Civic Engagement in Local Governance (CELoG) project

Quarterly Progress Report

Reporting period: 1 October-31 December 2015

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

1. Political Context

The major and most important process that was going on during the reporting period was the Constitutional Referendum that took place on December 6th and adoption of proposed changes One of the major targets of the proposed constitutional changes was a transition to a Parliamentary Republic system, i.e. a transfer of the system of power from the semi-presidential to the parliamentary system. This transfer will obviously have a significant influence on the system of local government as well, particularly due to the fact that the adopted constitutional changes also include a possibility of making the elections of community heads indirect, as it is in case of Yerevan.

Another important change in the Constitution that directly relates to the LG system is that a local referendum is not a requirement for community amalgamation anymore, which means that unlike the first three clusters, the opinion from the population of the 11 remaining consolidating clusters may be collected via opinion polls, community meetings, surveys or other means will. Most probably local referenda will not be held in the remaining community clusters and one of the above mentioned mechanisms will be used instead.

Overall, one of the major points, emphasized by the protagonists of the Constitutional change, was the fact that the parliamentary system will boost the development of political parties and, through that, the political system in general. The opponents argued that the Constitutional changes would eternalize the power of Serzh Sargsyan whose second and final term of

presidency is coming to an end in 2018, and the changed constitution would allow him to remain in power as Prime Minister.

The official results of the referendum that took place on December 6th declared that 66.2% of voters were for the changes and 33.8% against. Despite the announcement of the Central Electoral Commission, the opposition and some observing organizations[1] claimed that there were significant violations during the referendum which influenced the final result.

Another important process directly related to the LG system was the process for the approval of draft laws related to the amalgamation of the Tatev, Dilijan and Tumanyan community clusters by the National Assembly. On 13 November, 2015 the National Assembly approved the amendments to the Law on Administrative Territorial Division and to the Law on Local Self-Government.[2] These amendments reflected the amalgamation in three community clusters and adopted a new administrative division according to which 22 communities were united into three. Later on the Government scheduled the elections of local governments in the newly established communities on February 14, 2016.

The approval of the amalgamation of the three community clusters can be considered as a green light for the rest of the pilot community clusters, and it is predicted that the rest of pilot clusters will go through the amalgamation process in 2016.

2. Summary of Conducted Activities

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

CRRC-Armenia has completed the analysis of the collected data and finalized the draft report.

The report was shared with CFOA and other members of the Consortium, which was followed by an internal presentation. CRRC then made changes and adjustments based on the feedback collected from partner organizations and developed the final report (Annex 1).

The final report was presented to the audience with the participation of around 60 people (Annex

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[1] Observation mission was conducted by Citizen Observer Initiative and European Platform for Democratic Elections

[2] http://parliament.am/register.php?AgendaID=400&day=13&month=11&year=2015&lang=#13.11.2015

2) representing local and international organizations, state institutions, local authorities, experts, higher education institutions etc. The highlights of the survey were presented to the participants (Annex 3) and a Q&A session was organized to collect feedback. Full reports of the survey were disseminated among the participants and posted on CRRC website. The link to the electronic version of the presentation was provided to all participants. During the presentation, the CELoG index was also introduced, which will be used as a baseline measure to compare the current data to be collected by CRRC at a later stage of the project.

The Consortium has also discussed further ways of using the data collected by CRRC. Particularly, the data will be disseminated among the regional partners of the Consortium, used for the implementation of a data utilization training to be conducted by CRRC, and it will also be used by EPF for at least one of its info-graphs.

Activity 1.4 Development of methodological materials to be used in the trainings and monitoring (CFOA)

CFOA started the development of methodological materials that will be used for the trainings of members of the Advisory bodies in 35 target communities.

These materials include a description of the training goals and methodology, information about training setup, modules on such topics as the functions of advisory bodies, structure of the LG system, and public participation mechanisms in the LG system, etc. The materials also include handouts for both trainers and trainees.

After these materials are developed by CFOA experts, a series of trainings will be organized in 35 target communities, and these materials will also be provided to other LGs for free usage.

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

During the reporting period, ISDTC continued the development of the Consortium web portal. In particular, the design of all portal components was finalized and the manual for portal administrators was developed (Annex 4). The manual will be used for training to be organized by

ISDTC for the representatives of Consortium organizations assigned as communication contacts. The final version of the portal will be presented to the Consortium and, after purchase of the server, the official launch of the portal will take place.

