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Regional Programme on Local Democracy In the Western Balkans (ReLOaD)

UNDP

Final Project Evaluation

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1. Project title

Regional Programme on Local Democracy in the Western Balkans (ReLOaD)

2. Project details

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Project Evaluation:

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4. List of abbreviations and acronyms

CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DG NEAR	Directorate General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
IPA	Instruments for Pre-Accession Assistance
LG	Local Government
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PCM	Project Cycle Management
ReLOaD	Regional Programme on Local Democracy in the Western Balkans
TACSO	Technical Assistance for Civil Society Organisations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WB	Western Balkans

5. Executive summary

Introduction

Since February 2017, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is implementing the Regional Programme on Local Democracy in the Western Balkans (ReLOaD) project in six countries/territories in the Western Balkans: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo* , the Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia. The objective of the project is to strengthen participatory democracies and the European Union (EU) integration process in the Western Balkans by empowering civil society to actively take part in decision making and by stimulating an enabling legal and financial environment for civil society. It aims to achieve this objective by introducing a transparent and project-based funding mechanism of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) from Local Government (LG) budgets (LOD methodology²) towards greater civic engagement in decision-making and improvement of local service delivery. It does so by providing a combination of technical assistance and grants for CSO project implementation to LGs and CSOs in fifty-three municipalities in these countries/territories.

The ReLOaD project has a total budget of € 10,030,000 of which € 8,500,000 is funded by the EU and the remainder by UNDP and the respective participating LGs. 53 LGs and roughly 378 CSOs participate in the project. Of the total budget, 60% (or € 6,085,000) is earmarked for grants for project implementation by CSOs, while the remainder is intended to cover the costs for training, regional activities, salaries for staff and consultants and overhead costs.

The objective of this evaluation is to provide an impartial review of the ReLOaD project in terms of its relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, sustainability, overall performance, management and achievements. The information, findings, lessons learned, and recommendations generated by the evaluation will be used by the Project Board/Board of Partners, UNDP, EU and by the implementing partners to strengthen the remaining project implementation and inform future programming.

To obtain the relevant information, the evaluation conducted a desk review of documents, it paid a week long field visit to each of the six Instruments for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) beneficiaries, during which the consultant held in-depth interviews with key resource persons at national and local level, visited a selection of randomly selected participating LGs and related CSOs for interviews and group meetings and finally, the consultant participated in two regional meetings organised by the ReLOaD project in Tirana. In addition, an online survey among all participating CSOs and LG coordinators was conducted. 199 out of 378 CSOs or 53% of all CSOs participating in the project at the time of the evaluation filled out the questionnaire and 46 out of the 53 or 87% of the LG coordinators responded. Draft evaluation conclusions and recommendations were validated during a combined Board of Partners meeting held in Tirana.

Relevance of the ReLOaD project

All six countries/territories participating in the ReLOaD project are involved in the EU (pre) accession process. They all face a range of challenges, especially in fields such as the rule of law, corruption, organised crime, the economy and social cohesion. Civil society actors and organisations can make a substantial contribution to addressing many of these issues through their lobbying, advocacy and oversight activities at national, regional and local level. When it comes to democratic governance, the rule of law and respect for

* For the European Union, all references to Kosovo should be understood in full compliance with Resolution 1244 (1999) and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence. For the United Nations, references to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

² The term "LOD methodology" refers to the transparent and project-based funding mechanism of CSOs by LGs as developed by the former Reinforcement of Local Democracy (LOD) project implemented in Bosnia and Herzegovina and is still used in the ReLOaD project.

fundamental human rights, including the freedom of expression & association and minority rights, civil society can create demand for enhanced transparency, accountability and effectiveness from public institutions and facilitate a greater focus on the needs of citizens in policymaking.

By focussing on the cooperation between CSOs and LGs and on enhancing their capacities related to CSO project funding and implementation simultaneously, the ReLOaD project is very well positioned to operationalise some of the policy intentions of the respective countries/territories and of the EU, which recognize support to civil society as one of the strategic priorities for enhancing the quality of governance.

In all of the six IPA beneficiaries, the ReLOaD initiative was and still is very relevant and timely in relation to ongoing policy development and implementation. Within the overall process of EU accession, all countries/territories either recognise the need for and are in the (early) process of developing relevant legislation (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia) or they are starting to implement, monitor and subsequently revise recently developed legislation regarding transparent (local) government funding of CSOs (Kosovo, Montenegro and Serbia). The objectives of these efforts are all similar: to improve public finance management, to improve service delivery to citizens and to improve cooperation between LGs and CSOs.

The high level of relevance of the project (for both national government, the EU and UNDP) is mainly related to the fact that ReLOaD does not have an exclusive focus on either enhancing the capacities of CSOs or LGs separately as so many other project do, but on strengthening them simultaneously, while it uses, at the same time, a very practical tool (the LOD methodology) and some funding incentives to stimulate real cooperation and partnership.

Improving the transparency and quality of decision-making processes at the local level regarding the allocation of public funds by the LG is very important for improving more transparent and effective public spending and by doing so for enhancing the trust of citizens in their LG institutions and through that the legitimacy of the institution in general. The allocation of grants to CSOs is one of the most visible forms of spending public funds by the LG and, if it is not done in a transparent manner, might easily lead to (true or false) allegations of mismanagement of public funds or nepotism by decision makers. In addition, a more active involvement of CSOs in service delivery related to the realisation of local development priorities will assist the municipality as a whole to address at least part of the needs of groups of people that are at present not reached through its regular service provision mechanisms because the LGs lack the capacities or resources to do so. By combining their social engagement and volunteer labour CSOs are especially in the area of social service delivery far better equipped to provide services effectively and efficiently.

Project design and approach

By enhancing the capacity of local CSOs to draft project proposals and implement these projects in accordance with the recommendations of the EU in Project Cycle Management (PCM), the ReLOaD project complements, in its design, other EU supported activities in the six IPA beneficiaries that focus on strengthening civil society, in particular its grant or sub-grant mechanisms. By providing hands-on support to local CSOs in PCM, it raises their capacities to the minimum level required to participate effectively in these grant mechanisms in future, thus enhancing the outreach of these grant mechanisms to CSOs and municipalities they would otherwise not be able to reach.

The “LOD methodology” is a technically sound and not too complex instrument that triggers, at least in its design, several positive spin off effects at the local level related to improved governance. Since the ReLOaD project itself is not involved in the actual selection of strategic development priorities at local level but stimulates the local stakeholders to conduct that analysis collectively, it generates a high level of local ownership over the whole CSO project selection and implementation process.

The ReLOaD project has adopted a multi-stakeholder approach and is bringing the theory of “collective action” into practice. It brings together stakeholders at both the demand and supply side of democratic governance to resolve practical development problems and provides both the LG as well as the civil society players with the minimum capacities to play their role in the process of collective action. In addition, certainly in theory, it introduces the principle of mutual accountability to the local players involved in the project. ReLOaD is therefore in its design not a local government project and neither a CSO project nor only a grant mechanism but a true “local governance” project.

Performance of the ReLOaD project

Despite a six-months delay in the approval of CSO project proposals and the subsequent release of funds for CSO project implementation, which was caused by the DG NEAR temporarily not authorising the project to release those funds until there was an improved arrangement regarding the CSO representation on the evaluation committees, the project is on track and will be able to complete all major planned activities before the end of August 2020 if a requested budget neutral extension of seven-months is approved.

At the time of the evaluation, the second Call for Proposals is completed and a total of 419 CSO projects have been approved for a total amount of € 5,918,223.00 or an average of € 14,124.00 per project. The 419 projects are implemented by 378 different CSOs and the total number is twice as much as originally planned for, putting extra pressure on the staff to ensure proper implementation and monitoring.

Due to an effective introduction of the project and the LOD methodology to both LGs and CSOs in the six participating countries/territories, more than six times the number of LGs and CSOs have been introduced to the project and its methodology. From the survey the evaluation learned that the CSOs and LGs that actually participated in the project are highly satisfied with the quality of the training and with the support they have received from the ReLOaD project. The LGs confirmed that after the training and practical application they would be able to continue with the implementation of the LOD methodology in a similar way when allocating LG funds for CSO projects, while the CSOs mentioned that the application and implementation process is rather cumbersome, but that they understand the need for these procedures and that they now have the capacity to apply for bigger projects that have similar requirements.

Bringing 378 small CSOs that often have no previous experience in managing externally financed projects and 53 under-capacitated LGs to a level where they can manage projects in accordance with EU principles is by definition a labour-intensive exercise. Looking at the workload per staff member in the project, which has been very high over the last two and a half years, the project could realistically not have covered more municipalities (with each an average of 8 CSO projects) than at present, while adhering to the same quality standards for their services and adhering to the present budget allocation restrictions. 60% of the budget was earmarked for sub grants to CSOs for project implementation while the remaining 40% was earmarked for HR costs, training, operational costs, regional meetings, consultants, overhead, etc.

Project management, both at the regional and country level, has been outstanding. Internal and external communication with stakeholders at national and local level has been effective resulting in a high level of visibility of the project as a whole as well as the CSO projects implemented at local level. Procurement, monitoring and progress and financial reporting are in line with UNDP quality standards, while the Project Board and the Board of Partners in each country/territory is actively involved in decision-making.

Effectiveness and impact of the ReLOaD project

Both CSOs and LG Coordinators who participated in the surveys agreed that the project was very successful in generating unified and transparent mechanisms for the disbursement of municipal funds for CSO project-based activities in accordance with local service needs and identified priorities. All participating LGs were

implementing the “LOD methodology” in accordance with the guidelines, while most of them were in the process of adopting the methodology formally by integrating it in their local rulebooks or had already done so.

The LG Coordinators mostly appreciate that through the LOD methodology there is a stronger link between the LG development priorities and the CSO projects that are implemented, that the presence of the CSO representative on the selection committee combined with the objective selection criteria enhances the transparency and fairness of the CSO project selection process, and that the monitoring of CSO project implementation has improved.

The CSOs acknowledged these advantages as well and added that they appreciate the project-based funding mechanism above the small scattered contributions they received from the LG in the past because it enhances their capacity to make a real difference and become more visible in the community.

The discussion about how to deal with the potential conflict of interest of CSO representatives on the project evaluation committee in each LG had a positive side effect as well at local level. During the interviews with LG Coordinators and mayors as well as with CSOs it was mentioned that lengthy discussions were held at local level how to deal with the problem. These discussions helped both parties to realise the importance of resolving the conflict of interest issue on the one hand through enhanced regulation and the importance of Rule of Law, but that on the other hand there will always remain some grey areas that need to be dealt with individually, which proper resolution relies on underlying core governance values like ethics, trust and respect.

Both the LG Coordinators and the CSOs who participated in the project and the survey noticed an improvement in the relationship between the CSOs and the LG. 84% of the CSOs are of the opinion that their relationship with the LG has improved as a result of the ReLOaD project, while 78% of the CSOs notice that the LG is more appreciative of the work that the CSOs are doing for their community after the ReLOaD project.

While cooperation between CSOs and LGs has in general improved, this cooperation has resulted so far in only a few municipalities in the establishment of a more regular and institutionalised dialogue platform between the LGs and CSOs. In most municipalities contact between LG and CSOs remains restricted to ad hoc meetings and to regular citizens’ consultation moments, like the discussion of the annual plan and budget. Based on the positive experiences with the establishment of fora for interaction supported by ReLOaD in Bosnia and Herzegovina, this is certainly a complementary activity that ReLOaD can further support and promote in the next phase.

As a result of the ReLOaD project both LG Coordinators and CSOs noticed a difference in the behaviour, responsiveness and visibility of the CSOs that have participated in the ReLOaD project, which is partly related to the training they have received, but it is to an even larger extent related to the fact that the ReLOaD project through the combination of extra funding that became available and the enhanced link between the CSO projects and the strategic development priorities of the LG, which resulted in more tangible results of the CSO project in their community.

So far approximately 60,000 people benefited from the CSO projects combined, which is already far more than the planned 38,000, while the 2nd round projects have not been completed yet, meaning that the above figure will certainly increase before then end of the project. Also, in terms of the minimum percentage of women benefitting from the CSO projects the ReLOaD project is on track (48 % actual against 30% planned).

The ReLOaD project does not have an exclusive focus or objective on gender mainstreaming on improving the situation of marginalized groups in society and environmental protection, but it has successfully mainstreamed these perspectives in all its activities.

With regard to regional exchange of experiences and increased networking the ReLOaD project is slowly gaining momentum. It has so far organized two regional conferences in which a selection of local and national partners from government and non-government participated and during which initial experiences with regard to transparent CSO funding practices were shared. In addition, a regional platform for knowledge sharing and learning has been established and is operational. As a result, several knowledge products are made available. The dialogue and exchange platform is not yet actively used by its members and requires more moderation.

Sustainability of the ReLOaD project

The ReLOaD project is certainly having an impact on national level discussions and the development of relevant legislation regarding the transparent funding of CSOs by public institutions which enhances the institutional sustainability of the ReLOaD outcomes.

In the three countries/territories that have adopted some form of legislation or regulation regarding the transparent funding of CSOs by government which applies to local governments as well (Kosovo, Montenegro, Serbia), the actual implementation and enforcement of this new regulations takes time and is only progressing slowly. The support offered by ReLOaD is in these cases highly appreciated by the ministries involved. First of all, the support offered by ReLOaD, shows that transparent funding of CSOs by LGs is possible in practice, which is useful to convince other LGs to adhere to the regulations as well. Secondly, the experiences of the LGs that participate in the ReLOaD project are important to understand what the practical bottlenecks and support requirements are in the implementation of the regulations, and thirdly, these initial experiences feed into a revision or update of the regulations and are used to draft countrywide guidelines for LGs on how to apply the regulations.

In the other three countries (North Macedonia, Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina) the need for national level regulations for transparent funding of CSOs by public institutions is acknowledged by the national level partners in the project and they are at different stages of preparing adequate legislation. The ReLOaD experiences stress on the one hand the importance of such legislation and provide on the other hand valuable practical knowledge that could be integrated in these regulations.

83% of the LG Coordinators were of the opinion that their LG would have enough capacity in terms of qualified and sufficient number of staff to continue with the implementation of the LOD methodology. The only area which was mentioned as a concern by the LG Coordinators during the interviews was whether the LG would be able to maintain the same level and intensity of support to and monitoring of project implementation by CSOs, especially since as part of the ReLOaD project a lot of administrative support was provided by the UNDP staff.

Maintaining and gradually increasing the capacities of the CSOs is more problematic, partly because CSOs often have a short life cycle, they experience high staff turnover since they often rely on volunteers who stay in general not very long with the organisation, while new CSOs continue to emerge. Especially in the more remote municipalities, where there are only a few CSOs, the collective capacities gained during the ReLOaD project can easily dwindle as there is limited opportunity for peer learning and the CSO Resources Centres that could provide project cycle management training often do not reach out to these remote places (at least not until now).

The financial sustainability of the project (i.e. the level of financial support to CSOs from LG funds) is at local level often problematic especially in small municipalities with LGs that have a very limited or no budget for CSO project implementation and especially in countries like Albania where this practice of LG funding to CSOs is only gradually emerging and usually limited to the few largest LGs.

Recommendations for the next phase

The first phase of the ReLOaD project was a pilot phase, to assess whether the approach to strengthening Local Democracy and its methodology to enhance LG financing mechanisms for CSO support would be relevant and could be successfully implemented in the five additional countries in the Western Balkans. As the ReLOaD project comes to the end of the first phase, based on the evidence provided and the feedback received from almost 200 direct stakeholders in the project that were interviewed as part of this evaluation, the evaluation concludes that this pilot phase has indeed been successful.

There is in all participating countries/territories both at local and national level sufficient demand for improving transparent funding mechanisms as well as cooperation between CSOs and LGs. In all countries, a gradual decentralisation of service provision is taking place. With the transfer of responsibilities and functions to lower level government institutions, which is often not complemented by a comparable transfer of capacities and funding, LGs increasingly realise that they cannot fulfil their mandates on their own, especially in the socio-economic sector and therefore need to incorporate civil society actively and utilise their unique complementary abilities. CSOs on the other hand require a diversification of funding sources and look for opportunities that create more long-term stability and predictability in funding.

In this setting, the basic concept of the ReLOaD project to improve LG-CSO cooperation through the introduction of transparent funding mechanisms is a practical and effective response to these needs. The capacity development support provided by the project to both LGs and CSOs in the participating municipalities has been responsive, intensive and tailor-made. Despite the delay in the release of grants to CSOs during the first round of CSO project implementation that was caused by the need to resolve the potential conflict of interest of CSO members on the evaluation committees, the project is well on track to achieve its outputs and outcomes and thus its objectives of this first phase.

In summary, the relevance of and the demand for the ReLOaD project is in all six countries/territories high, its approach is effective though labour intensive, and the project management is able to deliver on its intended outputs and outcomes within the budget available, which is sufficient justification for granting the project a second phase in all six countries/territories.

For the second phase, it is recommended to:

1. **Draft country specific programmes with exit strategies.** During the coming months, the project should define more country specific ReLOaD project objectives and outputs (and related activities and budgets) while retaining its overarching regional perspective and framework and of course its basic unique approach. A good starting point for drafting a more country specific plan will be to define an exit strategy for the project by addressing the question what would be the ideal exit point for the ReLOaD project in each country/territory and how to achieve that in the most effective and efficient way? Analysing the most important differentiating factor, which is the existence of a legal framework for financing CSOs by (local) governments, two groups of countries exist: those with and those without a regulatory framework, which should determine the focus of the ReLOaD project in each of the countries in the next phase.
2. **Include strategies for upscaling of the number of municipalities in the 2nd phase of the project.** The geographical coverage of the project, i.e. the number of participating LGs per country/territory, could be substantially increased in the next phase of the project if it could expand its technical assistance

and reduce the budget for sub-grants. The report presents several strategies that could be considered by the project.

3. **More focus on youth projects.** The ReLOaD project has over the past few years gained relevant experience working with youth organisations and projects focused on youth participation and has through its approach (non-descriptive, stimulating initiative, etc.) proven to be attractive for youth to be involved in. Given the fact that in all countries/territories youth unemployment and youth migration to bigger cities and to the EU is of great concern especially in the smaller more remote municipalities, the ReLOaD project is well positioned to address some of the related issues in a very practical manner.
4. **Strengthen the regional component of the ReLOaD project.** The regional component of the project has remained rather underdeveloped during the first phase of the ReLOaD project and should receive more attention during its second phase especially now that more and more relevant experiences regarding the utilisation of the LOD methodology and related to the content and process of project implementation by CSOs. The online knowledge platform has been established and is operational, but it will require active moderation of the participants and practitioners and will require certainly in its initial stage a part time moderator to initiate discussions and exchange of experiences.
5. **Participation of CSOs on the evaluation committees.** Local CSO presence on the evaluation committees is in this process critical for the success of the approach and the long-term sustainability of the outcomes of the project. The process of learning to cooperate with each other and be mutually accountable to each other is in this regard as important as the actual outcome of the evaluation process. In order to limit the risk but to retain CSO representation on the evaluation committee, this evaluation recommends that the CSOs select among themselves a CSO representative on the evaluation committee only after the proposals for a Call for Proposals have been submitted from the CSO who has not submitted a proposal. Of course, in some IPA beneficiaries (e.g. Montenegro) there is a legal framework prescribing the composition and functioning of the local evaluation committees for selection of CSO applications. If so, these provisions should be respected and followed.

In addition to these recommendations, the evaluation listed several lessons learnt related to:

- The project duration in each municipality;
- The effectiveness of the measures that were made in the LOD methodology during the first phase of the project;
- The improvement of the analyses, identification and selection process of priority areas for CSO involvement in participating municipalities;
- Additional areas for capacity development of CSOs that could be considered by the project or by UNDP;
- Several minor technical improvements of the LOD methodology.

6. Introduction and overview

This report presents the findings of the final project evaluation of the Regional Programme on Local Democracy in the Western Balkans (ReLOaD) project which is implemented by UNDP in six countries/territories in the Western Balkans: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, the Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia. It is financed by the EU, UNDP and Local Governments in the participating Instruments for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) beneficiaries. The project started in February 2017 and will end in January 2020, or in August 2020 if a seven months budget neutral project extension is approved.

The evaluation was commissioned by UNDP to ensure accountability to national stakeholders and its partners, and to serve as a tool for quality assurance and lessons learnt to determine the way forward for the next phase of the project. After introducing the project and the evaluation assignment, the report begins with outlining the methodology used in the evaluation. It continues with presenting the findings and conclusions followed by recommendations and a proposed way forward.

The content of this report is the sole responsibility of the evaluator and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of UNDP, the EU or the authorities in any of the participating IPA beneficiaries. All efforts have been made to ensure that the information presented is correct. Any factual error that may appear is unintended and is the sole responsibility of the evaluator.

7. Description of the intervention being evaluated

7.1 Regional and sector background

The democratisation process in the Western Balkans is a complex and cumbersome process with many factors influencing its outcome. Besides the regular factors related to the politics of state, institution and procedure building, the process is affected by regional specific historical factors like, self-determination issues, the involvement of the international community in the Region, ethnicity, post-communist transition and corruption and organised crime³.

Within the process of establishing strong representative and participatory democracies, CSOs at both national and local level play an important role ensuring that the interests of (groups of) citizens are taken into consideration, that government institutions respect the rule of law and that citizens can actively participate in decision-making processes⁴. Similarly, LGs play a front-line role in service delivery to their populations and are therefore the “face” of government. Their performance will affect to a large extent the trust and confidence that citizen have in their government and of the democratisation process in general.

In most countries/territories in the Western Balkans, governments are in the process of developing policies and related legislation and regulations to improve the overall enabling environment for CSOs to operate and contribute to the development process and to cooperate with government institutions at both national and local level. The implementation of these policies and the actual application of the related regulations often lags behind however as well as the political will to welcome the critical voice of civil society⁵.

An integral part of the EU accession agenda is to promote the inclusion of civil society and further development of participatory democracies in the WB region. All WB IPA beneficiaries face similar challenges related to the lack of collaboration between LGs and civil society. Also, lack of transparency of existing public mechanisms for support of CSOs, mainly at the local level, is perceived as one of the main obstacles for development and functioning of credible civil society. As a result, most countries/territories have developed, or are in the process of developing more transparent public funding mechanisms for CSOs.

While governments are mostly ambivalent in building improved relationships with civil society, the capacities of civil society as a whole and of CSOs in particular to play a strong role in the democratisation process are also limited. Helvetas in its CSO monitor of March 2019 reflecting on the shrinking space for civil society

³ See for a detailed description: Gadjanova, Elena (2006) *The State of Local Democracy in the Western Balkans*.

⁴ DG Enlargement Guidelines for EU support to civil society in enlargement countries, 2014-2020, EC 2013

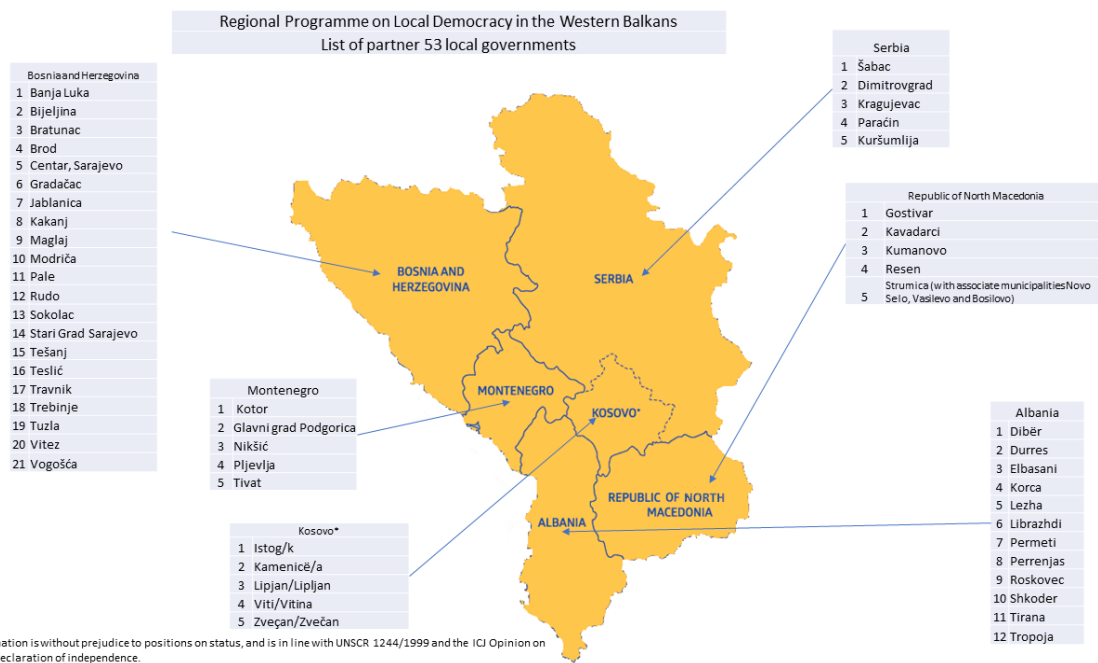
⁵ Spasovska, Biljana (2019) *A star is born... but the region is not shining; enabling environment for Civil Society Development & enlargement package 2019, background analysis*, BCSDN, 2019

across the Western Balkans notes that⁶: “Limited demand by CSOs in claiming their space and poor participation in existing spaces result in little influence on decision-making and democratic processes. The polarized, fragmented, financially unsustainable and under-capacitated CSOs cannot articulate strong demands towards the governments”.

7.2 Description of the intervention

The objective of the ReLOaD project implemented by UNDP and financed by the EU is to strengthen participatory democracies in the Western Balkans by empowering civil society to actively take part in decision making and by stimulating an enabling legal and financial environment for civil society. The specific objective/outcome of the project is to strengthen partnerships between local governments and civil society in the Western Balkans by introducing transparent and project-based funding of CSOs from LG budgets towards greater civic engagement in decision-making and improvement of local service delivery. Its target is to achieve this in 90 LGs (including 50 in Bosnia and Herzegovina from the former LOD project), reaching out to 38,000 citizens in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia (see figure 1).

Figure 1. Map of IPA beneficiaries and participating LGs in the ReLOaD project.



To achieve the above specific objective within the project period, ReLOaD has formulated the following outputs/results⁷:

1. LGs and CSOs have basic understanding on the comprehensive transparent model for funding of CSOs from municipal budgets.
2. A model of transparent and project-based funding of CSOs by LGs is introduced and institutionalized in all participating LGs, and thus promoted and anchored across Western Balkans countries.

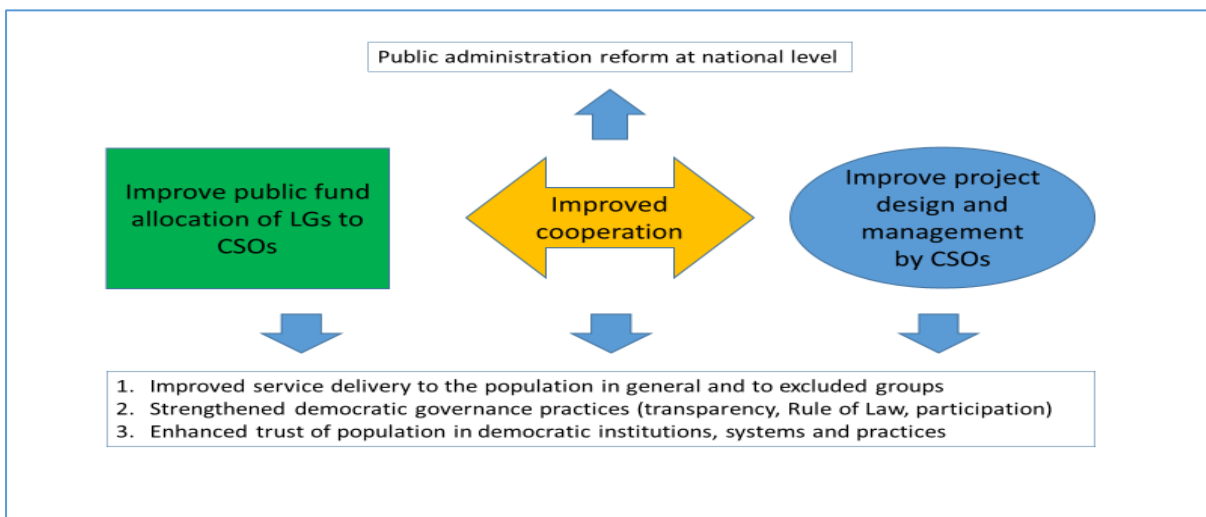
⁶ Helvetas (2019) Helvetas Monitor March 2019 page 1.

⁷ The ReLOaD project uses the term “outputs/results” to describe the tangible and intangible products that result from project activities and the term “specific objective/outcome” to describe the benefits that the project will deliver that contribute to the impact of the project being the higher level strategic goals (objective). The evaluation will use the same terminology.

3. Services delivered by CSOs address the needs of local communities within partner LGs across the Western Balkans countries.
4. The capacity of CSOs and LGs in implementation of municipal grant schemes and delivering of good quality projects is strengthened.
5. Enhanced regional networking and dialogue of civil society and LGs across the Western Balkans countries enable multiplication of good practices.
6. Diversified dialogue and cooperation mechanisms between LGs and CSOs. (specific for Bosnia and Herzegovina).

Main stakeholders in the participating IPA beneficiaries are the national level governments (usually represented by the Ministry in charge of Local Government/Administration), a selected group of local governments, CSOs in the participating municipalities and citizens in these municipalities. The participating LGs were selected in the early stage of the project through a country-wide call of interest and an objective assessment of their capacities by the Board of Partners. Other LGs and CSOs who are not a direct partner in the project can benefit from participating in training activities on request. The ReLOaD provides technical support to a selected group of LGs and by providing technical and financial support to CSOs for the implementation of social services and development projects in these local communities (see figure 2).

Figure 2. Simplified Theory of Change of the ReLOaD project.



The ReLOaD team consists of 2.5 full time regional staff members and 6 teams of 2-5 project officers/associates in each of the countries/territories depending on the size of the portfolio of participating LGs per country/territory who manage the project. These teams provide backstopping support to participating LGs and CSOs and conduct tailor made training. For the more standardized training and mentoring activities consultants are engaged. In each country, UNDP management provides these teams with regular support (HR management, financial control, logistics, etc.)

The implementation of the project and the provision of technical assistance to selected LGs and their local CSOs follows a more or less standardized stepwise approach, which is in practice referred to as “the LOD methodology”⁸, referring to the methodology as it has been developed under the former Reinforcement of Local Democracy Project (LOD) that has been slightly adapted by the project and consists of:

⁸ See for a detailed description of the LOD methodology: LOD methodology for allocation of funds to Civil Society Organisations; practice manual (UNDP, 2013).

