Civic Engagement in Local Governance (CELoG) Project
Annual Progress Report
Reporting period: 1 October 2014-30 September 2015

List of Abbreviations

AJC - Asparez Journalists' Club

CRRC - Caucasus Research Resource Centers-Armenia

CELoG - Civic Engagement in Local Governance

CSO - Civil Society Organization

CFOA - Communities Finance Officers' Association

EPF - Eurasia Partnership Foundation

FoI – Freedom of Information

GOAM - Government of Armenia

ISTDC - Information Systems Development and Training Center

LG - Local Government

LSG - Local Self-government

MAB - Management Advisory Board

MICE - Media for Informed Civic Engagement

MIC - Media Initiatives Center

MMIS - Municipal Management Information System

MTAES - Ministry of Territorial Administration and Emergency Situations

NA - National Assembly

NGO - Non-Governmental Organization

OAS - Organizational Activity Seminar

TARA - Territorial-Administrative Reform

TIAC - Transparency International Anti-corruption Center

YPC - Yerevan Press Club

Introduction

The Communities Finance Officers' Association (CFOA) in consortium with the Information Systems Development and Training Center (ISTDC), the Yerevan Press Club (YPC), the Asparez Journalists' Club (AJC), Eurasia Partnership Foundation (EPF), and the Caucasus Research Resource Centers-Armenia (CRRC), is implementing a Project titled "Civic Engagement in Local Governance" (CELoG), the Armenian equivalent of which is «Հանրային մասնակցություն տեղական ինքնակառավարմանը» (ՀաՄաՏեղ).

The Program aims at increasing civic engagement and oversight of decentralization and local self-government reform at the national and local levels.

This will be achieved through the accomplishment of the following four objectives:

a) To sustain and improve civil society's ability to engage citizens and articulate their interests in local self-government and in the process of the implementation of the decentralization reform;

b) To strengthen civil society's capacity to monitor the central and local government institutions and officials, and the implementation of the decentralization reform;

c) To increase citizens' access to independent and reliable information on the decentralization reform; and

d) To improve the civil society enabling environment with a special focus on decentralization.

This report introduces the activities carried out during the first year of program implementation, the political context in Armenia, a narrative analytical description of overall program progress towards results, data on indicators established in the Activity M&E Plan, as well as outlines priorities for the next reporting period based on the reflection of achievements reached and problems encountered during the first program year.

Political Context

During the first year of program implementation, there have been several political developments that have influenced the LG sector in Armenia.

Overall, the Government was much more active during the reporting period in the sphere of local government than during the past several years. This increased activeness has been illustrated through the adoption of a policy on community amalgamation, legislative changes, structural changes, etc.

In 2014 two key officials in the Government were changed. First the Prime Minister Tigran Sargsyan resigned and Hovik Abrahamyan was appointed in April 2014, then Armen Gevorgyan resigned from the post of Minister of Territorial Administration and Vice Prime Minister. This was followed by the merger of the Ministry of Territorial Administration with the Ministry of Emergency Situations with subsequent appointment of Armen Yeritsyan as the Minister of Territorial Administration and Emergency Situations.

The primary event that has directly influenced the LG sector was the launch of the community amalgamation in spring 2015. On 19 March 2015, the Government of Armenia adopted three decisions to hold local referenda on community amalgamation in three pilot

community clusters ([Tatev](), [Dilijan]() and [Tumanyan]()). The Government appointed 17 May as the date for the local referenda on amalgamation in all three clusters (in 22 communities). A local referendum was held for the first time in the history of independent Armenia. The results of referendum in general are positive (see [Attachment 1]()). After the referenda in the three community clusters, the Government decided to go on with the amalgamation process and announced the forthcoming amalgamation in the rest eleven community clusters that were included in the Government`s program[1].

The second important development that happened during the reporting period was the acceleration of the process of constitutional reforms initiated by the Armenian authorities. Among other critical changes in the form of governance, division of competencies among different branches of power, constitutional amendments propose significant changes to the part of the Constitution that regulates the LG sector. The constitutional referendum will be held on 6 December 2015 and in case of adoption of the proposed reforms, there will be serious changes in the procedure of community amalgamation process, local elections as well as the principles of forming community councils and the election of community heads.

Other political developments that have influenced the country in general, and therefore also the LG sector as well, relate to negative tendencies in the economic development of the country that are mainly caused by the crisis in Ukraine and Armenia's membership in the Eurasian Economic Union. In the period between December 2014 and February 2015, there were significant fluctuations in foreign currency exchange rates which harmed local production and particularly the SME sector.