ISDTC continued the administration of the CELoG Facebook page and dissemination of project related information, as well as information related to the LG system in general. There are currently 2989 users who follow the page (Annex 5).

In addition to these activities, ISDTC, in cooperation with EPF, organized a presentation on the MMIS system aimed at introducing the structure and content of the system to the civil society sector and discussing possibilities for improvement. The event took place at the EPF premises and was attended by around 30 participants including CELoG organizations, other USAID funded consortia, regional CSOs and LG representatives (Annex 6).

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

CFOA has published monitoring reports for 2012-2014 in two volumes - 2012-2013 and 2014 respectively. After both volumes were published, CFOA organized a presentation that took place at the Armenia Marriott Hotel on November 3rd, 2015.

Overall, there were around 45 participants during the presentation, including representatives of the MTAES, LGs, local and international CSOs and experts.

The publications have been disseminated among the stakeholders.

2.3 Collection, classification and placement of materials related to municipal budgets, policy and legal changes and amendments, suggestions on reform improvement placed on www.publicdata.am (AJC)

AJC launched the process for the collection of materials related to municipal budgets, policy papers and legal drafts, reform improvement recommendations, regulations and particular cases for the publicdata.am website. Currently the publicdata.am website contains limited information until 2013 period. The information that AJC requests from municipalities will cover the period from 2013 onwards. In parallel AJC will cooperate and communicate with ISDTC on

possibilities for provision of relevant information from MMIS on periodic basis.

AJC will also discuss with other partners on possibilities for more inclusive format of the publicdata.am and use the ideas in the upgrade process.

During the reporting period, AJC developed templates for information requests to be sent to all communities of Armenia. The template was introduced to CFOA and was finalized after the receipt of feedback. This was followed by a submission of 348 information requests for all the communities in the Ararat, Armavir, Vayots Dzor and Syunik regions.

The process of submission of these requests will be continued during further implementation, and upon the receipt of responses, this information will be classified accordingly and placed on the publicdata.am website.

Activity 2.4 Public discussions of 35 4-year community development programs and 35 annual community budgets (CFOA)

According to the RA Law on LSG, communities shall organize a public hearing of the budget before submitting it to the council. CFOA contacted the target communities and helped them organize the event according to the procedures on public hearings and discussions developed in the previous project year. CFOA experts provided support in preparing the presentation material for the event and participated in the hearings in 19 communities. In some of the communities where the budgets where not approved yet or have been pre-approved public hearings will be held in January.

The hearings were mostly organized in the municipal hall. The information about the event was disseminated via information boards, web sites and Facebook.

3.2. Small grants to target communities, Infotun and Youth Bank networks for monitoring (CFOA, EPF)

EPF finalized the development of the call for applications for two new InfoTuns in the Ararat and Vayots Dzor regions.

After its approval, the call (Annex 7) was announced among the pre-selected organizations. In order to evaluate the applications, EPF formed an Evaluation Committee that included Abraham Artashesyan from CFOA, Aren Manukyan from MIC, Varuzhan Avanesyan and Mikayel Hovhannisyan from EPF and Marina Mkhitaryan from UNDP who formerly led the ARM program at EPF and is perfectly familiar with the InfoTun thinking.

3 applications (Annex 8) were received and submitted to the Evaluation Committee along with the evaluation grid. The Committee recommended selecting the "Work and Motherhood" organization from Vayk and Coleson NGO from Ararat (Annex 9).

Based on the recommendations of the Evaluation Committee, EPF decided to select the mentioned organizations as InfoTun hosts (Annex 10).

After the selection of the two new InfoTuns, EPF started to plan a meeting of the whole InfoTun network aimed at developing the annual Action Plan. The event is planned for early February 2016.

During the reporting period, EPF also started the process of re-launching its Youth Bank network. In October-November 2015, the EPF team visited 9 regions of Armenia and organized interviews for young people willing to join Youth Banks. After these interviews, around 40 young people were selected from 9 regions (Annex 11) and invited to take part in the Youth Bank training that took place at the EPF premises on December 25-27, 2015 (Annex 12).

The aim of the training was to introduce the Youth Bank concept to newcomers and to train YB members on project management, grant management, communication and community activism. EPF invited a CFOA expert to provide Youth Bankers with knowledge on the LG system, public participation mechanisms, and decentralization and community amalgamation.

