

Agency Strategic Plan

2015-2020



amshc

Agjencia për Mbështetjen
e Shoqërisë Civile

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Executive Summary

The *Agjencia për mbështetjen e Shoqërisë Civile (AMSHC)* began preparations for a new strategic plan to guide its efforts to transform itself into

- an engine in Albania's national development and EU accession
- a donor of world-class standards, equal among other similar European agencies
- a donor of transparency and quality
- a donor able to not only disburse grants but provide high quality technical assistance, analysis, and sound decision-making

In December 2014, an international expert facilitated a two-day strategy workshop with staff of AMSHC and held meetings with the civil society representatives of the Board. With many initiatives proposed, a process of prioritizing what could be feasible and reasonable within the strategy period occurred. The results of this process are presented here.

The new Agency strategy for 2015-2020 acknowledges the tremendous efforts and investments required to build up AMSHC's operations over the first five years. Grants-making rules and procedures are in place; however, in its fifth year, the time has come to take stock of these accomplishments and set the path for the future to take AMSHC to the next level in technical and administrative excellence.

The new strategy sets forth five strategic aims for which the Supervisory Board will take responsibility to achieve. These are:

- ***Aim 1: AMSHC's organizational success is driven by a high performance Supervisory Board***
- ***Aim 2: AMSHC is recognized as a transparent, fair grant-making organization which serves the best interests of all Albanians through Albanian civil society***
- ***Aim 3: AMSHC has an agile, efficient administration with technical capacity to be a leader for the civil society sector***
- ***Aim 4: AMSHC measures and reports upon the impact of grants-making for the benefit of the Albanian public interest***
- ***Aim 5: AMSHC is the conduit of choice by foreign donors for grants distribution***

Together, these aims are designed to consolidate gains from the first five years of operations, and lay the groundwork for the Agency's future. At the same time they are ambitious and many of them may need to continue on into the next strategic period.

The Supervisory Board will oversee the implementation of the strategic plan, and hold the Director accountable for it.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

AMSHC	Agjencia për mbështetjen e Shoqërisë Civile
ASCS	Agency for the Support of Civil Society (which is AMSHC in English)
CSO	Civil Society Organization, used interchangeably with NGO
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
DSDC	Department of Strategy and Donor Coordination
DTS	Donor Technical Sectariat
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EIB	European Investment Bank
EU	European Union
GOA	Government of Albania
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization, used interchangeably with CSO
NSDI	National Strategy for Development and Integration, 2014-2020
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Unique Nature and Characteristics of AMSHC

AMSHC is a unique Agency in Europe in that it is *an Albanian-funded, independent government Agency with a specific mandate by law to serve and strengthen the country's civil society sector*. Being funded by the central budget, it has a stable, sustainable level of funding and is accountable to the Albanian taxpayer.

This unique nature of the Agency allows it to develop strategies and priorities in the best interest of the country's development, and free from foreign policy agendas. Its ability and interest in supporting start-up NGOs is another key distinguishing factor of AMSHC which allows it to engage with Albanian civil society in a more agile, flexible manner.

In addition, the Agency's national character allows it to interact at a more grassroots level throughout the country and build long-term, in-depth relationships with Albanian CSOs—particularly those in rural and isolated areas. Answering to the Albanian society as a key constituent, AMSHC has the mandate to be regularly and frequently engaged with Albanian civil society. In this way, AMSHC is charged with being an active, constant participant in the country's civil society sector.

As a new Agency operating in an environment where many CSOs are untrusting, all of AMSHC's staff are keenly eager to take measures to improve perceptions of the Agency's transparency and fairness

Challenges and Opportunities in Albania's Civil Society Sector

Even the most cynical stakeholders will admit that Albania has made significant progress in national development since the 1992 transition to a market-based economy and multi-party democracy.

