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Albania
Local Democracy in Action

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LOCAL DEMOCRACY IN ACTION

REPORT: "ASSESSMENT OF EXPERIENCES"

Support of LevizAlbania to individuals and informal groups through grant schemes and coaching"

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OPEN SOCIETY FOUNDATION FOR ALBANIA

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LEVIZ Albania
Local Democracy in Action

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ABBREVIATIONS

LA	LevizAlbania
SDC	Swiss Agency for Cooperation and Development
OSFA	Open Society Foundation for Albania
PA	Partners Albania for Change and Development
CP	Co-PLAN, Institute for Habitat Development
VASS	Value Added Services
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
LGU	Local Government Unit

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Albania's long transition journey towards good governance, led by democratic principles, continues to produce questionable results. (Albania Transitional Results Report 2018–2020, 3) A highly conflictual internal political debate and a fragile economy bring additional vulnerabilities to an already brittle society. One of the side effects, further accentuated by a disastrous earthquake and a global pandemic in recent years, is a temperamental level of trust in governance, be this central or local. (Trust in Governance 2020) Despite ongoing reforms, there is still a long way to meaningful achievements in this space. Nonetheless, there is widespread consensus that citizen engagement is key to stimulating a balanced power of authority, which is simultaneously representative of its residents and their interests.

With this background and context, in 2015 the Swiss Agency for Cooperation and Development (SDC) deployed LevizAlbania (LA) as project that has been implemented by a fully Albanian Consortium of Partners. The goal refers to the benefits of the Albanian population from an improved democracy at the local level. Through a grant mechanism, LA has supported emerging and existing civic actors to raise community relevant demands, maintaining an action-oriented approach that yields tangible results for the local population.

Through its innovative intervention that shifts focus towards the less prominent members of the Civil society, LA has provided support to 79 individuals and informal groups covering almost all Albanian geography. As part of its effort to sustainably increase citizen engagement, LA provides support which contribute to a full cycle of active citizenship, from the nascent 'social hero'[1], to the well-positioned formalized organization (CSO). Its transparent Calls and processes are held in high regard by the grantees and add credibility and integrity.

LA has often iterated and enriched its practices to enhance desired outcomes and impact. This assessment is, therefore, part of its learning and improvement cycle and aims to specifically examine how and where the support given to individuals and informal groups contribute to sustainably increase activism. The results show that under current conditions, the contribution of LA towards sustainable activism is commendable, though not evened as an outcome amongst target groups. Key motivators and constraints develop from the background characteristics and traits of individuals and informal groups which, along with other context singularities, determine the effectiveness of what LA offers and the degree of sustainability achievable.

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[1] The concept of the 'social hero' refers to the individual whose personal cause reaches a greater audience in a community and whose character and values appeal others to a deeper and wider level than a single problem. The 'social hero' becomes a point of reference and a figure of respect for others because of (among other things) the integrity, the deep empathy and a sense of objectivity that with time see the social hero gain further moral grounds and eventually trust of his/her followers.

LA's simultaneous idea incubation and platform approach are highly valued by grantees as a real and practical influence towards capacity building, strengthening this way the credibility of the civic actor and the quality of the results achieved for the community. Likewise, coaching proves to be especially relevant to Individuals, not only as transfer of knowledge but also as an emotional enabler. The latter prevails with informal groups too, who articulate the need for a more participatory and empathetic approach.

Finally, one of the key findings for LA's improvement cycle refers to a blind spot created by the lack of a follow up mechanism, after the grant projects end, which is seen as imperative by individuals and informal groups alike. Backing up efforts to yield results beyond the lifetime of a project, and addressing project failures to tackle impediments and inefficiencies, in the form of a fully dedicated Call would be a meaningful contribution by LA. They are likely to enhance considerably the legitimacy, credibility, and traction of the civic actor. More importantly, such efforts are central to creating change agents and initiatives with a direct effect on sustainability of engagement.

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

LevizAlbania is a project of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, implemented by a Consortium of three Albanian partners namely, OSFA, Co-Plan and Partners Albania. Its core aim is to enhance and strengthen local democratic governance through demand generated grant schemes and coaching, as mechanisms to engage and empower the civic actors in the country. LA's strategic direction towards the above goal brings two innovative approaches: First, the implementation is preceded by a thorough need assessment of the Albanian citizens for a well-functioning and collaborative local government; Second, the grant schemes' target groups have included individuals and informal groups as direct stakeholders of LGU decisions.

The innovative approaches are even more relevant, following the new territorial and administrative reform, implemented in 2015. More specifically, the reform included 4 strategic objectives:

1. Improving the overall effectiveness of the Local government structures

2. Strengthening local finances and increasing fiscal autonomy

3. Driving local sustainable growth

4. Strengthening local good governance

Whilst the reform has seen varied results on each of the 4 verticals outlined above, any degree of performance is dependent on both the supply and demand of and for good governance as well as service efficiency. LA's bottom-up approach within this context, supporting direct citizens' engagement and coaching nascent change actors, is a logical move towards promoting a self-aware community that demands efficiency of public services and prioritization of their more immediate needs by the LGUs.

Nevertheless, the challenges stemming from the territorial administrative and decentralization reform were further accentuated by an eventful political climate. The local elections in 2019, saw mono-party led, local government units (LGUs) country wise, which had further implications for an inclusive good governance and demotivated citizen engagement. It could be argued that the impact is reflected in the IDM's opinion poll results. There is an immediate drop of citizen's trust towards local government, from 49% in 2017, to 47% in 2018 and 42% in the next two consecutive years. This is further reflected in other aspects of citizen engagement measured in IDM's poll, such as participation opportunities in local public decisions and processes and citizen's perception of local public hearings as formal rather than inclusive events. (IDM Opinion Poll: Trust in Governance 2020, 74-90)

The pandemic of Covid 19, which emerged during the first quarter of 2020, imposed a new facet of practical and emotional burdens globally, including Albania. The civil society was quick to locally mobilize, however transitioning to a new 'on-line' culture of work, meetings and organization was challenging and left out those actors and communities without proper tech and connectivity infrastructure. Furthermore, the Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) reported lack of coordination between the public authorities and other stakeholders, generating gaps in the administration of the pandemic overall response. (The role of CSO and Media in Crisis Management, 6-7).

The above context reasonably accentuates the importance of LA's grass-root approach, empowering communities' individual voices to raise concerns and demands that affect their daily life. What's more, social changes and innovations emerge thanks to a few social heroes, who are trusted and with time gain 'representation' legitimacy and scale within and out of their communities (Design, when everybody designs: an introduction to design for social innovation, 62). Energizing individuals to that end, hence, is a rational first step towards a more active society that is self-aware. As part of its efforts to increase citizen engagement and activism, since its inception and until the writing of this report, LA has seen over 2,270 applications, 820 of which have come from individuals and informal groups.

They have brought a wide variety of community relevant and tangible ideas which confirm the recurring results of IDM's poll "Trust in Governance" whereby every second Albanian is interested in actively participating in the local decision-making process and over 71% feel knowledgeable about government decisions. (Trust in Governance 2020, 74-80) The number of individual and informal group applications in LA's Calls 1 through 7 and their geographical spread, additionally reaffirm the acceptance of fresh approaches in driving citizen engagement and LA's unique take within this space.

Sustainability of activism on the other hand, is a rather complex aim and requires that the small individual action endures, scales up and is further nurtured by a favourable environment in cultural, social, and economic terms. Albania's vulnerable economic, social, and political situation, especially post disastrous effects of a major earthquake in 2019 and an ongoing global pandemic since 2020, do not favour the sustainability of citizen engagement. IDM's poll results' year on year differences in nearly all indicators from 2018 onwards echo such concerns. Nevertheless, LA has persisted its core goal efforts. Since 2015, through 7 Calls for Applications, it has provided grants and support to 79 individuals and informal groups through a transparent and elaborate process which has continuously iterated and improved and has deployed a number of instruments such as coaching, and networking.

Through its Consortium of Partners, LA further provides Value-Added Services like free legal aid (Law Clinics), transparent access to local finances and public services (Financatvendore.al and Portavendore.al), etc. The effectiveness and contribution of these instruments towards sustainable activism goals will be subject of analysis in this assessment.

SCOPE OF WORK FOR ASSESSMENT

The purpose of this analysis is to undertake the design and assessment of experience in supporting individuals and informal groups by LA. The experience assessment will aim to consolidate and disseminate knowledge on if and how the support provided so far to individuals and informal groups (by LevizAlbania but not only) achieves to sustainably increase the activism level by creating a higher number of active citizens.

SUMMARY OF METHODS

The methodology for this report included a series of workshops and group discussions with LA, participatory observations, 15 in-depth semi-structured interviews with grantees from all Calls, an on-line survey to all individuals and informal groups supported by LA, dialogue with other key informants and literature review. The latter includes project-related articles, descriptions, policies, poll surveys, and literature review that help with constructing and learning from relevant dialogues or planning with the aim to capture different

stakeholders' perspectives.

