

PILLARS OF CIVIL SOCIETY:

More effective cooperation
between civil and state sector
in Albania



NPO ACADEMY

2015-2018

PILLARS OF CIVIL SOCIETY: MORE EFFECTIVE COOPERATION BETWEEN CIVIL AND STATE SECTOR IN ALBANIA - NPO ACADEMY 2015-2018

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Slovak Aid does not necessarily share the opinions here within expressed. The author bears the sole responsibility for the content.

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List of Acronyms

AR	Assessment Report
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
NPOs	Civil Society Organizations
NCEI	National Council for European Integration
NPO	Non for Profit Organization
PA	Partners Albania
PDCS	Partners for Democratic Change Slovakia
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
ToR	Terms of Reference

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I. CONTEXT OF THE PROJECT

1.1 Civil Society development in Albania

1.1.1 No exact figures exist on the current number of Civil Society Organizations (NPOs) registered and operating in Albania. According to the Tirana Court of First Instance, which maintains the register for NPO-s, there were 12,000 NPOs including associations, foundations and centers. However, the total number of active NPOs registered with tax authorities is just 3,724¹. Only in 2016, data show to have 307 new registered NPOs, of them 221 associations, 60 centers and 26 foundations. In a recent study commissioned by Balkan Civil Society Development Network (BCSDN) the working force within the sector is 7,505 employees representing 0.72% of the total employment in Albania. The organizations working in the field of youth, culture and education, and social services, represent the higher number of active NPOs. However, the lack of official information on the number and other relevant data on NPOs, such as their geographical distribution, size of the organizations, number of employees, annual incomes, source of funding, active and non-active status, etc., remains problematic.

1.1.2 In general, the legal framework governing establishment and functioning of NPOs is regulated in most of its aspects. However, it still presents some problematic issues in terms of centralization of registration/re-registration process in Tirana, financial costs of registration, lengthy procedures and lack of specialized lawyers, advocates and judges who deal with NPOs legal issues. The legal and regulatory framework on basic legal guarantees of freedom for NPOs is generally harmonized and in line with international standards.

1.1.3 NPOs in Albania operate in a quite dynamic environment and play a significant role in the country's development through their diverse competencies and expertise area. The sector involvement and presence on public and policymaking issues has been more and more visible, but there is still room for improvement regarding a more effective participation in decision-making and policymaking processes in line with some best practices. The legal and fiscal framework for the sector is subject to frequent changes affecting the sustainability and activity of the sector. The role of the NPOs as promoters of change depends on their maturity, competence, preparedness and capacity to successfully cooperate with country strategic partners. NPOs still need development programs to improve skills related to organizational development and management, sustainability and inclusion in participatory processes.

1.1.4 There are several reports that have diagnosed periodically the status of NPOs development in Albania. Thus, the [BTI Albania country report 2016](#) highlights the crucial importance of foreign assistance to create and support a non-existent sector, stimulating civic participation and socializing people to democratic values and behavior.

Some NPOs have managed to be successful to engage in advocacy work, cover monitoring roles and provide expertise that educational institutions were not able to provide. Still, the weak civic tradition inherited from the past, strong political influence, and heavy dependence on foreign funds have molded a particular type of civic action -concentrated in the capital and tailored to serve their financiers' priorities rather than society's concerns. [The Freedom House, in its Nation in Transit 2017, Albania Report](#) was positive in its overall assessment of the NPO status mentioning that civil society groups and activists showed increased vibrancy, organization, and engagement in voicing their concerns about different social and political issues. [Partners Albania, 2015-16. Monitoring matrix on enabling environment for Civil Society development. Country Report for Albania](#) make reference to the NPOs financial viability and sustainability highlighting that the available public funding is considered insufficient for the development and sustainability of NPOs. [USAID Report 2016:CSO Sustainability Index](#) presents that Albania is identified as a country with a stable sustainability index for the period 2014-15-2016.

¹ IDM, 2016 CSO sustainability index, 2017.

The report notes that NPOs continue to make efforts to improve their strategic planning, constituency and coalition building, advocacy, and use of modern technologies; however, these initiatives were insufficient to make significant and sustainable changes to the NPO environment in Albania. The Law on Volunteerism is not yet active, NPOs continue to advocate for proportional rules on accounting and financial reporting for organizations of different sizes and income, especially for small NPOs that do not engage in economic activity, there is still a gap in expertise and experience between NPOs in Tirana and those outside the capital. Donor dependence drives many NPOs to adopt broad missions, leading to generalization and lack of expert knowledge in specific areas of activity. Civil society continues to engage in Albania's EU integration process. Although NPO representatives participated in all meetings of the National Council for European Integration (NCEI), a consultative forum established in 2015 to guarantee inclusiveness in EU-related processes, the 2016 EU Progress Report for Albania concluded that NPOs failed to take an active role in the council. The sector's public image did not change much in 2016. NPOs enjoy some media coverage of their activities and advocacy campaigns—mainly those focused on good governance, accountability, women's and children's rights, and environmental protection. The public generally supports particular causes and campaigns, but not the sector as a whole.

1.2 Government contribution to NPOs

Albania 2016 Report of the European Commission:

1.2.1 The 2015 marked some positive development in the legal aspects related to State - NPOs cooperation and NPOs development. In May, the Government of Albania approved the Road Map for Drafting Policy and Measures for Enabling Environment to Civil Society, a document that includes nine priority areas of actions aiming to enable the government to undertake an efficient decision-making process with respect to establishment new or improving existing mechanisms for cooperation with civil society in order to contribute to the promotion of participatory governance, inclusive policy making and stronger democracy within the country. It is expected that the Road Map will contribute to a more efficient government and civil society cooperation, as a prerequisite for the sustainability and irreversibility of reforms undertaken within the frame of the European Union (EU) accession process. The nine priority areas are as follows: 1. the national strategic policy environment for civil society development; 2. Institutions supporting Government-CSO cooperation; 3. Involvement of NPOs in policy making process; 4. Public funding framework for NPOs programs; 5. The new legislative framework for registration and work of NPOs; 6. Financial reporting / accounting and tax treatment for NPOs; 7. Collection of available data regarding civil society development; 8. Development of voluntarism; 9. NPOs contribution to Albania EU accession processes.

1.2.2 In November, the Albanian Parliament approved the Law "On the Establishment and Functioning of the National Council for Civil Society", a collegial consultative body aiming to guarantee institutional collaboration between the state and NPOs in Albania, in favor of a consolidated democracy, good governance and increase of transparency through increased involvement of civil society in this process. Apart from increased number of consultations number of NPOs involved in these processes, consultations among state institutions and NPOs are still characterized by a lack of meaningful and timely dialogue.

Regarding the political criteria, adoption of the law establishing the NCCS provided the framework for more structured consultations with civil society organizations. Transparency and inclusiveness in parliament's work continued to follow an upward trend with the law on NCCS even though the selection process for NCCS civil society representatives was not clearly set out in law. Civil society representatives participated in all meetings of the National Council of European Integration, but their role remained passive overall. There is still a need for closer cooperation and coordination at all levels of government with parliamentary and civil society platforms dealing with EU integration matters. Effective implementation of the laws on the right to information and public consultations remained a challenge, especially at local level. Engagement of civil society in raising public intolerance to corruption, monitoring and denouncing corruption and overseeing anti-corruption bodies' performance remained weak.

1.2.3 The changes at the legislative, policy and strategy level, unfortunately are not accompanied by noticeable developments at the practice level. So, 39% of the surveyed NPOs declare that the cooperation between the state and NPOs is not improved, 36% that the cooperation is somehow improved, and only 25% declare that the cooperation is improved. In April, the law on volunteerism was enacted by parliament, fulfilling one of the nine priorities identified in the government road map towards a more enabling environment for civil society development. Generally, some progress was made in regulating the third sector, but the fiscal framework remains not supportive to its needs and development. Transparency, accountability, application and selection procedures on the distribution of the public funds from the public institutions, including the ASCS, needs to be improved to address the needs of NPOs. The state has institutionalized the recognition of the importance of the development of and cooperation with the sector.

1.3 Donors' Contribution to NPOs

1.3.1 NPO-s in Albania continues to be largely dependent from the donors and they are generally donors – driven. As a result, many of them are inactive due to lack of funds or completion of their initial mission, which make the number artificially bigger. Civil society organizations (NPOs) and individuals in Europe and Eurasia are increasingly learning to adapt to constricting civic space by finding new ways to advocate, to mobilize citizens, and to raise funds. NPO sustainability in many countries in the region is increasingly challenged by decreased access to funding and constricting operating space, highlighting progress in financial diversification through innovative practices, as for example crowd funding alternatives etc.²

1.3.2 The international community is envisaged to promote examples of good practice from Albania and the region, as well co - funding some activities. Both actors are invited to always include the relevant line ministry in implementation of the activities in order to help the coordination between the government and non-government efforts and to avoid overlapping and ineffectiveness. Donors' budgets for NPO-s financing NPO-s projects have been decreased over the past years in some cases over two-thirds during the past decade³. More worrying is the “donor flights” from Albania, less dialogue among donors about the support to civil society. As results, even funds addressing needs of vulnerable communities are more limited than before. The EU represents one of the most important sources of financing for the future however its application requirements are very difficult to be fulfilled by the local NPOs.

² 2016 CSO Sustainability Index for Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia, 20th edition - July 2017

³ Donor strategies and practices for supporting Civil society in the Western Balkan

2. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

2.1 Objectives and outputs

2.1.1 The overall goal of the project is to support the process of democratization and reforms in Albania with the emphasis on improving the cooperation of Albanian governmental and non governmental sectors through sector development towards skills enhancements, sustainability and transparency as well as strengthening of the cooperation between civil society, citizens and public officials.

The project specific objectives are: (i) to enhance the civil society in Albania through building capacities of small and medium sized organizations and (ii) to well set relations with the government.

2.1.2 The main outputs to be achieved by the project implementation are: (i) enhanced capacities of selected small and medium sized NPO executives' in Albania through the "NPO Academy" program and enhanced cooperation between them; (ii) NPO Academy participants consulted on the basic needs of their organizations; (iii) enhanced cooperation between the participants of NPO Academy and Government by enhancing the skills of Academy participants in the areas necessary for the cooperation with government (advocacy, lobbying and coalition building) in order to enhance their interactions and common activities; (iv) Enhanced skills of Academy participants in areas necessary to cooperate with government; (v) Shared experience by the Slovak NPO leaders and representative of the government. The envisaged final outcomes of the project implementation are "specific projects implemented as a result of building experts' capacities of the NPO leaders and new information related to non governmental sector and government (at least 3), the number of real contacts, problem solving or establishment of cooperation (at least 20)".