1. A selection of participating municipalities through a public call for municipal participation and based on objective selection criteria;
2. The training of relevant staff in each LG in PCM and in the LOD methodology;
3. The participatory identification of strategic local development priorities areas for each LG for CSOs to contribute to;
4. A public call for proposals for CSOs to submit project proposals for funding (including a basic training for interested CSOs);
5. Evaluation of project proposals by a selection committee consisting of LG staff and a CSO representative using objective criteria;
6. Allocation and distribution of funds and project implementation by CSOs (including the training and backstopping of these CSOs by UNDP);
7. Project monitoring by LG staff and an analysis of the effectiveness of the public call.

The project is implemented between February 2017 and January 2020 while a budget neutral extension of seven months has been requested by UNDP, which would extend the project until July 2020. The project has a total budget of € 10,030,000 of which € 8,500,000 is funded by the EU and the remainder by UNDP and the respective participating LGs. 53 LGs and roughly 378 CSOs participate in the project. Of the total budget, roughly 60% (or € 6,085,000) is earmarked for grants for project implementation by CSOs, while the remainder is intended to cover the costs for training, regional activities, salaries for staff and consultants and overhead costs.

8. Evaluation scope and objective

Purpose

In accordance with the Terms of Reference for this evaluation (see annex 1), the purpose of the Project Evaluation is to provide an impartial review of the ReLOaD project in terms of its relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, sustainability, overall performance, management and achievements. The information, findings, lessons learned, and recommendations generated by the evaluation will be used by the Project Board/Board of Partners, UNDP, EU and by the implementing partners to strengthen the remaining Project implementation and inform future programming.

Objective

The evaluation objective is to examine the overall performance of the ReLOaD, its results, inputs and activities, and how the outputs/results delivered added value to LGs and CSOs. In a substantive analysis of the effectiveness of the project approach and feedback from beneficiaries, the evaluation should assess cause and effect relations within the programme, identifying the extent to which the observed changes can be attributed to the ReLOaD. In addition, this evaluation aims to provide forward-looking recommendations to the EU and UNDP in the field of LG-civil society relations and promotion of CSO role in service delivery.

Scope

The evaluation will assess the extent to which the planned specific objective/outcome and outputs/results have been achieved since the beginning of the programme and likelihood for their full achievement by the anticipated end of the programme in July 2020 (based on the Programme Document/Description of the Action and its results framework). The evaluation will look into the overall programme performance and results, covering all six IPA beneficiaries in which the project is implemented.

Specifically, the evaluation reviewed, evaluated and made recommendation regarding the implementation of the ReLOaD programme in 53 partner LGs in six IPA beneficiaries. It addressed critical programme's aspects, such as partnership between CSOs and local authorities and institutionalization of the methodology for transparent and project-based funding of CSOs from LG budget. To the extent possible, it considered the

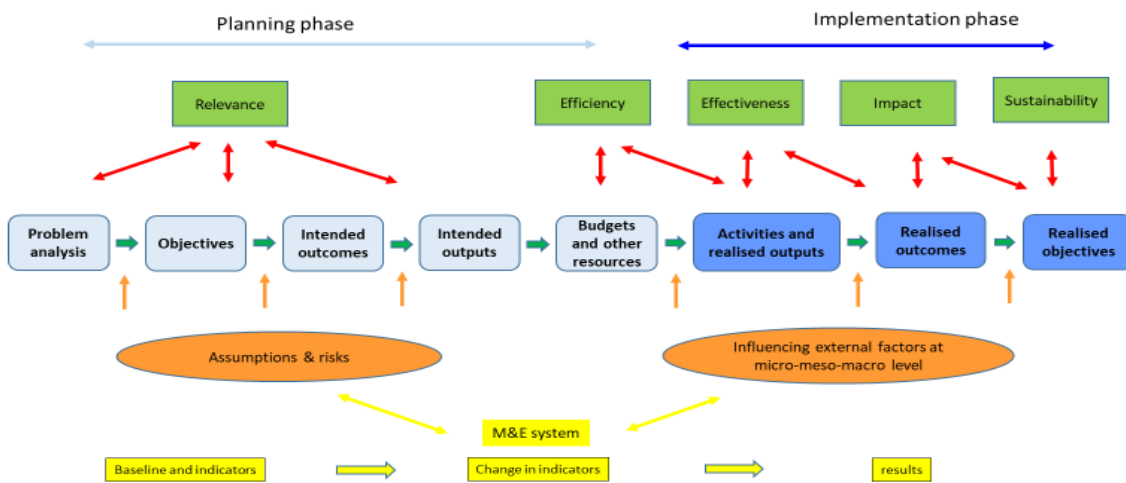
relevance and influence of 200 implemented CSO projects on the individuals and groups within the programme’s localities through an online survey of the programme beneficiaries.

Finally, the evaluation looked into the programme processes, innovations, strategic partnerships and linkages in the regional context, that proved critical in producing the intended outputs/results and the factors that facilitated and/or hindered the progress in achieving the outputs/results, both in terms of the external environment and risks, as well as internal, including: weaknesses in programme design, management, human resource skills, and resources.

9. Evaluation approach and methods

Figure 3 presents the simplified result chain of the ReLOaD project as presented in the original project document, which has been tested during this evaluation using the five standard evaluation criteria used by UNDP, being relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability.

Figure 3. Simplified result chain of the ReLOaD project.



In order to be able to provide a well-informed judgement on each of the five evaluation criteria, the evaluation used the following core questions as guideline while detailed overview of the evaluation questions and methods addressing these questions is provided in the evaluation matrix in Annex 2.

1. **Relevance:** Is the design of the ReLOaD project relevant in the Western Balkans context and adequate to address the identified problems?
2. **Efficiency:** Have the activities of the ReLOaD project been implemented in accordance with the approved Description of Action and have they been completed in the most efficient way? If so, why or if not so, why not?
3. **Effectiveness:** Did the activities that were implemented by the ReLOaD project and its outputs/results contribute to or is it likely that they will during the remainder of the project contribute to:
 - a. The establishment of transparent and project-based funding of civil society organizations (CSOs) from LG budgets;
 - b. The professionalization and responsiveness of both LGs and CSOs?
4. **Impact:** Has, or is it likely that the project will contribute to the democratisation process in the participating countries/territories?

5. **Sustainability:** Are the project outcomes institutionally, organisationally and financially sustainable beyond the duration of the project?

In accordance with the UNDP evaluation guidelines, the evaluation used the following quantitative and qualitative assessment tools to collect and analyse data.⁹

Document review

The evaluation started with a desk review of:

- A review of background documents related to EU and UNDP policies and programmes in the Western Balkans;
- A study of relevant research documents related to the functioning of LG and civil society legislation and performance in each of the participating IPA beneficiaries in general (see Annex 4 List of supporting documents reviewed);
- An analysis of regular project related data and reports from the UNDP Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) system, like Project Progress Reports, Annual Work Plans and Annual Reports, minutes of Project Board and Board of Partner meetings, the initial assessments of funding mechanisms for CSO support by LGs for each country/territory and the related initial assessment reports for each participating LG. In addition, the EU ROM report related to the project was reviewed.¹⁰

Survey

Secondly, the evaluation conducted an online survey among all participating CSOs and LG coordinators. The two questionnaires were designed by the evaluator in close consultation with the regional and country staff of ReLOaD to ensure maximum accuracy and relevance and they were translated in five languages. 199 out of 378 (53%) of all CSOs participating in the project at the time of the evaluation filled out the questionnaire and 46 out of 53 (87%) of the LG coordinators responded (see Annex 6 for survey population characteristics).

Field visits

The evaluation conducted a six week long mission to the Western Balkans region, visiting each of the six IPA beneficiaries for a week, during which the consultant held in-depth interviews with key resource persons at national and local level, visited a selection of randomly selected participating LGs and related CSO for interviews and group meetings and finally, the consultant participated in two regional meetings organised by the ReLOaD project in Tirana.

In-depth interviews

In-depth interviews were held with key stakeholders at three levels; regional, national and local level:

At regional level:

- DG NEAR, Western Balkans Regional Cooperation and Programmes, European Commission (by skype and at the regional Board of Partners meeting)
- UNDP regional project staff and Quality Assurance staff (Sarajevo) and
- Regional staff from the Istanbul Regional Hub (at the regional meeting)

At national level (in each of the six countries/territories and at the two entity levels in Bosnia and Herzegovina) 45 national stakeholders (roughly 7 per country/territory) were interviewed.

- Individual interviews were held with most members of the Board of Partners (including the Civil Society representative);
- Task managers at each EU Delegation;

⁹ UNDP (2019) UNDP evaluation guidelines

¹⁰ NEAR D 05 Project review of the ReLOaD project C-382867 September 2018

- UNDP senior management (Resident Representative or Dep. Resident Representative) and project staff;
- Ministry (or Agency or Department) responsible for LG;
- Ministry (or Agency or Department) responsible for Civil Society regulation and/or coordination;
- The Association of Local Governments;

At local level interviews were held in 17 municipalities (6 in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 3 in Albania and 2 in each of the other four IPA beneficiaries) with:

- Mayors and LG coordinators;
- 47 CSOs that are or have been participating in the project.

In addition, the evaluator visited 12 project sites of CSOs where he interacted with the project staff and several project beneficiaries.

Participation in regional conferences

Finally, the consultant participated in the 2nd regional conference of ReLOaD that took place in Tirana in October 2019. The conference was organised for stakeholders (mainly LG and CSO representatives) to exchange experiences, enhance knowledge development and stimulate regional networking. The consultant also participated in the Project Boars forum organised for all national Board of Partners members (second day of the regional conference in Tirana).

10. Data Analysis

The survey data were partially analysed during the field work and were used as an input into the qualitative interviews in order to triangulate findings, explain trends and identify gaps in information. While the evaluator could only visit 40% of the total number of participating LGs, the online survey provided a broader perspective and confirmed most of the ore in-depth findings in the selected municipalities.

During the Board of Partners conference, the initial findings, conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and validated.

Important cross-cutting issues in the context of this project are: gender mainstreaming, the involvement of ethnic minorities and the involvement of youth in project design and implementation (social inclusion), environmental protection and human rights issues. These cross-cutting issues are integrated in the key questions 1e and 4d in the Evaluation Matrix in Annex 2.

The evaluation used the UNDP gender checklist to assess to what extent the above cross cutting issues have been taken into consideration by the project in:

- project design;
- the identification of activities and workplan;
- stakeholder participation;
- the M&E system (have gender sensitive indicators been developed and monitored).

11. Findings and Conclusions

11.1 Relevance of project intervention

The relevance of the ReLOaD project concerns the extent to which the project addresses national development priorities and local needs and is responsive to the development objectives of UNDP and the EU in the Western Balkans.

A project focussing on the introduction of transparent public funding mechanisms for CSOs at local level in order to enhance civic involvement in local development and to create a more constructive dialogue between LG and CSOs in order to solve practical problems is highly relevant and timely in each of the six participating IPA beneficiaries from a regional, a national and local perspective.

Relevance to the EU policy for the Western Balkans.

Regarding the functioning of civil society in the Western Balkans, the Multi-Country Civil Society Facility and Media Action Document 2014-2015¹¹ recognizes and describes the importance of a vibrant civil society in strengthening the democratisation processes in the Western Balkans. “The enlargement countries face a range of challenges, especially in fields such as the rule of law, corruption, organised crime, the economy and social cohesion. Civil society actors and organisations can make a substantial contribution to addressing many of these through their lobbying, advocacy and oversight activities at national, regional and local level. When it comes to democratic governance and the rule of law and fundamental rights, including freedom of expression & association and minority rights, they can create demand for enhanced transparency, accountability and effectiveness from public institutions and facilitate a greater focus on the needs of citizens in policy-making”.

It also identifies several core bottlenecks that need to be addressed in order for civil society to play that role more effectively:

- The legal environment ensuring the exercise of the freedom of association and expression is formally guaranteed by all countries in the region, but inadequate by-laws and limited practical implementation often jeopardize the actual exercise of the fundamental freedoms.
- The lack of a conducive financial environment is one of the main challenges that civil society are experiencing in the current period of crisis. CSOs are still largely depending on funding by foreign donors. State funding, which could represent an important alternative support, presents problems of accountability and transparency of the distribution mechanisms. As a consequence, CSOs are struggling with insufficient diversification of funds that undermine their sustainability and independence.
- Participatory governance is another dimension which is lacking proper implementation.
- Civil society and media organizations in the Western Balkans are still perceived not completely transparent and accountable to their constituencies.
- In several countries of the region, CSOs do not regularly network with other organizations neither at international nor at national and local level and there is a clear need for support to CSOs coalition-building.

The ReLOaD project in its design and approach addresses most of these issues, with a strong focus on local level. **By focussing on the cooperation between CSOs and LGs and on enhancing their capacities related to CSO project funding and implementation simultaneously, the ReLOaD project is very well positioned to operationalise some of the policy intentions of the EU as reflected in the Guidelines for EU support to civil society in enlargement countries, 2014-2020 by the DG Enlargement¹²**, which recognizes support to civil society as one of the strategic priorities. An empowered civil society is an essential component of any participatory democracy. Although IPA beneficiaries are gradually adopting legislation and strategies more favourable to civil society development, engagement with civil society remains weak. An enabling legal and financial environment should be promoted while also ensuring that the necessary structures and mechanisms are in place for civil society to cooperate effectively with public authorities, including social dialogue.

¹¹ EC (2014) Multi-Country Civil Society Facility and Media Programme 2014-2020.

¹² DG Enlargement (2013) Guidelines for EU support to civil society in enlargement countries, 2014-2020

Within the overall context of the Western Balkans, the unique approach of the ReLOaD project, working with both CSOs and LGs at the same time, supporting the growth of relevant capacities on both sides and emphasizing the importance of cooperation and mutual accountability, has the potential to reduce suspicion between civil society and government, which could contribute to stronger issue based politics at local level and on a higher level of appreciation of the complementary functions of CSO and LGs in the local development process.

By enhancing the capacity of local CSOs to draft project proposals and implement these projects in accordance with the recommendations of the EU in Project Cycle Management (PCM), as well as the EU principles on the evaluation of the project proposals approach, the ReLOaD project complements, in its design, other EU supported activities in the six IPA beneficiaries that focus on strengthening civil society, in particular its grant or sub-grant mechanisms. By providing hands-on support to local CSOs in PCM, it raises their capacities to the minimum level required to participate effectively in these grant mechanisms in future, thus enhancing the outreach of these grant mechanisms to CSOs and municipalities they would otherwise not be able to reach. In addition, the project raises capacities for PCM within the participating LGs, thus enhancing their absorption capacities for the EU pre-accession financial assistance at local level.

Relevance to national level development processes.

In all of the six IPA beneficiaries, the ReLOaD initiative was and still is very relevant in relation to ongoing policy development and implementation as well as timely. Within the overall process of EU accession, all countries/territories either recognise the need for and are in the (early) process of developing relevant legislation (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia) or they are starting to implement, monitor and subsequently revise recently developed legislation regarding transparent (local) government funding of CSOs (Kosovo, Montenegro and Serbia). The objectives of these efforts are all similar: improve public finance management, improve service delivery to citizens and improve cooperation between LGs and CSOs.

In Serbia, Kosovo and Montenegro the ReLOaD project assists in applying new legislation and regulations related to CSO funding by LGs, thus gaining useful practical experiences about capacity gaps on both LG and CS side, and at the same time collecting relevant feedback on the applicability of the new legislation which will be used to adjust and finetune this legislation in the near future. Even though the legislation is in place, without the support of the ReLOaD project, the governments at national and local level would not have enough capacity to implement it effectively.

In the other three countries, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania and North Macedonia, the ReLOaD project is highly relevant by gaining initial experiences with the use of transparent CSO funding mechanisms at local level both in relation to their applicability as well as its potential impact on LG-CSO cooperation, which the national governments want to regulate in the near future and at the same time identifying and addressing capacity gaps of LGs and CSOs and in the national support structures. Annex 5 presents a more detailed description of the relevance of the ReLOaD project per country/territory.

Relevance for UNDP in the Western Balkans.

Even though most Country Programme Documents for the six IPA beneficiaries were drafted before the start of the ReLOaD project covering the period 2015-2019 or 2016-2020, the ReLOaD project is for most country programmes highly relevant for achieving the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) objectives. The ReLOaD project and its approach is in addition very useful and instrumental in localising the SDGs. The project complements some of the other activities that are implemented under the programmatic priorities of strengthening Democratic Governance, improved service delivery and social inclusion. In addition, it has a potential positive impact on some of the other programme priorities as well (like enhanced citizen engagement), partly through the improved cooperation between CSOs and LGs, but also through the

actual realisation of CSO implemented projects in the areas of improved access to services for vulnerable groups, employment generation for youth and women, environmental protection, etc.

The high relevance of the project (for both national government, the EU and UNDP) is mainly related to the fact that ReLOaD does not have an exclusive focus on either enhancing the capacities of CSOs or LGs separately as so many other project do, but on strengthening them simultaneously, while it uses, at the same time, a very practical tool (the LOD methodology) and some funding incentives to stimulate real cooperation and partnership.

Relevance of the ReLOaD project to LGs.

In all participating countries/territories there is an increased realisation that LGs cannot provide all required services to its citizens on their own. As described above, at national level all countries/territories are drafting policies and regulations that aim to improve and facilitate Government- civil society cooperation as well as citizen participation in planning and implementation. At the same time however, LGs that are at the forefront of the actual public service delivery lack the capacity, the experience and the means to bring these policies into practice, while CSOs at the local level also lack the skills to become more actively involved in local development either through service delivery and/or lobby and advocacy. For both parties it is difficult to break through their negative perceptions of mistrust, corruption and competition and explore the potential for cooperation and even co-creation.

Improving the transparency and quality of decision-making processes at the local level regarding the allocation of public funds by the LG is very important for improving more transparent and effective public spending and by doing so for enhancing the trust of citizens in their LG institutions and through that the legitimacy of the institution in general. The allocation of grants to CSOs is one of the most visible forms of spending public funds by the LG and, if it is not done in a transparent manner, might easily lead to (true or false) allegations of mismanagement of public funds or nepotism by decision makers. In addition, a more active involvement of CSOs in service delivery related to the realisation of local development priorities will assist the municipality as a whole to address at least part of the needs of groups of people that are at present not reached through its regular service provision mechanisms because the LGs lack the capacities or resources to do so. By combining their social engagement and volunteer labour CSOs are especially in the area of social service delivery far better equipped to provide services effectively and efficiently. Finally, by addressing very practical local needs and problems in a collective manner LGs and CSOs start working together and get used to cooperation and collective decision making, thus making the decision-making process more inclusive and transparent.

In addition to improving the capacities of CSOs for social service delivery, the learning by doing approach adopted by the ReLOaD project will help them to become confident as well and better understand the way in which LGs operate. A stronger civil society enhances social accountability and citizen participation in decision-making processes and is an essential component of any participatory democracy. Potentially, by promoting criteria based decision-making process using objective criteria, the ReLOaD project might even contribute to de-politicising local governance, which is highly relevant in the Western Balkans context.

Relevance for the ultimate target group of the ReLOaD project.

By addressing the needs of the more vulnerable or neglected groups in society, through the selection process of projects implemented by CSOs at the municipal level, the ReLOaD project is highly relevant for these groups in society, since their needs are in general insufficiently addressed through the regular government mechanisms for service provision. Not only are their needs or concerns directly addressed through the work of local CSOs, but through the ReLOaD project their needs, but also the potentials of these groups to contribute to society, become more visible at the local level, which creates an opportunity for CSOs to lobby for more structural solutions to their specific needs with the LG in future.

Conclusion:

In conclusion one can say that even though the dynamics related to local governance and civil society development are different in each of the six participating countries/territories, the approach of the ReLOaD project to enhance LG-CSO cooperation and local level service delivery by improving the mechanisms of transparent funding of CSOs by LGs using a combination of financial incentives, of capacity development and a learning by doing type of process approach is highly relevant in all countries/territories.

11.2 Efficiency of project implementation

In this paragraph, the evaluation addresses the second core question: Have the activities of the ReLOaD project been implemented in accordance with the approved Description of Action and have they been completed in the most efficient way?

Overview of major activities implemented

The ReLOaD project started in February 2017, with a four months inception phase during which the project management structure was established. The Project Board and Board of Partners and Advisory Groups were established in each country/territory, the project staff members in each of the participating countries/territories were recruited, existing public funding mechanisms for CSOs by LGs were assessed and where necessary, the LOD methodology was adapted to meet local legal requirements.

During the remainder of 2017, project activities were implemented in accordance with the work plan, with some minor delays due to elections and changes in government in some of the countries/territories. An open Call for Interest for LGs to participate in the project was conducted in every country/territory except for North Macedonia where LGs were selected by the Board of Partners to ensure that those LGs who needed the assistance most were included in the project. In total, 115 out of 490 or almost one-third of all LGs in the six IPA beneficiaries showed interest in the project, despite the fact that each LG had to provide approximately € 20,000 in co-funding, which could be problematic, certainly for LGs in small municipalities without a dedicated CSO budget. Based on pre-defined objective criteria, a total number of 53 LGs were selected to participate in ReLOaD (12 in Albania, 21 in Bosnia and Herzegovina and five LGs in each of the remaining partner countries/territories, namely Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia). In all countries/territories a proper mix between urban and rural and larger and smaller municipalities was achieved. A detailed analysis of existing funding mechanisms and of training needs in each of the participating LGs was conducted and the training of relevant LG staff was implemented. In parallel, trainings for CSOs were organized as a supporting activity for grassroots' CSOs to prepare project proposals and compete in transparent LG Calls for Proposals by CSOs.

Between April and August 2018, the project did not approve any CSO projects due to the fact that the EC had temporarily put the release of funds to CSOs on hold due to a perceived conflict of interest of CSOs who participated in the local project evaluation committees (see below). After the issue was resolved, the project resumed all its activities, while in several locations the Call for Proposals and the related training of CSOs was repeated. At the end of the year 185 CSO project proposals were approved and implementation had started and 284 monitoring visits of these projects by UNDP and LG staff had been conducted. In addition, a regional conference was organized in September 2018 in North Macedonia and a regional knowledge sharing platform was established to enable exchange of experience of the cooperation between LGs and CSOs among policy makers, local authorities and other stakeholders across the Western Balkans. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, ReLOaD provided support to improvement of civic engagement, involvement of municipal councils' members in better understanding and improvement of transparent information sharing related to CSO funding on municipal web sites.

At the time of the evaluation (end of September 2019) all projects from the first Call for Proposals (including the repeated Call for Proposals) have been completed, while the second Call for Proposals has been completed in all 53 LGs. In total, 419 projects have been approved for the total amount of € 5,918,223 or an average of € 14,124 per project. 41 CSOs applied successfully in both the first and second round of proposals. Most important activities for the remaining months of the project are:

- Assistance to the implementation and monitoring of the 2nd round CSO projects and
- Monitoring the independent Call for Proposals by the LGs using their own budget.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the project has in addition to its regular activities piloted the establishment of “fora for civic initiatives” to enhance civic participation in local decision-making process in six municipalities with the aim to create a platform for communication and dialogue between LG and civil society and ultimately to enhance cooperation between LG and civil society and to encourage civic activism and voluntarism. These fora could play an important role in the selection of development priority areas for CSO support by the LG. Members of the forum are representatives of CSOs, LGs, municipality/city council, business sectors, public institutions, etc.

In order to motivate these fora and to make their initial focus very practical and progress oriented, each of the fora selected and discussed three to four practical problems and remedies that would improve the quality of life in their municipality. These were presented to the population, who could vote for their preferred initiative. The winning initiatives were implemented using a combination of ReLOaD and LG funds. In Brod, citizens voted for the upgrading of a children’s playground, adapted to the needs of children with disabilities, in Bijeljina for an open-air fitness gym in the city park and in Rudo for tree planting along a boulevard. In all initiatives, citizens volunteered to implement them. In Sarajevo, a hackathon was organised for youth to find new more creative ideas how IT tools (information technologies) could be used to improve communication between the LG and its citizens.

Deviations from the original plan

In 2018, the project continued with the preparations for the first Call for Proposals and even conducted a few calls already when it encountered a serious delay. The delay occurred after the European Commission (EC) had raised an issue concerning the project’s methodological approach related to a potential perceived conflict of interest stemming from the participation of CSO representative(s) in the project evaluation commissions in each LG.

Regarding the representation of the CSOs on the evaluation committee in each municipality which assesses and approves the project proposals that have been submitted by CSOs in response to the call for proposals, the LOD methodology has included in its guidelines the following clause¹³: “Civil society representative in the Evaluation Commission must have an alternate representative. The purpose of an alternate representative is to participate in the evaluation of those projects that are developed by the regular CSO representative in the commission. For example, if a civil society organization applied to the public call and if a member of that organization is at the same time a member of the Evaluation Commission, that project proposal will be evaluated by the alternate representative to avoid a conflict of interest. In all other cases, an evaluation commission member who has a conflict of interest is exempt from the evaluation of that particular project proposal. At the beginning of the commission’s work, each member signs a declaration of impartiality and confidentiality, stating that he/she will report all possible conflicts of interest during the evaluation of proposals”.

¹³ See for a detailed description: UNDP (2013) LOD Methodology for allocation of funds to civil society organisations; practical manual page 13.

Even though the above guidelines were fully adhered to in all participating LGs and although the EC did not consider that conflicts of interest had affected the outcome of the public calls for CSOs, the EC wanted stronger measures to ensure that the methodology applied could not even invite such suspicions.

In order to resolve the issue, the EC put a temporary hold on the implementation of the grant scheme which lasted from April until October 2018 when the issue was resolved. While some activities could continue during that period, most of the planned activities regarding CSO project assessment, contracting and implementation came to a standstill.

After lengthy discussions UNDP and the EC agreed that CSO participation in the work of evaluation commissions could continue under the following conditions:

- A local CSO can participate as a voting member without possibility to apply in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Serbia;
- One (national) CSO representative can participate as a voting member in all five partner LGs, also without possibility to apply in Kosovo;
- A local CSO as a non-voting member/observer without possibility to apply in North Macedonia.

Due to the subsequent delay in CSO project implementation, the project will request for a seven months budget neutral project extension. Since all operational costs of the project will continue for an extra seven months as well, the project management agreed with the EC that as a consequence the planned number of six regional conferences/activities will have to be reduced to three only.

Quality of main project activities

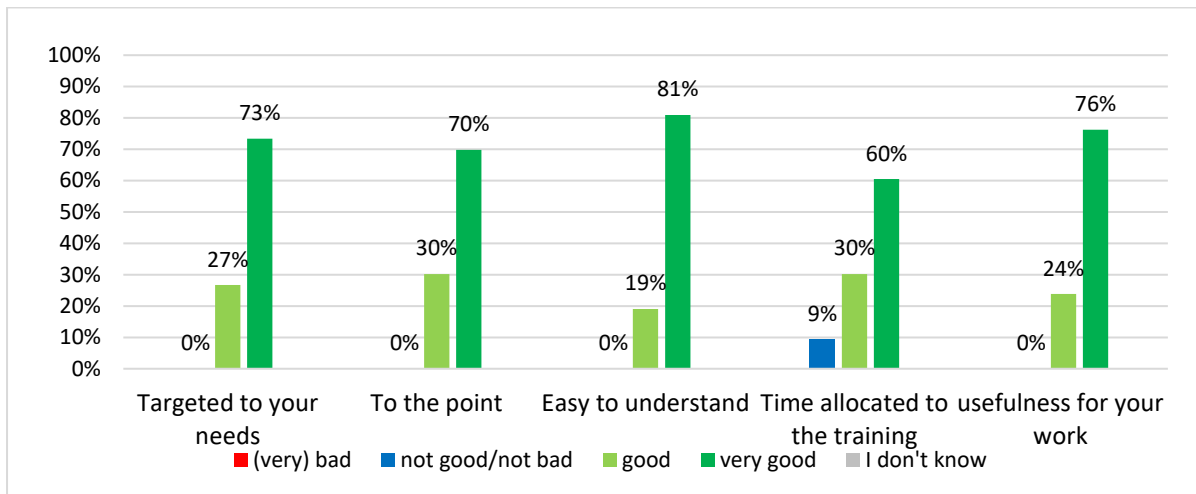
Looking at the quality of the implementation of its activities one may conclude from the project M&E system, from both surveys and from the interviews that were held as part of the evaluation that the ReLOaD project provided in general high-quality training and support services.

The surveys addressed several important aspects of the overall performance of the ReLOaD project. See for characteristics of the survey population Annex 6.

Training provided by ReLOaD

Regarding the quality of the training provided or organised by the ReLOaD project, both the LG Coordinators and the CSOs perceived the quality of these trainings in general to be good to very good (see figures 4 to 7 below). Figure 4 shows the satisfaction levels of the LG Coordinators with the overall training offered by the project, which is very high. Only on the time allocated to the training the satisfaction is slightly lower.

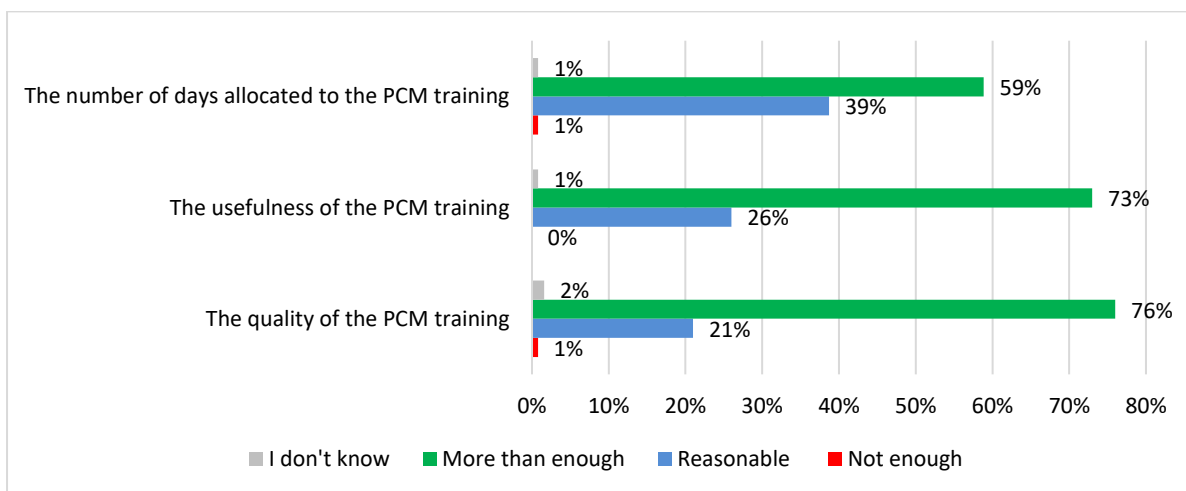
Figure 4. Perception of the quality of the training offered by the ReLOaD project by the LG Coordinators (N = 45).