While economic and political reforms have been difficult to implement over the years, the country's civil society sector has developed and is showing tangible results. In general, Albanian civil society is more organized, professional, and much more active in taking on issues of public concern and national priority. While there may be concerns related to capacity and lack of adequate financing, civil society is nevertheless more active and ready to engage. This presents perhaps the largest and most significant opportunity for AMSHC. It is a key trend which needs to be fostered and encouraged.

Albania's Development Context

The World Bank ranks Albania as an *upper middle-income country* which has made enormous strides towards a credible, multi-party democracy. While still among the poorest countries in Europe, Albania's economic progress is still to be lauded and acknowledged as significant since the 1992 transition to a market-based economy. Economic growth was brisk prior to the 2008 crisis, but faces a number of challenges which leave much of the country's economic potential unfulfilled. Currently, the dominant feature of the country's development strategies is based on the requirements to achieve EU accession.

Although the country is among the poorest in Europe, Albania has made progress in reducing its overall poverty. In 2013, the poverty rate stood at 14.3%. However, while the poverty rate remains higher than target, the country has made enormous progress in extending social services to economically disadvantaged areas and improving the national infrastructure. While significant social, political, and economic challenges remain, the country should be acknowledged for the enormous strides it has made.

Politically, there are deep divisions between the main political parties but the country has consolidated democracy and there is an increasing sense of entrenchment for democracy and acceptance for the “rules of the game”. Additionally, all parties recognize that the movement towards EU accession is necessary and irreversible. Thus, it is anticipated that the requirements of such will largely set much of the political agenda for the short to medium term.

Socially, the country is relatively homogenous and most Albanians have access to rights and services at least as enshrined by law. However, there are pockets of marginalized groups who face discrimination, stigma, reduced access to jobs, and generally differential opportunities within the society. Principal among these are Roma and Egyptian minorities, and others including at-risk youth, and the disabled. Women, in particular, continue to face a number of challenges including domestic violence, low social status (especially in rural areas), and traditional views which restrict their social, political, and economic participation.

EU Accession is a dominating feature in the country’s development plans as well as its political objectives. As the Albanian Government addresses key requirements for EU accession, AMSHC will likely need to play a contributing role by directing some of its grants-making to strengthening civil society to likewise support meetings these achievements.

Key Development Indicators:

GDP per capita:	\$8820
Poverty rate (2013):	14.3%
Unemployment rate (2013):	16.9%
Life Expectancy at Birth:	77.1 years
Human Development Index:	.749
<i>(rank 95 out of 187 in 2014 rankings)</i>	
Gender Inequality Index:	0.251
<i>in 2012 (ranked 41 out of 148)</i>	

Sources: World Bank:

<http://data.worldbank.org/country/albania>

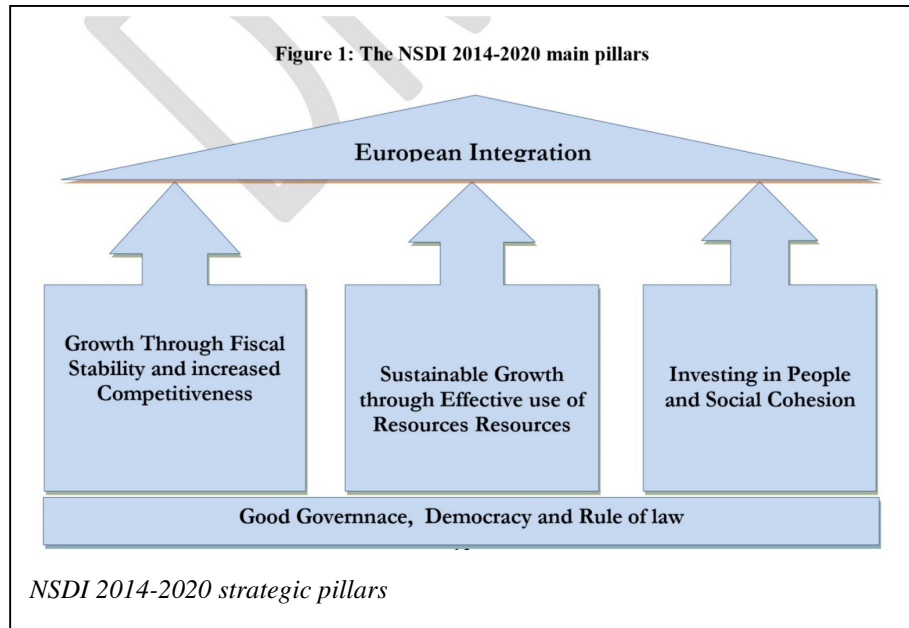
UNDP:

<http://www.al.undp.org/content/albania/en/home/countryinfo/>

Country Development Plan

The GOA has launched its second national development strategy, the ***National Strategy for Development and Integration (NSDI) 2014-2020***. The plan relies upon several pillars to achieve sustained, broad based economic growth and EU integration. These pillars include:

- Improving good governance and rule of law
- Growth through fiscal stability and increased competitiveness
- Sustainable growth through efficient use of resources
- Investing in people



The AMSHC 2015-2018 strategy is in alignment with the NSDI 2014-2020, as AMSHC assumes an important role in providing the technical and financial resources to civil society so that they can contribute in a meaningful way through their own specific roles in achieving the country's overall objectives. *AMSHC sees itself as a significant mechanism of the Albanian Government for achieving the objectives set forth in the NSDI 2014-2020, and as a tangible expression of the government's commitment to the role of civil society in achieving said objectives.*

The Law Governing AMSHC

*The Agency for the Support of Civil Society (ASCS)—the English version of **Agjencia për mbështetjen e Shoqërisë Civile (AMSHC)**--* was established on the basis of Law Nr. 10 093, enacted on September 3, 2009. The vision of the ASCS could be summarized as follows: active citizenship and vibrant civil society in Albania. The ASCS mission, according to the Law, is to encourage the sustainable development of civil society and the creation of favorable conditions for civic initiatives for the good of and in the interest of the public. For accomplishing its mission, the ASCS offers financial assistance for programmes that encourage and strengthen the sustainability of non-profit organizations, inter-sector and international cooperation, civic initiatives, philanthropy, volunteerism and democratic institutions of society as well as other programmes that facilitate the fulfillment of its mission. The Law stipulates that, in the exercise of its activity, the ASCS is guided by the strategic priorities of the government for the development of civil society.

The objectives of the ASCS are:

- Encouraging the development of volunteerism and participation of citizens in community development
- Promoting and strengthening capacities and sustainability of non-profit organizations
- Developing inter-sector partnership and cooperation between civil society organizations
- Increasing the visibility and public influence of civil society organizations
- Developing social entrepreneurship and employment in non-profit organizations

- Increasing the influence of civil society in policy and decision-making
- Encouraging the cooperation with non-profit organizations which have the role of fighting against the corruption, against trafficking of human being and treatment of its victims, against domestic violence and the violence towards children

AMSHC is extremely eager to strengthen its structure, operations, and engagement with Albanian civil society.

Analysis of the Operational Context

The overall analysis of the civil society sector in Albania is characterized by confronting large challenges but nevertheless optimistic.

Thanks to heavy investments in the civil society sector since the early 1990s when Albania transitioned to a democratic society, a number of positive trends have taken root and are producing tangible benefits. These trends form an important opportunity in which to implement this strategy.