2.2 Project activities

2.2.1 The key activities defined in the project document are: (i) Organization of a series of residential trainings for NPO executives within the Academy during the period 2015-2018; (ii) Preparation of an e-publication on topics relevant to cooperation among sectors, examples of good practice; (iii) Creating supportive Peer-coaching groups for the alumni of the NPO Academy; (iv) On site consultations for the Academy participants; (v) Organization of a Conference in Albania for sharing the main outcomes and outputs of the Academy 2015 and promoting a new toolkit for representative of experts, media and public; (vi) Public presentation of achievements at the end of the project's implementation; (vii) Intensive training program as an extension of the Academy for acquiring skills necessary for cooperation with the government sector; (viii) Organization of Study visits of Academy Alumni in Slovakia in order to get knowledge and practice on NPOs-government cooperation preceded by a webinar to map the participants expectations for the visits. The main activities planned and the indicators to be achieved are summarized in the table presented in Annex 1 of the AR.

2.3 Implementation strategy and key assumptions

2.3.1 The project is conceived in two phases: First phase of activities to be implemented during 2015-2016 and the Second Phase of activities to be implemented during 2017-2018. The project started as a direct reaction to problematic relationship between non-forprofit and governmental sector in Albania with certain consequences in democratic process and civil society development. After public presentation of the project results of the first phase, the lessons learned and beneficiaries' feedback were reflected in the newly planned activities. Thus, (i) the need for capacity building of small and medium size organizations was considered during the selection process of the Academy applicants as well as in widening the delivered topics for Academy participants; (ii) Direct provision of technical assistance to the organizations regarding internal processes of organization, financial systems in place and personnel management were considered particularly for young organizations; (iii) introducing the webinar prior to the study tours in order to narrow the focus and meet the expectations of the participants.

2.3.2 The project is implemented as a joint effort of the PA and PDCS. Clear division of responsibilities between implemented partners is presented in the project document. The key assumptions envisaged in the project document are: (i) government's persistent interest in supporting the development of the civil sector and in working with CSO representatives; (ii) Willingness of active leaders of Albanian NGOs to build successors in their sector; (iii) quality selection of participants and up to date content of training activities for Albanian NGO leaders; (iv) readiness to attend the study tours and have language skills to successfully master them; (v) interest in attending coaching meetings and interest of external guests to attend the conference.

2.3.3 Other administrative assumptions envisaged in the signed Cooperation Agreement by both partners are: (i) The content of the information materials developed and distributed should be in line with the Project objectives and they have to be consulted and approved by Slovak Aid Agency prior to the publication and distribution; (ii) Partners Albania permit the monitors and evaluators of the Slovak Aid to access the documentation related to the project implementation and to provide them with assistance in reviewing the project progress and impact; (iii) In case of extra cost needed for the completion of the activities, they will be covered by Partners Albania that is the final beneficiary.

2.3.4 The project document has presented risks that could negatively influence project activities. The most significant ones are: (i) Unexpected political events, diversion of interest of local democracy; (ii) insufficient added importance from the government sector needed to put new activities and strategy into practice;

2.4 Intended beneficiaries and key stakeholders

2.4.1 The primary beneficiaries to this given project include: (i) Albanian NPOs across the country, which could benefit from the series of lectures during the NPO Academy, from sharing experience with each other as well as from learning from transformation experiences of Slovakia in field of education of NPO executives and deepening cooperation between governmental and non for profit sector. (ii) NPO executives for whom it is an exceptional opportunity to progress in their professionalism and become actors of change; (iii) Inspiring representatives of governmental sector in new and proven forms of cooperation with the non for profit sector in order to enhance their interactions and common activities.

2.4.2 The secondary beneficiaries of the project include: (i) Other NPOs that would work and collaborate with more experienced and knowledgeable organizations; (ii) NPO donors, that would cooperate with better performing NPOs and would receive better proposals for financing; (iii) Central and local decisions making institutions that would have higher participation and quality of contribution from civil society during the decision making process; (iv) The local communities and the society in general that would benefit from better planned and better performed activities.

2.5 Technical and administrative management

2.5.1 The Project is technically managed by both the PA staff and the PDCS staff. Thus, PA has assigned the Project Manager responsible for the project management in Albania, the Assistant Manager responsible for coordination of activities and the Financial Manager who was responsible for financial reporting to PDCS. The Partner Slovakia assigned the Project manager – responsible for the overall project management/administrative management- thus reporting to Slovak Aid (narrative reporting /intermediate and final reporting) coordination with Albanian administrative staff for the smooth implementation of the project etc. and Financial manager – Responsible to check the financial reports of Partners Albania and financial reporting to SlovakAid for both project partners. The activity plan was drafted and implemented as a contribution of both organizations. PA has reported be monthly financially and narratively to PDCS.

3. EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT

3.1 Purpose of the assessment

3.1.2 The main purpose of this final external Assessment Report (AR⁴) is to analyze the achievements of the project, while providing project partners with an independent review of project outputs. The assessment scope is focused on overall assessment of the activities implemented in the timeframe of January 2015-April 2018, presenting the effectiveness, impact, and providing recommendations for future sustainability. More specifically the assessment will be focused in the following objectives: (i) Assess project results in comparison with originally planned aims and objectives; (ii) Identify factors that have facilitated and/or impeded the achievements of the objectives; (iii) Assess the relevance, effectiveness and sustainability of the project; (iv) Assess the impact of external and internal factors on the effectiveness of the project; (v) Assess the efficiency and the adequacy of the management arrangements of the project (e.g. cooperation with the Slovak Trainers); (vi) Identify lessons learned and good practices with regards to project implementation and partnerships, etc.

3.1.3 The AR findings and recommendations will determine whether the project has been able to address the issues of sustainability of results and outcomes the project has achieved. The recommendations are expected to be used by the implementing partners namely Partners Albania (PA) and Partners for Democratic Change Slovakia (PDCS) to guide their future programs' design and implementation, the NPO executives and organizations as a guidance in their future cooperation and exchange of experience with each other and with the governmental institutions as well as in their future fund raising efforts. More concretely, they will serve as guidance for: (i) recognition of the current situation regarding the developments achieved in the central and local level regarding NPOs and their relations with government; (ii) understanding the current situation of the capacities of the NPOs and issues to be addressed that could result in better performing organizations; (iii) understanding of the current role needed by the civil society organizations in cooperation with both the government and communities; (iv) the designing of new project proposals and fund requirements to support the future interventions in the areas of their mission.

3.2 Context of assessment

3.2.1 The project was conceived by both PA and PDCS and on this basis the implementation is organized in two phases and each one supported by the cooperation and financial agreement signed by both partners, namely: (i) The cooperation Agreement between PA and PDCS for the implementation of the project "NPO leaders for better partnership and Cooperation" signed in September 2015, covering the period October 2015-December 2016 and, (ii) The Cooperation Agreement between PA and PDCS for the implementation of the project "Pillars of civil society: More effective cooperation between civil and state sector in Albania" signed on November 2016, covering the period January 2017-April 2018. The total amount of funds for the implementation of both phases was 63,259EUR.

3.2.2 The assessment is carried out in a time when the civil society sector involvement and presence on public and community issues has been more and more visible and when their role is indispensable regarding many important and sensible issues nowadays that need increasingly more NPOs with positive image, clear and strong identity and that are trustful in the public. The assessor found interest and readiness for cooperation of the representatives of NPOs that participated in the NPO Academy, government representative involved in the project as well as other actors considered as relevant for the assessment process. A very good understanding to participate and respond to the assessment requirements was found by the PA manager and implementation staff. Their opinions and information were important during the collection of information and analysis of the situation and results.

⁴

The Final External Assessment is a mandatory requirement of the Slovak Aid Agency at the end of the project implementation.

3.3 *Assessment methodology*

3.3.1 The assessment was based on a desk review phase, which included: (i) the data provided by the project documents, and other alternative public and NPOs resources. This is especially related to the assessment of the planned and current outcomes of the project against the data and information coming from different sources. Thus, data and information were provided by the Partners Slovakia and Partners Albania, such as project document and logical framework matrix, progress and final reports, open calls for participating in the Academy, the selection criteria of Academies' participants, project technical documents including training materials, publications, assessment forms of the activities to be completed by participants; (ii) Several documents such as Albania 2016 Report of the European Commission, BTI Albania country report 2016, Freedom House Report on Albania 2017, USAID report on NPO Sustainability Index etc. which helped the assessor understand the project's environment and the relevance of its activities; (iii) Information from different available sources regarding the level of cooperation between NPOs and local and central government after the finalization of the first phase of the project as well as the advocacy and lobbying efforts made by NPOs around important topics of public interests. (iv) Other documents regarding the role the civil society is playing last three years as part of the EU integration efforts of the country.

3.3.2 Face to face interviews were conducted including representatives of the NPOs assisted/coached in the framework of the project's activities, representatives of the Government approached by the project in order to assist networking efforts with NPOs, CSO executives and other managerial positions of NPOs participating in the NPO Academy, PA lecturers etc. The main issues discussed with them are: (i) NPOs perception on the project's impact and their commitment on the civil society issues; (ii) Are NPOs participants in the Academy satisfied with the quality level of lectures and assistance offered and how these influenced their organization's performance and improvement; (iii) Are the government representatives confident about the future cooperation with these NPOs; and (iv) Main priority issues for future interventions and what good practices and benefits highlighted by them.

3.3.3 A qualitative survey was conducted in order to better understand the perception of the Project participants and direct beneficiaries regarding the project's outputs. The questionnaire (see Annex 5) was conceived to be completed electronically via survey monkey platform and was sent to 42 NPO attendees that were not part of the face-to-face interviews. There are 27 respondents that completed the qualitative survey. The main findings of the face-to-face interviews and qualitative survey were fundamental to confront the findings during the desk review, included in the Chapter 4 of this AR and to make a full analysis from the beneficiaries' viewpoint. The Head of Albanian Agency for the Support of the Civil Society was contacted too. In addition, a Google search of the activities implemented by NPOs participating in the project during the period 2016-on took place in order to help a general assessment of the compliance of the NPOs activities with the objectives of the Project's activities.

4. THE MAIN FACTS' FINDINGS

4.1 NPO Academy

4.1.1 During the course of projects' implementation there are 4 Calls for Applications to participate in the NPO Academy announced by the PA, respectively: (i) NPO Academy No. 1, Announced on February 2015, the duration of the program March-November 2015, the total number of the selected participants 18; (ii) NPO Academy No. 2, Announced on February 2016, the duration of the program March-November 2016, the total number of the selected participants 22; (iii) NPO Academy No. 3, Announced on February 2017, the duration of the program February-July 2017, the total number of the selected participants 15; (iv) NPO Academy No. 4, Announced on June 2017, the duration of the program September 2017-March 2018, the total number of the selected participants 15. The NPO Academy initiative was launched through all channels of communication such as newsletter, e-mail, Facebook, website, LinkedIn, Google + etc. and the interested applicants were asked to apply through an application form and a motivation letter.