Summary of Conducted Activities

During the first year of implementation, the consortium has contributed to all four objectives of the project. Below is a brief introduction of the activities conducted under each objective.

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

Activity 1.1. Signing of agreements between the Consortium lead and other members and setting up the Consortium management system (CFOA, EPF, ISDTC)

The first year of program implementation was launched with the development and signing of grant agreements between the lead organization (CFOA) and other partner organizations (CRRC, ISDTC, AJC, YPC and EPF). Grant agreements described the duties of each organization based on the project proposal.

Prior to awarding the grants, all partner organizations took part in a Grants Management Seminar and learned about the CFOA grant management procedures, the CFOA and USAID project management and reporting requirements, procurement policies, etc.

After the formal establishment of the Consortium, internal communication mechanisms were established by creating programmatic mailing groups for circulating information on programmatic, financial and administrative issues. Several internal rules were developed by

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[1] http://www.mta.gov.am/hy/hayecakarger/

the Consortium partners aimed at providing timely and comprehensive information on project activities.

Data indicators: 5 grant agreements were signed, internal rules were developed, and the internal communication system was established and used**.**

Activity 1.2. Opening Presentation and signing agreements with Project`s pilot communities (CFOA)

After signing sub-grants with Consortium members, an opening presentation was organized on December 2 2014 to introduce the content of the project to major stakeholders. The presentation introduced the project approach, methodology and activities; consortium organizations and their role in the project, as well as the expected results.

The presentation hosted representatives of relevant state institutions (Ministry of Territorial Administration, National Assembly), representatives of local and international organizations involved in LG sphere, representatives of local authorities, pilot communities and the media.

Prior to the opening presentation, the Consortium expert team visited about 50 medium-sized and large communities to identify 35 pilot communities and sign letters of agreements with them. The agreements were signed on the day of the presentation.

Data indicators: More than 80 representatives of central and local authorities, international organizations, local CSOs and media participated in the opening presentation. Letters of Agreements with 35 pilot communities were signed.

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

The first survey project on the perceptions, level of understanding and expectations from decentralization among the general public was conducted during the first year to collect the baseline data that Consortium organizations will use in their further activities, as well as disseminate widely.

CRRC developed a standardized questionnaire for the nation-wide quantitative baseline survey (app. 1,500 respondents) on public perceptions of LSG and decentralization. CRRC further met with experts and organizations within the scope of the questionnaire discussion sessions (including representatives of CELoG member organizations, as well as other USAID-funded consortia), collected feedback and incorporated their ideas, suggestions and comments into the draft questionnaire. The questionnaire also included several questions on Social Reform, Media and Transparency and Accountability after discussions with USAID and other USAID-funded consortia.

The supervisors and interviewers were trained prior to the start of the fieldwork. Apart from the Fieldwork Coordinator and the Questionnaire Development Expert, CRRC also involved experts from CFOA during the training.

The survey was conducted in 1500 households and the collected data was analyzed based on the CRRC data analysis methodology. The preliminary version of the report was presented to consortium member organizations during the consortium retreat. The final presentations of the survey will take place in November 2015.

Data indicators: 1,500 survey questionnaires were filled in; the fieldwork report and electronic database were developed, the survey report was finalized.

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

The first Organizational Activity Seminar (OAS), planned within the framework of the project, was conducted in February 2015. The OAS involved around 60 participants, who discussed the issue of public participation in local government and developed recommendations and project ideas for more participatory projects. Based on the report received from the OAS team, EPF developed an analytical document introducing the current situation in the local government sector, the attitude in society towards the reform process, as well as evaluating the resources available inside communities that can be used to increase the effectiveness of public participation.

Data indicators: Approximately 60 representatives of LGs, CSOs, central authorities and international organizations took part in the OAS. The highlights and suggestions produced by the OAS report were analyzed by the EPF team and introduced to the Consortium.

Activity 1.5. Development of regulations on Forming and Activities of Consultative Bodies, Public Participation in LSG, Public Hearings and Discussions (CFOA)

Under this activity, CFOA drafted three model regulations. These regulations must be adopted by the community councils according to amendments to the Law on Local Self-Government, introduced in June 2013.

The first regulation refers to the formation and functioning of LSG consultative bodies. The regulation defines procedures on forming such bodies, their structure, selection and nomination criteria, etc.

