50
Electoral Process	3.75	3.75	4.00	4.25	4.25	4.00	4.00	3.75	3.75	3.50
Civil Society	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00
Independent Media	3.75	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.25	4.25	4.25
Local Democratic Governance	2.75	3.00	3.25	3.25	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50
Judicial Framework and Independence	4.25	4.25	4.25	4.75	4.75	4.75	4.75	4.75	4.75	4.75
Corruption	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.25	5.25	5.25	5.25	5.25	5.25
Democracy Score	3.82	3.93	4.04	4.14	4.25	4.18	4.14	4.14	4.14	4.11

Source: Freedom House, Nations in Transit 2018

Table 3: Trends for the “Democracy Status” in Albania according to the BTI (Best rating is 10, worst rating is 1)

Criteria	2010	2012	2014	2016	2018
Stateness	8.8	8.8	8.5	9.0	9.0
Political participation	8.3	7.5	7.0	7.3	7.5
Rule of law	6.3	6.0	5.0	5.0	5.3
Stability of democratic institutions	8.0	7.5	6.5	7.0	7.0
Political and social integration	6.5	6.5	6.5	6.5	6.5
Overall political transformation (Democracy status)	7.6	7.3	6.7	7.0	7.1

Source: Bertelsmann Transformation Index

Table 4: CSO Sustainability Index Albania (1 = most developed, 7 = most challenging)

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Legal Environment	3.7	3.8	3.8	3.9	3.9	3.9	3.9	3.8	3.7
Organisational capacity	3.9	3.9	3.9	3.9	3.9	3.8	3.7	3.7	3.7
Financial viability	4.5	4.6	4.6	4.6	4.6	4.6	4.6	4.5	4.5
Advocacy	3.4	3.4	3.5	3.6	3.6	3.4	3.3	3.3	3.3
Service provision	3.7	3.7	3.7	3.7	3.7	3.7	3.7	3.7	3.7
Infrastructure	3.9	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	3.9	3.8	3.8	3.8

Public image	3.8	3.8	3.8	3.8	3.8	3.7	3.7	3.7	3.7
Overall sustainability	3.8	3.9	3.9	3.9	3.9	3.9	3.8	3.8	3.8

Source: USAID 2017

Annex 4 LevizAlbania project data

A) Regional distribution of grants (selection of case study regions)

Table 5: Overview about the regional distribution of grants in the selected case study regions)

		Shkodra		Dibër		Tirana		Korça		Vlora		Sub-Total	Total Grants
		Main	Incl. Others	Main	Main	Incl. Others	Main	Incl. Others	Main	Incl. Others			
1 Call	NGOs	2	2	1	0	4	0	1	1	2	15	22	
	Individuals	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	7		
2 Call	NGOs	1	0	0	1	3	0	0	0	1	13	19	
	Individuals	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	6		
3 Call	NGOs	1	1	1	4	1	0	3	1	1	24	33	
	Individuals	0	0	0	3	1	2	0	0	0	9		
4 Call	NGOs	1	2	2	4	2	1	3	2	2	23	39	
	Individuals	1	1	0	2	1	1	1	0	0	16		
Total Grants		6	6	4	18	12	4	8	6	6	113	113	

Source: LA grant statistics

B) Call directions

Call 1

Before holding the first round of calls for applications, LA has had to lay the groundwork to ensure maximum exposure to - and understanding of - the project across all of Albania. Therefore, the Call was heavily publicized across multiple channels. The announcement was shared on the website, in four major newspapers (Panorama, Shqiptarja.com, Shqip and Mapo), on Ballkanweb and News 24 TV, resulting in a high interest.

The 1st Call for Applications was officially launched via a robust communications campaign on November 10th, 2015. Participants were given 30 days to submit a brief proposal in one of the pre-defined directions:

- **Direction 1:** The institutionalization of meaningful citizen participation in decision-making, prioritization, planning, budget formulation, service provision (citizens participation);
- **Direction 2:** Increased and sustained citizen access to public information and improving the public services (information and transparency);
- **Direction 3:** The empowerment of media to enhance local democracy (media as an advocacy tool);
- **Direction 4:** Increased accountability of elected and appointed local officials (accountability).

These four directions allowed for considerable freedom in terms of project areas, aiming to bring in ideas from a broad range of democracy-related issues.

Call 2

LevizAlbania continues to encourage non-profit organizations, individuals and their groups to promote change through civic action and strengthen community feeling. LevizAlbania, is a project that aims to have a catalyst effect on local democracy in Albania. In this context, LevizAlbania announces the Second Call for Applications. Non-Profit Organizations, their individuals and groups are invited to apply through the CONCEPT IDEVE in two directions defined by LevizAlbania:

- **Direction 1:** Advocacy and lobbying for successful improvement, change or implementation of local policies through increased accountability of representatives of public institutions
- **Direction 2:** Increase accountability of elected and appointed local officials

The deadline for submission of concept ideas is 18 May 2016, time 17.00.

