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# ALBANIA DGA EVALUATION FINAL REPORT

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This publication was produced for review by the United States Agency for International Development. It was prepared by Barbara Coe and Charlotte Souibes, Management Systems International.

# ALBANIA DGA EVALUATION

## FINAL REPORT



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## ACRONYMS

ACAC	Albanian Coalition against Corruption
AEP	Agrarian Environmentalist Party
AIESD	Albanian Institute for Election System Development
AMC	Albanian Mobile Communications
CA	Cooperative Agreement
CAO	Citizen Advocacy Office
CDP	Christian Democrat Party
CEC	Central Electoral Commission
COP	Chief of Party
DAP	Democratic Alliance Party
DGA	Democracy and Governance in Albania
DP	Democratic Party
ECA	Election to Conduct Agency
EU	European Union
GoA	Government of Albania
HIDAA	High Inspectorate for the Declaration and Audit of Assets
HQ	Headquarters
HRUP	Human Rights Union Party
IDRA	Institute for Development and Research Alternatives
IR	Intermediate Results
IREX	International Research and Exchanges Board
LGDA	Local Government and Decentralization in Albania (USAID funded)
LGRP	Local Government Reform Projects
LUB	Liberal Union Party
MCA	Millennium Challenge Account
MSI	IREX's Media Sustainability Index
MSI	Management Systems International
NDI	National Democratic Institute
NDP	New Democrat Party
NED	National Endowment for Democracy
NGO	Non-governmental Organization.
NGOSI	NGO Sustainability Index
ODHIR	Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
OMOV	One Member One Vote
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PA	Partners Albania
PDC	Partners for Democratic Change
PM	Prime Minister
PSD	Party of Social Democracy
PVT	Parallel vote tabulation
RFA	Request for Application
RP	Republican Party
SC	Steering Committee
SDC	Society for Democratic Culture
SDP	Social Democratic Party
SELDI	Southeastern European Legal Development Initiative
SGP	Small Grant Program

SMI	Socialist Movement for Integration
SMS	Short Message Service
SO	Strategic Objective
SP	Socialist Party
TI	Transparency International
TVSH	Televizioni Shqiptar
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
ZEC	Zone Election Commission

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The USAID/Democracy and Governance in Albania (DGA) project was a three year, \$7.2 million project that began in October 2004 and ended in December 2007. It was conducted by a consortium led by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) with the participation of sub-grantees Partners, Albania, a local NGO affiliated with Partners for Democratic Change, (PDC) and the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX). The DGA Project consolidated under one umbrella projects that were already being implemented by the three organizations, but with the aim of extending activities into new areas and with a new focus on combating corruption and helping foster free and fair elections.

The primary aim of the Project was to help combat widespread corruption by fostering greater government transparency and accountability. The project centered on the Parliamentary elections of 2005 and local elections in February 2007. The project involved five principal components: citizen engagement; political party reform and leadership development; advocacy capacity building; media development; and strengthening of election processes. USAID/Albania indicated in the Request for Application Program Description that they would judge the program in part by the extent to which it had an impact on reducing corruption, as reflected in the Civil Society advocacy score in the *Nations in Transit Annual Report* and the Transparency International (TI) Corruption Perceptions Index.

DGA conducted many activities and submitted the products it promised. Only the last phase, EU Integration, could not be addressed specifically, mainly because of local election postponement and DGA Project closure. Based on analysis of project products/reports and the responses of interviewees, project impacts seem to be five-fold:

- Political party reform and leadership improvement.
- Increased awareness among citizens of rights and responsibilities and of ways they can engage with government.
- Institutionalization of political polling and greater awareness of its value.
- Increased citizens' awareness of electoral administration and practices.
- Capacity for domestic election monitoring built; this can be drawn upon in future elections if funding is provided.

The Civic Forum was the primary vehicle for civic engagement, reaching about 1,300 citizens. Most beneficiaries interviewed indicated they felt more empowered and equipped to organize activities to effectively solve some of their communities' problems. The Civic Forum clearly had a positive impact during the project period, while training and assistance were held. Unfortunately, the groups formed have now ceased to meet formally in the absence of Civic Forum coordinators.

In that program, DGA Outreach Coordinators gathered groups, which they trained and guided in advocacy. Election-related activities were the focus of most citizen engagement activity. Citizens were trained and participated in various aspects of election monitoring. Following the parliamentary election, community groups were provided with a tool to monitor performance of successful candidates. For the local election phase, Civic Forum activities were merged with the political party reform and training and focused on a Good Governance Campaign that included a number of local-government-oriented activities. After the election, citizens then advocated for their priorities, many of which were incorporated into local budgets and a number of which resulted in community improvements. The Good Governance Campaigns succeeded in getting strong media attention and had an impact during the election campaign. In fact, the DGA accompanied other international efforts aimed at opening a sustained communication channel between citizens and local government representatives.

The Political Reform and Leadership Academy, a continuation of a previous activity, provided the primary vehicle for the political parties work during the first two years of the DGA, from its inception, training 179 emerging senior party activists. In addition, NDI also conducted an extensive One Member, One Vote (OMOV) campaign that included 11 workshops for 530 senior party representatives of five political parties in areas outside of Tirana. Subsequently, OMOV was adopted by the Socialist Party (SP) and SMI and is gradually being implemented and is, according to interviewees, also being considered by the Democratic Party (DP). The Academy is credited by the political community for its contribution to political party improvement. Many graduates of its program are now in leadership positions.

Partners Albania successfully delivered over 80 training programs, in topics such as advocacy and conflict management. A total number of 862 beneficiaries—representatives from non-for-profit organizations, local government officials, business representatives, media and other non-governmental and governmental institutions—received training and technical assistance. Participating NGOs afterward undertook a total of 44 advocacy initiatives; of these, 23 were the first effort taken by the organization in advocacy. One institution that was particularly important to USAID was ACAC, a coalition of NGOs to combat corruption. ACAC was started in 2001 and was supported under a previous USAID DG project that ended in 2003. In the eyes of USAID, ACAC had made a good start and was performing but needed more capacity building as well as funding. Hence, ACAC was included as a prime recipient of assistance in the DGA RFA. About the time that DGA began working with ACAC, additional funds from various donors began coming on line. ACAC members' interest in acquiring these funds (as well as DGA funds distributed via ACAC) increased and the level of competition among member groups rose. As ACAC gained greater access to the media, members increasingly wanted to claim the media "spotlight" for themselves. Members began to see ACAC as a possible rival. Helping the coalition build its organizational capacity was, according to *all* interviewees, a frustrating process. NDI, Partners Albania and even ACAC members all stated that ACAC board members declined to participate in DGA training on strategic planning and proposal preparation. ACAC also delayed committing to an NDI sub-agreement covering its operational tasks. There were failures to comply with accounting rules once the sub-agreement was signed. According to the team's interviewees, members of the Board of Directors rarely met and did not share information with each other. Under DGA, ACAC never finalized a draft strategic plan for the coalition. In addition, there seems to have been little interest within ACAC or the board in addressing persistent management and planning problems. When DGA stopped providing funding, ACAC members stopped being willing to pay their membership fees. In 2004, ACAC claimed 200 paying members (NGOs). In 2007, despite a small amount of additional National Endowment for Democracy (NED) funding channeled via ACAC for monitoring good governance at the local level, only 30 coalition members continued paying their annual dues. Coalitions are inherently fragile and experience elsewhere has shown that they can be very difficult to sustain.

IREX reinforced investigative journalism in Albania, through the production of *Hapur*, a program loosely based on the *60 Minutes* format that unveiled government corruption. This program aired on Albnet (a private local TV network assisted by IREX) and for a while on TVSH (Albanian state-owned TV). IREX helped the Union of Albanian Journalists, a professional journalists' association to protect economic, social and professional standards and rights of journalists, prepare its statutes and by-laws, which they submitted to the Ministry of Labor to become a legally recognized organization. The Union signed an agreement with the Ministry of Labor to work cooperatively to improve labor legislation in the media sector, and signed collective agreements with three of Albania's largest media outlets, including Top Channel, Vision+ and the newspaper *Koha Jone*. The Union of Journalists continues to gain members and to sign contracts with media outlets, and will likely be sustained even without DGA assistance. This is a significant achievement that could have a lasting impact on the media sector by helping journalists to secure greater job security. The media components of the DGA indeed achieved the results that were agreed upon at the onset of DGA, although the IREX-led component of the program was not very proactive in adapting to DGA synergies and did not react positively to new directions.

With a Domestic Election Observation effort, the DGA consortium conducted numerous election-related activities aimed at centering political debate on issues of importance to citizens; on fostering local oversight of the campaigns and voting; and on training candidates and campaign managers on campaign methods and voter outreach techniques. The consortium collaborated closely with and funded a group of domestic election monitoring organizations and a domestic media monitoring effort. As a result, at least 5000 Albanian citizens were deployed in 2005 Parliament elections at 40% of the polling places and in the 2007 Local elections at 118 communities and 100% of municipality polling places. Election monitors sent about 40,000 SMS (text) messages to report election results on Election Day. Independent Political Polling data was released May 2005, a first in Albania. DGA also monitored all major television and newspaper outlets in 2005 and 2007. Lastly, the DGA helped political public debates become further part of the political culture. Twenty DGA sponsored debates in 2005 led to 51 DGA debates and forums in 2007. The DGA lead election and media monitoring activities contributed to fairer elections with more readily accepted results, and increased civic awareness and familiarity with election processes. However, there is no sign that election and media coverage monitoring could be sustained by a coalition of NGOs or NGOs operating individually without strong donor support.

Advocacy scores in the NGO Sustainability Index (NGOSI) for Albania show a slight improvement from 2004 to 2005 but are then flat through 2007; there was also a small improvement in the overall NGOSI score in 2007. Transparency International measures of corruption perception improved slightly as of 2007, meaning that the public perceived that corruption had lessened (the score went from 2.5 in 2004 to 2.9 in 2007, with a score of ten as “squeaky clean” and a score of zero as appallingly corrupt). There were improvements in the two most relevant components (for professional journalism and pluralism of news sources) of the IREX media sustainability index during the DGA period. There was a deterioration in the composite media sustainability index score, which measures several elements, and also a decline in the score for professional journalism in 2008, perhaps reflecting continued poor remuneration for journalists. In this index a score of zero means that the country does not meet the standards for that element at all and a score of 4 means that it meets the standards well. The decline in scores does suggest that some benefits of DGA are not sustainable. Finally the team also looked at progress against the Freedom House Nations in Transit “election process” index or indicator. A score of 7 is the worst score. The 2006 election did show improvement but there was slippage in 2007 due to the inability of the parties to agree on electoral reform. The local elections had to be postponed by nearly a month from the original date of 20 January 2007. Amendments to the Code resulted in tight deadlines, which imposed severe logistical and administrative challenges on the CEC.

The indicators discussed above are all macro level indicators and it would be pertinent to ask whether a project of roughly \$2.4 million per year for three years in a deeply corrupt and difficult environment could leverage such significant change at the macro level.

Some longer term and more far-reaching impacts were observed: DGA in combination with other donors and implementers who also work with communities helped to lay and expand the foundation for citizen engagement. Citizens now more readily advocate for their priorities than they did before the project started. How much of this change is attributable to DGA and how much to other efforts (or the combination of them) cannot be definitively ascertained. In addition, with respect to NDI’s political party reform and training, some political party leaders who were trained are now in high political positions and some parties have made changes in policies, specifically the adoption of the one “member one vote” principle by SP and SMI. Respondents reported that those young political leaders who were trained are raising the level of political discourse and promoting better governance, although concrete results are not yet evident. The full impact cannot be known at this time as it is still quite early. Given the training in ethical and competent politics and governance that these leaders both received and delivered, gradual change in governance as these trained leaders assume higher level leadership roles could be an outcome.

With respect to project management, the DGA Project faced a number of management and leadership issues from the outset. All staff and major partners interviewed by the team volunteered that the management had gotten off to a bad start – from which it mostly recovered. It was challenging for the main partners to implement the complex consortium design, which demanded a collaborative three-way partnership with numerous interconnected parts; this was very ambitious and difficult to execute because of coordination challenges. Merging three existing programs under one umbrella with a new focus added to the difficulty. Each partner organization was used to implementing its own project under its own authority; it was challenging for them to integrate and they were not natural allies given differing interests. Management, project structure and leadership issues created difficulties in implementing the project and probably limited its potential.

