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**POST PROJECT EVALUATIONS
FOR THE
UNITED NATIONS DEMOCRACY FUND**

EVALUATION REPORT

UDF-17-774-ALB – *Tracking Campaign Promises in Albania*

17 January 2023

Executive Summary

The project was a laudable effort to support local organizations in Albania in promoting accountability of elected officials and enhancing citizens' participation in monitoring public budgets' expenses. As such, the project's relevance was highly tangible. To a good extent, the project succeeded in putting forward innovative tools to assess the extent to which elected officials deliver on their electoral promises.

The availability of the Truth-o-Meter app and the related reports on the level of such promises kept are the most tangible added value of the project as they are intrinsically linked to the core concept of democracy-delegating power to officials so that the latter can deliver on their electoral programme. Failure to do so undermines the citizens' trust towards the electoral processes. The simplified versions of the municipal budgets were also an additional effort towards more transparency.

Nevertheless, what the project delivered were insufficient for establishing a critical mass of engaged citizens that would undertake pro-active actions to hold their elected officials accountable. There was a missed opportunity at the impact level for a full-scale uptake and utilization of the Truth-o-Meter from the citizens but also from other local and international organisations. Despite an overall efficient implementation of the activities, this aspect could and should have been considered by the grantee.

Most of the reasons for the limited impact are linked to gaps in the design as well as to external factors which the project grantee could not foresee nor control.

As for the Truth-o-Meter, the promotion of this tool was as crucial as the results of compared data stemming from it. However, the promotional/awareness activities envisaged in this case were relatively basic and did not incorporate major public events with high level media coverage where the findings would be presented.

Considering the importance of the findings and the topic under investigation (i.e. the extent to which promises have been kept), the designed activities and the related budget should have foreseen at least three public conferences and/or round tables with all concerned Member of Parliament (MPs), Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), communities, and media to discuss findings and generate public debates which would have had a substantial impact on the MPs' accountability. This major gap in the design affected in turn the effectiveness but also the sustainability of the project's Outcomes.

In terms of complementarity, the project may achieve a higher level of impact if its main output, the Truth-o-Meter, was used by other CSOs, or promoted by international organisations in Albania which have the capacities to share through country level public awareness campaigns.

As for the Citizens Budgets, the approach used (covering all 61 municipalities in the country), a less than accurate needs assessment at the local level (a good number of big/medium size municipalities already publish simplified versions of their budgets), and, as in the case of the Truth-o-Meter, limited promotional activities had a negative effect on the

achievements of the Outcomes. Reporting inaccuracies (detailing categories of participants in the activities and their total number, gender and minorities-oriented reporting, gaps in reporting the levels of achievements of some activities, and poor data recording systems) have been overlooked.

A key element to be considered for the limited impact is also the low level of willingness and commitment of citizens and the "civic apathy" to engage in such activities, which cast shadow on the extent to which the project's achievements shall be effectively used by the citizens.

In addition to the pandemic restrictions, another externality was the unusual electoral campaign in June 2019. The opposition did not take part and there was only one candidate from the majority hence there was no real electoral campaign with no concrete promises being made.

The major concerns linked to sustainability are the limited scale of public awareness and the limited willingness of the citizens, local media, and local civic groups to capitalise on the project's achievement and to exert positive pressure on public officials in order to hold them accountable. Although the project was completed five months ago, several actions can be undertaken to enhance prospects for impact and sustainability. UNDEF should consider sharing the project' achievements with a) UN organisations in Albania so that the latter could consider adapting them in their programmes, and b) with partners involved in accountability issues in other countries and promote the concept of the "Truth-o-Meter". Also, UNDEF should assess the possibility for supporting a follow up intervention aiming at promoting the Truth-o-Meter at a large scale in Albania.

What emerged as lessons learned during this evaluation is that inappropriate and generalised needs assessments that lead to a "one size fits all" approach can negatively affect the impact's likelihood. Furthermore, promoting innovative tools to a wide range of stakeholders is as important as their development, otherwise the impact of such tools remains limited and untapped.

For this reason, several considerations should be taken into account by UNDEF when supporting similar initiatives in the future: 1) Encourage potential grantees to apply the intervention logic of future projects at the local level prior to suggesting scaling them up at the national level, 2) Advise potential grantees on including a substantial promotional/public awareness activity in the design and foresee adequate budget allocations for implementing them, 3) Ensure that similar interventions are based on a thorough needs assessment and a clear understanding of target groups' absorption capacities, 4) Ensure that the progress reports provide an accurate picture of the mid-term and final values for all indicators, 5) Request from the grantees to maintain accurate attendance sheets and records for their activities in a user-friendly format such as Excel.

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I.   OVERALL ASSESSMENT

This report is the evaluation of the project "Tracking Campaign Promises in Albania". It was implemented by Regional Development Agency (RDA) Korcë as Implementing Agency and the Economic Intelligence Center (EIC, as Implementing Partner), from April 2019 to March 2021. The project benefitted from a UNDEF grant of USD 143,000 and sought to track promises made by politicians through tools used by citizens, Civil Society Organisation (CSOs), and media by developing an innovative full-scale electoral fact-checking platform and enhanced civic engagement by monitoring of local budget allocations. Increasing accountability of the public officials was an integral part of the project's approach.

The main outputs included: i) Truth-o-Meter online platform (web & app); ii) A report with 201 info graphs on promises of elected officials; iii) A second report tracking promises made by 61 elected mayors during the June 2019 local elections; iv) 61 Citizens Budgets (simplified forms of municipal budgets) on the use of taxpayers' money and effectivity of investments; v) A financial report with recommendations on municipal budget efficiency (post-election).

Direct beneficiaries were 610 youth (18-29 years old) living in urban areas (10 persons per each of the 61 municipalities); 915 Adult citizens (30-55 years old) (15 persons x 61 municipalities); 61 Mayors; 140 members of the parliament; 200 persons from Roma and Egyptian minorities. Indirect beneficiaries included the 20 correspondents covering 61 municipalities; 40 CSOs; 2000 members of the municipalities' council and the general public.

Image 1: Project activity with direct beneficiaries' involvement

What the project has achieved is putting forward an innovative way (the Truth-o-Meter app/portal) for assessing if elected officials are delivering on their campaign promises. However, there was no full-scale uptake and utilization of this tool due to a limited promotional campaign (and vague interest and enthusiasm from the citizens).