Recent societal trends in Albania	
1	the country has an increasingly developed civil society sector with many CSOs
2	the government is increasingly open to collaborating with CSOs in meaningful ways (one could even describe AMSHC itself as an expression of that openness to collaborate)
3	Albanian citizens—especially those of marginalized groups—are increasingly willing to participate publically, claim their rights, and engage in civil society
4	Albanian NGOs are increasingly connected to partners and networks in Europe, which strengthens their capacity
5	NGOs are generally willing and eager to innovate, adopt new methodologies, and adapt and apply new practices to Albania

However, there are still a number of challenges which this civil society sector must overcome. Three main challenges exist:

- Both within civil society as well as the population, there remains a lingering sense of distrust of government and apathy. While this sense is diminishing, it nevertheless continues among some in society.
- The civil society sector itself suffers from a series of challenges
 - The larger NGOs tend to dominate the field, crowding out the voice of and opportunities for smaller NGOs
 - There are more than 3,000 registered NGOs in Albania but many are non-functioning and/or have missions that are too general to make them meaningful
 - Some CSOs do not represent a constituency but instead are driven by their leadership’s vision
 - Capacity is mixed among NGOs. Generally speaking, it is low among NGOs in rural and isolated areas. This is true for management and technical matters. In addition, most NGOs lack capacity to document results and attract donors on the basis of achievements
 - Funding for Albania’s NGOs is relatively low and most NGOs struggle for sufficient financing

- Civil society still faces challenges to find, mobilize, and retain volunteers and raise funding from within Albanian society
- The legal environment is insufficient and not fully developed for civil society. This is particularly the case for the lack of VAT exemptions for NGOs as well as the lack of a law specifically for volunteers.

Technological changes have likewise been rapid in Albania. Even in rural, isolated parts of the country, there is much greater connectivity. News travels faster, social networks are more active, communications are increasing, and public opinion is shaped more easily as a result. Generally, this is a positive trend for civil society, which makes communications, awareness, and mobilizing easier, faster, and less expensive.

Analysis of AMSHC's Current State and Achievements

Since its establishment in 2009, AMSHC has made a great deal of effort and investment in its start-up. During those initial five years, AMSHC has operationalized its grants-making in accordance with the law and government procurement regulations. The bulk of these efforts have been bureaucratic and operational. As a new Agency with a relatively small staff, this process has been laudable.

Current Strengths and Achievements

Start-up. Since its founding five years ago, AMSHC have staffed several key functional areas such as monitoring, reporting, financial oversight, and administration (see Annex B: Current Staffing Structure). The Agency has launched six calls for proposals and disbursed more than 270 individual grants to Albanian CSOs. Both grants disbursements and monitoring of grants have been conducted within the law as well as government financial procedures.

Outreach to Albanian civil society. AMSHC staff traveled to cities in all regions of Albania especially to outreach to and engage with local civil society groups. These information sessions were held to gather input, record concerns of these groups, and to train them on the grants-making objectives and procedures of the Agency.

Efforts to increase trust and transparency. AMSHC staff are keenly focused on the need to build trust and transparency among civil society and the Albanian taxpayers. This has mainly been addressed through outreach and strict adherence to the rules and regulations related to grants-making and monitoring. AMSHC has also publically published its grants and all related procedures.

As evidence of these achievements, AMSHC has calculated that the amount of applications have been steadily increasing with each new call for proposals. While many CSOs naturally need grant funding, it is also a sign that more CSOs are knowledgeable of AMSHC and want to partner with it.

Donor Environment

The Albanian Government has established mechanisms for donor coordination. Since 2005, a Donor Technical Secretariat (comprised of the World Bank, OSCE, UNDP, and the European Commission) has been active in coordinating the activities of foreign donors. In the same year, the GOA

established under the Prime Minister's Office the Department of Strategy and Donor Coordination (DSDC). This department aligns foreign assistance with GOA strategies.

Much donor assistance to Albania is provided in order to assist the country to meet requirements for EU accession. The Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) is a dominant factor in the donor environment, and EU assistance has been oriented in this manner.

In addition to the EU pre-accession, there are a number of individual donors.

- European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD)
- World Bank
- European Investment Bank (EIB)
- Germany
- Italy
- United States

However, most of these donors support infrastructure, structural reforms, and capacity building for government. Direct support to local civil society organizations has declined markedly since the 1990s and early 2000s.