Differing interpretations of the “substantial involvement” clause in the Cooperative Agreement caused confusion and delay. The DGA management style during the tenure of the first COP affected the morale of partner organizations and staff and led to turnover of some key staff; during the tenure of the second COP, program and staff role restructuring limited program effectiveness.

Both the achievements and the problems of the DGA Project provide ideas for future programming:

- Civil society development to advocate with government: An appropriate endeavor for donors is to continue to stimulate the development of civil society to help push government toward transparency and accountability, as was done under DGA.
- Political competency: Further development of political skills around particular topic areas can both raise the interest level and the likelihood of implementation of reforms.
- Donor aid: Focusing on economic and social improvement that can be aided by improvements in governance could be instrumental in helping to change the awareness and thus the actions of elected officials toward this issue.
- Elections: Civic education programs aimed at increasing transparency and convincing Albanian voters that the new electoral administrative body is indeed neutral will be essential to sustain the fragile trust between Albanian voters and the election administration body.

# I. INTRODUCTION

## Background

As reported by USAID/Albania, following the end of one of the world's most insular and repressive Socialist regimes in 1990, Albania experienced gradual improvement in democracy and stability followed by political and economic turmoil in 1997-1998, and a refugee crisis in 1999. In this unstable context, democratization in Albania has been extremely difficult, with advances made in electoral democracy but with a general failure to advance good governance. By 2004, Albania had created elements of a democratic political system: governing institutions, political processes and to some extent a civil society. Its constitution guaranteed freedom of association, expression, the press and religion, and with rights generally respected. Political parties existed and competed for power, while nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) formed and operated without state interference. Election laws were in place, and the conduct of elections had improved significantly. Decentralization had begun to affect greater local government autonomy. Albania had by then multiple political parties, with the strongest, the Socialist Party (SP) and the Democratic Party (DP) balancing each other, aided by other smaller parties. The political system however remains highly centralized and dominated by the party leaders of the two major parties.

Problems with the quality of democracy were numerous. Election processes were characterized by fraud and irregularities, causing many to question the legitimacy of elected officials. Citizens viewed political parties skeptically, particularly in regard to ethical behavior and financing; parties were generally personality-based. The media was controlled by political and private business interests and unable to serve a watchdog role. State resources were concentrated in a few hands and public service agencies lacked funding and expertise. Corruption was endemic, and organized crime grew exponentially from the 1990s onward. Petty corruption and rent seeking penetrated every area of the public and private sector (credible reports showed corruption throughout the highest levels of the government). The government responded with initiatives to combat corruption but failed to enforce anticorruption laws. Judicial and law enforcement agencies were inefficient and themselves susceptible to corruption.

Numerous sources reported on Albania's corruption: Transparency International (TI) ranked the country at the bottom of those in the Balkans and only slightly ahead of Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan in perceived corruption. Southeastern European Legal Development Initiative (SELDI) surveys showed that Albanians believed that corruption was rising among customs officers, the police and ministers. A World Bank study released in 2002 saw in Albania "a startling picture of systemic corruption . . . deeply institutionalized." Weak institutions also increased the power of international crime, making Albania a major transit country for smugglers moving drugs and persons to Western Europe and the United States. In this context, it is not surprising that Albania's citizens remained detached from political processes and distrustful of government and political parties.

This situation guided the decision of USAID/Albania to stress assistance likely to have a direct impact on corruption. Although anti-corruption had been a cross-cutting element of USAID programs previously, it became a focus of the agency's portfolio in 2004. Recognizing corruption's negative impact on democracy, USAID/Albania sought expert technical assistance to promote more effective, transparent, and accountable democratic governance. As indicated in the Request for Application (RFA) issued in January 2004, "Corruption is a major impediment to democracy and governance in Albania; helping Albanians combat corruption has thus become an important U.S. policy objective."

The RFA addressed Strategic Objective (S.O.) 2.1 of the 2001-2006 USAID/Albania DG program, *Increased Involvement of Civil Society in Economic and Political Decision-Making*, and three Intermediate Results (IRs) critical to this objective:

- IR 1: Citizen Participation on Key Governance Issues Increased including Sub IR 1.1 *Improved Community Democratic Processes* and Sub-IR 1.2 *Increased Sustainability of Advocacy NGOs*.
- IR 2: Increased Citizen Confidence in Accuracy of News and Information, including Sub IR. 2.1: *Professional Reporting Standards Utilized* and Sub IR 2.2: *Anticorruption Investigative Journalism Improved* and
- IR 4: Representative Government Institutions Strengthened, including Sub IR 4.1: *Political Parties Strengthened* and 4.2: *Legislative Elections Processes Strengthened*.

USAID indicated that all activities under this framework should have a strong anti-corruption focus. For example, instead of broad support to strengthen the non-governmental organization sector, the focus was to be on anti-corruption advocacy NGOs, and on investigative media, watchdog groups, election monitors and polling as a means of producing greater government transparency and accountability. The Mission also planned to support domestic election monitoring coupled with parallel vote tabulation and polling and survey data collection.

USAID sought to increase involvement of local organizations in policy advocacy to lessen corruption. Additionally, it hoped to contribute to improvements in the “governing justly” performance criteria used to determine country eligibility for the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) funding under the proposed allocation rules.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the successful implementing partners were asked to conduct activities helping citizens to represent their interests to decision-makers to influence policy and provide oversight of government actions and expenditures to ensure government and citizen compliance with enacted policies. They were also asked to support plural, independent, and non-governmental sources of information, including print and broadcast media, and particularly activities aiming to boost the quality and prevalence of investigative reporting. The project was expected to work closely with USAID’s separate Rule of Law and Local Government Reform Projects.

## **Democracy and Governance in Albania Program**

Effective on October 1, 2004, USAID awarded a Cooperative Agreement (CA) of \$7,200,000 to a consortium, with the *National Democratic Institute* (NDI) as Prime Cooperating Agency and *Partners Albania* (PA), an independent local NGO that is a partner organization of Partners for Democratic Change (PDC), and *International Research and Exchanges Board* (IREX), as sub-grantees. A “Substantial Involvement” CA clause spelled out that the USAID CTO would be substantially involved in the approval of annual implementation plans as well as the Monitoring and Evaluation Plan, the selection of key personnel, and concurrence in the selection of sub-recipients. A modification, effective June 2005, extended the amount to \$160,000 for additional election-related activities. But a Mission-wide budget reduction came later; this was spread across all USAID projects and it reduced the total DGA budget by \$220,000. The grant period was initially through September 30, 2007, but a no-cost extension enabled some activities to continue until December 2007.

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<sup>1</sup> For a listing and discussion of the MCA qualification criteria, see the MCA website: [www.mca.gov/faq.html#qualify](http://www.mca.gov/faq.html#qualify). For a list of potentially qualifying countries, see [www.cgdev.org/nv/features\\_MCA\\_cgdocs.html](http://www.cgdev.org/nv/features_MCA_cgdocs.html).

According to the CA's Program Description (written by the implementers), the strategic approach of the DGA Consortium was to be guided by core values of participation, representation, transparency and accountability. It envisioned citizen participation in political affairs, as voters, advocates and watchdogs, and political party responsiveness as vital to orienting government to the public interest. In particular, transparency of policymaking and accountability to the public would help assure that government addresses citizens' interests and helps deter corruption in government.

The Consortium aimed to build upon existing projects, namely NDI's Civic Forum and political party reform and election monitoring; PA's NGO-based capacity strengthening, conflict management and coalition building; and IREX's *Hapur* television and efforts toward creating a journalists' association. All would be oriented toward combating corruption and effecting transparent and accountable government. Additional steps to be undertaken included:

- conducting baseline analyses;
- encouraging legislative initiatives;
- engaging political leadership;
- strengthening advocacy NGOs by bringing them more into the anticorruption process and by engaging them in monitoring government activities;
- improving media reporting standards;
- encouraging political party internal democracy and party finance reform; and
- developing capacity among citizens for engaging in all aspects of the election process.

In addition, activities would build the capacity and involvement of women in the political sphere.

The DGA Consortium Program Description highlighted the following expected program results:

#### **Intermediate Result 1 - Citizen Participation on Key Governance Issues Increased**

- NGOs form issue-based coalitions to pursue legislative advocacy initiatives that include public hearings and other activities to influence political decision-making and policymaking.
- NGOs regularly report to the public on the implementation status of anticorruption laws.
- Citizen advisory boards and information offices at the local level institutionalize citizen participation in oversight of local government activity, particularly municipal budgeting.
- A NGO code of conduct upholds ethical standards and professional responsibilities.
- Observance of international Anticorruption Day (December 9) is institutionalized.
- Watchdog efforts include assessments of the impact of government policies on women.

#### **Intermediate Result 2 - Increased Citizen Confidence in Accuracy of News and Information**

- A journalists' association is created to promote professional reporting standards, to provide support to those engaged in investigative journalism, and to oversee a peer code of ethics.
- A media labor contract is negotiated to protect reporters against political/private influence.
- Television programs on anti-corruption are broadcast by Albanian media.
- An Albanian media group designs, edits and publishes a journal of democracy.

#### **Intermediate Result 4 - Representative Government Institutions Strengthened**

- Internal political party auditors or other control mechanisms are created to work toward compliance with political party finance legislation.
- Transparency of political party financing grows through increased public disclosure of assets
- Political parties use public opinion research findings and empower women and youth activists to reach out to constituents on issues that speak to community/constituent priorities.

- The administration of the political leadership academy initiated by the Consortium is transferred to an Albanian organization.
- Election processes feature comprehensive, nonpartisan election monitoring, political party codes of conduct, media monitoring, and parallel vote tabulations.<sup>2</sup>

According to the NDI Program Description, DGA Consortium members had established working relationships with key stakeholders, including the Albanian Coalition against Corruption (ACAC), *Mjaft*, (which means “Stop” in English -- as in Stop Corruption), the Society for Democratic Culture, leading government and opposition political parties, and major print and broadcast media, and would build upon current programs and stakeholder relations. It would include sector-specific and cross-sector work with NGOs, citizen groups, media and political parties that featured technical assistance, training, and materials.

In seeking to achieve these results, the DGA Consortium would use established training and technical assistance methods, such as individual skills-building and organizational development, and also introduce new, more advanced tools, including a news journal, public opinion research and a nationwide “clean elections” campaign. The goal was to move beyond sector-specific assistance to integrated initiatives by NGO activists, journalists and political party representatives.

The DGA Consortium planned to phase program activity around the following key important events in Albania: the June 2005 parliamentary elections, local elections in the fall of 2006 (but postponed until February, 2007), and the accession process for EU membership, as follows:

- Phase One: from August/September 2004 to August 2005, around parliamentary elections;
- Phase Two: from September 2005 to October 2006, around municipal elections; and
- Phase Three: from November 2006 to August 2007, around Albania’s progress toward European Union accession.

The Program Description promised that much of its activity would take place outside central Albania, the focus of USAID and consortium member assistance to that date, and would occur in relatively under-served municipalities in northern and southern Albania. As such, satellite offices, or “Centers of Citizen Strength,” were established in the North, in Shkodre and the South, in Vlore, as agreed with USAID. All administrative staff and field coordinators of the central Albania consortium were housed in one facility in Tirana, in an effort to manage the partner consortium as one entity, stemming from its vision of “independence in unity,” a vision articulated by the first DGA COP.

## Purpose and Focus of the Evaluation

On March 11, 2008, The Regional Contracting Office of the Regional Service Center in Budapest, on behalf of the USAID Albania, issued an RFTOP for an evaluation of the “Democracy and Governance in Albania” project, in response to which MSI was selected. The broad purpose of the evaluation was to determine whether objectives and results of the project have been achieved and to determine as far as possible the impact of those results. USAID asked the evaluation team to respond to the following questions:

1. Has the project been successful in achieving the expected results? If not, or in some particular areas, why?

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<sup>2</sup> Source: USAID award agreement, NDI Program Description, 09/28/2004

2. What seems to be the main impact(s) of the project, if any, at this point in time?
3. How did the implementer perform in terms of project management in each phase?
4. To what degree were milestones met, or if they were not met?
5. Were project deliverables completed on time? If not, why?
6. How effective was the project leadership overall and how did it impact the success of the project?

Section II will present evaluation findings relating to these six questions.

