



LEVIZALBANIA

ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT
July 1st 2018– June 30th 2019

SUBMITTED TO: EMBASSY OF SWITZERLAND IN ALBANIA
October 11th, 2019

A PROJECT OF:



IMPLEMENTED BY:



Acronyms

CHF	Swiss Francs
CSO	Civil Society Organization
LGU	Local Government Unit
LogFrame	Logical Framework
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NPO	Non for Profit Organization
OSFA	Open Society Foundation in Albania
ProDoc	Project Document
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SEI	Strategic Enabling Instrument
YPO	Yearly Plan of Operations

Table of Contents

Project Snapshot.....	4
Executive summary.....	5
1. Background information.....	7
2. Outcomes achieved.....	8
2.1. Summary of Achievements of Phase I.....	8
2.2. Outcomes achieved during the period July 2018 – June 2019.....	11
3. Outputs and performance.....	18
4. Finances and management.....	31
5. Lessons learned.....	34
5.1. Summary of lessons learnt in Phase I.....	34
5.2. Implications and strategic measures for Phase II.....	35

List of Annexes

Annex 1.	State of Play of project activities as per YPO4
Annex 2.	Financial Statement
Annex 3.	External Evaluation of Grants - Calls 4 and 5
Annex 4.	External Review commissioned by SDC
Annex 5.	Story telling – success story
Annex 6.	Investigative article (Behar Dema and North Green)
Annex 7.	Communication and Visibility
Annex 8.	Leviz Democracy Week 2019
Annex 9.	Monitoring and evaluation
Annex 10	Achievement in Logframe Indicators for Phase I

Project Snapshot

Name of project	LevizAlbania		
Country, main location	Albania, country wide coverage of all municipalities, project office in Tirana.		
Working Area	Democratic Governance	Working Field	Local Governance
Start date	1 st July 2015	End date	30 th June 2019
Phase	Phase I		
Short description	During the four years of implementation of Phase I, LevizAlbania has contributed in producing tangible results towards enhancing local democracy. By empowering local actors through grants for NPOs, informal groups, and active citizens, LevizAlbania has supported civic actors' demand for transparent and accountable local governance, and efficient public services. Through the implementation of SEI, LevizAlbania has promoted a more enabling environment for civic actors to pressure local governments into being more open, more inclusive and better providers of public services.		
Overall goal	Albanian population benefits from an improved democracy at local level.		
Specific objectives/ Outcomes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Civic actors influence local priority setting, decision-making and oversight of local authorities. 2. Civil society actors initiate and support targeted structural changes to improve democracy at local level. 		
Outputs	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.1 Demand-driven grants, fellowships, and rapid response action (when warranted) are awarded and are successfully implemented. 1.2 Capacities of LA grantees to influence local democracy are improved through training and networking. 2.1 Skills and capacities of Civic actors (CSOs and individuals) for better drafting and implementation of initiatives that promote democracy are increased. 2.2 Open data platform to measure the fiscal and financial performance of local governments is created and is accessed by interested parties. 2.3 Local Law Centres provides legal support for communities in the fields of health care, environment and services provided by local government. 2.4 New multi-functional platform that enables publishing of independent and qualitative media content on local issues, and open knowledge on local government is created and used by citizens. 2.5 Technical skills in the development of new communication and interaction platforms for CSOs are increased and available. 		
Beneficiaries	NPOs, informal groups and active citizens in all 61 municipalities.		
Consortium	OSFA, Partners Albania, Co-PLAN.		
Donor	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, Albania.		
Reporting period	1 st July 2018– June 30 th 2019.		

Executive summary

Since 2015 LevizAlbania¹ has contributed to improve local governance from the demand side, by supporting civic actors (NPOs, informal groups, and active citizens) in their demand for transparency, accountability, and better local governance.

LevizAlbania has completed its first phase (July 1, 2015 – June 30, 2019). In Phase I, LevizAlbania launched 5 Calls for Applications which attracted overall 1,383 project ideas and supported 166 projects (108 NPOs and 58 individuals), in 56 municipalities (92%). LevizAlbania has been recognized as an important actor (brand) in laying the ground for a more inclusive citizen engagement and action at local level. Overall, LevizAlbania managed a budget of 6,450,000 CHF for Phase I with a total contracted amount for grants, of 3,449,923 CHF.

	Year of publication	No. of applications			No. of grants awarded			Amount (CHF)
		TOTAL	NPO	IND	TOTAL	NPO	IND	
CfA 1	2015	230	161	69	22	15	7	424,886
CfA 2	2016	230	163	67	19	13	6	383,000
CfA 3	2017	224	143	81	33	24	9	738,950
CfA 4	2018	346	181	165	46	29	17	934,490
CfA 5	2018	263	150	113	37	28	9	855,320
RR	2016-2019	90	90	0	9	9	0	113,277
TOTAL		1,383	888	495	166	118	48	3,449,923

Some of the main results and achievements over Phase I can be summarized as follows:

- Improvement of deficient public services in selected municipalities
- Giving voice to citizens, demanding more funds on health services, art, culture and youth policies
- Improvement of legal framework at local and national level
- Support to NPOs, litigating national/local decisions of public institutions
- Enhanced the accountability and transparency of municipalities
- Increased youth activism and participation in local decision-making and monitoring of local government
- Significant contribution in environmental protection
- Innovative ICT tools in support of local democracy and local actions

In the last year of its Phase I, LevizAlbania was implemented in a dynamic context with polarized political environment. Opposition carried out repeated boycotts of parliamentary activities which culminated in the decision by the main opposition parties to relinquish their parliamentary mandate *en bloc* in February 2019. In addition, these parties decided to not take part in local elections on 30 June 2019, by not registering candidates. In this context, the civic activism and engagement promoted by LevizAlbania remains highly relevant to promote the legitimate demand of citizens for good governance at local level.

The **External Review**² conducted in September – October 2018, evaluated LevizAlbania as highly relevant and well complementing the other donors as well as the other Swiss funded projects in the country. LevizAlbania is well recognised by the donor community and some of its approaches, such

¹ LevizAlbania is the Local Democracy project of the Swiss government implemented by a consortium of (i) Open Society Foundation for Albania (OSFA), (ii) Partners Albanian and (iii) Co-Plan.

² External Review of LevizAlbania Phase 1 was conducted in September – October 2018 by Dieter Zürcher – an international expert and Artan Rroji – local expert.

as the Idea Competition, are admired by them. The support for individuals and informal groups is also an instrument recognised as unique by other donors and civil society itself.

During the fourth and final year of Phase I (July 1, 2018 –June 30, 2019), LevizAlbania has delivered the following outcomes:

1. **Strengthened the influence of civic actors in the local priority setting, decision making, and oversight of local authorities.** 84% of the grants closed during the reporting period achieved to significantly influence local priority setting. 48% of these grants directly influenced local decision-making. 74% conducted a systematic oversight of local authorities, and 33% achieved to improve service provision by local government units.
2. **Contributed to a more enabling environment for civil society actors to initiate and support selected changes to improve local democracy.** Civil society actors, including LA grantees during the reporting period, have made use of the SEI (Local Legal Clinics; PortaVendore; FinancatVendore; Increased exchanges, capacity building and networking; Civic Innovation Lab Centre) to bring about change.

In the next four-year period the project will continue to strengthen local democracy, supporting civil society engagement, assuring public participation in local issues, enhancing transparency and accountability by local government, and providing better services to citizens. Particular attention shall be given to coalition building efforts in creating a more enabling environment for civic engagement and replication and/or upscaling of good models. Modalities and procedures for assuring effective civic engagement and strategic directions of the Calls shall be further enhanced.

1. Background information

The democratic deficits of Albania remain high. Throughout the reporting period, polarization of the political environment worsened, preventing progress towards a more democratic society. Parliamentary activities were affected by a prolonged boycott by the opposition, which began in September 2018. In December 2018, following several weeks of student protests against the existing education system, the government announced a substantial reshuffle of the government. Nine cabinet positions were changed and the replacement of the Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs (as well as the earlier change of the Interior Minister in November 2018) led to controversy between the Prime Minister and the President of the Republic on constitutional provisions regarding ministerial appointments. The Constitutional Court has been unable to fulfil its mandate over most of the reporting period due to resignations, retirements, and a vetting process that removed some of the sitting judges. Opposition parties walked away from Parliament in February 2019 and organized various protests against the government. Local elections were held on June 30, 2019. By refusing to register candidates, the opposition left the ruling party candidates with no significant competition. The government decided to continue with the local elections without the main opposition parties. As a result, in 31 of the 61 municipalities mayoral candidates ran unopposed. The number of voters in many municipalities, especially in those known as supporters of right wing opposition, was quite low. Varied among the municipalities, the turnout reached 23% nationally. After the local elections, all new mayors, except in one municipality, are representatives of the ruling party. Both local and central government will be managed by the same party. The main opposition parties are now literally outside all governing institutions at national and local level.

In this context, civic activism and engagement are fundamental to counter political polarization, and cultivate a community-based local civil society that has an impact and promotes the legitimate demand for good governance. The **overall goal** of LevizAlbania is: **Albanian population benefits from an improved democracy at local level.** To achieve this goal, the project focused along two outcomes:

Outcome 1 - Civic actors influence the local priority setting, decision-making and oversight of local authorities.

Outcome 2 - Civil society actors initiate and support selected structural changes to improve democracy at local level.

The project has supported civic actors (including CSOs, individual “Democracy Champions”, and media organizations and journalists) through a bottom-up approach, premised on the hypothesis that by empowering local actors and ensuring a more enabling environment, the pressure and demand for better local governance will be increased and a chain reaction will take place across the country, by bringing about positive change.

The two project instruments are:

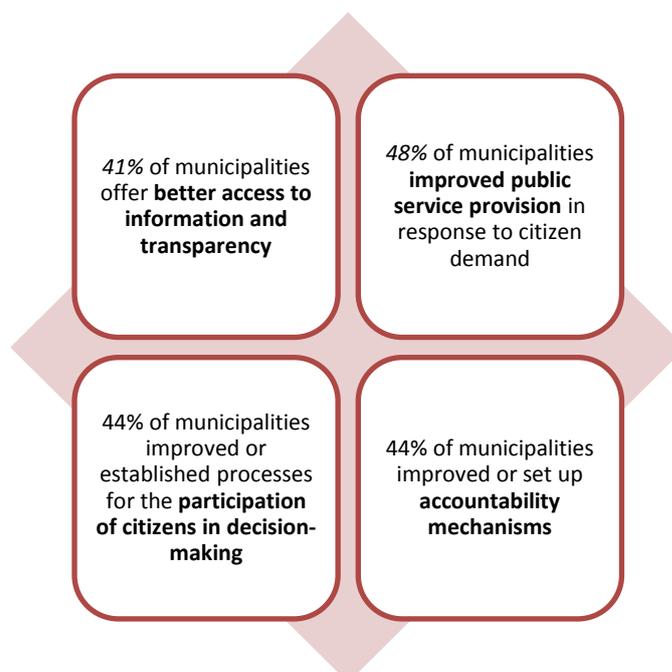
- 1. Demand-driven grants, fellowships and rapid-response support** — awarded through an innovative Competition of Ideas mechanism (action-oriented grants & fellowships), and an online submission process — in support of concrete project interventions.
- 2. Strategic Enabling Instruments (SEI)** — These are service-oriented instruments, aiming to benefit the LevizAlbania grantees and partners in terms of: i) Skills and capacities of civic actors; ii) Legal support through Legal Clinics; iii) Open data platform to measure the fiscal and financial performance of local governments; iv) Evidence based journalism on local issues and open knowledge on LGUs operations; and v) Technical skills in the development of new communication and interaction platforms.