4.1.2 By a special brochure, information regarding the application process, eligibility and the selection criteria were presented to the interested applicants (Annex 9). The eligibility criteria included NPO Directors or Board Directors or both, new and experienced NPOs, committed to attend a series of 10 lectures, follow up sessions and attend all other planned activities presented in the program, and knowledge in speaking and writing of English language since most of the case studies, literature and other supporting materials would be both, in Albanian and English language. The Brochure provided also overall information regarding the development stage of civil society in Albania and current needs, information about the main objective of the NPO academy, information about the achievements during the previous NPOs Academies as an opportunity to get better knowledge for NPO executives, cooperation, networking and partnership with other Albanian NPOs and NPOs abroad as well as the full Academy's Program.

4.1.3 The Academy participants were selected after each round of applications by a Selection Committee composed by the PA Director, 2 Programs' Directors and the Training Director. Out of 166 applicants for the four Academies, 70 are qualified as attendees. The number of applications under each call demonstrates that the interest about the program has been constantly good. The large majority of the qualified NPOs to attend the Academy where those with their headquarters in Tirana. The information searched about the activities of Tirana based organizations participating in the Academy, indicates that most of these NPOs are active throughout Albania. The Academy was attended also by organizations from other cities such as Puka, Lezha, Kukes, Berat, Elbasan, Durres, Gjirokastra etc. The attending NPOs have a wide spectrum of focus in their work such as women, youth, environment, local development etc. The Academy was attended also by second line management of well-known think tanks such as IDRA, Agenda Institute, Albanian Institute of Science etc. that are recognized for their long and professional experience in the CS sector in Albania.

4.1.4 Ten curricula were delivered to the participants of each Academy (see Annex 2). The selection of the curricula was based in the extensive knowledge and experience of the PA regarding the needs of the civil society organizations, the organizations' fields of interest expressed to PA in the framework of different programs, as well as on the findings of different evaluation reports regarding the main problems the sector is facing. There is a slight change of the curricula program after the 1st Academy, due to the modifications realized based on the feedback of the first Academy graduates. Thus, a newly introduced curricula was the "Participatory Governance and participatory tools". No change of the offered curricula is noticed during the 3 other Academies. The lecturers have integrated the concepts of orientation, education and development of practical skills. In addition to each module, the lecturers have delivered to the participants a set of reading documents regarding legal framework related to each topic, outlines for the preparation of the strategic documents by the organization, advocacy and lobbying plans, communication plan, an outline for the preparation of a policy and procedures' manual etc. The lecturers declare that they aimed to organize the sessions in a way that could maximize the results in terms of program effectiveness, sparring and competitiveness among participants to promote the interaction and potential of group dynamic, but also

providing personalized coaching where appropriate. Out of 10 delivered curricula the ones on Advocacy and Lobbying, Coalition building and Networking and Fundraising and Philanthropy for NPO leaders are delivered by PDCS trainers, while the rest from PA trainers. The three training topics delivered by 2 PDCS trainers are covered in 3 intensive training days in order to increase the group capacities for the necessary skills regarding networking and coalition building and implementation of advocacy and lobbying campaigns. The best Slovakian practices have been the main scope of the intensive training program. During the NPO Academy, alumni from the previous Academy participants were invited in order to share with the participants their experiences. Also, representatives of the local Government such as Vlora, Durres, Puka etc. were invited.

4.1.5 At the finalization of the complete Program of the Academy, NPO attendees are asked to complete a test that served to assess the gained knowledge during the Academy and as a self-assessment instrument regarding different aspects of their organization. Some of the assessed topics were about the clarity of the mission, vision of the organization, documented internal policies and procedures in the organization, performance indicators and mechanisms etc. Particularly young organizations have identified as a weak point of their organizations the lack of a strategic plan, the unclear internal procedures, lack of the fundraising plan, and the advocacy plan and as such the PA assistance through the coaching sessions was considered valuable. The test included questions about key knowledge related to the delivered topics important for the Academy Attendees. The test results indicated that the participants answered correctly to over 85% of the test questions.

4.2 *Creating supportive peer coaching groups*

4.2.1 4 Coaching and mentoring sessions were provided to the Academy participants during the first phase with the aim to motivate the networking among NPO alumni, who discussed about their challenges. Coaching sessions were conceived as follow up of the lectures delivered in the Academy. The participants were introduced with the scope, rules, what does peer coaching look like, calendar of meetings etc. Each coaching session have started with an introductory speech by the facilitator regarding: (i) the role of a CSO leader, disputes at organizational level, management of stress at work, decision making dilemmas, how to deal with unmanageable number of tasks and burnout, how to effectively express criticism etc. (ii) Organizational sustainability, challenges of fundraising and diversification of funds as well as the impact of NPO Academy in the organization development, sustainability, visibility and PR. The participants shared their experience regarding the role of the leader in the NPO, role of the board, conflict of interest, communication with the staff etc. During the sessions participants reflected on their own difficult situations within their organizations and shared stories with each other. Participants were opened and explored solutions on how to solve the above-mentioned issues within their organizations.

4.2.2 There are 15 NPOs that have benefited from on-site coaching sessions. Some of the topics for which the organizations received coaching sessions by the PA experts were preparation of the development strategy for the organization, development of the communication strategy, development/writing of project proposals, development of internal policies and procedures, fundraising funds etc. The PA experts worked with the managers of the organization, but special issues were discussed with broader audiences.

4.3 *Creating a publication on topics relevant to cooperation issues*

4.3.1 “NPOs development, sustainability and inclusiveness in participatory processes“ is a guidebook published to assist NPO executives participating in the Academy with deeper information regarding four topics: (i) development, governance and organizational management, (ii) fundraising; (iii) Advocacy; (iv) peoples participation in decision-making. The intention of the guidebook preparation was to support the curricula delivered in the Academy. For each topic of the guidebook, a theoretical framework combined with concrete examples and practical tools was provided that makes easier for the readers to understand and to exercise themselves for the gained knowledge. The authors of the publication were one PA expert and 3 PDCS experts. The guidebook was distributed as a reading material to the Academy attendees. The guidebook is published online on PA webpage.

4.4 Study visits of NPO Academy alumni in Slovakia

4.4.1 5 study visits were organized in the course of 2 project phases in Slovakia, in which participated 68 attendees of NPO Academy. The aim of each visit was to provide participants with models and successful practices regarding local government-NPO cooperation. Representatives of the local government from Vlora, Durres and Puka joined also the visit. They were informed on the activity of NPOs, citizens' groups and public institutions in several cities such as Bratislava, Banska Bistrica, Zvolen etc. The meetings with NPOs and public institutions helped the participants to learn about the cooperation, innovative practices regarding the fight against corruption, crowd sourcing, fundraising, participative budgeting etc. PDCS was crucial particularly for the content related aspects of the study tours' organization. The impressions about the study visits and the benefits were discussed in the peer coaching meetings. The Study Tours in Slovakia generated more communication with participants of the NPO Academy and promoted a larger degree of openness in their discussions.

4.4.2 The participants in the study visits held meetings with the Family Community Center to discuss "Youth activities, activities for mothers and families, education, participation, cooperation with local government", the Women Alliance Slovakia to discuss "Women rights, women empowerment, protection of the abused women and girls", the Fair Play Alliance NPO to discuss innovative anti corruption activities, monitoring of spending of public finances, Inakost initiative in PDCS to discuss LGBTI organizations in Slovakia, Advocacy, Psychological support, Civic Centre in Zvolen Town to discuss community center, center for mothers, cooperation and volunteers, the Cultural Center Zahrada to discuss promotion of cultural activities, concerts, theater, the Community Foundation Healthy City to discuss Community Foundation Model and Fundraising on municipal level Youth Council Slovakia to discuss youth activities, Youth Award, Cooperation with Municipalities.

4.4.3 The study visits during the second phase of the Academy, have been proceeded by two webinar session organized and facilitated by the PDCS experts. The idea of having a webinar session was a direct product of the lessons learned after the first phase of the project's implementation in order to improve the focus of the visit and increase its usefulness for the organizations. The webinar were held 2 months in advance to the study tours.

4.5 Technical assistance to the NPO Academy attendees

4.5.1 PA has provided on site technical assistance for 15 NGOs / 1 to 2 days each in order to guarantee the implementation of the gained knowledge and competences during the Academy to respond to the needs of their organizations. The NPOs were invited through an open call to express their interest for having on site assistance based on their issue of interest. The provided assistance was concrete: technical assistance for improving the project proposals prepared to apply in certain donors' programs, develop the communication strategy and tools to ensure greater visibility, guidance for preparation and finalization of the strategic plan, tools for an effective communication strategy among members, community, local government and other stakeholders (See Annex 3). The sessions were interactive and participatory, utilizing a wide range of techniques such as presentation of actual situations/documents/strategies, brainstorming, sharing of experiences of the experts' organizations etc.

4.6 National conference

4.6.1 The National Conference "Creating a good environment and capacity building for the development of the civil society in Albania" is organized, where findings and recommendations from the monitoring matrix of the enabling environment for civil society development in Albania. The NPO Academy was presented as well as an innovative program to build effective organizations for the benefit of the public and interest groups. The conference was attended by over 60 participants, representatives of the government and state institutions, local government, donor community and civil society organizations in Albania and Slovakia. Based on the experiences and lessons learned regarding the topics of the NPO Academy, the need for consultation and not just peer coaching sessions, the need for webinars prior to the study tours were considered and reflected in adjusted activities.

5. ANALYSES

5.1 *Project's relevance and focus*

5.1.1 The implementation of the Project "Pillars of Civil Society: More effective cooperation between civil and state sector in Albania - NPO Academy 2015-2018" is assessed as very relevant to the current situation and needs of the CS Sector and society. The analysis of the Albanian context in terms of the state of development of civil society from the perspectives of different reports, the problems it faces and the role it is envisaged to play at the current development stage are a strong favorable argument for the implemented activities.

In addition during the interviewing process other arguments regarding project's relevance are used: (i) the historical reforms Albania are under implementation such as Justice Reform and Anticorruption, both requiring real contribution by the civil society organizations, particularly in their advocacy and watch dog role; (ii) The fight against corruption and increased transparency is in the focus of government efforts last four years. Due to the financial fragility, lack of funds to cover the institutional cost of the organizations, lack of internal capacities, many NPOs find difficulties to comply with tax payment and reporting requirements. Under such situation, many NPOs are interested and are paying special attention to improve the internal procedures and rules, increase the capacity of their management and employ/outsource services to financial officers; (iii) Last month, the European Commission has recommended the European Council to open the negotiations for Albania membership to the European Union. Opening negotiations for membership brings the civil society agenda to a higher level requiring substantial contribution through lobbying, advocacy and oversight activities at national and local level to address issues of corruption, organized crime, economy and social cohesion as well as higher capacities in application for funds and project management. The interviewees think that cooperating with PDCS, which is an organization from a EU member country it is very good also because it has knowledge and experience about the EU integration path and processes.