## Evaluation Team and Methodology

The methodology used in the evaluation comprised the following main elements:

- a review of available background information and reports relevant to the DGA program;
- interviews of key informants, including Albanian Government representatives, elected officials, USAID and US NGOs, international agencies (Organization for Stability and Cooperation in Europe) local NGOs, journalists, current and former DGA staff, Partners Albania staff and former IREX staff;
- interviews with citizen (including Super Citizens) beneficiaries;
- direct observation of DGA's impact today and informant recall; and
- the use of primary and secondary statistical information from DGA and other institutional databases.

The evaluation team used a *semi-structured interview guide* for nearly all meetings when appropriate. The set questions formed a basis for comparison and analysis of key topics. Additional questions targeted to the particular interviewee formed a fuller picture of the DGA environment.

The consultants spent three weeks in Albania. They made three field visits (for six days) outside the capital to visit civil society stakeholders, including DGA and NDI former or current staff; "Super Citizens," a group of active citizens participating in the Civic Forum who were selected for special training and duties; journalists; elected officials; politicians; PA staff; and small medium and large NGOs that had been given small grants by DGA. The team traveled to Vlora, Saranda, Gjirokaster in the South, and to Durres and Shkoder in the North and so covered much of the country (the Kukes region of Albania is difficult to access by car) and reviewed documents received in the field. As such, the information gathered in communal and municipal areas, although it cannot be considered strictly comprehensive, gives a reasonable image of the reach of DGA outside Tirana in a remarkably centralized country.

At the conclusion of each field visit, the consultants shared interview notes and compared findings. Discussion confirmed the consultants' findings or provided a fuller picture of a particular vein of thinking. Findings encapsulated commonly shared views among interviewees and ones where there were strong differences of opinion. The approach was firmly anchored in identifying areas of strength or weaknesses, and avoiding personalizing issues that had arisen between DGA partners and with the USAID Mission. Additionally, the consultants solicited the recommendations of interviewees on key improvements to future democracy and governance programs.

## Study Limitations

Due to the late signing of the contract and, with one exception of a document that arrived the day before the team left for Tirana, background documents could only be obtained once the team arrived in Albania

and so had to be reviewed while the team was in the field or trying to prepare for and conduct interviews, instead of during the customary preparatory period at home. This had an impact on the efficiency of the team's field work.<sup>3</sup> In addition, most documents sent to the team in Albania were electronically corrupted and had to be requested several times. Crucial annexes to the DGA Project Proposal were missing and had to be retrieved along the way. The DGA Quarterly reports, Annexes to the DGA final report, and yearly work-plans were received episodically during the assignment while the team was conducting interviews and reconstructing the history of the project. Most importantly, a copy of the signed Cooperative Agreement was sent to the team by the end of the field work, without the modifications that had then to be requested as well.

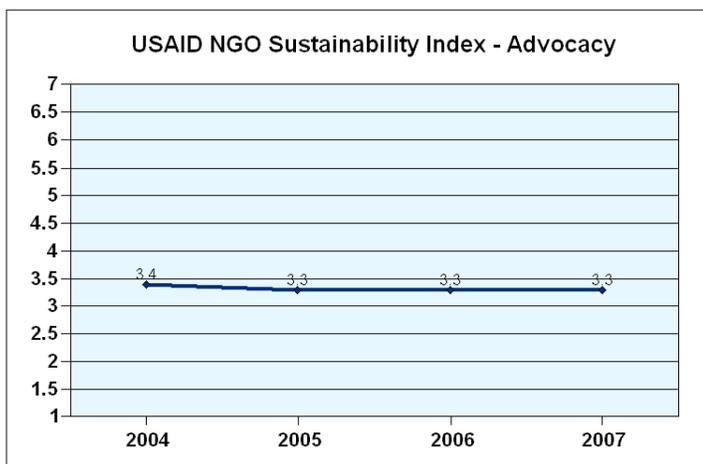
Implementer Annual Reports had been waived for the DGA. This meant that comparative results had to be based on quarterly reports, yearly work-plans and bits of annexes received through interaction with former DGA staff. Comparing the Work Programs with final reported results and quarterly reports was difficult because activities and accomplishments were described differently in different places. Indicators differed from Work Program to reports. PMP indicators were sent to the team after the evaluators left Albania, making it difficult to obtain more information about these in the interviewing process. Indeed, the confused archiving of DGA program documents, missing annexes, delayed time in delivery and in one specific case an inability to obtain access to the documents (IREX was unable to point us to the desk officer in charge in its Washington headquarters) and, finally, the lack of consistency in reporting, complicated the team's task, thus limiting the study.

## II. EVALUATION FINDINGS

The following discusses the evaluation findings, responding to the six questions posed by USAID/Albania, with one exception. Questions 3 and 6, addressing Management and Leadership, respectively, have been merged.

### Question 1: Has the project been successful in achieving the expected results? If not, or in some particular areas, why?

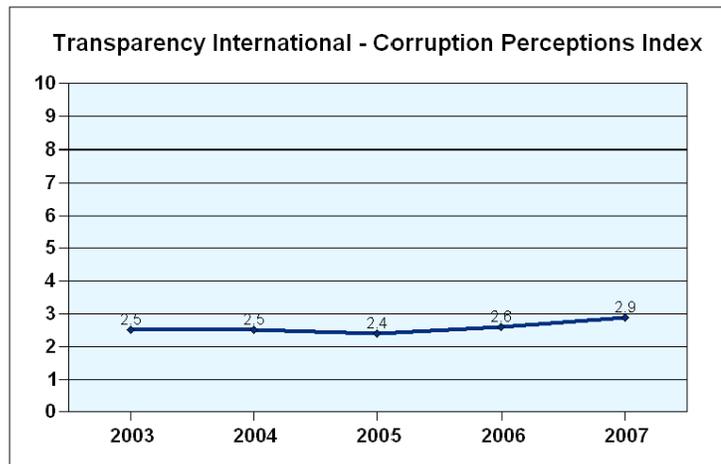
USAID's highest level indicators drew on the Transparency International (TI) index of perceptions of corruption and the advocacy element of the NGO Sustainability Index produced by USAID's own E&E Bureau. As the first graph indicates, *advocacy scores* in the NGO Sustainability Index (NGOSI) for Albania showed a slight improvement from 2004 to 2005 and then the scores were flat, with no discernible progress, through 2007. The *composite* NGO Sustainability Index scores (in the graph below) were flat from 2004-2006 and then showed a very small improvement



<sup>3</sup> The DGA final report with an outdated list of 'persons to contact' was available, one day prior to the team's deployment in Albania.

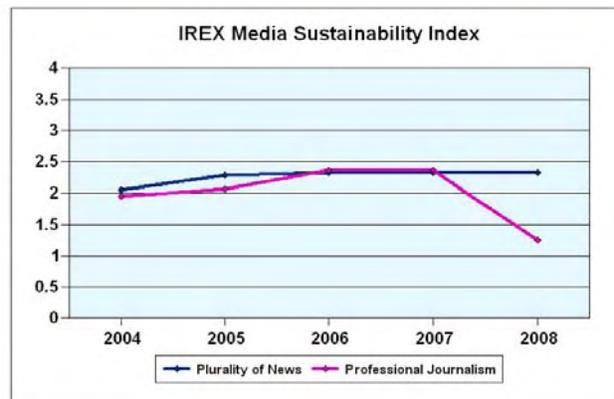
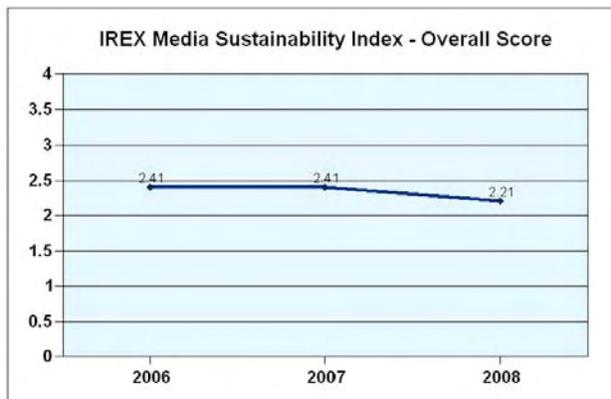
between 2006 and 2007, due to improvements in the elements for financial sustainability and public image. The NGOSI contains 7 separate elements (advocacy is one element); the composite score averages the scores for the individual elements.

Transparency International’s index of corruption improved slightly during the project period, meaning that the public believed that corruption had become less serious (the score went from 2.5 in 2004 to 2.9 in 2007, with a score of 10 as “squeaky clean” and a score of zero as appallingly corrupt).

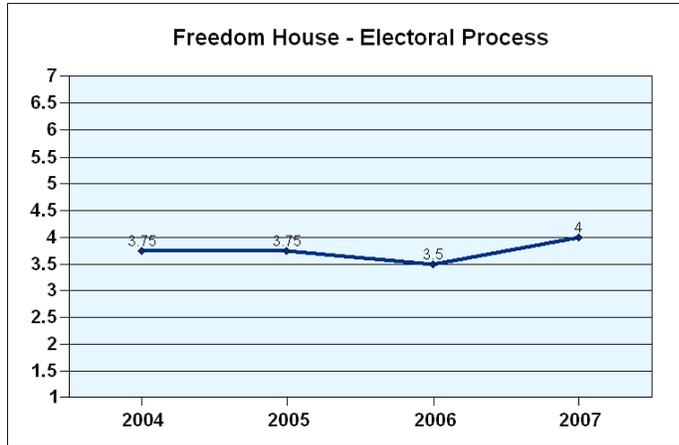


As the graphs below show, there were improvements in the two most relevant components (for professional journalism and pluralism of news sources) of the IREX media sustainability index during the DGA period. There was a

deterioration in the composite media sustainability index score, which measures several elements, and also a decline in the score for professional journalism in 2008, perhaps reflecting continued poor remuneration for journalists. In this index a score of zero means that the country does not meet the standards for that element at all and a score of 4 means that it meets the standards well. The decline in scores does suggest that some benefits of DGA are not sustainable.



It is important to note that these are very ambitious and high level indicators. It is relevant to ask whether a project of roughly \$2.4 million per year for three years in a deeply corrupt (as well illustrated by the very low scores on the TI index) and difficult environment could leverage such significant changes. Corruption perception is also a difficult standard since practical improvements in controlling corruption could be made but the time lag between the improvements and a significant portion of the population recognizing those improvements could be longer than the limited lifespan of many USAID development projects. Increasingly, experts who work on combating corruption are more interested in surveying experience with corrupt practices rather than just perceptions. Experience is a harder marker and one the Mission might consider measuring in the future, particularly if it focuses on combating particular kinds of corruption that victimize the general population or businesses (e.g., bribes paid to complete company registration or customs processes in the case of business or to obtain medical care in the case of individuals).



Finally, the team also looked at progress against the Freedom House Nations in Transit “election process” index or indicator. A score of 7 is the worst score. The 2006 election did show improvement but there was slippage in 2007 due to the inability of the parties to agree on electoral reform. The local elections had to be postponed by nearly a month from the original date of 20 January 2007. Amendments to the Code resulted in tight deadlines, which imposed severe logistical and administrative challenges on the CEC

Before exploring program results, it is worth noting again that DGA organized its activities as stated in the Program Description largely around the electoral calendar:

- a. Phase One: from August/September 2004 to August 2005, around parliamentary elections;
- b. Phase Two: from September 2005 to October 2006, around municipal elections; and
- c. Phase Three: from November 2006 to August 2007, around Albania’s progress toward European Union accession.

### I. Political Party Reform

Supported by USAID, NDI had conducted programs in Albania since 1991 to promote citizen political participation, election monitoring, and the development of political parties and emerging political leaders. Since 2000, NDI has trained mainstream political party activists in leadership, internal and external party communication, coalition-building, ethics and anti-corruption, and voter outreach techniques. Its’ Political Reform and Leadership Academy was established under a previous USAID Cooperative Agreement.

Begun in 2004, the DGA project extended the ongoing NDI training program for political parties, focusing on internal party reform and outreach to citizens. Of particular interest was the issue of party funding and expenditures, since citizens saw parties to be corrupt and non-transparent even to members. They proposed working with ACAC to conduct a baseline analysis on political party funding and expenditures. Then, they planned to enlist NGOs and political party representatives to create an advocacy initiative to address the financing issue, recommend to parties internal controls and train NGOs and media to monitor party financing.