While AMSHC is among one of the smaller donors in the country in terms of money disbursed, it is nevertheless one of the most significant donors in the country. As the only national donor in the country, it has a role and obligation to support Albanian civil society from the perspective of the country's own priorities for development. This unique position is critical in the Agency being well-placed and deserving of being a conduit for grants-making in the future using donor pass-through funding.

Talking Points for Donors

as to why AMSHC is well-placed to disburse and manage donor pass-through small grants:

- **Builds capacity for Albanian Government:** passing funding through AMSHC gives the Agency further experience and expertise in the grants-making role
- **Supports the Albanian government in engaging with civil society:** additional funding allows AMSHC to continue outreach and build partnerships with more CSOs in Albania, which in turn deepens the engagement between government and civil society
- **Allows funding to reach locally-prioritized initiatives:** AMSHC is able to collect and priorities needs from the grassroots, which may otherwise go unheard.
- **Follows strict procedures for transparency and financial management:** AMSHC has built strong systems to ensure transparent, donor compliant grants distribution

Constituency

AMSHC has three constituents and is accountable to them:

- The Albanian Government (through the Prime Minister's Office where the Agency is situated)
- The Albanian civil society
- The Albanian taxpayer (society)

When foreign donors also support AMSHC, then it will be accountable to them for the period in which AMSHC is disbursing grants on their behalf.

Strategic Objectives of AMSHC for the 2015-2020 Period

As described above in the section, *Analysis of AMSHC's Current State and Achievements*, AMSHC has achieved much in putting the mechanical elements of its operations into place. Five years after its founding, the time has come to focus on the five aims listed here.

NOTE: It should be noted that this is a strategic plan. The Supervisory Board will govern to achieve the aims and strategic objectives listed in this plan. The Director and his staff will operationalize the plan over the strategy period.

Vision Statement

AMSHC is a key engine in Albania's development and EU integration, partnering with, motivating, and equipping civil society to achieve sustainable impact.

Mission Statement

To encourage the sustainable development of civil society and the creation of favorable conditions for civic initiatives for the good of and in the interest of the public

AMSHC Key Values

- Unwavering support to Albania's development and European integration
- Commitment to Albanian civil society
- Compliance with Albanian laws
- Transparency
- Fairness
- Professionalism

Aim 1: AMSHC's organizational success is driven by a high performance Supervisory Board

The unique composition of the Supervisory Board, with members from both government and civil society as prescribed by law, is a unique asset which lends experience, expertise, credibility, and representation. During this strategy period, AMSHC will benefit from this unique asset by freeing up the Supervisory Board's contribution to a more strategic role and devolving more of the management and operational responsibilities to the Director and his staff. With much of the operational mechanisms of the Agency now in place, the time is right for the Board to shift its focus to concentrate on governance and devolve more of the day-to-day management to the Director and his staff.

Strategic Objective 1.1: The Supervisory Board's skills, networks, and talents are leveraged to optimize its strategic decision-making and governance of AMSHC

As noted above, the Board has a unique composition of leading figures in both government and civil society sectors which is a tremendous asset to the AMSHC. In this strategy period, they will gradually step out of the operational role and focus on strategic governance. With this objective in mind, they will concentrate their contribution to AMSHC in the following three areas:

- **Governing AMSHC**, playing a more strategic role, formulating and approving policy, by-laws, streamlined grants making rules, and other reforms.

- Being an advocate for the concerns raised by civil society (see AMSHC function in Aim 3). They will advise how AMSHC can prioritize these concerns and advocate for them with government, the media, the public, and other policy-makers.

Strategic Objective 1.2: The mechanisms for establishing priorities and selecting grants are strengthened.