The simplified versions of the municipal budgets do contribute to increase accountability, however, the approach used (covering all municipalities), a less than accurate needs assessment at the local level (a good number of big/medium size municipalities already

publish simplified versions of their budgets), and, as in the case of the Truth-o-Meter, a vague interest from the citizens coupled with limited promotional activities had a negative effect on the achievements of the Outcomes.

Image 2: Project activity with direct beneficiaries' involvement

Recommendations:
On enhancing impact and sustainability' prospects for this project:
UNDEF is advised to 1) Share the achievements with international organisations present in Albania so that they could use them in their programmes, and with partners involved in accountability issues in other countries, and 2) Consider a follow up intervention for promoting the Truth-o-Meter at a large scale.

On strategic approaches when designing and implementing similar interventions in the future:
UNDEF is advised to 1) Encourage potential grantees to apply the intervention logic of future projects at the local level prior to suggesting scaling them up at the national level , 2) Advise potential grantees on including a substantial promotional/public awareness activity in the design and foresee adequate budget allocations for implementing them, 3) Ensure that similar interventions are based on a thorough needs assessment and a clear understanding of target groups' absorption capacities, 4) Ensure that the progress reports provide an accurate picture of the indicators 'values, 5) Request from the grantees to maintain accurate attendance sheets and records for their activities in a user-friendly format such as Excel.
The two key lessons learned are that inappropriate and generalised needs assessments that lead to a "one size fits all" approach can negatively affect the impact's likelihood, and that promoting innovative tools to a wide range of stakeholders is as important as their development, otherwise the impact of such tools remains limited and untapped.

"Finally, we have a tool in our disposal to tell our MP that they are not delivering on what they promised two years ago, and that they are lying".

Interviewed women referring to the Truth-o-Meter

II.   PROJECT CONTEXT AND STRATEGY

(i) Development context

The project "Tracking Campaign Promises in Albania" addresses the lack of effective accountability of public officials at the local and national levels over campaign promises. Officials, especially at the local level, lack the necessary transparency when it comes to the use of the municipal budget and the necessity of efficiency of investments.

International reports clearly stated the low performance of Albanian elected officials. The World Justice Project (WJP) Rule of Law Index 2017 – 2018 ranks Albania in the 68th position (out of 122 countries), with an unchanged Rule of Law Index compared to 2016 – 2017.

The "Transparency Index 2018" (Transparency International) also ranks Albania 91st out of 180 countries. This means that currently there is a systemic problem of lack of transparency, which has eventually led to corruption and lack of rule of law.

(ii) The project objective and intervention rationale

The project was funded by UNDEF and was implemented during the period 01.04.2019 – 31.03.2021. The implementing agency was the RDA Korcë, Albania, and the Economic Intelligence Centre in quality of co-implementing partner. The total budget was USD 143,000. Its Overall Objective was to support democratisation by strengthening the voice of CSOs, promote human rights, and encourage the participation of all in democratic processes.

The intervention logic centred around two main pillars: 1) Enabling citizens to be informed on the delivered electoral promises of elected officials and to hold them accountable, and 2) Increasing citizens' participation in oversighting expenses in 61 Municipalities.

The main beneficiaries were voters in all municipalities, while the target groups were elected officials/candidates for mayors and Parliament. Local journalists, online portals, and CSOs were a linking bridge between the two groups but are also part of the main beneficiaries.

The main assumptions are linked to a) commitment of the Albanian authorities to progress with democratic processes with no dramatic setback from Albania's EU accession path, b) central and local elections being held according to the international best democratic principles, and c) Municipalities' willingness to cooperate and share budget expenses' data.

(iii)   Project strategy and approach

The main strategy adopted by the project was to create a knowledge base and increase measurability, tracking and analysis of campaign promises of 201 public officials (Outcome 1) by developing a "truth-o-meter" as an innovative full-scale electoral fact-checking platform for monitoring preelection promises and their implementation in a two-year period. Also, the project's focus was on checking expenses and investments of 61 Municipalities and a financial report on municipal budget efficiency over a period of 1.5 years after the local elections.

The approach was based on capturing data and profiles of 201 public officials (61 mayors and 140 members of parliament) to support Albanian citizens to remember politician's promises and check their level of achievement. The reports were foreseen to be published

before and after the local elections of June 30, 2019. The approach foresaw increasing civic engagement in local governance by monitoring of local and national budget allocations to increase transparency, accountability and efficiency.

III. EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The evaluation methodology is based on the UNDEF Evaluation Manual (2022) and the Evaluator's Launch Note (LN). The project's documents were shared with the Evaluator in September 2022. After the desk review of documentation (Annex 2), the LN was prepared by describing the analysis methodology, and a set of Evaluation Questions (EQs) was developed by using "traffic light" grades for each of the EQs. Qualitative and quantitative tools such as Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and online survey were used for data gathering purposes.

The field mission took place during October 2022 and 22 interviews and informal discussions took place with the following stakeholders and partners:
-   Implementing agency and implementing partner,
-   Sample of representatives of municipalities, and
-   Representatives of the United Nations (UN) Resident Coordinator Office and UN Women

Most of the KIIs were conducted as planned, however the number of respondents of the online survey was low (27 compared to over 220 individuals to whom the survey was sent).

The Evaluator applied traffic light grades for each of the Evaluation Criteria assessed in Section 4 of this evaluation report:

Grading	Qualitative	Rationale
A	Very good	Highly satisfactory. Recommendations on adopting these practices in other operations.
B	Good	Overall satisfactory, but there was room for improvements, as some issues affected the project.
C	Issues	There were severe issues which negatively affected the schemes performance. Major adjustments were necessary.

IV.   EVALUATION FINDINGS

(i)   Relevance

Evaluation Question	Grading	Qualitative	Rationale
To what extent was the project suited to context and needs at the beneficiary, local, and national levels?	B	Good	Overall satisfactory, but there was room for improvements.

The project aimed at addressing the alarming distance between the constituents and the Members of Parliament (MPs), and lack of accountability from the elected local officials. According to the report of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE) on the 2019 Local Elections, there is a significant decrease in likelihood to vote since 2016, fuelled by citizens' distrust in political parties. Elections turnout has constantly remained below 50% of the registered voters, whereas the lowest voter turnout in 25 years was recorded in the 2019 local elections.