During 2005 and 2006, NDI conducted political party reform activities centering on the Political Reform and Leadership Academy, which trained emerging senior party activists. Seminars presented to the 75 new participants each year covered such topics as citizen outreach, party finance reform, ethics, party responsibilities and election campaigning. A key aspect of the program was that each participant was required to design and implement action projects in their local districts, generally conducting training for others, thus widely disseminating the learning, or assisting with citizen outreach. To provide material for the trainings, NDI prepared and published a series of support publications in the Albanian language.

To work toward internal party democracy, NDI also conducted an extensive One Member, One Vote (OMOV) campaign. This included 11 workshops for 530 senior party representatives of five political parties in areas outside of Tirana. Subsequently, in collaboration with the SP Youth Forum, they reached

400 youth activists. OMOV was adopted by SP and SMI and is gradually being implemented and is, according to interviewees, also being considered by the DP.

<b>2005 Participants by Political Party Affiliation</b>	
<i>Political Party</i>	<i># Participants</i>
Socialist Party .....	17
Democratic Party.....	16
Socialist Movement for Integration .....	9
Social Democratic Party .....	8
Unity for Human Rights Party .....	5
Albanian Republican Party .....	5
New Democratic Party .....	5
Party of Legality Movement .....	4
National Front .....	4
Christian Democratic Party .....	2

According to interviewees, including participants, other party members and outside observers, the Academy was highly-regarded by the political community for its contribution to political party improvement. Some well-qualified applicants had to be turned away because the demand exceeded the capacity. In addition, the value assigned to the work of the Academy was evidenced by the fact that applicants for employment made a point to note on their resumes their participation and reviewers of candidates valued such participation. Many graduates of the program are now in high positions in government, which is not only good for their careers but more importantly inserts new ideas about ethics, responsibility and competent performance into government.

Political party reform activities were complemented with public opinion research in advance of the 2005 parliamentary elections. The research, conducted through three public opinion polls and a round of focus groups, was the first such poll in Albania, aimed to legitimize and institutionalize the approach. By providing confidential, individual reports for the three political parties, SP, DP and SMI, plus a general report for the public, both the public and parties learned about the public’s preferences and citizens’ views of the parties. This opinion research was credited by all of the evaluation team’s political party interviewees with having helped the parties accept the legitimacy of election results, rather than the usual disruptive practice of challenging them, and also with having institutionalized polling by parties. Polling has continued and the results are now publicly released by political parties.

After the departure of Dan Redford, the first Director of the Political Reform and Leadership Academy, NDI decided to complete the training of the current cadre but not to recruit a new group. Thus, the program became less prominent and visible. It did continue to conduct training on different issues of political party management and leadership of key importance. For example in 2006, NDI brought expert presenters from other transitional countries that have implemented finance reform to conduct two seminars on party finance reform. The first seminar presented various models used elsewhere; the second presented regulatory frameworks that might apply specifically in Albania.

In the second phase of the DGA, prior to local elections originally scheduled for the autumn of 2006, but actually occurring in February 2007, political party training was combined with Civic Forum and focused more on local government politicians and less on national party leaders. NDI conducted seminars on campaign management for more than 500 political leaders, campaign managers, government advisors and candidates. NDI aimed to foster a stronger connection among citizens and political leaders. To do so, they conducted a number of activities through the Good Governance Campaign (described in detail in 1.a. Election-related Activities). Staff interviewed indicated they found that building this connection was quite challenging for two main reasons: citizens were not very comfortable with collaborating with parties because of their basic mistrust; also, newly-recruited staff and staff in new roles received little training to prepare them for their new tasks.

Local party activists and government officials interviewed indicated that few political leaders were able to participate in formal election-related trainings for several reasons: first, the timing – two months before elections, activists were in the midst of conducting campaigns and had no time for such training; second,

they were unenthusiastic about participating in training with members of other parties; and third, they preferred their own in-party training.

Following local elections, NDI conducted assessments of local party branches to learn how they communicated with voters, how agendas met those of citizens, party internal communication and organization, and operations. They then used the assessments as the basis for one-day workshops on such topics as campaign management, communications, human resources, voter outreach, organizational structure and leadership.

In 2007, after the elections, NDI also assessed women's involvement with parties and held meetings to gauge participation in party decision making. They then formed a multi-party Women's Network to try to empower women to increase their level of participation within their political parties. Thereafter, DGA conducted workshops attended by women from various parties outside Tirana and conducted a larger seminar on advocacy for women from the nine largest cities in Albania. Women interviewed who had participated in DGA training such as leadership and capacity building expressed considerable enthusiasm. However, they also expressed regret about the continued lack of roles for women in political party decision making and election, a political reality NDI had no control over. They indicated that they wished that programs such as DGA would go beyond simply building women's political capacity to enhancing parties' openness to greater participation of women (which was an important element of the work of the Political Reform and Leadership Academy).

Several experts in Albanian politics, external to the Program, who were interviewed by the evaluation team questioned the wisdom of the overall focus of political party training on the local level in lieu of the national level. They indicated that the former Political Reform and Leadership Program to foster political party reform and leadership seemed both effective and congruent with the reality of strong central party control in Albania. They indicated that the Program had made some inroads into party structure and democratization and had also resulted in the placement of more highly-qualified party leaders in high level positions – according to informants, beginning to change the political and governance culture.

Based on review of the record of trainings and publications produced, on interviews of participants and external stakeholders and also on evidence of the placement of participants in high level political positions, the Political Reform component of the DGA Project seems to have achieved some results, at least in the first phase of the DGA project. The presence in responsible positions of party activists who are trained to understand ethics and responsible government was said by respondents to be producing beneficial results in the form of increased discussion by those party members/leaders who participated in training of ethical political practices and good governance practices. The OMOV promotion resulted in adoption of this principle by SP and SMI but has not been implemented yet. Given the strong top-down party control, whether awareness of better practices and OMOV are beginning to produce significant change in political party practices or will produce change in the future, is a question that cannot be answered now.

## **2. Domestic election observation and monitoring**

Election Observation and Monitoring was largely implemented via the Small Grants Program (PA) through the Albanian Coalition Against Corruption (ACAC) in 2005 and the Albanian Coalition of Domestic Observers in 2007.

### **2005 Parliamentary (general) Elections**

The election cycles in Albania, often volatile, complicated the DGA delivery of several activities which had to be put on hold due to election administration changes and delays in late election date and redistricting of boundaries, composition of the Central Election Commission & Zone Electoral

Commissions (ZECs), integrity of voter lists, debate tactical voting practices, and centralized ballot counting.

To support the delivery of elections that meet international standards, the DGA's three-pronged approach by phases was to mobilize all resources towards increasing citizens' awareness of their participation in the election process. Indeed, the 2005 general elections were DGA's zenith, when the Consortium succeeded in pulling all its resources together towards a solitary goal.

On election administration related matters (to be separated from political party activities) DGA worked intensively with individual stakeholders – citizens, NGOs, media outlets and journalists, and political parties and in particular, the DGA Consortium with domestic implementers, such as the Election Support Group, the Albanian Coalition Against Corruption (ACAC) and its member institutions, citizens groups and others, to ensure broad and effective collaboration. The DGA was also very active within the USAID-led Election Support Group (a group comprising elections stakeholders such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODHIR), various Embassies funding election projects in Albania), which pushed for domestic election monitoring, parallel vote tabulation, media monitoring, party poll watching, verification of voter lists and political party codes of conduct.

Despite these external factors, the DGA's impact on the legislative elections is largely remembered by most interviewees as making an important contribution to the election's credibility.<sup>4</sup> DGA's high visibility through ACAC's press conferences and its successful nationwide deployment of domestic monitors left a mark in the Albanian citizenry and increased citizen interest and confidence in the electoral process. The DGA's several "Clean Election" campaign's activities were undertaken simultaneously:

- NDI's Pre-Election Assessment Mission April 2005.
- Draft Code of Conduct for political parties during the election period in early April that was used by the OSCE.
- Publication of four election-related manuals on media monitoring, domestic election monitoring, party poll watching, and election campaigning.
- Nine DGA Small Grants were awarded, including to ACAC, in order to conduct domestic monitoring.
- Training (using the manuals) and deployment of over 2000 monitors to every one of the 100 electoral zones. A press conference was held to present preliminary findings.
- A first public opinion survey (Prism Polling of Bosnia-Herzegovina) made big impact upon its release on May 9th and helped promote issue-based election campaigns, rather than personality-focused political discourse. This was the first independent public opinion survey in Albania that included a voter's intention section.
- Media monitoring led by NDI and ACAC (co-funded in the amount of \$42,000 by the UK Embassy), the media monitoring team (Albanian NGOs and the Institute of Statistics), together with consultants from the Association of Young Journalists of Montenegro produced three thoughtful, empirical reports on the quality and balance of 20 Albanian news outlets (10 television stations, four radio, six newspapers).

Of particular interest is the DGA's led Domestic Observation's good collaboration with the OSCE Presence in Albania and the ODHIR Mission in 2005. The OSCE claims to have decided to merge and

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<sup>4</sup> The US Embassy saw the election as more credible than did the OSCE, whose final report stated that the election had only "partially complied" with international standards.

exchange observation results with DGA, even proposing a Joint Observation Cell where DGA/ACAC representatives would be present. This result illustrates the credibility of the domestic monitors in the eyes of the OSCE Presence in Albania, although the DGA-led Observers were not part of the first Preliminary Press Conference given by OSCE ODHIR.

In 2005, the idea of conducting Parallel Vote Tabulation (PVT) was dropped by DGA, because the time line for mounting a credible PVT effort did not exist. A lengthy debate over the electoral code, with finalization very late in the electoral calendar, left little time for making proper arrangements for a PVT. One of the amendments to the code that came very late involved counting and tabulation at the zone level. This was critical to PVT and the amendment left only two months to go through small grants award process through ACAC, conduct a TOT and follow on training, produce manuals with updated and correct CEC rules & regulations, monitor deployment etc. PVT is a way to independently double check election results against the official CEC counting, but it does not make technical sense in all circumstances. DGA contended that since the counting was made centrally at each of the 100 electoral district headquarters (a first in Albania), a PVT exercise was redundant. The Mission, however, believed that an independent count even at the electoral district headquarters level, would have diminished anticipated political party wrangling over results that ensued. Neither OSCE nor EU representatives agreed with USAID's assessment. This point seems moot, however, since it was not possible for DGA to re-adapt its training content and schedule to fit a Central Election Commission (CEC) last minute decision on central voting.

### **2006/2007 Municipal (local) elections**

Local elections originally set for early October 2006 were postponed to February 18, 2007, largely because of the cross-party talks' failure to agree on an electoral reform in 2006.

DGA's activities aimed at strengthening electoral actors (citizens, NGOs, media and political parties), and building on key achievements such as the ACAC-led "Coalition of Domestic Observers". It sought to promote free and fair elections through media monitoring to ensure balanced and objective coverage; polling station and counting station observation by non-partisan and party poll-watchers to deter fraud; and voter access to timely and accurate information.

In an attempt to repeat the Clean Election effort of 2005, DGA reduced its activities to Domestic Election Monitoring, Media Monitoring, Party Poll Watching and Public Opinion Research. The nature of the election, the delays and tensions surrounding changes to the electoral code and the lessons learned from 2005 regarding the Small Grants resulted in a much less complicated and realistic delivery of funds and implementation of activities. The DGA Small Grants program thus switched focus from technical election monitoring and disbursed grants on anti-corruption initiatives and transparency instead of election-related projects to respond to this situation. Funneled through PDC as a Small Grants disbursement, in October, November and December of 2006, an eight-member NGO coalition recruited a total of 3,500 volunteers to serve as domestic election monitors. Although most training and deployment was allocated to a single NGO, simplifying the operational process, several "monitoring activities" were devoted to 2005 and 2007 reruns and pale in comparison with the 2005 success.

Most citizens interviewed who were involved in the 2005 monitoring exercise do not remember ACAC's presence in the polling stations in 2007, notably outside of Tirana. This might be due to the fact that the coalition of NGOs was not organized under the ACAC logo, but under "Coalition for Domestic Monitoring."<sup>5</sup> It is difficult to tell how many observers in 2005 applied for observation of the 2007 elections, but because the daily per diem was less in 2007, it is possible that a different population of

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<sup>5</sup> The evaluation team asked about the presence of ACAC in the polling stations.

observers was hired and trained in 2007 and raised the total number of Albanian citizens familiar with election administration throughout DGA.