The second regulation clarifies the roles and obligations of each party involved in participatory governance, defines the mechanisms and procedures of public participation, and ensures equal opportunities for each group of beneficiaries to participate in the process of community government.

The third regulation defines the mechanisms and procedures for the organization and implementation of public hearings and discussions in communities, clarifies data processing and reporting procedures, and specifies mechanisms for ensuring the transparency of the decision making process at the local level.

Each regulation was drafted by CFOA experts, followed by internal discussions at CFOA and adjustments proposed by other experts. The draft regulations were discussed with representatives from MTAES, the National Assembly, USAID, Consortium organizations and other CSOs. The drafts were subsequently sent to the program's international experts for comments. Upon summarizing all comments, the regulations were finalized by the legal expert. For further information on introduction of the regulations see Activity 3.1.

Data indicators: 3 sets of regulations were developed by CFOA and reviewed by local and international experts.

Activity 1.6. Development of decentralization and LSG monitoring methodology (CFOA)

CFOA updated its monitoring methodology, which was introduced to relevant experts, representatives of MTAES, LGs, local and international organizations. During the

presentation in EPF on December 25 2014, the methodology was introduced and discussed with the participants. Based on the feedback received, CFOA experts made the necessary additions and used the finalized version of the methodology.

During the consortium retreat on September 10-11 2015, it was decided to develop a composite LG index that would allow measuring the progress of the LG system across the years.

Data indicators: The Methodology on Decentralization and Local Self-Government Reform Monitoring was updated and it will be used for the preparation of coming years' reports.

Activity 1.7. Trainings on FoI in LSG (AJC)

During the reporting period, AJC redeveloped its FoI training methodology and conducted trainings in all 35 pilot communities. During each training AJC experts introduced FoI-related legislation and regulations, procedures of requesting information from state institutions, central, and local authorities. AJC also introduced its experience in exercising citizens' right to Freedom of Information and described various situations and possible behavioral models for each separate case.

Data indicators: 744 participants (215 men, 529 women) from 35 communities participated in the FoI trainings.

Activity 1.8. Development of infographics on decentralization (EPF)

During the reporting period, EPF developed the concept of the infographics and identified topics for the first 4 of them. The preliminary script for the first infographic was developed. EPF has also selected the studio that will design the materials. It is planned that the first two infographics will be ready by the end of the first quarter of the second year of project implementation.

Data indicators: The concept of the infographics was developed, topics were identified, and the preliminary script for one infographic was developed.

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

During the reporting period, CFOA redesigned and re-launched its website (www.cfoa.am). The new website has a more user-friendly interface and optimized structure that allows visitors to navigate easily and find the necessary information. The entire content of the old website was transferred to the new one; and a separate section dedicated to the CELoG project was added. This section 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 the necessary information about the project, including news and documents reflecting the ongoing activities of the project, minutes of board meetings, project reports, etc. The content of the website is updated on a regular basis.

The re-launch of the "Hamaynk" periodical was delayed because of a need to revisit the concept of the newspaper. Publication will start in November 2015.

Data indicator: The CFOA website was redeveloped; the concept for the "Hamaynk" periodical was redeveloped.

Activity 1.10. Grants management system upgrade (EPF)

Throughout the whole first year of implementation, EPF continuously shared its experience with CFOA and other members of the consortium. EPF supported CFOA in further improvement of its grants management system and policies, sharing its experience and tools accumulated during the past years of operation. EPF also supported CFOA in the improvement of other policies and procedures on HR, internal and external communication, etc.

Data indicators: CFOA's eleven policies and procedures related to grants management, HR, communication, etc. were improved with the support of EPF.

Activity 1.11. Consortium management and communication training (EPF)

Prior to the development of the training module and agenda, EPF used the Capacity Enhancement Tool, developed within the CSO DePo project, to evaluate the capacities of all 5 consortium members. Based on the evaluation results, EPF identified the major aspects that need to be addressed during the training and developed a tailored training module and agenda addressing both organizational and consortium building issues.

The evaluation and further work of the EPF team resulted in a two-day training (April13-14 2015) for approximately 20 representatives of the CELoG consortium. The training addressed such issues as vision and mission (organizational and joint), internal and external communication, the multiplication of efforts by establishing connections between various project activities, etc.

EPF is planning to conduct another training for CFOA during the second year of project implementation.

Data indicators: 5 consortium organizations were evaluated, training for approximately 20 consortium members was organized.