The project is well aligned with the national legislation regulating freedom of information and civic participation such as the Law "On the Right to Information" and the Law "On Notification and Public Consultation". The National Crosscutting Strategy for Decentralisation and Local Governance 2015-2020 stipulates that all decisions at the local level will involve citizens' participation. The Law "On Notification and Public Consultation" specifies that municipalities should take necessary measures to facilitate public consultation.

The project addressed the concerns raised by the European Commission (EC)'s Progress Report of 2019 which states that "enhancing accountability remains essential, and that communication channels between citizens and MPs need to be strengthened". Lastly, the project is also in line with the Implementing Partner's goal of improving local government services to the community and developing the civil society.

Gaps in identifying needs at the local level are noted. Although the relevance of tracking electoral promises is fully confirmed, the needs' analysis for a more transparent local budget was not well elaborated. There is no explanation of where one of the core outputs (the Citizens Budgets) could have been a real added value (e.g. in the big municipalities vis a vis small/medium size ones). The desk analysis and insights from the field phase reveal that smaller municipalities are lagging behind bigger municipalities on enhancing transparency and accountability.

While it is true that generally the citizens perceive municipalities to be far from transparent and accountable, there are several key municipalities that comply with transparency requirements at least as concerns making the budget available to the public (in an overall understandable format).

This is due to several reasons, mainly linked to the cooperation with several international donor-funded projects and the pressure from various groups, in addition to the legal framework which makes it obligatory for municipalities to publish their budget and to organise public hearings. The latter is also increasingly becoming a trend in the big municipalities in Albania, albeit not a fully efficient one. For example, according to reports prepared by the Albanian Centre for Public Information Issues and the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network, the municipality of Korçë stands out for its implementation of legal regulations on access to information, and it is considered the most transparent municipality followed by other big municipalities such as Shkodër, Lezhë, Durrës, Elbasan, Vlorë, and Tiranë.

Representatives of several of these key municipalities met during the evaluation's field phase confirmed the above by stating that, while in general the cooperation with civic groups is always welcomed, the publication of a simpler form of municipal budgets has already been in place and available on their relevant websites prior to the project's commencement.

Public hearings and instruments to gather citizens' views are not a novelty for the main municipalities. As confirmed during the KIIs, several big municipalities, (Durrës, Shkodër, and Vlorë) hold regular public hearings and publish a user-friendly version of their budgets. This level of distinctive analysis on the needs to introduce the Citizens Budgets is missing in the PD, and the intervention logic disregarded the above-mentioned differences by adopting a "one size fits all" approach.

Reconstructed Theory of Change (ToC) of the project:
In a context (C): Where the authorities are committed to democratic processes, and there is no dramatic setback from Albania's EU accession path;
If Activities (Ac): 1) a Truth-o Meter platform is developed and promoted so that promises are tracked and reported in the media/press and social media, and 2) 61 simplified citizens budgets are prepared and discussed with the communities, followed by recommendations:
and presuming that (As): 1) MPs and Mayors are committed to make their data public, 2) elections are held according to the democratic principles, 3) Municipalities are willing to include the Citizens Budgets in their websites, and 4) Citizens are committed to undertake actions to hold their representatives accountable and to monitor expenditures; **then it is highly likely that (Oc)**: Campaign promises of public officials are duly measured, and civic engagement in monitoring expenses in 61 Municipalities is increased; all to **the benefit of (Ch):** Holding public officials accountable.

The formulation of the intervention logic is based on three layers: the Overall Objective (OO), Outcomes, and Outputs, which is in line with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)'s good practice of a three layers approach. Overall, both the results statements and the indicators comply with the Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound (SMART) criteria especially as concerns Outcome 1: "Increased measurability of campaign promises of 201 public officials". Deficiencies are noted for the target indicators under Outcome 2: "Increased civic engagement in monitoring expenditures and investments in 61 Municipalities". One out of three indicators, namely <u>2.1:</u> "At least 200

people from each municipality and media will consult the website" is not relevant to illustrate steps of the citizens to monitor the municipalities.

The ToC is accurate as concerns the 1st pillar on creating tools to track campaign promises, an issue that is intrinsically linked to the core concept of democracy-delegating power to officials so that the latter can deliver on their electoral programme. The proposed mechanism of change - the "Truth-o-Meter"- besides being very relevant is also an innovative tool as there are no indications that such tool (or a similar one) has been previously developed in Albania. The added value of this tool is not only the tracking of electoral promises but also the reports with findings which were foreseen to be published online (on a dedicated webpage), on the websites of the implementing partners, and on various social media accounts.

The promotion of this tool and of the relevant findings is as crucial as the findings per se. From this perspective, the promotional activities envisaged for the Truth-o-Meter were relatively basic and did not incorporate major public events with high level media coverage where the findings would be presented. Given its importance, the designed activities and the related budget should have foreseen at least three public conferences and/or round tables with MPs, CSOs, communities, and media to discuss findings and generate public debates which would have had a substantial impact on the MPs' accountability.

Several deficiencies are noted as concerns the 2nd pillar - simplified Citizens Budgets. Besides not being necessarily fully relevant for the major municipalities (given that these versions were already made available by the municipalities themselves prior to the project's start), the design' second deficiency is the far stretched geographical reach of the related activities, covering the entire local municipalities in the country. While the rationale behind it (covering the entire country), may have sounded valid during the inception phase, it affected the quality of substantial engagement with the municipalities. The resources were dedicated to achieving the quantitative target (61 municipalities) rather than deepening the cooperation with a reduced sample of small/medium size municipalities where the need was higher.

The design's third gap was the causal pathway of change between the Citizens Budgets - as the second core output of the project - and the "Increased civic engagement in monitoring expenses and investments in 61 Municipalities" which is the 2nd Outcome.
Although the Citizens Budgets were foreseen to be discussed and validated through meetings with communities in all municipalities this not necessarily implies that the same groups of individuals attending the meetings would undertake pro-active actions to monitor expenses and hold local officials accountable.

A particular section in the PD is dedicated to Risk Management. Only three risks were identified, and the mitigation strategies are found to be overall adequate. This Risk Management section was not updated in the mid-term and final narrative reports although the new risks which the project encountered were in fact identified in various parts of the reports.