Because of the politicized nature of invalidated polling (reruns) in 2005 and 2007, spot observations were performed, obviously in smaller numbers. This domestic observing effort (in numbers of observers trained, of training of trainers and of deployment on election-day) stood alone and gained less media exposure than during the 2005 elections.

The Domestic Election observation of the February 2007 voting was performed by a coalition of eight NGOs while the Training of Trainers was done by the Election to Conduct Agency (ECA) and the Albanian Institute for Election System Development (AIESD) respectively.

The AIESD which undertook the Domestic Monitoring (November 22, 2006 through February 28, 2007) recruited and trained 48 trainers to train 2,300 local observers on election rules and procedures as well as Ethic and Professional Code of Conduct of monitors. As in 2005, the DGA also participated within the USAID-led Election Support Group (a group comprising elections stakeholders such as the OSCE, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODHIR), various Embassies funding election projects in Albania), which pushed for domestic election monitoring, verification of voter lists and political party codes of conduct.

DGA conducted 115 trainings of trainers workshops, which resulted in the deployment of 2,300 independent observers, out of which 1,700 monitored election procedures at the polling stations and 600 at the zone commission level. The second Clean Election campaign (2006/2007) consisted of:

- Twenty re-runs (due to invalidated election results) of the Local Government Elections 2007 fell to the Society for Democratic Culture (SDC), which recruited 111 local observers, accredited by the Central Election Commission (CEC). Of these 111, 77 monitors covered the voting process at the polling stations level in four areas while 14 were placed at the Local Government Election Commission). Twenty regional coordinators were also hired and deployed.
- Rerun observation of the local elections. Rerun observations (accredited by the CEC for 50 observers) were carried out by the SDCI in zone 31 with 46 local observers out of whom 40 to monitor the voting process at the polling stations level and six at the Zone Election Commission (ZEC) and Vote Counting Center, including election day. SDC also activated its local branch in Elbasan for the Partial Parliamentary Election (in Zone 26), with 136 monitors at the Local Government Election Commission observing the voting process in 12 prefectures through 692 independent local observers in the polling station. 3600 civic education leaflets were distributed and two round tables in Berat and Lezha on participation in the electoral process, voters' education and registration in the voters' lists. SDC and AIESD carried a technical "post mortem" through six focus groups in Shkodra, Fier, Lushnja, Berat, Diber and Kukes in a national follow-up to the Parliamentary Election Process Findings. These focus groups with monitors identified remaining issues with ballot counting, procedures related to the delivery of election materials by polling station commissions, and tabulation results. The post mortem recommended legal and administrative changes that would improve the electoral process for the next parliamentary elections.
- Calling in observation reports via SMS or cell phone text messages. The DGA had set up a system to call in observations on election-day and claims to have received 40,000 SMS messages during the exercise. Although political parties had consistently used an SMS monitoring system in prior elections, this was the first time domestic observers would use it in Albania. Through this independent NGO calling in of trends of results, the SMS tool strengthened the results of the election and dampened political wrangling over the winner's legitimacy.

- **Media Monitoring.** Media monitoring was also simplified in 2007. DGA decided to fund a single NGO, the Institute for Development and Research Alternatives (IDRA), as opposed to multiple organizations, in order to avoid the need to train and provide TA to several organizations and reduce the reporting problems that can result from trying to merge the results of different groups. The media monitoring conducted for the first time in 2005 can be credited in part for an increase in broadcast time allocated to the then main opposition party, per a CEC request. In other words, the CED gained authority to address media coverage problems and had the information it needed to do so from the monitoring. In 2007, these results improved when the channels for the first time took the initiative in respecting CED media regulations concerning coverage. The fact that in 2007 several TV stations corrected their bias without an injunction from the CEC (i.e., without debate surrounding what was previously a highly politicized issue in Albania) is a clear DGA success: the credibility of the media monitoring was firmly established. IDRA monitored five national stations (Top Channel; Klan TV; TVSH; Vision Plus, News 24) and five local TV stations (TV Teuta and Adriatik TV in Durres; ETV Egnatia in Elbasan; and 6 + 1 TV and TV Amantia in Vlore). It also monitored Shekulli, Panorama, Gazeta Shqiptare, Shqip and Metropol. Two press conferences were organized, one prior to Election Day, and the second one a week after the elections, but there generally was less media coverage than in 2005.
- **Public Opinion Research.** DGA tracking polls were released in January 2007 (Global Strategy Group and Prism Research). Polls focused on Durres, Elbasan, Korce, Sarande, Tirane and Vlore. A total of 2,500 Albanian residents were surveyed chosen to represent a mix of population, political balance, geographic diversity, and the 2003 election results, to project elections results and compare behaviors. Polling undertaken in July 2007 was conducted by AGENDA Institute, an Albanian research firm (with a national focus on 1200 adults over the age of 18). It is difficult to compare findings, since methodologies differed between the 2005 to 2007 polls.

The election and media monitoring contributed to fairer elections with more readily accepted results. IDRA, which was selected owing to its proven professional capacity to conduct the task, can be credited with having pushed successfully for the media's self-corrective measures in allocating balanced time to all candidates. Also, most interviewees told the evaluation team that the DGA opinion polls "broke a political taboo" and that citizens polling, including voting intentions, became a more accepted and regular feature of Albanian politics.

On the other hand, there is no sign that election and media coverage monitoring can or will be sustained by NGOs without external support. Some NGOs, such as the SDC or AIESD, have the proven technical skills and knowledge of electoral processes, but lack adequate manpower and funding for a nationwide election monitoring exercise.

### **Late 2006/August 2007 Albania's progress toward European Union accession**

Because of the delay in holding the 2007 elections, the third phase was dropped. The DGA did not have enough time to implement any activities related to that framework.

### **3. Increased Sustainability of Advocacy NGOs & Small Grants**

DGA, which followed the RFA request focusing on anti-corruption advocacy NGO activities, should aim to represent citizens' interests to decision-makers to influence policy; and provide oversight of government actions and expenditures to ensure government and citizen compliance with enacted policies.

Prior to DGA, few Albanian NGOs had enough structure or capacity to undertake anti-corruption projects. Because of the nature of corruption and its ties to organized crime, few Albanians, however

committed to bettering their country and had the strength and organizational capacity to fight corruption on their own. In 2004 a few successful advocacy campaigns by the Albanian Coalition Against Corruption (ACAC), the Citizen Advocacy Office (CAO), and the “*Mjaft*” (Enough!) movement, resulted in the repeal of a series of controversial government decisions regarding utility rates and other issues. The Citizen Advocacy Office and Transparency International, a global anticorruption organization, partnered to focus on anti-corruption issues. In addition, the ACAC and the CAO monitored asset disclosures for the High Inspectorate for the Declaration and Audit of Assets (HIDAA). These advocacy organizations and coalitions have pursued aggressive, media savvy approaches that have resulted in increased media coverage of their anti-corruption activities.

## ACAC

USAID began a Civil Society Reduction Corruption Project in 2001 to:

- assist Albanian civil society (Albanian NGOs, business associations, public policy institutes/think tanks and other non-government actors) in increasing awareness of Albanian civil society regarding corruption, and to transform that awareness into advocacy and pressure for reforms;
- engage policy makers in dialogue on the impact of already identified, and possible future, reforms;
- monitor the progress of the Government of Albania (GoA) in implementing its program to combat corruption; and
- identify and support private sector measures to reduce corruption and develop similar public/private dialogue with local policy makers and implementing authorities, depending on the extent to which national authority was devolved to local governments.

ACAC was formed via a Civil Society Coalition and Combating Corruption Workshop, held in 2001, which brought representatives from over 60 Albanian NGOs and guests from the GoA. The objective of the workshop was to mobilize civil society by establishing an NGO-private sector coalition and develop a civil society anti-corruption action plan. The workshop participants committed themselves to establishing a coalition of civil society organizations, the media, and the private sector, in joining resources to fight corruption, and working in partnership with government authorities toward their common objectives. All attendees signed a final resolution of the workshop.

A steering committee (SC) and a Chairperson were selected to lead the ACAC membership. In addition, several interest-based working groups were created and later provided input for the Coalition’s charter and strategic framework, which was approved by Coalition members at the first General Assembly meeting in March 2001. In a General Assembly resolution, the new Coalition expressed its intention to promote principles of integrity, transparency, accountability, and rule of law in government and society.

The project implementer at the time (MSI) placed an emphasis on strengthening the capacity of ACAC and its coordinating mechanisms with government authorities. By the project’s closure in 2003, in the eyes of the implementer, the ACAC had gained the respect of its members. However, as additional funds from various donors were coming on line in Albania, ACAC members’ interest in acquiring these funds for their own organizations increased and the level of competition among member groups also increased. Decision-making efforts among the SC members became increasingly fraught because of this heightened competition. As ACAC itself became a recognized entity and gained greater access to the media, members increasingly wanted to claim the media “spotlight” for themselves. Members began to see ACAC as a possible rival.

Although the Secretariat helped to cope with the growing problems of the ACAC, management issues also emerged. For example, it took nine months to find and hire a suitable Executive Director.

The ACAC organized working groups with specific tasks in mind. One such group that proved successful was the one for study of the notary service – it drafted bills related to the Declaration of Assets and the Conflict of Interest. Both were passed into law.

There is insufficient documentary evidence to describe the exact state of ACAC in late 2004, when USAID asked DGA to support ACAC and make it a key sub-grantee of the program. The baseline at the point that the DGA took over support to this organization is therefore unclear. This makes it very difficult to gauge progress during DGA implementation. USAID believed that ACAC was a functional coalition in 2004 based on its own direct knowledge of the coalition and on a final project report that the previous implementer, MSI, completed in 2003. Soon after taking over the provision of support, NDI came to feel that ACAC was weaker than NDI had been given to understand. ACAC itself did not produce or still retain a paper trail for its work during the gap period in 2004; the only document for that period available to the evaluation team is the NDI assessment of ACAC, which was an internal document produced for NDI management purposes. The team does not have enough neutral data to determine the ACAC status at the starting point of DGA support in a conclusive manner.<sup>6</sup>

Evaluation team member interviews with the USAID Mission as well as with DGA implementing partners in Albania confirmed the difficulty in building and sustaining ACAC's structure. Interviews with NDI personnel suggested that the reason the Mission requested follow on support for ACAC on the project shortly after the award was made was because of USAID's desire to ensure an adequate legacy behind, despite serious weaknesses emerging in ACAC.<sup>7</sup> NDI did state its intention to work with ACAC in its RFA proposal as well as with other NGOs and coalitions engaged in anti-corruption work. At the point of writing its proposal, however, it did not have the same understanding of ACAC that it later came to have and did not understand what a drain ACAC would prove to be on its staff resources.

After the beginning of the DGA Project, NDI housed ACAC in the basement of the same facility as its other DGA partners and took on the task of organizational development. A goal of increasing membership at the same time that it shored up the existing organization made this effort even more complex. Although ACAC was originally an informal coalition, NDI began the process of registering it as an NGO, presumably to give it legal standing and make it eligible for grants; NDI had proposed to do this in its proposal in response to the RFA. The coalition could not survive on membership fees alone so needed to be able to tap external sources of support.

Helping the coalition build its organizational capacity was, according to *all* interviewees, a frustrating process. NDI, Partners Albania, and even ACAC members all stated that ACAC board members declined to participate in DGA training on strategic planning and proposal preparation. ACAC also delayed committing to an NDI sub-agreement covering its operational tasks. There were failures to comply with accounting rules once the sub-agreement was signed. Delays in financial disbursement then occurred when ACAC requested an exemption from NDI sub-grant reporting requirements. According to

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<sup>6</sup> The team feels sensitive to concerns about a potential conflict of interest in being asked to assess the progress of ACAC under DGA since MSI was awarded the contract for this evaluation and also implemented support to ACAC from 2001-3, a year before DGA began supporting ACAC. The evaluation team has tried to be extremely careful in keeping to documentary evidence and the sense of interviewees. Neither evaluation team member is on MSI's staff, and neither has a sustained relationship with MSI. MSI did not compete for the 2004 DGA Cooperative Agreement.