5.1.2 The interviewed governmental officials confirm the relevance of the project's activities. According to them, the young organizations are passive in liaison with governmental institutions mainly due to lack of good expertise, the opinion that their suggestions are not considered in approved policy documents etc. While the relations in the local level are declared to be easier due to mostly personal relations among people of the same community. However, they suggest that both the government and organizations should be assisted and promoted to establish contacts and cooperation and increasing inter knowledge for each other is the first step towards that.

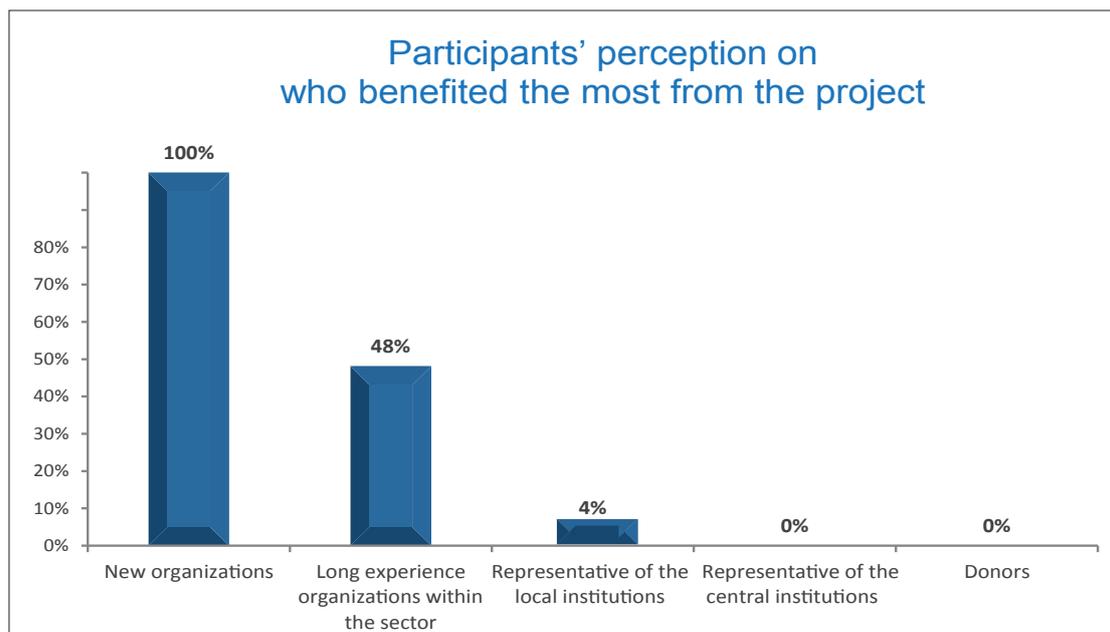
5.1.3 Considering the issue of relevance at the organizational level, the interviewees emphasized that last years donors and other financing institutions are working to establish a new financing culture in fund allocation. They look increasingly more to support well-managed and transparent organizations, with profiles and achievements that impose respect to the local communities/society and that are seriously taken by the local and central government institutions. The interviewees widely confess the compliance of the performed project's activities, which have fulfilled to a large extent the expectations they had at the application phase.

5.1.4 The interviewees categorize the implemented activities in three groups: (i) those that raise the management and organizational capacities of the organizations based on the internal governance standards including internal structures, financial management, transparency; (ii) Activities that strengthen the capacities to advocate and to cooperate with the government and public institutions; (iii) activities that tackle the issue of financial sustainability including the diversification of resources, meaning the membership fee by the public and private sources of income in addition to the donors funds. Almost all interviewees belonging to the newly established organizations declare that the first group of activities creates a set of knowledge that could be implemented in their organizations, while the knowledge received from two other groups of activities can be implemented to a very limited scope. They note that the topics of Organisational Development; Strategic Planning; Strategic Communication and Fundraising were very professional to be absorbed by the

representative of very young and small organizations since most of them lack the knowledge and skills on development of strategic documents related to the topics (as development of internal rules and procedures; a strategic plan development; a fundraising plan development; an internal communication strategy etc).

5.1.5 Regarding the primary beneficiaries, NPOs participating in the Academy in general and new NPOs and young NPO Leaders among them in particular, can be considered that were the ones that benefited more from the project's activities. The major number of training, coaching and technical assistance activities targeted these groups. The face-to-face interviews provided a strong perception about this, while the survey results clearly demonstrate that (See Graph 1).

Graph 1



The representatives of the local government are the second group who benefited from the Project. Participation of the local government representative from Albanian municipalities in the study visit in Slovakia; participation of various LGs and other officials from the central government in the National Conference held in Albania; meetings of Albanian NPO Academy representatives with various Slovakian LG and Central Government representatives contributed to the enhanced cooperation among sectors. Also during the implementation months of the NPO Academy, 3 NPOs participating in the program advocated and lobbied with regards to participatory budgeting implementation in two municipalities (Durrresi and Puka, those representatives were part of the study visit in Slovakia) and two Albanian Ministries (Ministry of Education and Sports and Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth). The responses in interviews with the representative of the local/central government support this conclusion.

5.2. Project results and good practices

NPO Academy

5.2.1 The interviewees assessed the NPO Academy as useful and that has largely met their expectations. They consider as very important the NPOs investments in capacity building because they clearly recognize that no progress can be made in the NPOs activity now-days without having clear medium term strategic development plan, fundraising scenario, financial management procedures, communication strategy etc. Also, funding is difficult to be achieved if the project proposals are not well written and well supported by the qualified human resources. Many interviewees declare that although they have participated in NPOs activities, they didn't have any specific knowledge about the sector until the time they got employed in the sector. According to them, the university studies in rare cases provide any specific knowledge regarding the organizational, management and other aspects of civil society. Usually they introduce only some general definitions and principles regarding civil society depending on the graduation field. The capacity building activities for the sector have been always an exclusive domain of the activity of the professional NPOs in the field of capacity building.

5.2.2 The participation targets in the NPOs Academy were well achieved. The number of applications has been around 2 times more than the selected ones. The large majority of participants are Executive Directors or Board Members of the organizations enjoying the possibility to directly implement the gained knowledge in their organizations' activity. The survey results and interviews highlighted the idea that the selection of the applicants be based on the organizations that share similar missions and whose activities focus on similar target groups. This would have created more ground for exchange during the Academy and more cooperation in the future. The wide spectrum of organizations' missions and activities weaken the direct interest to share experiences and to create the ground for future cooperation. Also, some respondent suggest that more participants attend the Academy from the same organizations and not only the NPOs leaders or Board members.

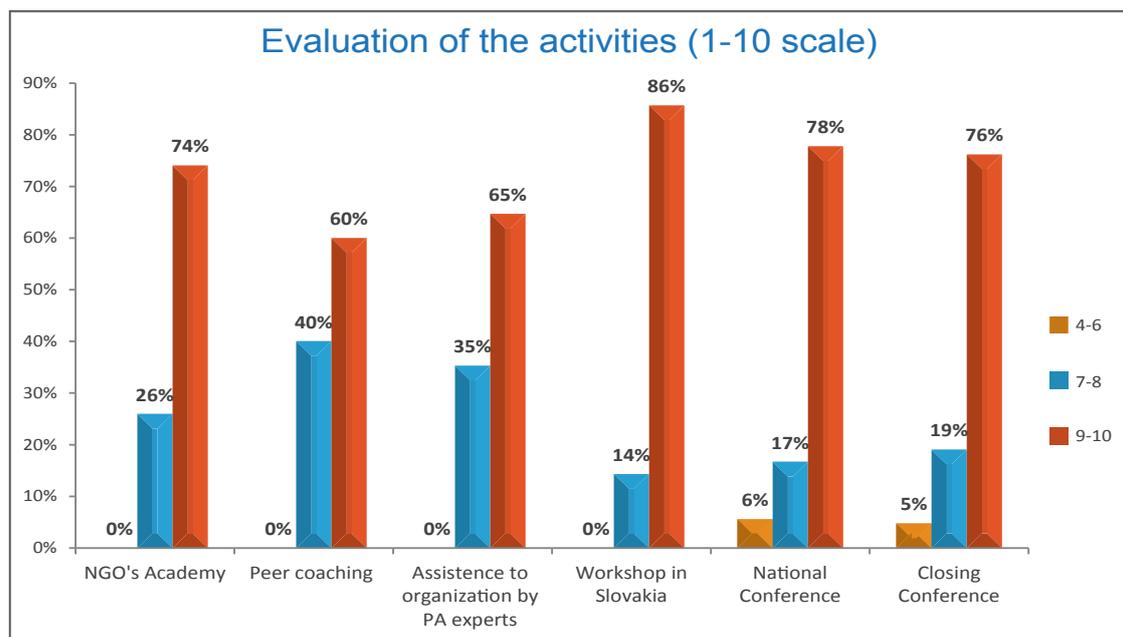
5.2.3 Around 71% of the NPOs participating in the Academy are Tirana based (but some of them operates in other cities as well) and the large majority of them are young and small size. This has fulfilled the specific objective of the project to assist the small and medium size NPOs in Albania. However, a better representation balance between Tirana based and locally based NPOs would have increase the project effectiveness. The survey with the representatives of the NPOs outside Tirana identified that the distance and English language are two main barriers in this respect. The majority of those that are involved in the NPO sector outside Tirana have another full time job, while activism is a non full time involvement. As such, it is difficult for them to find the space to regularly attend the Academy program. As results, knowing that locally based NPOs have huge needs for capacity building activities, the interviewees suggest that some of the most relevant training topics to the needs of the locally based NPOs be offered through distant learning platforms.

5.2.4 No representatives from the local and central government institutions were part of the NPO Academy lectures. As foreseen in the project document, the call for applications in the Academy targeted the executive levels of the NPOs such as Directors and Board members. In relation to the project overall goal "to support the process of democratization and reforms in Albania with the emphasis on improving the cooperation of Albanian governmental and non governmental sectors through sector development, sustainability and transparency as well as strengthening the cooperation between civil society, citizens and public officials" both project partners contributed through inclusion of LGs and central government representatives in other activities related to the project.