Click the link below to get to know more about the call and to download the necessary documents for the application. http://www.levizalbania.al/slideshow_item/levizalbania-shpall-thirrjen-per-aplikime-nr-2/

Call 3

- **Direction 1:** Strengthening accountability and accountability of elected or appointed officials, as well as advocacy and lobbying during the electoral process
- **Direction 2:** Monitoring, advocacy, and concrete actions on how local public services are provided.

LevizAlbania invites all interested actors to apply in Call No.4 which will remain open from 11 September 2017 to 29 September 2017 at 17:00.

LevizAlbania encourages civil society organizations, individuals and their groups that have concrete initiatives aimed at changing the level of local democracy, improving local governance, enhancing transparency, accountability, promoting and supporting inclusion in decision-making as well as promoting local policies that strengthen the role of young people, apply online at www.levizalbania.al or send their applications by mail (also copied to CD / USB) at the address: LevizAlbania, Street: Bardhok Biba, Trema Palace, Entrance "B", 9th Floor.

Call 4

- **Direction 1: Civic participation as an important element in the impact of local priorities:** Lobbying and advocacy to determine the priorities of local elected citizens through civic engagement can bring more efficient local policies to citizens. The civic role in local government decision-making is an inalienable link affecting the different categories of a society and influences the proper orientation of local policies in sectors such as nursery, kindergartens and schools infrastructure; Public transport; environment and cleaning; housing issues; care for the elderly, services for women and girls or for other marginalized groups.

Maximum Grant Limit: NGOs up to CHF 20,000 / Individuals up to CHF 10,000
Project implementation deadline up to 15 months

- **Direction 2: Art and Innovation as an Alternative to Promoting Local Democracy** Innovative and creative ideas that combine art or information technology, which in their primary objective are strengthening and increasing the level of local democracy, create more favorable conditions for advocating for issues and causes of importance to the community. In this regard, ideas generated by young people and their groupings, IT professionals and artists are encouraged.

Maximum Grant Limit: NGOs up to CHF 20,000 / Individuals up to CHF 10,000 •
Project implementation deadline up to 15 months

- **Direction 3: Transparency and accountability for local institutions accountable to citizens** Transparency and accountability increase the accountability of local elected to citizens. Any local, political or administrative decision-making should be transparent in the face of citizens, as voters of local government leaders. Through concrete ideas and initiatives, the aim is to raise

the civic voice for greater transparency and accountability, avoiding corruption and arbitrary decision-making.

Suggested topics for applicants:

- Monitoring the main services of municipalities and other local institutions;
- Generating public debates, also cooperating with the media, for high sensitivity issues that did not receive proper attention from local elected;
- Realization of alternative reports on the exercise of municipal competencies for the practical implementation of the laws on the functioning of local government;
- Monitoring the transparency of local institutions (not just municipalities).

Project implementation deadline up to 15 months

NGOs up to CHF 50,000 / Individuals up to CHF 10,000

Call 5

Direction 1: Promote Civic Participation and Activism in the Pre-Election Period of Local Elections 2019

Law 139/2015 "On Local Self-Government" defines the Municipal Council as the representative body of the Municipality and the Mayor as the executing body. Consequently, the linkage and interaction of the community with local councils is of particular importance. Civil society and citizens need to identify and address community priorities throughout the pre-election period as a communication platform and cooperation for the future. In the direction no. 1 applications should be oriented to:

- Assessing the performance of municipal councils, their role and responsibility as community representatives;
- Dealing with electoral promises of current local elected officials and identifying local development priorities as a basis for advocacy in the election campaign of the 2019 local elections.

Direction 2: Effects of Law Enforcement 139/2015 "On Local Self-Government" under Citizen Optics

From the optics of civic monitoring it is necessary to analyze in depth through research methods, the main aspects of good governance defined by Law 139/2015 "On Local Self-Government". This monitoring can be accomplished through various forms of civic monitoring, comparative analysis or case studies from different municipalities for functioning, challenges and successful cases, with impact at local and national level. In the direction no. 2 applications should be oriented to:

- Monitoring of successful models or mechanisms, challenges and issues related to: (i) the level of implementation of legal requirements for effective citizen involvement in decision-making; (ii) accountability of local elected / appointed to citizens; (iii) municipal transparency vis-à-vis the implementation of the legislation in force.
- Monitoring the accessibility, coverage, quality and impact of local government services in rural / peripheral administrative units versus urban ones.