<sup>7</sup> An internal USAID revalidation exercise, dated September 2004 (one month before the start of DGA), expressed strong doubts as to ACAC's capacity and shortcomings.

the team's interviewees, members of the Board of Directors rarely met and did not share information with each other.

Partners Albania undertook a spot evaluation of the ACAC in September 2006 and concluded that the Coalition lacked formal personnel or office management policies, sufficient financial management systems, and promotional materials and public relations capabilities. These deficiencies were confirmed by NDI staff and other local partners working with ACAC. Under DGA, ACAC never finalized a draft strategic plan for the coalition. In addition, there seems to have been little interest within ACAC or the board in addressing persistent management and planning problems.

The complexity in building the capacity of ACAC is perhaps best illustrated by the group's difficulty in hiring and retaining executive directors and in selecting board members (after the resignation of DGA's first year ACAC Executive Director). It took ACAC six months to find a replacement, who quit three months later and was replaced by the current Executive Director. Unable to recover from these recurrent leadership issues, new Board members had to be retrained continuously, further delaying or weakening ACAC's activities. ACAC was, in fact, left for almost a year without direction.

DGA's activity regarding the sustainability of ACAC in the first year focused on the development and administration of a baseline survey of NGOs implementing advocacy activities, including a database; Action Plan and Strategic Planning; and most importantly the convening of an ACAC Board Meeting to select an executive director. An NGO Advocacy Capacity survey was undertaken, a final report of NGO sector analysis was produced, and a small grants RFA was produced by ACAC with substantial DGA assistance and then released.

Under DGA, ACAC mainly served as an umbrella organization to carry out election-related activities during the 2005 general elections, during which time it attracted a lot of media exposure. Election-related activities under ACAC overlapped with several sets of trainings performed with the help of the Political Reform and Leadership Academy, such as the constituents' platforms and study tours and other pre-existing NDI structures and programs. ACAC was also in charge of small grants management for election observation in the 2005 elections.

ACAC claimed to have delivered two awareness campaigns in 2005. In May a press conference was held to launch a "Mobile phones harm your pocket" campaign against high cell phone per minute rates with a call for a one-hour boycott whose impact is impossible to measure. In June, ACAC held three regional roundtables for NGOs and local governments to discuss the Casals/IDRA survey on corruption and launched an advocacy campaign "Albania, No Ghetto" aimed at fighting corruption in visa granting procedures.

Despite serious DGA efforts to turn the ACAC into a sustainable and highly functioning coalition over the DGA timeframe, the majority of knowledgeable informants felt that ACAC was perceived by most member NGOs as an avenue primarily for funding rather than as a coalition for true joint action. ACAC's funding was derived largely from DGA small grants but the money was channeled via PA, reducing the share of the pie for many NGOs. When DGA stopped providing funding, ACAC members stopped being willing to pay their membership fees. In 2004, ACAC claimed 200 paying members (NGOs). In 2007, despite a small amount of additional National Endowment for Democracy (NED) funding channeled via ACAC for monitoring good governance at the local level, only 30 coalition members continued paying their annual dues.

ACAC's continuing internal paralysis and loss of prestige, concurrent with its discontinued disbursement of small grants, left an organization regarded by most management level interviewees at NDI, PA, IREX, ACAC itself, as an "empty shell." Many respondents interviewed by the evaluation team regarded ACAC as an artificial structure created by outsiders, not an indigenous organization, and thus lacking credibility

and “ownership.” NDI further indicated that the very substantial amount of time it needed to spend on trying to develop ACAC limited its ability to conduct the overall program it had proposed and thus, its results. Experience elsewhere, including in the United States, does in fact suggest that coalitions are very difficult to sustain over time.

### **Small Grants program**

The DGA Small Grants Program provided sub-grants to registered NGOs, primarily coalitions and networks to enhance their effectiveness in watchdog and advocacy roles. The Small Grants program, disbursed grants to small, middle size and larger NGOs to include three main topic areas: public awareness and action; legislation and policy; and watchdog and oversight functions.

The grant sizes ranged from: \$100 up to \$5,000 (small grants); \$5,000 up to \$12,000 (medium grants); and \$12,000 up to \$25,000 (large grants). The institutional capacity and sustainability of DGA Small Grants recipients were to be improved through the provision of technical and financial assistance, specifically for anti-corruption initiatives. Approximately \$750,000 was to be awarded in sub-grants, according to the Program Description in the Cooperative Agreement signed in September 2004, and a total of \$563,939 was spent at the end of DGA. Fifty-one Albanian NGOs received funds to carry out 48 projects. Between October 2004 and September 2005, PA trained 200 Albanians (60% women) in 13 programs on the following topics: cooperative planning, advocacy and lobbying, civil society anti-corruption initiatives, conflict management and negotiation skills, networking and coalition building.

Delays in the election calendar and consistency in the Small Grants criteria created challenges for the DGA and Partners Albania (PA) which was responsible for awarding the grants. PA performed well under, despite these difficulties.

Because the Small Grants program (also called Sub-Grants Program) followed the election calendar and the electoral administrative changes, focus had to be revised several times along the way, making it operationally difficult for PA to manage its small grants RFA themes. Moreover, the channeling of funds for DGA activities (with different sources of funding) through Partners Albania to ACAC and the reallocation of these funds by ACAC created tension inside the DGA between competing NGOs and finally within ACAC itself. The collaborative atmosphere on which the spirit of DGA was based found its limits. Many NGO members of ACAC, because they did not fit the selection criteria for awards, felt left out of the process and gradually stopped paying their membership fees. Criteria were established, in collaboration with the Mission, to screen out projects and NGOs with a low likelihood of success, but last minute changes affected the process.<sup>8</sup> Yet, PA performed well with these late requests and added different criteria to in its screening of proposals.

DGA recognized that many Albanian NGOs largely consist of one dominant leader and that they lack the human resources to effectively implement projects, so DGA included points in the grant evaluation criteria for previous experience in the project area and the relevance of the project to the organization’s mission. Overall, changing criteria prompted some NGO leaders to claim that the process was not as transparent or neutral as it could have been. The principal NGO criticism arose when one criterion

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<sup>8</sup> For instance, during the second grant award preparation in September 2005, USAID requested by email that NGO members of ACAC be given “preferential treatment” and it hoped for proposals that would include a clear role for ACAC. PA claims this request created challenges in the selection process. In fact, we found that USAID, in its review of PA’s solicitation for the Small Grants Round 2 in mid September 2005 (anticorruption advocacy and watchdog activities), proposed to “fund proposals from NGOs that would carry out activities in concert with other NGOs seeking DGA funding or separately but as a member of ACAC and with a clear role for ACAC.”

required ACAC membership. ACA was clearly identified with the DP, the opposition party running on an anti-corruption platform.

Development of local capacity naturally fell under the Partners Albania mandate. The time spent in Albania (and the project's many components) did not allow the team to assess in depth the extent to which local NGO capacity was developed, however, many Albanian NGOs have indeed included anti-corruption activities and/or advocacy components to their projects after DGA.

## **IREX**

IREX joined the Consortium, bringing long-standing experience in working with local media outlets to provide training, small grants, and consulting to support the ongoing development of independent media. Building upon its existing activities, it came under the DGA umbrella when its ProMedia program ended in December 31, 2004 and merged its existing activities with the overall goals of DGA.

IREX's contribution to DGA remained somewhat discreet and separate, partly because of its long history and ties to Albanian journalism. IREX's lack of collaboration on program activities, in the eyes of NDI and Partners Albania staff, made it difficult to:

- bring news on corruption to national level attention;
- to increase the visibility of ACAC and DGA; and
- foster a national response to corruption.

Yet, the team's findings show that IREX produced 98 episodes of *Hapur* ("Open"), 56 of Albanian Heroes and organized 37 election debates. *Hapur*'s mission was to uncover local corruption scandals, and it did so. *Hapur*, which is described in more detail below, for example, unveiled local stories on embezzlement of funds related to the refurbishment of the old cemetery and Ismail Kadare's childhood home (now a museum) in Gjirokaster.. IREX also helped create and organize the Union of Albanian Journalists, which is an important accomplishment

## **Albnet**

Prior to the start of DGA, IREX sought to promote and preserve independent local television by bringing together a loose network (AlbNet) of local stations that could share lessons and good practices. AlbNet was initially composed of eight stations that then began broadcasting shared programming – including episodes of the programs Albanian Heroes and *Hapur* in March 2005.

Tracking the effectiveness of Albnet was challenging because information was not available to indicate whether the member stations were in fact operating, how and where, and much less when. There were no monitoring tapes or traces of broadcasts kept in the still-operating channels' archives or available at IREX or in the USAID Mission. There was also little information about this component in DGA reports.

The network progressively strengthened its presence in Albania's media industry, reaching a peak inclusion of 10 stations that covered roughly 40 percent of the nation's territory in early 2006. It dissolved at the end of 2006, however, when it was unable to raise sufficient income from advertising. IREX continued to produce the program *Hapur* (discussed below) and ensure that episodes were shown on Albnet.

## *Hapur*

The television series "*Hapur*"— modeled loosely on the American news program "60 Minutes" - investigated cases of corruption in Albanian society, aiming to penalize and reduce corruption through public exposure and professional journalism. DGA helped fund the production of 98 episodes. It is important to note that DGA only helped in funding production of episodes and did not pay for broadcast costs and that *Hapur*, while being sustained through USAID funding, was not a DGA creation. Because *Hapur* was oriented to local news uncovering regional scandals, it never succeeded in gaining a truly nationwide audience except for a period of several months when it was broadcast by state television.

*Hapur's* impact on Albanian citizens' awareness of corruption is difficult to ascertain, although there is evidence that it helped bring into light several scandals. Sometimes legal action was taken against the alleged perpetrators following broadcast of specific scandals. *Hapur* topics included the following:<sup>9</sup>

- Misuse of Funds for Construction of Public Works (100 stories)
- Illegal Construction or Abuse of Construction Permits (70)
- Public Tenders (40)
- Projects Supported by Foreign Donors (25)
- Corruption in Privatization (25)
- Abuse of Funds for Road Maintenance (20)
- Abuse of the Environment (15)
- Abuses within the Albanian Electroenergetic Corporation (15)
- Abuses in the Mobile Telephone Market (15)
- Consumer Problems and Quality of Goods Issues (5)

Some of *Hapur's* stories were highlighted by ACAC's public relations efforts through press conferences. The two major ACAC campaigns (against the high AMC cell phone rates and corruption in visa granting) were also successful in highlighting corruption partly because *Hapur* broadcast them. But the team found only one evidence of national level action being taken subsequent to a *Hapur* episode (when AMC, following a *Hapur* show, was forced to decrease its phone call cost per minute in Albania) in 2005.

In 2006 and 2007, DGA sought to increase cross-partner collaboration by providing *Hapur* with leads on stories that *Hapur* could use, while expecting *Hapur* journalists and IREX to point them to corrupt practices that DGA could take up via ACAC activities. But according to most DGA staff interviewed, IREX did not agree to accept leads from DGA partners as stories to be investigated, reserving the right of *Hapur* to decide what should be investigated.

Because *Hapur* was broadcast through Albnet channels, it reached local audiences from the very beginning of DGA; it later aired on TVSH (Televizioni Shqiptar- Albanian National state funded TV) for almost a year in 2006 but was taken off the air in September of that year by a new director affiliated to the party in power.

According to the Mission, *Hapur's* viewership (which included programs broadcast prior to the start of DGA) did not reach the level it had hoped for. According to the ratings DGA garnered about *Hapur* from a broader opinion poll conducted in 2007, only 5% of respondents said that they watched *Hapur* frequently, while 15% did so occasionally, 11% rarely, and 69% not at all. USAID contended that limited

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<sup>9</sup> Taken from NDI's Final Report. The numbers in parenthesis show how many episodes were devoted to each topic.

audience size was a strong indicator of the show's limited impact on raising awareness about corruption. IREX believed that the Harpur programs were important to start the process of raising awareness that corruption could and should be tackled in a country inured to high levels of corruption. *Harpur's* purpose as noted earlier was to cover local news; it was unlikely then to obtain national impact. The limited viewership then cannot serve as an indicator as to the program's impact on Albanian's behavior towards corruption, although it does prove that national exposure through TVSH or nationwide private TVs may have had a greater impact. Possibly a better directed audience survey should have been conducted; adding one question about *Harpur* to a general opinion poll does not seem to be the best way to obtain solid data.