The survey results and interviews responses indicate that both, the representatives from the government institutions and the Academy attendees, suggest that some participation of public officials in the academy would be necessary to promote the cooperation between them. The respondents suggest that the Academy would be more efficient if people from the departments dealing with local and central budgeting in public institutions, representatives of Albanian Agency for the Support of Civil Society etc. would be part of the Academy and the practical sessions regarding relevant topics to the Government role, be offered in the local and central public institutions. Their presence as guest speakers during some lectures would have contributed to cross sector cooperation. The challenge to increase the sector's skills, confidence and transparency is one side of the coin, because increasing the information and knowledge of public officials for the NPO sector is equally important. Again, knowing the time and distance barriers particularly of local public officials, the online training delivery would be a welcomed option to guarantee participation.

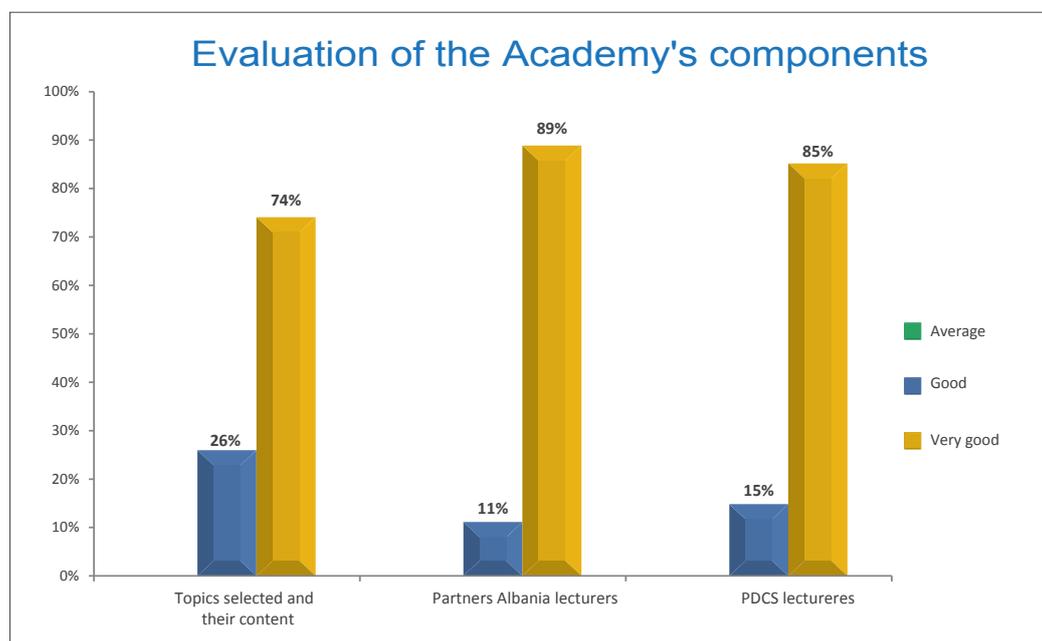
5.2.5 Around 65% of the survey respondent (47 beneficiaries were interviewed through the questionnaire and face to face think that the training topics of the Academy were very well chosen, while the rest have the opinion that they were well chosen. Their comments suggest that it would have been better to have less topics and more coverage of some topics such as the financial management of the organizations, and more time spent for each of the offered topic. Also, they appreciate the reading materials suggested for each training topic. However, there are suggestions to organize the trainings in the form of workshops with working group sessions that give more emphasis to the practical work and teamwork. Also, the trainings were assessed as top- quality level and many young organizations had some difficulty to absorb the maximum of the curriculum. Mixing up representatives of well-established organizations and young ones imposes this risk. The suggestion is to organize the curricula in different advanced level, where the most advanced ones be offered only to those that have long experience in the sector. However, the coaching and technical assistance have filled the knowledge gap in case of representatives from young organizations. Also, the survey respondents suggest interlinking more the Academy topics and the experiences from the projects implemented by the NPOs attendees (Graph. 2).

Graph. 2



Almost all survey respondents and interviewees have assessed as highly professional PA and PDCS lecturers, very clear in their explanations and with good pedagogical skills. (Graph. 3)

Graph. 3



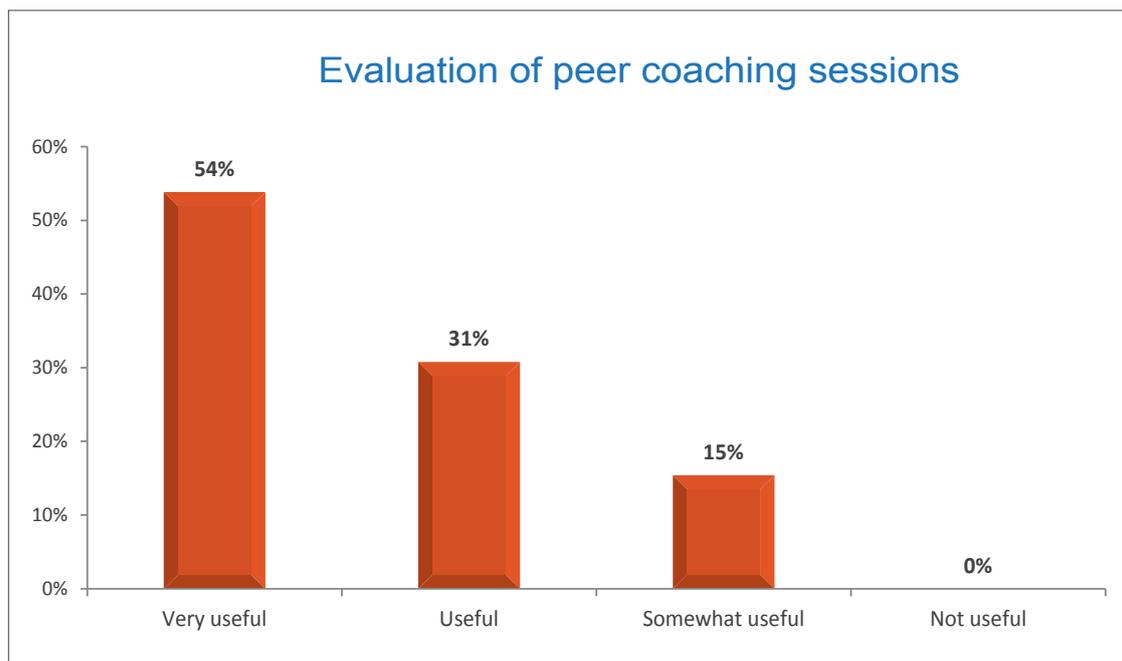
5.2.6 The guidebook published in the course of the project as a resource material for the Academy participants is considered as very useful by the respondents in the interview. The interviewees consider particularly attractive the examples, quizzes, the practical tools and instruments provided regarding the ethical fundraising, the fundraising performance measurements, preparation of the analysis matrix of groups of interests involved in advocacy, examples of citizens advocacy, instruments for citizens participation in decision making etc. They declare that they use it as a resource material whenever they feel necessary to (<http://partnersalbania.org/publication/csos-development-sustainability-and-inclusiveness-in-participatory-processes>)

5.2.7 The interlinked project activities such as trainings, coaching/technical assistance and study tour to Slovakia was appreciated by the majority of the interviewees. However it results that the most appreciated aspects of these activities are two: (i) the possibility to learn on procedures and processes linked with the organizational management, (ii) the possibility to establish contacts and exchange with other organizations. Also, the suggestions provided by the survey respondents highlight that they are interested to participate again in case the Academy will reorganized in order to establish new contacts as well as to update the knowledge. They would see the Academy more as an ongoing learning institution rather than as a one-time initiative. Peer coaching groups and technical assistance

5.2.8 There are 67% of the survey respondents that assess as very good the peer coaching activity and 31% of them as good. While asking only those respondents that have directly participated in the peer coaching activities the assessment indicate that 54% of them consider it very beneficial, 15% beneficial and 18% somehow beneficial (see Annex 5).

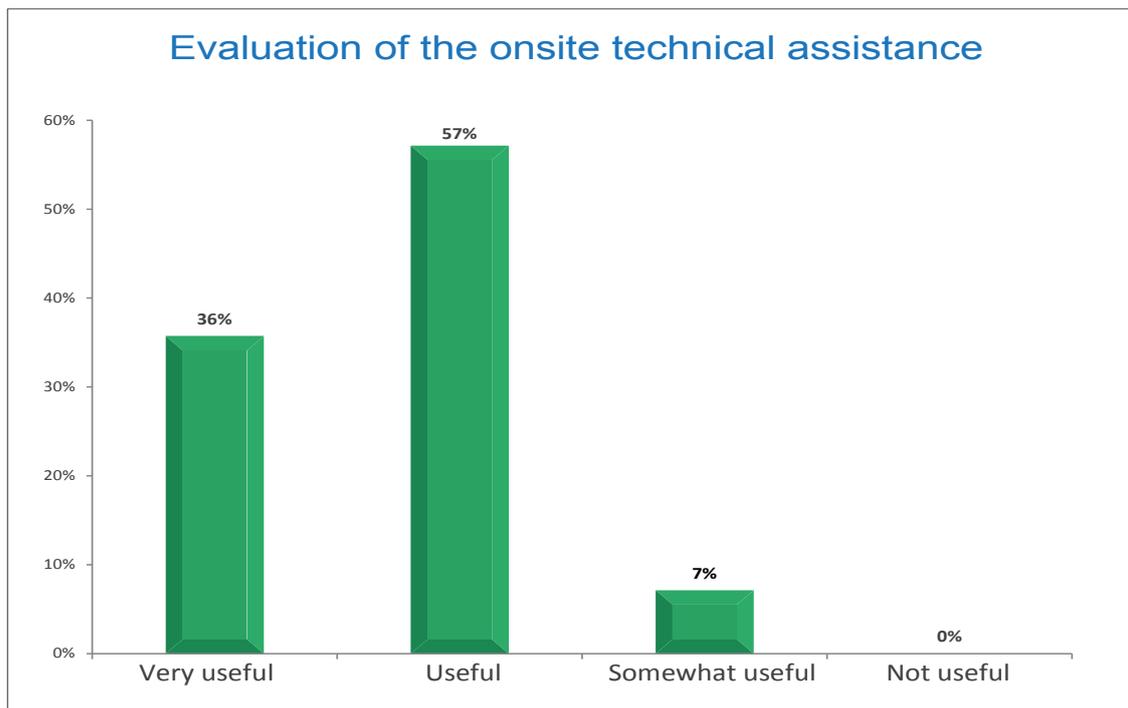
Some of the issues mentioned by the respondents as beneficial from the participation in the peer coaching sessions are identification of the fundraising instruments, internal staff relations, networking and advocacy between organizations of different missions but interested around a common public cause, share of experience between organizations etc. (Graph. 4)

Graph. 4



5.2.9 The technical assistance provided by PA experts on very concrete issues linked with the activity of the organizations such as the preparation of a medium term strategic plan, the preparation of the communication strategy, developing and writing project proposals for certain call of proposals, defining the internal policies and procedures, development of fundraising plans etc. is considered as valuable. Almost all interviewees that represented coached and assisted organizations declared that this has helped due to the fact that they were young organizations without concrete experience, and the output of this work makes the activity of the organization disciplined and with clear perspective of the needed efforts and objectives. The survey asked those that benefited from the technical assistance provided by the project’s experts, how valuable it was for them. 41.7% declare that the assistance was very valuable, 50% consider it as valuable and 8% as somehow valuable (Graph. 5).