Source: LG Coordinator survey, September 2019.

73% of the responding CSOs participated in the PCM training offered by the ReLOaD project (either the respondent her/himself or another member of the CSO). Of the 146 CSO respondents who participated in the training, roughly three out of four respondents rated the quality and usefulness of the training to be “good”, while the remainder rated it as “reasonable” (see figure 5). Regarding the length of the training, 59% of the respondents mentioned that it was more than enough, while 40% mentioned that it was reasonable. Note that there was no significant difference between the respondents who participated in the two-day training and those who participated in the three-day training regarding the adequacy of the length of the training.

Figure 5. Assessment of the quality of the PCM training by CSOs who participated in the training (N = 146).



Source: CSO survey, September 2019.

During the in-depth interviews with CSO representatives, they confirmed the importance and quality of the training, especially in combination with joint mentoring sessions and the support and feedback they received from the UNDP staff during proposal drafting and project implementation. 77% of the CSOs participated in

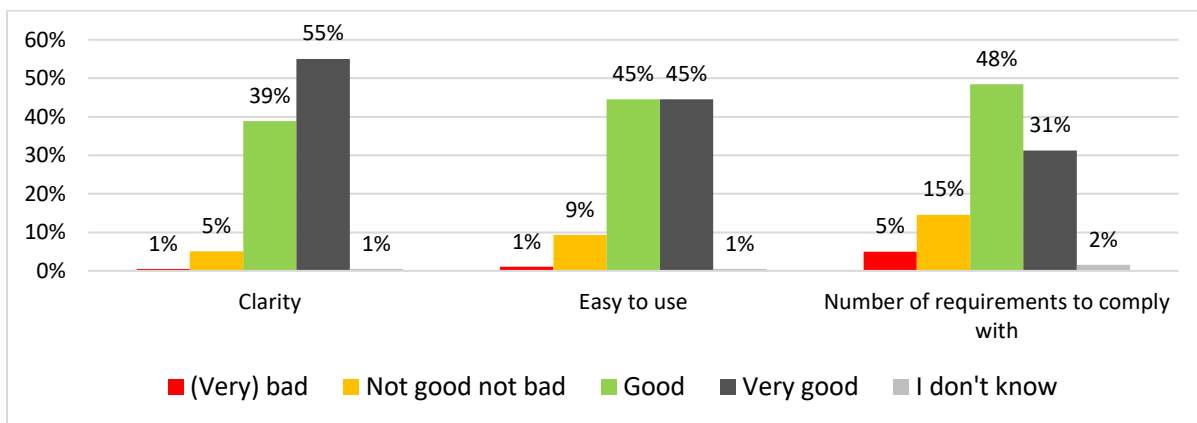
the joint mentoring sessions and 95 % found them highly relevant and useful. Many interviewees mentioned spontaneously how useful these sessions were to complete their application successfully.

78% of the CSOs that participated in the survey participated in the “open days” that were organised jointly by the LGs and ReLOaD in each municipality to explain the content of the project and the application procedure to all interested CSOs. The open days were widely announced and 97% of the CSOs who participated in these open days found the content very useful and complete while it triggered them to participate in the project.

Regarding the quality of the Guidelines for CSOs to apply for the project, most of the respondents found them complete, useful and easy to understand (see figure 6). Only with regard to the number of requirements to comply with (like the submission of supporting documents) the CSOs were less satisfied. During the interviews, most CSOs confirmed that the number of requirements to comply with was quite substantial but most of them understood that this was necessary. Since the project is dealing with a large diversity of CSOs in terms of experience with project applications, the requirements were straightforward for the more experienced CSOs, while quite complicated for the less experienced ones.

Since the project offered the possibility of group mentoring and the project staff functioned as a kind of “help-desk” during the application period, it was able to respond well to the individual needs of the CSOs, which was highly appreciated. Most of the CSOs who had finished their project already mentioned that once they had prepared a comprehensive project proposal and budget it helped them a lot during the project implementation and reporting process as well. In addition, they mentioned that it helps them to prepare good quality project proposals for other donors in future. Various CSOs mentioned that they would have appreciated more individual mentoring to address and resolve of their specific questions. Several others who did not participate in the mentoring sessions that were offered before submitting their proposed project mentioned that they did not do so as they were afraid that other CSOs might “steal” their ideas.

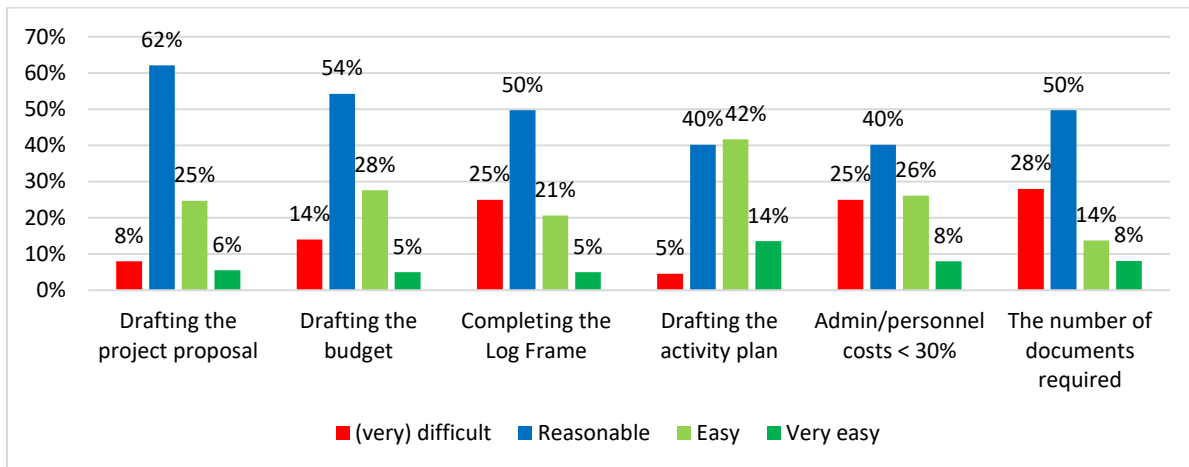
Figure 6. Quality of the project application guidelines as perceived by the CSOs participating in the ReLOaD project (N = 199).



Source: CSO survey, September 2019.

Relatively seen, the most difficult requirements for the CSOs to comply with were the completion of the logframe (for 25% of the CSOs difficult), keeping the administration and personnel costs below 30% of the total budget (for 25% of the CSOs difficult) and the number of supporting document required (for 28% of the CSO difficult) (see figure 7). Some of the CSOs requested for an online application process, which would avoid a lot of paperwork and copying.

Figure 7. Most challenging requirement of the project application process according to CSOs participating in the ReLOaD project (N = 199).

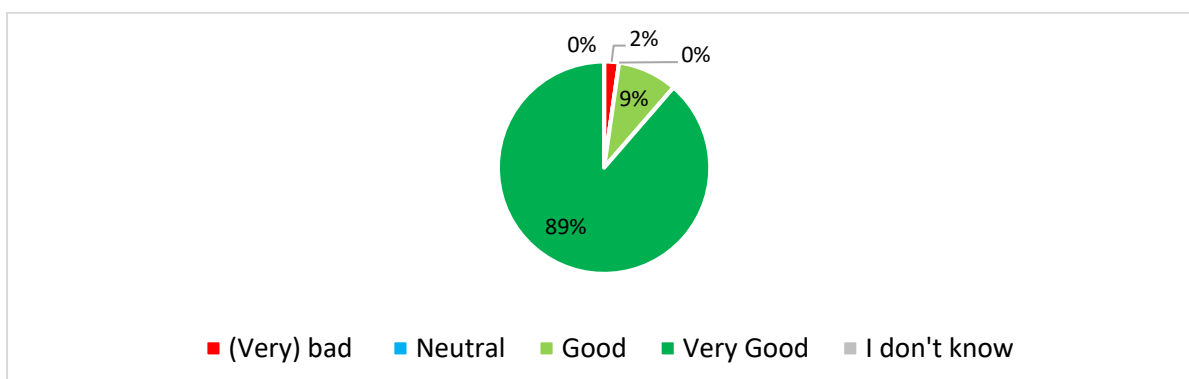


Source: CSO survey, September 2019.

The ReLOaD project extended the amount of time to prepare and submit a project proposal for CSOs from 4 weeks in the 1st Call for Proposals to 6 weeks in the 2nd Call for Proposals. From the 120 CSO respondents who had 4 weeks to submit a proposal, 87% mentioned that the time was enough or more than enough, while 91% of the 66 CSOs that had 6 week to submit a proposal mentioned that the time was enough or more than enough, i.e. there is no significant difference. Note that those CSOs who participated in the 2nd Call had in addition mentoring assistance which made the drafting easier. During the interviews, most CSOs mentioned that they completed the bulk of the work for completing the proposal in the last week before the deadline anyhow. If the mentoring continues and is available in that last week, possibly combined by a phasing of the proposal drafting in 2-3 blocks over the whole period, 4 weeks should be enough for the next phase.

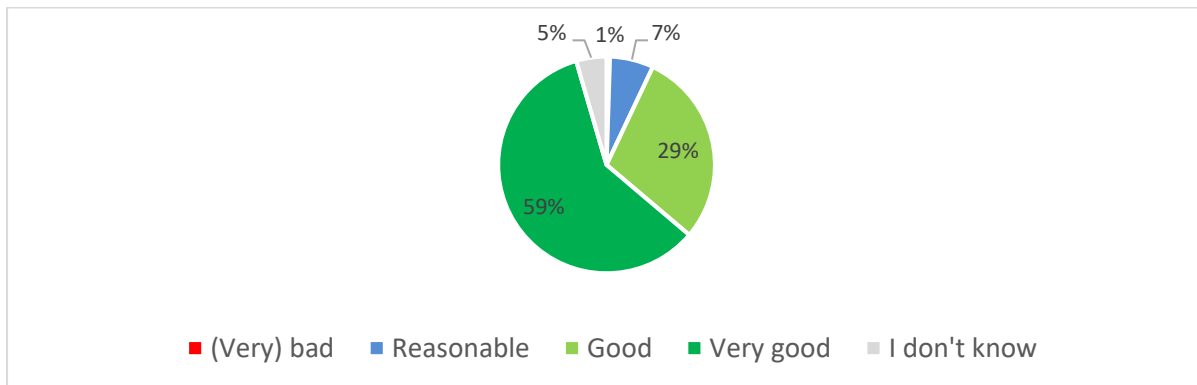
The overall performance of the ReLOaD project in terms of the appreciation of the support provided to the LGs and CSOs throughout the process is presented in the figures 8 and 9 and is in general perceived to be good or very good (CSO 98% and LG Coordinators 88%) with no significant differences between countries/territories.

Figure 8. Quality of the overall UNDP support as perceived by the LG Coordinators (N=44).



Source: LG Coordinators survey, September 2019.

Figure 9. Quality of overall UNDP support as perceived by the CSOs participating in the ReLOaD project (N=199).



Source: CSO survey, September 2019.

The appreciation of the quality of the technical support provided by UNDP was confirmed during the in-depth interviews with both LG Coordinators and CSOs. The UNDP staff was highly responsive to their request for extra information or on the spot assistance, searching together with the partners for tailor made solutions to their problems.

ReLOaD project management

Managing a regional programme across six countries/territories is a complex task as one has to deal with double accountability issues as staff is primarily accountable to in country line management, but with regard to the implementation of the project to the regional project manager, while the implementation arrangements might be slightly different per country. From the country level staff and UNDP country management the evaluator learned that relative authorities are respected from both sides, that the project management maintains an open and active communication style, keeping country management well informed and respects the authority of the country management related to HR matters.

The Project Board and the Board of Partners in each country/territory play an active role in the management of the project and in the strategic planning of the project, like the selection process of participating municipalities and the adjustment of the LOD methodology to the country context. The Project Board and the Board of Partners were properly involved by the project management in all important decision-making processes that were relevant to their respective mandates. Their active involvement enhances local ownership and finetuning the project activities with those of other key actors in LG and civil society coordination.

The Advisory Groups have on the other hand been less effective in almost every country/territory. They have been established to receive feedback and advise from renown civil society members, but it proved in practice difficult to keep the members interested in the general progress of the project and as a result, both the UNDP teams and the Advisory Group members themselves questioned the added value of the structure. Instead of having regular scheduled meetings, it would be more useful to consult a few well-informed civil society members at strategic moments when their input could make a difference, like e.g. the design of the country specific second phase of the project.

The project management adhered to UNDP's internal quality assurance standards throughout the ReLOaD project implementation regarding procurement and contracting. Progress and financial reporting both at regional and country level by the ReLOaD project to UNDP management and to the EU was timely and of

good quality and in line with the specific EU requirements. The project is actively monitoring and managing its risks.

Monitoring of the ReLOaD outputs and activities as well as monitoring progress made by all LGs and CSO partners is of high quality and easily accessible. The data collected are sufficient for project management and for meeting its M&E requirements. The indicators used are however mainly quantitative and lack a qualitative dimension. E.g. Output 4.1 “the number of CSOs in WB with improved capacities for better service delivery is measured through training participants list and action reports but lacks a description and measurement of what “improved capacities” are. Some of these qualitative data are available (e.g. intake and exit questionnaires of trainings, or the percentage of rejected CSO project proposals which is an indicator for the quality of the proposals and therefore the ability and capacity of the CSOs) but are not (yet) integrated into its M&E system. The project management is aware of this but lacks an M&E expert to further enhance the M&E system and make it more useful for knowledge management and development as well.

The ReLOaD project has well designed and effective visibility and communication strategy to promote the ReLOaD project, its funding partner and the multitude of CSO projects at national and local level. It actively assists its participating CSOs with the development of promotional material. As part of the strategy, the project has produced factsheets, newsletters, local and national press releases and events, human interest stories, video recordings of events and CSO projects and articles on various web sites and in newspapers, etc. As a result, ReLOaD and the LOD methodology are known to many people outside the project context at both local and national level.

The ReLOaD project teams consist of the right calibre of staff, who are highly dedicated and well informed and maintain a high level of internal communication. Given the total workload, the intensity of the support provided to the participating LGs and CSOs, and the country level coordination and project management responsibilities, the country teams (with two staff members in the four countries/territories with 5 participating LGs, 3 staff members in Albania with 12 participating LGs and 5.5 in Bosnia and Herzegovina for 21 LGs) are over-stretched to carry out all required activities, especially over the last few months when 2nd round of Calls for Proposals overlaps with the monitoring of the implementation of the 1st round projects. If the volume of work for the next phase remains more or less the same, it is recommended to add at least one additional staff member to each country team. If the programme in each country becomes more country-specific in the next phase as is suggested, the evaluation recommends adding a local governance specialist/governance officer to each team. In addition, the regional team would require an extension to the team as well in the form of an M&E and knowledge management specialist.

Bringing 360 small CSOs that often have no previous experience in managing externally financed projects and 53 under-capacitated LGs to a level where they can manage projects from both sides in accordance with EU regulations is by definition a labour-intensive exercise.

In terms of number of municipalities and number of CSOs reached, the project was restricted in its outreach by the predefined ratio of 60-40. 60% of the budget was earmarked for sub grants to CSOs for project implementation and the remaining 40% was earmarked for HR costs, training, operational costs, regional meetings, consultants, overhead, etc.

Looking at the workload per staff member in the project, which has been very high over the last two and a half year, they could realistically not have covered more municipalities (with each an average of 8 CSO projects) than at present, if adhering to the same quality standards for their services. Some minor gains could be made by outsourcing some support activities (e.g. basic training, mentoring and project monitoring) or by further standardizing some training modules, which should certainly be explored for the next phase, but a

serious expansion in the number of participating municipalities is only possible by reducing the grant component (see for more details the recommendations).

The fact that the implementing LGs contributed part of the resources (both staff time as well as their monetary resources) to the implementation of the ReLOaD project, combined with the high level of local ownership and commitment of these partners made it possible for ReLOaD to do more with its limited resources and therefore contribute to a high level of efficiency as well. Similarly, the competitive selection process of both LGs and CSO projects also contributed to an efficient use of the project funds earmarked for CSO project implementation.

While it is important to ensure that the limited resources available (both funds as well as manpower) are utilised in the most efficient manner, striving for maximum efficiency in the short term should in these type of projects that aim to achieve institutional reform and improved governance always be balanced with the objective of achieving maximum effectiveness in the long term. Accepting that the pace of project implementation is defined by the local partners in order to achieve maximum local ownership and internalisation of the awareness of the need for institutional change might not be the most cost effective way to make use of e.g. staff resources, but it will certainly contribute to the optimal effectiveness of the project in the long term and increase of sustainability of the LOD methodology. Weighing these considerations, one can say that the ReLOaD project has done well in achieving a good balance between efficiency and effectiveness.

The municipal co-funding mechanism to supplement the ReLOaD budget for CSO project with a minimum of 20 % contribution from their own budget has worked well in the participating municipalities and enhanced the local ownership of the ReLOaD project. Some participating municipalities contributed even more to show their commitment to the project. Kakanj in Bosnia and Herzegovina contribute e.g. 50% which is a substantial amount for a small LG. In practice, only in Albania some LGs mentioned they had difficulties raising the funds since it still is not common practice to fund CSOs from the LG budget in Albania.

The evaluator did not meet with non-participating LGs, so it is not possible to say whether the compulsory contribution of 20% has acted as a restricting factor for smaller and more remote LGs to apply for participation in the ReLOaD project.

Internal knowledge management is improving as more and more valuable lessons learned about are integrated into the project approach and the LOD methodology and this will most likely continue to improve through regular reflections on project outcomes, by monitoring the changing project context and by generating higher level lessons learnt from the project.

Conclusion:

If the ReLOaD project is extended with seven months, the project will most likely implement all it planned activities and slightly overachieve on its direct outputs, within its budget limits and more or less in accordance with its predefined budget. While some additional efficiency gains could still be made by outsourcing some of the more standardized support activities (training, mentoring, project monitoring), the project achieves a high level of efficiency in the implementation of its activities. Project management is well tuned and effective in managing a complex regional project in a matrix structure.

11.3 Effectiveness of the ReLOaD project

In the following section the evaluation will take a slightly broader perspective by looking at the effectiveness and impact of the ReLOaD project. The effectiveness is focussing more on the short-term direct changes that

have occurred as a result of the project in behaviour and operations of organisations, while the impact addresses the more indirect and mid-term changes in a wider context of their communities.

Regarding the effectiveness, the evaluation will focus on the questions whether:

the activities that were implemented by the ReLOaD project and its outputs/results contribute to or is it likely that they will during the remainder of the project contribute to:

1. ***The establishment of transparent and project-based funding of CSOs from LG budgets;***
2. ***The professionalization and responsiveness of both LGs and CSOs;***

11.3.1 Project results

In terms of achieving its planned outputs, the ReLOaD project is well on track as presented in table 1 below. At the time of writing, 5 out of 8 outputs have already been achieved (dark green in the table), 2 are not yet achieved but will most likely be achieved before July 2020 (light green), while 1 will not be fully achieved against its original target (orange).

Table 1. ReLOaD result chain. Targets and achievement until 31 August 2019.

	Results chain	Baseline and target (incl. reference year)	Current value August 31, 2019
Specific objective(s): Outcome(s)	To strengthen partnerships between LGs and CSOs in the WB by scaling-up a successful model of transparent and project-based funding of CSOs from LG budgets towards greater civic engagement in decision-making and improvement of local service delivery.	Baseline: 50 LGs, from LOD 1-4 in BiH (2016) Target: 90 LGs (2019) Alb: 10 BiH: 60 (50 + 10 new) Kos: 5 NM: 5 Mon: 5 Ser: 5	Total: 62 Alb 1, BiH 61, Kos 0, NM 0, Mon 0, Ser 0 Number of independent public calls to be published by each partner LG that will take place early 2020.
		Baseline: 0 (2016) Target: total 38,000 citizens (of whom 30% female) (2019) Alb: 5,000, BiH: 20,000, Kos: 3,250 NM 3,250 Mon: 3,250 Ser: 3,250	Total 59,518 citizens (28,827 female or 48 %) Alb 10,681 BiH 30,596 Kos 1,914 NM 4,086 Mon 7,138, Ser 5,103
Outputs	R1. LGs and CSOs have basic understanding on the comprehensive transparent model for funding of CSOs from municipal budgets.	Baseline: N/A (2016) Target: total 240 LGs and CSOs (2019). Alb: 30, BiH: 70 Kos: 20 NM: 40 Mon: 15 Ser: 65	Total: 1681 Alb 386 (61 LGs and 325 CSOs) BiH 813 (114 LGs and 699 CSOs) Kos: 190 (34 LGs and 156 CSOs) Mon: 44 (4 LGs and 40 CSOs) NM: 221 (34 LGs and 187 CSOs) Ser: 27 (16 LGs and 11 CSOs)
	R2. A model of transparent and project-based funding of CSOs by LGs is introduced and institutionalized in all participating LGs, and thus promoted and anchored across WB countries.	Baseline: 37 LGs from LOD 1-4 in BiH (2016). Target: 77 LGs (2019) Alb: 10 BiH: 47 (37 + 10 new) Kos: 5 NM: 5 Mon: 5 Ser: 5	Total: 72 Alb 12 BiH 51, Kos 5 NM 0, Mon 2, Ser 2
	R3. Services delivered by CSOs address the needs of local communities within partner LGs across the WB countries.	Baseline: 290 CSO projects, from LOD 1-4 in BiH (2016) Target: total 490 CSO projects (2019) Alb: 40, BiH: 370 (290 by LOD 1-4, 80 new) Kos: 20 NM: 20 Mon: 20 Ser: 20	Total: 705 Alb 71 BiH 467 (290 from LOD 1-4, 177 new) Kos 42 NM 38 Mon 48, Ser 39
	R4. The capacity of CSOs and LGs in implementation of municipal grant schemes and delivering of good quality projects is strengthened.	Baseline: N/A (2016) Target: 300 CSOs (2019) Alb: 60 BiH: 120 Kos: 30 NM: 30, Mon: 30, Ser: 30 Baseline: 50 37 LGs from LOD 1-4 in BiH Target: total 100 (2019) Alb: 10, BiH: 70, Kos: 5, NM: 5, Mon: 5, Ser: 5	Total: 1,641 Alb: 443, BiH: 373, Kos: 117 NM: 395, Mon: 127 Ser: 186 Total: 102 Alb: 12 BiH: 71 Kos: 5 NM: 5, Mon: 4, Ser: 5

	R 5. Enhanced regional networking and dialogue of civil society and LGs across the WB countries enable multiplication of good practices.	Baseline: N/A (2016) Target (2019): 3 regional meetings (original target was 6) Baseline: N/A (2016) Target (2019): 6 LGs best practice model Baseline: N/A (2016) Target (2019): 300 unique visits to web site/month by the end of the Action Baseline: 1 (2016) (LOD methodology) Target (2019): 7 knowledge products (e.g. methodologies for disbursement of funds to CSOs by LGs; Guidelines for CSOs for implementation of projects, etc.)	Total 1 Total 0 Total 697 (estimate by www.siteworthtraffic.com) Total 63 knowledge products
	R 6. Diversified dialogue and cooperation mechanisms between LGs and CSOs. (specific for BiH)	Baseline: 0 (2016) Target (2019): 5 Baseline: 0 (2016) Target (2018): 1	Total 6 Total 1

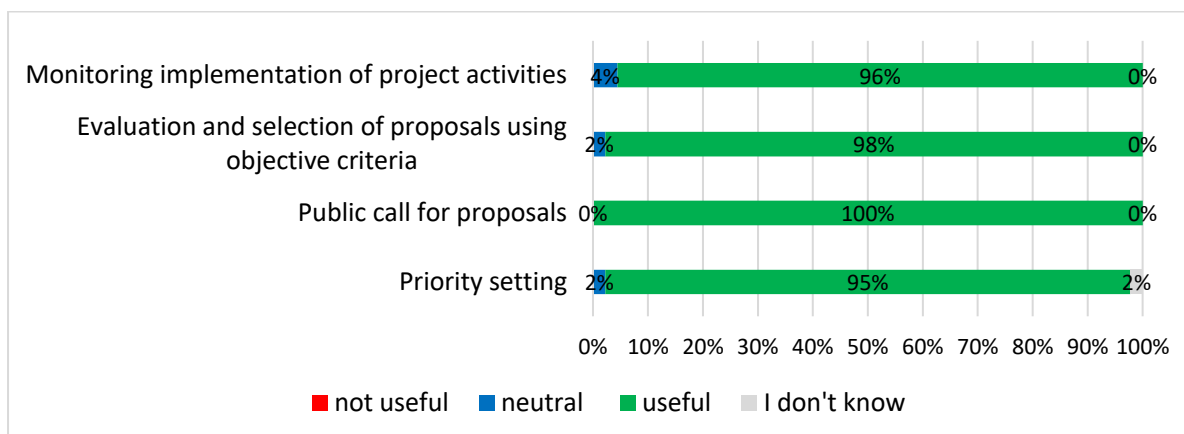
Source: progress monitoring data ReLOaD project.

The underachievement on result area 5 is mainly due to a transfer in budget from regional activities to extra operational costs that the project faces as a result of the delay in CSO project approval and implementation as described above.

Generating unified and transparent mechanisms for the disbursement of municipal funds for CSO project-based activities in accordance with local service needs and identified priorities.

In general, the LG Coordinators were very positive about the usefulness of the different elements of the LOD methodology for the allocation and monitoring of LG funds for CSO project implementation (see figure 10). Out of all 46 LG Coordinators who participated in the survey, only 1 or 2 coordinators were less positive.

Figure 10. Usefulness of the LOD methodology for funds distribution to CSOs according to LG Coordinators (N = 46).



Source: LG Coordinators survey, September 2019.

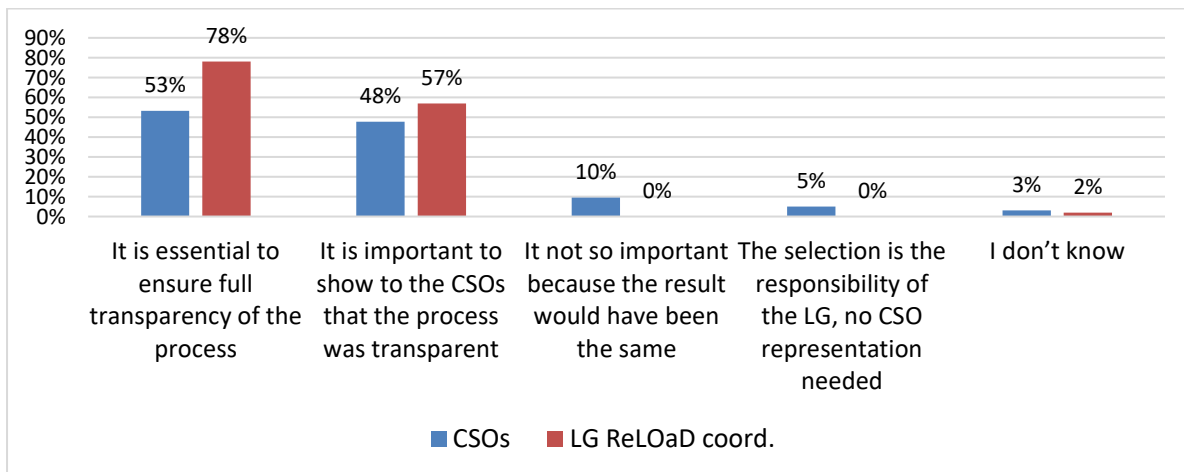
All LGs visited and interviewed had published the overall results of the ReLOaD Calls for Proposals including both the CSO projects that were approved and those that were rejected. In most cases, the CSOs that had applied but were rejected received a written explanation as to why they were rejected in order to be transparent and enable them to improve on their application the next time. In some cases, these explanations were also made public in order to be fully transparent, but in order to respect the privacy of the applicants the evaluator is of the opinion that it is good to present the scores of each candidate publicly but to provide the motivation for the rejection in a letter to the rejected candidate CSO separately.

From the interviews with both CSOs and LG Coordinators (and Mayors) the evaluator learned that the selection process of priority areas for the Calls for Proposals has been treated differently in some of the participating LGs. In all LGs, a pre-selection of priority areas for CSO projects was made based on existing strategic development plans that were available. The quality of these plans differs a lot per LG and per country, including the level of citizen participation in the development of these plans. According to several CSOs, the priority areas were already selected by the LG on forehand and discussed and confirmed during the open day while in other LGs a more open consultative process was followed in which the CSOs could really contribute to the selection of priority areas. Given the fact that the ReLOaD project aims to improve cooperation between LGs and CSOs this is an area where the LOD methodology could be further improved (see recommendations).

96% of the ReLOaD coordinators mentioned that a CSO representative was present as a member of the CSO project evaluation committee for the ReLOaD projects, while only 47% of the CSO mentioned that a CSO representative was present. This low figure could be explained by the confusion around the first round of CSO project selection caused by the temporary stop on the release of grants and the different solutions that were applied afterwards in each country/territory. E.g. in Kosovo a CSO representative was a voting member on the committee but in order to ensure impartiality, the person was not a member of any of the local CSOs and in North Macedonia the CSO representative only had an observer status without voting rights.

Figures 11 shows how important the participation of a CSO representative was according to both CSOs and LG Coordinators to ensure fairness and transparency in the evaluation process. The figures show that the LG Coordinator find the presence of a CSO even more important than the CSOs.

Figure 11. The importance of having a CSO representative on the CSO project evaluation committee to ensure fairness and transparency according to LG Coordinators (N = 46) and CSOs (N = 199) (more than one answer possible).