Furthermore, to design the assessment of experience, Design Thinking has been deployed as a method that is centered around the 'end user' (the civic actor in this case) and therefore specifically stages and scrutinizes what motivates, detracts, and eventually alters their behaviour towards a set out problem statement (sustainable engagement). Therefore, this approach helps to point out elements of sustainability as it draws exactly on what is commonly shared by the target group and can be repeatedly used. Last but not least, Design thinking further works on the lines of incremental improvement as it deems experience as an evolving process, the results that it produces hence are not set for life, but rather are used to iterate and constantly improve those valuable elements that produce value and the desired impact.

LEVELS OF ANALYSIS

As per the methodology described above, the following levels of analysis will be produced in this document

1. The Personas[2], creating a clear definition of who is the civic actor, what are their characteristics, what are their shared needs, what do they deem valuable for themselves and the community and where do they see value in their initiative in the role of the 'social hero'.

2. A process map that details the key interaction points between LA and the personas and what is provided as an enabler and what creates potential value for sustainability.

3. Using the feedback from the interviews and survey, a document of learnings observations is produced centring around the assessment of experience that create categories of desirable or non-desirable/

limiting practices. The latter, enforce or diminish respectively sustainability of engagement.

4. To feed capitalization of experience, a table of "Continue doing", "Review" and "Start doing" will be produced as findings and recommendations.

5. The 5 most important sustainability factors are emphasized in final remarks and conclusions, as shared by the interviewed grantees against the process and value design that LA provides through grant schemes and coaching to finalize where exactly LA can play a role to enhance activism.

PROJECT AND ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK

Before taking a deep dive into the assessment of experience, it is important to have the defined analytical framework that is being used. Figure I below, sets the following rationale: if and how the activities and mechanisms provided by LA exactly

produce new/returning civic actors and initiatives, and if and how do these in turn create a higher number of active citizens as a means to sustainably increase activism level.

FIGURE I.

GOAL:
SUSTAINABLY INCREASE ACTIVISM LEVEL

INTERVENTION
CREATE A HIGHER NUMBER OF ACTIVE CITIZENS

ACTIVITIES/ MECHANISMS:
GRANTS, COACHING, VAS

DESIRED OUTPUTS:
NEW ACTIVISTS, NEW INFORMAL GROUPS, SUSTAINED ACTIVISTS, CAUSES AND INFORMAL GROUPS

Sustainability of Activism may be defined and measured in many ways, however for the purposes of this assessment, sustainability of activism will refer to: the ability to create and further develop individuals and informal groups civic actors;

the ability to give voice to community driven demands and sustain efforts to address such demands with LGUs and other government authorities; and the ability to network and multiply energies of civic actors to gain traction and community support.

PERSONAS

The design and assessment of experience requires a thorough understanding of the target groups under study, that is the individuals and informal groups that have participated as grantees. Emphasis is placed on creating archetypes based on that part of their background which defines and shapes the need and attitude towards support of LA and other potential instruments available from the Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), with the ultimate aim of producing the desired outputs as described in Figure I above. These archetypes are described as Personas. The chosen individuals and Informal groups that have been named, serve to specifically sketch and represent the more general Persona Profiles as presented in the tables included herewith respectively.

The detailed descriptions help to see the how generalizations are made, based on real experiences and backgrounds but also contextualize action and behaviour. A key aspect of working with Personas is going through their experience journey on their shoes, with no prejudice, and where there are no right or wrong doings. That is why the Persona Profiles in turn, help to unambiguously assess the experience and determine where value and/or waste is created as they go through project ideation through to implementation and beyond. The in-depth interviews with the grantees have drafted the Personas described below.

PERSONA 1

NEW INDIVIDUAL, ALBA[3]

Alba has applied for the first time as an individual in LA's Call. Alba is employed full time (outside CSOs) and is very committed to her daily job. She often speaks with family and colleagues about issues she feels are and should be important not just to herself but to a larger community too. Alba has deep emotional attachment to a problem that she feels is not unique to her own experience. This attachment leaves her very opinionated and clearly positioned. She seeks attention and involvement from larger groups and takes small steps towards achieving her goals requiring general consent rather than procedural approval. Alba is enthusiastic but sometimes dubious about her role and her powers. She is very realistic that the world will not change overnight but is determined to play her part. She does not have any significant experience with the civil society and project management; therefore, she is easily overwhelmed by procedures and project management requirements. As a result, Alba needs a lot of hand-holding and coaching. She is very tangible-result-driven and sees the latter as a way to gain legitimacy and credibility within a larger group of like-minded people as well as some basic authority level with government representatives. Alba is very active in social media but not very fluent with other digital tools and mediums.

Alba is limited in her activities by her full-time job and family obligations and requires the empathy and flexibility of collaborators. Her personality and vulnerabilities give her credibility and make her an example of a social hero rather than just a victim of injustice. She is an inspiring figure to many others within her social and professional circles. Finally, Alba is very self-aware about her capabilities and shortfalls. Her insights about the contributions of LA and the project in general, are very practical and to the point. She shows a sense of worry towards not just achieving but also maintaining results over time, after her project has finished. Her cause prevails beyond the project life and she still needs to work to get long term action from the municipality. She is not financially capable to sustain long her activism without financial support. Her very modest salary as a primary school teacher is barely enough to support her little family. A general profile of Alba as the individual who is emerging as an active civic actor herein named New Individual is captured in Table 1 below.

[3] The Personas narrative refer to real grantees however, the names have been changed for confidentiality purposes

PERSONA PROFILE: NEW INDIVIDUAL

The new individual is someone who is making first attempts as an active member of the civil society. They are people with very good professional expertise and feel compelled to speak out for matters that concern them deeply. They have a strong personal attachment to a problem and this gives them credibility in their community or interest group. They become the locale's social hero, whose opinion is heard; with a great ability to gain empathy they acquire very naturally support that easily multiplies. They strictly speak of own experience and this makes them come across very driven and highly opinionated but also show a great need for recognition and self-actualization. While what they seek is of personal importance, it further extends beyond individual gains.

They feel that trust is the most important thing to engaging others and as such are prefer to pursue initiatives with very tangible outcomes; the latter either sees them continuing civic action or abandoning it. They appreciate all the help they can get but may feel intimidated as 'newbies' in the civil society. They don't always understand the lengthy procedures and often see them as a lack of trust rather than as valuable parts of a process. They are very easily overwhelmed by the necessity to play so many different roles, the organizer, the implementer, the bureaucrat, the opinion leader, the speaker, the subject matter expert, administrative worker, the demanding citizen and the rest of roles taken in their private life. They require heavy hand-holding and guidance and any other support is of great value.

TABLE 1. NEW INDIVIDUAL

PERSONA	NEW INDIVIDUAL
CHARACTERISTICS	• HAS VERY GOOD KNOWLEDGE OF AN AREA OF PROFESSIONAL EXPERTISE • PERSONALLY AND EMOTIONALLY INVESTED IN A CAUSE • MIDDLE AGED • HAS BASIC DIGITAL SKILLS • LIVES IN THE COMMUNITY OF PROJECT SCOPE
NEEDS	• SELF-ACTUALIZATION • RECOGNITION • SAFETY • LEGITIMACY • COMMUNITY CREDIBILITY • FINANCIAL SUPPORT

PERSONA	NEW INDIVIDUAL
VALUE PLACEMENT	• ACTION DRIVEN THEMES • AGGREGATION AND ORGANIZATION OF INFORMATION • NETWORKING • PROJECT MANAGEMENT SKILLS SUPPORT • FINANCIAL SUPPORT • ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT • REPORTING SKILLS • RELIABLE SOURCES OF INFORMATION AND GUIDANCE • RELIABLE AND FREE LEGAL AID • LEARNING NEW DIGITAL TOOLS AND RELEVANT SUPPORT • LEARNING AS A PROCESS THAT CAN BE REPLICATED • SIMPLE FORMATS OF CALLS • SIMPLE ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA • SIMPLE AND FRIENDLY COMMUNICATION STYLE • PARTICIPATORY APPROACH OF DONOR • OPPORTUNITIES FOR FOLLOW-UP ACTION

PERSONA 2

SUSTAINED INDIVIDUAL, GENTI[4]

Genti is an energetic young man who has made a long-term commitment towards activism and the civil society. He has had success in previous civil society endeavors and projects and takes pride in his achievements in this area.

Genti is methodical in his approach and rational in his attitude towards community concerns generally. He clearly balances between what is the problem that needs to be solved and what is attainable within a time frame.

Whilst pursuing activism as a profession, he strives to accumulate expertise and experience within one or two problem areas where he feels he can contribute the most.

Genti is result driven and feels that tangible results for the community gain him credibility threefold, with the donor, civil society and specific communal or interest groups where he is active. He has very good project management skills and clearly articulates potential shortfalls where help is needed. Genti sees value and power in networking as these provide him with opportunities to upscale his interest and potentially achieve longer lasting results.

Genti does not always live in the community where his project is implemented, however he travels very often and has close relations with the people. In fact, he deeply values such ties and aims towards nurturing them further.

Genti often acts as the spokesperson of pocketed communities and sees himself as a reference point for them. In doing so, he is careful and keeps an open mind about communal sensitivities and particular backgrounds of others. This leads him to be less opinionated and more flexible in solution proposals.