(ii) *Coherence*

Evaluation Question	Grading	Qualitative	Rationale
How well did the project "fit"; i.e. to what extent was the project compatible with other projects, sector or institution?	B	Good	Overall satisfactory, but there was room for improvements.

The intervention builds on previous projects of the implementing partner which has established a reporting portal and citizens advisory group in the Korcë region for pressuring local decision makers on good governance. One of the lessons learnt from these activities is that women and minorities representation is generally low. This has been reflected in the activities of this project. Data from the reports indicate that women's participation was 40-45% which is in line with the overall population of females in Albania. Most of those who accessed the reports and the app are less than 45 years old. Workshops were also organized in the Greek-minority municipalities.

External coherence: The PD does not identify any previous or ongoing similar initiatives, nor is this done in the mid-term and final narrative reports. There is no mentioning of other donor funded projects such as the "Bashki të Forta/Strong Municipalities" project funded by the Swiss Development Cooperation in 61 municipalities. The same is true for a major donor project, the EU for Municipalities (EU4M), https://eu4municipalities.al/en/. What is most important, both the PD and the progress reports did not identify other interventions implemented by UN agencies in Albania. The latter had no information on the UNDEF project although UN WOMEN in Albania has been promoting political participation in the country.

(iii) *Effectiveness*

Evaluation Question	Grading	Qualitative	Rationale
To what extent was the project, as implemented, able to achieve objectives and goals?	B	Good	Overall satisfactory, but there was room for improvements.

The objectives were reached to a fair extent, mainly under Outcome 1 on tracking campaign promises and less under Outcome 2 on civic engagement to monitor local expenditures. Almost all activities were completed albeit difficulties encountered linked to the pandemic and the electoral campaign in 2019 which was far from democratic principles. Under Outcome 1, ten out of 11 activities have been fully completed. They were linked to designing the Truth-o-Meter portal/app, data gathering and processing, creation of 201 info graphs for MPs, the promotional strategy, videos, and reports on tracking promises.

One activity was partially completed, and it was linked to developing partnerships with local media and 20 local reporters during the 2019 electoral campaign. According to the implementing partner, the reason was the unusual electoral campaign where the opposition did not participate, and no concrete promises being made. The team decided that this activity was obsolete, and funds were diverted to another activity under Outcome 2.

While it is true that this externality (the 2019 electoral campaign with a single candidate and absence of electoral promises) did occur, cancelling this activity and diverting resources to the 2nd Outcome was a missed opportunity to make the local media aware of the Truth-o-Meter and to increase the likelihood that this tool was used by the local communities.

Under Outcome 2, the activities linked to the preparation of 61 simplified budgets, organising focus groups and debate groups to discuss and validate the Citizens Budgets, and the preparation of the financial report on municipalities budgets' efficiency were completed. Two activities under this Outcome were partially completed. The first is 2.1.3 "Presenting the Citizens Budgets to each mayor and city council in all municipalities". While the Final Narrative Report (FNR) marks this activity as fully completed, there is no evidence of this document being submitted to the mayors and city councils in some of the big municipalities such as Tirana, Durres, Vlora (although it has been the case for Korcë, Pogradec, and Elbasan municipalities). There is no sufficient evidence in the FNR that these simplified versions of the budgets were presented in all the remaining municipalities.

The second partially completed activity is 2.1 4 "Citizens Budgets are accessible on each municipalities' website, on social media, and as printed versions". While the Citizens Budgets were made available in the social media of the implementing partners, not all the 61 municipalities included them on their websites. Although this activity is marked as fully completed in the FNR, the same document lists only 18 municipalities where these documents were published. This data was triangulated during the desk phase, and the number of municipalities which published this document is 12 or 20% of the total 61 municipalities. Other municipalities published their own version of Citizens Budgets.

The main outputs under Outcome 1 are the Truth-o-Meter portal/application which includes 1578 electoral promises, and the reports tracking all promises made by 61 mayors and 140 MPs in the 2017/2019 elections. Under Outcome 2, the outputs are 61 simplified citizens budgets and a financial report on municipal budget efficiency for the fiscal year 2020-2021. The project delivered a set of collected and compared data (on electoral promises), various reports which were published in social media accounts and in various websites.

The project did not achieve any substantial progress in big municipalities, apart from Korcë, Elbasan, Berat, and Devoll municipalities (located mainly in the central and east regions which also coincides with the areas where the two implementing partners have been active).
In smaller municipalities (and in some mid-size ones such as the Pogradec and Maliq municipalities located in the Region of Korcë), the project assisted the authorities in promoting transparency thanks to the simplified versions of local budgets. This is due to the fact that, unlike big municipalities, the smaller ones have limited capacities to dedicate to transparency-linked activities, and consequently the outputs were of an evident added value.

Otherwise, the project failed to fully promote and communicate its produced outputs. It did not capitalise on the meetings and debate groups to engage with a critical mass of citizens in each municipality who were potentially interested in undertaking actions to hold their elected officials accountable to monitor local expenses. While some actions were undertaken (in the municipalities where the implementing partners had previous experience) they were not sufficient to produce a positive effect.

The reasons are both internal and external to the project. Internally, they are linked to the design which unrealistically envisaged to achieve a nation-wide effect on two crucial topics (political promises and transparency) through a small-scale grant to a local CSOs which, despite its experience at the regional level, had limited capacities to effectively cover the entire country and produce tangible impact. Externally, several assumptions did not hold true and the most important was the assumption on elections being held according to democratic principles, which was not the case for the local elections in 2019. Another layer of externality which negatively affected the project was the COVID pandemic and the related restrictions which were in place during most of the implementation period.

(iv)   Efficiency

Evaluation Question	Grading	Qualitative	Rationale
To what extent was there a reasonable relationship between resources and impacts?	B	Good	Overall satisfactory, but there was room for improvements.

There is a good cause-effect relationship between the budget allocations and the outcomes.

The main efficiency gaps are linked to the project's design. More specifically, the first design gap is the country wide reach of activities with an obvious effect on the funds required to cover costs of implementing activities in all 61 municipalities, and on the other side gathering information, data, and evidence for over 200 elected officials (at the national and local level). The budget allocations for the Truth-o-Meter app/portal's technical development were appropriately planned. Yet, the costs required for collecting promises of 201 MPs and Mayors and data on their level of fulfilment could have been better focused on a smaller number of MPs (electoral zones) and municipalities. The second is the insufficient budget allocations for promotional activities which impeded the project to present the Truth-o-Meter' compared data in public events.

