

Civic Engagement in Local Governance (CELoG) project

Quarterly Progress Report

Reporting period: 1 January-31 March 2015

Cooperative Agreement No. AID-111-A-14-00004

1. Political Context

The major and most important development that took place in the sphere of the LG reform during the reporting period was the decision to launch the process of community consolidation in spring 2015.

In January-February 2015 there were various publications in the media, including interviews of representatives of the MTAES announcing the upcoming launch of the local referenda and community consolidation process.

On February 9th 2015, Armen Yeritsyan, the Minister of Territorial Administration and Emergency Situations met USAID/Armenia Director Karen Hilliard, Head of USAID/Armenia's Democracy, Health and Social Reform Office, Alison McFarland, USAID Program Managers Arev Movsisyan and Bella Markarian, as well as CFOA Chairman Vahan Movsisyan and CELoG CoP David Tumanyan. During the meeting, the objectives and activities of the CELoG project were introduced to the Minister and the issue of the consolidation of communities was discussed.¹

On March 19th 2015, the Government of Armenia adopted three decisions to hold local referenda on community consolidation in three pilot community beams ([Tatev](#), [Dilijan](#) and [Tumanyan](#)). The Government has appointed May 17th as the date for the local referenda on consolidation in

¹ <http://mta.gov.am/hy/news/item/2015/02/09/7896/>



all three beams (in 22 communities).

This decision has accelerated some of the processes for both the government and the CELoG project. Soon after the Government Decision appointing May 17 as the date for local referenda in three community beams, representatives of the MTAES started visits to the target communities to advocate for consolidation.

In order to contribute to effective public participation in local government and ensure informed participation of community members in the local referenda, CELoG staff had to make several rearrangements and adjustments in the project implementation plan. Namely, the visits to target community beams were moved to April since there is a strong necessity to conduct explanatory activities in the three target community beams.

2. Summary of Conducted Activities

Activity 1.3. Survey on perceptions of LSG and decentralization (CRRC)

CRRC-Armenia started developing the questionnaire for the public opinion survey. The logic behind the questionnaire consisted of the eight dimensions of the Green Paper (Annex 1) to embrace local-government-related developments in Armenia. The draft questionnaire was circulated among and discussed with USAID-funded consortia members. Contributions to the questionnaire were made by CFOA, Transparency International, and Media Initiatives Center. Most of their comments were considered in the questionnaire (Annex 2) development process. The document was submitted to the lead organization for further communication with USAID and pre-approval. After a group discussion planned in April, a pre-test will be conducted and the questionnaire will be used in the field.

Activity 1.4. Organizational Activity Seminar on strategies of public involvement in LSG (EPF)

During the past reporting period, EPF launched preparatory activities for conducting an Organizational Activity Seminar (OAS) on public strategy and participation mechanisms in local governance.



Based on past experience, EPF has selected Collage LLC (Annex 3) to develop the OAS scenario, implement the OAS and develop the report. EPF and CFOA have discussed with the OAS methodologist the details of the event and delivered expected outcomes.

While the OAS methodological team was developing the scenario, the EPF team implemented organizational activities such as developing a list of OAS participants, arranging logistical issues, etc.

In order to ensure inclusive participation in the event, EPF consulted other members of the consortium and designed the list of potential participants. The list consisted of representatives of LSGBs, central authorities, CSOs working in the sphere of local government and community development, local NGOs and community activists, representatives of media, as well as several participants that have past experience of participation in an OAS.

The list was submitted to CFOA and USAID for approval and, after receipt of approval, EPF started contacting potential participants. The total number of OAS participants after the final approval was 53 people (Annex 4, 5, 6).

EPF received the OAS report consisting of the general report of the senior methodologists and the working group report (See OAS Consolidated Report in Annex 7).

EPF is currently working on developing the version of the report for distribution, consisting of the major situation diagnostics, evaluation of results, recommendations and project ideas developed during the OAS.

In order to evaluate the results of the OAS, EPF developed and disseminated an online questionnaire to the participants and received around 30 responses (Annex 8).