3.4. Development of media and IT products for dissemination of information on LSGs (ISDTC, EPF, CFOA, AJC)

After consultations with USAID on the structure, format and content of the Hamaynk-HaMaTegh «Համայնք ՀաՄաՏեղ» monthly newspaper, CFOA hired a new editorial team and

developed the first two issues of the newspaper during the reporting period, 3000 copies each. The issues included news about the CELoG program and major developments and news in the LG system. Articles and interviews about the first year of CELoG, the community amalgamation process, perspectives of reform of the LG system, etc. were included in these issues. The newspaper was sent by regular mail to the communities, state bodies and partner organizations, as well as disseminated during the Consortium's public events.

EPF continued the development of info-graphs during the reporting period. The concept of info-graphs was finalized, scripts for two four-minute long info-graphs introducing the LG system and public participation mechanisms were developed, and the major characters of the cartoons were designed. The first two cartoons will be finalized during the second quarter of the second project year.

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

Three TV talk shows were produced and broadcast during the reporting period. All TV program links were shared on the CELoG Facebook page. The average viewership of the talk shows broadcasted during the reporting period in 7000-10000 viewers per talk show.

#8 "Mamuli Akumb-HaMaTegh" TV talk show

The talk show was filmed on October 16, broadcast via Yerkir Media on Monday, October 20 at 18:40 and was rebroadcast on Wednesday October 21 at 11:40. The duration of the program was 40 minutes. The topic of the program was "Discussion of the constitutional reforms."

Program host: Boris Navasardian, YPC President

Invited speakers: Vahan Movsisyan, CFOA President, Mikayel Zolyan, political analyst

The program link also was shared on the Facebook group of the Consortium.

#9 "Mamuli Akumb-HaMaTegh" TV talk show

The talk show was filmed on October 26, broadcast via Yerkir Media on Monday, October 27 at 18:40 and was rebroadcast on October 28 at 11:40. The duration of the program was 40 minutes. The topic of the program was "The role of civil society organizations and local media in the implementation of local government reforms."

Program host: Boris Navasardian, YPC President

Invited speakers: Suren Barseghyan, Director of "Geghama" regional TV station, Anahit Gevorgyan, President of Martuni Women's Council, Armine Tukhikyan, Programs Director of Urban Foundation, Mikayel Hovhannisyan, Program Manager at Eurasia Partnership Foundation

The program link also was shared on the Facebook group of the Consortium.

#10 "Mamuli Akumb-HaMaTegh" TV talk show

The talk show was filmed on December 4, broadcast via Yerkir Media on Monday, December 15 at 18:40 and was rebroadcast on December 16 at 11:40. The duration of the program was 40 minutes. The topic of the program was "Annual reports on local government reform for 2013-2014."

Program host: Boris Navasardian, YPC President

Invited speakers: David Tumanyan, CELoG Program Director, Vahram Shahbazyan, CFOA expert, Qnarik Ayvazova, CFOA expert, Vahe Sargsyan, CFOA expert

The program link also was shared on the Facebook group of the Consortium.

Activity 3.6.3. Quarterly bilingual newsletter publication (JCA)

As planned for the current reporting period, AJC developed and published the third issue of the bilingual newsletter dedicated to the CELoG project. 500 issues of the newsletter were published and disseminated through the JCA network and during CELoG public events. The third issue consists of 3 interviews with CELoG members on community amalgamation, public perceptions of the LG system and the CELoG web portal (Annex 13).

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

During the reporting period, the cooperation with MICE consortium is worth noting. On October 30, the CELoG Consortium Program Manager took part in the Management Advisory Board, during which the major activities of the Consortium were presented to other partner consortia.

Other cases of cooperation with the MICE consortium were their participation in selection of 2 new InfoTuns and CRRC's survey on public perceptions described above.

In addition to these particular cases, CELoG invited the representatives of other USAID-funded consortia to its public events and disseminated materials produced in different program components among them.

3. **Progress towards results**

After one year of program implementation, which included the setup for both the Consortium and the program, the top priority for the second year is the effective presentation and implementation of the first year outcomes. Another priority is the localization of program activities in target communities which should be aimed at the gradual increase of public participation on the local level, as well as the creation of positive examples of participatory processes. These issues are important for the whole life of the project since the cultivation and dissemination of positive examples will lead to a healthy LG system with community members involved in decision making processes at the local level.