The same is true for the 2nd pillar. The process of drafting Citizens' Budgets was relatively efficient, however the costs for organising two rounds of meetings in all 61 municipalities were a major budget line. No sufficient costs were foreseen for their effective promotion. The performance of the implementing team has been adequate, and it proved to be flexible to

adapt to the COVID-19 restrictions without losing focus from the project' objectives. The no-cost time extensions enabled the team to complete most of the activities.

The project's accountability was based on narrative and financial reports prepared by RDA Korcë, and external ones (Milestone Verification Reports (MVRs) and Audit Reports) prepared by third parties.

Internally, the two mid-term and final narrative reports depict a relatively clear picture of the implementation, challenges encountered, and the progress achieved. Despite the delays caused by the pandemic and the two no-cost extensions, the activities were implemented within the foreseen budget. In some cases, the project generated minor savings, and all activities were implemented by the existing staff without hiring additional personnel.

However, some deficiencies in the quality of reporting were noted. Although the reports indicate the percentage of women' participation in the activities, there is no mentioning of other categories such as youth, minorities, representatives from CSOs, nor is there a final classification of all participants according to the categories of target groups (communities, local government, CSOs, and media) for each municipality. Furthermore, the attendance sheets for the debates' groups and the focus groups discussions were kept in scanned PDF format which inhibits an efficient analysis of the categories of participants by external parties, including but not limited to the Evaluator.

Some inaccuracy issues in reporting the targets are also noted, as in the case of Output 1.3.1 on tracking electoral promises of 61 Mayors. Although this output is marked as "Achieved", the related narrative text explains that the activity was not fully implemented.

Externally, the Audit Report and the two MVRs were additional layers of oversight which provided for a satisfactory level of accountability. Findings from the Audit Report, conducted by an independent member firm of Moore Stephens International Limited, indicate that funds were used in accordance with UNDEF guidelines. On the other side, the two MVRs provide useful insights on particular activities under observation.

(v)   Impact

Evaluation Question	Grading	Qualitative	Rationale
To what extent has the project put in place processes and procedures supporting CSO's role in contributing to democratization?	C	Issues	There were issues which affected the impact.

Data from the KIIs, the FNR, and insights from the online survey's respondents indicate that while some signs of impact are tangible, they are limited mainly to Outcome 1.

Satisfactory levels of impact are noted as concerns indicators 1.A and 1. B on increased measurability of electoral promises and on comparative data gathered and measured. All measurable promises of the 201 elected officials were gathered, compared, and referred to the Truth-o-Meter. By the end of the project, 1578 electoral promises had been identified (1424 promises were marked as accomplished whereas 154 electoral promises as not accomplished).

While the levels of accomplishment are important per se, the real impact achievements are a) the availability of this innovative instrument which can be accessed by all citizens, and b) a dataset of electoral campaigns which for the first time is available in the country. Insights from the field phase indicate that data on unfulfilled promises stemming from the Truth-o-Meter is likely to influence the electoral choices of those individuals who have visited the portal and the app. This is another positive impact attributable to the Truth-o-Meter.

The target for Indicator 1.C referring to at least 50,000 citizens, 122 CSOs, and 30 media outlets which checked 201 profiles of politicians (and related promises) in the portal and app, is not achieved given that according to the FNR's latest data only 18,773 unique visitors checked the portal and app. The missed target is an illustration of the lack of a large-scale communication/awareness campaign to promote the Truth-o-Meter (a major project design deficiency) which consequently had an adverse effect at the impact level. Furthermore, the total number of individuals who have visited the app/portal is quite low compared to the total number of voters in each municipality and/or electoral zones.

The same was observed for Outcome 2 where there is very little evidence that the outputs contributed to increased citizens' engagement. There were only some sporadic cases where this has occurred (mainly by other local CSOs, driven by other donor-funded projects). Only in very few cases those citizens that were involved in the debates' groups and FGDs or other citizens have undertaken actions to hold their elected officials accountable.

Other external factors played an important role in the less than satisfactory level of impact. The main reason is the limited willingness and commitment of citizens to engage in such activities. The civic apathy is also explained by the insufficient culture among today's Albanian citizens to react to arbitrary government acts that affect the interests of society.

This is not the first time that such approaches (informing citizens and organising them in formal and informal structures to increase civic oversights) were adopted by numerous multi-million donor-funded projects in Albania. So far, they have had timid results in creating a strong culture of civic participation, apart from few cases in the big municipalities.

(vi)   Sustainability

Evaluation Question	Grading	Qualitative	Rationale
To what extent has the project, as designed and implemented, created what is likely to	B	Good	Overall satisfactory, but there was room

be a continuing impetus towards democratic development?			for improvements.

The latest figures from the portal/app indicate that this tool is still being accessed by the citizens even after the project ended. For example, during the period June-September 2022, the average number of single individuals visiting the portal and app was 1660. Furthermore, the RDA Korcë plans to continue maintaining the portal and the app functional, and cover the related costs which are affordable for RDA Korcë.

The grantee plans to use the same tool to track the electoral promises in the upcoming local elections in April 2023 and to compare with the unfulfilled promises from the latest local elections. This is a laudable illustration of the fact that the most tangible achievements of the project, the Truth-o-Meter and the related set of electoral promises, shall be further referred to in the future.

What remains doubtful is the willingness of the voters and civic groups to refer to such tools, reports, and instruments prior to the upcoming elections. The citizens' apathy around political issues is at the highest level which reduces their motivation for engaging in accountability actions.

(vii) UNDEF added value

Evaluation Question	Grading	Qualitative	Rationale
To what extent was UNDEF able to take advantage of its unique position to achieve results that could not have been achieved had support come from other donors?	B	Good	Overall satisfactory, but there was room for improvements.

Overall, there are no major differences in the grant procedures or in the overarching goals between UNDEF and the major international donors in Albania (such as the EU through various grant mechanisms to CSOs, the United States Embassy, or other embassies in the country). Direct granting through Calls for Proposals is the preferred mechanism of funding for CSOs while the overall goals of all donors refer to strengthening democratic processes.