LevizAlbania aligns to the overall goal and strategic orientations of the Swiss Cooperation Strategy 2018-2021 for Albania as it contributes to a functioning democracy and improved public services in support of Albania’s European integration. The project falls under the **Democratic governance domain** and directly contributes to the objective “People benefit from inclusive, effective and democratic institutions” under outcome 3 “**Citizens and civil society engage in decision-making and hold the government accountable**”. LevizAlbania’s alignment to the Swiss Cooperation Strategy 2018-2021 is also reflected in the adoption of a **Gender-sensitive** approach and **good-governance** approach.

2. Outcomes achieved

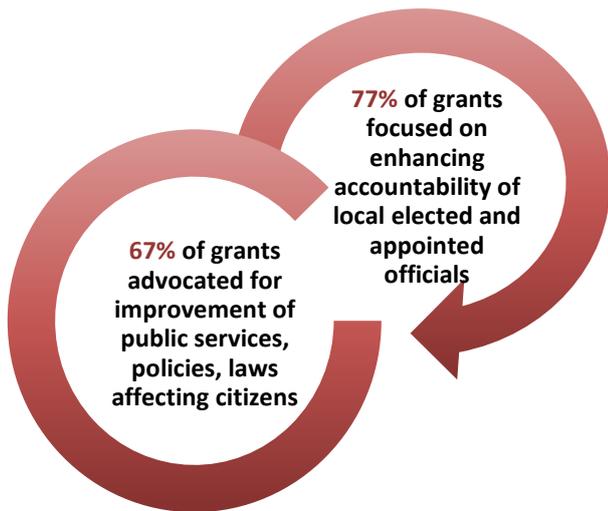
2.1. Summary of Achievements of Phase I³

LevizAlbania’s intervention incentivized civic actors to implement local actions and initiatives to have an influence on the way local governments set priorities, make decisions and deliver services to citizens. Simultaneously, the intervention of LevizAlbania incentivized civic actors to undertake actions in specific strategic areas for structural change to improve local democracy.



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³ The Achievements for each of the Logframe indicators during phase 1 are included in Annex 10 based on the last version of the Logical Framework (June 2018).



Outcome 1: Civic actors influenced the local priority setting, decision making, and oversight of local authorities

By supporting civil society actors (NPOs, informal groups, active individuals, journalists) across the country, LevizAlbania has **empowered** them to have effect on the priorities, decision-making and service delivery of local governments. Diverse civic actors have been enabled to demand local government for the implementation of changes improving local democracy and good governance.

Examples of concrete results in **giving voice to the requests of citizens** to allocate more

funds on health services, art, culture and youth policies are shown by the increase of local funds dedicated to primary health care services (with nearly 73,000 CHF in 2018 budget) and reconstructions of 4 healthcare centres in 5 municipalities (Ura Vajgurore, Gramsh, Kuçovë, Mirditë and Pogradec), the increase by 40% of the local funds (in the municipal budget 2018) dedicated to art and culture in 3 municipalities (Himarë, Vlorë and Sarandë); and the establishment of at least two community centres, one in Dibër for elderly people and one in Lushnjë for youth (Youth Social Centre).

Moreover, concrete changes have been achieved through the bottom-up pressure initiatives supported and **improvement of deficient public services** in different municipalities: Cleaning service and waste management in Kavajë, Maqellarë (Peshkopi), Tiranë – among others, improved public services in Kavajë, Shkodër and Vlorë, social housing for vulnerable communities in Tiranë, Elbasan and Vlorë, environmental management in Ura Vajgurore, upgrading of health centres in Mirditë and Ura Vajgurore, drainage and irrigation services in several administrative units in Shkodër, improved sports infrastructure in rural administrative units in Tiranë and Korçë, increased budget for art, culture and youth in Korçë, improved the recoveries of the public money in the municipalities of Maliq, Përrenjas, Elbasan, Lushnjë and Pogradec, through pushing for the implementation of High State Audit recommendations.

Outcome 2: Civil society actors initiated and supported selected structural changes to improve democracy at local level

By making available different opportunities in the form of support service-oriented instruments, LevizAlbania has contributed to a more **enabling environment for civil society actors** advancing local democracy in Albania. This in turn has reflected in civic actors initiating and supporting different structural changes that improve local democracy.

For example, in the area of **improvement of legal framework** at local and national level, LevizAlbania has contributed to: i) annulment of 2 draft laws aiming protection of the environment (i.e. law on waste imports and conversion of agricultural land into peat land for energy); ii) proposals to two draft laws to ensure the citizens' participation in decision-making (i.e. draft law on improving the legal framework for public concessions on hydro power plants; draft law on regulating the local referendums); and iii) initiation of regulatory changes in licensing quarry extraction by the Ministry of Environment and Tourism.

In support to **NPO litigating national/local decisions** of public institutions, 9 strategic lawsuits were filed by NPOs representatives with the support of LevizAlbania Legal Clinics against the constructions of hydro power plants (in Valbona River, Osumi River and in Vjosa River - Tepelenë), incinerator of Fier, landfill in Durrës, etc.

In using **innovative ICT tools** to combine data and evidence-based journalism, a multifunctional platform (www.portavendore.al), with at least 90 independent professional in-depth articles/investigative stories and detailed information about LGU functions was developed, a user-friendly open data platform (www.financatvendore.al) analysing the revenues/expenditures, and a platform on transparency of public contractors (www.opencorporates.al) covering all the 61 municipalities, largely used by media and civil actors. Innovative tool for ensuring public consultation, through a web-based platform (www.buxhetim.al) that ensures wide citizens' participation on annual budgeting, which was successfully applied in 23 municipalities enabling more than 23,000 citizens voting on their priorities for the 2018's and 2019's municipalities budgets.

A significant contribution has been given in **environmental protection** through the annulment of 2 draft laws: i) suspension of a development project in Divjakë-Karavasta National park; ii) suspension of the environmental license for two Hydro Power Plants in Osumi River/Skrapar, one in Tepelenë and one in Shushicë, development of a medium-and long-term action plan to preserve and manage sustainably the low and high forests, and serving as catalyst for suspending licenses for quarry extraction at national level and initiating changes in legal framework on licensing quarry extraction.

Strong contribution in **building capacities of NPOs, communities and individuals**, in research and evidence-based interventions, in introducing innovative practices and approaches with a high potential to be scaled up at regional and national level.

Youth activism and participation in local decision-making and monitoring of local government was also supported through 27 projects, which strengthened youth capacities in monitoring and holding local governments accountable and established youth structures to lobby and advocate for youth and community priorities in municipal councils.

Media has been engaged (directly or indirectly) in enhancing local democracy and promoting social accountability in all of the grant projects. 100% of the supported projects used media (including social media) to support their visibility actions or as an advocacy tool. 40% of grantees in Phase I were individually coached to use media for advocacy purposes. In addition 19 grants were awarded to journalists/media organisations and a network of around 50 local journalists was created and supported to produce and publish evidence based journalistic content in support of civic advocacy for local government transparency and accountability.

Achievements in gender mainstreaming

Out of the 166 funded grants, LevizAlbania supported 9 women's organizations (organisation working specifically on gender issues), while **40% of individual grantees** were women (19 out of 48). Many other projects have achieved an impact on the gender perspective during their implementation, including active participation of women and girls in forums/boards with municipalities; budgeting of priorities affecting mainly girls and women; monitoring and bringing change in the delivery of municipal services that that are mostly used by women such as social housing, residential services, local Reference Mechanism on Domestic Violence, health centres, kindergartens, elementary education, public transport service, etc. Furthermore, it is estimated that **40% of beneficiaries** involved in the activities of 166 supported projects are women.

2.2. Outcomes achieved during the period July 2018 – June 2019

The outcomes achieved during the last year of the Phase I of LevizAlbania are linked to the analysis of: 1) 86 grants that were awarded in Call 4⁴, in Call 5⁵ as well as Rapid Response⁶ awarded and implemented during the same period and 2) the 5 Strategic Enabling Instruments and achievements during the reporting period.

Outcome 1: Civic actors influenced the local priority setting, decision making, and oversight of local authorities

LevizAlbania has strengthened the influence of civic actors in the local priority setting, decision making, and oversight of local authorities.

Based on the External Evaluation and the on-going monitoring of the grants, including the monitoring notes of Grant Managers and the narrative reports submitted by grantees, LevizAlbania assessed⁷ the extent to which grantees achieved to influence local priority setting, to influence decision making, to implement oversight of local authorities and improve services provision:

Call for Applications	No. of grants	Percent of grants that achieved to:			
		influence local priority setting	influence local decision making	implement oversight of local authorities	improve service provision
Call 4	46	93%	65%	67%	46%
Call 5	36	69%	22%	81%	17%
Rapid Response	4	100%	75%	100%	25%
Total		84%	48%	74%	33%

It is worth mentioning that grants awarded under Call 5 had on average a shorter duration compared to Call 4. Furthermore, grants of Call 5 were closed in a polarized political environment at local level. Most of grantees did not report delays or to have been affected by this situation in the implementation of their projects. However for the grantees from Call 5 which focused on: i) accountability of elected officials' promises to their communities in the previous local elections (June 2015); and ii) mapping of local priorities in consultation with local communities to present to candidates of local elections in June 2019 this represented an issue as in most of municipalities there

⁴ 46 grants awarded in Call 4 started implementation on 12/02/2018 and the majority of them (37) lasted between 9 and 15 months. For this reason the analysis will include all the 46 Grants of Call 4.

⁵ 36 grants awarded in Call 5 started implementation on 01/08/2018 and the majority of them lasted 9 months (23) or more (2 lasted 12 months). In this call is also included the project "31 minutes".

⁶ 4 Rapid Response grants implemented by AKIP, Albania Rafting Federation, EcoVolis, Green Vision lasted between 4 months (2 RR grants) and 5 months (2 RR grants).

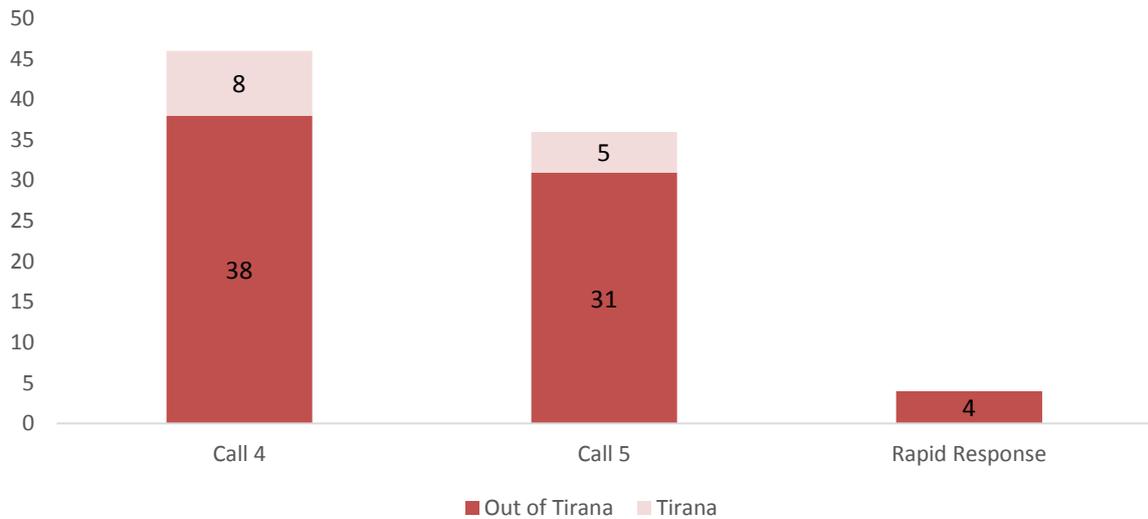
⁷ The methodology followed was to construct a database of the 86 grants and determine if the results reported by each of the grant complied with the following criteria: **Influence local priority setting:** The grantee managed to get the attention of local authorities on an issue which was not previously addressed. **Influence local decision-making:** The local authorities made a policy decision in response, as a result or in line with what the grantee wanted to address. **Implement oversight of local authorities:** The grantee conducted a systemic monitoring of a certain issue and communicated the results to local authorities, community and/or public at large. **Improved service provision:** The local authorities improved service provision in response, as a result or coincidentally in line with what the grantee wanted to address. The database and the results are available upon request.

were no alternative candidates from opposition parties, which could include the identified priorities in their electoral programs. In terms of achievement of the outcome 1 by grantees of Call 5 there might be some indications that the context could have affected the effectiveness of some grants to influence local priorities and decision-making by local authorities.