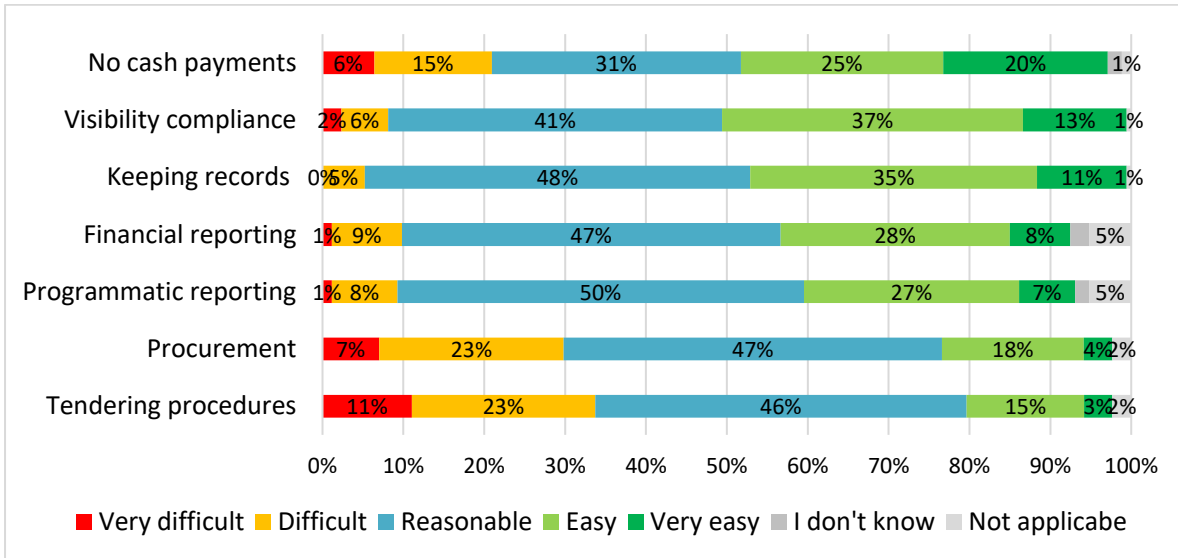
Source: LG Coordinators and CSO survey, September 2019.

The CSOs found the participation of an UNDP representative on the project evaluation committee even more important with 85% stating that it is very important to ensure that the committee adheres to the procedures.

Still, only 71 % of the CSOs were sure that the last allocation process for the ReLOaD project was transparent and fair and only 67 % was sure that the last allocation process by the LG using its own CSO budget using the LOD methodology was fair and transparent, while the remainder of the CSOs mentioned that they did not know.

Regarding project implementation, the CSOs provided the responses as presented in figure 12.

Figure 12. Challenges encountered by the CSOs during ReLOaD project implementation, for those that had started or completed their project (N =199).



Source: CSO survey, September 2019.

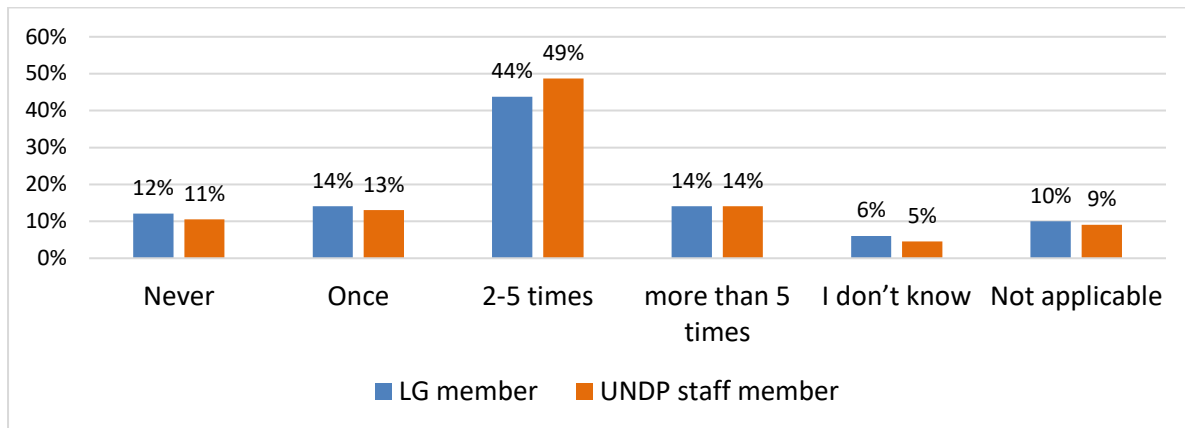
The figure shows that adhering to the tendering and procurement procedures was the most difficult for the CSOs (34% and 30% found it difficult or very difficult respectively) followed by the regulation that no cash payments could be made (21 %).

During the interviews, various CSOs, especially in the smaller municipalities, mentioned that it was for them very problematic to obtain three quotations from different suppliers as suppliers were either not interested to provide them for relatively small orders or that there were simply not enough suppliers. In general, most CSOs found the administrative procedures related to project expenditures too stringent and not proportional to the size of the budget or individual procurements the CSOs were dealing with. While it is on the one hand a good learning experience for CSOs, these procedures could be made a bit simpler without compromising too much on diligence, especially since most LGs will not require (or be able to implement) the same level of checks and balances for projects implemented using the LG budget (see recommendations for suggestions).

On the other hand, most CSOs interviewed mentioned that while implementing their project, they appreciated in hindsight the detailed planning they had done earlier as it helped them to remain focused on the results and to implement the project in the right sequence and within budget limits. It also made their financial and progress reporting much easier. Both CSOs and LG Coordinators agreed that project monitoring and reporting by CSOs has improved substantially as a result of the application of the LOD methodology. Monitoring is on the one hand much easier, since the objectives, the activities, the implementation schedule are already defined on forehand and in detail, while reporting on progress and finance is much simpler as well. In most municipalities/cities that were visited, CSO project monitoring is in general implemented in accordance with the guidelines of the LOD methodology.

Figure 13 shows an overview of the number of monitoring visits to each CSO during the CSO project implementation according to the CSO respondents.

Figure 13. Overview of the number of monitoring visits to each CSO by LG and UNDP staff member during the CSO project implementation period according to the CSO respondents (N = 199).

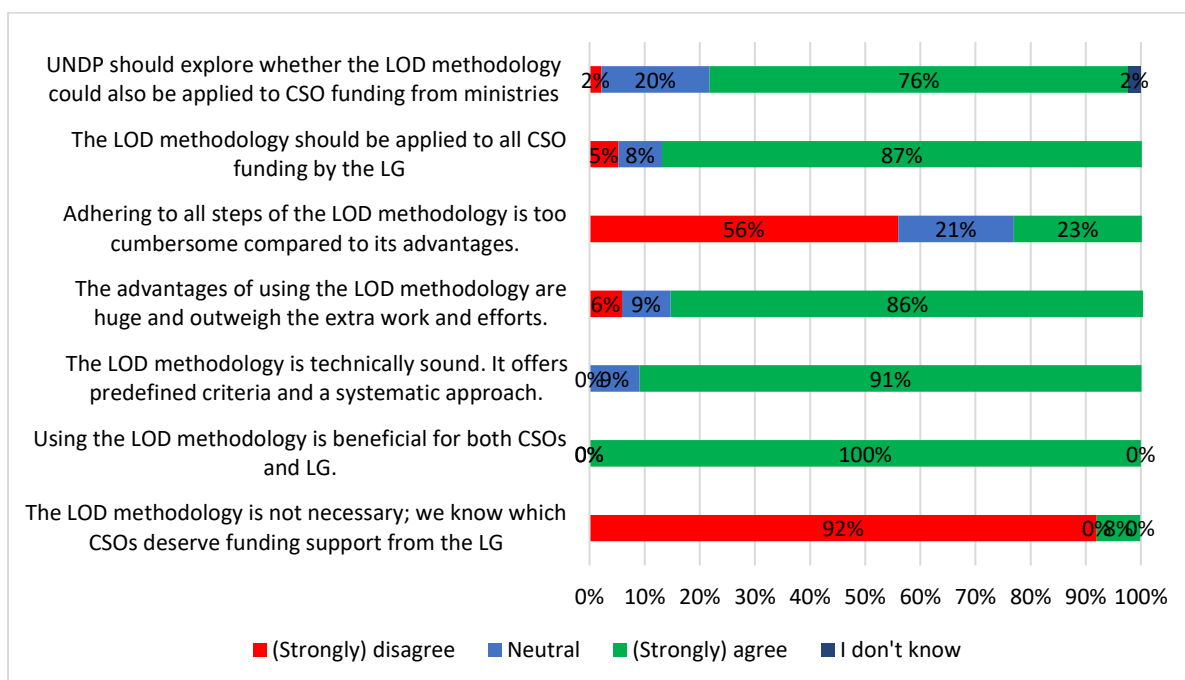


Source: CSO survey, September 2019.

Since the UNDP and LG representative usually visited each project as a team, the number of visits were similar. The average number of visits was 3-4 visits per project for both cycles, meaning a total number of roughly 1500 monitoring visits to the 420 CSO projects implemented as part of the ReLOaD project. These visits were usually not only monitoring visits but mentoring visits as well, and they were highly appreciated by the CSOs as mentioned during the interviews, not only because their practical questions were resolved but also because it showed the CSOs that both UNDP and the LG were interested in their project and showed appreciation for the work done.

Figure 14 presents the overall appreciation of the LG Coordinators working with the LOD methodology by responding to statements about the methodology.

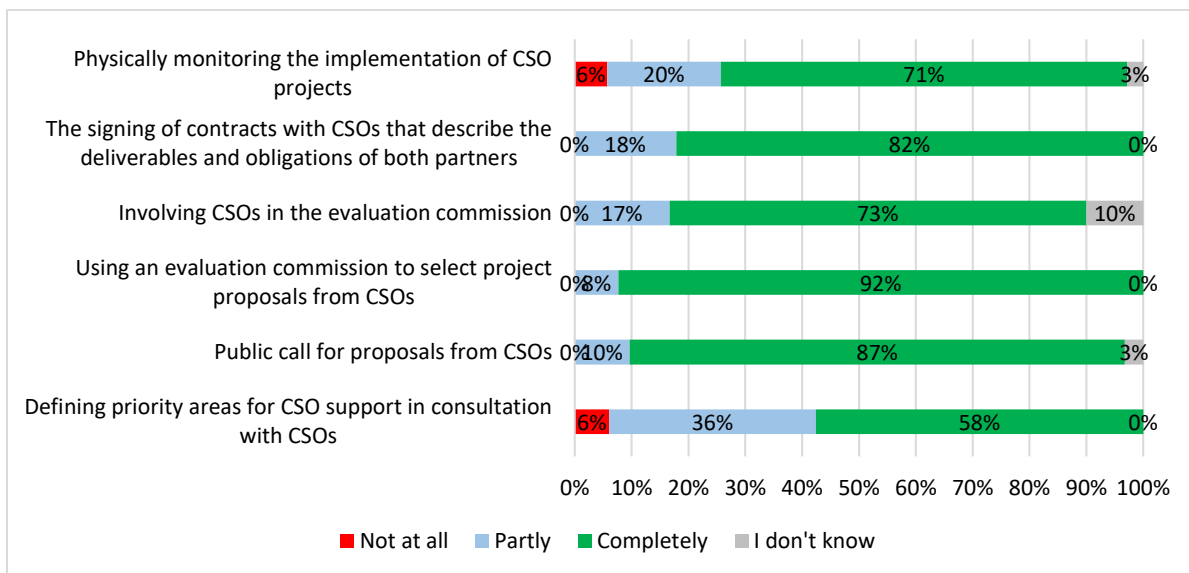
Figure 14. Appreciation of the LOD methodology by LG Coordinators (N = 46).



Source: LG Coordinators survey, September 2019.

The responses show a high level of appreciation of the LOD methodology, but also acknowledge that it requires additional work and capacity to implement it fully, which is often scarce in most LGs. When asked to what extent their LGs were already applying the various elements of the LOD methodology for their own CSO budget allocation process and whether they expected that the LG would implement all steps in future accordingly, the LG Coordinators responded as in presented in figure 15.

Figure 15. Actual use of elements of the LOD methodology by LGs for the allocation of all or part of its CSO budget according to LG Coordinators (N = 45).



Source: LG Coordinators survey, September 2019.

The above figures show that the LOD methodology has already been well integrated into the practice of most LG even though it has not yet been fully endorsed and integrated in the rule book of all of them. 32 out of the 53 LGs have fully endorsed the methodology at the time of the evaluation, which includes the five participating LGs in Kosovo that do not have to approve the methodology individually since the methodology has already been integrated into the overall LG financial management regulations. Similarly, in Montenegro the LOD methodology is already embodied in national legislation, apart from some rules, templates and principles that were identified in the assessment of budgetary mechanisms and will be incorporated by amending the existing municipal decisions by the end of the project.

The remaining 21 LGs are in the process of adopting the LOD methodology formally, which will most likely be completed before the end of the project. As a result, 77% of the LG Coordinators expect that it will be easy to continue using the LOD methodology after the ReLOaD project has come to an end, while 51% of the LG Coordinators expect that it will be easy to implement the LOD methodology for the allocation of funds to sports organisations as well.

During the interviews, it became clear that various LGs (e.g. Sarajevo Centar in BiH and Kragujevac in Serbia) have fully adopted the methodology for almost all of their funding to CSOs including sports organisations and in Sarajevo Centar even the war veteran organisations. The only exemption was granted to the so called “special interest” CSOs that receive a fixed amount of support every year (like the red cross, the volunteer fire brigade, etc.). But even for those, the reporting requirements have been upgraded and have become more stringent.

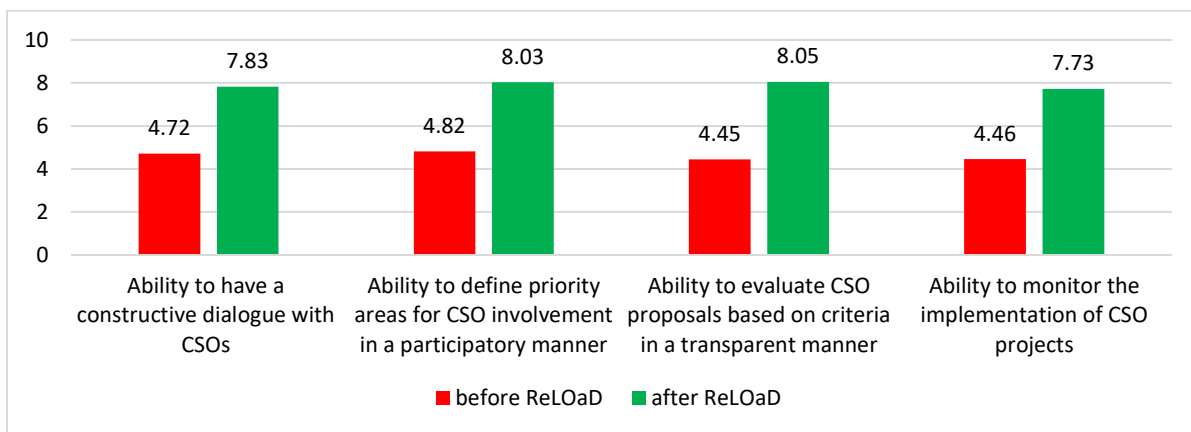
Conclusion:

Both from LG as well as CSO side there is a high level of appreciation of the LOD methodology and the way in which it has been implemented so far. The participation of CSOs on the selection committee is seen by both sides as an important mechanism to ensure transparency and fairness in the project selection process. In addition, both sides acknowledge the importance of a good monitoring mechanism but foresee problems in capacity of the LG to continue implementing it after the end of the project. In general, the selection of priority areas for CSO project formulation could be more participatory in practice (see for more detail page 56 and recommendations).

The professionalization and responsiveness of both LGs and CSOs.

Regarding the capacities of the LGs to implement the LOD methodology, the survey requested the LG Coordinators to rate the capacity of the LG in the following areas before and after the ReLOaD project (see figure 16).

Figure 16. LG capacities to implement various elements of the LOD methodology before and after the ReLOaD project according to the RELOAD coordinators (N = 45).



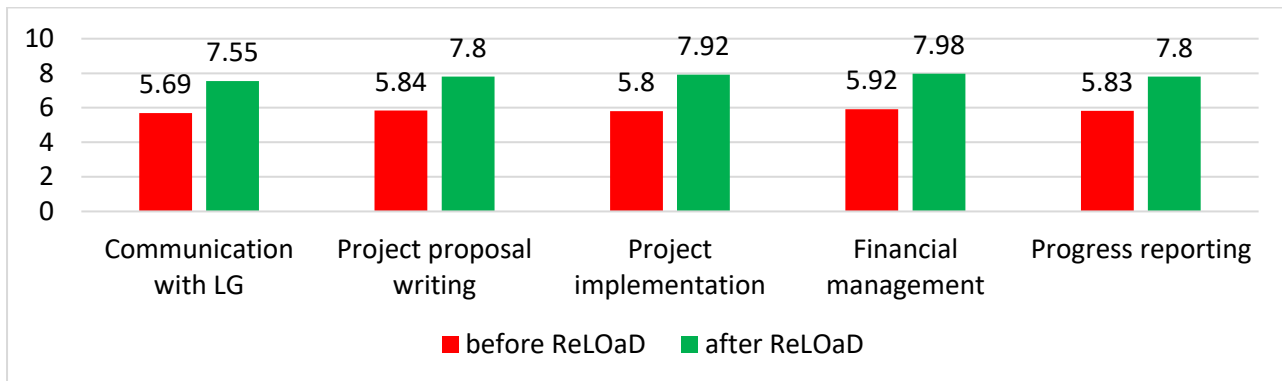
Source: LG Coordinators survey, September 2019.

The overall perceived capacity improved on average from 4.6 to 7.9, with significant improvements in each of the four relevant areas.

83% of the LG Coordinators who participated in the survey mentioned that presently, after the completion of the ReLOaD training and experience, the capacities of their LG were sufficient to continue with implementing the LOD methodology in future without further external support. 15% indicated they still would need some additional support in future. This means that, in general, the present set up of the ReLOaD project to conduct two rounds of Call for Proposals using the ReLOaD funds and monitoring one round of Call for Proposals by the LG using its own budget, is sufficient to enhance the capacities on the LG side and to gain sufficient practical experience and support for the methodology to get it institutionalised.

Regarding the capacity improvements of the CSOs to implement projects effectively, the results are presented in figure 17.

Figure 17. Capacities of CSO related to project preparation and implementation before and after the ReLOaD project according to the CSO respondents (N = 199).



Source: CSO survey, September 2019.

The overall perceived capacity improved on average from 5.8 to 7.8, with similar improvements gained in each of the five relevant areas.

Some other benefits related to the improved capacities of the CSOs that were mentioned during the interviews are:

- A better understanding by CSOs as to how their LG operates;
- Enhanced self-esteem and confidence and the ability to apply for larger external funding for their organisation;
- Some of the smaller CSOs (e.g. of parents with dyslectic children) realised through their project that the problem they aim to address is not an exclusive problem for their members, but it is in fact a problem for which the whole community is responsible. In order to get more community attention, and find a more sustainable solution to their problems, they realised that they need to enhance their lobby and advocacy and their communication and networking skills so that more institutions know the CSO and its work and start supporting it;
- LG Coordinators mentioned that project implementation by CSOs has improved substantially; There are less deviations from the original plans and budgets and it is much easier to monitor progress and completion against the original targets;
- In addition, they confirmed that the quality of the proposals for the LGs own Calls for Proposals had improved as well as a result of the ReLOaD support.

From the in-depth interviews, it became clear that especially the smaller and recently established CSOs benefited at lot from the ReLOaD training and support, even though they often complained that the requirements were rather heavy for the type of project they wanted to implement.

From the CSO perspective, it would be good to include more rounds of Calls for Proposals supported by the ReLOaD project in order for the methodology and the related capacity development activities to become a routine and more institutionalised, while the project could consider providing higher level capacity development support activities to the more experienced CSO (see recommendations). The longer the project focuses on a limited number of municipalities (more in-depth), the less resources it will have to spread the methodology to more municipalities (less width). Project management needs to carefully balance these two objectives. Looking at the pros and cons, the evaluation recommends to stick to the two rounds of Calls for Proposals financed by ReLOaD, but to enhance its own technical capacity in the next phase to be able to continue to provide backstopping support to the LGs from the first phase (e.g. remain on the evaluation committee, facilitate basic training of new CSOs, etc.).

Risk of fragmentation of CSO grants.

In many LGs there was a tendency, before the ReLOaD project was implemented to split the already limited LG budget for CSO over a large number of CSOs in order to satisfy at least to some extent the financial needs of as many CSOs as possible and try to keep them all happy. As a result, the projects do not contribute to reaching the development objectives, because the grants can only cover the operational costs of the CSOs and they remain invisible to the general public, which raises questions from the public as to how the LG is spending its budget. In addition, by providing small grants to many CSOs, the LG is not stimulating a professionalization and self-selection of CSOs but instead it continues to stimulate a mushrooming of too many inviable CSOs. There is a risk that this might happen again after the ReLOaD project even when the LG continues to use the LOD methodology. Most of the LG Coordinators and mayors that were interviewed are aware of the risk and see the benefits of having larger projects financed and implemented because these contribute more to realising the development objectives of the municipality, which can be used for political gain, while they do realise that by distributing small amounts they are also keeping some meaningless CSOs alive. Nevertheless, the pressure to distribute the funds over many CSOs is real, even after the completion of the ReLOaD project. If so, especially the slightly larger CSOs will opt out to even submit a proposal because for them the amount of work involved in drafting a proposal is not proportional to the grant received.

When discussing this issue with the CSOs, most of them are in general in favour of receiving a larger grant once every three or four years with which they can complete a meaningful project than receiving a small amount every year. In addition, it stimulates competition and more professionalism among CSOs.

While the ReLOaD methodology stimulates on the one hand an increase in the number of quality proposals and competition between CSOs and therefore forces every organisation to stay on its toes, it might on the other hand restrict new inexperienced organisations, who have wonderful ideas to reach out to their community but have not received the same basic induction training and backstopping support from UNDP to apply successfully for funding from the LG. This is a difficult dilemma since the LGs do not want to stimulate a wild growth of CSOs on the one hand, but also do not want to block new CSOs effectively from the system. Especially in the medium and larger municipalities and cities this could present a problem. One could argue that these new CSOs should link up with existing ones in the beginning or ask for peer support in order to learn how to draft good proposals, but in practice this rarely happens as they are in fact each other competitors for a limit source of funds. While no ready-made solution is available, it could be worthwhile to experiment during the next phase of ReLOaD with a small seed fund (per municipality or managed by the ReLOaD team) for emerging CSOs only, with smaller amounts per project and less stringent application criteria (see recommendations).

Positive spin offs from the ReLOaD project.

During the interviews with LG Coordinators and CSOs several positive spin off effects of the ReLOaD project were mentioned related to various aspect of governance:

- While the ReLOaD project stresses the importance for transparency on the LG side, CSOs start to understand the importance of being transparent and accountable in the use of their funds as well in order to stay or become a trustworthy partner for the LG since a potential misappropriation of funds by the CSO might taint the credibility of both parties and might disqualify them from future participation in the process.
- Partly through the enhanced understanding of each other's role in local development, the CSOs, especially in bigger municipalities and cities, start to realise that they need to network more amongst themselves and meet with the LG on a regular base in order to discuss the cooperation and partnership between the two parties in general, but also to collectively monitor the overall performance of the LG. In addition, they also realise that providing services to their beneficiaries is a good starting point to make their problems more visible, but that it is not enough to resolve their

problems structurally and that they therefore also have to lobby and advocate for the interests and rights of their target groups. Most LG Coordinators and mayors interviewed were highly in favour of setting up such consultation structures (possibly including the private sector as well), which could be an area for UNDP support in future especially if such fora could be linked to the selection of development priorities for LG funding of CSOs.

- Mayors and councillors in the participating LGs start to see the potential win-win opportunity of a more transparent grant allocation system to CSOs. Handing over the decision of CSO grant allocation to a non-political committee that deals with it in a transparent manner, will protect them against false allegations of mismanagement, while they also do not have to deal with each application individually and take allocation decisions from a political perspective. In Travnik in Bosnia and Herzegovina the council has as a result reduced the number of and budget for “special interest” CSOs and war veteran organisations and increased the budget for public interest CSOs that apply following the LOD methodology.
- The discussion about how to deal with the potential conflict of interest of CSO representatives on the project evaluation committee in each LG and the related delay in grant disbursement certainly had a positive side effect as well at local level. During the interviews with LG Coordinators and mayors as well as CSOs they mentioned that lengthy discussions were held at the local level as well as to how to contain the problem. These discussions helped both parties to realise the importance of resolving the conflict of interest issue on the one hand through enhanced regulation and the importance of Rule of Law, but that on the other hand there will always remain some grey areas that need to be dealt with individually, which proper resolution relies on underlying core governance values like ethics, trust and respect.
- LGs can use the LOD methodology also for other projects. E.g. in Rudo in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the LG will start a similar project with Caritas in future. They have agreed to use the LOD methodology for the selection and allocation of projects.
- By completing full projects, CSOs are much better able to show what could be achieved for their target groups even though small projects with only limited funding available. According to the LG Coordinators (e.g. in Gostivar, North Macedonia) the plight of several marginalised groups like Roma, youth employability, etc. are as a result more on the radar of the LG than before.

11.4 Impact of the ReLOaD project

In this section the evaluation will, for as far as possible, look at the impact of the ReLOaD project in a wider context. Did the communities’ benefit from the CSO projects that were implemented by the CSOs, has cooperation between CSOs and LGs improved and has the project contributed to a change in perception about democratic governance at local level?

Without conducting a full citizen perception review one is not able to find much hard evidence, let alone be able to attribute these change fully to the ReLOaD project since it addresses only one small aspect of state-non state interaction which is affected by many other factors outside the control of the ReLOaD project or UNDP in general. Nevertheless, both from the surveys as well as from the interviews, the evaluation was able to gain some insights from both the CSOs as well as the LG Coordinators regarding the importance of these projects and the change in the relationship between LG and CSOs in general.

Strengthening of partnerships between CSOs and LGs.

Both the LG Coordinators and the CSOs who participated in the project and the survey notice an improvement in the relationship between the CSOs and the LG. 84% of the CSOs are of the opinion that their relationship

with the LG has improved as a result of the ReLOaD project, while 78% of the CSOs notice that the LG is more appreciative of the work that the CSOs are doing for their community after the ReLOaD project.

The LG Coordinators mentioned similar improvements. 94% of the LG Coordinators mention that through the support of the ReLOaD project the relationship with CSOs has improved. Several LGs in different countries/territories that were visited have included an overview of the active CSOs in their municipality on their municipal website and even a description as to how they cooperate with the LG. Similarly, 70 % of the LG Coordinators is of the opinion that the LG in general is more appreciative of the work that the CSOs are doing for their community.

In Kragujevac in Serbia, several local CSOs that provide services to different groups of people living with a disability have recently established a network of CSOs that meet each other on a regular base to coordinate their support. Through the ReLOaD project their cooperation with the LG has improved and as a result they have now drafted a joint action plan with the LG to improve services to people living with a disability, thereby optimally making use of each other's capacities and abilities. A similar experience was recorded in Travnik, where partly as a result from the ReLOaD project several youth organisations together with the LG have established a Youth Council for Travnik that has developed a joint strategy for the coming years.

In Dimitrovgrad in Serbia, the LG is desperately seeking for ways to stop the outflux of young people to Sofia where salaries are much higher. Based on the ReLOaD experiences it wants to involve CSOs more actively in the planning and budget preparation process especially related to job creation and the prevention of further depopulation. CSOs with realistic proposals that might attract people or businesses to settle in Dimitrovgrad can receive instant funding from the LG.

In Sarajevo Centar, the LG has linked up with a group of CSOs to jointly submit a project proposal to the EU for funding and implementation.

In Lipjan, in Kosovo, a local CSO "Polis" has been working together with the LG to improve the public finance management system of the LG, which resulted in Lipjan becoming the best in finance management of all LGs in Kosovo. It started by Polis asking critical questions about the LG finances. Instead of trying to discredit the CSO, the LG decided to take their criticism seriously and asked them to assess the situation resulting in both parties working together with the above result.

In Albania, the ReLOaD project has potentially the highest impact on LG-CSO cooperation, because formerly most LGs did not have any budget for CSO support, while cooperation in general was very limited, while on both side the capacities for project implementation and cooperation was very limited. Now, LGs and CSOs start seeing the potential for cooperation and some joint initiatives have started, like the youth centre that is now operational in Lezhe, or the fact that as a result of the project, the LG in Tirana has declared that children with disabilities and special needs are one of their priority areas for support for the coming years. In Librazhd, "Alb Nature", has implemented a project to clean the river that runs through the municipality and enhance awareness of citizens about proper refuse disposal in several communities. Based on the success, surrounding LGs such as Elbasan want to replicate the project in all relevant communities.

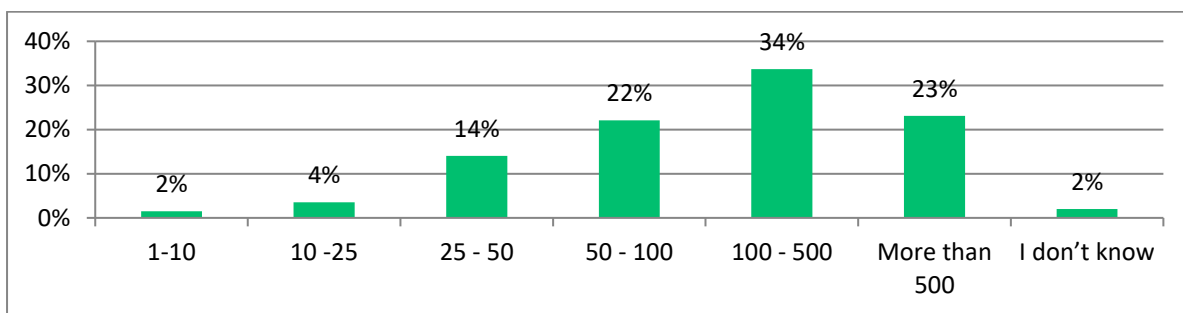
This improved cooperation between participating LGs and CSOs has resulted so far in only a few municipalities in the establishment of a more regular and institutionalised dialogue platform between the LGs and CSOs. In most LGs contact between LG and CSOs remains restricted to ad hoc meetings and to regular citizens' consultation moments, like the discussion of the annual plan and budget. Based on the experiences with the establishment of fora for interaction (civic participation) supported by ReLOaD in Bosnia and Herzegovina, this is certainly a complementary activity that ReLOaD can further support and promote in the next phase.

One may therefore conclude that, partly as a result of the ReLOaD project, there is more understanding and appreciation of each other’s role in the local development process between LGs and CSOs which has resulted in more frequent consultation and more intense cooperation in some municipalities, but it is too little or too fragile to qualify this as “permanent partnerships”. In order to achieve that, much more needs to be done. A foundation is laid by the ReLOaD project; it is now up to the local partners to start building concrete partnerships on these foundations.

Visibility and impact of CSO projects.

According to the data from the ReLOaD M&E system, so far approximately 60,000 people benefited from the CSO projects combined, which is already far more than the planned 38,000, while the 2nd round projects have not been completed yet, meaning that the above figure will certainly increase before then end of the project. Also, in terms of the minimum percentage of women benefitting from the CSO projects the ReLOaD project is on track (48 % actual against 30% planned). The number of citizens directly reached through the CSO projects differs a lot depending on the character and scope of each project (see figure 18).