The Mission decided to encourage IREX to create a *Harpur* Foundation to train Albanian journalists in investigative journalism and find alternative ways to fund *Harpur* and continue its broadcast. The foundation was created but, as of this writing, remains inactive and is looking for funding. *Albanian Heroes*, a show highlighting ordinary Albanians who spontaneously service their community, was discontinued in 2006 with IREX claiming there were no interesting stories to cover.

### **The Union of Albanian Journalists**

Prior to 2005, journalists in Albania lacked any kind of support network or employment protection. Journalists operating without contracts were vulnerable to economic pressures and were generally exploited at low wages, hindering their professional development, discouraging good journalists from remaining in the profession, and encouraging corruption within the sector. Furthermore, concerns about being dismissed for reporting on a politically sensitive issue could lead to avoidance of such topics and self-censorship and to the detriment of journalistic integrity and the public good.

There are several journalism unions in Albania, but none has dealt effectively with key labor issues. With the help of IREX, the Union of Albanian Journalists was created, drafted its statutes and by-laws, and was legally recognized as an organization in October 2005. A year later, the Union signed an agreement with the Ministry of Labor to work cooperatively to improve labor legislation in the media sector. In 2007, it signed collective agreements with three of Albania's largest media outlets, including Top Channel, Vision+ and the newspaper *Koha Jone*.

According to our findings and interviews, the Union succeeded in registering most Albanian journalists in and outside Tirana. However, in our meetings with journalists, notably in the South, the team realized that not much had been accomplished in persuading or forcing media outlets to offer contracts at minimum wage to their reporters. In Tirana, Shkoder and Durres, journalists were content with the work of the Union, understanding how much efforts is required to achieve full job security for the journalism community.

The Union has taken one legal action so far, filing a complaint against a VIP's editor in chief for not paying its journalists for five months. It is currently waiting for the labor dispute to be resolved via negotiation but is ready to proceed in court.

The Union registered its last branch in Berat, while the evaluation team was in Albania (2008).

### **IREX election debates**

IREX trained Albanian journalists at the local level (unfortunately, it was impossible for the team to determine how many) to facilitate political debates. Debates did occur, but were sometimes chaotic (e.g., in Vlora in 2007, when the journalists did not apply the training at its highest level).

The media components of the DGA indeed achieved the results that were agreed upon at the onset of DGA. It is to be noted, however, that the IREX-led component of the program was not very proactive in adapting to DGA synergies and did not react positively to new directions.

## **Question 2: What seems to be the main impact(s) of the project, if any, and at this point in time?**

The term impact can be defined as project effects that extend beyond the immediate project boundaries. In other words, did the project affect the community, country, or culture beyond the people directly involved in the work? And did such results extend past the time during which the project was being conducted?

Based on analysis of the products and the responses of interviewees, the impacts seem to be five-fold:

- Political party reform and leadership improvement.
- Increased awareness among citizens of their rights, responsibilities, and ways they can engage with government.
- Institutionalization of the mechanism of political polling and greater awareness of its value.
- Increased citizen awareness of electoral administration and practices.
- Capacity for domestic election monitoring built; this can be drawn upon in future elections if funding is provided.

### **I. Political parties' reform and leadership improvement**

According to the NDI Final Report for DGA, the 75 participants in the two years of operation of the Political Reform and Leadership Academy provided outreach to an estimated 15,000 participants. These participants disseminated information concerning ethics, party management including finance, party democracy, communication with citizens, and other such topics. Additionally, of the graduates of the Academy, 20 are now holding responsible party positions and 48 involved with directing campaigns. These young leaders are seen by informants interviewed by the team as fostering cultural change in the political world but only time will tell whether the skills and values transmitted widely will produce systemic change. The OMOV campaign has been adopted in principle by the SP and SMI but the effect upon political party democratization is not yet apparent.

### **2. Citizen engagement**

According to former NDI staff and beneficiaries, when an important issue arises, citizens are more likely than they were previously to mobilize to oppose unwanted actions by government; they now understand how to take action and are more likely to feel that they have some chance of success. As always with such projects, separating the influence of DGA activities from those of the other donors which have also worked extensively in this arena is impossible. However, DGA seems to have contributed to some amount of change in citizen attitude and action. Also, other projects (such as the LGDA) benefit from the presence in communities of people with experience in citizen engagement. Staff in those projects can use such groups as a resource when their projects require it.

Beneficiaries of the DGA Civic Forum activities who were interviewed were quite positive about this topic, indicating that the training and assistance helped citizens become more organized, empowered, and effective in solving some community problems. However, they also indicated that without staff to guide and support them, they found taking action much more difficult. It is important to note that without Coordinators, the Civic Forum groups have not continued to meet formally.

Citizens were engaged mainly through the Civic Forum program, the core of the citizen engagement program and a continuation of an earlier NDI project. Initially, Civic Forum (CF) Outreach Coordinators convened groups in communes for a 17-week education in democracy. This was followed by a shorter community organizing period, in which participants initiated an activity to address one of their priorities. After the reformulation of the project in 2006, the education phase was shortened and more emphasis was placed on citizen action, “learning by doing,” as well as initiating CF in municipalities. In activities surrounding the local elections, NDI also attempted to bring together the Civic Forum and Political Parties. NDI Outreach Coordinators convened Civic Forum groups and then trained and guided them to prepare Community Platforms, approach candidates to sign good governance pledges, monitor elections and post-election performance of elected officials, described above under “Election-related Activities.”

Outreach Coordinators and Partners Albania also provided training to in the “Sunshine Budget” process, responding to the law mandating an open budgeting process at the local level. Citizen groups attended open budget meetings and also made requests to local government for a number of improvements. They successfully advocated for a wide variety of priorities such as: open doors for citizens in local government; water service (after 17 years of no service); road projects; flood reduction infrastructure improvements; and inclusion of local priorities in local budgets although these were not always achieved.

All told, according to NDI reports, CF worked with up to 75 citizens’ groups in the Vlore and Shkodra areas, expanding the program to 32 new municipalities in Year 3. CF reached 1,300 citizens and more than 100 groups, 50 percent of them women. Citizens took part in advocacy efforts ranging from attending city council meetings and other meetings with elected officials, canvassing neighbors to determine priorities and in some cases working with government to implement community improvements. Some 79 of 139 priorities indicated by citizens in 2006 were apparently included in local budgets. NDI also distributed an MP Performance Monitoring Tool to more than 1,600 citizens, which citizen groups used as a basis for meetings with elected officials regarding job performance.

Another part of the Civic Forum activity was the Engaged (or “Super”) Citizens element. In 2005 and 2006, 50 community members whom NDI Coordinators identified, were selected for advanced training in leadership and advocacy. These citizens were expected to take a leadership role in stimulating participation by other citizens and in post-election monitoring of elected officials. Super Citizens did not receive extensive training in the final year of the DGA Project, however.

Shortening the education phase and supporting the learning of advocacy by doing helped speed the process and motivate citizens. However, more and better training and deeper involvement were widely considered to be needed so as to stimulate citizens to act on their own. NDI field staff and Super Citizens who were interviewed indicated that participants rarely take action on their own. Their view was that community groups needed more time with Coordinator assistance to develop the confidence and skills needed. They also indicated that more extensive training for both Outreach Coordinators and citizens and working more deeply with fewer communities could have produced more lasting and far-reaching results.

Establishing “centers of citizen strength”—offices in Vlore and Shkoder, in the south and north—was envisioned as foci for citizen activity, but they were used mainly by NDI Coordinators. Likewise, the attempt by NDI and PA to work together on advocacy campaigns, guiding communities with engaged citizens and NGOs to conduct opinion research and community platforms to define advocacy priorities was less successful; the two partners found collaboration difficult and preferred working separately. PA’s role was to train local NGOs in these methods, supporting local NGOs with small grants. NDI and PA were to support and monitor the advocacy campaigns. According to former NDI staff, however, NDI and PA ended up mainly working in different communities.

### **3. Institutionalization of the mechanism of political polling and greater awareness of its value**

Local organizations, including IDRA, have conducted sophisticated media monitoring during elections, and have gained the experience necessary to implement that monitoring in the future if provided the funding. Their efforts helped promote fair and accurate reporting in Albania, as shown in both of the media monitoring efforts conducted as part of DGA, during which media outlets decreased the bias with which they reported on the campaign following the public release of monitoring reports. In 2005, the Central Election Commission ordered TVSH, the public television station, to alter its broadcasts to allocate more time to the DP so as not to disproportionately favor the SP (the ruling party at the time) in its election coverage. This CEC ruling, based on a media monitoring finding performed outside of the CEC structure, is a strong indication that Albania's electoral administrative institution is ready to show more flexibility in serving Albania's neutral interest and move away from the politicization of the CEC.

DGA introduced and helped normalize the use of public opinion research in electoral campaigns. Today, polling is viewed by parties as a vital tool for developing campaign strategies, by citizens as an acceptable method for identifying priority issues, and by the media as a useful source of information for election-related stories. Prior to the 2005 pre-election poll conducted by DGA, public opinion research was viewed skeptically within Albania and, to our knowledge, unreleased to the public. The acceptance of public opinion research coincided with a larger trend toward more issue-based campaigns. Also, these independent opinion polls were unique in releasing voter's intentions.

The DGA also helped normalize political parties' debates. Political debates had occurred in Albania prior to DGA, but not so massively on a local level, and broadcast on local televisions.

### **4. Increased citizens awareness of electoral administration and practices**

By conducting domestic observation in 2005 and 2007 and providing training for monitoring through Small Grants (4,300 observers were trained and deployed by DGA) and also through ACAC's high visibility around election-day and announcement of monitoring results, the DGA has undoubtedly increased the public's knowledge of electoral practices. For instance, it ensured that a large number of Albanians were educated through the debates on the new election law in 2006.

### **Question 3: How did the implementer perform in terms of project management in each phase?**

The complex design, which envisioned a group of equal partners working closely together, demanded the most capable, astute and sensitive of collaborative managers. Unfortunately this vision was not completely realized, affecting both project implementation and its results. The evaluation team did not directly raise the issue of project management with interviewees but asked informants instead to outline their involvement with DGA and to elaborate on "what went wrong and what went right." Most respondents quickly introduced the issue of weak management.

Conflicts arose early on among the first NDI COP and the IREX and PA Consortium partners. The COP's expectation that all communication with external parties would be channeled through her did not sit well with PA and IREX staff. For one thing, PA had other projects it was overseeing in addition to its collaboration on DGA; as was agreed at the outset, for example, that the time of PA's Director would be only 80% committed to DGA (this proportion was later reduced at PA's request, to 60%). It is easy to imagine a situation in which PA would be directly communicating with an Albanian partner under one project but be precluded from doing so under DGA, creating some confusion in the mind of the Albanian partner about when they could and couldn't talk to PA. There were also conflicts between the COP and

other partners over the extent that other partners were entitled to communicate directly with the public. Although the Civic Forum activities and NGO strengthening had been envisioned as a coordinated effort, in short order, they were operating independently. In December, 2005, NDI HQ asked the COP to resign. After a change of COP, relations between NDI and PA improved, but the relationship with IREX remained less than ideal. The project went through a re-visioning exercise at USAID's request with the change in leadership. An interim manager evaluated the status, helped formulate next steps and ensured handover to the next COP. After a change of COP, relations between NDI and PA improved, but IREX remained aloof from coordinated planning and management.

Differing interpretations of the "substantial involvement" clause in the Cooperative Agreement caused confusion and delay. The DGA management style during the tenure of the first COP affected the morale of partner organizations and staff and led to turnover of some key staff; during the tenure of the second COP, program and staff role restructuring limited program effectiveness.

Staff interviewees explained that following the merger of the community engagement and political reform and training programs, they were then all assigned to the field in teams of two Outreach Coordinators, with each maintaining a second role as well. These staff, who were trained only for their original roles, were not as prepared for these new roles as for those in which they were already experienced. They indicated that had the new COP provided staff with training for their new positions, they would have been able to perform better in the new roles. Additionally, staff indicated that they considered the attempt to cover extensive territory, rather than covering less territory in greater depth, to have restricted their ability to develop lasting results. Also, they thought that discontinuation of the Super Citizens training meant that, although they could recruit a larger number of active citizens for the community engagement work, the new recruits had fewer skills than those who had been extensively trained, therefore limiting the lasting results of this effort as well. However, lacking comparative data, this deduction is uncertain.