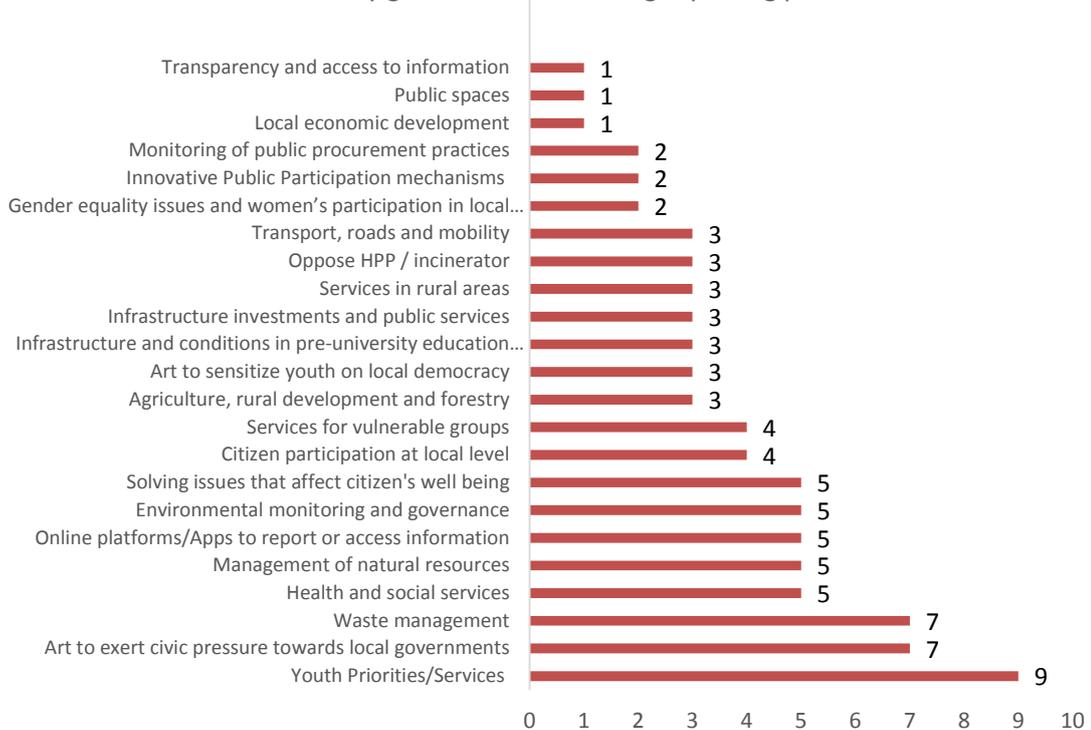
Civic actors (NPO, citizens, civic groups, and media) took action to influence local priorities, decision-making and oversight of local authorities in 90% municipalities. The 86 grants implemented during the reporting period reached out to over 47 municipalities ensuring a wide territorial coverage. 85% of the grants awarded in the reporting period were implemented outside or beyond Tirana municipality.

The sectors in which these achievements took place are also very diverse, being youth and art one of the most recurring thematic of the grantees in the reporting period.

Grants awarded during reporting period



Sectors covered by grants awarded during reporting period



In terms of gender mainstreaming achievements, grantees during the reporting period in most cases provided gender sensitive data for their activities emphasizing equal access to project resources to girls and women including rural young women and to men. Project reports provide evidence of girls and women's participation in project activities particularly, composition of citizens' groups, youth forums and public forums. Two projects addressed specifically gender equality issues in women's participation in local decision-making. However, several grantees faced challenges in conducting gender sensitive analysis in the project design phase, but overall it was noted gender sensitivity in project documents, reports and interviews. Another challenge mentioned by some grantees working in isolated rural areas was to manage to achieve gender balance in some activities.

Municipalities improved public service provision in response to citizen demand

27 grants from Calls 4 and 5 achieved to improve public service provision. These 27 grants covered 22 municipalities and the sectors covered were: health and social services, waste management, agriculture, rural development and forestry, infrastructure of pre-university education institutions, etc.

Examples:

The Municipality of **Selenicë** increased the budget allocated to agriculture by 37% after the organization “**Gjelberimi 2000**” conducted an analysis of the municipal investments in this sector and concluded that irrigation canals were insufficient to cover the needs of farmers in this municipality. This organization reached out to inform and mobilize about 500 community members and facilitate the process to voice their needs in the Municipal Council. The Municipal Council took action by increasing funds for agriculture in the 2019 budget.

The Municipalities of **Elbasan** and **Vlorë** increased the budget for social housing programs (from 1,680,000 ALL in 2017 to 2,680,000 ALL in 2018 in the municipality of Elbasan and to 4,000,000 ALL vs. no budget line in 2017 in municipality of Vlorë). This was a result of the mobilization of Roma and Egyptian Communities in these municipalities by the organization “**Levizja Rinor Rom dhe Egjiptian (LRER)**” which with an upscale project awarded in Call 4 continued the work previously done only in Elbasan in Call 2, partnering with a local organization from Vlora. Both LRER and its partner organisation from Vlora reached out to more than 100 Roma and Egyptians families through information campaigns on social housing and education scholarship programs and the requirements for applying. Due to their contribution, 110 Roma and Egyptians applicant families in Elbasan (80) and Vlore (30) were supported to apply for housing rent bonus in 2018 and 42 of them resulted successful beneficiaries respectively: 30 in Elbasan and 12 in Vlore. In addition, 50 Roma and Egyptians families in Elbasan and 20 in Vlore applied for the social housing bonus in 2019. In 2018, the municipal council endorsed 85 education scholarships, 54 of them for Roma and Egyptians community members to attend the vocational schools for the school year 2017-2018 and 65 students are enrolled in vocational training for the year 2018-2019. 14 Roma and Egyptians students were awarded scholarships in 2018 vs. 8 in 2017 in Vlore.

The Municipality of **Dibër** managed to: (i) increase the frequency of cleaning of waste containers at the Administrative Unit Maqellarë centre and along national road and promised to increase the number of waste containers and waste collection points all over the Administrative Unit in Maqellarë; (ii) clean two water collection spots in two villages and assigned waste collection points for the villages; (iii) approve the fiscal package for 2019 defining that the cleaning fee will be collected annually only for the villages that receive this service and exempted from tax all the inhabitants who do not benefit; (iv) exempt from cleaning taxes all families on economic aid or have family members with disabilities beneficiaries of disability allowance. These decisions were a result of the activism of **Behar Dema**, an individual grantee who set up the advocacy group “For a Clean Maqellarë” and engaged in an advocacy and media campaign focusing on raising community’s awareness in 22 villages in Maqellarë on the obligations of the municipality towards its citizens for provision of public services and in particular for the cleaning services and urban waste management service in their territory for which they pay taxes. 500 residents in AU of Maqellarë signed a position paper on waste management issues which was submitted to the Municipal Council of Dibër.

Municipalities progressed in establishing processes for participation of citizens in decision-making

7 grants from Calls 4 and 5 achieved to improve or establish mechanisms for the participation of citizens in local decision making. These 7 grants covered 35 municipalities.

Examples:

The Municipality of **Polican** established and institutionalized a “Citizen’s Committee” to ensure citizen participation in local decision-making. This result was obtained thanks to the work by the organization “Misionarët e të Drejtave Sociale (**MDSK**)” which conducted information meetings with community on the importance of their participation and proposing the idea to establish this committee. 25 citizens (40% females) were selected to be members in the Citizens' Committee, representing different interest groups. The Internal regulation on the functioning of the Committee was drafted and a Memorandum of Cooperation was signed with the mayor institutionalizing the mechanism that facilitates citizens' participation in decision-making. The members of the Committee were trained in participatory budgeting, transparency of local government, access to information, legal framework on local governance and social policies.

23 municipalities were enabled to take into account citizens’ priorities in decision making through the platform buxhetimi.al, implemented by “**Agenda**” as a result of an upscaled intervention by expanding use of the online platform to 20 additional municipalities. Agenda partnered with 12 local organizations to inform and engage citizens in using the website. The online platform was used by 20,000 users (51% females) thus contributing to local budgets planning in 23 municipalities in total (3 from the first project and 20 from the upscale). Based on the contribution and proposals of citizens, the project drafted 23 data reports on local priorities where the platform was piloted and submitted them to municipalities, 17 of which provided a positive response to the report. Four out of ten selected priorities by citizens were addressed by the municipalities in the new budget plans. The most positive examples resulted in **Vlorë** municipality where the mayor introduced himself the report in a public event and in **Shijak** municipality where the local partners were invited in a Municipal council meeting to present the findings.

The Municipality of **Lezhë** made progress to improve the participation of women in local decision-making thanks to the work of the organization “**Gruaja-Vizion i Ndryshimit**”. They monitored and analyzed the enforcement of law no 139/2015 “On Local Governance” specifically article 18 (consultation sessions with the community) by the Municipal Council of Lezhë Municipality in central Lezhë and in 5 selected Administrative Units. The findings showed deficiencies in law enforcement and low participation of citizens especially of women throughout the decision-making processes. 5 local women group were created in 5 Administrative Units, 70 women were trained on community needs assessment and advocacy. Women local groups identified the local priorities in five Administrative Units. These priorities were raised in the Municipal Council meetings and two of them were included in the budget for 2019.

Municipalities improved or set up accountability mechanisms

60 grants from Calls 4 and 5 achieved to improve or establish accountability mechanisms through citizen oversight of local authorities by covering 43 municipalities.

Examples:

The elected officials of the Municipality of **Devoll** were held accountable by its citizens regarding the electoral promises made in the agricultural and rural development sector. The Albanian Center for Environmental Governance (**ACEG**) contributed in monitoring the realization of 14 electoral promises made by the mayor of Devoll by conducting a comprehensive analysis on site. The organization designed the “agricultural barometer” which is an innovative initiative in a rural municipality. The analysis was focused on five main competences of the municipality according to article 27 of law 139/2015 “On Local Self-Governance” namely: agriculture (5 promises), forests and pasturelands (1 promise), environment (1 promise), rural development and agro tourism (6 promises), irrigation and drainage (1 promise) and defined by 33 qualitative and quantitative indicators for performance assessment. The results from analysis provided evidence that the

performance of the municipality in the 5 competences marks 55% progress and 45% regress. The results were available on line, social media, in printed media and print copy and disseminated to the relevant interest groups. The project organized 4 local forums respectively in the Administrative Units of Progër, Miras, Hociht and Bilisht attended by 192 participants (28% female) to present the findings of the agricultural barometer. Participants discussed their needs and priorities that should be addressed by the municipality such as market for their produce, advisory and extension services, lack of infrastructure, lack of local policies for branding and marketing the agricultural products. The identified priorities were consolidated in a roadmap with 20 development priorities that were presented in a meeting for consideration by the local government and were shared with the political parties to include them in their electoral programs for local elections.