Activity 1.12. Consortium retreat (CFOA, EPF)

At the end of the first project year, CFOA and EPF organized the first Consortium retreat on September 10-11, 2015 with the involvement of staff members from all Consortium member organizations. The retreat was aimed at evaluating the first project year and planning further activities. It was also a teambuilding event that was targeted at the establishment of better communication between staff members of the Consortium organizations.

During the retreat, a thorough analysis of the past project year was conducted and the second year activities were planned. The Consortium management team introduced the second year action plan and discussed possible adjustments and improvements that could be made. Retreat participants also discussed the best ways of using savings and reserving funds, and made relevant improvements in the second year action plan.

Data indicators: Reflection on the first implementation year and analysis of activities were conducted, 25 representatives of consortium organizations took part in the retreat.

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

During the reporting period, ISDTC worked on the development of two major tools for the electronic communication of the CELoG project. The web portal on decentralization will accumulate all the relevant data, as a tool for the external communication of the project.

ISDTC has brainstormed on the possible structure of the portal and introduced the initial draft to other members of the Consortium and USAID. The proposal was discussed and necessary comments were suggested. ISDTC has developed the pilot interface of the portal, incorporated the necessary IT tools in the portal, and registered the domain. The internal communication tool is being developed and tested as an Intranet for Consortium member organizations. This includes the organization of training for Consortium members and printing of the user's manual.

ISDTC has conducted a study and identified possibilities for improvement of the Municipal Management Information System (MMIS). Based on the OAS results, ISDTC is currently working on adding more possibilities to MMIS, allowing inter-community communication.

ISDTC started a research on Modern IT and Electronic Tools used in the local government sphere and, after the study it will develop recommendations on their adaptation for Armenia.

Data indicators: Web portal structure and interface design were developed and introduced to the consortium, a study on improvement of MMIS was conducted, new additions to MMIS are in progress, and study of new IT tools began.

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

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

During the first project year, CFOA developed the LSG reform monitoring reports for 2012, 2013 and 2014. The reports have been developed according to methodology that was redesigned and updated (see activity 1.6).

Five hundred copies of the 2012-2013 report were published bilingually (Armenian and English) in one book. The books will be distributed among different groups, policy and decision makers in the area of decentralization and local self-government, representatives of local self-government bodies, international and non-government organizations, students and so on. The report for 2014 is in the publishing house.

Presentation of the reports is planned in early November 2015.

Data indicators: 2 publications on monitoring of local self-government reforms in Armenia in Armenian and English covering 2012-2013 and 2014, 500 copies of each.

2.1.b Monitoring of community consolidation referenda in 22 target communities in 3 community clusters.

After the introductory meetings held in all 3 community clusters, the Consortium started to prepare for the referendum. On the day of the referendum (May 17), CFOA organized an observation mission in cooperation with AJC and EPF. The CELoG team formed three mobile observer groups so that each group could monitor the referendum in one cluster. As a result, CELoG observers visited all 22 communities, checked voters lists, and interviewed members of the electoral commissions and regular voters. During the ballot count, each of the members of the group stayed at the polling station until the count was finished. Each group submitted a report on the observation, as well as drafted articles about the referendum; all of them are posted on CFOA's web page.

Data indicators: Monitoring of the community referendum was conducted in 22 communities.

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

CFOA experts developed the **draft law on the Principles and Procedures of Community Amalgamation and/or De-merger, as well as Election Timing in Newly Established Communities.**

After developing the drafts, CFOA organized a discussion that was held on 12 June in Dilijan with participation of the representatives of MTAES, National Assembly, USAID, consortium member organizations, municipalities, international, and local organizations.

The draft document was translated and sent to the international experts for comments. The draft law was finalized based on the comments received, and submitted to the MTAES. MTAES put in circulation the draft laws and after receiving comments and suggestions from various governmental agencies updated them and submitted to the Government for approval.

Data indicators: 2 Drafts were developed by CFOA experts, discussed with stakeholders and submitted to the MTAES.

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

Activity 3.1 Establishment of Advisory Bodies in 35 communities (CFOA)

CFOA conducted meetings in 35 target communities to introduce the regulations (see activity 1.5) to the local authorities, NGOs, active groups, and citizens. The meetings aimed at a) discussing how the developed regulation can be adjusted to the local needs, b) fostering public participation by informing different groups of opportunities to be involved in the Advisory Bodies of the community and c) raising awareness of the public on the CELoG program.

The meetings were held in municipal halls. The experts presented the regulations and, through the Q&A sessions, discussed the key points of the document. At the end of the meetings agreements were reached with local authorities on further steps to present the document to the Council and get it approved.