Graph. 5



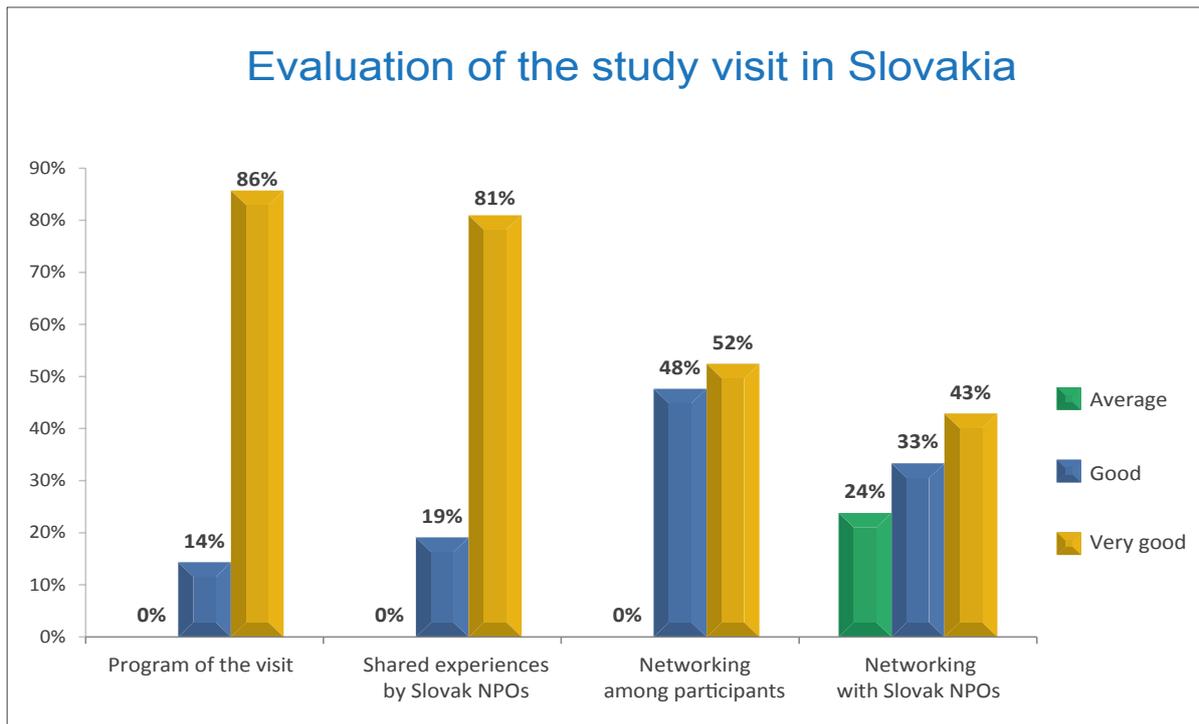
5.2.10 The survey respondents suggest that more technical assistance was necessary particularly regarding the project design for two or more organizations and all the modalities of project cycle management including project management, project implementation and reporting. Also, it was suggested that the technical assistance activity be supported by a small fund, which could be used to support on competitive basis all the assisted young organizations for financing simple initiatives as a first step toward other projects and initiatives.

5.2.11 All the interviewees declare that the PA experts involved in coaching and technical assistance were very professional. Some interviewees and survey respondents mentioned that they continue to keep contact with PA experts and ask them regarding certain issues raised from their day-to-day work of their activities. Few of them declare that PA has committed to assist them in following current organizational needs.

Study visits of NPO Academy alumni in Slovakia

5.2.12 Almost all the survey respondents participated in the study tour organized in Slovakia. The Study Tour is the highest activity assessed by the survey respondents among all other project's activities. Thus, 85% of the survey respondents assess it as a very good activity. The survey asked about 4 aspects related to the Study Tour activity and the assessment is: (i) the program of the visit is assessed as very good by 85% of the respondents; (ii) the experience of the invited Slovak organizations to offer their experiences is assessed as very good by 80% of the respondents; (iii) the networking level between Albanian study tour participants is assessed as very good by 55% of the respondents and, the networking/contacts with Slovakian organizations is assessed as very good by 45% of the respondents (see see Graph. 6).

Graph. 6

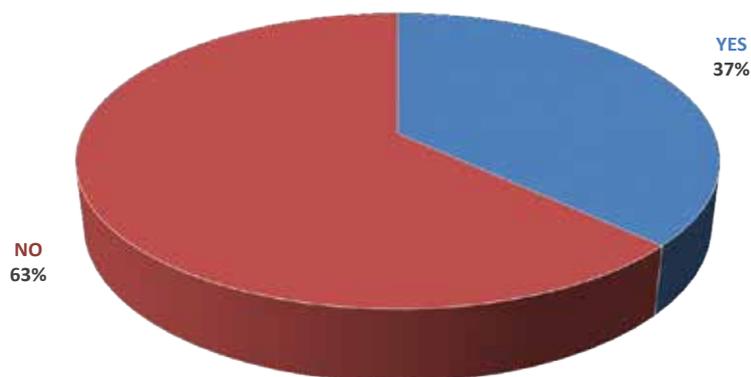


The interviewees expressed their appreciation on the opportunity to know a EU member country and the experience of its civil society sector. Also, they have appreciated the presentations provided by the Slovak organizations and networks and the concrete stories and lessons learned shared with the visitors from Albania.

5.2.13 The survey respondents were asked whether they have used so far in their organization’s activities any model introduced during the Study Tour. 37% of the respondents declare that they have used at least one already, while 63% of the respondents not (see Graph 7).

Graph. 7

Slovak best practices replicated in Albania



Two NPOs working on the field of the Disability Rights undertook an advocacy campaign for the rights of persons with disabilities' on the International Day on Disability Rights which declare that it came directly after the experience that they got in the study visit in Slovakia. Never before in Albania was anything organized for people with disabilities and their parents on this special date.

Four NPOs in the program were engaged in the participatory budgeting process advocating for the law "For Social Care Services" in Albania with the Ministry of Education and Sports; Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth, and Parliamentary Commission on Labor, Social Issues and Health, were inspired by the models of participatory budgeting implemented in Banska Bystrica, during their study visit in Slovakia.

Some of the experiences presented during the Study Tour and already used are social business, funds diversification model, the functionality model of the community centers, internal organization management etc. In addition, the Study Tour participants were very positively influenced by many aspects regarding the cities' life they were introduced during the visit such as recycling containers all over the cities, use of environmentally friendly products, minimizing the use of plastic products etc. Such experiences were very motivational for future initiatives of the organizations.

5.2.14 The survey respondents were asked whether they plan in the near future to introduce any experience from the Study Tour in the activities of their organizations. 74% of the respondents plan to use such experiences, while 26% declare they don't know. None of the respondent is negative about potentially using the shared practices and experiences (see Graph. 8). In concrete terms, several models were mentioned as future opportunities such as: community center Kalaab, increasing the number of services to PAK in schools and preschool facilities and increase advocacy about them, fundraising instruments used by some Slovak organizations, extend the community center in rural areas, social business, community centers for families, crowd funding (online fundraising), school based NGO services for pupils and families, etc.

Graph. 8



5.2.15 The large majority of the interviewees pointed out that Study Tours were crucial to share experiences, learn from successful models, think about new ideas, how to adopt them in the respective country, build channels of connection with people and activities without borders in implementation for future cooperation, exchange knowledge and know-how that helps to a faster adoption, explore different contexts and ideas, compare works, to get inspired from something that works abroad, to see problems fixed in other perspectives, to use tools and practices for the analysis, to develop discussions etc. However, they suggest that it might have been more useful to have the Study Tour organized at the beginning of the Academy or at least in the middle of the project implementation because the Academy attendees could use the information/knowledge and contacts to feed the discussions and to further develop them during the coaching sessions and technical assistance in the benefit of their organizations.

5.3 *Effectiveness*

5.3.1 The overall goal of the project to support the process of democratization and reforms in Albania with emphasis on improving cooperation of Albanian governmental and non governmental sector through sector development was achieved. 70 representatives of NPOs are trained through the Academy on 10 curricula, relevant to the needs and context, 2 groups of 12 representatives from the organizations were coached and 15 NPOs were technically assisted. The conclusion about the achievement of the overall goal is admitted also by the survey respondents, 88% of who declare that their individual capacities are increased and 72% of the respondents who admit that their internal organizational management is improved as result of project intervention.

5.3.2 The specific objective to well set relations with the government is only partially achieved. There is little direct participation of government representatives in the project activities. The survey respondents support this conclusion also. Only 16% of them admit that they feel more confident in relation to the government. However, the project output on enhanced skills of Academy participants in areas necessary to cooperate with government is achieved. The guidebook and the intensive training days have been assessed as very useful by the attendees. 32% of survey respondents declare to have increased the advocacy and lobbying activities as result of the project such as: advocating for increased budgets to address societal needs at local level; advocating on disabled peoples rights issues; advocating on environmental protection issues. Some of the campaign were: "Don't touch "Valbona" campaign; "He for She campaign"; "Campaign against chemical weapons" etc;

5.3.3 The final outcomes envisaged in the project document regarding at least 3 projects implemented as results of building capacities and at least 20 real contacts, problem solving and establishment of cooperation are achieved.

There is evidence that indicate that there are at least 5 projects jointly implemented as result of the participation in the project's activities and 20 organizations have admitted that they have established real contacts, communication and cooperation with other Academy attendees. What's up communication is the most usual and fastest communication tool used by them.

5.3.4 All project activities and all indicators envisaged in the project document are fully achieved. This is proved by the facts finding phase of the assessment, the collected related evidence as well as the opinions provided during the interviews and survey responses. It results that the quality and effectiveness of implementation of activities during the second phase of the project's implementation has increased due to the several adjustments made and new instruments used.

5.3.5 The selected methodologies and approaches with regards to project activities, selection of Academy attendees, the organization of webinar as a preparatory tool for the organization of the Study tour, the form and frequency of the intervention, the activities to analyze and disseminate the project's achievements such as the national and the final conference, were appropriate and positively contributed to to achieve the project's objectives at approximately 90%. Also, PA has managed the project according to the signed Agreement with PDCS. It has regularly reported narratively and financially to PDCS. The division of responsibilities and roles of PA and PDCS was clear and the synergy between them is highly appreciated by the project's participants.