In the municipality of **Tirana** efforts were made to hold responsible officials accountable for “red flags” in the procurement procedures or the quality of public investments. The **Albanian Center for Quality Journalism** assessed 13 public investments accomplished by Tirana municipality mainly in the field of infrastructure (local streets, pedestrian streets, passing bridges for pedestrians and cars, investments in greening of parks and playgrounds, investments in urban requalification of dwelling blocks) which surpass the investment amount of 10,000,000 Albanian Lek. The project produced 13 relevant reports accompanied with photos to support the finding that public funded works continue to have low quality, fail full compliance with technical conditions defined in the standard practices of contracts for implementation of works as well as in the other legal framework. The project published 9 investigating articles. The findings of assessment were presented in a final report which provides assessment and recommendations on the quality of works, compliance with deadlines, and current situation of the infrastructure of these works.

The Municipality of **Saranda** was held more accountable to citizens due to the online platform PermirosLagjenTime.al (Improve My Neighbourhood) established by grantee **Emiliano Hajna**, enabling many citizens in the towns of Saranda and Ksamil to report their issues related to their neighbourhoods and demand local government to address them. In less than four months of public launching of the platform, there were registered 70 reports from the citizens and 32 of them were addressed by the local administration.

Municipalities improved access to information and transparency

11 grants from Call 4 and 5 contributed to increased transparency and access to information through use of ICT tools, open data on public funds management, monitoring and oversight of municipal action. Out of these 11 grants, one covered all 61 municipalities, and 10 had a coverage in 6 municipalities.

Examples:

The **Albanian Institute of Science** contributed to increase citizens' access to information and transparency through monitoring the clients of **61 Municipalities** in Public Contracts and making accessible a rich database of 6,256 business, including data on owners, start-up capital, type of economic activity, administrators and governing bodies, financial performance in the last three years, list of awarded contracts by municipalities, etc. The data are linked with information on treasury transactions to the benefit of the companies as well as with the list of tenders awarded by the municipalities. All data are formatted according to open corporates standards enabling the information to be easily accessible through the search engines. The database contributed to identify deficiencies and problems in the award of public contracts through tenders such as: (i) concentration of public funds in few companies; (ii) contract awards with companies registered in places which ensure confidentiality on the owners known as shell companies; (iii) tendering and award of contracts through negotiations with non-competitive bidding procedure. 50 articles were published on printed and online media based on information and visualization generated during the project.

The Municipality of **Tirana** provided increased access to information and transparency in an innovative way by working with the organization “**EESTEC Tirana**”. Together they designed and launched the mobile application [InstiucioniVirtual](#), accessible in Play Store and App Store under the same name to access the information on social services and on procedures adopted by the Municipality of Tirana for its residents. The project promoted the application through media, online postings and one reportage broadcast in TV stations and three workshops attended by 144 high school students.

Outcome 2: Civil society actors initiated and supported selected structural changes to improve democracy at local level

LevizAlbania has contributed to a more enabling environment for civil society actors to initiate and support selected changes to improve local democracy.

Civil society actors, including LevizAlbania grantees during the reporting period, have made use of the Strategic Enabling instruments to bring about change:

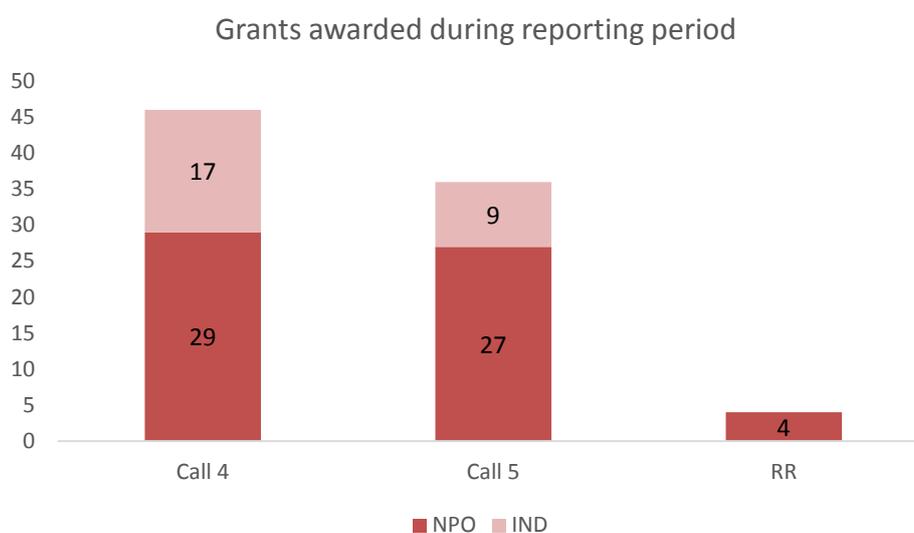
1. In pursuit of strategic issues affecting the interests of a large number of citizens, the grantees AKIP, Albanian Rafting Federation and EcoAlbania approached the Legal Clinics supported by LevizAlbania and received legal assistance for the administrative and/or judicial prosecution of claimed environmental damage cases. The Legal Clinics also provided legal consultations services to other grantees during the reporting period.
2. The platform PortaVendore.al offers journalistic coverage of local issues, focusing on evidence based reporting, engaging a wide network of local journalists from all over Albania. An active role was played by the citizens through the REPORT section of the platform. Over 150 people have addressed their concerns to the PortaVendore platform, concerns that were followed by local journalists, and/or transferred to the legal clinics for legal advice/action. There have been several cases where the local government units have reacted after the reporting of the problems by PortaVendore, taking action towards their solutions.
3. Through the provision of municipal financial data on a regular, open and accessible to a number of different users, the FinancatVendore.al platform has initiated an evidence-based discussion on municipal finances, be it among media partners, experts, authorities, academics and policy-makers at local and national level. Any interested citizen, can check how his municipality is spending his/her taxes and what it plans to spend by looking at the medium – term budget programs.
4. Increased exchanges and networking among LA grantees and other civil society organizations to achieve joint results and to ensure amplification of results and impact of their initiatives, through thematic networking sessions, trainings (face-to-face and on-line) and individual coaching. Through these opportunities grantees have had the chance to widen their networks, exchange experiences and learn from each other, increasing the potential to jointly work in common causes in the future through coalitions.
5. A Civic innovation Lab Centre (CILC/OFICINA) helped to improve the competences of civic society actors in applying web and new media tools in their daily work and projects to further strengthen democracy at the local level. OFICINA achieved to enhance the technical skills of civic actors in the development of new communications and interaction platforms

for the public benefit. Additionally it provided low cost access to licensed software and professional electronic programs so that civic actors could better achieve their objectives.

3. Outputs and performance

Output 1.1: Demand-driven grants, fellowships, and rapid response action (when warranted) are awarded and are successfully implemented

In total 86 grants to NPOs and individuals were awarded (26 or 30% of these were awarded to individuals) and implemented during the reporting period in a successful way as follows: 46 in Call 4, 36 in Call 5 and 4 Rapid Response.

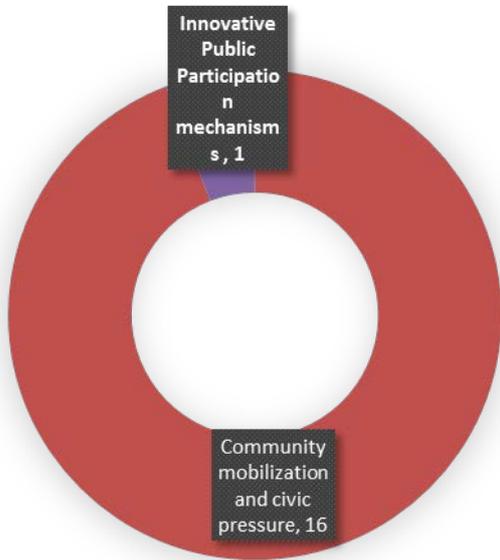


The 46 grants awarded in Call for Applications 4 started implementation on February 12, 2018 and had an average duration of 12 months and were concluded during the reporting period (most of them within February 2019). The 36 grants awarded in Call for Applications No. 5 started implementation on August 1, 2018. Most of these had a nine-month average duration and were concluded during the reporting period (most of them within May 2019). In the reporting period it has been also awarded the Project “31 minutes”.⁸ The grants were awarded according to the different Directions of the Calls for Applications as follows:

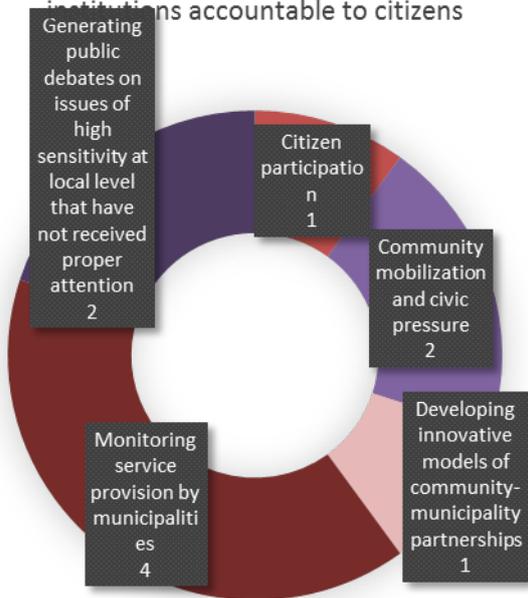
⁸ The main purpose of this TV show (31 Minutes’ project) is to bring light to the actual context of Albania, in many fields such public expenditures, corruption, criminal issues and activity, that affects the daily life of the citizens, the management of public sources, environment, food safety, civil rights, and many others. The objective of this project was the concept, produce and publication of a tv show program, weekly, with investigative and dossier nature and profile. The show was visualized weekly at Albanian Public Radio Television, where journalist engaged with the program, created, edited and publicized cases related and connected with the activities written above. The program is a produced by RTSH and Albanian Center for Quality Journalism, with the support of US Embassy in Tirana, Embassy of Netherland, Embassy of Switzerland and LevizAlbania.