Genti is digital savvy. He makes daily use of digital tools and mediums and is easily adaptable to switch between more or less advanced ways of communications. He is very sensitive towards audiences, thus resourceful and creative in his approach towards solutions. Genti has a strong need to belong to affirmed group(s) of the civil society as a way to empower himself as a change agent. Genti's profile as an Individual that is regularly and full time involved with civic action is presented in Table 2 below.

PERSONA PROFILE: SUSTAINED INDIVIDUAL

The sustained individual has been an active member of the civil society for a number of years. They are engaged with less than a handful of causes that they feel close to and take a systematic approach to solve them. They are very rational, with clear ideas of what they wish to achieve and what is achievable. The Sustained individual pursues activism as a professional career and are hence very organized.

They seek to be recognized by the donor and CSO community and feel that this gives them further credibility with the LGUs and other government bodies. Their affirmation as a civic actor is highly dependent on the community trust and legacy and therefore they show a clear preference towards community action based initiatives but also stress the importance of creating synergies through networking.

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[4] The Personas narrative refer to real grantees however, the names have been changed for confidentiality purposes.

They feel that single voices without structured support cannot be sustained and may in turn even harm civic engagement generally as the communities are not very welcoming to recurring initiatives that have been taken on previously but with no results by other civic actors. The sustained individual highly values any support or instrument that allows them to gain traction especially networking.

They also appreciate VAS as this helps their methodical nature and their need for credibility with both the CSOs and the communities. They tend to create positive relations with LGUs and government authorities as a means to achieve longer lasting results.

TABLE 2. SUSTAINED INDIVIDUAL

PERSONA	SUSTAINED INDIVIDUAL
CHARACTERISTICS	• HAS GOOD KNOWLEDGE OF A SPECIFIC AREA WITHIN THE CIVIL SOCIETY • PROFESSIONALLY INVESTED IN A CAUSE • YOUNG, ENERGETIC • WELL ORGANIZED • IS DIGITALLY SAVVY • HAS CLOSE TIES WITH THE COMMUNITY OF PROJECT SCOPE
NEEDS	• PROFESSIONAL CAREER ACHIEVEMENT • DONOR RECOGNITION • LGUS RECOGNITION • GROUP BELONGING • LEGITIMACY • COMMUNITY CREDIBILITY • AFFIRMATION AS A CIVIC ACTOR
VALUE PLACEMENT	• ACTION ORIENTED THEMES • AGGREGATION AND ORGANIZATION OF INFORMATION • NETWORKING • ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT • SIMPLE CALL ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA • THEMATIC WORKSHOPS • FIELD WORK SUPPORT • MEDIA SUPPORT • FREE OF CHARGE SERVICES SUCH AS LEGAL AID • FRIENDLY OVERSEEING PRACTICES

VALUE PLACEMENT	• AGGREGATED AND RELIABLE SOURCES OF INFORMATION • TRANSPARENT RULES AND PROCESSES • FOLLOW UP PROJECTS/LEGACY

PERSONA 3

INFORMAL GROUP, JETA[5]

The Informal group JETA is comprised of highly energetic and creative youngsters. They are very enthusiastic, at times idealistic, nonetheless very focused within a specific community problem area. There is a flat hierarchy within the group and leadership is rotational and fully consensual amongst members. 3 to 4 more prominent members have emerged nevertheless, who lead activities and activists. These are the initiators of the idea. Only 1 or 2 of the group leaders engage with the informal group activities full time. The rest of the members have other professional engagements but are very active in their commitment and voluntarism.

JETA are highly opinionated and take a clear stance in community issues. They are very vocal and persistent in improving the life style and life quality of themselves, their families and friends in the area where they live. There are many formal and informal discussions and engagements within the group. JETA take pride in having deep roots in the local area and insist in pronouncing themselves as an apolitical organization. They strongly feel unrepresented or misrepresented in government decision making (both local and central government) and party politics.

JETA as a group seek to find creative ways of engaging, youth in particular, and they see society's lethargic reaction as a systemic and cultural problem whose root cause is embedded in a general sense of hopelessness and a poor educational system that does not promote either critical thinking or activism as a right. Nevertheless, JETA is an optimistic group of youngsters either still attending university or at early stages of their professional life. They are non-conformists by nature and persistent in their efforts to change things around them.

JETA feel vulnerable as they consider the environment as generally not hospitable towards civic actors in many dimensions, be these social, political or financial. Because they feel representative of a financially and socially vulnerable community near Tirana, they seek to survive by the legitimacy of their action and not just rely on the availability of instruments available to them by CSOs and the donor community.

[5] The Personas narrative refer to real grantees however, the names have been changed for confidentiality purposes.

JETA are organized but recognize the need for more practical skills in project management, writing and financial management of their activities when they participate in initiatives such as the one with LA. They also point out their strong need for community credibility. With the latter, they hold as essential the collaboration with CSOs, but are very cautious to point out that they appreciate a more participatory approach rather than an overseer role by the latter.

PERSONA PROFILE: INFORMAL GROUP

The informal group is comprised of young and very energetic people who show a close tie to the community of group of interest. They are very active and show clear emotional attachment to the group. They may evolve their causes and may undertake several initiatives at the same time. Gaining consensus amongst group members exposes the Informal Group in small scale to the challenges of gaining a broader community/locale consent and thus they are very careful in expressing their apolitical nature (referring to party politics). They tend to be more creative than the other two Personas as a way to express the collective vulnerability of the members and the eagerness to survive. The Informal Group take great pride in being community tied and show special interest to any initiative that may improve the life quality and life style of their area.

JETA's representative is very outspoken and very creative in her suggestions for LA and other CSOs. She suggests that the Donor community and CSOs focus on worst practices and failures as a means of improving, rather than on best practices, as the former may provide greater contributions and more valuable insights to what is in reality an impediment for results and impact. The general profile of Informal groups is summarized in Table 3 below.

Vested with more confidence, skills and a wide range of backgrounds and expertise supplied by the members, the Informal Group expresses a very explicit need for affirmation and recognition. They want to be seen as partners to civic action rather than grantees. As such they highly appreciate community action initiatives as a means to further get credibility as a civic actor within their community but also with the government authorities at local or central level. Their efforts continue most often beyond the scope and lifetime of their project implementation with LA and that is why they especially value networking and any support in creating synergies with other CSOs. They place emphasis on the need to up-scale action on impediments and potentially roll over on a national scale by partnering up with other local players. They do not wish however to become a 'national' player. They are very aware and proud of their small community belonging and persist to play a role as more mature partners of the Civil Society within their locale.