5.3.6 There was a monitoring, evaluation and assessment mechanism functioning throughout the project implementation to measure the outputs of the project activities. This was realized in a professional way: drafting the implementation plan of the activities, analyzing progress through quantifiable indicators and evaluate the quality of the implementation of the activities. This experience was on itself a capacity building element that was transmitted to the Academy attendees involved in the activities as a well-structured methodology that could be adapted to their day-to-day work.

5.3.7 Thanks to this system, it was possible for the assessor to conclude that the project complied with the initial targets. This could be easily evidenced by the number of managers and key positions' staff of the NPOs trained, assisted/ coached, the connections established between NPOs as an entry strategy towards the establishment of future exchanges and cooperation, good results of the study visits in terms of the lessons learned from the Slovak NPOs and contacts established with them as the basis for future cooperation. Thanks to this system, other indicators, which were not achieved against the initial targets, were easily identifiable. This relates to the low number of organizations attending the project from locations other than Tirana.

5.4 Sustainability

5.4.1 The project's outputs are in general sustainable. This is mainly related to the outputs that have effected the improvement of NPOs organizational management and activities by newly introduced/improved strategic development and planning, financial management, communication strategy, fundraising plans, advocacy and lobbying strategy etc. Most of the NPOs that have applied to be furthered assisted through the coaching sessions by PA experts, have updated their manual for internal procedures or have developed new ones; have developed new and/or revised their strategic plans and programatic areas; have conducted advocacy campaigns contributing to their targets groups and addressing community needs and have received financial support by various donors due to improved project proposals.

5.4.2 As it has been mentioned, a web facts screening process was realized consisting in the identification of the ongoing initiatives of the organizations that participated in the project during 2016 and on. It is noticed that from 70 NPOs participating in the program around 35 organizations that had updated websites, 7 organization implemented projects focused on advocacy and lobbying, while 13 organizations were involved in monitoring programs of the local and central government based on citizens' participative approaches. This is a very encouraging situation to believe that the knowledge and experiences shared during the project would continue to result in more and higher quality activities/projects.

5.4.3 The high interest and appreciation regarding establishing contacts among NPO attendees is another encouraging sign for undertaking common initiatives and projects. The achievement of the main outputs of the project in terms of established cooperation and jointly implemented projects proves this.

5.4.4 There are three main weaknesses related to the sustainability of the project's results: (i) Government commitment to effectively cooperate with young NPOs on issues of common interest is still low; (ii) The lack of an ongoing program that could respond to the government interested officials and NPOs needs for capacity building; (iii) Staff turnover, which relates to the cases when trained staff change the sector in terms of their employment.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The analysis chapter of AR highlights conclusions and suggestions for almost every project's activity. Hereby there are presented the most important ones:

6.1 The beneficiaries have very positively assessed all the implemented activities as being highly relevant to the NPO's and country's needs. However, the suggestion is that in future projects, direct participation of local and central government public officials be targeted in all activities, particularly those that are dealing with issues linked with the NPOs mission and activities. Some of the practical work during the training sessions can be organized in the premises of local and central government institutions.

6.2 The NPOs Academy is highly appreciated. However, it might be more effective if each Academy round include organizations with similar missions and target groups in order to create more ground for exchange and cooperation. The Academy be opened for more than just one representative of the organization. In addition, it is suggested that the Academy is organized with modules of different levels because for those that are new in the sector it is difficult to absorb the highest level of knowledge. Also, the trainings might be better to be organized as workshops with more practical and teamwork and less reading in home.

6.3 The Academy should function as an ongoing program. A major step towards sustainability might be the introduction of the NPOs learning curricula in the University in the most relevant faculties. The subject could be optional for students, but it can be a great opportunity for young scholars to have knowledge about the sector. Also, the NPOs organizers see the opportunity to introduce distance-learning practice at least for the most relevant topics, which can help the local NPOs and the local officials to participate.

6.4 The PDCS has played a very important role to guarantee the effectiveness of implemented activities. The PDCS trainers are highly assessed for their professionalism and the study tour has been a value added to the project. It must be with interest to consider that the Study Tour be organized in the middle of the Academy in order to create more possibilities to use the gained knowledge and information in the course of Academy and other activities implementation.

6.5 The peer coaching sessions and technical assistance are highly appreciated, but it might be effective to have a small fund allocated to support on competitive basis all the assisted young organizations for financing simple initiatives as the first step towards other projects.

6.6 Fostered partnerships transcending beyond the duration of the program has been an important objective of the Academy. The final conference evidenced that participating NPOs are implementing joint initiatives/projects and they are in constant communication with each other. Sharing of best practices and examples of an enhanced networking and cooperation among participants and government sector was one of the main goals of the conference. Creating an enabling environment for an increased cooperation among both sectors was another important topic of discussion during the conference that brought together various sectors from both sectors.

Exploring different ways to increase communication and share of ideas among NPOs is with interest and could be very valuable for the sector in the future.

Annex 1: Main information about planned activities and indicators of achievement

No.	Activities planned	Time frame	Indicators	Notes	Implementing partner
Overall outputs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific projects implemented as a result of building experts' capacities of the NPO leaders and new information related to non governmental sector and government (at least 3), • The number of real contacts, problem solving or establishment of cooperation (at least 20)". 					
1.	Organization of the NPO Academy	2015-2016	Two Academy rounds, 20 participants each from at least 30 organizations, 5 and 7 training modules respectively, 4 hours training duration each. 15 pages report on analysis of the Academy educational program. Questionnaires about experience of cooperation with the government sector before and after project implementation;	The modules envisaged are: Law and lobbying; Coalition building and networking; Fundraising; Strategic communication for NGOs; Philanthropy and development of social enterprise.	PA+PDCS
2.	Preparation of a publication as a supportive element to the CSO Leadership Academy with good practices of NPO and government cooperation	2015-2016	Online publication and 100 printed copies	A guidebook, Albanian and English language, joint contribution of Slovak and Albanian lecturers based on jointly plan on methodology and content, printed copies to be distributed during and after conference.	PA+PDCS

No.	Activities planned	Time frame	Indicators	Notes	Implementing partner
3.	Organization of the study Tour for NGO leaders to learn examples of NPO-Government cooperation in Slovakia	2015-2016	4 day study tour for successful Academy participants	The study tour conceived to take place in different cities and would take different forms (meetings, discussions, workshops and site visits).	PDCS
4.	Creating supportive peer coaching groups for NPO Leaders	2015-2016	Two 10 members groups, regularly meetings every two months for two hours	Voluntarily participation, professional facilitation around leadership challenges in building cross - sectorial cooperation.	PA (PDCS consulting role)
5.	Conference to share experience of NPO Academy to the Governmental representatives and next generation of leaders.	2015-2016	1 day conference, 60 participants, examples of good practice	Provide new ideas for content enrichment of the Academy Concept.	PA (speaker PDCS Director)

No.	Activities planned	Time frame	Indicators	Notes	Implementing partner
6.	Organization of the NPO Academy for small and medium size organizations	2017-2018	<p>Two Academy rounds, 16 participants each, 8 training modules each, one training day (6 hours)/module.</p> <p>15 pages report on analysis of the Academy educational program.</p> <p>Questionnaires about experience of cooperation with the government sector before and after project implementation;</p>	<p>Civil Society Sector Development Trends and NPO Legal framework;</p> <p>Organizational development and governance, HR management and internal procedures;</p> <p>Financial Management- Budgeting and accounting and reporting to state authorities;</p> <p>Ensuring public support and working with the private sector-Fundraising and philanthropy;</p> <p>Ensuring Financial Support through grants. Proposal writing and management-EU grants;</p> <p>Strategic communication for NPOs;</p> <p>Strategic planning;</p> <p>Participatory Governance;</p> <p>Mobilization of constituency, networking and coalition building;</p> <p>Advocacy and Lobbying;</p>	PA
7.	Consultation sessions directly in organizations in order to create stable CS actors	2017-2018	2 days expert consultations for 15 organizations concerned in certain issues	Areas of consultations: setting up internal processes of organization, financial systems or personnel management.	PA
8.	Final Event for public presentation of project results	2017-2018	1 day conference	Present the results and planning further cooperation	PA

No.	Activities planned	Time frame	Indicators	Notes	Implementing partner
9.	Intensive training program	2017-2018	3 day intensive training for each of two groups of NPO Academy participants.	Acquiring skills necessary for cooperation with the government sector	PDCS
10.	Webinar	2017-2018	On line discussion before the study tour, 1 webinar/Academy group	Map the expectations of the participants before drafting the program of the study tour	PDCS
11.	Organization of the study Tour for NGO leaders to learn examples of NPO-Government cooperation in Slovakia	2017-2018	6 day study tour for successful Academy participants	The study tour conceived to take place in different cities and would take different forms (meetings, discussions, workshops and site visits).	PDCS

Annex 2: NPO Academy Program

NPO Academy I	NPO Academy II	NPO Academy III	NPO Academy IV
General Overview: Civil Society Sector Development Trends and Legal framework	Civil Society Sector Development Trends and NPO Legal framework	Civil Society Sector Development Trends and NPO Legal framework	Civil Society Sector Development Trends and NPO Legal framework
NPO Development- Organizational Development Rules and Procedures. Human Resources Management	Organizational development and governance, HR management and internal procedures	Organizational development and governance, HR management and internal procedures	Organizational development and governance, HR management and internal procedures
NPO Development- Financial Management Procedures	Financial Management- Budgeting and accounting and reporting to state authorities	Financial Management- Budgeting and accounting and reporting to state authorities	Financial Management- Budgeting and accounting and reporting to state authorities
Financial Management- Budget and Reporting	Ensuring public support and working with the private sector- Fundraising and philanthropy	Ensuring public support and working with the private sector- Fundraising and philanthropy	Ensuring public support and working with the private sector- Fundraising and philanthropy
Financial management- Reporting to State Agencies	Ensuring Financial Support through grants. Proposal writing and management- EU grants	Ensuring Financial Support through grants. Proposal writing and management- EU grants	Ensuring Financial Support through grants. Proposal writing and management- EU grants
Ensuring public support and working with the private sector	Strategic communication for NPOs	Strategic communication for NPOs	Strategic communication for NPOs
Ensuring Financial Support through grants	Models of participatory processes. Participatory governance	Strategic planning	Strategic planning
Mobilization of constituency, sector and cross sector collaboration	Mobilization of constituency, sector and cross sector collaboration, networking and coalition building	Participatory Governance	Participatory Governance
Development of advocacy campaigns	Advocacy and Lobbying	Mobilization of constituency, networking and coalition building	Mobilization of constituency, networking and coalition building
Lobbying skills	Strategic planning	Advocacy and Lobbying	Advocacy and Lobbying
Strategic Communication for NPOs (PR and Branding)	Study visit in Slovakia	Study visit in Slovakia	Study visit in Slovakia
Strategic Planning for NPOs			