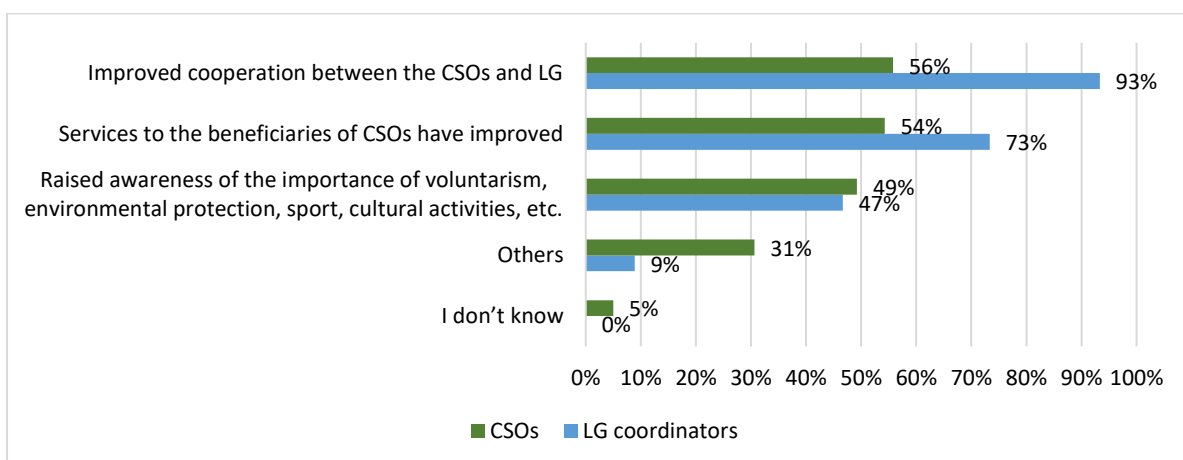
Figure 18. The number of citizens directly affected by their CSO project according to the participating CSOs (N =199).



Source: LG Coordinator and CSO survey, September 2019.

Figure 19 presents the perceived impact that the CSO projects have on their community according to both LG Coordinators and CSOs.

Figure 19. The perceived impact that the LG Coordinators (N = 46) and CSOs (N = 197) think the CSO projects have on their community.

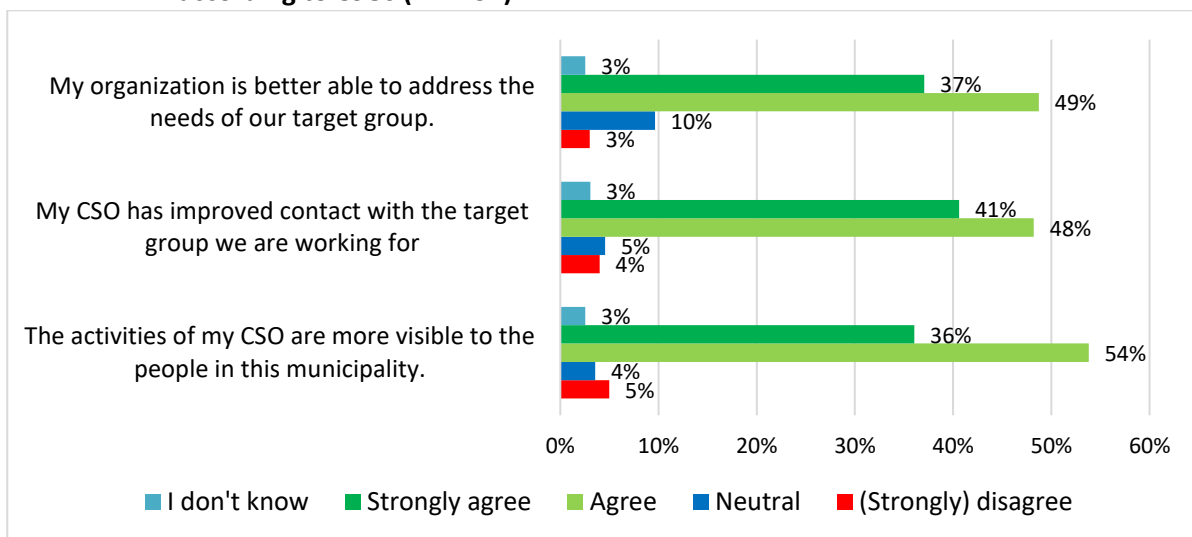


Source: LG Coordinator and CSO survey, September 2019.

As is shown, most of these benefits are either related to improved service delivery to the target groups of CSOs (like better care for children with special needs or disabilities), increased knowledge of citizens and skills (e.g. providing youth with basic skills that help them to find employment), raised awareness of citizens (like the need for environmental protection), more interaction between different ethnic groups through sport activities, or a combination of these benefits. At the same time most of the activities contributed to improved cooperation between CSOs and the LG as well, like a more activated LG that starts to address the needs of children living with disabilities as well as raised awareness of the citizens of these needs. LG Coordinators appreciated this improved cooperation even more than the CSOs.

As a result of the ReLOaD project both LG Coordinators and CSOs noticed a difference in the behaviour, responsiveness and visibility of the CSOs that have participated in the ReLOaD project (see figure 21), which is partly related to the training they have received, for example on how to make their work more visible, but it is to an even larger extent related to the fact that the ReLOaD project through the combination of extra funding that became available and the enhanced link between the CSO projects and the strategic development priorities of the LG, which resulted in more tangible results of the CSO project in their community.

Figure 20. Improvement in performance of CSOs as a result of participation in the ReLOaD project according to CSOs (N = 197).



Source: LG Coordinator survey, September 2019. Note that percentages are rounded off and might not add up to 100%.

The LG Coordinators confirmed these improvements since 92% of them agreed that the services of the CSOs in the community have improved as a result of the ReLOaD project.

From these figures, the evaluation concludes that linking the strategic development objective of the LG to CSOs that work directly with their target groups, helps them to become more meaningful in their community by shifting from welfare related activities to resolving marginalisation issues in more structural ways. A few examples might help to explain this shift in focus as well as the way in which some of these projects had a wider impact on the community at large:

- CSOs in Rudo in Bosnia and Herzegovina mentioned that it was now easier to mobilise citizen to participate in activities that they organise, while in addition their membership has increased as well.
- “Savez za povratak” (alliance for return), a CSO in Brod in Bosnia and Herzegovina trained 23 youth in the application of JAWA to design websites. 4 girls that were trained have started a business and are now earning money from designing websites. They receive many applications from Brod and surrounding villages to repeat the training, since youth has recognized its potential. While the results

are small, the project helped youth to break through their negative perceptions about their villages/country.

- In Istog/k in Kosovo, a CSO, the LG and a newly established local company called Agroproduct work together to collect wildflowers as basic ingredients for medicines and perfumes. The CSOs trains and assists women, the company provides seeds and the LG assists in getting a bank account etc. The activity of growing since collecting wildflowers is a great activity for women because they can do so next to their other activities and at a time that suits them best. So far, 40 women get a complementary income out of the project.

Although difficult to quantify, but certainly very evident during the interviews with CSOs, is the impact that the ReLOaD project has on the self-esteem and confidence of the CSOs. Most of the CSOs see their selection and participation in the project as a recognition by both the LG and the UNDP/EU of the importance of the work that they are doing for their community. As a result, they are even more motivated to continue with their work after the project has come to an end, even if the same level of funding will not be available anymore.

Dissemination of the LOD methodology to non-participating LGs.

The dissemination of the LOD methodology to other LGs that do not participate in the grant scheme remains problematic. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Associations of Municipalities and Cities in both entities are actively involved in this process, and provide training and lobby for the adoption of the methodology among their members, but without the financial incentive, the targeted hands on support for both LG staff and CSOs and a supportive legislation, the impact is limited. So far only three LGs have adopted the LOD methodology without being part of the LOD or ReLOaD project. For the next phase a different strategy needs to be developed for each country/territory to ensure countrywide dissemination (see recommendations).

National level impact of the ReLOaD project.

The ReLOaD project is certainly having an impact on national level discussions and the development of legislation regarding the transparent funding of CSOs by public institutions.

In the three countries/territories that have adopted some form of legislation or regulation regarding the transparent funding of CSO by (local level) government (Kosovo, Montenegro, Serbia), the actual implementation and enforcement of this new regulations takes time and is only progressing slowly, partly because there are no sanctions attached to the regulations for institutions that do not adhere to the regulations and partly because the capacities to implement them, especially at lower government levels are very limited. The support offered by ReLOaD is in these cases highly appreciated by the ministries involved (which could be either the Ministry of Local Government, the Ministry of Finance and the department dealing with CSO coordination). First of all, the support offered by ReLOaD, shows that transparent funding of CSOs by LGs is possible in practice, which is useful to convince other LGs to adhere to the regulations. Secondly, the experiences of the LGs that participate in the ReLOaD project are important to gain experience in what the practical bottlenecks and support requirements are in the implementation of the regulations, and thirdly, these initial experiences are monitored and feed into a revision or update of the regulations and are used to draft countrywide guidelines for LGs on how to apply the regulations. The ReLOaD teams and Board of Partners in each of the three countries/territories play an active role in this process. In these countries/territories, more could be done in the next phase of the ReLOaD project to support a countrywide application of the regulations (see recommendations).

In the other three countries (North Macedonia, Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina) the need for national level regulations for transparent funding of CSO by public institutions is acknowledged by the national level partners in the project and they are at different stages of preparing adequate legislation. Whether that should be done in the form of a regulation from the Ministry of Finance from the perspective of proper Public

Finance Management or whether it should be regulated by Law (which is often a more cumbersome process to get adopted) and if so as a primary or secondary law depends on various factors that require more detailed legal scrutinizing, like e.g. the level of autonomy of LG institutions to determine their own regulations or the question under which primary law this needs to be regulated (Local Government Law, Law on NGOs).

Regional networking and dialogue.

The project management agreed with the Project Board that due to the delay in CSO project approval in 2018, the extra operational costs resulting of this delay would be covered by a reduction in the number of regional activities for this phase.

As a result, regional exchange of experiences and increased networking the ReLOaD project is only slowly gaining momentum. It has so far organized two regional conferences in which a selection of local and national partners from government and non-government participated and during which initial experiences with regard to transparent CSO funding practices were shared. In addition, an EU Knowledge Sharing Platform for Local Democracy in the Western Balkans has been established that seeks to host, manage, and share knowledge and facilitate connections and networking¹⁴. The aim is to provide governments and CSO practitioners within local communities across the WB with a platform for exchange of best practices and improving cooperation, transparency and innovative public service delivery mechanisms. The platform offers at present 63 knowledge products from the WB and it aims to facilitate discussion and exchange of experiences on its intranet platform. At present it is not yet very actively used by LG or CSO members and will need more facilitation in order to become a real exchange network. Since the first round of CSO projects has been completed in all six countries/territories, more relevant experience is now available among members which could be used for peer learning.

The ReLOaD project has in addition not been very active in establishing and maintaining contact with existing CSO or LG networks in the Region like the Regional Youth Compact for Europe, European Association for Local Democracy (ALDA), Balkan Civil Society Development Network (BCSDN), or the Network of Associations for Local Authorities in South-East Europe (NALAS). In that sense, ReLOaD is still more a project than a network of practitioners or a community of practice. In addition, no practical results have so far resulted from the contacts between ReLOaD and ROMACTED besides that several ROMA CSOs have submitted project proposals and participated in the CSO training.

Mainstreaming of gender and social inclusion.

The ReLOaD project does not have an exclusive focus or objective on gender mainstreaming on improving the situation of marginalized groups in society and environmental protection, but it has successfully mainstreamed these perspectives in all its activities. Within the UNDP gender marker system, it would receive a gender marker 1 meaning that it is an activity that will contribute in some way to gender equality, but not significantly.

In its design, the ReLOaD project has a strong and practical focus on gender mainstreaming, on addressing the interests of marginalised groups in society (in particular ethnic minorities, people living with a disability and youth) and on environmental protection, by ensuring that these topics are integrated into the Call for CSO proposals at local level. By doing so, it not only raises the level of service delivery by CSOs to these groups of people who in general have limited access to the regular services provided by the LG, but it also raises the awareness of the special needs of these people in the community and the responsibility of the LG to adjust its services to meet their needs as well.

¹⁴ See: <https://eulocaldemocracy4wb.org/en/>

The ReLOaD project ensured that in all its training components there was an equal representation of male and female trainees, while LGs were encouraged to pay attention to these topics in their selection of the priority areas for the Calls for Proposals. CSOs were encouraged to address gender equality in their project proposals as well. As a result, 48% of the ultimate beneficiaries of the implemented CSO projects are women, which is much more than the 30% planned.

By having a strong focus on “social inclusion” as a general denominator or overarching selection criteria for all projects, several projects focussing on improving gender relations or enhanced socio-economic opportunities for women did emerge where they fitted into the strategic development priorities as defined by the LGs. By encouraging LGs to include women empowerment as one of the priority areas for the selection of CSO proposals, gender related issues that formally did not get any attention at the local level are now receiving at least some attention, like domestic violence and women self-employment. In discussions with women groups and CSOs, it became clear that this support is both practically as well as morally very important to them. On the other hand, these CSOs increasingly realise that much more needs to be done in order to achieve any structural changes. In order to take their actions to the next level more capacity development is required focussed on improving their lobby and advocacy capacities.

In its M&E system, a few gender-sensitive qualitative and quantitative indicators are identified and the collection and analysis of sex-disaggregated data is ensured.

In a similar way, the project encourages LGs to focus their prioritisation of projects to focus on improving the position of youth and on marginalised ethnic groups, especially Roma where relevant (see further on for more detail).

While gender and social inclusion are properly mainstreamed by the project, ReLOaD could during the next phase further improve its performance in these areas by lifting this intention to a higher level by formulating a specific quantitative and qualitative result and target for gender and social inclusion. E.g. it could aim for at least 40 or 50% of the CSO projects to be targeted towards social inclusion of women, youth and/or ethnic minorities.

11.5 Sustainability of ReLOaD achievements and outcomes

The overall sustainability of the ReLOaD project remains rather fragile, especially in countries/territories where there is no supportive legal framework that regulates transparent funding from CSOs by LGs. The formal adoption of the LOD methodology by the participating LGs does provide some form of institutional sustainability over a longer period, as is proven in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but is not sufficient in the long term. Some mechanisms for organisational and financial sustainability are in place in all participating IPA beneficiaries, but they are not (yet) fully available or utilised by the ReLOaD project to ensure that its outcomes are sustained.

Institutional sustainability.

Regarding the continuation and institutionalisation and therefore sustainability of the outputs and outcomes of the ReLOaD project the situation is of course different in the three countries/territories with a supporting legal framework and the three without such framework. The likelihood of the LOD methodology being continued to be used and further disseminated after the project is more likely in Serbia, Kosovo and Montenegro, while in Albania, North Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina it depends on each participating LG whether and to what extent it will be used in future. The formal adoption of the methodology by the LG council and its integration in the LG rulebook proves that there is a high level of local ownership and provides some institutional sustainability as is proven by the LGs that participated in the former LOD project in Bosnia and Herzegovina, of which the majority continues to use the LOD methodology. At least 32

LGs in Bosnia and Herzegovina that participated in the LOD project between 2009 and 2017 are still using the LOD methodology, because that was a condition for reapplication for the ReLOaD project. But such decisions can easily be revoked and certain groups of CSOs (like sport organisations and special interest NGOs) can be exempted from the LOD related procedures.

On the other hand, in the typical local government setting in the Western Balkans, which is characterised by weak financial management, minimal oversight by the legislative institution over the executive, combined with low ethical standards and big political interests, there is a high likelihood of mismanagement of public funds and corruption. Establishing a proper legal framework without local level understanding and acceptance of a transparent mechanism for CSO fund distribution proves to be insufficient as well given the low level of actual compliance and low pace of implementation in the countries with a legal framework in the non-participating LGs. For a country-wide adoption of the “LOD methodology” by all LGs, a combination of a supporting legal framework and a local level introduction and related capacity development is required. Given the differences in capacities between the larger municipalities (with in general better performing LGs) and smaller municipalities a differentiation in approach by the ReLOaD project could be considered for the next phase.

Organisational sustainability.

As shown above, 83% of the LG Coordinators were of the opinion that their LG would have enough capacity in terms of qualified and sufficient staff to continue with the implementation of the LOD methodology. The only area which was mentioned as a concern by the LG Coordinators during the interviews was whether the LG would be able to maintain the same level and intensity of support to and monitoring of project implementation by CSOs, especially since as part of the ReLOaD project a lot of administrative support (like e.g. checking the procurement and tender plans, the ex-ante procurement check and authorisation, etc.) was done by the UNDP staff.

In terms of retaining the minimum capacities in future, which could be reduced due to the transfer of trained LG staff members, the ReLOaD project included more LG staff members in the basic training from each participating LGs to ensure at least some broadening of skills and knowledge. Increasingly, with other staff members on the evaluation and monitoring committees, this knowledge will be transferred automatically. Nevertheless, some LG Coordinators suggested that it would be useful to organise refresher courses by the ReLOaD project or by the Local Government Association (especially if in the next phase a country-wide training of LG staff will be developed), while in addition the PCM training could be integrated into the curriculum of the public administration training institutes in each country/territory.

Maintaining and gradually increasing the capacities of the CSOs is more problematic, partly because CSOs have in general a short life cycle, they experience a high staff turnover since they often rely on volunteers who stay in general not very long with the organisation, while new CSOs continue to emerge. Especially in the more remote municipalities, where there are only a few CSOs, the collective capacities gained during the ReLOaD project can easily dwindle as there is limited opportunity for peer learning and the CSO Resources Centres that could provide project cycle management training often do not reach out to these remote places (at least not until now).

Some LGs, like Travnik and Vitez in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Tivat in Montenegro have acknowledged this problem and they have allocated part of their CSO budget to provide refresher training for CSOs (using the same trainers that the ReLOaD project was using). The justification for this allocation is that it will further improve the quality of the CSO projects from which the community is benefitting, while at the same time it will save the LG staff a lot of time in future for backstopping and support.

Financial sustainability.

The financial sustainability of the project (i.e. the level of financial support to CSOs from LG funds) is at local level often problematic especially in small municipalities with LGs that have a very limited or no budget for CSO project implementation and especially in countries like Albania where this practice of LG funding to CSOs is only gradually emerging and usually limited to the few largest LGs. Even though the coordinators and mayors acknowledge the importance of the projects implemented by the CSOs, only a few LG Coordinators and Mayors mentioned that (partly as a result of the ReLOaD project) the LG had increased or had the intention to increase its own CSO budget in future, usually because its budget to implement even its most basic functions was already very restricted (e.g. Karvadarci in North Macedonia, Tivat in Montenegro, Kragujevac in Serbia).

More intense cooperation with other (sub) grant mechanisms that could benefit from the enhanced experience and skills of the CSOs in the ReLOaD municipalities and continue some form of funding to the CSOs, preferably through or in close cooperation with the LG, which could lead to more long term financial support being available. Lengthening the period of the ReLOaD project (e.g. by continuing in the same LGs in the next phase) would limit its ability to cover new municipalities and to widen its outreach.

11.6 Overall Conclusion

The first phase of the ReLOaD project was a pilot phase, to assess whether the approach to strengthening local democracy and its methodology to enhance LG financing mechanisms for CSO support would be relevant and could be successfully implemented in the five additional countries in the Western Balkans. As the ReLOaD project comes to the end of the first phase, based on the evidence provided and the feedback received from more than 200 direct stakeholders in the project that were interviewed as part of this evaluation, the evaluation concludes that this pilot phase has indeed been successful.

The basic concept of the ReLOaD project to improve LG-CSO cooperation through the introduction of transparent funding mechanisms is a practical and effective way to trigger such cooperation. The capacity development support provided by the project to both LGs and CSOs in the participating municipalities has been responsive, intensive and tailor-made. Bringing 378 small CSOs that often have no previous experience in managing externally financed projects and 53 under-capacitated LGs to a level where they can manage projects in accordance with EU regulations is by definition a labour-intensive exercise. Nevertheless, the ReLOaD project has been effective in raising the capacities to the minimum level required as was confirmed by the surveys and interviews that were conducted as part of this evaluation.

Despite the delay in the release of grants to CSOs during the first round of CSO project implementation that was caused by the need to resolve the potential conflict of interest of CSO members on the evaluation committees, the project is well on track to achieve its outputs and outcomes and thus its objectives of this first phase.

Success of the ReLOaD approach.

The essential characteristics that make the approach utilized by the ReLOaD project different from and therefore complementary to other approaches is:

1. It combines technical assistance (capacity development) with a sub-grant mechanism;
2. It focusses on the LG and CSOs at the same time, while other support programmes focus more on either the LG or the CSO sector.

The success of the ReLOaD project in terms of achieving its results and outcomes as well as in generating higher overall awareness and support for transparent government grant allocation mechanisms to CSOs in general can to a large extent be attributed to the specific approach adopted by the project. This approach

can be characterized as a combination of a “process” and a “collective action” approach which has the following features:

- a. The ReLOaD project does not come with fixed blueprint solutions, but learns together with its local partners, seeking solutions for specific local problems and gradually gaining experience in what works and what not in a specific local socio-political context (sometimes called: problem-driven iterative adaptation);
- b. It adjusts the content and intensity of its technical assistance to the specific needs of the project beneficiaries and partners and is highly responsive to changing circumstances offering tailor-made support, training and backstopping, without adopting a hands-on attitude;
- c. Since the ReLOaD staff are not actively involved in the actual selection of strategic development priorities at the local level, but stimulate the local stakeholders to conduct that analysis collectively, it generates a high level of local ownership over the whole CSO project selection and implementation process;
- d. ReLOaD works with reform objectives that are both technically sound (high impact, liable to be taken to scale and sustainable beyond donor funding) and politically possible (offering a reasonable prospect of being introduced);
- e. The ReLOaD project has adopted a multi-stakeholder approach and is bringing the theory of “collective action” into practice. It brings together stakeholders to create “communities of change” at both the demand and supply side of democratic governance to resolve practical development problems and provides both the LG as well as the civil society players with the minimum capacities to play their role in the process of collective action. In addition, it introduces the principle of mutual accountability to the local players involved in the project. ReLOaD is therefore in its design not a local government project and neither a CSO project nor only a grant mechanism but a true “local governance” project.
- f. By focussing on practical development problems at the local level that require collective action of both LGs and CSOs, since these problems do not fall in the exclusive domain of either of them, the ReLOaD approach not only brings them together to tackle these problems collectively, but it also generates the awareness on both sides that an institutional reform in the way in which grant provision mechanisms at the local level are distributed is required in order to sustain and further develop effective partnership in future. In this way, practical and institutional development bottlenecks are tackled at the same time.

In summary, the relevance of and the demand for the ReLOaD project is in all six countries/territories high, its approach is effective though labour intensive, and the project management is able to deliver on its intended outputs and outcomes within the budget available, which is sufficient justification for granting the project a second phase in all six countries/territories.

12. Recommendations

While the project has been successful in its initial phase, several adjustments are recommended by this evaluation for the second phase:

- To make ReLOaD even more relevant to the specific context in each country/territory;
- To increase its outreach by including more municipalities per country/territory;

- To further enhance the sustainability of its outcomes;
- To increase cooperation with other actors in each country/territory;
- To enhance regional cooperation and exchange of experiences;

These recommendations are based on the following assumptions:

- The next project phase will be for approximately three years again;
- The overall budget for the second phase will be similar to that of the present phase;
- A relatively larger share of the budget could become available for technical assistance;

1. Draft country specific programmes with exit strategies.

In the first phase, based on an analysis of existing legal frameworks and funding mechanisms and practices in each of the IPA beneficiaries, the ReLOaD project adjusted its LOD methodology to comply with these legal frameworks where necessary, but the type of activities, the outputs and outcomes were more or less the same for each country.

After almost three years of project implementation, the project staff has on the one hand a more comprehensive understanding of:

- The specific bottlenecks and opportunities in each country;
- The ideas of the national government regarding the process of drafting or upgrading the legal framework;
- The capacities of (potential) partners or service providers;
- The speed and direction of the decentralisation process;
- The existence of other (complementary) grant mechanisms and/or CSO support activities;

while on the other hand the partners in the project have, based on their practical experiences, a far better understanding of the actual added value of the project in their countries/territories.

For the second phase, it is recommended to make the ReLOaD project objectives and outputs (and therefore its activities and budgets) more country specific while retaining its overarching regional perspective and framework and of course its basic unique approach.

2. Strategies for upscaling of the number of municipalities in the 2nd phase of the project.

The ROM review which was conducted in September 2018¹⁵ rightfully mentions that the project intervention logic is multi-faceted, focusing on designing transparent funding mechanisms, on enhancing capacities of LGs and CSOs to utilise these mechanisms and on the direct improvement of services that the CSOs provide to their community. While the direct impact of the sub-grants provided to the CSOs is substantial, the sub-grant component is in the project intervention logic first of all a tool and incentive to improve the LG financing mechanisms. In practice, the size of the grants component (which was in the initial phase fixed at 60% of the total budget) is the main constraining factor limiting the number of municipalities that can be included in the project because it restricts the funds available for the technical assistance component and therefore the number of municipalities that can be covered given the high labour intensity of the intervention.

The geographical coverage of the project, i.e. the number of participating LGs per country/territory, could be substantially increased in the next phase of the project if it could expand its technical assistance and reduce the budget for sub-grants. This could be achieved in various ways:

- Lower the average size of the sub-grants available per LG (at present roughly € 100,000 over two years per LG). For this scenario, one could think of either lowering the amount available for sub-granting for every LG or differentiating the amount available per LG based on the size of the LG (in terms of population or the size of its budget), which would practically result in a reduction of the

¹⁵ NEAR D 05 Project review of the ReLOaD project C-382867 September 2018

amount available for smaller LGs to e.g. € 60,000 over two years. Such a reduction could also help making the project more attractive for smaller LGs because it would lower the size of their own nominal co-financing contribution, which is fixed at 20% and should be maintained. Such a reduction would also reduce the downturn after the project has come to an end and be better tuned to their limited absorption capacity because the sub-grant available through the project is in small LGs often bigger than the CSO-budget from the LG itself;

- An alternative (or complementary) strategy would be to intensify the cooperation with other EU (or other donor) funded grant mechanisms, that could provide part of the funding for the sub-grants, especially in countries/territories like Kosovo and Montenegro where sufficient grant mechanisms are available. Many of the existing grant mechanisms for CSOs have difficulties reaching out to the more remote municipalities with smaller CSOs that have limited capacities, because it is very labour intensive to work with them and raise their capacities to a level that enables them to manage such projects properly. The ReLOaD project has proven that it can do so effectively, which means that closer cooperation between ReLOaD and these grant mechanisms could create a win-win situation. The additional advance would be that funding for the CSOs in these smaller communities would continue to be available after the end of the ReLOaD project, building on the foundations that have been created in the previous three years, which is very important because these remote LGs usually have a very limited budget available for CSO support. Such partnership would improve the financial sustainability of the ReLOaD project and increase the outreach of the grant mechanisms at the same time.
- Another strategy could be to work with clusters of three to four municipalities, possibly in the more remote regions of each country and possibly around the municipalities that participated in the first phase of the project. Logistically it would be much easier to manage for the ReLOaD team, because a lot of training, mentoring and monitoring activities could be combined. In addition, peer learning mechanisms (and formal partnerships) could be established between the more experienced LGs and CSOs in the phase one municipalities and those in the surrounding ones. Depending on the size and number of CSOs in these surrounding or remote cluster of municipalities, one could think of having one combined budget, one Call for Proposals based on shared or similar priorities and allocating mechanism available for a group of municipalities. If it is a deliberate choice of the ReLOaD project (which needs to be confirmed with the national partners and could differ per country) to focus on the more remote municipalities it could consider lowering the co-financing contribution for each LG to 10 %, to reduce the threshold for these less affluent LGs. Introducing a focus on specific geographical areas or on clusters of municipalities will of course affect the competitive selection process of participating LGs.

3. Focus on youth projects.

The ReLOaD project has over the past few gained relevant experience working with youth organisations and projects focused on youth participation and has through its approach (non-descriptive, stimulating initiative, etc.) proven to be attractive for youth to be involved in. Several sub-themes have already emerged around the following topics:

- The role of LGs in stimulating active youth participation in their local community;
- Youth and environment;
- Youth in local employment (like tourism or IT);
- Youth in culture;
- Youth and substance abuse;
- Youth in social service provision and volunteer activities;

Given the fact that in all countries/territories youth unemployment and youth migration to bigger cities and the EU is of great concern especially in the smaller more remote municipalities, the ReLOaD project is well positioned to address some of the related issues in a very practical manner. Through the implementation of projects, it can offer youth temporary employment by which they gain relevant work experience and enhance their knowledge, it can improve their connection to their home community and their active involvement in volunteer activities. Not only in topics but also in tools and methodologies to reach out to youth the various CSO project have gained relevant experience. In Kargujevac in Serbia, the project Omladina Jazas-a used youth as peer educators on topics of reproductive health care or drug abuse and assisted them in making online videos and the development of chat groups.

4. Strengthen the regional component of the ReLOaD project.

The regional component of the project has remained rather underdeveloped during the first phase of the ReLOaD project and should receive more attention during its second phase especially now that more and more relevant experiences regarding the utilisation of the LOD methodology and related to the content and process of project implementation by CSOs. The knowledge platform has been established and is operational, but it will require active moderation of the participants and practitioners and will require certainly in its initial stage a part time moderator to initiate discussions and exchange of experiences.

5. Participation of CSOs on the evaluation committees.

The overall objective of the ReLOaD project is to enhance LG-CSO cooperation in order to strengthen local democracy. True partnership will only emerge if there is a sense of trust in each other's intentions and respect for each other's differences and the willingness to be mutual accountable to each other. In the ReLOaD project setting it is important that all partners perceive the evaluation and allocation process of CSO funds to be fair and transparent and that CSOs and their proposed projects are solely evaluated on their merits and the potential benefits to the community.

Local CSO presence on the evaluation committees is in this process critical for the success of the approach and the long-term sustainability of the outcomes of the project. The process of learning to cooperate with each other and be mutual accountable to each other is in this regard as important as the actual outcome of the evaluation process. It makes in the opinion of the evaluator therefore no sense to replace the local CSO representative on the evaluation committee with an additional LG member, with an external neutral expert (including UNDP) or a national level CSO representative. You cannot build true partnership if you disqualify one partner as not being capable of being involved in the decision-making process.