TABELA 3. GRUPI INFORMAL

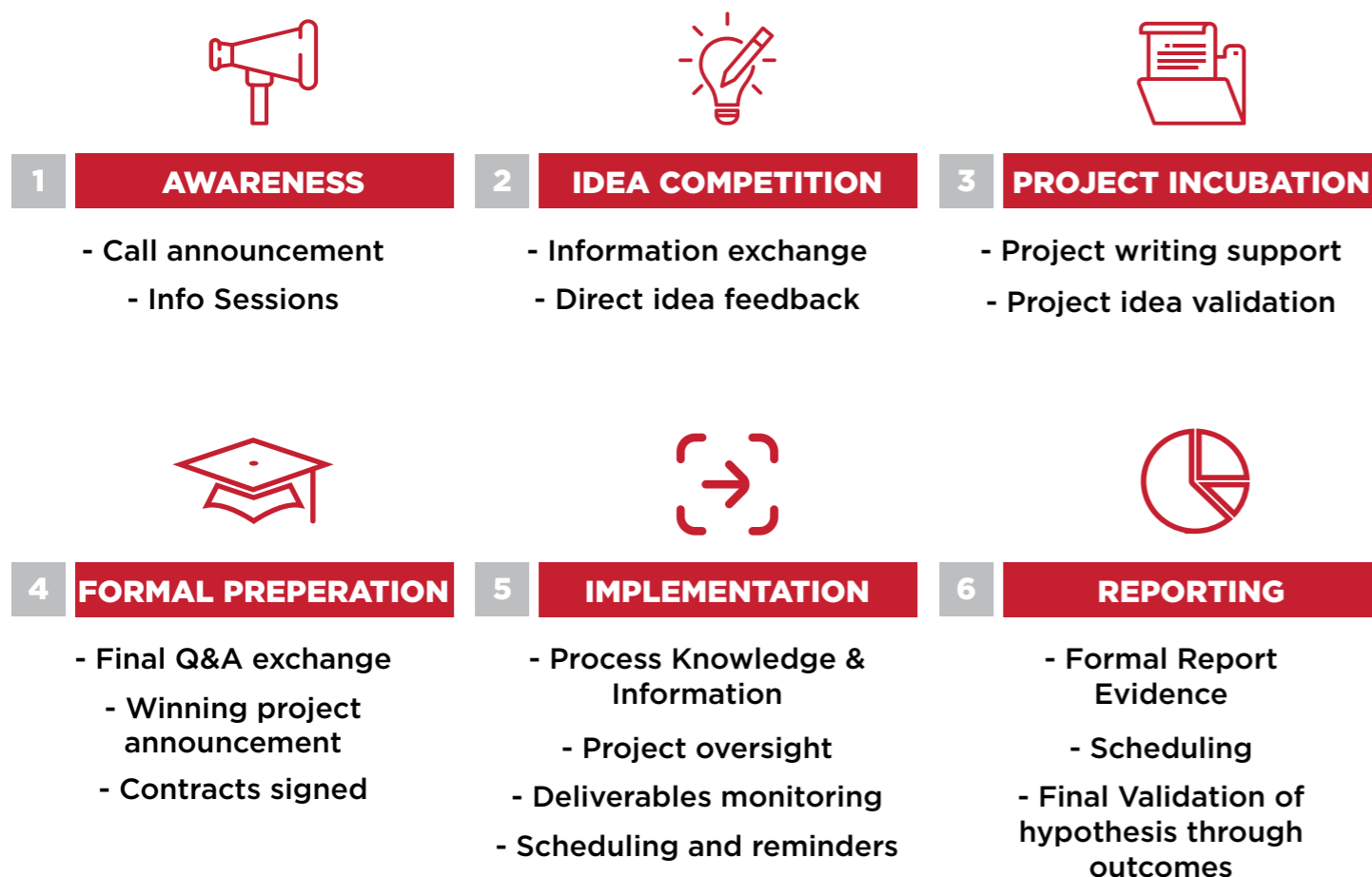| PERSONA	INFORMAL GROUP
CHARACTERISTICS	• YOUNG AND HIGHLY ENERGETIC • VERY ACTIVE • PROBLEM AREA FOCUSED • PERSONAL AND EMOTIONAL ATTACHMENT TO THE GROUP AND CAUSE • FLAT HIERARCHY • VULNERABLE FORM OF ORGANIZATION • QUICKLY ADAPTABLE • VERY CREATIVE
NEEDS	• PRONOUNCED SUPPORT • CREDIBILITY • SENSE OF PRIDE AND SELF RELIANCE • GROUP AFFIRMATION • LIFE STYLE QUALITY • COMMUNITY RECOGNITION • COLLABORATORS RATHER THAN OVERSEERS
VALUE PLACEMENT	• COMMUNITY ACTION ORIENTED THEMES • NETWORKING • MEDIATIZATION • DIGITAL AGGREGATES OF INFORMATION • INNOVATIVE AND CREATIVE APPROACHES TO ACTIVISM • ITERATIVE PRACTICES TO UNSOLVED OR PARTIALLY SOLVED PROBLEMS • CONTINUED (SUSTAINABLE) FINANCIAL SUPPORT • UPSCALING PROJECT IDEAS • COORDINATE EFFORTS OF SIMILAR FOCUS GRANTEES TO MAXIMIZE RESULTS • TRANSPARENT PROCESSES AND EVALUATIONS

VENDOSJA E VLERËS	• PARTICIPATORY APPROACH OF THE DONOR AND LA • A HIGHER NUMBER OF GRANTS TOWARDS INFORMAL GROUPS OUT OF TIRANA MORE EMPOWERMENT WORKSHOPS

PROCESS MAP AND ENABLERS

As already mentioned, LevizAlbania provides support, through grants, coaching and a number of Value-Added Services (VAS) to Individuals and Informal Groups to contribute to a higher number of active citizens. Elaborate processes are set in place as standard practices and procedures that aim to make the end-to-end flow transparent and generally enabling towards the overall goal.

Figure II below captures key interactions between LA and the grantees. Key interactions are those events or activities without which the Project (of the individual or informal group) cannot move forward. These are heavily documented and saved as evidence by LA and the grantee.

1	AWARENESS	2	IDEA COMPETITION	3	PROJECT INCUBATION
	- Call announcement - Info Sessions		- Information exchange - Direct idea feedback		- Project writing support - Project idea validation

4	FORMAL PREPERATION	5	IMPLEMENTATION	6	REPORTING
	- Final Q&A exchange - Winning project announcement - Contracts signed		- Process Knowledge & Information - Project oversight - Deliverables monitoring - Scheduling and reminders		- Formal Report Evidence - Scheduling - Final Validation of hypothesis through outcomes

Through each step described above LA intends to create and nurture a supporting environment for the civic actor. Interviews with the grant managers have helped to create the following list of enablers that includes instruments, direct and indirect support action and principled activities presented collectively in Table 4 below.

TABLE 4. LA ENABLERS

KEY INTERACTION STEP	ENABLER
AWARENESS	• TRANSPARENT PUBLIC CALL ANNOUNCEMENT • CLEAR CALL THEMES • UNAMBIGUOUS ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA FOR APPLICATIONS • COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVE THEMES
COMPETITION OF IDEAS	• OPEN AND TRANSPARENT COMPETITION THEME • CLEAR AND SIMPLE COMPETITION FORMAT • SMALL-EFFORT GRANT MECHANISM
PROJECT INCUBATION	• PROJECT IDEA ELABORATION SUPPORT • PROJECT WRITING SUPPORT • ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT • GENERAL PROJECT MANAGEMENT COACHING
FORMAL PREPARATION	• Q&A SESSION TO SUPPORT WITH PROJECT FINETUNING • TRANSPARENT ANNOUNCEMENT FOR WINNERS • TRANSPARENT FEEDBACK FOR NON-WINNING PROJECT IDEAS • ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT FOR CONTRACTUAL AGREEMENTS

| IMPLEMENTATION	• PROCESS AND KNOWLEDGE SUPPORT
	• SPECIFIC NEED COACHING
	• NETWORKING
	• AGGREGATE DIGITAL SOURCES OF INFORMATION
	• FREE LEGAL AID
	• ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT
	• PROJECT DELIVERABLES OVERSIGHT
	• EXPERT SUBJECT MATTER NETWORKING AND SUPPORT
	• FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT SUPPORT
REPORTING AND PROJECT CLOSURE	• SIMPLE FORMAT TEMPLATE
	• ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT
	• FINAL VALIDATION OF HYPOTHESIS THROUGH DELIVERABLES AND OUTCOMES

CONTRIBUTION TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY

In this section, each Interaction step has been assessed as a means to contribute towards Sustainability of Active Citizenship as measured by the dimensions described above. More specifically:

Awareness: Transparent public call announcements and simple eligibility criteria combined with specific target groups (individuals and informal groups) provide opportunities for newly emerging actors.

The call announcements do not place criteria for individuals or informal groups applicants' backgrounds, but rather focus on themes and community action, laying therefore a greenfield for non-traditional civic actors. What's more, the community relevant themes help the grantees gain credibility and legitimacy within their immediate locale, a fact that is uniformly acknowledged by all interviewees and further supported by the results of the online survey shown here as Figure III.

Although the above table of enablers is comprehensive, it fails to capture some elements that directly contribute to sustaining Civic Action and Actors. They will be included in the Observations Section of this document. On the other hand, the table provides evidence to an informed assessment of how enablers in each step are serving sustainability goals. For the purposes of this analysis sustainability refers to LA's ability to increase the activism level by creating a higher number of active citizens.

Other dimensions of sustainability have been provided earlier in this document and include: the ability of the individual(s) to group, scale and network within a larger group/community with a common cause or shared interest; the ability of an individual or group of individuals to sustain their efforts and activities in time in pursuit of a common social interest; and the ability of an individual or group to create a body of knowledge and experience that can serve as social capital, which be replicated an improved in pursuit of a common social interest. Other aspects of sustainability such as the credibility, accountability and legitimacy of the actor and initiative will be looked at in the Observations Section.

FIGURE III

DO YOU BELIEVE THAT YOUR COMMUNITY TRUSTS YOU TO REPRESENT THEM FOR AND ISSUE OF CONCERN?

3.7%
22.2%
74.1%

● *YES* ● *SOMEWHAT* ● *JO*
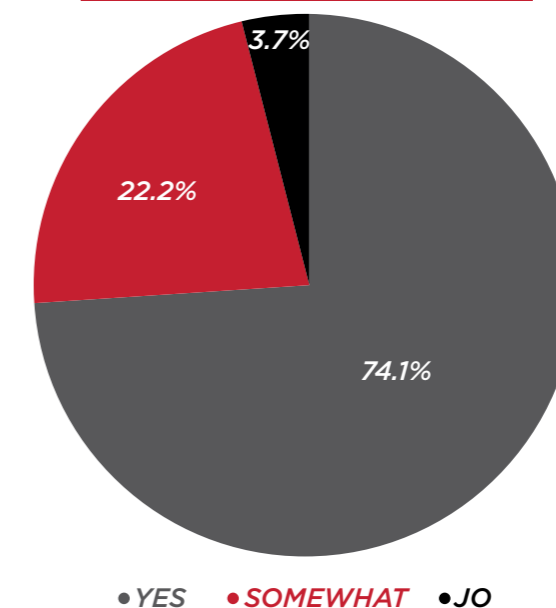
SOURCE: ONLINE SURVEY, P 45

COMPETITION OF IDEAS:

The competition as an open event itself helps the grantees not only to get immediate feedback from the selection panel but also serves as an adhoc check for the resonance of their initiative and its attainability. In addition, when the grantees were asked if there was any particular part of their experience with LA that they enjoyed, without fail, the Competition of Ideas is their top-of-mind answer.