Due to the critical nature of grants-making and ensuring that these investments are aligned with the NSDI, the Board will retain its role in selecting grant applications for funding. Doing so will likewise ensure accountability in the Board’s decision-making. AMSHC’s establishment laws prescribe the eight programming priorities and the Board must consider grant applications under each of those. In order for the system to be effective, the Board will give priority to applications according to the following criteria:

- Geographic: although all of Albania must be served, priority will be given to rural and isolated areas
- Target groups: although all of Albania must benefit, priority will be given to including and mainstreaming participation from vulnerable or marginalized groups (ie, women, children at-risk, persons in conflict with the law, Roma and other ethnic minorities, LGBT, disabled persons, etc)
- Priority programming areas: although projects serving the five priority areas are acceptable, priority will be given to those areas which have a strong impact on the country’s development, fit government priorities, answer criteria for EU accession talks, education and skills building, and anti-corruption.

<p>Priority Programming Areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing the impact and involvement of civil society in the drafting and approval processes of policy / public reforms; • Good governance, strengthening of the institutions, society and the dialogue, youth empowerment through basic values of democracy (participation, human rights, rule of law, culture, etc.); • Protecting the environment, regional development, economic and sustainable development (cultural heritage, tourism, public services and innovation etc.); • Increasing of the public influence and the activity of Civil Society Organizations, networking and cooperation within the European Union harmonization and cooperation / regional development; • The creation and consolidation of civil society skills in public communication and civic education, encouragement of citizens to activities, involvement of their participation in community development
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Prior to each call for proposals being issued, AMSHC’s Board will take into consideration reports and situational analyses conducted by the staff to set priorities and sub-priorities for that year’s call.

Aim 2: AMSHC is recognized as a transparent, fair grant-making organization which serves the best interests of all Albanians through Albanian civil society

Given lingering sentiments of suspicion or distrust, especially when money is being disbursed, AMSHC has and should continue to build a perception of transparency and fairness. This is likely to be an on-going strategic aim and is vital to the Agency’s ability to engage with civil society, bring it into partnership with government, and be a voice for its interests into the future.

Strategic Objective 2.1: AMSHC is widely recognized as a transparent grants-maker

In answering to the Albanian taxpayer, AMSHC should publically declare and disseminate all aspects of its operations, grants awarded, and monitoring activities. In this way, the entire grants-making cycle will be made public—from decisions, grants made, and monitoring of grants given—in order to build confidence in the process. AMSHC will need to create standardized reporting formats and dedicate a section of its website to publish these. These should be updated with each grants-making cycle.

In particular, AMSHC should declare with each cycle what was the minimum score required to be successful in receiving a grant. Rejected applications should include the score they received and a comparison to the minimum score. In addition, the rejection letter should include broad categories for the reason for rejection (ie, did not meet the call’s priorities, did not demonstrate sustainability, did not demonstrate feasibility, etc) and provide these to each rejected proposal. Doing so will improve transparency and be a learning opportunity for applicants. AMSHC should also be available for debriefing if rejected applicants request such.

AMSHC should develop an easy-to-understand rating or grading system for grants it has given. This will provide feedback to the grantee on how they managed the grant from programming and administrative perspectives. This will be a learning opportunity to the grantee and will also help AMSHC in evaluating future applications from them.

Strategic Objective 2.2: AMSHC’s contribution to Albania’s development is understood and valued by the civil society and the public

As AMSHC is designed to strengthen civil society and bring it into partnership with government, it is vital that it conducts regular and frequent outreach to civil society and the public. This is especially true in rural and isolated areas.

Outreach to civil society and the public will take several forms. Open meetings should be increased to offer information as well as to provide AMSHC staff with the opportunity to consult with civil society. These should occur around the country on a regular schedule. In addition, a small-scale public relations campaign should be designed and executed to ensure the image and role of AMSHC is well-known. It is a critical that a communications strategy/plan guide AMSHC’s public image.

**AMSHC should increase visibility
upwards to donors
&
downwards to Albanian civil society**

In addition, AMSHC should develop visibility requirements for all the projects it funds. In this way, the donation of the Agency will be better known to the beneficiaries and public at large. Requirements will set standards for visibility, and this will be included in the monitoring responsibilities of the staff.