After the meetings, the CFOA experts made follow-up calls to the communities to receive information on the establishment of Advisory Bodies and offer support if needed. At the end of the year, 20 out of 35 target communities approved all three regulations. In addition, nine had appointed a date for the council meeting, where the regulations will be discussed and approved. Out of six communities that had their own regulations in place, some decided just to modify them based on the presented regulations, others preferred to continue using the old ones.

Advisory Bodies have already been established in 13 target communities, and are in the process of establishment in the others with the support of CFOA experts.

Data indicators: Regulations on Advisory Bodies were introduced in 35 pilot communities, Advisory Bodies were established in 13 target communities.

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

EPF conducted visits to all six existing InfoTuns, introduced the project and discussed possible activities. EPF also identified potential organizations for two additional InfoTuns in the Ararat and Vayots Dzor marzes. During the reporting period, EPF developed a call for applications for establishing the new InfoTuns. Based on the results of the OAS, EPF identified the strategy of involvement of InfoTuns in the project and planned the activities to be implemented during the second year.

Data Indicators: The strategy for involvement of InfoTuns in the project was developed, potential organizations for new InfoTuns were identified, call for applications was developed.

Overall Timeframe: July-September 2015

Activity 3.3 Organization of open discussions with students (CFOA)

The first meeting with students was held at the Armenian State University of Economics. With the support of the University and Department administration, an open lecture was organized for students and faculty. During the lecture, CFOA experts presented ongoing reforms in the LSG sector. In particular, the CELoG project and mechanisms of public participation were introduced. A separate section was dedicated to issues of community amalgamation, financial equalization, program budgeting, and constitutional reforms.

Data indicator: Around 60 university students and faculty received first-hand information about developments in the LG sector and learnt about the CELoG project.

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

In order to inform citizens about the community amalgamation process, its benefits and risks, CFOA organized awareness-raising discussions with active groups in all communities involved in the 3 community clusters. CFOA experts, along with representatives of the Consortium organizations, visited 22 communities of the three clusters: Tumanyan (Lori marz), Dilijan (Tavush marz) and Tatev (Syunik marz). During these meetings, the main essence of community amalgamation, its pros and cons were introduced, and feedback was collected from community members.

Data indicators: The concept of community amalgamation was introduced in 22 communities.

Overall Timeframe: January– September 2015

Activity 3.5 Seminars and briefings for journalists (YPC)

Yerevan Press Club prepared and organized two briefings, which mostly focused on the issues of local government reform and local referenda. Participants also debated the potential impact of upcoming constitutional reforms on the local government system.

The first briefing was held at the premises of the Tesaket press club on June 30. An agreement was reached with the leading local media outlets, both traditional and new. However, given the street protests on Baghramyan Street against electricity price increase (which started on June 22), not all media representatives were able to attend. The briefing by CELoG Consortium leadership Vahan Movsisyan and David Tumanyan mostly focused on the issues of local government reforms, the results of local referenda and on awareness

raising. The following media outlets participated in the briefing: Arminfo news agency, Media Initiative Center, H2 TV, A1+ online TV, Nyut.am online news, Yerkir Media TV, Hraparak.am online news and a few others.

The second briefing was held in the premises of the Union of Journalists of Armenia on September 8. The topic of the briefing was "Constitutional Reforms and Local Self-government System in Armenia." CELoG consortium leadership Vahan Movsisyan and David Tumanyan gave the briefing. The speakers explained how the upcoming constitutional reforms will affect the local government sector and informed on their collaboration with members of Constitutional Commission to improve the chapter on LSG.

YPC organized 4 seminars/workshops for representatives of traditional and new media outlets (both from Yerevan and the regions) aimed at improving their capacities for covering issues related to local government. An open call was distributed via the mailing list of YPC before each seminar. Overall, 62 journalists representing local and national media outlets (both traditional and broadcast media) participated in 4 workshops, introducing various aspects of decentralization reform. The topics of trainings were logically interconnected and complemented the knowledge of participants in the sphere of LSG. Trainings were aimed at improving their skills in covering issues related to the mentioned area. It is planned that during the next year monitoring for YPC's Media Award nominations some of the participants will be monitored.

Data indicators: 2 media briefings and 4 seminars for around 60 representatives of traditional and new media were held.