#### **Question 4: To what degree have milestones been met, or if they were not met, why not?**

As indicated in the DGA Program Description, the approach was process-oriented rather than event-driven; nevertheless events planned for the three-year project cycle were critical for Albania's democratic progress and increased public attention on corruption. As they indicated, the most important were probably the parliamentary elections anticipated for June 2005, local elections scheduled for the fall of 2006, and the accession process for EU membership. The DGA Consortium proposed to phase or anchor their program activity around those events.

- Phase One: from August/September 2004 to August 2005, around parliamentary elections;
- Phase Two: from September 2005 to October 2006, around municipal elections; and
- Phase Three: from November 2006 to August 2007, around Albania's progress toward European Union accession.

The evidence provided in documents and through interviews indicates that the activities were conducted in order to meet the milestones laid out in the first two phases. However, the postponement of municipal elections until February 2008, meant that local election-related activities had to be postponed. Following the elections, DGA focused more on government monitoring and additional citizen and political party activist training. In addition, the Project was by then in the completion phase. For these reasons, milestones relating to European Union accession were not addressed.

## **Question 5: Have project deliverables been completed on time? If not, why?**

According to the documents reviewed and the interviews, the DGA completed a wide array of deliverables: organizing and guiding of education and advocacy of Civic Forum groups, political party trainings and support materials, TV programs, distribution of small grants to local NGOs for capacity building and advocacy, and numerous election-related activities including pre- and post-election monitoring, debates, community platforms, candidate pledges, and TV programs. (Please see the table in the Appendix for more detailed information.) They were delivered when they were expected and needed, based on the three phases indicated above.

## **Question 6: How effective was the project leadership overall and how did it impact the success of the project**

The DGA Consortium's activities centered around four components as outlined in the Project Proposal:

- Integrating Program Partners and Components
- Building Upon Existing Relationships in Albania
- Developing Local Capacity
- Educating for Action

NDI itself, Partners Albania and IREX are long established NGOs in Albania [dating back to 1991 (NDI), 1995 (IREX), and 2001 (Partners)].

The program was extremely complex, with many connected and intertwined components, intended to be complimentary, but difficult to coordinate and manage. On several occasions, the DGA partners' existing programs and carefully built relationships with their Albanian counterparts experienced challenges. For instance, IREX's work with Albanian journalists on editorial freedom and choice was at odds with DGA's requests that Albnet investigate DGA's stakeholders corruption story leads and include them in its *Hapur* programs. This contravened editorial freedom; a rather large assumption was made that the *Hapur* editorial board would agree to accept all these leads. NDI itself was very worried by the public release of the first opinion poll results in 2005, due to questions about the public's perception of political parties. It feared that data about the public's views of political party leaders would damage its relationship with political parties. The change in COP created challenges in moving its partners to the next stage. Other organizations lack of consistent leadership, such as ACAC's lack of a director for some time, complicated a cohesive leadership platform from which DGA could launch complex programs.

Oddly, co-location of partner organization in one office may have exacerbated the conflicts. Some DGA component staff complained that they had inadequate access to office equipment, and they felt and resented that communicating with their consortium partners was prohibited. This created a very tense working environment, not conducive to synergy and resource sharing amongst staff.

The assumption that DGA could build on existing relationships to ground the project through civil society active networks was also ambitious. In a small country like Albania, civil society organizations are interconnected. NGO heads have established relationships and pass information frequently, watching that funding is disbursed in a "balanced and fair" manner. The Small Grants criteria changes raised concerns in the NGO community, and created resentment amongst DGA stakeholders.

While this design proved ambitious amidst inconsistent leadership and sometimes challenging partner relations, a volatile electoral calendar did not help matters. DGA relationships with the USAID Mission became strained because of a difference in focus and the substantial involvement clause. Additionally the

NDI driven Consortium wanted to focus on long term democracy development (which it had started implementing since its arrival in Albania in 1991) while the Mission was clearly more focused on election related activities.

There was a difference of opinion between NDI and the Mission over what ACAC could or should offer to the DGA process (strengthening of a domestic coalition against corruption on the Bulgarian model, for instance). This created a tension between the two and consumed considerable time of those involved, the COP and Partners Albania in particular.

### III. CONCLUSIONS

This is a lengthy assessment with many parts and numerous findings. We will follow this section with an overview of “Ideas to Explore,” which builds on specific conclusions. In order to avoid repetition and overly artificial distinctions between findings, comments, and recommendations, we wish to use this section mainly to discuss the performance results of the program in relationship to the IRs laid out in the Cooperative Agreement and the requirements of the evaluation SOW, by including the operating context in which DGA performed.

The DGA was a project composed of optimistic assumptions. The major ones are as follows:

- That the Albanian NGO community was ripe for integrating into a Coalition, while many NGOs are exclusively dependent on international assistance and are highly competitive.
- That a Consortium (DGA) could easily coordinate a logistically heavy domestic election observation operation involving nationwide training, training of trainers, deployment in ZECs, distribution of kits, while vital CEC rules and regulations used in training were varying and sometimes issued very late.
- That the Consortium partners’ collaboration would easily integrate their activities further to offer a unified program (the NDI umbrella) and rely on ‘good personal relationships’.

In the SOW of this evaluation, two questions out of six address management issues (“How did the implementer perform in terms of project management in each phase?” and “How effective was the project leadership overall and how did it impact the success of the project?”). Our conclusion is that management changes and weak leadership did have an impact on the DGA and complicated the delivery of activities. DGA did not have the strong operational and organizational structure to ensure the smooth and proper functioning of such a highly collaborative project around three pillars (and four with the key sub-grantee ACAC), drawing inputs and producing outputs from many competing civil society organizations and other stakeholders. It was challenging for the main partners to implement the complex consortium design, which demanded a collaborative three-way partnership with numerous interconnected parts; this was very ambitious and difficult to execute because of coordination challenges. Merging three existing programs under one umbrella (especially when one of three equals was put in charge of the other two) with a new focus added to the difficulty. Each partner organization was used to implementing its own project under its own authority; it was challenging for them to integrate and they were not natural allies given differing interests. This was an overly complex management structure and while consolidation perhaps aided USAID project management (due to one and not three management units), it did not improve project performance but instead may have detracted from it.

Another SOW question (“What seems to be the main impact(s) of the project, if any, and at this point in time?") opens the issue of measuring the sustainability of DGA’s activities after the project ended. The DGA RFA did not require absolute sustainability, only “increased” sustainability of advocacy NGOs,.

Other DGA activities (election observation, political party related work, small grants program management, media) were not necessarily created and implemented by DGA to have a measurable sustained impact after the project closed. Some activities have had a lasting impact (domestic election observation trainings, to a lesser degree the Union of Albanian Journalists, for instance). They are sustained today independently from the DGA, and the DGA played a role in ensuring their survival.

Because Albania is a country where, historically, electoral matters are highly sensitive and election dates and rules are unpredictable, committing to structure this project around electoral schedules was perilous and a challenge to all parties involved. However, DGA was successful in delivering the project, on time as noted in Question 5 and collaborated with the Mission in adjusting its activities around the electoral milestones that were set and agreed to be both parties.

## **IV. IDEAS FOR EXPLORATION IN DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE**

During the team's interviews, a political party leader indicated: "we have reached a certain level; it is time for new ideas, new approaches." Below, we explore some ideas for future consideration. In general, Albania can benefit from linking democracy and governance programs with citizens' real-world concerns and goals in a new way. As evidenced by the priorities expressed by citizens in this project, people in Albania care mainly about securing improvements in infrastructure, job creation, health care, and education. They tend to see democracy as a means to an end, not an end in itself.

Focusing on policies and priorities and applying democratic processes have been shown in other countries, as well as in Albania, to stimulate change more than education about democracy. Several areas bear further exploration:

a. Civil Society development to advocate with government: An appropriate endeavor for donors is to continue to stimulate the development within civil society of a willingness and capacity to push the government toward transparency and accountability, as in the DGA. Donors help to change the culture by supporting work with citizen groups to identify and discuss priorities with government officials and then work collaboratively to achieve them. Some basic principles can make such efforts more effective and, most important, sustainable.

- Citizen groups must be seen as legitimate by both other citizens and government. In areas of larger population, such as municipalities, groups need to be composed so as to be representative, not simply gathered by one prominent member of the community (which continues an elitist tradition). In other words, participants should represent the community as a whole. For example, in a UNDP community project, neighborhoods select someone to represent them in a working group; thus the group is legitimized and inclusive.
- Citizen groups should address their priorities to the level of government appropriate to Albania. For some priorities, this will be the local government; in others, such as education and health care, for which responsibility is still centralized, citizens need to work with the appropriate Ministry at the District level. Often local officials can serve as intermediaries to make the linkage.
- For performance monitoring to be taken seriously by officials, working groups need to have a sound basis for their evaluation, not simply give an opinion. The groups should be knowledgeable – first becoming informed about the facts: what have officials done and what are both the mechanisms and the needs for achieving a certain improvement. Citizen groups should avoid commenting on priorities with which they have not been involved or for which they lack

information. For example, if citizens are commenting on the delivery of water, they should know not only whether the water system has been established but also if any action has been taken, what the challenges are, what costs are involved and other specific information. Monitoring groups could thus either include experts in particular fields or they can seek input from experts and also then discuss priorities in greater depth with officials.

- Most important, in such programs, if an active citizenry is to be established, programs should now focus on developing skills of citizens to operate independently, not fostering dependency upon coordinators. Thus, hands-on skills building in facilitating democratic processes should take precedence.

b. Political Competency: An appropriate role for donors continues to be supporting political development. Although considerable effort has been devoted to internal development of political parties, perhaps the time is right to raise awareness of the price paid for corruption and lack of good governance and to devote attention to making linkages between governance and social and economic development. Further development of political skills around a particular topic area can both raise the interest level and the likelihood of implementation.

Despite considerable donor aid, Albania remains the poorest country in Europe, second only to Moldova. Thus a focus on how (and perhaps, more important, why) to develop and implement public policy for fostering social and economic development could be timely. Most countries near Albania such as Bulgaria, Montenegro, Slovenia and even Macedonia, have advanced much more but these are also countries that had a less totalitarian history. Focusing on the economic and social improvement that can be aided by good governance could be instrumental in helping to change the awareness and thus the actions of elected officials toward this issue.

Training, exchanges and study tours with politicians in these other countries are proven ways to foster awareness of needed policy and practice. When elected officials hear from others with similar backgrounds about what has been achieved and how, they are more likely to pay attention than when they hear from people from a completely different context. Also, seeing, on the ground, what has been achieved, at the same time as they learn what policy instruments were used, can implant ideas upon which they can then build. When elected officials then start producing and implementing public policy that supports Albania's progress toward both economic health and EU Integration, citizens' attitudes toward politicians will also start to change.

c. Election awareness is key for Albanian politics to reach stability, reduce political wrangling over results, and ultimately consolidate the citizens' awareness of their rights. It is important that Albanians understand how and why electoral management issues can impact the integrity of their vote. In reaching a sound civic understanding of how elections are managed, most Albanians could be equipped to differentiate electoral management from political maneuvering and in doing so, reinforce the neutrality and credibility of the administration body.

It is, therefore, crucial to consider the consequences of the April 2008 constitutional amendment that annulled Chapter XII of the Constitution (Art. 153 & 154) relating to the CEC. Albanian and international election specialists believe that the Albanian CEC will, in the new Electoral Code, be ultimately placed under the Ministry of Interior. Discussing the viability and the reasons of this major shift in electoral administration is not our purpose here, but this change will have to be explained to the often suspicious Albanian voters. Almost fifteen years have been devoted by the CEC and USAID-funded programs to raise awareness on the neutrality and independence of the CEC as a permanent stand-alone body. Because the Albanian perception of the CEC neutrality had finally improved in the 2005 and 2007 elections, it will be essential to sustain this nascent trust at a time when the CEC could be perceived, again, as a political tool under the Minister of Interior. Civic education programs aimed at increasing

transparency and convincing Albanian voters that the new electoral administrative body is indeed neutral will be essential to sustain the fragile trust between Albanian voters and the election administration body.

d. Finally, in general, the focus of donor democracy and governance projects should move to supporting EU Integration and fostering those elements in keeping with this goal.