EPF plans to hold a post-OAS meeting in May 2015 with the involvement of the OAS team, CELoG staff, USAID representatives and some of the OAS participants.

Activity 1.7. Trainings on FoI in LSG (AJC, CFOA)

During the reporting period, AJC made the necessary changes and amendments in the methodology of the FoI trainings as proposed by USAID and CFOA. Due to the objections of USAID regarding the AJC co-trainer and consultations held with CFOA and USAID, AJC decided that the AJC Project Manager will act additionally as trainer and conduct all planned trainings alone. After the receipt of final approval from USAID, AJC launched the trainings and conducted 8 of them during the reporting period in the Artik, Maralik, Akhuryan, Azatan communities of Shirak region, Spitak, Alaverdi and Odzun communities of Lori region and Noyemberyan community of Tavush region.

On March 20th USAID proposed to announce a call for applications to hire the co-trainer. AJC made the vacancy announcement via www.asparez.am and disseminated the announcement widely via Facebook groups and pages including the CELoG Facebook page, setting April 15th as the deadline. Thus, the co-trainer will be recruited during the third quarter of the project year.

Activity 1.9. Redevelopment of the CFOA website and re-launch of “Hamaynk” periodical (CFOA)

During the reporting period, CFOA redesigned and launched its new [website \(www.cfoa.am\)](http://www.cfoa.am). The new website has a more user-friendly interface and optimized structure that allow one to navigate easily and find the necessary information. The entire content of the old website was transferred to the new one; and a separate division dedicated to the CELoG project was added. This division has a banner with the project logo on the front page of the website and allows users to filter all the relevant information easily. The website contains all interesting information about the project, including news and documents reflecting ongoing activities of the project such as minutes of the board meetings, project reports, etc. The content of the website is updated on a regular basis.

Activity 1.11. Consortium Management and Communication training (EPF)

EPF finalized the analysis of the evaluations of the Consortium member organizations implemented with the application of the Capacity Enhancement Tool developed within the



framework of the CSO DePo program. Based on the analysis, the EPF staff has developed the training module and agenda. Initially the training was planned for 12-13 March 2015, but was postponed due to the busy schedule of Consortium member organizations' staff and particularly the heads of organizations. Therefore, it was agreed to postpone the training to mid-April.

Activity 1.13 Development of the Consortium web portal and other IT tools of the project (ISDTC)

During the reporting period, ISDTC developed and introduced the procedures of use of the CELoG project Facebook Page and Group. These procedures were presented during an introductory meeting organized at the ISDTC premises with the participation of representatives from USAID and consortium member organizations. The Facebook page has become an important information source and communication tool for the Consortium with more than 3100 users. The procedures presented by ISDTC include technical information and a set of rules on sharing and posting information on the page, administering the posting process within organizations and the Consortium.

In order to develop an effectively functioning and user-friendly portal of the CELoG project, ISDTC initiated consultations within the consortium on the possible structure and content of the portal. A separate meeting discussing the portal was organized by ISDTC with the participation of consortium member organizations. Additionally, periodic discussions are being held with the Consortium Management Team.

It is expected that during the 3rd quarter of the project year, the final concept of the web portal will be developed and introduced to the Consortium and wider audience.

Activity 2.1 Monitoring of implementation of LSG reform and publishing reports (2012, 2013 and 2014) (CFOA)

CFOA completed development of the monitoring reports for the years of 2012 and 2013. These reports were developed according to the methodology which was presented during the first quarter and discussed with the involvement of consortium members and other stakeholders. There were several adjustments that were made based on the feedback received from the



audience during the presentation. The reports will be published and presented during the 3rd quarter of the project year.

Activity 2.2. Development and sharing of at least 2 policy and legal recommendations on reform (CFOA)

During the reporting period, CFOA experts were working on the development of the **draft law on Principles and Procedures of Community Amalgamation and/or De-merger, as well as Election Timing in Newly Established Communities**. This will be necessary for the current process and will help the Government mitigate risks during the consolidation processes. This activity became a priority taking into consideration the acceleration of the consolidation process by the Government. Thus CFOA is aiming to finalize and introduce the draft law to major stakeholders as soon as possible so that it can be circulated and enter the final development stage before it is needed.