The debate on CSOs' impact is a constant feature of the civil society development process and performance in general. This debate has gained intensity particularly in the recent years in Albania and has become one of the central topics of the public discourse. Donors' funding appears to be the main lifeline for the vast majority of CSOs and their attempts to diversify their resources continue to be limited by their organisational capacities. The European Commission Report for Albania 2018 noted that the "financial sustainability of civil society organisations remains a challenge due to fiscal and legal frameworks."

Compared to other major donors, UNDEF has a limited portfolio of projects funded in Albania such as the project subject of this evaluation and few others linked to combatting hate speech in Albania, or the "Media, Transparency and Accountability in Albania" implemented in 2011.

Despite this limited presence, two are the main added values of UNDEF for this project compared to some approaches adapted by other donors:

1. Supporting two local organisations.

Following the re-granting approach adopted by several foreign donors over the past few years, more funds became available to local CSOs since 2017 through the deployment of sub-granting schemes implemented by local intermediary organizations. However, CSOs outside of Tirana continue to have limited absorption capacity and difficulties in accessing small-mid size grants. Despite the donors' efforts, the "big" and well-established Tirana-based CSOs tend to be a favourite choice of the donors, especially for grants over 100.000 USD or Euro.

By supporting two local CSOs through a mid-size grant of $130,000, UNDEF provided an opportunity to local actors to engage in actions which helped to highlight accountability issues.

2. Supporting innovative approaches and tools.

As mentioned in previous sections, the Truth-o-Meter is an innovative tool to track and measure electoral promises which has not been previously applied in Albania by CSOs (or by other organisations). From this perspective, UNDEF has supported an interesting (although not fully explored) mechanism of accountability in Albania which has not been funded by other donors. Lack of coordination and sharing of information with other UN agencies in Albania somewhat shadows the above-mentioned added values.

V.   CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion	Recommendation
Relevance 1.The project's relevance remains confirmed three years after its start, especially as concerns tracking of electoral promises. The introduction of the innovative tool for tracking electoral promises, the "Truth-o-Meter" in Pillar 1 is laudable for it provides citizens with a mechanism to promote accountability.	N/A
2. Given the importance of the topic addressed by the "Truth-o-Meter", the design should have paid more attention to (and allocate the necessary resources) to promote and communicate the tool and the results. These could have envisaged public	*For strategic approaches when supporting similar interventions in the future:* *UNDEF is advised to:* 1. Encourage potential grantees to apply the intervention logic of future projects at the

conferences and/or round tables with all concerned MPs, CSOs, communities, and media to discuss findings and generate public debates which would have had a substantial impact on the MPs' accountability.	local level prior to suggesting to scaling them up at the national level. 2. Advise potential grantees on including a substantial promotional/public awareness activity in the design and foresee adequate budget allocations for implementing them.
3. The design' robustness could have been reinforced by a more detailed and comprehensive needs assessment on Pillar 2 in smaller vs. bigger municipalities in order to avoid obsolescence in some big municipalities. A more geographically focused Pillar 2 could have enabled the implementing team to a) target those municipalities with limited abilities in drafting simplified versions of the budgets, and b) engage more closely with communities in these municipalities to undertake pro-active actions aiming at monitoring municipalities' expenses.	3. Ensure that similar interventions are based on grantees' thorough needs assessments and clear understanding of target groups' absorption capacities.
Coherence 4. The lack of sharing information on the activities with other donor-funded projects, and UN agencies in Albania, reduced chances of full exploitation of the delivered outputs by other actors and organisations.	N/A
Efficiency 5. The project was completed with no major deviations from the budget. Reporting inaccuracies (detailing categories of participants, gender and minorities-oriented reporting, gaps in reporting the levels of achievements, and poor data recording systems) have been overlooked.	*For strategic approaches when supporting similar interventions in the future:* *UNDEF is advised to:* 4. Ensure that grantee progress reports provide an accurate picture of indicators' values, and that grantees have instruments in place to properly monitor the results' achievements. 5. Request from the grantees to maintain accurate attendance records of their activities in a user-friendly format, such as Excel.
Effectiveness 6. The project put forward an innovative way of capturing the extent to which elected officials are fulfilling their mandate. The Truth-o-Meter provides this opportunity to interested citizens and interest groups. What has not been achieved is a full-scale uptake	N/A

and utilization of this tool, due to a limited awareness campaign to promote it. The Citizens Budgets were also a laudable transparency-oriented effort. Yet, the approach used (covering all municipalities), a less than accurate needs assessment at the local level, and vague interest from the citizens coupled with limited promotional activities had a negative effect on the Outcomes' achievements.	
Impact and Sustainability 7. The delivered outputs and the meetings held were insufficient for establishing a critical mass of engaged citizens that would undertake pro-active actions to hold their elected officials accountable. The app and the reports are still easily accessible, yet the citizens' limited willingness to engage in such activities and the "civic apathy" drastically affects the impact and sustainability. Prospects for both the impact and sustainability could be higher if the Truth-o-Meter would be used by other CSOs and promoted by international organisations with presence in Albania, which have the capacities to promote it through country level public awareness campaigns.	*On enhancing impact and sustainability' prospects for this project:* UNDEF is advised to: 6. Share the project' achievements with UN organisations in Albania so that the latter could consider them in their programmes. 7. Consider supporting a follow up intervention aiming at promoting the Truth-o-Meter at a large scale in Albania. 8. Share the project' achievements with partners involved in accountability issues in other countries to promote the concept of the "Truth-o-Meter".
UNDEF Added Value 8. Despite the relatively small fund granted to this project, UNDEF's added value is tangible for it enabled two local organisations to develop innovative approaches and tools for holding elected officials accountable. Such value could have been better promoted if the results were communicated to other UN agencies in the country.	N/A

VI.   LESSONS LEARNED

1. One of the main problems of this project was that its design robustness could have been reinforced by a more detailed and comprehensive needs assessment on Pillar 2 in smaller vs. bigger municipalities in order to avoid obsolescence in some big municipalities. Consequently, inappropriate and generalised needs assessments that lead to a "one size fits   all"   approach   can   negatively   affect   the   impact's   likelihood.
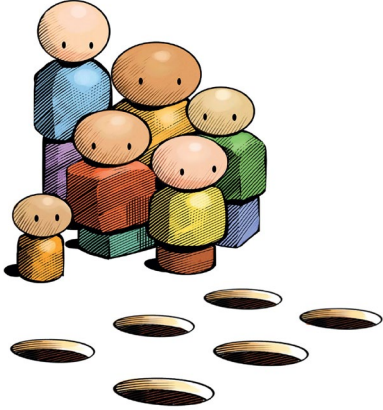
2. Given the high relevance and importance of the "truth-o-meter", the design should have paid more attention (and allocate the necessary resources) to the promotion and communication of the tool and the results. There could have been public conferences and/or round tables with all concerned MPs, CSOs, communities, and media to discuss findings and generate public debates. Therefore, promoting innovative tools to a wide range of stakeholders is as important as their development, otherwise the impact of such tools remains limited and untapped.