Grants awarded in Call 4, by Direction

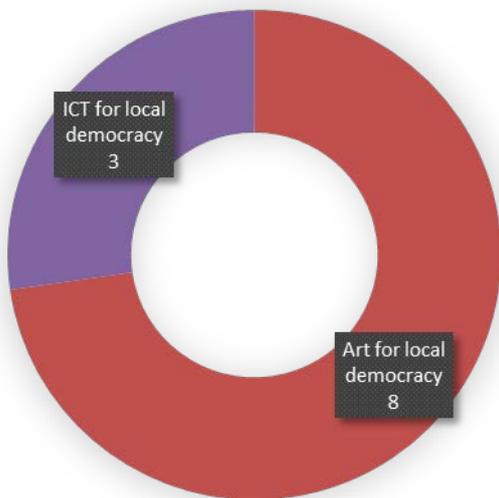
Direction 1:
Citizen participation as an important element in impacting local priorities



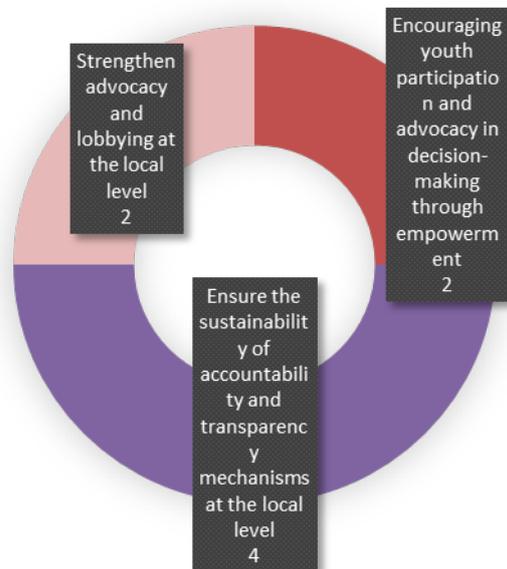
Direction 3:
Transparency and Accountability of local institutions accountable to citizens



Direction 2:
Art and Innovation as Alternative Ways to Promote Local Democracy

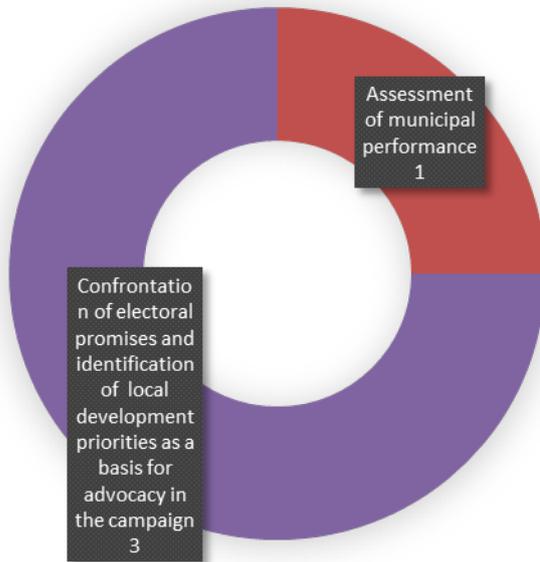


Direction 4:
Supporting Strategic Interventions previously supported (Continuity/Upscale)

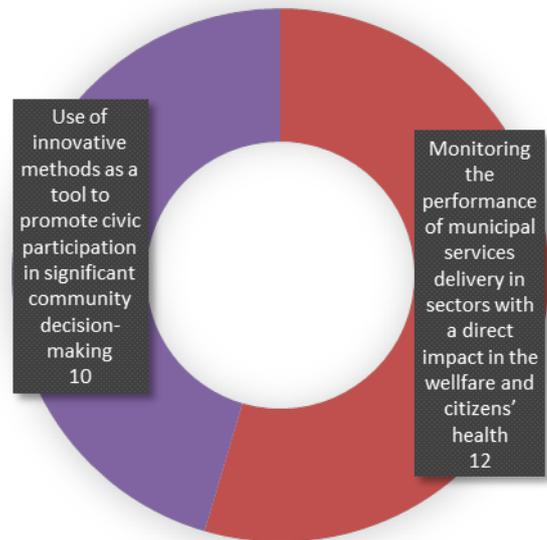


Grants awarded in Call 5, by Direction

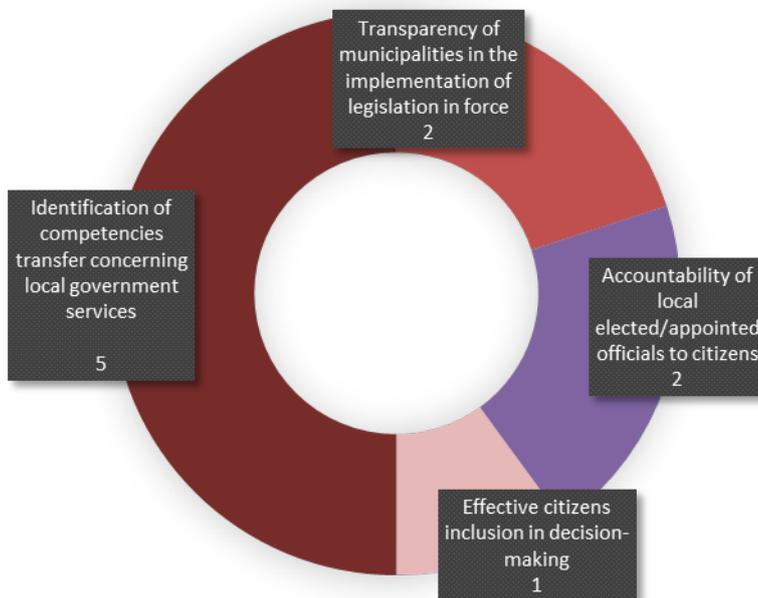
Direction 1: Inciting participation and civic activism in the pre-electoral period of local elections 2019



Direction 3: Increase the local government social responsibility through civic activism



Direction 2: The effects of the law 139/2015 "On Local Self-Government" implementation under the civic optic



LevizAlbania encouraged the participation of small NPOs and individuals in Call 4 and 5. In order to further incentivize the participation of this target group, in Call 5 LevizAlbania introduced the following terms of application:

- Directions 1, 2 and 3 were open to all registered NPOs;
- Fellows (individuals) could only apply under Direction 3;
- NPOs implementing projects outside their operation regional area, had to be in partnerships with local NPOs. This condition applied only to Directions 1 and 2;
- NPOs for Direction 2 had to cover at least all municipalities of one region. If they planned to cover 2 or 3 regions, bordering regions should be selected and implement the project in partnership with local NPOs.

These set of conditions were successful to: 1) expand the geographical coverage; 2) encourage the participation of local and small NPOs (both as applicants and as partners in different projects); 3) incentivize the participation of individuals and smaller NPOs; 4) mitigate the tendency observed in previous calls in which a considerable part of the projects out of Tirana were being implemented by more qualified Tirana-based organizations, but without in depth knowledge of the local context.

Up-scale mechanism:

In order to support good models with the potential to be up-scaled and ensure their continuity and sustainability, LevizAlbania included as a Direction in Call 4 the support to “strategic interventions” that had been previously implemented.

Within Call 4, 8 projects (6 NPOs and 2 individuals)⁹ were awarded and successfully implemented by grantees with the potential to up-scale/consolidate or extend into other geographic areas previously supported projects through a specific direction in Call 4. The results of 8 grants have produced positive effects in terms of strengthening the sustainability of the initiatives implemented. Upscale projects contributed to enlarging the impact of their interventions in terms of geographical coverage, number of beneficiaries, increased budgets and investments, transfer of know-how, skills and expertise, and strengthened youth activism structures.

The experience with the up-scale mechanism has shown that investing in initiatives that have potential and supporting solid organizations is beneficial to achieve higher scale results. The up-scale mechanism has shown the coalitions and joint actions making use of strategic advocacy can address systemic challenges, based on the belief that change can be achieved as a result of mixed groups of accountability actors working together.

Investing to consolidate results through Supporting Strategic Interventions (Continuity/Upscale)

8 grants from Call 4 not only achieved concrete reaction from local authorities but also strengthened the sustainability of the initiatives implemented and managed to establish partnerships of grantees with local organizations.

Example:

In **Tirana**, the Municipality reconstructed the kindergarten No 60 which hosts 120 children and it was intervened to address the air pollution close to kindergarten No 41 attended by 246 children due to public works. In **Sarandë** (Ksamil), the hydro sanitary conditions of the kindergarten No 1 were improved whereas the kindergarten No 2 was subject to intervention to address the humidity issue and upgrade the bathrooms. Both kindergartens are attended by 123 children. In **Pogradec**, in the kindergarten “Persefoni Treni”, the municipality intervened in upgrading the facility benefiting 130 children. These improvements were a result of the work of the organization “**Together for Life**” which with an upscale project awarded in Call 4 continued the work previously done only in Tirana in Call 2, partnering with **Egnatia** a local organization in Pogradec and **Ajmi**

⁹ Youth Movement Egyptian and Rome (Levizja Rinore Egjyptiane Rome, LRER), Free Thought Forum (Forumi I Mendimit te Lire), Eco-Albania, Albanian Institute of Science, Together for Life, Infnit +, Diana Malaj, Gentian Hajdari

a local organization in Saranda and Delvina. Together they monitored the physical standards of 16 kindergartens (5 in Pogradec town, 5 in Saranda town and its rural areas, and 6 in Delvina town and its rural areas) and continued advocating for the implementation of the recommendations derived from the previous project (Call 2).

Rapid Response:

The Rapid Response instrument offers support to civil society actors in incidental instances in which quick support is needed and when there is insufficient time to react through the standard grants. This instrument allows the possibility to react in only 10 days on specific arising causes with public interest, thus increasing the flexibility of LevizAlbania interventions to tackle opportunities that fall outside the normal call cycle. The Rapid Response instrument was operationalized through an on-line application process. Over Phase I, 90 applications were received for Rapid Response Support out of which 9 projects were supported.

During the reporting period 4 Rapid Response Grants finalized their implementation addressing environmental protection issues. 3 of the RR grants in this period recurred to legal action (2 of them from the Legal clinics supported by LA and one through another Legal Clinic) and advocacy at the national level to increase the visibility and opportunities to succeed in their fight against issues affecting the interests of a large number of citizens:

- As a result of awareness and advocacy by AKIP, the case of the Fier incinerator turned into an issue of significant public interest and consequently the government did not advance in its initiative to build an incinerator in Tirana.
- Albania Rafting Federation succeeded in protecting the Osumi Canyons through coordinated advocacy with media, public awareness and legal action. As a result the environmental permits of two HPP were annulled and the third one is still subject to court ongoing proceedings.
- Green Vision organization supported the community's advocacy activities in 9 villages in the Selenicë municipality against the 35-years concession for the construction of the hydropower cascade over the Shushicë River. The project documented irregularities in the consultation processes with residents of nearby areas. As a result of the pressure, the government announced the suspension of the concession

These achievements are in line with the objectives of this instrument foreseen originally. Yet the issue of large volume of applications that do not fulfil the eligibility criteria of this instruments has persisted. Another challenge is the existing trade-off between flexibility/quickness to respond to an urgent issue and the need to comply with the requirements and procedures to contract, implement and close a grant.

Output 1.2: Capacities of LevizAlbania grantees and fellows to influence local democracy are improved through training and networking

The capacities of LevizAlbania grantees (NPOs and individuals) during the reporting period were supported in different ways through training, coaching, and networking activities¹⁰. In particular this output is related to their capacities to implement LevizAlbania grants.

LevizAlbania made use of SEI implemented by Partners Albania to provide targeted capacity building activities to grantees and potential grantees (see Output 2.1 for more details).

In addition, LevizAlbania provided coaching for all winners of Call 5 and supported them with the grant-giving procedures until contract signature. Once awarded, ad hoc support and consultations were provided on daily basis, especially for individual grantees or small NPOs. LevizAlbania provided close support for all the fellowships of Call 4 and 5, providing on-going advice on project implementation and communications. This support was very much appreciated, especially by individual grantees as in many cases individual grantees have limited resources to fulfil some of the more complicated financial management work.

LevizAlbania also organized a Guiding Session - Grants Management Rules for all 5th Call Grantees. 37 participants followed the session, acquiring knowledge on issues related to: Narrative Report; Financial Management for NPOs: Reporting Format; Detailed List of Expenditures; Supporting documents for different types of expenditures; etc.

In terms of networking LevizAlbania organized for the third time the “Leviz for Democracy” Week on 23-26 April 2019, dedicated to local democracy¹¹. The week integrated 6 activities organized in Berat, Gramsh and Tiranë on local democracy issues identified mainly by grantees, such as food safety, citizen participation and its role in public service provision in the context of the Administrative and Territorial Reform, youth as agents of change in communities, etc. The presentation of the Status Report 2018 for Local Public Finances (see Output 2.2) and the documentary summarizing the achievements of LevizAlbania in Phase I were also activities that were organized in the framework of the 2019 Leviz for Democracy Week. These events created an opportunity for grantees to meet each other, exchange experiences and network. The 6 activities organized in the framework of Leviz Democracy Week counted with over 200 participants and were widely promoted and broadcasted live through the Leviz Albania social media channels. Traditional and on-line media covered the majority of the events.