Regarding the potential conflict of interest issue, grey areas will always remain. They can be reduced by regulation but never fully abolished. LG members on the evaluation committee can also have conflicting interests if e.g. they or a family member run a CSO that could potentially apply for funding. In order to limit the risk but to retain CSO representation on the evaluation committee this evaluation recommends that the CSOs select among themselves a CSO representative on the evaluation committee only after the proposals for a Call for Proposals have been submitted. This should of course be someone whose CSO has not submitted a proposal.

13. Way forward

While the project should continue as a regional programme, it should start to formulate more country specific strategies during the formulation process of its next phase. A good starting point for drafting a more country specific plan will be to define an exit strategy for the project by addressing the question what would be the ideal exit point for the ReLOaD project in each country/territory and how to achieve that in the most effective and efficient way? This does not mean that the 2nd phase will necessarily be the last phase, but UNDP together

with its partners need to define what it ultimately wants to achieve and leave behind in each country/territory related to the introduction of transparent LG funding mechanisms for CSO support.

Analysing the most important differentiating factor, which is the existence of a legal framework for financing CSOs by (local) governments, two groups of countries exist: those with and those without a regulatory framework, which should determine the focus of the ReLOaD project in each of the countries in the next phase.

In the group of countries/territories with a legal framework; Kosovo, Montenegro and Serbia, the project could in the next phase add a component that aims to generate sufficient capacity in each LG in the country/territory to apply the country specific (or to LOD methodology upgraded) financing mechanism. This will speed up the dissemination and application of the LOD methodology and will enable LGs who are not part of the project to start applying the LOD methodology as well. Some off the activities that need to be considered are:

- An assessment and if necessary revision of the present legal framework;
- Drafting of a template text to be integrated in the LG rulebooks;
- Adjust the present training for LGs to be rolled out countrywide;
- An assessment of whether the training could be outsourced or integrated into existing refresher training modules (e.g. to the Local Government Association), which would enhance the prospective of institutionalisation of the training and therefore the organisational sustainability of the project outcomes;
- The actual provision of the training to 2-3 relevant staff members per LG;
- Provide LGs who want to start to apply the LOD methodology but are not financed by the project with an affiliated status, as was done in Bosnia and Herzegovina before and develop and set up an (online) help desk/peer support structure to provide advice and backstopping support to these LGs;
- A PR/sensitizing campaign (national workshop) among mayors and council chairpersons to enhance their understanding of the concept and to ensure their buy in to the concept like the one organised in Bosnia and Herzegovina by the ReLOaD project in 2018 for the participating LGs

As mentioned earlier, in the group of countries without a proper legal or regulatory framework, there is, certainly in Albania and North Macedonia, sufficient momentum and support to start the development of a legal framework, in which process the ReLOaD project could assist by engaging a legal expert who could advice the government on the best way forward by assessing and comparing the regulations in the other West Balkan countries, by assessing what type of law or regulation would be most appropriate (e.g. integration in existing law, drafting of a secondary law or decree, a regulation by the Ministry of Finance, etc.) and if necessary, assisting with the actual drafting of the law. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, similar support could be provided to the Ministry of Justice in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, to ensure that a draft version of such a law is ready once the political situation is ready to consider it.

The evaluation would advise against a country wide roll out/training of LG staff as described above as long as such supportive regulatory framework does not exist since the chances are small that it would be adopted at the local level. The project could however consider providing such training on a demand base to LGs that show a firm commitment to start applying the LOD methodology, next to those fully incorporated in the project.

In order to extend the number of municipalities in each country/territory through a selection or combination of the above-mentioned strategies, the evaluation advises that the project management for the phase of the ReLOaD doubles the number of staff members in the next phase and outsource even more of the standard training, mentoring and monitoring. If so, the ReLOaD project should be able to double or triple the number of participating municipalities in each country/territory. If that is possible, the evaluation recommends

combining a competitive selection process for medium and large municipalities with a more top-down selection process of remote and smaller municipalities. Focusing on the more remote municipalities would have the additional advantage that a possible overlap with the EU civil society resource centres would be avoided.

For Bosnia and Herzegovina and in particular for the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, knowing that national/entity level legislation will still take a while, the ReLOaD project could consider working with a few Canton level governments during the next phase either to introduce the LOD methodology at their level and/or assist in the development of Canton level regulations that would be prescriptive for all LGs in that Canton. Sarajevo Canton has already requested for such support. It would be good to explore the potential during the coming months so that it could be integrated in the next phase if it shows sufficient potential.

Regarding the strengthening of the regional component, the evaluation proposes to give a boost to the most obvious starting points that have been identified by the project already, which are the initiation of virtual thematic networks. Since the project wants to strengthen its focus on youth related topics in the next phase, it could, already before the end of this phase start with the development of a virtual network based on the youth projects and activities that have already been implemented by focusing on topics that have been central in various youth focused projects.

Once this network is running other potential interesting networks could be:

- The role of LGs, CSOs and citizens in processes of social inclusion of people living with a disability, elderly people, ethnic minorities
- Environmental protection and climate change
- Income generating activities for women

By doing so, the project's regional network could gradually become a community of practice for both CSOs and LGs active in LG-CSO interaction.

14. Lessons learnt

During the interviews and in response to the survey both CSOs and LG Coordinators, a lot of valuable suggestions were made on how the approach and methodology of the ReLOaD project could be further enhanced. Some of the most realistic and useful suggestions are presented below for further consideration.

1. Duration of the project in each municipality.

The ReLOaD project aims to strike a proper balance between the depth and coverage of its outreach. The higher the number of Calls for Proposals in each municipality, the more experience is gained by LGs and CSOs, but that will restrict the number of municipalities that can participate in a full three-year phase. Local partners plead for a longer involvement, beyond the present two Calls for Proposals in order to further consolidate the methodology and receive more training and backstopping, while reducing the involvement to only one Call for Proposals using ReLOaD funding would enable the project to almost double the number of participating municipalities. Conducting two Calls for Proposals seem to be the right number at the moment and should be the standard for the next phase.

It would be good however, especially if the project can expand its technical assistance component during the next phase, to continue providing technical support to the group of partners (both LGs and CSOs) from the first phase, which will enhance the organisational sustainability of the outcomes of the project. This could be realised in various ways:

- All training modules offered in the 2nd phase could be open to partners from the first phase, either as refresher training or for new CSOs who want to learn how to do project management;
- The project could continue to offer limiting backstopping support to municipalities from the first phase (e.g. continue to be a member of the evaluation committees as external expert, which most CSOs would certainly appreciate);
- If the ReLOaD project decides to work with clusters of 3 to 4 municipalities, it would be good to group them around a municipality that participated already in the first phase. Both the new and old municipalities can benefit from this through joint learning, peer-to-peer support and continued technical assistance from the ReLOaD project. Whether the “old” municipality should again receive (reduced) funding from the project for its Calls for Proposals (e.g. based on a 50-50 contribution ratio) in “exchange” for offering peer support to the new surrounding municipalities needs to be assessed in more detail.

2. Effectiveness of changes made in the LOD methodology during the first phase of the project.

Between the first and the repeated Call for Proposals, several measures were introduced in the methodology and in the support offered by the ReLOaD project. As part of the field work and the survey, the evaluation assessed the effectiveness of these changes.

a. Increased time to write a proposal.

In order to improve the quality of the proposals, the duration of the public Calls for Proposals for CSOs was increased from four to six weeks. The CSOs participating in the survey were asked whether the time provided for preparing a proposal was enough. 87 % of the CSOs who had 4 weeks to prepare a proposal mentioned that the time provided was enough or more than enough, i.e. only 13 % struggled to get it completed in time. From the CSOs that had 6 weeks to prepare a proposal, 91 % mentioned that the time provided was enough or more than enough, i.e. only 9 % struggled to get it completed in time. Increasing the time from 4 to 6 weeks made only a minor difference in the number of CSOs who struggled to complete the proposal, which was low already. This conclusion was confirmed during the interviews. Most CSOs stated that they did most of the work to finalize the proposal in the last few days before the deadline anyhow, meaning that adding more time did not make much of a difference.

b. Increase the duration of PCM trainings for CSOs from 2 to 3 days.

To prepare the CSO better for project proposal writing and implementation, the standard PCM training was increased from two to three days. Similar results were noted when comparing the quality and effectiveness of the 2 and the 3-day PCM training (as was shown in figure 13). The CSOs that were interviewed confirmed this picture. The three-day training had more repetition and for people who run their CSO on a voluntary base and/or as a side activity next to a regular job it was often difficult to attend all three days.

c. Introduce mentoring for CSOs as a new capacity building activity.

The introduction of group mentoring during the process of project proposal writing was highly appreciated by most CSOs interviewed. Those who did not make use of the opportunity offered where either experienced in proposal writing or regretted afterwards that they did not make use of the opportunity. If the mentoring is offered several times during the project proposal writing period, the mentor can guide CSOs to divide the work in manageable chunks thus avoiding the overload of work at the end of the period. If so, a four-week period for proposal writing should be enough. In addition, the project should consider individual mentoring for the next phase, possibly combined with group mentoring, which could e.g. be offered online (skype) to resolve specific requests. In addition, it is advised that complementary to group mentoring, individual mentoring is offered by the project using online technology.

d. Provide detailed feedback to CSOs after public calls to contribute to their learning.

The CSOs interviewed were the ones who successfully applied for funding, so they were in general happy with the feedback received. A few CSOs interviewed were not successful in the first round but tried again in the second round and were happy with the feedback received from the evaluation committee as it helped them to improve on their proposal. The evaluation did not speak to non-successful CSOs, so it is difficult to assess how they perceived the detailed feedback and the fact that the feedback was made public. Most LG Coordinators were of the opinion that the scoring results should be made public, but that the detailed justification for the scoring of each CSO that applied should only be made available to each CSO individually in order to respect privacy and not damage the image of the CSO unnecessarily. The evaluation agrees with this point of view.

3. Improve the selection process of priority areas for CSO involvement.

Several CSOs interviewed (in Montenegro, North Macedonia and Kosovo) did not find the selection process of priority areas for Calls for Proposals for CSO projects truly participative in character. In their view, the priority areas were already selected on forehand by the LG and discussed during the initial open day to introduce the ReLOaD project to the CSOs. The CSOs felt that they were more requested to endorse the choices made by the LG than to participate in an open-ended dialogue.

Based on the ReLOaD project's experiences with the establishment of consultative Fora in Bosnia and Herzegovina and UNDP's experience with participatory planning techniques in general, it is recommended to improve on this process in the 2nd phase of the project. The evaluation recommends leaving the process of selecting priority areas for the first Call for Proposals more or less the same as in the 1st phase in order not to try and tackle too many things at the same time. Between the 1st and 2nd call for proposals the team can assist the LGs in setting up consultative fora similar to the ones established in the pilot in Bosnia and Herzegovina in which LG (executive and legislative), civil society and the private sector are represented. Such fora could be used for a collective definition of priority areas. If this works well, further support can be provided by the ReLOaD project (or by UNDP under a separate project) to transform these fora into more institutionalised platforms for regular dialogue and cooperation between LG and civil society with a much wider mandate, like consultation on the strategic local development plan, the development of joint proposals for external funding or the development of action plans for local development priorities (like employment generation for youth).

4. Additional areas for capacity development of CSOs.

The first objective of the ReLOaD project regarding the capacity development of the participating CSOs is to bring them to a level that is sufficient to develop and manage projects in their community adequately. As the evaluation saw before, the project is certainly doing so. Of course, the capacity needs of most CSOs are bigger than only related to project management. Since the ReLOaD project is building a close relationship with many CSOs and know their needs very well, the project offers a great opportunity to expand the capacity development of (selected) CSOs in which the project either plays an active or a more mediating role, e.g. towards the rejuvenated TACSO or the EU resource centres or to other UNDP projects that have complementary objectives (like improved participatory planning).

Areas on which CSOs require extra capacity development are:

- Improving the internal governance practices of CSOs by enhancing their monitoring and evaluation practices, financial management, transparency and accountability and how to strengthen their membership base;
- Increasing the CSOs capacity for analysis and monitoring of LG performance and for holding the LG and its political leaders accountable (watch dog function);
- Enhance their capacity to articulate citizens' concerns and ensure that these are featuring on the LG's agenda (lobby and advocacy);
- Improving partnership, coalition-building and networking among CSOs;

- Enhance the capacities of CSOs to facilitate and mobilise the active involvement of citizens in general or youth in particular in LG planning or in volunteering;
- Improve the capacities of CSOs to diversify and improve their fundraising, targeting both public as well as private funding sources;
- Improve the communication and PR capacities of CSOs to showcase their projects to their community and to attract external funding from private sector or other donors. The ReLOaD teams in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Serbia have some experience with this, while some very good examples were seen in some municipalities where local media were actively involved (like Gostivar in North Macedonia), which could be used as a starting point to build on. Involving local media from the start and providing them with some support and training in exchange for actively covering the whole process in a municipality could be a very useful complementary activity of the ReLOaD project.

5. Minor technical improvements of the LOD methodology.

Besides these major lessons learnt, several smaller, more technical improvements were mentioned during the interviews that could be considered for the next phase. Details are provided in Annex 7.

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Annex 1 Terms of Reference for the ReLOaD project evaluation

I. Identification of the Position

Job Title:	International Evaluation Consultant for the Programme Evaluation
Project:	Regional Programme on Local Democracy in the Western Balkans (ReLOaD)
Supervisor:	Rural and Regional Development Sector Leader
Location:	Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia
Travel requirement:	Yes
Practice Area:	Governance and Peacebuilding
Application deadline:	7/15/2019
Type of Contract:	International
Duration:	August - November 2019 (up to 47 expert days, ca. 27 days in the field)
Presence in the UNDP premises	Partial presence

II. Background and context

As a critical component of any democratic system, civil society has been and will continue to be an important actor of reform processes taking place in the Western Balkans (WB). In this context, the EU accession agenda in the region promotes the role of civil society in further democratisation, including consultation in decision making, contribution to processes associated with policy and regulatory changes, as well as performing a watchdog function and promoting public accountability. Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, the Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia (hereinafter: EU IPA beneficiaries) face comparable challenges when it comes to the cooperation between governments and CSOs (CSO), including limitations in the overall environment for CSO operations, lack of structured CSO participation in public affairs and inadequate CSO capacities. While considerable public funding is allocated to CSOs, available procedures are often not transparent, monitoring of awarded funds is not performed and effects are not measured.

In Albania, the civil society sector remains fragmented, sporadically involved in decision making and overly dependent on donor funding. Comprehensive information on public funding of CSOs is not available. The State Agency for Support of Civil Society and some larger municipalities provide funding to CSOs based on competitive calls for proposals, but the lack of clear rules and procedures for public funding remains a major impediment to the sustainability of the CSO work. The Government adopted an updated roadmap meant to improve the overall environment for CSO operations, including in the area of CSO financing. LGs report to have limited experience with CSO projects, mainly due to limited financial resources and lack of clear procedures.

Bosnia and Herzegovina experienced some progress in establishing institutional mechanisms for cooperation between governments and CSOs, as well as for public funding of CSOs. However, a strategic framework for cooperation with civil society is missing, while transparent procedures are needed for allocating public funding to CSOs across government levels. In general, CSOs have difficulties to mobilise financial resources, and only a fraction of them have a wide base support. Reporting by CSOs on received funding is inadequate, while governments rarely monitor CSO activities that they fund. Steps forward have been made through the

* For the European Union, all references to Kosovo should be understood in full compliance with Resolution 1244 (1999) and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence. For the United Nations, references to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

EU-funded Reinforcement of Local Democracy (LOD) Project,¹⁶ which introduced transparent procedures for competitive project-based funding of CSOs by LGs.

Recent years saw improvements in government-civil society relations in **Kosovo**. Some progress has been noted in the overall environment for CSO operations and public consultations in policy making; however, CSO financing remains one of the major challenges. In 2017, the Government adopted a regulation stipulating criteria and procedures for public funding of CSOs, paving the way for improved governance and a more transparent use of public funds. However, capacities of CSOs and public authorities (LGs in particular) need to be improved to provide for abiding by the new standards of transparency and accountability. With the upcoming 2019-2023 Strategy for Cooperation between Government and Civil Society, the Government demonstrates commitment to further enhance the environment for CSO work.

The climate in which CSOs operate in **the Republic of North Macedonia** has somewhat improved, with the Government showing commitment to dialogue and inclusion. The 2018-2020 Strategy for Collaboration with civil society, among others, envisages further support for civil sector development, civil society participation in policy design and implementation, and improved CSO sustainability, including through transparent public funding. The Government formed a special unit that administers the CSO funding through public calls in accordance with the relevant legal provisions. Generally, public funding for CSOs is limited and has been declining over time. Cooperation between LGs and CSOs remains weak and there is no unified system for CSO funding with clearly defined rules and procedures.

In Montenegro, mechanisms for government’s consultation of CSOs are in place, but they need clear rules, and genuine engagement on both sides. In 2017, the Government adopted a strategic framework to enhance the environment for CSO work and amended the relevant legislation introducing a new system for funding of CSOs from the state budget. All LGs have adequate decisions on criteria for allocation of funds to CSOs, envisaging public calls for proposals. However, majority of LGs face challenges with the implementation of those decisions, including programming of funds for CSOs, defining of priorities for financing in consultation with CSOs, monitoring and reporting on allocated funds. Moreover, CSO capacities to design and implement projects to the benefit of their target groups remain limited.

Serbia introduced a regulatory framework that provides for the participation of CSO in public policy making at both national and local level, as well as for financing CSO from public sources, including LG budgets. However, further efforts are needed to strengthen cooperation between the government and civil society and enhance the environment for CSO operations. CSO work continues to be challenged by the lack of stable funding. Also, to ensure overall transparency, criteria for financial support need to be better defined (at the local level in particular) and robust monitoring and evaluation practices need to be introduced. With several training sessions on transparent public funding of CSOs and monitoring of awarded projects already delivered to public institutional at the national level, the Office for Cooperation with Civil Society also plans to support capacity development for LGs in the upcoming period.

b) About the ReLOaD programme

Project title	Regional Programme on Local Democracy in the Western Balkans (ReLOaD)
Atlas ID	00095613
Corporate outcome and output	UNDP Strategic Plan 2018-2021; Outcome 1, Output 1.2.1

¹⁶ Funded by the EU, the Reinforcement of Local Democracy (LOD) Project was initiated in 2009 to strengthen inclusiveness and transparency in municipal funding for CSOs. The project introduced competitive project-based funding, inciting CSOs to professionalize and provide specific services, in accordance with local development priorities.

Country	Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, the Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia	
Region	Europe and Central Asia/Western Balkans	
Date project document signed	31 January 2017	
Project dates	Start	Planned end
	February 2017	January 2020
Project budget	EUR 10,030,000 million (ca USD 10,704,375)	
Project expenditure at the time of evaluation	ca USD 6,000,000.00	
Funding source	EU, UNDP, Government	
Implementing party	UNDP	

Funded by the EU, the ReLOaD programme supports partnerships between LGs and civil society by scaling-up a successful model of transparent and project-based funding of CSOs introduced by the LOD Project implemented in Bosnia and Herzegovina (2009-2016). As a regional initiative, the ReLOaD is implemented throughout the Western Balkans, including Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, the Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia. It focuses on institutionalization of interaction between LGs and CSOs with underlying intention to put in practice and sustain a transparent, development-oriented and project-based approach to funding of CSOs by LGs, thus contributing to realization of legitimate local priorities in line with local development strategies.

The **overall objective/impact** of the ReLOaD is to strengthen participatory democracies and the EU integration process in the Western Balkans by empowering civil society to actively take part in decision making and by stimulating an enabling legal and financial environment for civil society. The **specific objective/outcome** of the programme is to strengthen partnerships between LGs and civil society in the Western Balkans by introducing transparent and project-based funding of CSOs from LG budgets towards greater civic engagement in decision-making and improvement of local service delivery. The programme **outputs/results** focus on promotion and institutionalization of transparent and project-based funding of CSOs by LGs, capacity building of LGs and CSOs and their effective interaction, improved service delivery by CSOs to the most vulnerable and excluded groups and facilitating cross-country thematic networking of CSOs and LG representatives. *Detailed outline of the Programme Result Framework is available in Annex 1.*

Partnership: Project Board, bringing together representatives of EU and UNDP, is responsible for providing strategic guidance and overseeing the ReLOaD implementation. Due to regional complexity, the ReLOaD institutionalizes the National Board of Partners within its overall governance structure, enabling systemic and meaningful engagement of relevant stakeholders in each participating IPA beneficiary. The ReLOaD partners with 53 LGs in six IPA beneficiaries. Additionally, there is an Advisory Group in each of the IPA beneficiaries, bringing together representatives of civil society (through TACSO Local Advisory Groups and/or Resources Centres) academia, etc., to provide advice to the national Board of Partners. *Overview of key stakeholders and partners and their roles in evaluation is provided in Annex 2.*

Target groups and beneficiaries: Final beneficiaries of the ReLOaD are grass-root CSOs, citizens and local communities in participating LGs. It is expected that by the end of the programme, approximately 38,000 citizens including, socially excluded population groups, youth and women will directly benefit from the programme assistance.

Main achievements: In two years of the programme implementation, 25 new LGs in six IPA beneficiaries adopted the mechanism for transparent disbursement of public funds for CSO based on the [LOD Methodology for Allocation of Funds to Civil Society Organizations](#) (12 in Albania, 12 in Bosnia and Herzegovina and 1 Montenegro). As a result of enhanced partnership between LGs and CSOs, 183 civil society projects were supported in the areas of culture, education, environment, social inclusion, volunteerism, youth, poverty reduction, gender and sport, benefitting 22,000 citizens.

Programme relevance and alignment: The programme is aligned with the pertaining EU strategies, national and UNDP development frameworks and goals (UNDAF, CPD). It contributes to targets set within the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions. *Overview of relevant documentation is provided in Annex 3.*

III. Evaluation purpose, objectives and scope

a) Purpose

The purpose of the Project Evaluation is to provide an impartial review of the ReLOaD programme in terms of its relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, sustainability, overall performance, management and achievements. The information, findings, lessons learned and recommendations generated by the evaluation will be used by the Project Board/Board of Partners, UNDP, EU and by the implementing partners to strengthen the remaining Project implementation and inform future programming.

b) Objective

The evaluation objective is to examine the overall performance of the ReLOaD, its results, inputs and activities, and how the outputs delivered added value to LGs and CSOs. In a substantive analysis of the effectiveness of the project approach and feedback from beneficiaries, the evaluation should assess cause and effect relations within the programme, identifying the extent to which the observed changes can be attributed to the ReLOaD. In addition, this evaluation aims to provide forward-looking recommendations to the EU and UNDP in the field of LG-civil society relations and promotion of CSO role in service delivery.

c) Scope

The evaluation will assess the extent to which the planned specific objective/outcome and results/outputs have been achieved since the beginning of the programme and likelihood for their full achievement by the end of the programme in July 2020 (based on the Programme Document/Description of the Action and its results framework). The evaluation will look into the overall programme performance and results, covering six IPA beneficiaries where the programme is implemented (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, the Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia).

Specifically, the evaluation will review, evaluate and make recommendation regarding the implementation of the ReLOaD programme in 53 partner LGs in six IPA beneficiaries. It will look into critical programme's aspects, such as partnership between CSOs and local authorities and institutionalization of the methodology for transparent and project-based funding of CSOs from LG budget. To the extent possible, it will also consider the relevance and influence of 200 implemented CSO projects on the individuals and groups within the programme's localities (online survey of the programme beneficiaries).

Finally, the evaluation will look into the programme processes, innovations, strategic partnerships and linkages in the regional context, that proved critical in producing the intended results/outputs and the factors that facilitated and/or hindered the progress in achieving the results/outputs, both in terms of the external environment and risks, as well as internal, including: weaknesses in programme design, management, human resource skills, and resources.

IV. Evaluation criteria and key questions

The ReLOaD evaluation is to answer the following questions, so as to determine the programme's relevance, performance, results, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability, including lessons learned and forward-looking recommendations. The evaluation questions are summarized below.

Relevance

- Were the programme's objectives relevant to the needs of the IPA beneficiaries, having in mind political, social and institutional context of the Western Balkans, and what are its potentials to adequately contribute to development processes in the future?
- To what extent is the programme aligned with the relevant national development priorities of the IPA beneficiaries, the EU enlargement policy/accession agenda and UNDP strategic objectives and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 - peace, justice and strong institutions?
- To what extent does the programme contribute to gender equality, empowerment of women and human rights of target groups?

Effectiveness

- To what extent were the programme activities implemented and intended results and the specific objective/outcome achieved? What are the main programme accomplishments?
- What are the positive or negative, intended or unintended, changes brought about by the programme's interventions? This may, inter alia, include an overview of the number of beneficiaries benefiting from CSO grant awarded projects implemented in local communities, CSO/citizen participation at the level of local community, level of LG co-financing, etc.
- What factors have contributed to achieving or not achieving the intended specific objective/outcome and outputs/results?
- To what extent has the programme contributed to strengthening partnership between CSOs and local authorities?
- How effective were results in partner LGs, considering bifurcated approach to selection in Bosnia and Herzegovina? What were the differences in terms of effectiveness between LGs that participates in a more than one programmatic cycle, or new partner LGs?
- To what extent has the programme managed to institutionalize and anchor the methodology for allocation of financial resources from LGs' budgets to CSOs?
- To what extent and through what mechanisms has the programme managed to promote participatory decision making and inclusiveness of civil society in transparent and project-based funding of civil society organizations from LG budgets?
- To what extent has the programme outreached marginalized groups (i.e. youth, persons with disabilities, returnees, internally displaced, minorities...) and supported gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment?
- How effective was the programme's interaction with other local level programmes/projects, specifically other similar EU-funded initiatives in order to trigger synergies maximizing development results?

Efficiency

- Have resources (financial, human, technical) been allocated strategically to achieve the programme results?
- Are there any weaknesses in programme design, management, human resource skills, and resources?

Impact

- What are the programme effects and impact in terms of implemented CSO projects, both in qualitative, as well as quantitative terms, on the overall improvement of quality of life of citizens in targeted areas?
- What are the main benefits (qualitative and quantitative) for beneficiaries' groups of CSO projects?
- To what extent are key stakeholders/final beneficiaries satisfied with the programme implementation, specifically in terms of the partnership support and what are specific expectations for the potential follow-up assistance?

- What are the overall programme effects and impact in relation to LGs' capacities to improve CSO funding procedures, the culture of transparency and participatory decision-making?
- To what extent the programme has elevated cooperation between partner LGs and civil society?

Sustainability

- To what extent are the programme outputs/results sustainable? How could programme results be further sustainably projected and expanded, having in mind the potential future contribution of mechanism for funds disbursement for CSOs?
- To what extent has the programme approach (intervention strategy) managed to create ownership of the key national stakeholders?
- To what extent have the capacities of CSOs been strengthened to sustain the results of the programme? Which are, in this regard, challenges to overcome or potentials to be unlocked in the future?
- What would be directions to expand positive effects of the programme's concept in the area of social services, inclusion and gender equality in the future?
- What would be future priority interventions to ensure long-term sustainability of the programme's achievements and contribute to further development of civil society and improved cooperation between LGs and CSOs?

The evaluation needs to assess the degree to which the programme initiatives have supported or promoted gender equality, a rights-based approach, and human development. In this regard, [United Nations Evaluation Group's guidance on Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluation](#) should be consulted.

V. Methodology

Based on the [UNDP Evaluation Guidelines](#), [UNEG Norms and Stand for Evaluations \(2016\)](#) and in consultations with UNDP Country Office, the evaluation will be participatory, involving relevant stakeholders.

The International Evaluation Consultant (the Consultant) will propose an evaluation methodology and agree on a detailed plan for the assignment as a part of the evaluation Inception Report. The proposed methodology may employ any relevant and appropriate quantitative, qualitative or combined methods to conduct the Project Evaluation, exploring specific, gender sensitive data collecting and analytical methods and tools applicable in the concrete case. The Consultant is expected to creatively combine the standard and other evaluation tools and technics to ensure maximum reliability of data and validity of the evaluation findings.

Standard UNDP evaluation methodology would suggest the following data collecting methods:

- **Desk review:** The Consultant will conduct a detailed review of the programmatic materials and deliverables including the Programme Document/Description of the Action, theory of change and results framework, monitoring and programme quality assurance reports, annual workplans, consolidated progress reports etc. *An indicative list of documents for desk review is provided in Annex 3.*
- **Key informant interviews:** The Consultant will interview representatives of main institutional partners, EU and UNDP, other relevant stakeholders (e.g. Advisory Group) and donors and in all six IPA beneficiaries. For the interviews, the Consultant is expected to design evaluation questions around relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability criteria, according to different stakeholders to be interviewed. *An indicative list of main stakeholders that may be considered for meetings is provided in Annex 2.*
- **Meetings / focus group discussions with LGs and CSOs:** 2 - 3 site visits per IPA beneficiary will be arranged to meet with men and women, beneficiaries and stakeholders and review results of the programme;
- Other methodologies, as appropriate, such as case studies, statistical analysis, social network analysis, etc.¹⁷

¹⁷ UNDP Evaluation Guidelines, Annex 2. Summary of common data-collection methods/sources used in UNDP evaluations

As an integral part of the evaluation report and specifically under the impact criteria, the Consultant will review the programme effects and impact on its target groups. In this context and using the online survey, the consultancy is expected to gain insights from both the partner LGs and CSOs regarding the importance of grassroots CSO projects and the work of the CSOs in general in their communities.

Stakeholders involvement: During the evaluation process, the Consultant is expected to meet senior representatives of the UNDP, EU and the programme team, key partners and stakeholders in all six IPA beneficiaries. Initial briefing and evaluation debriefing to obtain the critical feedback on the evaluation report, are envisaged. To assess programme performance, approach and modalities, the Consultant will meet with key programme partners and stakeholders, members of national Boards of Partners (respective ministries of local governments, offices for cooperation with civil society, associations of cities and municipalities in all six IPA beneficiaries). In addition, the views of representatives of partner LGs and CSOs awarded under the ReLOaD grant scheme will be considered to obtain critical insight and information on the programme activities and results. As relevant, the Consultant will also meet with representatives of other UNDP-implemented initiatives as well as EU-funded projects (such as ROMACTED, TACSO, etc.) active in the field of civil society development. During these meetings, it would be important to record and accumulate inputs necessary not only for the programme evaluation, but also to highlight recommendations and advise on potential programme follow-up phase.

The expected duration of the assignment is up to 47 workdays, with ca 27 days in the IPA beneficiaries (5 days in Albania, 6 days in Bosnia and Herzegovina and 4 days in the remaining IPA beneficiaries) in the period May/July 2019.