Annex 1: Evaluation Matrix and Questions

DAC criterion	Evaluation Question	Related sub-questions	Indicator	Data Source	Data Collection Method	Limitations / Risks

Relevance	To what extent was the project, as designed and implemented, suited to context and needs at the beneficiary, local, and national levels?	▪ Were the objectives of the project in line with the needs and priorities for democratic development, given the context? How did this project fit with the overall strategy and activities of the Implementing Agency? ▪ Should another project strategy have been preferred rather than the one implemented to better reflect those needs, priorities, and context? Why? ▪ Were risks appropriately identified by the projects? How appropriate are/were the strategies developed to deal with identified risks? Was the project overly risk-averse? ▪ What is the level of absorption capacities of the stakeholders/beneficiaries? ▪ What is the quality of the vertical intervention logic? Are planned outputs and outcomes clearly described in a logical sequence? ▪ Is the content of the RFW) adequate?	I1. Level of participation/ ownership in the co-design by the main project stakeholders. I.2 Level of alignment to the national, sub regional needs overtime. I.3 Evidence of the project´s adaptability to response to the changing political, social, and economic context, including the effects of the pandemic. I.4 Expert assessment and perceptual data indicating the plausibility, accuracy and robustness of the ToC, including its assumptions and causal pathways of change (both the vertical and horizontal aspects). I.5 Expert assessment indicating the extent to which the RFW framework adequately allowed for an effective follow up of the project strategies.	Project document	Desk Review	None

Coherence	How well did the project "fit"; i.e. to what extent was the project compatible with other projects and programmes in the country, sector or institution?	*Internal coherence:* ▪ To what extent are there synergies and interlinkages between the project and other initiatives carried out by the Implementing Agency? *External coherence:* ▪ To what extent is there consistency with other actors' initiatives in the same context? ▪ To what extent is there complementarity, harmonization and coordination between the Implementing Agency/the project and other organizations/projects working in the same context and on the same issue? ▪ To what extent is the project adding value while avoiding the duplication of efforts?	I.6 Level of integration of the lessons learned from previous similar initiatives. I.7 Evidence of synergies are generated among other similar initiatives supported by UN Agencies in Albania.	Project Document External Sources	Desk review KII with UN Albania	None

Effectiveness	To what extent was the project, as implemented, able to achieve objectives and goals?	• To what extent have the project's objectives been reached? • To what extent was the project implemented as envisaged by the project document? If not, why not? • Were the project activities adequate to make progress towards the project objectives? • What has the project achieved? Where it failed to meet the outputs identified in the project document, why was this?	• I.8 Assessment of the implementation progress based on the workplan. • I.9 Assessment on the status of output and outcome delivery. • I.10 Identification of factors contributing to success and/or constraining accomplishments. • I.11 Assessment on the use and update of the risk assessment/mitigation matrix, and the actions taken to address identified challengers and/or opportunities. • I.12 Assessment of the contingency planning and impact on effectiveness due to the COVID-19.	Project document Progress and Final Narrative Reports, M&E data Insights from implementing partners, and beneficiaries.	Desk review KIIs Online survey	Limited number of respondents to the online survey. Some local officials and journalists are not available to meet with the Evaluation Consultant.

| Efficiency | To what extent was there a reasonable relationship between resources expended and project impacts? | ▪ Was there a reasonable relationship between project inputs and project outputs?
▪ Did institutional arrangements promote cost-effectiveness and accountability?
▪ Was the budget designed, and then implemented, in a way that enabled the project to meet its objectives? | I.13 Extent to which resources (personnel and know-how) were coherent with the expected objectives and planned actions.
I.14 Extent to which the budget was sufficient to achieve the objectives, and the extent to which it was affected due to the COVID-19.
I.15 Extent to which the timeframe for the implementation of activities has been sufficient to achieve expected goals. | Project document. Progress and Final Reports, Narrative and Financial. Requests for project extensions. Audit report. M&E data. Insights from implementing partners, and beneficiaries | Desk review KIIs Online survey. | Limited number of respondents to the online survey.

Some local officials and journalists are not available to meet with the Evaluation Consultant. |

Impact	To what extent has the project put in place processes and procedures supporting the role of civil society in contributing to democratization, or to direct promotion of democracy?	▪ To what extent has/have the realization of the project objective(s) and project outcomes had an impact on the specific problem the project aimed to address? ▪ Have the targeted beneficiaries experienced tangible impacts? Which were positive; which were negative? ▪ To what extent has the project caused changes and effects, positive and negative, foreseen and unforeseen, on democratization? ▪ Is the project likely to have a catalytic effect? How? Why? Examples?	I.16 Assessment of the level of achievement of key impact indicators. I.17 Assessment and results of the quantitative and qualitative data. I.28 Identification of collateral effects (positive and/or negative ones).	Project document. Progress and Final Narrative Reports, M&E data. Insights from implementing partners, and beneficiaries.	Desk review KIIs Online survey	Limited number of respondents to the online survey. Local officials and journalists are not available to meet with the Evaluation Consultant.
Sustainability	To what extent has the project, as designed and implemented, created what is likely to be a continuing impetus towards democratic development?	▪ To what extent has the project established processes and systems that are likely to support continued impact? ▪ Are the involved parties willing and able to continue the project activities on their own (where applicable)?	I.19 Identification of indications of institutional, sustainability of results, and commitments achieved (formal and informal agreements, exit strategies, etc.) I.20 Stakeholder perception of the sustainability of results. I.21 Assessment on how contextual challenges might shape the sustainability of results.	Project document. Progress and Final Narrative Reports, M&E data. Insights from implementing partners, and beneficiaries.	Desk review KIIs Online survey	Limited number of respondents to the online survey. Some local officials and journalists are not available to meet with the Evaluation Consultant.