Aim 3: AMSHC has an agile, efficient administration with technical capacity to be a leader for the civil society sector

Owing to the fact that AMSHC has a small staff for a donor Agency and is likely to remain a small team of no more than 12-16 persons, it is imperative that the Agency develops and maintains an agile, efficient administration within the requirements of the law.

Much of the operational mechanisms of the Agency have been put into place, thanks to great effort on the part of the staff. After five years of experience in applying these mechanics, the Agency is now ready to raise the bar and streamline them for the benefit of applicants, grantees, and its own staff. Predictably, this aim is likely to be among the most challenging to achieve and the most time consuming.

AMSHC's staff have demonstrated a keen eagerness to continuously analyze, learn, and improve its internal procedures for the benefit of applicants, grantees, staff themselves, and the public image of the Agency

AMSHC will begin receiving technical assistance through two staff seconded by the EU's TACSO project. The Technical Assistance for Civil Society Organizations (TACSO) is a tremendous opportunity for AMSHC to gain expertise in order to achieve this aim and its strategic objectives.

Strategic Objective 3.1: AMSHC is an effective advocate for civil society concerns.

AMSHC should be active in gathering and analyzing trends in civil society, gathering their concerns, and being a centralized advocate for the concerns they raise. Staff, with improved facilitation and analytical skills (see Strategic Objective 3.3), should regularly and frequently engage with civil society through consultative and open meetings. These meetings should address societal trends, trends in civil society, and legal framework matters which affect civil society. The analysis from these meetings will be compiled and submitted to the Board twice yearly.

Based upon Board recommendations, AMSHC will raise some of these concerns and become an advocate for proposed improvements. With its annual report, engagement with the media, engagement with government, and participation in national dialogue, AMSHC will be an advocate for some of these concerns which it considers to be a priority.

Strategic Objective 3.2: AMSHC is an innovating force for civil society, through technical assistance and funding

Albania is in need of more methodologies and best practices to revitalize its civil society sector. AMSHC staff, with improved skills (see Strategic Objective 3.3), will research and promote new trends, practices and methods. This is especially the case for practices to promote volunteerism, a sense of local philanthropy, engagement with the private sector/CSR, and social enterprise development. This will be done through providing technical assistance, giving these priority in the calls for proposals, and funding them.

Strategic Objective 3.3: AMSHC's staff have technical capacity to manage the programs and transfer knowledge to civil society

AMSHC leaders and staff acknowledge that they wish the Agency to become more than merely a grants-maker but also a technical advisor to civil society. To accomplish this, AMSHC programming staff themselves need to gain skills which they can offer to grantees and other civil society actors.

The Director will establish ***staff development plans*** for all staff and look for opportunities to build this capacity—through formal trainings, experience, exchange opportunities with other donors, and other creative means. Overall, building capacity of staff will require their engagement and participation with other donors, experience working in the field, and other actions which require them to be active in the country's civil society activities.

Priority areas for capacity building are:

- Needs assessment
- Contextual analysis
- Facilitation skills
- Sectoral technical skills
- M&E
- Project cycle management and results-based management

Strategic Objective 3.4: The grants application process is more efficient for both applicants and AMSHC itself

It was seen that the grants process is thorough but administrative requirements sometimes are costly to potential applicants and bureaucratic to the staff. In addition, a number of civil society actors mentioned that the process is burdensome for them.

AMSHC should convene an internal committee to re-write the rules and processes for grants applications. They should consult other donors, civil society applicants, and government procurement officials to include all of those perspectives in their recommendations. The main areas the committee should address are: (a) ways to reduce the administrative burden of having to submit costly documents with each application; and (b) ways to move towards a two-stage process similar to EU restricted calls in which a brief concept paper is submitted and only invited projects submit a full proposal. The committee may also consider a “pre-registration system” similar to PADOR in which administrative documents and requirements are submitted online and the process relies only upon an active registration number.

In addition, AMSHC should decide if it wishes to earmark a certain percentage of its funding each year for cost-shares in order to support Albanian civil society to meet requirements to leverage international funding.