The Leviz for Democracy Week has been one of the flagships of Leviz Albania over Phase I. Overall, the three Leviz for Democracy Weeks organized have had added value on the following three fields:

1. Boosted the visibility of Leviz Albania project through the organization of events and promotional activities where the brand of the project has been further disseminated through the media and among participants in the activities.
2. Offered a chance for further advocacy on selected topics. The participation of different decision-makers at different levels and in different thematic areas have increased the opportunities to advocate on a first-hand basis.
3. Widened the networking of grantees and other civic actors as well as opportunities to showcase their achievements.

The project organized two study visits in the reporting period, one in the region (Serbia) and one in a European country (Spain). Study visits were attended by LA and grantees supported by the project.

¹⁰ According to the [External Review conducted in 2018](#): Coaching and support by LA were appreciated by grantees as being on time and professional. In total, 1229 civil society actors have benefited from capacity building sessions, mentoring and coaching provided by LA and SEI projects up to now..

¹¹ Previously the Leviz Democracy Week had been organized in 2017 and in 2018.

Study visit in Beograd, Serbia (8-11 April 2019) was organized in the frame of the “[International Civil Society Week](#)” a global event attended by civil society organizations around the world engaged in various areas, such as environment, youth, media, activism, etc. This visit was attended by 6 LA grantees, which had the opportunity to be exposed to experiences and models from peers in the region and beyond, and to present their success stories and the achievements of their respective projects and of LA.

Study visit in Madrid, Spain (25-28 June 2019) involved 8 grantees of LA and had two objectives: a) to expose grantees to good practices in countries with similar features, in an effort to explore elements of a participatory democracy processes, incentivizing cooperation among actors and enhance participation methods; and b) to improve engagement of successful LA grantees in strengthening civic participation at local level and incentivize the creation of networks for cooperation and advocacy. The study visit included meetings with organisations and civic activists in Madrid. The visit was evaluated very positive by the participants, who had the opportunity to learn about civic activism models at the grass root level (neighbourhoods), engagement of journalists and media into public campaigns and hot issues, use of public platforms as instruments to assure public participation, etc.

Output 1.3: CSOs and fellows supported by LevizAlbania advocate to improve local democracy through media

All grantees and fellows received guidance on use of media to boost the impact of their projects. During the orientation session, LA Orientation Session - Grants Management Rules grantees were advised on different strategies using media in order to better advocate in the framework of their projects. 4th call grantees produced 10 promotional articles; 62 visibility articles and 26 video products. 5th call grantees produced 19 promotional articles; 100 video products and 286 visibility articles¹². 100%¹³ of the projects supported in Call 4 and 5 used media (including social media) to support their visibility or as an advocacy tool and approximately 40% of them received individual coaching in media use for these purposes.

Output 2.1: Skills and capacities of Civic actors (CSOs and individuals) for better drafting and implementation of initiatives that promote democracy are increased

Civic actors, including CSOs and individuals have increased skills and capacities to better demand for an improved local democracy through tailored trainings (on-line and face-to-face), individual coaching, local democracy camps, and thematic networking sessions conducted by Partners Albania under the SEI project ‘Increased exchanges, capacity building and networking’. Results of the different capacity building activities are summarized below:

Type	Training Program	Place/Date	Participation
On-site	Cooperative Advocacy	Kukës: 8 - 9 September 2018 Berat: 01 – 02 October 2018 Shkodër: 04 – 05 October 2018.	43 participants, 33 from CSO and 10 individuals, out of which 5 were LevizAlbania grantees. 30 were women and 13 men.

¹² Promotional articles advertise a certain activity in the framework of a project while visibility articles intend to disseminate results or key messages within the project.

¹³ It was a mandatory requirement for grantees to make use of media. The Grant Management rules established that “The Grantee shall use social media channels for communication (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube & Instagram), coordinating with the Grantor. To assure visibility of the project supported by LevizAlbania and convey the message to the interest groups it is suggested the use of such instruments as: photos, info-graphs, digital posters, short videos, reportages or short documentaries.”

	Participatory Governance	Kavajë: 24 - 25 January 2019 Elbasan: 13 - 14 February 2019 Pogradec: 16 – 17 April 2019.	38 participants, 33 from CSO and 6 individuals, out of which 34 participants were interested to apply on LevizAlbania grantee financial schemes and 5 participants were grantees of LevizAlbania. 24 were women and 14 men
On-line	Strategic Communication	26 October 2018	8 participants, 6 from CSO and 2 individuals, out of which 4 were LevizAlbania grantees. With regards to gender disaggregation 3 were men, and 5 were women.
	Strategic Planning	21 February 2019	6 expressions of interest to participate in the online training, all from civil society. 6 were women. 1 participant was LevizAlbania grantee.
	Participatory Governance	10 April 2019	10 expressions of interest to participate in the online training, 9 participated. 5 were women.
	Strategic Communication	14 May 2019	5 expression of interest to participate in the online training, 4 participants coming from CSO and 1 individual. 3 were men and 2 women.
	Cooperative Planning	24 May 2019	7 participants from 3 were men and 4 were women.
	Proposal Writing	29 May 2019	16 young participants interested to apply in the future call for proposal of LevizAlbania. 15 were women and 1 was man.

The above trainings were subject to an impact assessment by Partners Albania. Key findings of the impact assessment were:

- 50% found the training very useful;
- 56% said it helped in the preparation of their project for LevizAlbania;
- 80% evaluated the training programs as very good;
- 70% said training met their expectations.

Additionally, the capacities of CSO and individuals were supported through:

- Individual coaching provided to 26 grantees from the Call No.5 of LevizAlbania.
- Two Local Democracy Camps were organised in Elbasan (November 13-15, 2018) and Tirana (March 11-13, 2019) to develop skills and activism among 37 young men and women contributing to improving local democracy in their cities.
- Three Thematic Networking Sessions organized in Durres, Elbasan and Tirana, attended by 17 LevizAlbania Grantees, out of which 15 from CSO and 2 individuals. These thematic sessions served to share experiences (best practices and lessons learned) among the LevizAlbania beneficiaries that are implementing similar initiatives, in order to identify possibilities of collaboration and common activities.

Output 2.2: Open data platform to measure the fiscal and financial performance of local governments is created and is accessed by interested parties

The Financat Vendore platform implemented by Co-Plan is fully operational in two languages, and regularly enriched and updated with data on a quarterly basis from the Treasury Directory in the Ministry of Finance and Economy. Based on improved web-site architecture any citizen can easily obtain a very detailed insight into any given municipality's financial health and performance, for the past 5 years. Through the provision of municipal financial data on a regular, open and accessible way to a number of different users, the platform has initiated an evidence-based discussion on municipal finances, be it among media partners, experts, authorities, academics and policy-makers.

During the reporting period, the work was focused on:

1. Consolidation of the reviewed “Municipal Profiles for all 61 municipalities in the country for the year 2018 offering a succinct municipality-specific overview on (a) revenues by sources, (b) expenditures and (c) other economic indicators.
2. Updating the database with quarterly data for all 61 municipalities in the country for all four quarters of year 2018 and the first quarter of 2019.
3. Analysing the performance of the municipalities in the form of Quarterly Analytical Reports: four quarterly reports on the status of local finances were prepared and disseminated including an Annual Status Report (in two languages).
4. Actively participating in media programs and engaging with print and online media. Visibility and outreach have played an important role: (1) in trying to make local finances feature in the media agenda; (2) feeding the discussions with evidence-based arguments.
5. Forums to introduce and discuss the findings from the Local Public Finances Status Report for 2018: In addition to the national event for the presentation of the Status Report of Local Finances during the Leviz for Democracy Week, the report was also introduced / anchored in several local events.
6. Thematic Articles/Studies on various aspects of local governance and local finances have been published by different media.
7. “How-to” videos to guide specific user groups have been prepared and uploaded on the platform.
8. Updated legislative amendments in the field of public local finances: Changes in the legislative framework (related to local finances) were included in the website together with the first drafts of the Medium-Term-Budget-Programs 2019-2021 for most municipalities & MTBP 2020-2022.
9. Regular technical maintenance of the platform and periodical update.
10. Translation in English of the platform to ensure better accessibility for foreign users.

Key results of www.financatvendore.al

31,031 views of the platform: increase of 3.98% when compared to previous reporting period

Expansion of the new user pool by about **13.83%** compared to previous year

Total number of users increased by **16.73%** compared to previous year (**4,361**)

Local finances under the media spotlight

- Intense media coverage, including predominantly television, online media, and print media (3 articles on printed media and 35 articles in on-line media, 6 TV appearances)
- Most articles based on the quarterly reports, yet there are several occasions when particular topic have been developed, such was the case analyses on particular municipalities or particular taxes (property tax, infrastructure impact tax, etc)
- The choice of focus is influenced by the ongoing reforming processes and current dynamics in the country

A source of information for both national & regional authorities

- National Framework for Regional Development (local finances section)
- World Bank, Case studies of lagging regions in Western Balkans (to be published in 2019)
- Annual Budget Execution and Monitoring – Training Manual for Local Government Officials (Ministry of Economy and Finance & Decentralization and Local Development Programme, 2018)
- Annual Review of Territorial Governance in Albania, specifically the policy-paper “Territorial Administrative Reform and the Decentralization Strategy – Progress Towards the Desired Objectives after a Governing Mandate”

Endorsed by the Ministry of Finance and Economy

- Link to the platform has been published on the official website of the Ministry
- Adds to the legitimacy and credibility of the data provided

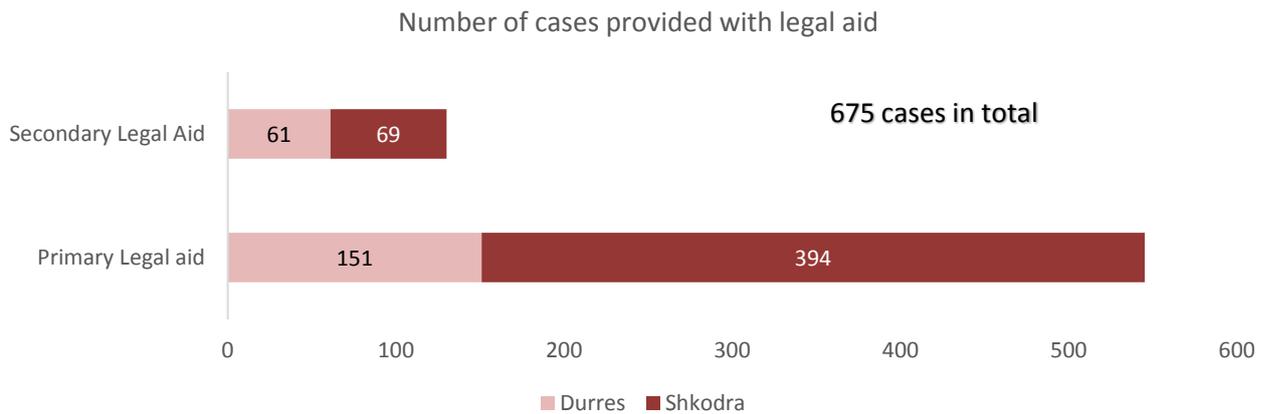
Output 2.3: Local Law Centres provide legal support for communities in the fields of health care, environment and services provided by local government

With the support of LevizAlbania, two local Legal Clinics, are fully functional respectively from February 2, 2018 in Durrës, and from February 1, 2018 in Shkoder. Legal clinics are focused on delivering primary and secondary free legal education and aid services for individual cases and on identifying and pursuing cases affecting a large number of citizens and that may bring changes at the policy level.