UNDEF value added	To what extent was UNDEF able to take advantage of its unique position and comparative advantage to achieve results that could not have been achieved had support come from other donors?	• What was UNDEF able to accomplish, through the project that could not as well have been achieved by alternative projects, other donors, or other stakeholders (Government, NGOs, etc). • Did project design and implementing modalities exploit UNDEF's comparative advantage in the form of an explicit mandate to focus on democratization issues?	I.22 Expert assessment and analysis of UNDEF's position in the donors' landscape in Albania and overview of modalities of funding mechanisms of different donors. I.23 Analysis of differences and similarities.	Insights from implementing partners, and beneficiaries.	Desk review KIIs	None

Annex 2: Data Collection Questions (KII Protocol/Template)

The purpose of this KII template is to guide the Evaluation Expert in the process of collecting qualitative (and to some extent) quantitative data from the local CSOs, journalists, activists, and local officials. It serves to capture more in depth and to summarize the opinions, perspectives, and potential recommendations of the beneficiaries.

Questions	Responses	Consultant remarks
Can you please describe what was your engagement with the activities of the project implemented by the Regional Development Agency Korca? When and how were you approached by RDA? *(both for local media/CSOs and for local officials)*		
What do you think of the objectives of this project? Were they clearly explained to you by the RDA? *(both for local media/CSOs and for local officials)* Was there something missing in these activities (or in the project, overall) that you think would have been great to be included? *(both for local media/CSOs and for local officials)*		
One of the main outputs of the project was the so-called Truth o Meter, how was (or		

still is) your experience with this app/website? *(both for local media/CSOs and for local officials)*		
Did your organization/local media refer to it during the last 1.5 years? Kindly explain *(in the case of local CSOs/media/journalists)*		
Did this Truth o Meter receive any kind of attention/reaction from the Mayor or municipality officials? Kindly explain *(in the case of local officials)*		
Do you think this instrument had any positive and/or negative effect? If so, what is that? And what could have been done better or more from the RDA's side? *(both for local media/CSOs and for local officials)*		
What could have been done better or more from the local administration and local actors? *(both for local media/CSOs and for local officials)*		
As the new round of local elections is approaching, do you think the Truth o Meter can play any role in holding local		

officials accountable, and how? *(both for local media/CSOs and for local officials)*		
The other main outputs of the project was the Citizens Budget for your Municipality, how was (or still is) your experience with this instrument? *(both for local media/CSOs and for local officials)* Did your organization/local media refer to it during the last 1.5 years? Kindly explain *(in the case of local CSOs/media/journalists)* Did you use this Citizens Budget to monitor the expenses of your Municipality? If not, kindly explain why? *(in the case of local CSOs/media/journalists)* Did this Citizens Budget receive any kind of attention/reaction from the Mayor or municipality officials? Kindly explain *(in the case of local officials)* As far as you are aware, has there been any case/attempt of the citizens to monitor local budget expenses by referring to this Citizens Budget relevant for your		

municipality? *(both for local media/CSOs and for local officials)*		
Do you think this instrument had any positive and/or negative effect? If so, what is that? And what could have been done better or more from the RDA's side? *(both for local media/CSOs and for local officials)* What could have been done better or more from the local administration and local actors? *(both for local media/CSOs and for local officials)* As the new round of local elections is approaching, do you think the Citizens Budget can play any role in holding local officials accountable, and how? *(both for local media/CSOs and for local officials)*		
Any other suggestions? Comments?		

Annex 3: Documents Reviewed

1. Regional development Agency (SME) Korçë, 2019, *Project Document*
2. Regional development Agency (SME) Korçë, 2019, *Annex III Budget*
3. UNDEF, 2022, *Audit Report*
4. UNDEF, March 2020, *Financial Utilisation Report*
5. UNDEF, October 2020, *Financial Utilisation Report*
6. UNDEF, April 2020, *Narrative Report*
7. UNDEF, February 2020, *Milestone Verification Report*
8. UNDEF, September 2020, *Milestone Verification Report*
9. UNDEF, November 2020, *Project Extension Request From*
10. UNDEF, September 2021, *Project Extension Request From*
11. UNDEF, May 2022, *Narrative Report*
12. Stephen Whitefield, Endrit Shabani, 2018, *Obstacles to Women's Participation in Elections in Albania*, Albania
13. Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM), 2022, *Opinion Poll 2021: Trust in Governance*, Albania
14. European Commission, 2019, 2020, 2021, *Progress Reports for Albania*, Belgium
15. OSCE Presence in Albania, 2019, *ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report*, Albania
16. Westminster Foundation for Democracy, 2020, *National Survey: Young People and Politics in Albania*, UK
17. Albanian Centre for Public Information Issues, 2015, *Transparency of Local Decisions and Public Participation in Korca Municipality Council*, Albania
18. Balkan Investigative Reporting Network, 2017, *National Monitoring Report on Transparency of Local Governments,* Albania

Annex 4: Schedule of Interviews

30 September 2022
Head of RDA Korcë (Implementing Agency)
Head of Economic Intelligence Center, Korcë (Implementing Partner)
Korcë Municipality
3 October 2022
Bilisht Municipality
Maliq Municipality
3, 4, 5 October 2022
Rrogozhine Municipality
Fier Municipality
Peqin Municipality
Has Municipality
Tirana Municipality
6, 7 October 2022
Project coordinator covering Berat Municipality
UN Resident Coordinator Office, Albania
UN Women, Albania Office
11, 12 October 2022
Project coordinator covering Shkoder and Lezhe Municipalities
14 October 2022
Rrogozhine Municipality
17 October 2022
Debriefing of Implementing Partners

Annex 5: Acronyms

CSO	Civil Society Organisations
EIC	Economic Intelligence Center
EQs	Evaluation Questions
EU	European Union
FNR	Final Narrative Report
KIIs	Key Informant Interviews
LN	Launch Note
MPs	Members of Parliament
OECD	Organization for Economic Development and Cooperation
PD	Project Document
RDA	Regional Development Agency
MVRs	Milestone Verification Reports
UNDEF	United Nations Democracy Fund
UN	United Nations
WJP	World Justice Project