Activity 3.2. Further build-up of InfoTun network (EPF)

EPF started preparatory work aimed at involving the InfoTun network in the activities of the CELoG project. This work includes introductory meetings and visits to the Vanadzor, Armavir and Gyumri InfoTun host organizations implemented jointly with the representatives of the MICE project, since the latter also plans to involve the InfoTun network in its activities. The visits allowed representatives of both consortia to introduce the content of CELoG and MICE projects, as well as to make a preliminary assessment of the InfoTuns and readiness of the three organizations to be involved in project activities. EPF plans to visit the south of Armenia (Ararat, Vayk, Yeghegnadzor and Goris) to meet potential InfoTun hosts in April 2015.

On March 6th 2015, CELoG representatives also took part in a working meeting organized by the MICE project during which a presentation with the CELoG project objectives, activities, expected results and more precisely expectations from InfoTuns was organized for the representatives of all InfoTun hosts as well as the representatives of other consortia funded by USAID.

Activity 3.4 Introduction of community consolidation concepts in 40 target communities (CFOA)

Due to the acceleration of community consolidation in three pilot community beams and the appointment of the May 17th referenda, CFOA and the Consortium team decided to conduct introductory meetings in the target communities. CFOA listed the preparatory activities, such as the scheduling of visits, design of the event structures, dissemination of information about the upcoming presentations via municipalities and local partners, as well as the development of dissemination materials and presentations. CFOA plans to finish the presentations of the consolidation concept in all pilot communities by the end of April 2015.

Activity 3.5 Seminars and briefs for journalists (YPC)

Yerevan Press Club continued preparations for organizing the trainings for media outlets envisaged by CELoG objective 1. YPC also continued the study of the media coverage of local governance reform and civic engagement in this process as well as the previous assessment of the Armenian media community awareness on local governance reform. The premises were arranged for the upcoming first briefing on April 17. An agreement with Tesaket Press Club was acquired for the event. Also, an agreement was arranged with leading media outlets, both traditional and new, to provide competent and experienced journalists for the briefing. The briefing will be mostly concentrated on the issues of local government reform, emphasizing the possibilities of awareness on local referendums. The leadership of the CELoG consortium will be the key speakers.

Activity 3.6.1. Production of talk shows on decentralization and broadcast via national TV channel (YPC)

During the reporting period, as part of the preparatory activities for the production of talk shows on decentralization, YPC contacted several media production companies for bidding, including the TV Company Yerkir Media, Matrix Media Ltd. and Altera Ltd. Yerkir Media was chosen as the winner for production and broadcast of the TV talk shows. The bidding procedures and the draft of the contract with the TV Company were preliminarily coordinated with CFOA staff. On March 11, a contract with Yerkir Media was signed for the production of 6 TV talk shows. The



production of a TV talk show called “Mamuli Akumb-HaMaTegh” (Press Club-CELoG in Armenian) started on March 18. Two TV talk shows were produced and broadcast during the reporting period.

[#1 “Mamuli Akumb-HaMaTegh” TV talk show](#)

The talk show was filmed on March 18 and broadcast on Yerkir Media on Monday, March 23 at 18:40 and rebroadcast on Friday March 27 at 11:40. The duration of the program was 40 minutes. The topic of the program was “Civic engagement in local government.”

Program host: Boris Navasardian, YPC President

Invited speakers:

- Vahan Movsisyan, CFOA President
- Abraham Artashesyan, CELoG program coordinator
- Sara Petrosyan, journalist at Hetq online newspaper
- Ashot Giloyan, Head of the local government department at the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Emergency Situations of RA

[#2 “Mamuli Akumb-HaMaTegh” TV talk show](#)

The talk show was filmed on March 24 and broadcast on Yerkir Media on Monday, March 30 at 18:40 and rebroadcast on April 2 at 11:40. The duration of the program was 40 minutes. The topic of the program was “Government decree on implementation of local referendums: how it will contribute to the real will of the population of communities.”