Their recommendations shall be submitted to the Supervisory Board for their amendments and final approval.

Strategic Objective 3.5: Grants administration and oversight is made more efficient

Currently, all grants are managed in the same way with significant responsibilities for oversight. AMSHC shall convene an internal committee to create recommendations on how the oversight can be improved within the limitations of the law and government procurement rules.

The internal committee shall address issues such as:

- dividing grants according to size and risk, with separate rules for each
- creating sampling methods for verifying receipts, instead of verifying all receipts
- requiring external, accredited audits for larger projects
- requiring evaluations for larger projects
- and other initiatives to streamline the administrative process

Aim 4: AMSHC measures and reports upon the impact of grants-making for the benefit of the Albanian public interest

Measuring the impact of its grants-making and contributing to the NSDI 2014-2020 is a key responsibility to the Albanian government and Albanian taxpayer. As such, the Board will supervise how AMSHC can improved its capacity for monitoring and reporting.

Strategic Objective 4.1: AMSHC has improved capacity and systems to effectively monitor its grants

These efforts will require both improved staffing as well as systems. AMSHC should appoint an M&E officer who will be charged with technical capacity building of other staff as well as establishment of tools, procedures, and systems for monitoring.

In addition, AMSHC should divide the portfolios of projects among its technical monitoring staff so as to allow them to specialize in a smaller number of programming areas. This will serve to boost not only their own technical capacity but improve monitoring for impact.

Strategic Objective 4.2: AMSHC demonstrates the value, impact and contributions to national/global development goals of its grants-making

AMSHC must be able to demonstrate the value and impact of its grants-making. It should ensure that it uses and contributes to standardized indicators in alignment with various national and global strategies. This will allow AMSHC to measure and compare its work against industry-standard larger benchmarks and position the agency to engage on equal footing with different donors. In order to do this, it must accomplish several tasks:

- Contribute to indicators in the NSDI
- Develop and/or adapt standardized indicators in the 8 priority programming areas and be able to show a cumulative impact over the years
- Conduct regular evaluations of its work, either sectorally or collectively

Aim 5: AMSHC is the conduit of choice by foreign donors for grants distribution

As mentioned above, AMSHC as a national Agency is closer to the grassroots of Albanian civil society. As a result of this strategy, it will deepen its engagement with them, consult them on their concerns, and analyze the needs of the country. For this reason, AMSHC should have a deeper understanding of the country's needs which makes it an ideal grants-maker for foreign donor assistance to the country. Through improved management and reporting (see Aims 3 and 4), it will also demonstrate its ability to manage those funds well.

Strategic Objective 5.1: AMSHC is acknowledged as a reputable, reliable grants-maker by foreign donors

AMSHC has a strong logical argument for passing-through foreign donors funds to local civil society. In order to do this, it must first increase its visibility (and credibility) to those donors. This will be done through increased engagement with foreign donors and embassies in Albania. It will be done through a results and evidence-based approach in which the accomplishments and capacity of AMSHC will be highlighted.

Strategic Objective 5.2: AMSHC distributes and manages at least 1 million euros per year of external donor funding

AMSHC is well-placed to disburse grants on behalf of foreign donors. It should increasingly play a role as a conduit for these funds, on the basis that it is a transparent, efficient grants-maker and also that it is more closely connected to the grassroots level. This strategy's target is to obtain one million euros per year to disburse.

However, merely obtaining the funding is not sufficient. AMSHC will commit to excellence in managing the funds and reporting upon them in order to establish itself as a credible partner of these donors.

Strategy Implementation and Execution

Implementation and Execution

Operational objectives, suggestions, and a recommended timeline are included in Annex B.

The Director shall bear the ultimate managerial responsibility for the implementation and execution of the strategy. He shall report regularly on its progress to the Supervisory Board and seek their support and advice when necessary.

Strategy Renewal

In the second half of 2020, the Supervisory Board shall mandate a process of taking stock of this strategy and developing a new strategy.