During the reporting period, the Legal Clinics have focused on:

- Providing primary and secondary free legal aid.
- Enhancing capacities of the project staff (five training sessions and one study visit).
- Synergizing and establishing partnership with local stakeholders, including public administration institutions, local CSOs, local Chambers of Lawyers, journalists, universities, etc.
- Promotion and visibility of the Legal Clinics in traditional and social media.

Key results of Legal Clinics



During the reporting period, the Legal Clinics provided legal services in the pursuit of 6 strategic litigation cases:

- i. Legal support to residents of Verri, Fier and AKIP against building a waste incinerator near their village.
- ii. Legal assistance to local civil society and Tepelenë Municipality regarding the construction of the Hydro Power Plant Driza no. 1 within its territorial unit.
- iii. Primary and secondary legal assistance for 2 CSOs (Eco Albania and Albanian Rafting Federation) to address at court claims on preventing environmental degradation by building hydro power plants in the canyons of Osumi River in the case “HP Bigas dhe Veleshnje Energy” shpk vs National Environmental Agency, Ministry of Tourism and Environment and the National Environmental Inspectorate. The court accepted the request of 2 CSOs for secondary intervention and recognized their claims based on the law regarding preventing environmental degradation from building the hydro power plants.
- iv. Primary legal assistance to the residents of a village near the landfill in Porto Romano in Durres which is built without having an environmental permit by presenting several request for information to the public institutions.
- v. Secondary legal assistance to Albanian Rafting Federation against the building of the Hydro Power Plant “Prishta” from “HP Prishta 1 & 2 Energy” shpk in the Municipality of Skrapar (threat to the Osumi canyons).
- vi. Represented 30 residents of Valbona and TOKA organization at the Court of First Instance of Bajram Curri related to a criminal complaint, claiming falsified signatures in the Dragobi Project consultation process. The court rejected the request of 30 residents of Valbona and TOKA organization, while the Legal Clinic addressed the case to the Court of Appeal.

Output 2.4: New multi-functional platform that enables publishing of independent and qualitative media content on local issues, and open knowledge on local government is created and used by citizens.

The multifunctional platform www.portavendore.al aims to create an enabling environment for local democracy and participatory decision-making, by improving citizens' knowledge and understanding of municipal functions and responsibilities, by strengthening local journalism, and advocating for more transparency and accountability of local government units.

PortaVendore.al was launched in May 2018, and it has become a useful reference tool for its journalistic profile. In one year, PortaVendore had 140,000 unique visitors in its website, with up to

20,000 active users per month. PortaVendore articles were shared 1,300 times from other Facebook profiles.

PortaVendore journalists' network extended to 50 professional local journalists, located in all the municipalities of Albania. They have been supported and capacitated through trainings, mentoring and on the job coaching, in addition to financial support.

Based on a constructive and objective journalism, the topics covered by PortaVendore have been very diverse. Within the five journalism categories, PortaVendore covered issues in the area of Infrastructure, Education, Environment, Agriculture, Public Investments, Social Services, Consumer Protection, etc.

Key results of www.portavendore.al

- 19 LGUs functionalities portfolios, 62 public services passports and 61 data profiles for each municipality, prepared and published.
- Around 40 laws and legislative acts on local government operations, duties and responsibilities, identified and published.
- 100+ monitoring reports and analytical studies on local government and democracy, identified and published.
- A network of 50 local journalists contributing to PortaVendore media content
- 30+ local journalists improved their knowledge through information and capacity building workshops & on the job training.
- Around 300 articles prepared and published. Over 100 news, 90 in depth reporting and data analyses, 50 reportages, 50 photo and video reporting and 10 investigative stories have been carried out and published
- At least 25 cases of abuses, wrongdoings or other law violations related to LGUs operations and/or public officials identified and exposed
- A database with more than 1,500 electoral promises for 61 municipalities made during 2015 electoral campaign, Around 1000 electoral promises verified by engaging 25 local journalists

There have been several cases where the local government units have reacted after the reporting of problems by PortaVendore, taking action toward their solutions. Some of such examples are:

- Municipalities of Dibër Region started to publish the decisions of the municipalities' councils after the publication of an article;
- Durrës Municipality was fined with 1,000,000 ALL for throwing kelp on the highway, denounced by PortaVendore;
- Kamëz Municipality invested to connect electrical power to "Jashar Hoxha" kindergarten,
- The Mayor of Pogradec decided to cancel the abusive water tax.
- Klos Municipality approved the fund for the reconstruction of "Shaban Collaku" High School.
- Vlorë Municipality invested to improve the poor conditions of the old market in Vlorë, reported by a merchant.
- Klos Municipality invested in buying a new fire truck, after PortaVendore reported on the poor conditions.
- PortaVendore was the first to investigate and report on a series of conflictual decisions made by different government agencies on Zagori case. The publication caused public reactions and protests from environmental activists, pushing the Prime Minister and Shell Company to declare publicly in the media that no oil exploration excavations or explosions would be allowed in the Zagoria natural protected area.

Output 2.5: Technical skills in the development of new communication and interaction platforms for CSOs are increased and available.

Civic innovation Lab Centre (CILC/OFICINA) functioned as a centre for advancement of information technology skills and capability for organizations and individuals. Its main objective was to further strengthen democracy at local level through enhancement of technical skills of civic actors in the development of new communications and interaction platforms for the public benefit. OFICINA provided low cost access to licensed software and professional electronic programs so that civic actors could better achieve their objectives.

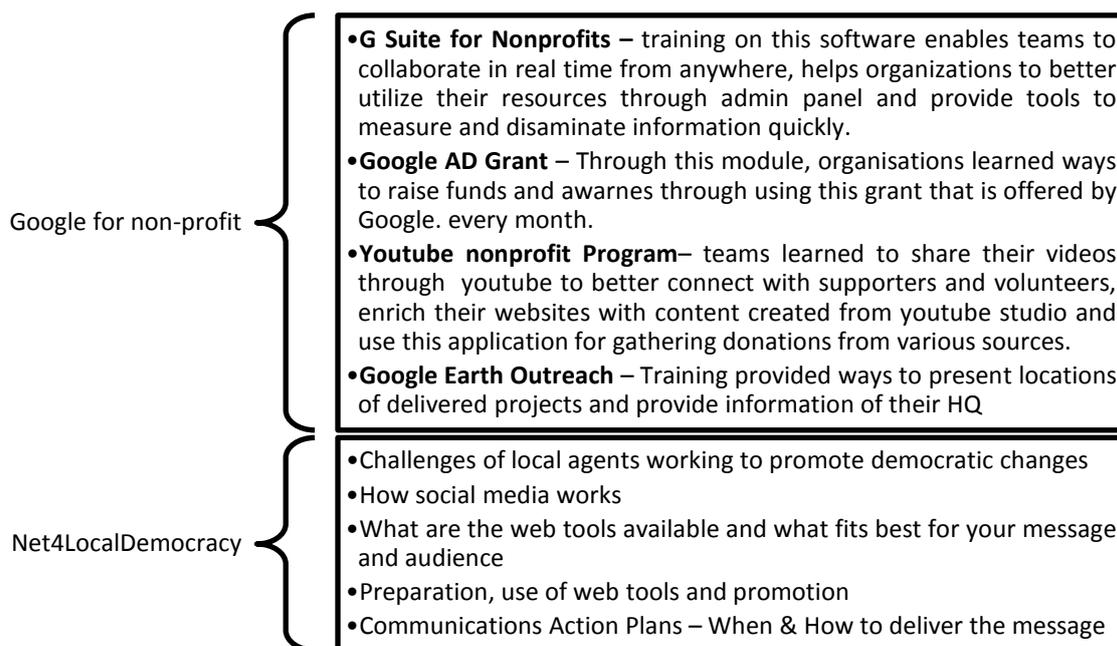
OFICINA delivered in total 32 days of training to civic actors in 10 different cities of Albania. Trainings were delivered in two different modules: Google for Non-profits platform and NET4Local Democracy. Overall, 191 organizations and 93 individuals participated in the trainings in Korçë, Fier, Elbasan, Shkodër, Durrës, Berat, Lezhë, Vlorë, Kukës and Tiranë.

The Google for Non-profit module offered participant civic actors a practical way to reach their targeted audience and promote their work while using new technologies and processes within the Google for Non-profit framework. Training curricula was based on latest trends and included workshops to increase their professional capacities by utilizing these tools. Additionally, organizations were offered practical examples of how other NGOs in the world are benefiting from increased usage of similar tools.

OFICINA developed 20 websites during these workshops, targeting those organizations which had content ready to show. Specifically Wellpoint, Epoka e Re, DARC, Levizja Rinore Rome & Egjiptiane, Gruaja në Fokus, AKS and Active Durrës (grantee Klaudio Hyseni), are some of the organizations which built new websites with the support of OFICINA ICT expert.

The training course “NET4LocalDemocracy” was dedicated to the role and influence of social media in the democratization processes at the local level. Internet and social media are playing an important role in fostering the impact of democratic grass-root movements. Most successful civil initiatives in Europe are widely using web tools and social media in order to bring forward their messages and demands for local change.

There is a positive feedback for the trainings and its content from 95% of the participants. OFICINA received constant requests to repeat some of the trainings in other cities. OFICINA also made available self-help training materials, consultancy and technical expertise remotely. Meetings with those organizations which required face-to-face support and willingly travelled to Tirana were also held. Although some of their requests for technical support fell outside the scope of the work of OFICINA, such as domain and web hosting, their requests were met and the organizations were provided with the particular services.



4. Finances and management

The total budget of LevizAlbania for the 4th Project Year (July 1st, 2018 – June 30th, 2019) was CHF 2,976,845.

During this reporting period LA finalized the grant-giving process for the following:

- LA awarded 36 grant contracts (27 NPO's & 9 Fellows) under the Call 5, with a total budget of CHF 850,405.
- One additional project "31' minutes" implemented by Albanian Centre for Quality Journalism, was awarded with a total budget of CHF 4,915.
- One rapid response grant was awarded to Green Vision with a total budget of CHF 10,450.
- A total of CHF 44,000 of additional funding was approved for Civic Innovation Lab Center/OFICINA project, implemented by OSFA, increasing the total budget of the project to CHF 121,840 for the implementing period from 05.01.2018 until 31.05.2019.

Based on the grant contracts signed between LA and each grantee (organization) the funds were disbursed in three instalments. Meanwhile for grants awarded to individuals (fellows), all financial transactions were executed by LA upon confirmation of the implemented activities and verification of all the supporting documents by the grantee and LA responsible grant manager. Financial and narrative reports were submitted to LA at the end of each phase. LA assisted individuals (fellows), to prepare and submit the financial reports on a continuous basis.

During the Orientation Sessions grantees awarded under Call 4 and 5 were guided on grant financial management rules and procedures. While, LA continued to provide support to grantees throughout the project implementation in terms of grant's financial management, the coaching was tailored to the needs of the grantees with regards to financial reporting and procedures. Less experienced NPOs and fellows assessed coaching as very useful in developing their financial skills.

The total expenditures of the reporting period (July 1st, 2018 – June 30th, 2019) are CHF 2,836,970. For the reporting period of the project there is a budget balance of CHF 139,875 or 4.7% of the project Year 4 budget of CHF 2,976,845.

The total expenditures for Phase I amount to CHF 6,307,677, while the overall Phase I budget balance is CHF 142,322 or 2% of the project total budget of CHF 6,450,000.

Actual balances are mainly due to unspent budget in Part 3b related to fees and reimbursable costs for short-term expertise. The reason for the underspending is because of a greater LA staff and consortium engagement in the preparation of the package of documents for the second phase.