It is sound to argue hence, that this interaction between LA and the grantees is a strong motivator and as such, plays an important role to recurring applications. The latter works well to measure sustainability of actors and is further supported by the online survey, see Figure IV below, whereby more than half of grantees have applied already more than once in Calls issued throughout the years from LA.

FIGURE IV

HOW MANY TIMES HAVE YOU APPLIED FOR A GRANT IN THE CALLS PUBLISHED BY LA?

- *ONLY ONE TIME*   - *2 to 3 HERË*   - *4 to 5 HERË*   - *IN EVERY CALL*
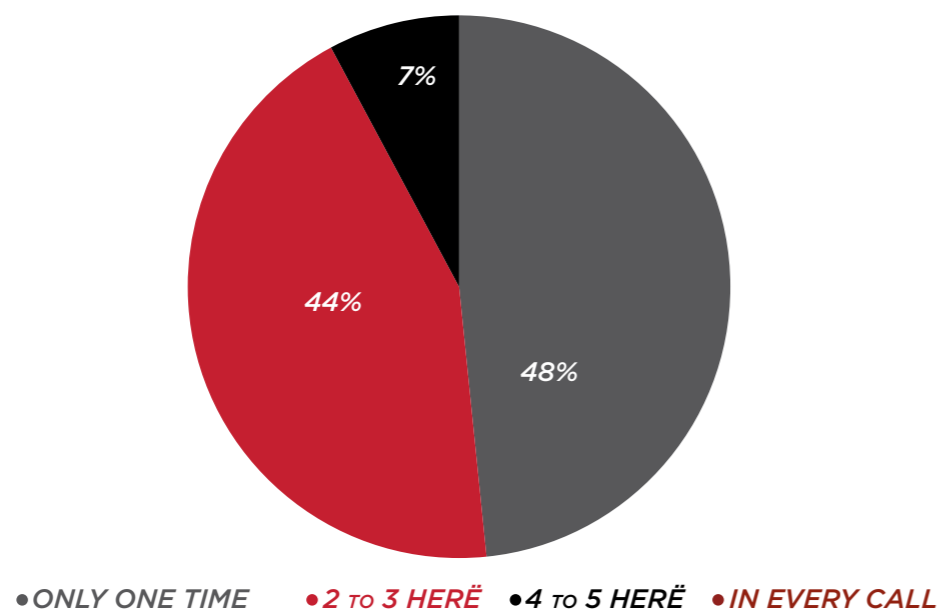
SOURCE: ONLINE SURVEY, P 5

PROJECT INCUBATION, FORMAL PREPARATION, REPORTING AND PROJECT CLOSURE:

Coaching, guidance and support of LA grant managers, during these three stages, is oriented towards hard skills development such as writing and financial planning and management; as well as soft skills such as organization, collaboration and leadership. These are all the more important when creating a body of learning that is applicable and replicable in other initiatives that the civic actors may engage with and thus, are an important part of the social capital that is created.

Both in-depth interviews and the online survey (Figure V below) confirm that the grantees have learned and acquired new skills although the nature and degree of learning vary and will be further subject of analysis in the Observations section.

FIGURE V

DID YOU EXPERIENCE AS A GRANTEE SERVE YOU TO LEARN SOMETHING NEW AND VALUABLE?

- *YES*   - *SOMEWHAT*   - *JO*
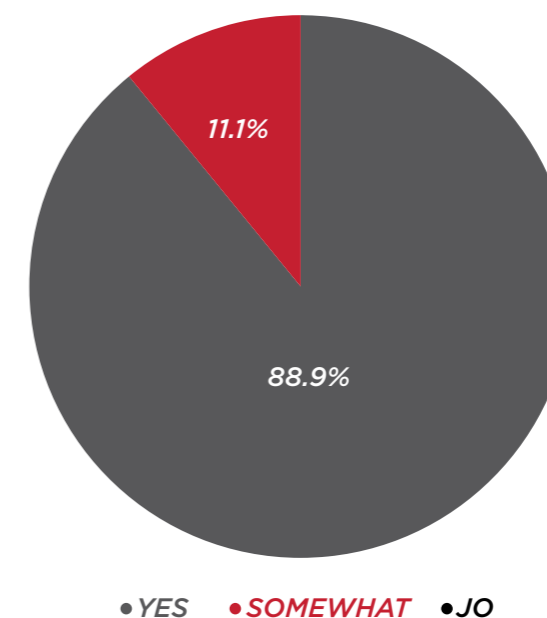
SOURCE: ONLINE SURVEY, P 33

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

This is arguably the most important step where interactions between LA and the grantees may enhance or weaken all the dimensions of sustainability mentioned earl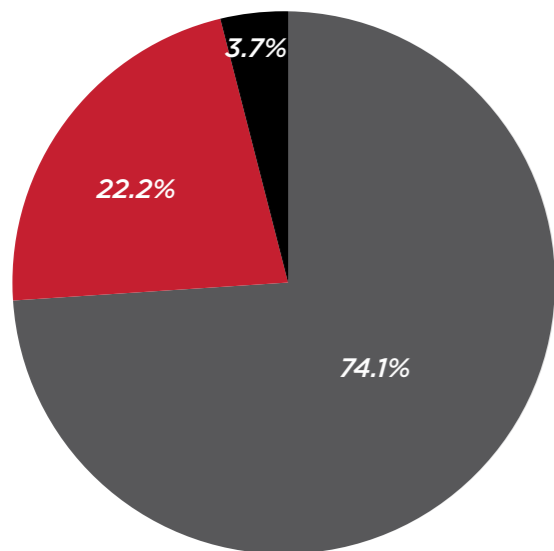ier. Hence, the grant manager as the interface of support and a platform of network and subject matter expertise, gains a crucial role. It must be mentioned in this context, that the interviews point towards a deeper and a more meaningful relationship between the grantee and the grant manager in Calls 6&7 compared to Calls 1-5.

All Grantees from the later Calls (6&7) refer to the grant manager by name and clearly articulate how and where her coaching and guidance has exactly helped to deliver tangible project results, feel a more powerful change agent and upscale efforts as part a larger network. These are direct contributions to all sustainability dimensions that are commendable and may be further iterated. Figures VI, VII and VIII from the online survey supply evidence and support to the assessment.

FIGURE VIII

HOW MANY TIMES DID YOU MEET WITH LA STUFF DURING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF YOUR PROJECT?

- *AT LEAST ONCE A WEEK* — 11%
- *AT LEAST ONCE A MONTH* — 52 %
- *SOMETIMES* — 37%
- *PRACTICALLY NEVER*

SOURCE: ONLINE SURVEY, P 35

Furthermore, the in-depth interviews and the online survey results attest that the Value-Added Services (VAS) offered by LA are appreciated by the grantees, with the most noticeable being the Law Clinics. A variety of other VAS are currently in place, whose relevance and use with the grantees varies greatly.

Portavendore.al appears to be the most popular and reasonable choice given that the nature of information it provides is directly linked to local government action sought after in LA's Calls.

FIGURE VI

DID LA GRANT SCHEME HELP YOU TO ACHIEVE RESULTS FOR YOUR PROJECT?
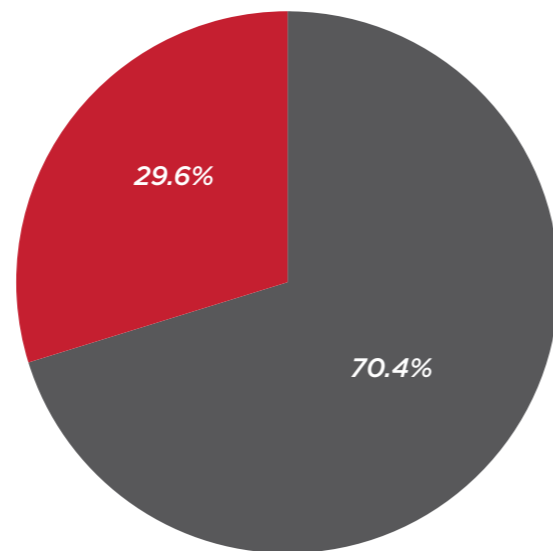

- 3.7%
- 22.2%
- 74.1%

- •YES •SOMEWHAT •JO

SOURCE: ONLINE SURVEY, P 25

FIGURE VII

HOW DID YOU CONSIDER THE SUPPORT AND COACHING AVAILABLE FROM LA TO ACHIEVE THE OBJECTIVES AND GOAL OF YOUR PROJECT?
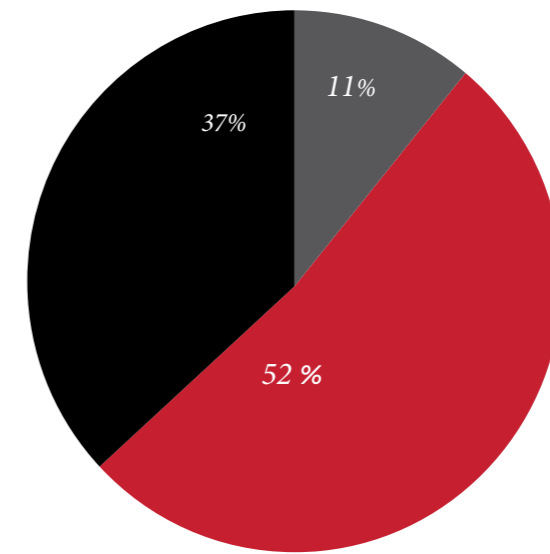

- 29.6%
- 70.4%

- *VERY IMPORTANT* • *SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT* • *NOT VERY IMPORTANT*

SOURCE: ONLINE SURVEY, P 31

LEARNINGS AND OBSERVATIONS

This section of the assessment will present how the coaching, support and VAS that LA provides, meet or disconnect with value placement of the Personas defined earlier in the document. This is a key step to the assessment of experience as it aims to explicitly point out the specific relevance of LA's coaching, support and VAS to each Persona within their (Personas) context. Those areas where Personas see value (here called Value Placement) that are met by LA function as motivators for the civic actors and therefore contribute to sustaining activism and as such need to prevail and be further capitalized.