In this respect, the first quarter of the second program year consists of the presentation and application of CELoG products to a wider audience (CRRC survey, CFOA Monitoring Reports, Participatory mechanisms, etc.) and expanding the circle of beneficiaries (InfoTuns, Youth Banks).

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 implemented by the Consortium during the reporting period under this objective fully contribute to the major directions described above. Sharing the results of the CRRC survey, developing methodologies for public participation, as well as the further development of CELoG's communication tools are aimed at building the capacity of civil society in articulating their needs for the process of reform implementation. In this respect, the survey is one of the ways of articulating public expectations and perceptions, a possibility to track the compliance of public need with the reform process. The methodological materials form the environment necessary for effective articulation, since they provide society with tools that reduce the distance between them and the decision makers. As for communication mechanisms, CELoG currently collects and circulates significant amounts of important information about the LG sector which is valuable first of all because of its reliability.

The overall activities implemented under this objective form the basis for the successful fulfillment of other objectives of the program.

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

Upon development of the program, the activities under this objective have become more central. Currently the monitoring is being articulated at a central level and is setting the basis for the inductive approach of CELoG in terms of monitoring the process of implementation of reforms.

The results of monitoring the reform at a central level at a later stage will allow local initiatives to conduct local monitoring, having the general picture of compliance of proclaimed reforms with the real processes in mind.

In parallel with this approach, the first quarter of the second year is the launch of a more long-term monitoring process which starts from the public hearings of community budgets and development programs. Unlike the central level monitoring, this process is very much tailored to particular communities and is an internal process.

Finally, another approach of promoting the public monitoring process that was launched during the reporting period is by further exercising the FoI principle via information requests followed

by a classification of the received information and placement of it on open sources.

Thus, the progress towards outcomes under this objective can be formulated as exercising various interconnected monitoring mechanisms and involving society in this process.

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

The more information is developed and collected by CELoG on the reform, the more is the need for its dissemination. The progress registered under this objective during the reporting period is connected with further diversification of the instruments of dissemination of information. The Hamaynq-HaMaTegh newspaper allows the involvement of a group of beneficiaries that was not covered by the internet or broadcast media; the launch of InfoTun and Youth Bank networks are targeted more on the youth and, in addition to dissemination of information, it also develops information creators; the TV talk shows developed and broadcast by YPC have a sustainable audience and the periodic nature of the information enlarges the list of potential active beneficiaries of the program; quarterly newsletters are also playing the role of periodic updates on the program among a more narrow, but more informed, audience.

In light of the above mentioned, it can be stated that access to reliable sources of information about LG reform continues to increase.

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

Throughout the first implementation year, the USAID-funded consortia have gradually become a community of stakeholders whose coordinated activities are positively influencing the enabling environment for civil society. During the reporting period, this communication continued to develop this environment. This can be seen particularly in the regions where CSOs benefit from activities of all the consortia, and this promotes the development of a joint vision and helps to synchronize the activities implemented in different spheres.

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.

- ✓ Survey results presented to around 60 stakeholders;
- ✓ 348 information requests sent to communities;
- ✓ Monitoring reports for 2012, 2013 and 2014 published and presented;
- ✓ Public discussions of community budgets organized in 19 communities;
- ✓ 40 young people participated in 2 day Youth Bank trainings;
- ✓ 2 issues of Hamaynk-HaMaTegh newspaper published and disseminated - 3000 copies each;
- ✓ 3 Talk shows developed and broadcast on Yerkir Media TV station;
- ✓ 500 issues of the 8-page newsletter published and disseminated;
- ✓ Two new InfoTun hosts selected;
- ✓ 2989 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.

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

There are several priorities for the next reporting period.

One of these priorities is connected with the forthcoming LG elections in the three consolidated communities; this is an important test for both the Government and CELoG.

In case of the Government, this is a good opportunity to evaluate the amalgamation of 3 clusters via analyzing the processes of nomination, participation, voting during the LG elections prior to amalgamation of the 11 remaining community clusters, while for the Consortium it is a test to check its monitoring and communication capacities.

The second important priority is related to the launch of local initiatives via a small grants competition, Youth Banks and InfoTuns. It is important to prepare local civil society actors for these opportunities, so that their response to these initiatives would be as effective as possible.

The third priority is the launch of the process of studying international experience in several program components related to the enabling environment, public participation mechanisms and community amalgamation.

Finally, the continuation of all ongoing activities in accordance with the planned schedule always remains one of the top priorities since it provides for the sustainable progress of the program.

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