

Terms of Reference

for

External Mid –Term Review

of

Project: “LevizAlbania” Phase 2

in

Albania

(7F-00952.02)

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Annexes I: List of Documents

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

1. Context

1.1 Background

Democratic deficits in Albania remain high, although efforts to decentralisation and demand at local level for transparent and accountable, government to benefit all citizens is manifested. The Territorial and Administrative Reform - TAR (2015), created a new and favourable framework for strengthening municipalities and service delivery, but also re-dimensioned the challenges of advancing local democracy and citizen engagement in public affairs. Key laws at local government have followed suit in the last years (Organic Law 139/2015 on Local Governance, Law 68/2017 on Local Finances etc.), however implementation is still unsatisfactory. Donors/actors are supporting Municipalities to reach organizational and performance standards.

Albania is undergoing a fundamental Justice Reform, however, due to the long process, the justice system remains semi-functional, leading to a delayed justice for citizens. On fundamental rights, Albania complies with international human rights instruments and has developed its legal framework in line with European standards.

During the past year the European Union (EU) has determined that Albania has made great strides in its reforms and by October, 2020 was expecting negotiations to begin for the country's ascension to the EU. In particular, the European Council noted the progress made in fighting corruption, judicial reforms, freedom of expression and electoral reform.¹ However, the EU member states have postponed the start of accession negotiations into 2021.

The civil society sector (CS) has developed substantially since the 1990s, but it continues to be fragile in capacity and fragmented in cooperation. The national registry counts several thousand CSOs, nonetheless a very few based in Tirana are able to engage with the public institutions. Overall trust between citizens and government is low with only 39%² of citizens trusting the government. Democratic understanding is at an early stage and citizens' apathy widespread. Citizen's activism and participation is developing slowly but is still insufficient to guarantee the required checks and balances. Media and especially the social media have emerged as a powerful tool in demanding more accountability and responsiveness at all levels of governance, at the same time Albania made some steps back in terms of media freedom. The heavy political polarization of the country has negatively influenced the role and function of civil society in Albania.

Many of the government consultative processes are considered limited by CSOs and there is a persistent lack of meaningful consultation and substantive input into the legislative process for civil society representatives. This is particularly the case with a weak consultative process on draft laws and government policy implementation. The fiscal treatment of the sector (including VAT refunds for grants) still constitutes a concern and has a negative impact on CSO operational capacity, independence and sustainability. Drafting of laws with a direct impact on the activity of CSOs (i.e., For the registration of NPOs, for the national register of bank accounts etc.) as well as the prolonged legislative process for numerous laws impacting CSOs (i.e., Law on Voluntarism, Youth, Social Enterprises) have combined had a negative impact on CSOs as well. In addition, the limited capacity and ability for local and grassroots CSOs to access and manage operational funds is a persistent issue.³

Albania has dealt with two major crises during the period between 2019 and 2020. The devastating earthquake of November 26th, 2019 caused 51 casualties and thousands of people lost their shelter. While the COVID-19 pandemic that hit the country in March 2020 has caused over 1,700 casualties by February 2021.

Civil society and media in the country have played an important role in the management of both crises. Meanwhile, very real challenges to a sustainable and operationally independent civil society sphere

¹ <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/10/06/albania-north-macedonia-should-start-eu-accession-talks-this-year/>

² Trust in Governance Opinion Poll, 2019

³ Albanian National Conference on Civil Society (December 2020) presentation of findings (excerpt): <https://resourcecentre.al/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Proceeding-2020-EN-1.pdf>

persist. At present, the operational space for CSOs in Albania and opportunities to fully and meaningfully engage in the democratic process is narrowed due in part to the COVID-19 pandemic that began in 2020.

1.2 Information on the current SDC portfolio

The Swiss Cooperation Strategy with Albania (2018-2021) is aligned with the National Strategy for Development and Integration (2015-2020) and consists of four domains: (1) Democratic Governance; (2) Economic Development, (3) Infrastructure and energy; and (4) Health. The democratic governance domain represents Switzerland's largest programme portfolio, co-financed by the SDC and SECO. The main goal of the Democratic Governance (DG) domain is as follows: People benefit from inclusive, effective and democratic institutions.