Program host: Boris Navasardian, YPC President

Invited speakers:

- Vahan Movsisyan, CFOA President
- David Tumanyan, CELoG CoP
- Inga Zarafyan, Chairman of EcoLur NGO



- Karen Bakoyan, Head of the local government coordination unit at the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Emergency Situations of RA

Note: Links to recordings of both talk shows were also shared on the Facebook Group of the consortium.

Activity 3.6.2. Media award for covering issues related to local government and decentralization

The jury for the annual media award for covering issues related to the local government and decentralization was in the process of formation. It is anticipated to involve representatives from consortium members as well as key media experts from outside. During the reporting period, YPC staff members continued limited media monitoring to identify media outlets and journalists that are involved in the coverage of local government reforms. In addition, YPC contacted other media experts for their opinion on relevant media coverage. Also, YPC started working on criteria in accordance to which the evaluation of the winning candidates will occur.

Activity 3.6.3. Quarterly bilingual newsletter publication (JCA)

As planned for the current reporting period, AJC has developed and issued the bilingual newsletter dedicated to the CELoG project. 500 issues of the newsletter were published on March 30th 2015. The first issue consists of 6 interviews with the heads or respective representatives of all member organizations of the Consortium. Each interview introduces a specific perspective on the project activities and expected outcomes based on the type of involvement of the represented organization in CELoG.

It is planned to disseminate the newsletter via consortium member organizations and project stakeholders during April-May 2015.

Activity 4.1 Communication with other USAID consortia on CSO environment (2 meetings, CFOA/EPF)

During the reporting period, the Consortium members were actively involved in the discussions initiated by the Ministry of Justice on the draft law on NGOs. Representatives of consortia took

part in several meetings organized by MoJ and the British Council, and provided feedback and recommendations on possible improvements and amendments to the law.

CELoG also continues to build up partnerships with other USAID funded consortia. The instances of collaboration among consortia include joint visits conducted by MICE project representatives to InfoTuns, involvement in activities of the Management Advisory Board, participation in the DePo presentation and application of the CET tool developed by the latter.

3. Progress towards results

The next step after completion of the project and consortium setup activities is expanding the circle of beneficiaries of the project. Two important tools for this expansion are capacity building and awareness raising activities. Thus the second quarter of project implementation can be described as a gradual expansion of the circle of project beneficiaries via training and information dissemination. It is also worth mentioning that the capacity building activities within the Consortium are continuing and will last long after the launch and setup of the project, since each of the Consortium member organizations has expertise and knowledge worth sharing with partners.

Objective 1: To sustain and improve civil society’s ability to engage citizens and articulate their interests in local self-government and in the process of implementation of decentralization reform.

- Continuation of capacity building activities of the consortium and within the consortium.

Despite the fact that the Consortium is technically organized and functioning, there are various activities planned within the framework of the project that will contribute to its further development. These activities include the training on management and communication planned by EPF for consortium organizations, redevelopment of CFOA website, continuous elaboration of the Facebook page and group, and other internal and external communication tools. In all these directions, the Consortium has registered significant progress during the reporting period. Additionally, CFOA has successfully implemented all recommendations and requirements of USAID developed during the pre-award evaluation.

- Capacity building and awareness rising of the representatives of beneficiary groups.

There were several activities serving this objective that were implemented during the current reporting period. The OAS conducted by EPF, introductory meetings with InfoTuns, and seminars conducted by AJC are aimed at improving civil society's ability to engage citizens and articulate their interests in local self-government. All these activities resulted in the involvement of representatives of LSGBs and local NGOs, media professionals, civic activists and experts working in the sphere of local governance in the discussion on possible ways to involve civil society in LG reform. The recommendations developed during the OAS propose various intervention mechanisms aimed at the effective involvement of the communities in local government via assessing resources and needs, monitoring LSGBs and the reform implementation processes, advocating for policy and legal improvements, etc.

Trainings held by AJC in target communities propose giving community members additional tools such as equipping them with knowledge on how to request and use information for an increase in the transparency and accountability of their local authorities.