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

The production of the TV talk show called "Mamuli Akumb-HaMaTegh" (Press Club-CELoG) started on March 18. Overall, 7 TV talk shows were produced and broadcast during the reporting period. All TV program links were shared on the CELoG Facebook page.

#1 "Mamuli Akumb-HaMaTegh" TV talk show

- Topic : Civic engagement in local government
- Program host: Boris Navasardian, YPC President
- Invited speakers: Vahan Movsisyan, CFOA Chairman, Abraham Artashesyan, CELoG program coordinator, Sara Petrosyan, journalist at Hetq online newspaper, Ashot Giloyan, Head of the Local Government Department of the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Emergency Situations of RA
- YouTube link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MVK08umDqVI

#2 "Mamuli Akumb-HaMaTegh" TV talk show

- Topic: Government decree on implementation of local referenda: how it will contribute to expressing the real will of the community residents
- Program host: Boris Navasardian, YPC President
- Invited speakers: Vahan Movsisyan, CFOA Chairman, David Tumanyan, CELoG Chief of Party, Inga Zarafyan, Chairman of EcoLur NGO, Karen Bakoyan, Head of the Local Government Coordination Unit of the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Emergency Situations of RA
- YouTube link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mQ2lxx-dLSc

#3 *"Mamuli Akumb-HaMaTegh"* TV talk show

- Topic: Public engagement in local self-governance: is it possible?
- Program host: Boris Navasardian, YPC President
- Invited speakers: David Tumanyan, CELoG Chief of Party, Naira Arakelyan, Chairman of Armavir Development Center, Gevorg Ter-Gabrielyan, EPF Director, Lendrush Manukyan, Chief Expert at the Programs' department of Gyumri Municipality
- YouTube link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cMQTPYizhys&feature=youtu.be

#4 *"Mamuli Akumb-HaMaTegh"* TV talk show

- Topic: Local referenda to decide the issue of amalgamation of the communities
- Program host: Boris Navasardian, YPC President
- Invited speakers: David Tumanyan, CELoG Chief of Party, Levon Barseghyan, member of Gyumri City Council, Sara Petrosyan, Hetq.am online journalist, Grisha Khachatryan, Chairman of ISDTC
- YouTube link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-P_JucTd4SA

#5 *"Mamuli Akumb-HaMaTegh"* TV talk show

- Topic: The results of local referenda on amalgamation of the communities
- Program host: Boris Navasardian, YPC President
- Invited speakers: Vache Terteryan, First Deputy Minister, MTAES, Vahan Movsisyan, CFOA Chairman
- YouTube link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CGlE0npo66Q

#6 *"Mamuli Akumb-HaMaTegh"* TV talk show

- Topic: Research on public involvement in LSG reforms
- Program host: Boris Navasardian, YPC President
- Invited speakers: David Tumanyan, CELoG Chief of Party, Heghine Manasyan, CRRC Executive Director, Sara Petrosyan, journalist at Hetq.am online newspaper, Yevgenya Paturyan, Political science lecturer at AUA
- YouTube link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pg4yR62fJrY

#7 *"Mamuli Akumb-HaMaTegh"* TV talk show

- Topic: Constitutional reforms: how they will affect local government sector
- Program host: Boris Navasardian, YPC President
- Invited speakers: Vahan Movsisyan, CFOA Chairman, Heriknaz Tigranyan, Legal advisor at Transparency International anti-corruption center, Shoghik Galstyan, journalist at AraratNews.am, Artsvik Minasyan, Member of ARF faction at the RA National Assembly, Vice-Chairman of Standing Committee on Financial-Credit and Budgetary Affairs
- YouTube link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QG-eNFrGdmM

Data indicators: 7 TV talk shows on decentralization were produced and broadcast by a national TV channel, and also disseminated electronically.

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

In order to identify the winners of the annual media award, YPC formed a jury from representatives of consortium members, as well as external media experts. The jury had been monitoring media publications on reforms since the end of 2014. At the same time, YPC staff members continued limited media coverage monitoring to identify media outlets and journalists involved in the coverage of local government reforms. In addition, YPC contacted other media experts for their opinion on relevant media coverage. The prize for the best coverage of local self-governance reforms was awarded to Sara Petrosyan during a ceremony combined with the 20th anniversary of Yerevan Press Club on 18 July 2015. Despite the fact that CELoG program had anticipated four different awards for the 1st year, the jury did not consider other candidacies and awards due to the absence of other comparable publications. The budget saving from the other three awards was used for additional TV talk show production in September 2015. We hope that this year the award as well as the briefings and workshops organized by YPC will motivate the coverage of reforms in 2015-16. It will enable to nominate more candidates, allowing to award all four prizes by the end of the second year of the program.