Today, Switzerland is the second largest bilateral cooperation partner in the country. The overall goal of the Swiss Cooperation Strategy 2018-2021 is to contribute to a functioning democracy, to improved public services and to support an inclusive, competitive market economy in support of Albania's European integration. The strategy focuses on four thematic domains, all of which complement each other and are mutually reinforcing. Development work in Albania focuses on four domains:

- **Democratic Governance**
- Economic Development and Employment
- Urban Infrastructure and Energy
- Health

Swiss cooperation relies on partnerships with civil society, governmental and non-governmental organisations, and bilateral and multilateral international partners. Cooperation work is result-oriented and fosters Albania's development with a long-term vision. Gender and Governance are transversal themes for all programmes and projects.

Currently, the new country programme Switzerland – Albania 2022-2025 is under preparation and support to civil society may be more important and diversified.

2 Project's objective

LevizAlbania project was set-up in July 2015 (phase 1 2015-2019) aiming to strengthen local democracy in Albania. Parallel to the introduction by Government of Albania of regulatory reforms to local level in Albania (TAR), LevizAlbania aimed to build demand for better governance through fostering civic engagement and empowering citizen groups. Primary target groups were drivers of change (NPOs, informal groups, activists, individuals and journalists) who sought to influence decision-making and improvement of public services provided to citizens at local level.

Based on a context analysis and stakeholder needs, the support for a second phase of LA was decided by SDC. The phase 2 of LevizAlbania is currently ongoing, 2019-2023 (7 mio CHF).

The **overall goal** of LevizAlbania Phase II is: *Albanian population benefits from an improved democracy at local level*. To achieve this goal, the project will deliver along two outcomes:

Outcome 1 - Civic actors influence the local priority setting, decision-making and the effectiveness of service delivery by local authorities.

Outcome 2 - Civil society actors engage in strategic/ joint actions to address structural/ systemic challenges relate to good governance and local level.

LevizAlbania works based on bottom-up approach reflected in its "Theory of Change", built upon a 5 level impact hypothesis:

- 1) By empowering local actors and improving the enabling environment,
- 2) Citizens will demand for more transparency, accountability and space to influence
- 3) Citizens take action to influence policy and decision making
- 4) Local governments respond, bringing positive change and benefits to citizens/community at large
- 5) Successful models are promoted, inspiring replication at larger scale

The project is implemented by a consortium of three organizations based in Albania, OSFA Albania (lead organization), Partners Albania and Co-PLAN Institute.

3 Objective of the Mandate

The external mid-term review is foreseen in the Credit Proposal and the Project Document. The Embassy in Tirana mandates a team of consultants to perform an External Mid-Term Review with a strong focus on the results achievement as well as risks and opportunities. The main objectives of the external evaluation are to:

- Assess the project based on the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) evaluation criteria (relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence, impact, sustainability);
- Analysis of the results achieved so far and the efficiency of the Swiss investment.

Through this mandate, the Embassy of Switzerland is looking for responses to the following guiding questions:

I. **RELEVANCE:**

Approaches and strategic orientation in the given development/transition context, perception of the implementer by relevant stakeholders.

- a. To what extent do the project's instruments, strategies and interventions respond to identified gaps and needs and the context?
- b. What have been the major challenges during the implementation of the second phase? How has the project team addressed those challenges? What are the potentials and opportunities that the project has not been able to address?
- c. Who are the main agents of change that the project is currently working with? What are their characteristics? Where do they come from, size of organizations, type of organizations etc.?
- d. To what extent have the project implementers taken into consideration the evolving transition and changing context in Albania, especially level of adaptability in view of Earthquake (2019 and COVID-19) ?
- e. To what extent has the project reached its target group, directly and indirectly?

II. **COHERENCE:**

Internal and external:

- a. To what extent the intervention is compatible with other interventions of Swiss development cooperation in Albania and thematic field?
- b. To what extent the intervention is compatible with interventions of other actors in the country and thematic field? Did the project adapt in order to coordinate, complement new projects on the same topic and modality?

III. **EFFECTIVENESS**

Implementation towards reaching the set objectives and goals

- a) To what extent has the project contributed to the likelihood of achieving goals as set in the Credit Proposal and Project Document?
- b) To what extent has the corresponding Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) system followed?
- c) How is the transversal theme of gender mainstreamed by the project team in the project intervention?
- d) How has the project set-up and its steering mechanisms contributed to achieving the objective of the project?
- e) Which of the LA instruments is the most effective one in achieving results? Which one is less effective?
- f) How has the consortium set-up contributed to achieving the objectives of the project? What has been the contribution of the consortium partners?