Objective 2: To strengthen civil society's capacity for monitoring the central and local government institutions and officials, and the implementation of decentralization reform.

Activities implemented by CFOA during the current reporting period resume the tradition of centralized monitoring of the LG reform, which creates a unique opportunity to evaluate the progress based on a single methodology.

The development of draft laws on the Principles and Procedures of Community Amalgamation and/or De-merger, as well as Election Timing in the Newly Established Communities are another important tool allowing civil society to keep track of the development of the LG system, since these processes are based not only on the significant expertise of CFOA staff but also on the feedback collected from the communities.

Objective 3: To increase citizens' access to independent and reliable information on decentralization reform.

The development and broadcasting of two talk shows dedicated to the issues of local government and community consolidation, publishing of AJC's newsletter on CELoG as well as attracting more people to the CELoG Facebook page are gradually forming the field of information dedicated to the issue of local governance. Providing user friendly information about the system of local government, the essence of decentralization and community consolidation as well as disseminating information about possible ways and mechanisms to involve in the report implementation and monitoring process create the potential necessary for forming the constructive atmosphere that is crucial to any reform. Further activities will be aimed at expanding and sustaining the information circulation mechanisms which will effectively contribute to the current objective.

Objective 4: To improve the civil society enabling environment with a special focus on decentralization

There are already positive precedents of cooperation with other USAID-funded consortia. Joint activities implemented with the MICE project on InfoTuns, application of DePo capacity enhancement tool, participation in joint presentations and involvement in the MAB initiated by Media Initiative Center is effectively contributing to forming the environment in the civil society. Additionally CELoG staff took active part in the discussions on the NGO law initiated by the Ministry of Justice. CELoG has provided its feedback to the MoJ and is following the developments.

4. Data on Indicators

Data on all indicators are established in the Activity M&E Plan for the award activities. Data should be disaggregated by gender where relevant.

- ✓ 53 people representing LGs, local NGOs, experts, media representatives, international organizations and central authorities took part in the 4 day OAS,
- ✓ Trainings on Freedom of Information held in 8 Target Communities,
- ✓ 2 Talk shows developed and broadcast on Yerkir Media TV station,
- ✓ 500 issues of the 8-page newsletter published and ready for dissemination,
- ✓ Visits to three InfoTun hosts conducted,

- ✓ Monitoring reports for 2012 and 2013 developed and ready for publication,
- ✓ 3150 CELoG Facebook page followers.

5. **Problems encountered**, *reasons why established goals were not met, if appropriate, and how challenges or problems will be overcome during the next reporting period.*

There were no major problems encountered during the project implementation process. All activities planned within the framework of the project are being implemented in due time. Consortium members are in periodic communication with each other and the Consortium management team plans to develop internal communication tools further.

6. **A comparison of actual expenditures with budget estimates**, *including analysis and explanation of cost overruns or high unit costs, cost savings, and any other pertinent information.*

The actual expenditures during the reporting period are mostly in line with the budget estimates. Due to the instability of the financial market, there are some overruns which are being negotiated with both CFOA and USAID.

It might be necessary to discuss some adjustments and reallocations in budgeting for upcoming implementation periods.

7. **Priorities for programming during the next reporting period.**

One of the major priorities for the upcoming quarter is the referenda to be held in three community hubs. Although the monitoring of the referenda was planned for the second year of the project implementation, the new situation will require certain adjustments in the budget and activities of the first year. In this respect, stronger consolidation of efforts within the consortium will be needed to effectively work in the spheres of awareness raising and monitoring.

Another important priority is the effective application of the first products that the project has developed. This primarily relates to the Talk Shows, OAS recommendations, and forming the network of beneficiaries. Further involvement and more intensive



intervention in target communities are needed. In light of the consolidation process, other communities should not be forgotten and the Consortium should undertake steps to constantly involve the latter via project activities.

Another important priority for the project is effective implementation of the survey and timely analysis and dissemination of its results among the stakeholders and beneficiaries. The involvement of InfoTuns, work with media and development of the web portal concept are also among key priorities of the third quarter of the project.

D. Tumanyan

CoP of CELoG Program

30.04.2015