Those areas where LA is not providing support or is partially addressing on the other hand, need to be held as potential areas of improvement for the following cycle of calls and respective practices.
The tables 5, 6 & 7 below provide the relevance of LA's Coaching, Support and VAS to each of the Personas defined as fed by the in-depth interviews with the grantees.

TABLE 6. NEW INDIVIDUAL

NEW INDIVIDUAL VALUE PLACEMENT	LA'S PRACTICE	CROSS HECK
ACTION DRIVEN THEMES	COMMUNITY ACTION THEMES	✓
AGGREGATION AND ORGANIZATION OF INFORMATION	VAS (PORTALS)	✓
NETWORKING	NETWORKING AND VAS	✓
PROJECT MANAGEMENT SUPPORT	PROJECT MANAGEMENT COACHING	✓
FINANCIAL SUPPORT	GRANT SCHEME	✓
ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT	ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT	✓
REPORTING SKILLS SUPPORT	COACHING	✓
RELIABLE SOURCES OF INFORMATION AND GUIDANCE	VASS AND COACHING	✓
FREE LEGAL AID	VASS (LAW CLINICS)	✓
LEARNING NEW DIGITAL TOOLS AND DIGITAL SKILLS	N/A	✗

NEW INDIVIDUAL VALUE PLACEMENT	LA'S PRACTICE	CROSS HECK
SIMPLE CALL FORMAT	SIMPLE CALL FORMAT	✓
SIMPLE ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA	OPEN CALLS	✓
SIMPLE AND FRIENDLY COMMUNICATIONS STYLE	GRANT MANAGER SUPPORT	✓
PARTICIPATORY APPROACH OF THE DONOR	PROJECT OVERSIGHT	✗
OPPORTUNITIES FOR FOLLOW UP	SOME PROJECTS ARE SELECTED TO UP-SCALE	PARTIAL

As the results in the table suggest, LA's practice satisfies most of areas where the New Individual Persona sees and seeks value. Key values mentioned in the interviews include simplicity of Calls and non-restrictive eligibility criteria, extensive support and hand-holding for administrative and project management during project implementation, financial support and an empathetic relation with the grant manager. In addition, two important areas where there seems to be some disconnect between what the New Individual sees value and LA's practice needs improvement include a more participatory approach of the donor and opportunities for follow up. To be more specific, the New Individual sees more value in a partnership-based relationship with LA, where the latter is less involved in the strict role of overseeing and measuring performance as a way to validate or invalidate the civic actor.

By contrast, the New Individual feels that LA as the enabler, they should focus on learning the nature of impediments and ensuring that results are achieved even after project closure. Long bureaucratic procedures of LGUs, very often push the project implementation beyond the project deadlines, with consequences on partial achievements of tangible results or with formal positive answers from the LGUs but no concrete action. As the New Individual is very keen to gain credibility within their community, it is key for them to bring back tangible products and outcomes. This would play a major role to their sustainability as a reliable 'social hero'.

TABLE 7. SUSTAINED INDIVIDUAL

SUSTAINED INDIVIDUAL VALUE PLACEMENT	LA'S PRACTICE	CROSS CHECK
ACTION DRIVEN HEMES	COMMUNITY ACTION THEMES	✓
AGGREGATION AND ORGANIZATION OF INFORMATION	VASS (PORTALS)	✓
NETWORKING	NETWORKING AND VASS	✓
FINANCIAL SUPPORT	GRANT SCHEME	✓
ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT	ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT	✓
THEMATIC SUPPORT	UNIVERSAL SUPPORT	✗
FIELD WORK SUPPORT	NETWORKING AND VASS	✓
MEDIA SUPPORT	NETWORKING AND VASS	✓
SIMPLE CALL FORMAT	SIMPLE CALL FORMAT	✓
FREE LEGAL AID	VAS (LAW CLINICS)	✓
FRIENDLY OVERSEEING PRACTICES	PROJECT OVERSIGHT	PARTIAL
FOLLOW UP CALLS/LEGACY	SOME PROJECTS ARE SELECTED TO UP-SCALE	✗

TABLE 8. INFORMAL GROUP

INFORMAL GROUP VALUE PLACEMENT	LA'S PRACTICE	CROSS CHECK
COMMUNITY ACTION ORIENTED THEMES	COMMUNITY ACTION THEMES	✓
DIGITAL AGGREGATES OF INFORMATION	VASS (PORTALS)	✓
NETWORKING	NETWORKING AND VASS	✓
CONTINUED FINANCIAL SUPPORT	GRANT SCHEME	✓
ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT	ADMINISTRATIVE UPPORT	✓
INNOVATIVE AND CREATIVE APPROACHES	LA'S APPROACH IS INNOVATIVE	PARTIAL
ITERATIVE PRACTICES TO UNSOLVED PROBLEMS	SOME PROJECTS ARE SELECTED TO UPSCALE	✗
MEDIATIZATION	NETWORKING AND VASS	✓
UPSCALING PROJECT IDEAS	SOME PROJECTS ARE SELECTED TO UPSCALE	✓
FREE LEGAL AID	VASS (LAW CLINICS)	✓
PARTICIPATORY DONOR AND LA APPROACH	PROJECT OVERSIGHT	PARTIAL
TRANSPARENT PROCESSES AND EVALUATIONS	TRANSPARENT PROCESSES	✓
COORDINATE EFFORTS OF SIMILAR FOCUS GRANTEES TO MAX RESULTS	NETWORKING	PARTIAL
A HIGHER NUMBER OF GRANTS OUT OF TIRANA	GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION OF GRANTS IS CASE BY CASE	PARTIAL

The Sustained Individual, unlike the New Individual sees less value in heavy hand-holding for project management as they are equipped with such skills. For them, it is more important to get support for specific themes where the subject matter expertise is lacking and, in those areas, where they wish to further their knowledge base. Often these themes include fresh policy areas and approaches, specific reforms, youth and/or marginalized community relevant practices. The info sessions appeal less to the Sustained Individual as they seem to add no particular value. Two key areas that the Sustained Individual Persona point out in the interviews include Networking and some kind of Legacy for their Action/Initiative.

While LA provides ample opportunities for networking, its practices to up-scale prominent projects or lenient eligibility criteria that allow previous grantees to participate in consecutive Calls do not necessarily meet the Sustained Individual's value placement for follow up. They express that it is important to show some persistence of the initiative, and this is at times more important that the endurance of the Civic Actor himself/herself.

The Informal Group is very different to the other two personas in terms of value placement. Their quasi-formal organization structure leads to a much higher appreciation for areas of support that enable the organization to grow and sophisticate.

That is why they rank highly the support given for Networking, community initiative calls, reliable platforms of information, mediatization of issues and innovative/creative approaches to civic engagement.

The shortfalls between the LA's practices and the value placement by the Informal Group persona are reasonable because LA's practices do not differentiate between these Personas and are universal for all target groups. The informal group is the most insistent Persona for the participatory practice of the donor and less oversight from LA. The prevailing argument is that there is a danger of over-formalizing the role of the civil society actors which leads to less weight given to the quality of action and tangible results and more weight to supplying evidence of activities. The Informal Group also underline missed opportunities to upscale civic action within the lifetime of the project implementation because the networking practices do not fit their exact definition of value placement.

They believe that higher impact is possible where grantees with similar focus areas work together (regardless of territory) and possibly complement one another rather than work as single agents of change. Last but not least, the Informal Group call attention to increasing presence and action of Civic actors and civic action outside Tirana city. The argument presented is that the asymmetries that are already present economically, politically and socially between Tirana and the rest of the country are also present in the number and role of the civic society actors. Therefore it would be sensible to counterplay the existing asymmetries rather than reinforce them.

The asymmetries that exist between Tirana and the rest of the country are accentuated during the conversations with the grantees. They stress the importance of creating and sustaining civic actors and initiatives in areas where local authorities are non or less responsive towards communal needs and where other cultural inhibitions limit the scope, power and sustainability of civic engagement and action. Indeed, increasing the number of individual and informal group grants, especially outside Tirana is the most frequent suggestion also from the online survey respondents.