- g) How the Evaluation Board of grants has functioned? Is the current set-up the best one?
- h) How is the entire evaluation process perceived by the target groups and actors outside of LA?

IV. **EFFECIENCY:**

- a) Is the management model/project set-up adequate for achieving the set objectives?
- b) Have the staff changes/re-organizations helped the efficiency of the project?
- c) Have the financial and human resources been efficiently allocated?
- d) Are the project management and steering mechanisms in place and adequate for the efficient implementation of project activities?
- e) How the risk management, and conflict sensitive management has taken place?
- f) In cases when the LA grantees have failed to reach to the objective, what is the position and action of LA?
- g) What is current assessment of the cost-benefits of the intervention?

V. **SUSTAINABILITY:**

The results and benefits of the project are likely to be sustained after the completion of the project.

- a) To what extent the philosophy of LA has been understood or well-perceived by target group.
- b) How is the project ensuring its interventions are sustainable?
- c) Will the results of the implemented project components last beyond the end of funding? What are the indications for this?
- d) Which results are likely not to be sustainable? Are there options to increase the chance of sustainability within the remaining project period?

VI. **IMPACT:**

- a) What is the assessed impact of LA interventions, considering that overall, this is the 6th year of LA?

VII. What are **the key lessons learned (including challenges faced)** of the current Project phase and what are their implications for next steps?

5 Scope and Method of Work

The review team will consist of an international consultant acting as team leader and a local expert.⁴ A translator and driver could be subcontracted by the local expert.

The team will make use of information given by LevizAlbania project, Embassy of Switzerland, beneficiaries, other actors engaged in civic engagement and international organizations.

The main tasks of the assignment are as follows:

- a) Desk Research (information collection and analysis).
Relevant documentation, to be provided, are specified in the Annex I.
- b) A briefing at the Embassy of Switzerland in Tirana at the beginning of the field mission.
- c) Conducting interviews with management and all staff of LevizAlbania in charge of project implementation. Conducting meetings/interview with three heads of consortium members of LevizAlbania project. Conducting meetings/interviews with members of the Evaluation Board (previous members and current ones).

⁴ The present TOR are valid both for the International Consultant (team leader) and the Local Consultant.

d) Field trip to the sites of funded project:

Part 1) conducting individual with the key partners/beneficiaries from at least 5 regions in the country. Conducting interviews with a sample of organizations and individuals that have applied but not benefitting from LA grant fund scheme.

Part 2) conducting interviews with representatives of the partner organizations and other development projects/agencies, inclusive Swiss projects on local level

f) A debriefing at the Embassy of Switzerland in Tirana:

Part 1) Presentation of the preliminary findings and recommendations of the review team.

Part 2) Presentation of main findings and recommendations of the review team with Swiss Embassy and LA consortium

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

6 Deliverables / Reporting

The team is expected to produce the following deliverables:

- 1) Draft review report to be submitted electronically within 15 working days after the mission to the Swiss Embassy in Tirana
- 2) Final Report, revised based on comments and remarks of the Embassy of Switzerland in Albania and the implementing partner shall be submitted by **xxxx**. It shall be written in English (Arial 11).
- 3) The report shall comprise the following chapters: a) Executive summary b) Background and rationale for the assessment c) Findings (based on the ToR) and conclusions d) Main recommendations for improvement e) Annexes. Electronic copies of the final operational report must be submitted to Embassy of Switzerland in Albania.

7 Schedule

The evaluation will take place from September to October 2021. The tentative evaluation schedule is the following:

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

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

8 Duration and Implementation Arrangement

The assessment mission shall be tentatively conducted in Albania during September 2021. A more detailed mission programme shall be elaborated by the consultant in cooperation with the Embassy of Switzerland in Albania, LA Project and the consultants.

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

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

9 Evaluation Team / Qualifications

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

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

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

The following documents are requested for this offer:

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

Annex 1: List of Documents (to be provided to the selected consultants)

- Key Questions on the five dimensions of the evaluation

- Swiss Cooperation Strategy for Albania 2018 - 2022
- LA Project Document
- Credit Proposal for phase 2
- Log-frame
- Yearly Plans of Operations for 2020, 2021
- Interim and Annual Progress Reports
- Management Responses to Annual Reports
- Grant Fund Manual
- Evaluation Procedures and outcomes in last years
- Evaluation Report mandated by LA
- Publication of Results of Project
- Others....