Data indicators: One media award was granted for covering issues related to the LG system and decentralization reform.

Activity 3.6.3. Quarterly bilingual newsletter publication (AJC)

During the reporting period, AJC developed and disseminated two issues of the bilingual (Arm-Eng) quarterly newsletter and developed the 3rd issue. All issues of the newsletter covered project activities via articles and interviews with representatives of Consortium member organizations. 500 copies of each issue of the newsletter were disseminated among target communities, CSOs, the mass media, donor and international organizations, local and regional authorities.

Data indicators: 2 issues of the bilingual newsletter, 500 copies each, were developed and disseminated.

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

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

In order to multiply the effect of various activities implemented by Civil Society Actors in Armenia, complement each other and avoid overlaps, the Consortium has established communication with other USAID-funded Consortia working in the spheres of transparency and accountability, social reform, media and civil society development.

During the first year of project implementation, there have been several cases of effective cooperation, namely the application of the CSO DePo tool in the evaluation of consortium member organizations' capacities, cooperation with the MICE project during selection of new InfoTuns, membership in MICE project's Management Advisory Board (MAB), inclusion of questions reflecting the public attitude towards media, social reform and transparency and accountability in CRRC's baseline survey, as well as involvement of the representatives of all 4 consortia in OAS.

Data indicators: Communication with other USAID funded Consortia was established and cooperation in various activities developed.

Activity 4.1a Cooperation with other actors working in the LG sector

On March 11 2015, the USAID-funded Tax Reform Project (TRP) in cooperation with the Civic Engagement in Local Governance (CELoG) Program organized the "Local Taxes: Current Issues and Policy Perspectives" conference to discuss issues on local taxes, including tax reform, the development of a unified tax code, fiscal decentralization and local fiscal autonomy. The participants of the Conference were the representatives of USAID, MTAES and Ministry of Finance, local governments, international and local NGOs.

During the conference, CFOA experts gave presentations on the following topics:

- "Municipality Budget Revenue Structure and Local Taxes";
- "Local Tax Reforms in Armenia and Local Self-Governance Tax Administration";
- "Revenue Sources and Principles of Planning of Yerevan Municipality Budget."

Data indicators: Around 50 participants of the Conference received information on possible improvements in the sphere of local tax organization.

Progress towards results

The first year of the project can be considered a period for preparation, establishment of the necessary connections, collection of baseline information and formation of the foundations for cooperation. During the first year of project implementation, the first contacts were established with project beneficiaries. The initial contacts and cooperation, as well as the collected information, will allow the Consortium to launch active participatory components such as small grants, youth bank grant pools, InfoTun activities, presentations, pubic discussions etc. on a more comprehensive basis.

The information collected and the products developed by the Consortium during the first year will be widely disseminated during the next project phase.

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.

The activities registered under this objective reflect the development of internal capacities of the consortium, both in terms of organizational capacities, as well as forming of the joint vision of the Consortium. This contributed effectively to the second important result that relates to addressing the developments, information problems and proposals on possible solutions to the public via various tools. Here the fact that activities of Consortium members became more interconnected plays a significant role. For example, the results of CFOA monitoring or CRRC surveys are being effectively addressed via YPCs talk shows, briefs and seminars, or recommendations from EPF's OAS contribute to upgrading the ISDTC's MMIS. These kinds of interconnections between various project components contribute significantly to the multiplying effect that the Consortium is targeting. Overall, the progress registered by the project during the first year will serve as a basis for further activities, particularly to those targeting the active involvement of beneficiaries.

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

Under this objective, the first monitoring precedents were formed by consortium members on both the central and local government levels. Monitoring the reform implementation for the period between 2012 and 2014 created the necessary conditions to keep track of LG reform in general. At the same time, monitoring of the local referenda implemented by consortium member organizations illustrates the capacity of the consortium to work efficiently in the field. Monitoring experience on both central and local levels during the first year of project implementation may be valuable both in terms of policy advice and advocacy respectively. The acquired experience will allow the consortium to contribute to the overall environment in LG sector on one hand and to create particular positive precedents of public participation in target communities on the other.

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

The major progress under this objective is development and use of external communication tools and mechanisms for the dissemination of first-hand information to public. Thanks to thematic talk shows, briefs and seminars for media representatives, the consortium has focused the media on issues related to the LG sector. These activities, along with more active

course of reforms of the Government, resulted in the increase of media coverage on LG related issues in Armenia. This means that more people heard about such topics, as community consolidation, decentralization and other issues.