VI. Evaluation tasks / deliverables

Following the initial briefing and a detailed desk review, the Consultant will be responsible for delivering the following products and tasks:

- **Inception Report (10-15 pages)** will be presented before the evaluation starts, showing how each evaluation question will be answered by proposing methods, sources of data and data collection procedures. The Inception Report should elaborate an **evaluation matrix** (*provided in Annex 4*) for the ReLOaD programme and propose a schedule of tasks, activities and evaluation deliverables. The Evaluation Inception Report should follow the structure proposed in the [UNDP Evaluation Guidelines, p. 22-23](#).
- **Evaluation and data collection mission:** Upon the approval of the Inception Report and the evaluation work plan by the UNDP, the Consultant is expected to carry out the programme evaluation, including review of effects of CSO projects in target local communities in six IPA beneficiaries. To collect data and insights on the programme, the Consultant will undertake one field mission per IPA beneficiary and have meetings and interviews with relevant stakeholders, including government, CSO, EU and UNDP representatives. UNDP will provide support in organization of meetings and logistical arrangements as necessary.
- **Draft Evaluation Report:** Based on the findings generated through desk review and data collection missions, the Consultant will prepare and submit the Draft Evaluation Report to the UNDP team and key stakeholders for review. *Structure of the Report is outlined in Annex 5.*
- **Evaluation review process** (and eventual dispute settlement): Comments, questions, suggestions and requests for clarification on the evaluation draft will be submitted to the Consultant and addressed in the agreed timeframe. The Consultant should reply to the comments through the **evaluation audit trail**

document¹⁸. If there is disagreement in findings, these should be documented through the evaluation audit trail, while effort should be made to come to an agreement.

- **Evaluation debriefings:** will be held with UNDP Bosnia and Herzegovina (contracted party that administers the programme), EU representatives and other key stakeholders to present main findings and recommendations either face-to-face or in a form of a Skype briefing. In addition, short briefings on immediate findings with UNDP sr. management will be considered after completion of field work in each IPA beneficiary.
- **Evaluation Report** (maximum 50 pages of the main body) should be logically structured, contain data and evidence-based findings, conclusions, lessons and recommendations, and be presented in a way that makes the information accessible and comprehensible. Finally, based on the evaluation findings and in a distinct report section, the Consultant will provide **forward-looking actionable recommendations**, outlining key strategic priorities to be addressed in the potential next phase of the programme.¹⁹

VII. Evaluation team composition and required competencies

The evaluation will be conducted by an International Evaluation Consultant. The Consultant is expected to provide an independent and substantiated review of the programme achievements; capture underperformance; review coherence and inter-connectivity among initiatives within the programme; assess partnership strategy; capture feedback from beneficiaries of assistance provided by the programme, in light of development results; last but not least – recommend improvements that may be undertaken to ensure quality outcome, and provide strategic forward-looking recommendations, outlining pathways for the period beyond this programme phase.

a) Competencies

Core values

- Demonstrates integrity and fairness by modelling UN values and ethical standards;
- Displays cultural, gender, religion, race, nationality and age sensitivity and adaptability.

Core competencies

- Demonstrates professional competence to meet responsibilities and post requirements and is conscientious and efficient in meeting commitments, observing deadlines and achieving results;
- Results-Orientation: Plans and produces quality results to meet established goals, generates innovative, practical solutions to challenging situations;
- Communication: Excellent communication skills, including the ability to convey complex concepts and recommendations, both orally and in writing, in a clear and persuasive style tailored to match different audiences;
- Teamwork: Ability to interact, establish and maintain effective working relations with a culturally diverse team;
- Client orientation: Ability to establish and maintain productive partnerships with national partners and stakeholders and pro-activeness in identifying of beneficiaries and partners' needs and matching them to appropriate solutions.

¹⁸ Template available at http://web.undp.org/evaluation/guideline/documents/PDF/UNDP_Evaluation_Guidelines.pdf, p. 25

¹⁹ Evaluation Report Template available at http://web.undp.org/evaluation/guideline/documents/PDF/UNDP_Evaluation_Guidelines.pdf, p.49

b) Required qualifications for the International Evaluation Consultant

- Academic Qualifications/Education
 - Advanced university degree in social sciences, economics, public administration, regional development/planning, or other sciences sustainable development;
- Experience
 - At least 5 years of extensive project/programme evaluation expertise and experience, with evaluations in the area of local governance and local development;
 - Sound knowledge of results-based management systems, and gender-sensitive monitoring and evaluation methodologies;
 - Expertise in the area of local governance/public administration and/or civil society development;
 - General understanding and knowledge of the political/administrative and development context of the Western Balkans region;
 - Previous working experience in the Western Balkans region is an asset;
 - Proven analytical skills and ability to conceptualize and write concisely and clearly.
- Languages Requirements
 - Fluency in English language.
- Other
 - Excellent computer skills (MS Office applications) and ability to use information technologies as a tool and resource.

VIII. Evaluation deliverables and timelines

Deliverables	# of days per task for Consultant	Tentative due date	Location	Responsible Parties
Initial meeting with the Project owners and desk review;	5	10 August	Online	Consultant/Evaluation Reference Groups
Inception report including detailed evaluation work-plan;	2	20 August	Online	Consultant
Evaluation and data collection mission across the Western Balkans;	27	04 October	Western Balkans	Consultant
Debriefing session held;	1	10 October	Sarajevo or online	Consultant/Evaluation Reference Group
Draft evaluation report;	7	17 October	Online	Consultant
Evaluation review process;	0	25 October	Online	Evaluation Reference Group
Submission of the Project Evaluation Report.	5	31 October	Online	Consultant

IX. Evaluation ethics

This evaluation will be conducted in accordance with the principles outlined in the UNEG ‘Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation’. The Consultant must safeguard the rights and confidentiality of information providers, interviewees and stakeholders through measures to ensure compliance with legal and other relevant codes governing collection of data and reporting on data. The Consultant must also ensure security of collected information before and after the evaluation and protocols to ensure anonymity and confidentiality of sources of information where that is expected. The information knowledge and data gathered in the evaluation

process must also be solely used for the evaluation and not for other uses with the express authorization of UNDP and partners. The Consultant should be free from any conflict of interest related to this evaluation.²⁰

X. Implementation arrangements and reporting relations

The Consultant will report to the Rural and Regional Sector Leader and the ReLOaD Regional Manager. A UNDP Evaluation Focal Point will be assigned to oversee and support the overall evaluation process. In addition, an evaluation reference group will be formed to provide critical and objective inputs throughout the evaluation process to strengthen the quality of the evaluation. The CO Senior Management will take responsibility for the approval of the evaluation report.

XI. TOR annexes

Annex 1. ReLOaD Logical Framework

Annex 2. Indicative list of the main stakeholders and their roles in evaluation

Annex 3. List of documents to be considered for the evaluation desk review

Annex 4. Required Evaluation Matrix Template

Annex 5. Standard outline for an evaluation report

²⁰ UNDP Evaluation Guidelines, Box 7. Sources of conflict of interest in evaluation

Annex 2 Evaluation Matrix

Evaluation criteria	Key questions	Data Sources and collection methods	Success standards
	1. Is the design of the ReLOaD project relevant in the Western Balkans context and adequate to address the identified problems?		
Relevance	1a. Are the objectives of the ReLOaD project relevant to the needs and development priorities of the IPA beneficiaries, having in mind the political, social and institutional context of the Western Balkans;	Documents, In-depth interviews	
Relevance	1b. Has the ReLOaD project and its methodology been flexible enough to adjust to the particular needs and context of each of the participating IPA beneficiaries?	Documents, In-depth interviews	
Relevance	1c. Is the Theory of Change of the ReLOaD project realistic to address the problems of lack of transparency in the allocation of public funds for CSO activities at the LG level?	In-depth interviews, M&E data	
Effectiveness	1d. Has the specific objective of the project been translated into SMART outputs/results?	In-depth interviews, M&E data	
Relevance	1e. Did the ReLOaD project in its design pay sufficient attention to gender mainstreaming and to addressing the interests of marginalised groups in society?	In-depth interviews, M&E data	
	2. Have the activities of the ReLOaD project been implemented in accordance with the approved Description of Action and where they completed in the most efficient way? If so, why or if not so, why not?		
Efficiency	2a. Have the project activities been implemented in accordance with the work plan and budget? Have the initially set targets been met, as measured by project indicators? If any deviations have taken place, have these been properly documented, justified and approved by the appropriate authorities?	In-depth interviews, M&E data, Survey, Site visits, Group meetings	
Efficiency	2b. Were the activities of the ReLOaD project implemented in accordance with UNDP quality standards?	In-depth interviews, M&E data, Survey	UNDP Guidelines
Efficiency	2c. Could these results, in hindsight, have been achieved in a more efficient (i.e. faster or with less resources)?	Minutes of meetings, In-depth interviews, M&E data, Survey, Site visits, Group meetings	
Efficiency	2d. Has there been a proper balance between the provision of hands on assistance and the creation of local ownership?	In-depth interviews, M&E data	
Efficiency	2e. How did the municipal co-funding mechanism work in practice? What were the advantages and disadvantages?	In-depth interviews, Survey, Group meetings	
Efficiency	2f. What was the quality of the interaction between the various partners in the project? Did every partner fulfil its roles and functions, and did they have enough capacities to fulfil their role?	In-depth interview, Group meetings	
Efficiency Effectiveness	2g. How did Quality Assurance function and how did this affect the performance of the project?	In-depth interviews, M&E data	
Efficiency	2h. Are there any weaknesses in the project design, management and human resources?	In-depth interviews, M&E data	

	<p>3. Effectiveness. Did the activities that were implemented by the ReLOaD project and its outputs/results contribute to or is it likely that they will during the remainder of the project contribute to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The establishment of transparent and project-based funding of civil society organizations (CSOs) from LG budgets; - The professionalization and responsiveness of both LGs and CSOs? 		
Effectiveness	3a. Did the implemented activities lead to the intended outputs/results and were there any unintended results? Has this been monitored and has remedial action been taken in order to achieve the results?	In-depth interviews, M&E data, Group meetings	
Effectiveness	3b. What are the overall effects of the project on local governments' capacities for participatory planning, for implementing transparent CSO funding procedures and the monitoring of CSO project implementation?	In-depth interviews, M&E data, Minutes of meetings	
Effectiveness	3c. What are the overall effects and impact of the project in relation to the capacities of local CSO to apply for funding, to implement projects and to monitor and report on progress of project implementation?	M&E data, In-depth interviews, Site visits, Group Meetings, Survey	
Effectiveness Impact	3d. Have potential risks and assumptions that link the outputs/results of the project to the specific objective/outcome been defined at the start of the implementation and have they been monitored, and were corrective measures taken when necessary? Was in hindsight the risk analysis adequate?	M&E data, In-depth interviews, Site visits, Group Meetings, Survey	
Effectiveness	3e. Has progress towards achieving the specific objective/outcome been monitored and has the project taken adequate action in case of delays or deviations?	In-depth interviews, Site visits, Group Meetings,	
Effectiveness	3f. Has the communication strategy been implemented as planned and has this achieved the intended results?	M&E data, In-depth interviews,	EC/UNDP standards
	<p>4. Has, or is it likely that the project will contribute to the democratisation process in the participating countries/territories?</p>		
Effectiveness Impact	4a. Have participating local governments, as a result of the project support improved their participatory planning, their funds allocation to CSOs and their project monitoring?	In-depth interviews, Site visits, Group Meetings, Survey	
Impact	4b. What positive or negative, intended or unintended changes were brought about by the project related to the improvement of relationships between local governments and civil society, the improvement in transparency of funds disbursement and utilisation by local governments related to CSO activities?	In-depth interviews, Site visits, Group Meetings, Survey	
Impact	4c. Can the evaluation get an indication of the impact of all the projects that have been implemented by the CSOs on the living conditions and wellbeing of the inhabitants in their respective communities?	In-depth interviews, Site visits, Group Meetings, Survey	
Impact	4d. To what extent has the project been able to reach out to marginalized groups (i.e. youth, persons with disabilities, returnees, internally displaced, minorities...) and supported gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment?	In-depth interviews, Site visits, Group Meetings, Regional meeting	
Impact Sustainability	4e. Are there indications that the model for public funding of CSO by Local Governments is or will be institutionalised and/or replicated in non-participating local governments.	Documents, In-depth interviews	UNDP guidelines

Impact Sustainability	4f. Is the ReLOaD project influencing national level discussions or policy development around state-civil society relationships resulting in a more enabling environment for CSOs to operate and what could it do more?	In-depth interviews, Site visits, Group Meetings, Survey	
Impact Sustainability	4g. What has the project done to stimulate regional networking and dialogue of civil society and (local) governments across the Western Balkans and has this been effective in further multiplication of good practices? Did any external collaboration with similar or related projects or likeminded regional initiatives take place and to what extent have these been successful?	M&E data, In-depth interviews, Site visits, Group Meetings, Regional meeting	
	5. Are the specific objective/outcomes institutionally, organisationally and financially sustainable beyond the duration of the project?		
Effectiveness Impact Sustainability	5a. Have the institutional and organisational capacities of the implementing partners at local level (Local Government and CSOs) been raised to a level, such that they can continue with the LOD methodology without external support and are sufficient financial resources made available for such continuation?	In-depth interviews, Group Meetings, Regional meeting	
Sustainability	5b. Is there sufficient interest within each IPA beneficiary to apply the LOD methodology outside the framework of the ReLOaD project, and if so, to what extent has it already been or will be institutionalised and integrated in national level legislation or LG performance management? What bottlenecks and support needs are there to do so in future?	M&E data, In-depth interviews,	UNDP guidelines
Sustainability	5c. Did the ReLOaD project include an exit strategy for UNDP and other supporting partners to ensure that the results that have been achieved will continue beyond the life cycle of the project, that sufficiently addresses the institutional, organisational and financial sustainability requirements?	M&E data, In-depth interviews,	
Sustainability	5d. What could the project have done more or better to achieve long-term sustainability of the LOD methodology and what could be done more (by UNDP and/or others) within the limitation of the present political-economic context to enhance the sustainability of the results after the project has come to a closure or during a next phase of the project?	M&E data, In-depth interviews, Regional Meeting	

Annex 3 List of people interviewed

EC

1. Maria Esposito, Directorate General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, EC
2. Liselotte Isaksson, Head of Sector-Civil Society and Social Inclusion, Directorate General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, EC

UNDP Regional Hub Istanbul

1. Robert Bernardo, UNDP Regional Hub Istanbul

Albania

UNDP

1. Limya Eltayeb, Resident Representative
2. Entela Lako, Programme Specialist
3. Eglantina Gollaj, ReLOaD Project Officer
4. Misela Dervishi, ReLOaD Government/CSO Associate
5. Lorena Gjergji, ReLOaD Project Associate

National level stakeholders

1. Bekim Murati, General Director Agency for Support of Local Self-Government
2. Oriando Fusco, Task Manager EUD
3. Erion Banushi, Agency for Support of Civil Society
4. Eva Gugu, Advisory Group
5. Saimir Bakalli, Advisory Group
6. Anxhela Mustafai, Advisory Group

Local Government representatives

1. Petrit Marku, ReLOaD project coordinator, Lezhe
2. Assistant Mayor, Lezhe
3. Zef Zefi, European integration, Lezhe
4. Bardhok Ndreca, Bashkia, Lezhe
5. Anxhela Doku, Ass. ReLOaD project coordinator, Tirana
6. Epidamn Zeqo, ReLOaD project coordinator, Tirana
7. Tresi Trebicka, Communication officer, Tirana
8. Ervin Saraci, Deputy Mayor, Elbasan
9. Bledar Arteziu, Foreign Affairs Coordinator, Elbasan
10. Shefki Lika, ReLOaD project coordinator, Elbasan

CSO representatives

1. Lediana Besh RDIW, Tirana
2. Lorena Cadri RDIW Tirana
3. Klodiana Kadeli, Youth Network, Lezhe
4. Age Tortaj, Association of pasture, Lezhe
5. Gjovalin Marku, OJE, Lezhe
6. Fiona Bashi, Youth Network, Lezhe
7. Iva Muskaj, Foundation Down Syndrome Albania, Tirana
8. Mirela Juka, Foundation Down Syndrome Albania, Tirana
9. Flavia Shehu, Foundation Down Syndrome Albania, Tirana
10. Ejnxx Pepa, Counsellig line for women and girls, Tirana
11. Eglantina Shllaku, Help the Life Association, Tirana
12. Aferdita Seiti, Help the Life Association, Tirana
13. Rita Strakosha, National Centre for Community Services, Tirana

14. Fatmir Brazhda, Albania Natura Organisation, Elbasan
15. Hasan Delia, Albania Natura Organisation, Elbasan
16. Ndrim Cela, Albania Natura Organisation, Elbasan
17. Denis Ahmetaj, Action for Albania, Elbasan
18. Dhoksii Gjoka, Forum i Gruas, Elbasan
19. Nertila Hoti, Forum i Gruas, Elbasan

Bosnia and Herzegovina

UNDP

1. Sukhrob Khoshmukhamedov, Deputy Resident Representative
2. Adela Pozder-Čengić, RRD Sector Leader
3. Nedim Čatović, UNDP Quality Assurance, RRD sector
4. Samir Omerefendić, ReLOaD Project Manager
5. Siniša Ignjatić, ReLOaD Capacity Development Officer
6. Aida Kazagić, ReLOaD Project Associate
7. Sanja Bokun, ReLOaD Sr Project Coordinator
8. Selma Osmanagić Agović, ReLOaD Governance Officer
9. Damir Žarak ReLOaD Field Officer
10. Branka Matić, ReLOaD Field Associate
11. Emir Basić, ReLOaD Field Associate

National level stakeholders

1. Vladimir Pandurević, EUD Program Manager
2. Alan Teletović, Assistant Minister, Ministry of Justice FBiH
3. Aco Pantić, General Secretary Association of Municipalities and Cities RS
4. Goran Rakić, Project Coordinator Association of Municipalities and Cities RS
5. Jugoslav Jevđić, Development Manager, OKC, also Advisory Group member
6. Aida Bahrem, Director, Zene s Une, also Advisory Group member
7. Alexander Kaurin, Ministry of Administration and Local Self-government RS

Local Government representatives

1. Rato Rajak, Municipal Mayor, Rudo
2. Jelena Kuzmanović-Šalipur, Project manager, Rudo
3. Ibrahim Hadžibajrić, Municipal Mayor, Stari Grad Sarajevo
4. Selma Velić, Head of sector for local development, Stari Grad Sarajevo
5. Jasmina Fazlić, Assistant to mayor, Sarajevo Centar
6. Ismeta Demir- Mameledžija, expert associate for CSO cooperation, Sarajevo Centar
7. Amra Đelibašić, Assistant to mayor, Travnik
8. Tomislav Bošnjak-Matić, Municipal Mayor, Vitez
9. Katica Iličić Radman, Expert associate for social development, Vitez
10. Mihaela Malešević, Expert associate for social development, Brod

CSO representatives

1. Marija Ivanović, Women Association Eva, Rudo
2. Svetlana Vuković, Luna, Rudo
3. Ivana Medović, PSO Vihra, Rudo
4. Mahir Selmanović, Generacija, Sarajevo
5. Anja Markov Didović, Infohouse, Sarajevo
6. Alem Česir, Momentum, Sarajevo
7. Emina Osmanagić, Association XY, Sarajevo
8. Amel Kapo, SPID, Sarajevo
9. Alisa Destanovic, Korsarkaski klub, Travnik
10. Amela Mrakić, Centre for Youth Education, Travnik

11. Anto Bilić, Hrvatsko Kazaliste, Travnik
12. Milica Doko, Betanija, Vitez
13. Sabahudin Takhrović, Zura Lipe, Vitez
14. Elma Trako, Zura Lipe, Vitez
15. Julia Petrovic, Savez za povratak, Brod
16. Gordana Kovačević, Korak Nade, Brod

Kosovo

UNDP

1. Maria Suokko, Resident Representative
2. Valbona Bogujevci, Assistant Resident Representative and Programme Coordinator
3. Fjolla Raifi, ReLOaD Project Officer
4. Anita Smallovic, ReLOaD Project Associate

National level stakeholders

1. Ereza Pula, Senior Research fellow Group for Legal and Political Studies
2. Dario Di Benedetto, Team Coordinator Civil Society, Human Development EUD
3. Donika Emini, Executive Director Civikos
4. Dardan Kryeziu, Project Director Civikos
5. Rozafa Ukimeraj, Secretary General, Ministry of Local Government Administration
6. Dafina Olluri, Dept. Director, Open Data Kosovo

Local Government representatives

1. Imri Ahmeti, Mayor, Lipjan
2. Shkelzen Hajdini, ReLOaD project coordinator, Lipjan
3. Haki Rugova, Mayor, Istog
4. Edona Hoxha-Bujupaj, ReLOaD project coordinator, Istog
5. Genc Ademaj, Mayor's office, Istog

CSO representatives

1. Muhamet Qeriqi, Polis, Lipjan
2. Diturie Bytyqi- Mollopolci, Polis, Lipjan
3. Ideas for Partnership, Lipjan
4. Enda Fils, Peace corp volunteer, Istog
5. Angemit Beloci, SHB Melissa, Istog
6. Kumrije Maxharraj, SHB Melissa, Istog
7. Majlinda Kelmendi, Innovation hub, Istog
8. Gent Agolli, Let's do it Peja, Istog

Montenegro

UNDP

1. Daniela Gasparikova, Resident Representative
2. Tomica Paović, Democratic Governance and Environment Team Leader
3. Dzenana Šćekić, ReLOaD Project Officer
4. Arta Hoxha, ReLOaD Project Assistant
5. Aleksandra Vavić, former ReLOaD Project Assistant

National level stakeholders

1. Jadranka Vukčević, Director General, Directorate for Local Self Government, Ministry of Public Administration (MPA)
2. Zorana Popović, Advisor, Directorate Local Self Government, MPA
3. Marija Janković, Advisor, Directorate for NGOs and Good Governance, MPA
4. Sasa Šćekić, Deputy Secretary General, Union of Municipalities

5. Milena Bešić, NGO CEDEM, BOP member
6. Ana Margarida Tome de Freitas Mariguesa Lorentzen, DEU Task manager
7. Anja Zagorac, EU TA project
8. Igor Vidačak, EU TA project

Local Government representatives

1. Mersudin Halilović, advisor to Mayor, Municipality of Pljevlja
2. Emina Salihović, Secretary of the Secretariat for Culture, Municipality of Pljevlja
3. Sanja Đondovic, advisor for NGOs, Municipality of Pljevlja
4. Dubravka Nikčević, Secretary of the Secretariat for Culture, Municipality of Tivat
5. Ivana Petković, Advisor for NGOs, Municipality of Tivat/Biljana Krivokapic, Municipality of Tivat

CSO representatives

1. Žana Đačić, Organizacija slijepih za Pljevlja i Žabljak, Pljevlja
2. Tamara Bajović, Organizacija slijepih za Pljevlja i Žabljak, Pljevlja
3. Karolut Zaijuca, Viva Vita, Pljevlja
4. Zagorka Kalović, Viva Vita, Pljevlja
5. Munira Dešević, Viva Vita, Pljevlja
6. Miloš Ostojić, Legalis, Pljevlja
7. Jugoslav Radović, Center for youth Education, Podgorica
8. Dejan Kumić, Youth Club Tivat, Tivat
9. Iva Gopčević Čelanović, Creative Center, Tivat
10. Vesna Đukic, Olive Growers association, Tivat
11. Marina Vuksanović, Nada, Herceg Novi
12. Marijana Mišić-Škanata, European home, Tivat

North Macedonia

UNDP:

1. Narine Sahakyan, Resident Representative
2. Emil Angelov, Programme Analyst
3. Biljana Georgievska, ReLOaD Project Officer
4. Iva Kolosova, ReLOaD Project Associate

National level stakeholders

1. Nicola Bertolini, Head of Cooperation DEU
2. Eli Cakar, Ministry of Local Self-Government
3. Ivana Serafimova, Association of Units of Local Self-Government
4. Nikica Kusinikova, exec director Konekt
5. Jane Dimeski, Journalist
6. Xhabir Memedi Deralla, Director Civil
7. Biljana Spasovska, researcher BCSDN

Local Government representatives

1. Mitko Janchev Mayor, Kavadarci
2. Sasho Moshev, ReLOaD project Coordinator, Kavadarci
3. Dobro Petrushev, Ass. ReLOaD project Coordinator, Kavadarci
4. Todor Efremov, Head of Economic Development, Kavadarci
5. Dasmir Osmani, ReLOaD project Coordinator, Gostivar
6. Besim Dogani, Ass. ReLOaD project Coordinator, Gostivar
7. Edit Azizi, Monitoring Officer, Gostivar

CSO representatives

1. Petar Gurev, Progress Plus, Kavadarci
2. Cvetanka Koleva, Biovita, Kavadarci

3. Blagica K. Todorova, Step for Europe, Kavadarci
4. Arlind Musliu, Youth Empowerment Platform, Gostivar
5. Sunchica Gjurchinowska, Initiative for Civic Integration, Gostivar
6. Adrian Abazi, Snowline, Gostivar

Serbia

UNDP

1. Francine Pickup, Resident Representative
2. Milovan Filimonović, Programme Analyst/Good Governance Team Leader
3. Vera Kovačević, ReLOaD Project Officer
4. Natasa Protić, ReLOaD Project Associate
5. Ana Radojevic, ReLOaD Project Assistant
6. Natasa Ivanović, UNOPS

National level stakeholders

1. Ivana Antić, Ass. Minister Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government
2. Ana Milenić, Task manager EUD
3. Ekmel Cizmecioglu, Task Manager EUD
4. Žarko Stepanović, Office of Cooperation with Civil Society
5. Marija Lukić, Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities
6. Aleksandar Marinković, Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities
7. Nesa Simić, Advisory Group
8. Dane Pribić, Advisory Group
9. Slobodan Martinovic, Advisory Group
10. Vojislav Velković, Advisory group

Local Government representatives

1. Radomir Nikolić, Mayor Kragujevac
2. Gordana Damjanović, ReLOaD project Coordinator, Kragujevac
3. Tamara Jovanović, Ass. ReLOaD project Coordinator, Kragujevac
4. Vladica Dimitrov, Mayor, Dimitrovgrad
5. Dejan Milev, ReLOaD project Coordinator, Dimitrovgrad

CSO representatives

1. Maja Veselinović, Omladina Jazas-a, Kragujevac
2. Vojislav Veljkovic, CEOOR, Kragujevac
3. Representatives Caribod, Dimitrovgrad
4. Jopah Bicol, Hendikep, Dimitrovgrad

Annex 4 List of supporting documents reviewed

General Documents

- Agency for the Support for Civil Society (2018) Road Map for the Government Policy towards a more enabling environment for Civil Society development 2019-2023.
- EC (2013) Guidelines for EU support to civil society in enlargement countries, 2014-2020.
- EC (2014a) Multi-Country Civil Society Facility and Media Programme 2014-2020.
- EC (2014b) Multi-Country designation Civil Society Facility and Media Action Document 2014-2015.
- EC (2018) Enlargement Strategy for the WB (A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, Strasbourg, 6/2/2018 COM.
- EC (2019a) Montenegro 2019 Report. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions 2019 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy COM (2019) 260 final.
- EC (2019b) North Macedonia 2019 Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions 2019 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy COM (2019) 260 final.
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- Republic of Kosovo, Ministry of Finance (2017) Regulation MF-NR. 04/2017 on criteria, standards and procedures on public funding of NGOs.
- Government of the Republic of North-Macedonia (2017) Program of Government 2017-2020.
- Helvetas (2019) Helvetas Monitor March 2019. <https://www.helvetas.org/en/eastern-europe/about-us/follow-us/helvetas-mosaic/article/why-is-the-space-for-civil-society-in-the-Balkans-shrinking>
- Republic of Kosovo, Office of the Prime Minister (2018) Government Strategy for Cooperation with Civil Society 2019–2023.
- Republic of Serbia (2018) Regulation of funds intended to incentivize programs or lacking part of funds for funding programs of public interest implemented by associations. *Official Gazette of RS, No. 16/2018*.
- Spasovska, Biljana (2019) A star is born.. but the region is not shining; enabling environment for Civil Society Development & enlargement package 2019, background analysis, BCSDN, 2019.
- UNDP (2013) LOD methodology for allocation of funds to Civil Society Organisations; practice manual UNDP, 2013.
- UNDP (2014) Country Programme Document for Bosnia and Herzegovina 2015-2019.
- UNDP (2019) UNDP evaluation guidelines.

Project related documents

- NEAR D 05 Project review of the ReLOaD project C-382867 September 2018.
- ReLOaD Description of Action with annexes.
- ReLOaD Inception Report (February 1, 2017 to May 31, 2017).
- ReLOaD Annual Report first year (February 1, 2017 – January 31, 2018).
- ReLOaD Annual Report second year (February 1, 2018 – January 31, 2019).
- ReLOaD draft half year report (February 1, 2019 – August 31, 2019).
- ReLOaD Periodical Activity reports.
- ReLOaD 5 in country assessments of CSO funding mechanisms in each WB country.
- ReLOaD Assessment of CSO funding mechanisms in ReLOaD partner municipalities.

Annex 5 Relevance of the ReLOaD project in each of the participating PA beneficiaries

The government of **Albania** has initiated a mayor decentralisation process in 2014²¹ that should ultimately lead to a complete redefinition of the roles and functions of the LG and an improvement in service delivery by delegating more service provision functions from the central to the local level. This process started in practice in 2015 with the Territorial and Administrative reform when the 384 Local Government Units were transformed into 61 municipalities. Since then, a gradual transition of functions to the LGs is taking place as well as a strengthening the institutional and administrative capacities at local level. As part of this reform, it is foreseen that LGs work in close cooperation with CSOs in the identification of development priorities as well as in the provision of social services. While mainly in the larger municipalities, the cooperation between LGs and CSOs is improving, only a limited number of LGs are allocating a small part of their budget to finance CSO activities.

Recently, the National Council for Civil Society and the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Albania have adopted the “Road Map for the Government Policy towards a more enabling environment for civil society development 2019-2023”²². Among many other objectives, the road map aims to improve “regulation of public funding for CSO initiatives, projects and programs both at the central and the local level” (Agency for the Support for Civil Society, 2018 page 8) as well as the training of civil servant focussing on government-civil society cooperation in public policy-making and the institutionalisation of citizen consultation mechanisms.