The grantees, especially from the later calls, often express a sense of gratitude towards the grant manager, which speaks to a supportive relationship built between LA and the civic actor. These are more frequent with individuals than informal groups as the former are also more vulnerable and limited in their capabilities and capacities to take a multitude of roles during the implementation phase of their project ideas.

On the field coaching, is additionally pointed out, as more valuable compared to standard workshops; and a learn by doing approach is seen as a more appropriate fit. This will be explored further in the Findings and Recommendations section.

The grantees are all well aware of the boundaries and restraints that come with being a single 'social hero' or an informal group. They are quite vocal about the value they see in networking and collaborating with other interest groups, CSOs as well as other grantees. This directly allows them to improve their message outreach as well as gain further credibility both with the communities they represent and the LGUs. In almost all conversations, Law Clinics prevail as a major contributor while other collaborators from the media, Civil Society and subject matter experts are also held in high regard. Collectively they add, to the end result of a project, a sense of achievement and affirmation, which in turn affect sustainability of the initiative, the actor and latter's potential to multiply.

CATEGORIES OF PRACTICE

Interviews with grantees have supplied abundant information and insights. Whilst having an overall positive regard of their experience with LA, the grantees express mixed opinions when discussing about sustainability and its dimensions. These have been separated into two main categories of Desirable and Non-Desirable/Limiting practices which directly or indirectly affect sustainability in one or more ways.

DESIRABLE PRACTICES

The grantees highly esteem LA's innovative approach to include individuals and informal groups as eligible applicants in their published Calls. Especially with the scepticism of the community towards CSOs, they feel that such takes bring Civil Society to a fresh start, closer to citizen's needs and helps newly emerging civic actors gain credibility and legitimacy. The grantees also fully appreciate the transparent processes and procedures. A key highlight, unanimously mentioned, is the Competition of Ideas which they particularly enjoy, a fact that brings about the latent need for creativity in civic engagement.

LIMITING PRACTICES

With all the above mentioned, the grantees point out several areas for improvement. As stated earlier, despite the appreciation of LA's fresh take towards individuals and informal groups, the interviewees stress the necessity for increasing the number of grants towards these two groups. A one-off support vehicle is not enough to sustain individual action in particular.

One of the most prevalent factors, which directly affect negatively the sustainability of both the civic actor and the initiative, is the lack of a follow up mechanism. The consequences are more substantial when, at project closure, there are still unresolved/pending results. New Individual and the Sustained Individual Personas almost never pursue further their efforts beyond the lifetime of project implementation, for they lack the financial and non-financial support and resources to do so.

Therefore, their credibility, community accountability and legitimacy as an emerging 'social hero', become questionable for future endeavours in the civil society space. Informal Groups on the other hand, tend to continue their efforts beyond the grant's life either as a merit of their members' voluntarism or because they are able to find additional support from other sources.

The so-called "Community Action Initiatives" (Direction 3 in Calls 6 and 7) are well esteemed; however, grantees point out that the amount of time and energy spent on the bureaucracies of their projects is overwhelming and often overtakes what is required to produce tangible results for the community. A specific example was observed at the project closure event of a New Individual Persona. The grantee, before the opening speech had to: make sure that a full presence list was circulated and signed, ask for help to broadcast on Facebook the event, take pictures, lead and simultaneously keep notes of the discussions between LGU, the subject matter experts and the community members present, recap and formalize the results achieved and pending items, ensure informal and written consensus on next steps, serve and organize refreshments for those present, organize invoicing for the venue, and finally noting down a few reflections that were needed for the report.

Despite the powerful discussions that emerged and the personal engagement of all present, single-handedly managing everything was distracting for everyone and overwhelming for the grantee. Producing evidence took over the commitment towards the end result.

What's more, even the most rigorous of plans is frequently challenged by local or national dynamics which leads the grantees towards ad hoc solutions for the sake of compliance. Grantees further suggest that as they focus on producing ample evidence to the deliverables of the project, they meet with cynicism or at times fear of those who participate in activities, and do not particularly wish to document their presence. Collectively these experiences may often overpower Individuals (especially the New Individual Persona) and as a result the first project initiative is also often their last. The results of the Online Survey, presented as Figure X below, confirm such cases and call for some reflection.

Another aspect that needs attention is the financial support budget that is available for these two groups. Although the projects are small scale, a single individual is unable to do everything singlehandedly. That implies outsourcing a number of activities with a budgetary restraint in hinder sight. Two implications are observed here. First, the New Individual Persona often underestimates the budget, lacking the experience and miscalculating hence efforts required to implement the project. Second, the significant differences between formal and informal prices leave the new individual persona to source considerably more expensive services, producing thus adequate paperwork at the expense of budgetary inefficiencies which are important for small scale financial support schemes.

A final item relates to the grantees' shared expression of interest for a more empathic approach from LA rather than a procedural project oversight role. They mention also that they would have wanted SDC to participate in their activities as a way to showcase some challenges that are not captured through evidence and reports. As indicated earlier in the document, Individuals and Informal groups from later calls (6&7) show a closer relation and partnership with the grant manager but they again show an inclination to see higher value from LA in the role of a partner of the Civil Society and less as an overseer of project implementation.

DO YOU THINK YOU WILL APPLY AGAIN IN CALLS LAUNCHED BY LA IN THE FUTURE?

19%

11%

70%

● *YES*   ● *NO*   ● *NOT SURE*
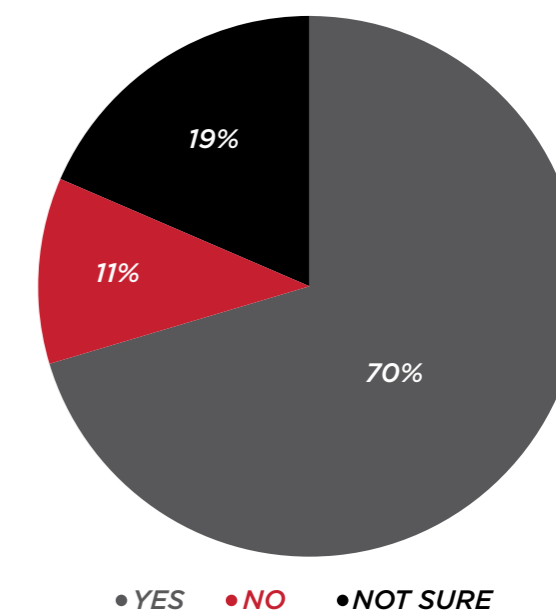
SOURCE: ONLINE SURVEY, P 39

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The interviews with all stakeholders have offered a 360 degrees sight of experiences and interactions between the Consortium Partners, LA, Individuals and Informal Groups.

A deep dive into the assessment of experience of grantees informs the following findings and recommendations as existing and potential practices/exchanges that affect the sustainability of citizen engagement through the grant mechanism in place.

CONTINUE DOING...

• Targeting Individuals and Informal groups through small grant schemes contributes to creating and sustaining civic actors who gain the trust of local communities.

• Community action driven themes directly contribute to increasing the legitimacy, accountability and credibility of Civic actors within their locale or interest group but also within the larger community of CSOs.

• The Competition of Ideas and other transparent processes and practices of LA motivate both potential and existing Civic actors to trust the CSOs and add further integrity to LA as an instrument, the Consortium of Partners and the donor.

• The geographical coverage of LA's calls addresses both, the need for community emerging voices and demands, as well as a better and more realistic representation of the wide range of requests that exist outside Tirana.

• Coaching and support through Networking and other VAS allow the Civic actors to learn, develop and multiply directly and indirectly contributing towards sustainability of actors and initiatives alike.

• Building positive relations between grant managers and grantees encourage the latter to make better use of support, coaching and VAS, therefore they shape more rounded and empowered Individuals and Informal Groups.

• VASS are a rich source of support and expertise. They are extensively used and appreciated by the grantees. VAS contribute to enabling the role of the Civic Actor and his/her initiative outreach.

REVIEW...

• A more empathetic approach towards the civic actors makes the latter feel empowered, therefore LA can explore ways of being present without accentuating their role as an overseer. A recommendation is to have two meetings with the grantees, LA; one before project implementation to create realistic expectations between all parties and foster a sense empathy and partnership. A second meeting would be highly valuable to discuss achievements and shortfalls as a reflective session between all for lessons learned. This would benefit all parties with a learning curve and possible capitalization of experience. It is key however that these meetings take the form of discussions and not that of rating projects on a scale for achievement.

• Differentiating between Personas as target groups with specific characteristics should serve to also differentiate the means to support them. Two options were discussed with LA staff. Both alternatives were received as desirable, but not fully feasible. One option would be to have more lenient rules, procedures and documentation for Individuals (New and Sustained). A result-based approach that focuses on evidence of the end outcome (LGU's action) rather than hard evidence of all activities and outputs would further promote a higher number of new civic actors and a greater number of those that remain as such beyond the lifetime of a project.