It is also worth mentioning that citizens' access to independent and reliable information during the reporting period increased not only via mass media but also via field visits aimed at providing expert information on community consolidation and public participation mechanisms. Unlike the media coverage, it is a more interactive process, since it allows receiving feedback and reacting to it.

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

The progress registered under this objective for the reporting period relates primarily to stakeholder coordination and to a certain extent is similar to the progress registered under Objective 1. Effective cooperation with other actors working on improving the civil society enabling environment in fact already contributes to the objective. Effective cases of cooperation, consolidation of resources and other similar efforts, which occurred in the case of the baseline survey, will allow addressing the issue of enabling environment in a more sustainable manner. Additionally, the development of a culture of coordinated activities among CSOs can become a valuable resource while advocating for legal and policy improvements, particularly taking into account that anti-corruption, transparency and accountability, social sector, and LG sector reforms are strongly interconnected.

Problems encountered

During the reporting period there were several technical problems related to some project components, however, through communication within the Consortium and between the lead organization and USAID, all these issues were resolved.

Also, some problems arose due to exchange rate fluctuations and inflation; however, the Consortium members effectively distributed savings.

A comparison of actual expenditures with budget estimates

Due to exchange rate fluctuations as well as some shifts in project activities, the actual expenses were less than budget estimates. Thus, during the retreat, consortium member organizations made several revisions in the second year work plan that allowed solving the issue of underspending.

Priorities for programming during the next reporting period

The second year of project implementation will become the year of utilization of all the information, expertise and products developed during the first year. One of the major priorities for the second year will be focusing on more active involvement of target communities in the project. In this respect and based on the results of the first year activities, it was decided to launch the small grants component and Youth Bank grants component beginning from the second year of implementation instead of the third year as it was initially planned.

Attachment 1. Results of the Local Referenda on May 17, 2015

Name of Community	Total Number of Community Residents	Total Number of the Persons Having the Right to Vote	Voter Turnout		The Total Number of "Yes" Votes		The Total Number of "No" Votes	
			number	percent	number	percent	number	percent
1.Atan	254	210	99	47.1%	42	42.4%	55	55.6%
2.Ahnidzor	211	176	75	42.6%	33	44.0%	40	53.3%
3.Toumanyan	1896	1535	634	41.3%	576	90.9%	36	5.7%
4.Lorut	887	718	245	34.1%	125	51.0%	115	46.9%
5.Marc	483	384	139	36.2%	99	71.2%	31	22.3%
6.Shamut	303	238	85	35.7%	19	22.4%	64	75.3%
7.Qarinj	664	479	205	42.8%	113	55.1%	83	40.5%
Tumanyan Cluster	4698	3740	1482	39.63%	1007	67.95%	424	28.61%
1.Aghavnavanq	344	267	189	70.8%	140	74.1%	17	9.0%
2.Gosh	1137	815	296	36.3%	103	34.8%	172	58.1%
3.Dilijan	18675	14668	3778	25.8%	3317	87.8%	344	9.1%
4.Teghut	1583	1138	415	36.5%	167	40.2%	222	53.5%
5.Khachardzan	367	275	130	47.3%	94	72.3%	27	20.8%
6.Haghartsin	4039	2950	720	24.4%	243	33.8%	444	61.7%
7.Hovq	432	319	153	48.0%	76	49.7%	65	42.5%
Dilijan Cluster	26577	20432	5681	27.80%	4140	72.87%	1291	22.72%
1.Khot	936	660	380	57.6%	365	96.1%	12	3.2%
2.Halidzor	600	443	229	51.7%	173	75.5%	38	16.6%
3.Harjis	784	570	334	58.6%	304	91.0%	30	9.0%
4.Shinuhayr	2584	1766	1098	62.2%	1079	98.3%	15	1.4%
5.Svarants	289	224	145	64.7%	140	96.6%	2	1.4%
6.Tatev	842	651	418	64.2%	389	93.1%	21	5.0%
7.Tandzatap	85	64	48	75.0%	47	97.9%	0	0.0%
8.Qashouni	20	18	16	88.9%	16	100.0%	0	0.0%
Tatev Cluster	6140	4396	2668	60.69%	2513	94.19%	118	4.42%
Average in all three clusters				34.4%		77.9%		18.6%

Source: CEC of RA, www.elections.am