Government officials at both national and local level who were interviewed as part of the evaluation, see the ReLOaD project to be very relevant and vital in this process and stress the importance of its continuation. The “LOD methodology” is presently implemented in 12 municipalities and thus tested for its practical relevance and applicability in the Albanian setting. It is seen as a “blueprint” for the regulation that will be developed over the coming years (the action plan of the roadmap has scheduled the legislative exercise for 2020-2021). Experiences gained in the participating municipalities will feed into the design of these new regulations. In addition, there is potential for the training provided by the ReLOaD project to LG staff on government-civil society cooperation to be integrated into the nation-wide training modules of the School of Public Administration.

In **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, the country where the original LOD project was initiated in 2008, ReLOaD remains relevant even though institutionalisation of the LOD methodology at state, entity or canton level remains after all these years problematic. Both entity governments of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) and the Republika Srpska (RS) have approved the LOD methodology and have recommended it for adoption and integration into the rule books at the lower level governments. At the same time, the Ministry of Justice in the FBiH and the Ministry of Administration and Local Self-Government in the RS are in the process of preparing legislation that might be adopted during the coming few years. Whether this is realistic to expect is difficult to say as such intentions have been expressed many times before without subsequent action. Political processes (especially in the FBiH) are however highly complex and unpredictable, which means that even when the administrations have completed the necessary legislative preparatory work, the formal adoption might still be stalled. In the meantime, the utilisation of the LOD methodology in former participating LGs remains high and there is increasing interest from other LSGs and Cantons to adopt the

²¹ Parliament approved the reform by adopting law 115/2014 “On the territorial and administrative division of LG units in the Republic of Albania”.

²² Agency for the Support for Civil Society (2018) Road Map for the Government Policy towards a more enabling environment for Civil Society development 2019-2023.

methodology and be part of the project. It shows that the LOD methodology can gradually be institutionalised through a bottom up adopting process even though this takes much longer and remains fragile compare to national level top down legislation.

In **Kosovo**, the ReLOaD project started at the same time when the Ministry of Finance issued its Regulation MF-NR. 04/2017 on criteria, standards and procedures on public funding of NGOs²³, which defines “criteria, standards and basic procedures for public funding of non-governmental organizations (hereinafter NGOs), with the purpose of establishing a transparent and accountable system, for financing with public funds programs and projects pertaining to the public interest of non-governmental organizations in Kosovo”. The regulation is based on the same EU regulations as the LOD methodology and differs only on some small details.

While the regulation is compulsory, its actual introduction and implementation at both national and local level is rather slow and in practice, only those LGs that are participating in the ReLOaD programme have integrated it fully in their local rulebook. The Office of Good Governance in the Office of the Prime Minister (OGG-OPM), in its recently adopted Government Strategy for Cooperation with Civil Society 2019–2023²⁴ states that: “The Regulation MF-04/2017 has been well received amongst public institutions and CSOs, but for its application in practice greater efforts must be made with the existing Strategy as well as continuous capacity building for Institutions and CSOs”.

This makes the ReLOaD project timely, relevant and highly appreciated, as it offers the government the opportunity to “test” its roll out and gain practical experience through its actual implementation under guidance and support from ReLOaD. The successful application in the ReLOaD project also shows that, with sufficient support, the regulation is applicable and beneficial to the users while it improves the transparency of public funding. The Ministry of Local Government Administration and Ministry of Finance intend to use the initial experiences of the LGs participating in the ReLOaD project to evaluate and refine the regulation and its related manual in one- or two-years from now.

The situation in **Montenegro** and therefore the relevancy of the ReLOaD project is similar to that in Kosovo. With the adoption of a new law on the financing of local self-government in December 2018²⁵, which is similar (although less detailed) to the LOD methodology, and the strengthening of the legal framework regulating the work of CSOs, the legal framework for cooperation between LGs and CSOs is more or less complete but needs to be implemented by all government institutions, which requires time and additional capacities, partly because there are no detailed guidelines or manuals available. At the time of the evaluation, only a limited number of LGs (mostly ReLOaD participants) had integrated the new legal requirements in their own rulebooks and were even then not implementing them fully.

According to the EC 2019 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy for Montenegro, the dialogue on cooperation between public institutions and civil society has significantly improved since the Council for the Development of NGOs has resumed its work in September 2018 with a new organisational structure. According to the Directorate for Local Self-Governments, the support offered to LGs by ReLOaD is highly relevant since there is at the moment no other facility to provide such training and hands on support to LGs. Similarly, in the past, the EU funded Technical Assistance to CSOs (TACSO) and the four EU Resource Centres where not able to reach out to the CSOs in the more remote municipalities to provide them with basic skills

²³ Republic of Kosovo, Ministry of Finance (2017) Regulation MF-NR. 04/2017 on criteria, standards and procedures on public funding of NGOs.

²⁴ Republic of Kosovo, Office of the Prime Minister (2018) Government Strategy for Cooperation with Civil Society 2019–2023.

²⁵ EC (2019) Montenegro 2019 Report. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. 2019 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy COM (2019) 260 final.

to successfully apply for and implement projects. According to the EU Delegation to Montenegro, this will change however with the contracting of new service providers, who should provide services to these CSOs as well.

Specifically, for Montenegro, due to its limited population size and the fact that Montenegro consists only of 24 LGs, the grant component of the ReLOaD project is less relevant and is partly overlapping with other existing and new grant facilities from the EU and other donors. Through a shift in emphasis within the project (less grant facility more technical assistance), combined with better coordination and cooperation with these other grant facilities, this could however easily be resolved in the possible next phase of the project.

In **North Macedonia**, the enabling environment for civil society has improved significantly since the start of the ReLOaD project. Important features are the proper functioning of the Council for Cooperation between Government and Civil Society, the active involvement of civil society in policy development and the adoption of the Strategy of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia for Cooperation with and Development of the Civil Sector 2018-2020, including its action plan. Financial sustainability of CSOs, especially the smaller ones, remain problematic since public funding of CSO activities remains rather limited.²⁶

Regarding the strengthening of LGs, the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia expressed its intention in its Government Programme 2017-2020²⁷: The Government will implement policies in view of increasing the municipalities' capacities, as well as their transparency and accountability. The goal will be to give more power to citizens, but also improve the services and life quality across the territory of the Republic of Macedonia..... The Government will pursue a policy of transferring new powers and more funding to municipalities for the successful execution of entrusted responsibilities and provision of better services to citizens."

In light of these developments, the ReLOaD project is and remains highly relevant, especially since the Government has according to the Ministry of Local Self Government the intention to either draft a law or to draft more detailed regulations regarding transparent public funding of CSOs by (local) government institutions in which the ReLOaD experiences will be integrated.

In **Serbia** the overall environment for CSOs to operate freely and independently is shrinking according to the EC 2019 communication on EU enlargement policy²⁸. Amendments to the Law on state administration, Law on local self-government and the Law on the planning system introduced specific provisions aimed at improving public participation in policy development. However, the relationship between the government and CSOs is still marked by fragmented cooperation... A national strategy and action plan to contribute to an enabling environment for civil society have still not been adopted. A council for civil society cooperation still needs to be set up.

The legal framework for funding of CSOs by public institutions in Serbia is more or less complete. The Regulation of funds intended to incentivize programs or lacking part of funds for funding programs of public interest implemented by associations of March 2018²⁹ and various supporting decrees resemble the

²⁶ See EC (2019) North Macedonia 2019 Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions 2019 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy COM (2019) 260 final and BCSDN website: <http://www.balkancsd.net/report-on-enabling-environment-for-civil-society-in-macedonia-presented-improvement-for-the-first-time-in-six-years/>

²⁷ Government of the Republic of North-Macedonia (2017) Program of Government 2017-2020.

²⁸ EC (2019) Serbia 2019 Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions 2019 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy COM (2019) 260 final page 8.

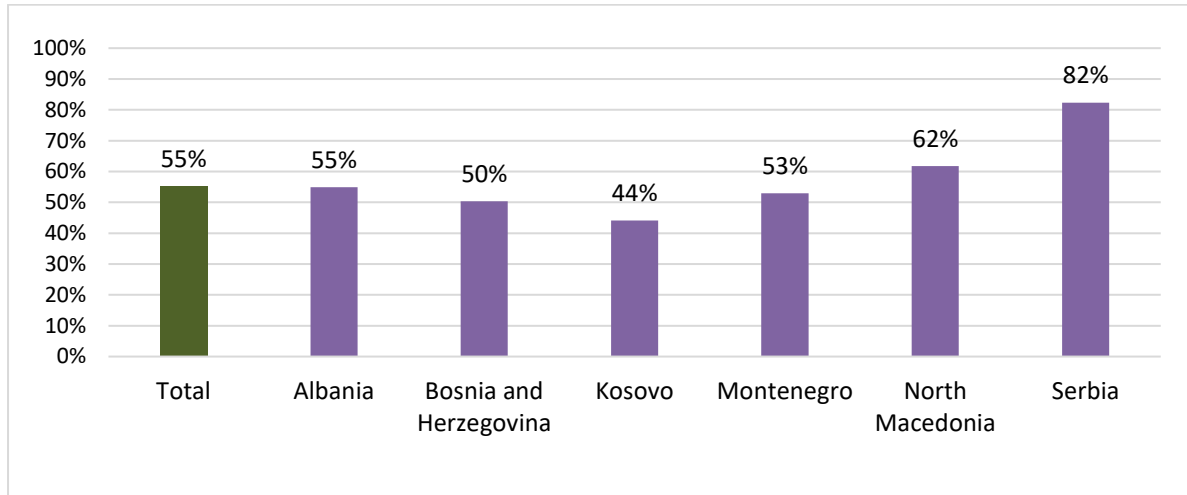
²⁹ Republic of Serbia (2018) Regulation of funds intended to incentivize programs or lacking part of funds for funding programs of public interest implemented by associations. *Official Gazette of RS, No. 16/2018*.

procedures of the LOD methodology. Nevertheless, criteria for public financial support for CSOs need to be better defined and implemented to ensure overall transparency, especially at local level (EC 2019, page 8). In addition, especially both LGs and CSOs in smaller municipalities often lack the capacity to implement these new regulations, which is why the ReLOaD project remains highly relevant. Experiences from the municipalities participating in the ReLOaD projects are according to the Ministry of Public Administration and LG very valuable to check whether the present regulations are complete and implementable and can be used for the drafting of more detailed guidelines.

Annex 6 General characteristics of the survey populations.

199 out of 378 CSOs (or 53%) who participate (or participated) in the ReLOaD project at the date of the survey responded to the survey. The highest response rate was in Serbia (see figure 6.1).

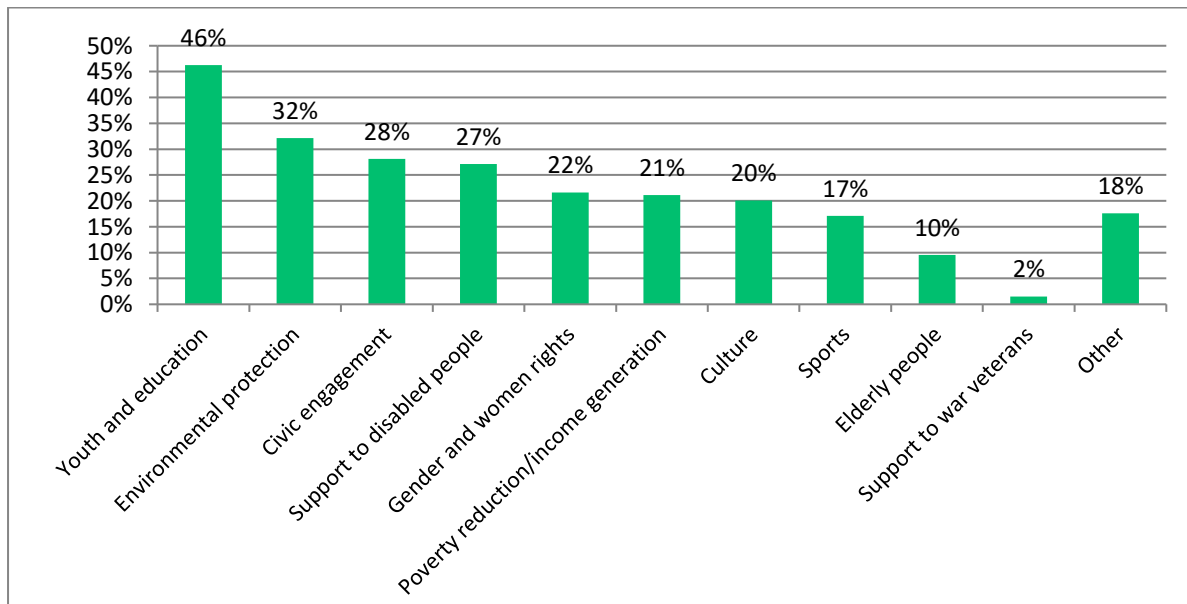
Figure 6.1 Survey response rate of CSOs participating in the ReLOaD project (N=199).



Source: CSO survey, September 2019.

Figure 6.2 presents an overview of the sectors in which the CSOs who participated in the survey are active, which reflects the priority areas that the ReLOaD project would like to cover.

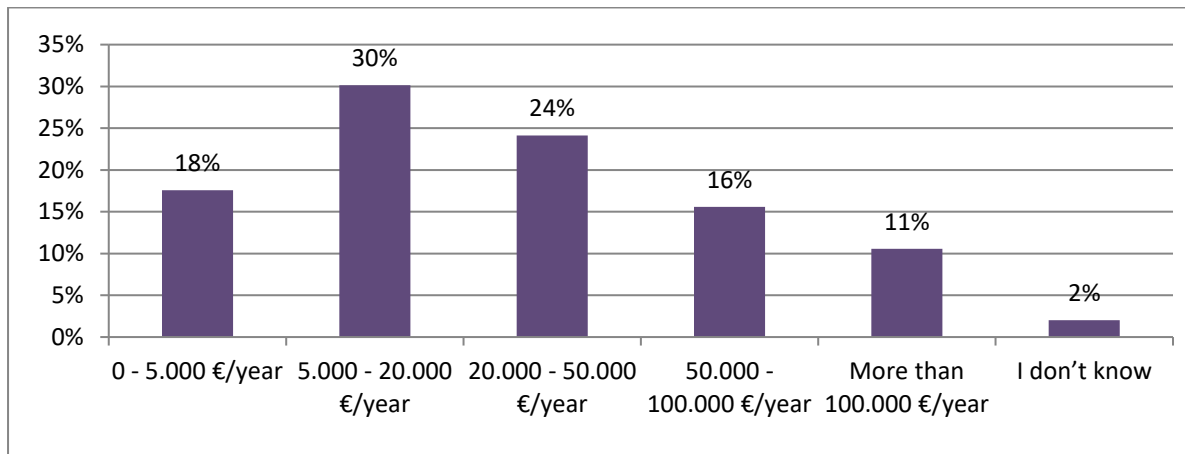
Figure 6.2 Overview of sectors in which the participating CSOs are active (N=199).



Source: CSO survey, September 2019. Note that more than one answer was possible.

Figure 6.3 presents the average annual budget of the participating CSOs, showing that most of them (72%) are relatively small or very small with an annual budget below € 50.000.

Figure 6.3 The estimated average annual budget in € of the participating CSOs over the last 3 years (N = 199).



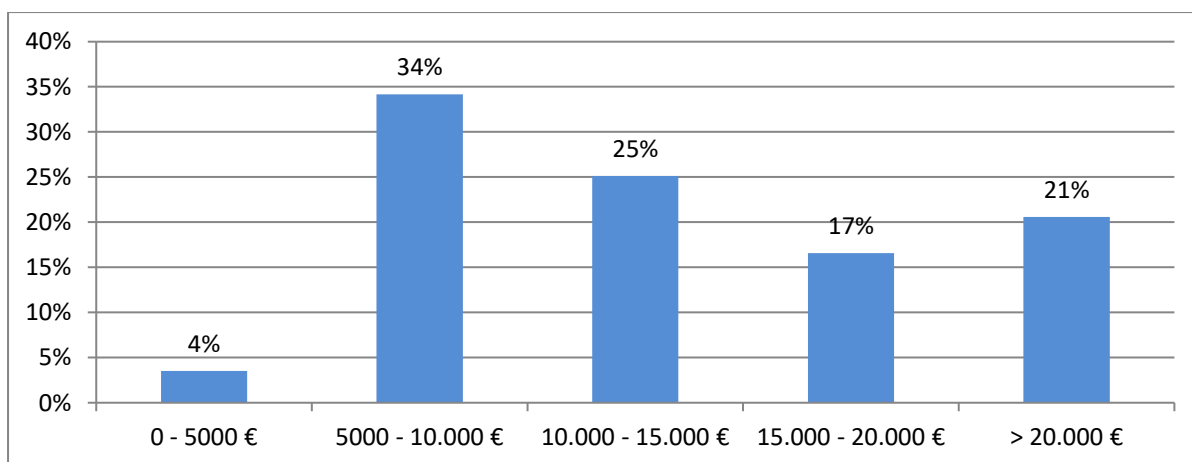
Source: CSO survey, September 2019.

89% of the participating CSOs exist already for more than three years and only 4% less than 1 year, which is an indication that most of them are “genuine” CSOs and most likely not GONGOs who tend to have short life cycles.

The amount of funding each CSO received from the ReLOaD project is presented in figure 6.4. Almost 80% of the funding distributed to the individual CSOs was smaller than € 20.000. With an estimated number of 420 CSO projects completed at the end of the project (not all 2nd Call have been completed), each municipality has implemented an average of 8 projects and the average amount of funding per project will have been € 14,300.

The funding allocated to each participating CSOs might seem small, but given their limited total annual budget, it meant for a significant number of CSOs a temporary increase in budget of more than 100%. Combined with their limited absorption capacity these amounts seem to be appropriate.

Figure 6.4 The amount of funding each participating CSO received from the ReLOaD project (N = 199).

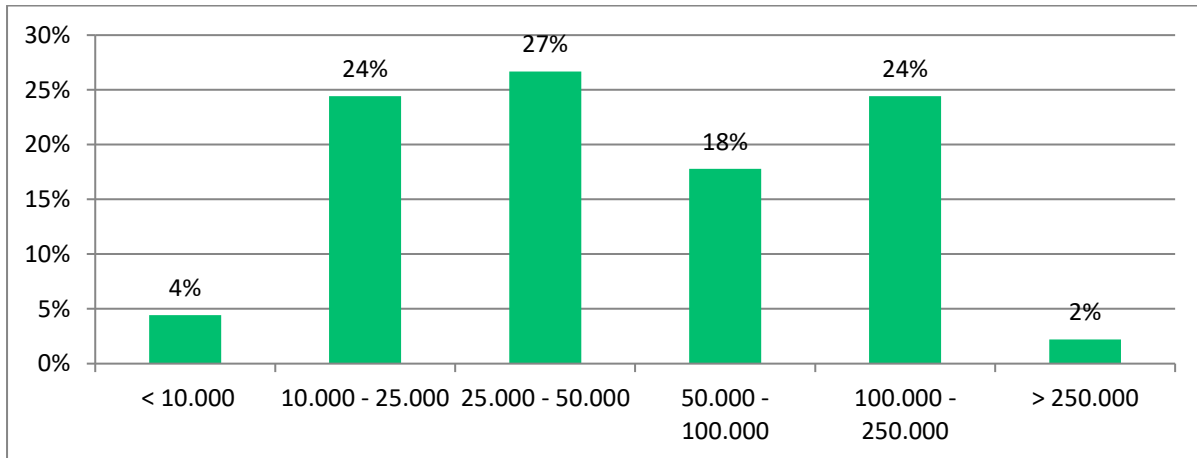


Source: CSO survey, September 2019.

46 out of 53 (or 87 %) of the LG Coordinators participated in the LG Coordinators Survey, which is a very high response rate.

The estimate population size of the municipalities in which the LG Coordinators work is presented in figure 6.5 showing an equal distribution over small medium and large municipalities.

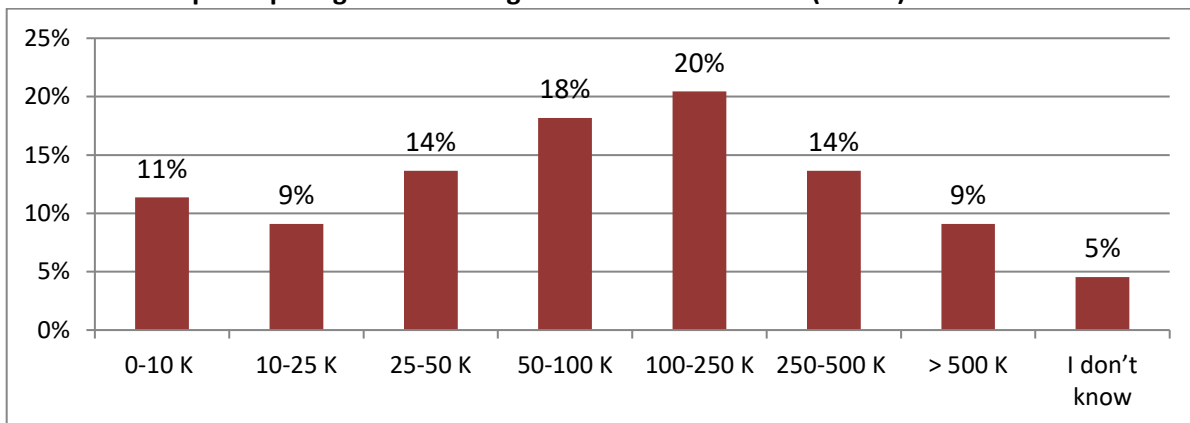
Figure 6.5. The estimated total population size of the City or Municipality in which the LG Coordinators work (N =45).



Source: LG Coordinator survey, September 2019.

Likewise, the average annual LG budget (excluding ReLOaD) for Support to CSO activities (excluding political parties but including sport activities) shows a similar distribution (see figure 6.6).

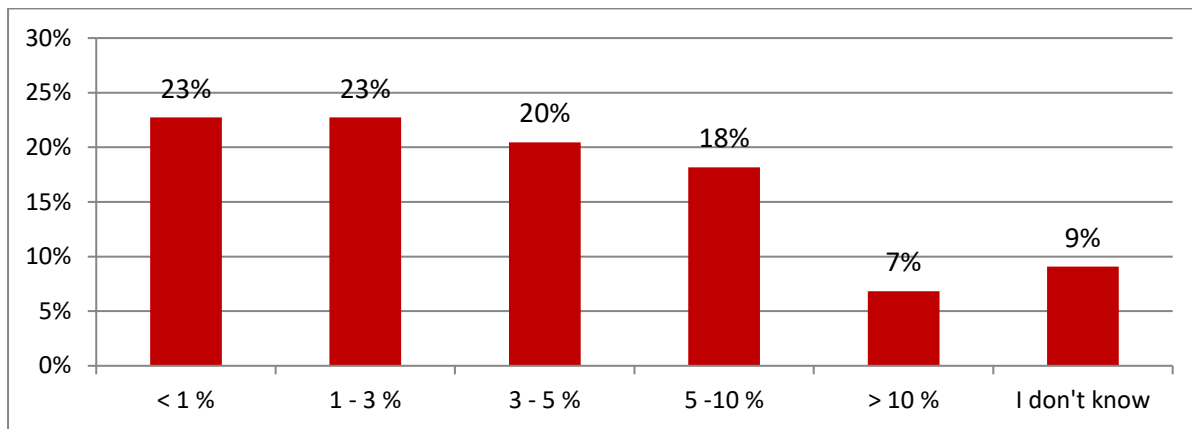
Figure 6.6 The average annual LG budget for Support to CSO activities over the last three years in the participating LGs according to the LG Coordinators (N = 44).



Source: LG Coordinator survey, September 2019.

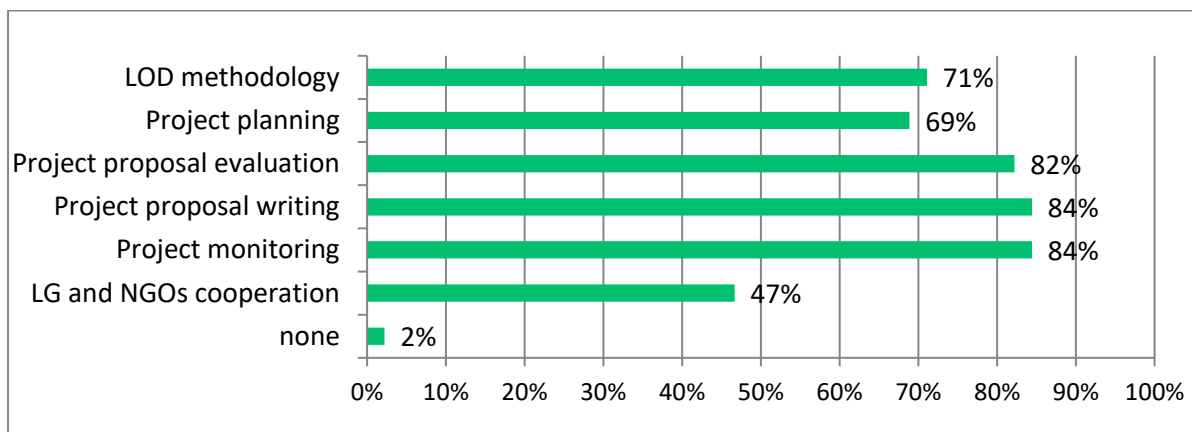
Figure 6.7 shows the average annual LG budget for Support to CSO activities over the last three year in the participating LGs in percentage of their total LG budget. Since the number of respondents per country/territory is rather low, the evaluation cannot draw any firm conclusions, but both in amount as well in percentage of total budget, LGs in Albania record in general the lowest contribution, while those in Serbia record the highest amounts.

Figure 6.7 Average annual LG budget for Support to CSO activities over the last three years in the participating LGs in percentage of the total LG budget according to the LG Coordinators (N = 44).



Source: LG Coordinator survey, September 2019.

Figure 6.8 Participation of LG Coordinators in the ReLOaD training modules (N = 45).



Source: LG Coordinator survey, September 2019. Note: the training module: “LG and NGO cooperation” was not offered in every country/territory.

Annex 7 Proposed technical improvements of the LOD methodology

In order to enhance the commitment from the local council to the project and to LG-CSO cooperation in general and thus the sustainability of the project outcomes especially in countries without a supportive legal framework, it would be good to involve the local council more systematically and actively in the various stages of the project, as part of its introduction (present the selection mechanism and confirm priority areas), regular progress updates (by the Mayor or LG Coordinator) and by the CSOs themselves after completion. Their involvement could also have a positive effect on the LG budget allocation for CSO support in future once the councillors see the impact of the projects and are more aware of the fact the allocation process was fair and transparent. Possibly with assistance of the Local Government Associations, a module on project management and CSO cooperation could be integrated in the general induction course of newly elected councillors were applicable.

While the LOD methodology stimulates on the one hand an increase in the number of high quality proposals and competition between CSOs and therefore forces every organisation to stay on its toes, it might on the other hand restrict new inexperienced organisations, who could have wonderful ideas to reach out to their community, but who cannot compete with the more experienced ones since they have not received the same basic induction training and backstopping support from UNDP to apply successfully for funding from the LG. This is a difficult dilemma since the LGs do not want to stimulate a wild growth of CSOs on the one hand, but also do not want to block new CSOs from the system. Especially in the medium and larger municipalities and cities this could present a problem. One could argue that these new CSOs should link up with existing ones in the beginning or ask for peer support in order to learn how to draft good proposals, but in practice this rarely happens as they are in fact each other competitors for a limited source of funds. While no ready-made solution is available, it could be worthwhile to experiment (e.g. in municipalities that participate for a 2nd time) during the next phase of the ReLOaD project with a small seed fund for emerging CSOs only, with smaller amounts per project and less stringent application criteria. To a certain extent this principle has already been applied in Bosnia and Herzegovina and several other IPA beneficiaries where CSOs could apply either for a grant below € 10.000 or for a grant between € 10.000 and € 35.000. To qualify for the larger grant, their overall score on the selection criteria had to be above 70 out of 100, which indicates a higher level of capacity.

The ReLOaD project could consider developing an online application procedure for public calls for CSOs, which could be used next to the paper version application. This might help to reduce the amount of time spend on the application process, even though some documents might still need to be submitted by hand.

Several participating municipalities (e.g. Sarajevo Centar and Banja Luka in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Strumica in North Macedonia) are using the LOD methodology successfully for all or most of the financial support to CSOs, including sport organisations and war veteran organisation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Sarajevo Centar even organized a PCM like training for war veteran organisations to prepare them for the change. Since these are sectors that receive substantial financial support in most LGs it would be good if these allocation processes could become more transparent as well and the monitoring of the actual usage of these funds could be improved. The LGs that apply the LOD methodology for all CSOs usually have a separate budget line with an earmarked budget for each category of CSOs and they usually apply for sport organisations a slightly adapted procedure and application process, since these organisations have special requirements (e.g. some ongoing regular activities that require funding are difficult to capture in project proposals). According to these LGs the application of the LOD methodology for sports organisations is not too complicated, while other LGs mentioned that they do not do it yet because it is too complicated. It is therefore recommended that the ReLOaD project makes an inventory of these experiences and, if useful,

develop an addendum to the guidelines that focuses on the application and monitoring process of these organisations.

If there is one area that CSOs would like to see changed in the LOD methodology it is the tendering and procurement procedure. Many organisations, and even LG Coordinators, find the procedures as defined by UNDP not proportional with the amounts involved and too strict. These organisations understand the need for solid procedures to prevent mismanagement of funds and they therefore comply with them, but it costs them and the UNDP staff a lot of time to manage the administration. Most LG Coordinators mentioned that their LGs will not be able to adhere to the same strict procedures in future. Especially in small municipalities CSOs struggle to comply with the regulations since often there simply are not enough potential suppliers or they are not able or willing to submit a written pro-forma quotation for the small amounts involved. The evaluation advises the project to conduct a risk analysis and to assess the present procedures again and simplify them where possible, e.g. some ex-ante approval requirements of procurements could change to an ex-post endorsement if in line with a procurements plan. At the regional meeting in Tirana, Mr. Primožic from the Municipality of Skofja Loka in Slovenia mentioned that they have been able to introduce much simpler procurement and tendering procedures that still comply with the EU regulations. It would be worthwhile for the ReLOaD project to assess such options and discuss with the financial management of UNDP whether they would be acceptable. From a sustainability perspective it would be much better to focus on procedures that the LGs can easily comply with in future (without necessarily increasing the risks of mismanagement) than to adhere to very stringent rules.

Many CSOs mentioned during the interviews that they would appreciate some kind of “Letter of successful completion and appreciation” from both the LG and UNDP after the successful completion of their project. This would give the CSOs a formal public recognition of their efforts, it enhances their visibility and could be useful in future application processes. It would be nice if this could be done in a similar ceremony as is done around the signing of the contract in which a selection of CSOs is requested to showcase their completed projects.