Annex 3: Information about assisted NPOs and results achieved

Assisted organization	Onsite assistance	Results
Albanian Institute for Policy Development	"Project Proposal Writing"	Two projects submitted pursuant to the assistance offered by PA
International Association for Solidarity, Tirana	"Strategic Communication in NPOs"	Leaflets / brochures production
People in Focus	"Development of Strategic Planning for the NPO"	Draft document
ACT for SOCIETY Center	"Development of Strategic Planning for the NPO"	Finalized
EVS Tirana	"Development of Strategic Planning"	Finalized
Observatory for Children's Rights	Manual of Internal Policies and Procedures"	Finalized
Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment in Albania (PPNEA)	"Development of Internal Policies and Procedures"	Finalized
Open Mind Spectrum Albania	"Development of Project Proposal Writing"	A project proposal under EIDHR / EUSubmitted
Southeast Europe Social Contact Institute	"Development of Communication Strategy"	First draft
Open Mind Spectrum Albania	"Development of Strategic Planning"	Ongoing
Open Doors	"Strategic Communication in NPOs"	Ongoing
ACEG Center	"Strategic Planning Development"	Ongoing
Youth Act	"Development of an Advocacy and Lobbying Plan of Action"	Finalized
Albanian Education Foundation	"Manual of Internal Procedures Development"	Ongoing
Youth of Ura Vajgurore	"Development of a Strategic Planning"	Ongoing

ANNEX 4: TESTIMONIALS AND BEST PRACTICES

The Academy has been very useful for us as an organization because we got good knowledge about organization policy and administration, financial management, advocacy and lobbying. After the Academy, we have been able to implement in our organization the gained knowledge to improve the internal policies of the organization and the financial manual and this has been a direct result from the Academy. The PA assistance to develop a 3 years Strategic Planning was an added value to our NPO.

Armela Pengili, NPO Academy participant, 2015

As a banking association, we have the institutional cost covered by the membership contribution. But we do not have funds to run activities such as financial education of the people. We needed to open a new fundraising perspective for the association and that's why we attended the NPO Academy. The Academy made us understand very much all the philosophy behind the non-for profit activities and what aspects should be considered. Thanks to the Academy I know in what direction we should go as an association to guarantee the funding. Also, I have established communication with many other participants, we have created a what's up group and we share all the questions and information about our activity.

Junida Tafaj, NPO Academy participant, 2018

It is difficult to tell which aspect of the project was the most positive because there are many, but I would appreciate most the establishment of contact with other NPOs leaders and interaction with them.

Oltiana Rama, NPO Academy participant, 2015

I have been part of the Academy 2015. It was very important for me and for my organization "People in focus" that was just established. I didn't have previous experience with civil society organizations and the Academy offered me full information about organizational and financial management, fundraising, legislation etc.

The reading materials and lectures are very useful source of information every time I need to go and read them back. I have also established valuable contacts with other organizations with whom we constantly share information, questions and opinions. I think that if I would not have participated in the Academy a longer time would have been needed to be integrated in the social society sector in Albania.

Armelia Barci, NPO Academy participant, 2015

We appreciate all the activities of the Project and moreover we appreciate the continuous support by Partners Albania to our organization.

Emanuela Zaimi, NPO Academy participant, 2015

Few years ago, there were private universities such as "Luarasi" University and "UFO" University that did introduce optional subjects with knowledge on the NPOs. However, most of the Universities do not provide specific knowledge about civil society as part of their curricula. In this context, initiatives such as the NPO Academy are crucial to gain and update theoretical knowledge and practical experiences for the third sector.

Blerta Selenica, NPO Academy participant, 2017

I have participated in the Academy (February-July 2017). It was a very good professional experience for me and for my organization. It has helped me to structure some elements of our daily work starting from documenting, improvement of administrative procedures and the strategic planning.

Marsela Allmuca, NPO Academy participant, 2017

Before the Academy, I had a lot of problems in my organization regarding financial management including VAT regulations as well as the quality of internal procedures. With the help of the Academy and coaching sessions I have fixed both. In addition, we have received important details regarding the donors, funding procedures, contacts etc. that are very important to us.

Mirela Juka, NPO Academy participant, 2017

We succeeded in a joint project design and currently are implementing "Young people on environmental protection - Environmental Education and Youth activism on Urban Waste" - a European Union project.

Jonida Lamaj and Rezarta Agalliu, NPO Academy participant, 2015

SHIS Albania and Woman in Development, Shkodër will jointly implement an EU funded project during 2018-2020.

"Help the life Association" on 3rd of December, which is the International Day for persons with disabilities, undertook an initiative 'Advocacy for the rights of persons with disabilities'. This came directly after the experience that they got in the study visit in Slovakia.

"Based on this experience, I came away with the idea of organizing an advocacy activity. Never before in Albania was anything organized for people with disabilities and their parents on this special date. It was a great experience; similar to the practice that I learnt in Slovakia." We were pleasantly surprised by opportunities to interact and learn from partnership with other NPO Academy participants.

Eglantina Shllaku, NPO Academy participant, 2015

"We are engaged in various advocacy initiatives on disabled children. We have organized a common Conference on Parental Care and Intellectual Disability. Down Syndrome Albania and Help the life Association. Also, Woman Democracy Network Organization and Coalition for Free and Fair Elections are engaged in the "Justice for All Coalition of NPOs" an initiative / project that contribute to a transparent, independent and accountable, professional and reliable justice system in Albania where service for the citizens and in particular, disadvantaged groups are offered properly".

NPO Academy participant, 2015, 2016, 2017

Four (4) organizations: Partners for Children; Southeast Institute for Social Contact; Agenda Institute and SHIS Albania ([attendees of the NPO Academy 2015 & 2016](#)) were actively engaged in the participatory budgeting process at central level advocated and lobbied with the two Ministries (Ministry of Education and Sport and Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth) on the budgeting of the Law for Social Care Services and requested the Albanian Parliament through their participation in the a meeting with Budgeting Commission and Commission of Labor, Social Issues and Health, to not pass the Law for Social Care Services without specifying the costs of financial services.

"People in focus" with "DevAid Association" ([both participants from NPO Academy 2015](#)) strengthened the partnership and cooperated to implement a pilot project on solar panels and energy in a high school of suburban Tirana (Kashari). It was a successful initiative and both organizations.

Four (4) organizations: Partners for Children; Southeast Institute for Social Contact; Agenda Institute and SHIS Albania ([attendees of the NPO Academy 2015 & 2016](#)) were actively engaged in the participatory budgeting process at central level advocated and lobbied with the two Ministries (Ministry of Education and Sport and Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth) on the budgeting of the Law for Social Care Services and requested the Albanian Parliament through their participation in the a meeting with Budgeting Commission and Commission of Labor, Social Issues and Health, to not pass the Law for Social Care Services without specifying the costs of financial services.

Annex 5: Questionnaire

1. In your perception, which was the main goal of the NPO Academy implemented by PA?

(Please select only one option)

- Strengthen NPOs capacities
- Improve NPOs -Government cooperation
- Exchange experiences among NPOs
- Don't Know

2. In which activities have you participated?

(Please chose all activities in the list that you participated)

- NPOs Academy
- Peer coaching sessions
- Consultation sessions with PA
- Study Visit to Slovakia
- National Conference
- Final Conference

3. Please evaluate the activities you have participated?

(1-4 =not good; 5-6= somewhat good; 7-8= good; 9-10= very good)

	1-4	5-6	7-8	9-10
NPO Academy	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Peer coaching Sessions	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Consultation sessions with PA	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Study Visit to Slovakia	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
National Conference	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Final Conference	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

4. In your opinion, who were the main beneficiaries of the project? (Please, chose not more than two options)

- New organizations in the sector
- NPOs with long experience
- Representatives of local institutions
- Representatives of central institutions
- Donors

5. Please assess the following aspects of the NPOs Academy?

	Not good	Somehow good	Good	Very good
The selection of the modules and content	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
PA trainers	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
PDCS trainers	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

6. Do you think that the time for each module was sufficient?

- Yes No Don't know

7. If you participated in the peer coaching sessions please assess the level of benefit and mention in concrete terms what you benefited?

- Highly valuable
- Valuable
- Somehow valuable
- Not at all valuable

Concrete issue benefited: _____

8. If you have benefited from the consulting sessions with PA, please assess to what extent it was valuable for you and what you benefited concretely from the assistance?

- Highly valuable
- Valuable
- Somehow valuable
- Not at all valuable

Concrete issue benefited: _____

9. If you participated in the Study Tour in Slovakia, please assess the following:

	Somehow good	Good	Very good
The program	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Experiences presented by Slovakian NPOs	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Contacts/networking between Albanian NPOs	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Contacts/networking with Slovak organizations	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

10. Have you already used any experience you were presented in the Study Tour?

- Yes No

If yes, please mention concretely _____

11. Do you plan to implement any initiative that you saw which impressed you?

- Yes No Don't know

If yes, which concretely _____

12. Please state which are the main benefits you had from the project?

- Better individual capacities
 More confident with public institutions
 Improved internal organization
 Increased cooperation with public institutions
 Increased participation in lobbying and advocacy
 Joint projects with other organizations from the Academy

Other _____

13. Please, give your opinion what you would like to see different if the Academy will be organized again in the future?

- a) _____
b) _____
c) _____

Annex 6: List of interviews

Organization	CITY
DOWN SYNDROME ALBANIA	TIRANE
ACT FOR SOCIETY	TIRANE
INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTARY PROJECTS	TIRANE
PEOPLE IN FOCUS	TIRANE
SHELTER FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS	TIRANE
ALBANIAN ASSOCIATION OF BANKS	TIRANE
INSTITUTE FOR RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT ALTERNATIVES	TIRANE
YOUTH FOR INTEGRATION AND AWARENESS	TIRANE
ALBANIAN AGENCY FOR SUPPORT TO CIVIL SOCIETY	TIRANE
ALBANIAN CENTER FOR ENVIROMENTAL GOVERNANCE	TIRANE
HELP THE LIFE	TIRANE
LEGAMBIENTE	VLORE
GJIROKASTRA FOUNDATION	GJIROKASTER
MEDPAK	LIBRAZHD
ALBANIAN CONSUMERS CENTER	DURRES
YOUTH COMMITTEE	LEZHE
DOCAS AID INTERNATIONAL ALBANIA	KORCE
MERRY POTTER – PALLIATIVE CARE	KORCE
NEW BRIDGES	URE VAJGUORE
ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT	LEZHE
PARTNERS ALBANIA FOR CHANGE AND DEVELOPMENT	TIRANE
PDCS	SLOVAKIA