Direction 3: Increasing social responsibility of local government through civic activism Participation and active role of citizens in policy making, as well as in monitoring service delivery are essential elements to increase the social responsibility of municipalities that have a direct impact on their communities. In the direction no. 3 applications should be oriented to:

- Use of innovative methods as a tool to promote civic participation in community-based decision-making such as: annual budgeting, investment plan, strategies / plans for economic and social development, etc.;
- Monitoring performance in providing municipal services to the community in sectors that directly affect the well-being and health of citizens such as food safety, consumer protection, environmental pollution from economic development activities and other related areas.

Terms of application: Directions 1, 2 and 3 are open to all NPOs registered under the legislation in force; Individuals can apply only in Direction 3; NGOs planning to implement projects outside the district area where they operate should have partnerships with local NGOs. This condition applies only to Running 1 and 2; NPOs applying for Running 2 and out of their area of origin should cover at least all municipalities of the 1 (one) district. In case of coverage of 2 or 3 circuits, boundary circuits must be selected.

C) Finances

Table 6: Overview about financial allocations per instrument and Calls (until mid 2018)

	Call 1	Call 2	Call 3	Call 4		Call 5	Total
					Upscale		
CSOs	361'848	319'000	646'023	548'050	223'000	778'040	2'875'961
Individuals	63'038	64'000	92'924	135'940	27'500	72365	455'767
Total	424'886	383'000	738'947	683'990	250'500	850'405	3'331'728
SEI							629'607
Rapid Response							102'781
Overall Total							4'064'116

Source: LA M&E data

D) Decision.making

Table 7: Statistics about the success rates during the various LA decision making filters

Calls	Number of Applications			Idea Competition			Next stage (%)	Conditionally approved			Next stage (%)	Contracted			Next stage (%)
	NPO	Ind	Total	NPO	Ind	Total		NPO	Ind	Total		NPO	Ind	Total	
1	161	69	230	86	16	102	44	37	8	45	44	15	7	22	49
2	163	67	230	33	17	50	22	21	8	29	58	13	6	19	66
3	143	81	224	49	16	65	29	27	10	37	57	24	9	33	89
4	181	165	346	55	43	98	28	26	19	45	46	23	18	41	91
5	150	113	263	73	31	104	40	39	13	52	50	27	9	36	69
	798	495	1293	296	123	419	32	150	58	208	50	102	49	151	73
							874				211				57

Source: LA M&E data

Annex 5 Bibliography

Most important websites

ASCS: <http://www.amshc.gov.al/web/raporte/vjetore/index-en.php>

BIRN : <http://albania.mom-rsf.org/en/media/>

BTI (Bertelsmann Transformation Index): https://atlas.bti-project.org/share.php?1*2018*CV:CTC:SELALB*CAT*ALB*REG:TAB

LevizAlbania : <http://www.levizalbania.al/en/>

NIT (Nations in Transit): <https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2018/albania>

SDC - DDLGN:

https://www.shareweb.ch/site/DDLGN/topics/democratisation/citizen_participation/SitePages/Home.aspx

Context Documents

CoPLAN (2018): Administrative - Territorial Reform and the Decentralization Strategy

EC (2018): Commission staff working report Albania 2018

Government of Albania (2015): Roadmap for Albanian Government policy towards more enabling environment for civil society development

ICNL (2018): Effective donor responses to the challenge of closing civic space

IDM (2018): Trust in Governance, 2017 Opinion Poll

IPSOS (2015): Civil Society Organisations in Albania

Karlstedt, Cecilia (2017): Civil Society Challenges and Donor Approaches (Albania)

PartnersAlbania (2015 and 2017): Monitoring Matrix on Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development. Country Report for Albania

Reporters Without Borders (2018): World Press Freedom Index (<https://rsf.org/en/ranking/2018>)

SDC and SECO (2018): Swiss Cooperation Strategy 2018-2021

Sida (2018): Evaluation of Swedish Civil Society Support in Albania

USAID (2017): 2016 CSO Sustainability Index for Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia

Zguri, Rrapo (2014): Media landscape

LA Project Documents

Evenson, Kristie D. (2015): Local Democracy Promotion Project, Preparatory Field Report

Leviz Albania (2018a): Leviz Democracy Week 2018

LevizAlbania (2018b): Organogramme

LevizAlbania (2018c): Project Task Analysis

LevizAlbania (2017a): Revised logframe

LevizAlbania (2017b): Mid Review Meeting, Minutes

LevizAlbania (2016a): Revised logframe

LevizAlbania (2016b): Rules of procedures advisory board

LevizAlbania (2015): Project Document

LevizAlbania: Call documents for Call 1 to 5

LevizAlbania: Grant Manual

LevizAlbania: Annual Reports 2015/2016, 2016/2017 and draft 2017/2018

Metaj, Elida: Evaluation of LevizAlbania Grants Call 1 (2017), Call 2 (2018), Call 3 (2018)

Metaj, Elida (2018b): Consolidated results of Call 1, Call 2 and Call 3

SDC: Management Responses to the LevizAlbania Annual Reports and the Mid Review