In addition, the civic actors would focus more towards tangible results rather than producing hard evidence of the project expenditures. A second option would be to have a team within LA that is specifically producing the evidence for the Individuals. They may attend the activities, take care of the invoicing, do the paperwork and take pictures and videos leaving the civic actor engage fully in their role of engaging the community and following up their demands towards the LGUs. Given the limited number of Individual Personas per call, a minimum number of 2 LA staff would be of significant value and sufficient.

• Coordination between individuals and informal groups pursuing similar or complimentary initiatives will automatically yield a multiplier effect and create positive synergies and learnings. Given that LA already organizes a number of info-sessions with the grantees, a brief section may be added where possible synergies between grantees are discussed and formalized. In addition, LA may share with the grantees other known CSOs within their area of interest who may add value.

• Workshops and information sessions ought to differentiate between recurring or more mature grantees and new ones. Whilst there is no added value for those that have been part of these activities before, there is a danger to leave the new grantees feeling uncomfortable and intimidated.

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[6] LA through grant managers and finance already have an initial orientation session with grantees (collective) to set expectations at the beginning of the projects but it is focused also in the procedural expectations and establishing ways of collaboration and "rules".

It is recommended therefore to split the workshops and info sessions between the New Individuals and the rest of the Personas and refresh the content based on the value placement suggested in the tables above.

START DOING...

• Explore developing a follow up mechanism that allows Civic Actors to further pursue with unresolved or partially resolved results. This will contribute to all dimensions of sustainability. A recommendation would be to study projects where grantees have had partial or failed to produce results and address them in a dedicated Call every two – three rounds or at the end of LA's project implementation life. Addressing specific impediments may produce the same effect (if not better) towards sustainability of initiatives. An additional recommendation is to network Individual Personas with CSOs operating in their area of interest during or at the end of their project. For example, someone pursuing community action initiatives that relate to women's safety can further pursue their cause with prominent Women Organizations in the country. Likewise, those community initiatives that relate to the environment can upscale their efforts through engagement with Environment protection Organizations ... etc.

• Innovative/creative approaches to activism are highly appreciated. Any explorations towards this area will stimulate engagement especially of youth. During the project incubation stage, best practices from other countries may be discussed and explored especially focusing on

This would make LA's work more effective and efficient towards contributing where Personas see value rather than a regular procedural flow.

digital engagement which has shown international remarkable results (such as the #Me2 movement).

• All grantees use digital sources of information, with some more than others. However, they are not all digital savvy. Any support towards such skills will in turn contribute to creating Civic Actors that understand, appeal and speak the language of the digital natives. This is particularly important when targeting youth segments for activism and citizen engagement. Differentiating content in the info sessions and workshops as suggested above, will lead to more relevant coaching and training and to an upskilled civic actor.

FINAL REMARKS

The experiences of the Civic Actors under this assessment are colourful. Some are new to activism, some others more seasoned, yet all taking small steps towards making a change for themselves and their communities or interest groups. Albania's perturbed political, economic and social context, stages serious challenges for the Civil Society in general, even more so for the more vulnerable members such as individuals and informal groups. The latter do not possess the resources and capacities that more prominent formal organizations have. As such, they are more exposed to action failure and often struggle to survive. However, individuals and organizations have something that is very valuable. Their grass rooted interests, community ties and action driven initiatives appeal to others like them who share the same concerns, worries and problems and demand small but meaningful solutions.

There is no magic formula, which ensures that a nascent 'social hero' or a promising group of activists grow support, endure results and appeal to others in continuum. However, an assessment of their experience as engaged and engaging citizens sheds light to what motivates, nurtures and dissuades their role and impact subsequently. Interviews with individuals and informal groups point towards a wide range of drivers. As a final recap, the 5 most significant, shared by the interviewed grantees as relevant to the process and value design that LA provides through grant schemes and coaching include the following:

- First, through the expansion of the current scheme in number of available grants for succeeding Calls, LA will be able to directly influence to some degree a higher number of active citizens. Pursuing target areas outside Tirana, is likely to produce longer term effects for citizen engagement on a national scale.

- Second, continued coaching and support, especially when provided on-the-field and further refined to the needs and value placement of each Persona as suggested above, develop the individual, collective competences, creativity, and is highly likely to bring a new level of efficiency to the grants, more tangible results for the community and ultimately legitimacy and credibility to the local Civic Actors.

- Third, any similar contributions to Law Clinics and Porta Vendore will further enhance the quality of the projects and the integrity of respective outcomes. A recommendation would be to set up a similar structure for the CSOs where aggregated information on initiatives, areas of policy and activity are included in one platform and provide all interested New or existing civic actors with a window of trustworthy information, networking opportunity and success stories that can be followed and replicated.

Setting and promoting examples of citizen engagement is important but not sufficient. Hence, a 4th key factor of sustainability is further nurturing an accommodating environment where the CSOs are partners to emerging and vulnerable civic actors rather than watchdogs for their activities. Recommendations to flatten the hierarchy and increase the number of exchanges between the grantees, LA and SDC, mentioned in the Findings Section, will enhance a fostering environment for new civic actors. They are already demanding change of the levels of authority expressed by the LGUs, therefore adding another layer of authority over their change agent role cannot serve as a drive towards increasing civic engagement.

- The final and perhaps the most important contribution to sustainability of individuals and informal groups is a follow up mechanism after the projects end, because it implies sustainability as a process rather than as a step and it fosters a highly relevant setting to encourage and reassure the sustainability of civic engagement. It is therefore highly recommended that a first step towards this end is taken at least once within Phase II of LevizAlbania.
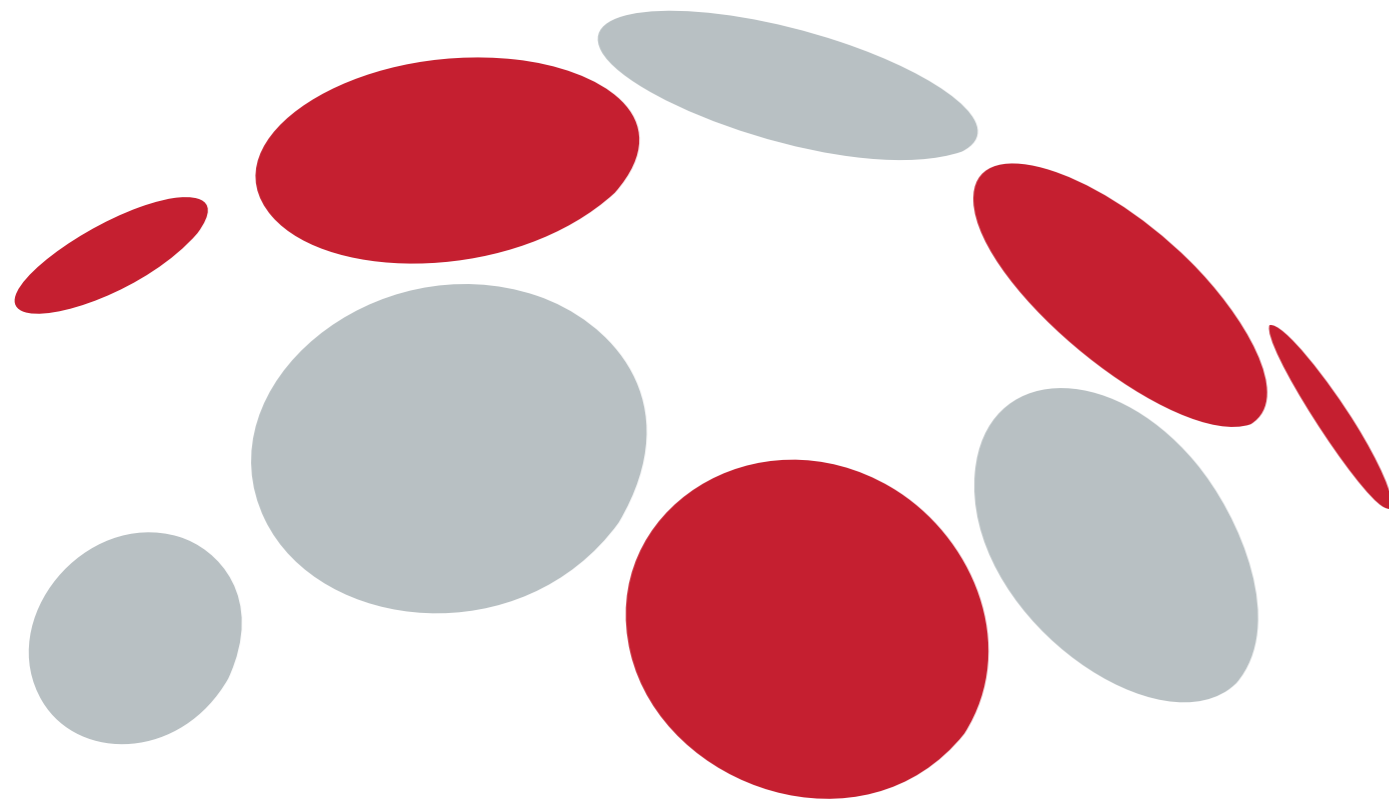
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