Underspending in Part 4, for both *Demand Driven Grants, Fellowships and Rapid Response* and *SEI Cross-cutting projects*, is related to the unused amounts for the grant-giving schemes as well as the differences between the contracted and the reported amounts for implemented grants.

During this reporting period (July 1st, 2018 – June 30th, 2019), LA has contracted under budget line 4.1.1 for grants + fellowships and under budget line 4.2 for Strategic Enabling Instruments, a total of CHF 909,770, while disbursing CHF 1,648,983. Meanwhile progressively calculated since the beginning of the project, LA has contracted till June 30th, 2019, a total budget of CHF 4,123,530 for grants and disbursed CHF 4,031,970.

The progressive financial situation for the awarded grants during the four years of project implementation is as follows:

- The grantees from Call 1 have completed their projects and submitted the final narrative and financial reports. The total amount reported is CHF 421,078 out of CHF 424,886 contracted in the beginning of the call.
- The grantees from Call 2 have completed their projects and submitted the final narrative and financial reports. The total amount reported is CHF 377,659 out of CHF 383,000 contracted in the beginning of the call.
- The grantees from Call 3 have completed their projects and submitted the final narrative and financial reports. The total amount reported for this period is CHF 716,104 out of CHF 738,950 contracted in the beginning of the call. (The last 2 grantees from this Call have received their last instalment after December 2018).
- The grantees from Call 4 have completed their projects and submitted the final narrative and financial reports. The total amount reported is CHF 910,226 out of CHF 934,490 contracted in the beginning of the call.
- The grantees from Call 5 have completed their projects and submitted the final narrative and financial reports. The total amount reported is CHF 843,058 out of CHF 855,320 contracted in the beginning of the call.
- For the Rapid Response grants, the reported amount up to June 30th, 2019 is CHF 105,783 out of CHF 113,277 contracted.
- The total budget disbursed for five SEI projects under implementation is CHF 658,062 out of CHF 673,607 contracted.

Table 1:
Summary of Grants contracted, disbursed and reported in the period July 1, 2018 – June 30, 2019

	Contracted amount			Disbursed amount			Reported Expenses		
	NPO	Individuals	TOTAL	NPO	Individuals	TOTAL	NPO	Individuals	TOTAL
Grants of the 1 st call	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Grants of the 2 nd call	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Grants of the 3 rd call				20,437	1,975	22,412	35,108	(28)	35,079
Grants of the 4 th call	-			342,835	106,833	449,668	724,041	126,000	850,041
Grants of the 5 th call	782,955	72,365	855,320	774,916	68,142	843,058	774,916	68,142	843,058
Rapid Response	10,450	-	10,450	27,184	-	27,184	62,116	-	62,116
TOTAL 4.1.1	793,405	72,365	865,770	1,165,372	176,950	1,342,322	1,596,180	194,114	1,790,294
SEI Projects	44,000	-	44,000	306,661	-	306,661	380,256	-	380,256
TOTAL 4.1 & 4.2	837,405	72,365	909,770	1,472,033	176,950	1,648,983	1,976,436	194,114	2,170,550

Table 2: Progressive summary of grants contracted, disbursed and reported in Phase I (2015-2019)

	Contracted amount			Disbursed amount			Reported Expenses		
	NPO	Individuals	TOTAL	NPO	Individuals	TOTAL	NPO	Individuals	TOTAL
Grants of the 1 st call	361,848	63,038	424,886	359,157	61,921	421,078	359,157	61,921	421,078
Grants of the 2 nd call	319,000	64,000	383,000	314,669	62,990	377,659	314,669	62,990	377,659
Grants of the 3 rd call	646,026	92,924	738,950	630,058	86,045	716,103	630,058	86,045	716,103
Grants of the 4 th call	771,050	163,440	934,490	763,289	146,937	910,226	763,289	146,937	910,226
Grants of the 5 th call	782,955	72,365	855,320	774,916	68,142	843,058	774,916	68,142	843,058
Rapid Response	113,277		113,277	105,783		105,783	105,783	-	105,783
TOTAL 4.1.1	2,994,156	455,767	3,449,923	2,947,873	426,035	3,373,908	2,947,873	426,035	3,373,908
SEI Projects	673,607		673,607	658,062		658,062	658,062		658,062
TOTAL 4.1 & 4.2	3,667,763	455,767	4,123,530	3,605,935	426,035	4,031,970	3,605,935	426,035	4,031,970

During the 4th Year, issues have been faced with the reporting from a part of grantees, mainly related to delays and inaccuracy in reporting due to lack of capacities to fulfil LA requirements and Albanian legislation. The project has made great efforts to interact with grantees with the aim of bringing them in line with reporting requirements.

Human Resources

Following an increase of the budget of Phase I in late 2017, the number of grants to be managed increased; hence the need for additional personnel in the financial department arose. One financial consultant was contracted in February 2019 to support grants' financial management.

In the last year of implementation of Phase I, LevizAlbania went through an important change of staff. Out of 9 project staff, 3 people including the Team Leader, the Grant Programme Manager, and the M&E and CSO Manager resigned thus respective recruitment processes took place to cover these positions accordingly. A new Grant Programme Manager and a New M&E and CSO Manager were appointed on March 2019, while the Team Leader was appointed in April 2019. The new staff members were recruited through a transparent and competitive procedure. LA and the LA Consortium members published the vacant positions in the LA official website, LA social media channels, such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram and in all the communications channels of the LA consortium members, including the publication in national newspapers.

The staff changes¹⁴ brought about difficulties and challenges in the management of the projects, considering that a number of important process such as the finalization of the Project Documents for the second phase, the management of the grants from Call 4 and Call 5, etc. Serious efforts of LA staff and Consortium, contributed to overcome the difficulties.

VAT reimbursable by Albanian Government

During this reporting period (July 1st, 2018 – June 30th, 2019) LA has received all the VAT original invoices from the Prime Minister's Office belonging to the first semester (up to December 2018), while the file for the second semester is being processed by that office, in order to take the necessary steps for the VAT reimbursement. The last request submitted on August 2019, refers to reimbursable VAT at an amount of ALL 2,530,489.

¹⁴ At the time, this report was finalized, other staff changes occurred in the project for the positions of Project Assistant and Financial Manager. Additionally one staff member was on birth leave and the project carried out the procedures for the recruitment of the Finance Officer, a new position for phase II.

Table 4 : The detailed list of VAT (in ALL) received by LA from the beginning of the project.

Request date	Amount requested for reimbursement	Reimbursed amount	Reimbursement date
27.04.2016	507,434	507,434	12.10.2016
13.07.2016	263,144	263,144	22.11.2016
12.01.2017	717,953	2,246,821	23.11.2017
22.09.2017	1,528,868		
06.04.2018	1,114,182	1,114,182	17.10.2018
20.08.2018	2,319,389	2,318,467	17.10.2018
17.12.2018	962,567	962,567	24.12.2018
19.08.2019	2,530,489	In process	tbc
TOTAL	7,413,537	7,412,615	

Annex 2 presents the Financial Statement of the reporting period July 1st, 2018 – June 30th, 2019 detailed per budget lines following the modified cash basis accounting principles.

5. Lessons learned

5.1. Summary of lessons learnt in Phase I

Considering all the above achievements, several lessons-learned from Phase I can be drawn:

- **Limited impact of isolated actions**

While LevizAlbania was able to support considerable number of local initiatives and actions as per track record with many examples of success stories, these have had impact mainly in specific communities and municipality level, and have yet to generate impact that would connect and translate to a more structural and long-term effect. It is crucial to **develop a critical mass of skills, actions and awareness for civic engagement and activism**. The grants that have similar features (same intervention theme, intervention area, local government partner) should be encouraged to network during and after project implementation to maximize synergies, resources and impact at local level. It is of paramount importance that grants implemented in the same area coordinate resources and activities to build up a critical mass of pressure on LGUs and maximize their impact at local level (increased transparency, and improved public services);

- **Low interest and capacity for networking and coalition building**

Most of the grants in Phase I, were implemented at local level or regional level, and few among them had national coverage. A **more coordinated and structured approach** should be undertaken by LevizAlbania during Phase II to support strategic cooperation and networking among grantees at regional or intraregional level to build pressure and demand on LGUs for good governance, rather than leave the initiative on individual grantees' willingness or casual cooperation. One of the priority areas of the upcoming call (Phase II) should have specific focus on encouraging coalition building among civil actors at local, regional and national level on issues of concern for the communities. Successful individual projects should be encouraged to scale up at regional or national level through horizontal partnerships among CSOs, media and/or other actors.

- **Community mobilization, key to sustainability of individual support**

While support to evidence-based research should continue, it should **be accompanied with community mobilization as an effective tool** to exert positive pressure on LGUs and "shake" the people from lethargy and apathy" and generate community cooperation and interaction to bring social change. There are several good examples of civic action that through active external pressure in the form of public protests and community actions have achieved positive changes related to the

services provided by the LGU. These types of civic activity should be encouraged and supported further where civil society actors build alliances with citizens to pursue issues of public concern. It is suggested some financial flexibility to be allowed in budgets for supporting community mobilization activities. In order to ensure longer-term impact and time for initiatives to grow and develop, it is important to also extend project duration beyond initial 12 months.

- **Easier application processes encourage grass-root and community building ideas to be brought to the attention of LevizAlbania**

The application procedures for 5th CfA was exclusively online. Based on the lessons learnt, LevizAlbania has upgraded and improved some of the features of the online applications. A tutorial video on how to fill the template was prepared, which was automatically displayed before filling the online template.

- **Media as an important driver of change**

Leviz Albania has been recognized as having 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 LevizAlbania and its grantees were presented in social media. The project over Phase I 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, LevizAlbania 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. The efforts in communication and visibility will continue in the same way, but the strategic approach to media will be further enhanced. National and local media plays an essential role in identifying problems in local communities, decision-making and can draw attention to it for both citizens and decision-makers to discuss, solve and improve. Offering concrete (financial) support to media organisations, non-for-profit media portals, and individual journalists/activists, to media in partnership with NPOs and other civic actors; Increasing access to data, information, analysis on state of local democracy and local finance; Offering independent publishing space and financial support to publish, and develop knowledge and capacities through professional trainings, mentoring and on the job coaching, are all ways that can contribute to bridge the gap between media/journalists and NPOs and enhance their cooperation on issues of public interest.

5.2. Implications and strategic measures for Phase II

The Project Document for Phase II (ProDoc) reflects these lessons-learned which paved the way for refining the intervention strategy for the next 4-year period:

In terms of its strategic orientation, LA will pay particular attention to:

- 1) Develop a critical mass of skills, actions and awareness for civic engagement and activism rather than supporting isolated actions;
- 2) Have a more coordinated and structured approach to support strategic cooperation and networking among grantees at regional or intraregional level to build pressure and demand on LGUs for good governance, rather than leave the initiative on individual grantees' willingness or casual cooperation;
- 3) Incentivize community mobilization, cooperation and interaction to bring social change, encouraging alliances of civil society with citizens to pursue issues of public concern.

The introduction of new grant instruments for different types of civic actors, and adjustments to the size and duration of the grants has been also reflected in the ProDoc to cater for the specific needs of diverse applicants (individuals/informal groups/small or new NPOs/consolidated and experienced NPOs).

In terms of its steering mechanisms and transparency, procedures have been further enhanced and strengthened: The composition of the Grants Board and the grant-giving procedures (including an easier application process) have been revised in order to improve decision-making and management for grants to be awarded in transparent, competitive and impartial way. Periodic consultation with the consortium will ensure coordination and proper steering of the project.