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Civic Engagement in Local Governance (CELoG) Program

Quarterly Progress Report

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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

FB- Facebook

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

MTAD- Ministry of Territorial Administration and Development

NA - National Assembly

NGO - Non-Governmental Organization

OAS - Organizational Activity Seminar

TARA - Territorial-Administrative Reform in Armenia

TIAC - Transparency International Anti-Corruption Center

YB- Youth Bank

YPC - Yerevan Press Club

POLITICAL CONTEXT

The most important event that took place in the very beginning of the reporting period was the Four Day War in Karabakh.

The Four Day War illustrated that there are enormous gaps and problems in the Armenian governance system and, as it usually happens in critical situations, all major shortcomings became more visible. One of the major problems of the country that showed its whole scope was the systemic corruption that is present in every single area of governance. The most dangerous consequence of the entire process of the unsuccessful fight against corruption, which was happening in conditions of complete absence of political will and a systemic approach towards a systemic problem, was the gradual reduction of the country's development resources. The April war impacted at least on declarative level all areas of governance in Armenia which can be judged from various statements of various high ranked officials. During the post war period two important LG-related issues came up: conceptualizing the approach towards security of bordering communities and civic defense which directly relates to the LG area. On 21 April 2016, the CELoG consortium held its board meeting and extended staff meeting during which among other issues the possible impact of the April war on the program was also discussed. EPF CEO Gevorg Ter-Gabrielyan introduced his perspective on the situation and the role of the civil society in light of new circumstances. Possible programmatic adjustments were discussed, among them the issue of including the security aspect in the upcoming Organizational Activity Seminar, as well as the necessity of more active work with bordering communities were discussed.

Another block of events and developments taking place during the reporting period that had a direct influence on the LG system were the elections that occurred in several communities as well as the decision to further continue the community consolidation process.

Among the local elections that took place after the April War, only the elections in Hrazdan were at the center of society's attention, not only because Hrazdan is one of the largest industrial towns in Armenia, but also since this was the sole case where there was competition between the representative of the ruling Republican Party and the opposition Civil Contract party candidate. According to the reports of both the Civil Contract Party, as well as media and civil society organizations observing the polls, there were mass violations during the elections, such as vote-buying, directing of voters, etc. As a result Aram Danielyan the acting

Mayor of Hrazdan was re-elected.

This situation demonstrated that the process of running elections in Armenia remained the same as it was before April War, despite the expectations of the society illustrated in social networks and various publications that the authorities will have lessons learnt after the war and will illustrate readiness to implement democratic reforms.

The decision of the Government to consolidate 15 community clusters in addition to the first three has increased the number of consolidated communities to 140 (22 communities within the first 3 clusters and 118 in 15 new clusters), which makes this a mainstream process in the reform of the LG sector. This immediate increase also emphasizes the necessity for both raising public awareness about the process, as well as building the capacities of LG in light of these new developments. The decision of consolidating a large number of new community clusters presents quite a challenge, since the effect of the consolidation of the first three clusters is not yet visible to society.

There have been some quite negative developments in the LG sector that contradict the logic of decentralization and harm the reform process. During the reporting period, two decisions directly affecting LG system were made by the Government. One of them relates to changes in the Tax Code and affects local taxes (which is in process of discussions yet). This decision basically limits the right of community councils to decide the rates of local taxes, since it only allows to increase the defined rate by 10%.

Another decision of the Government that negatively affected the LG system and also illustrated the lack of autonomy in the decision-making process among all LGs was the appeal by the Government to communities proposing that the latter transfer the ownership of water supply internal networks and other engineering facilities from the local to the central level. This appeal was followed by the decisions of all community councils in favor of the Government's request. None of the community councils objected to the obvious reduction of their authority.

Overall, the political developments that took place during the reporting period can be evaluated as more negative than positive in terms of their influence on LG reform. The only more or less positive development is the boost that was given to the community consolidation process, which however should be properly addressed by both the Government and other

institutions involved in the LG reform process.

SUMMARY OF CONDUCTED ACTIVITIES

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 the implementation of the decentralization reform;

Activity 1.5 Trainings for the target community activists on data utilization and citizen journalism (Cons.)

CRRC-Armenia continued partnering with Consortium members to present the findings of the household survey in different communities of Armenia. In partnership with CFOA, the findings of the survey were delivered (1.5 hour presentation and discussions) to Metsamor community representatives (community council members, LG staff, etc.) within a three-day training on participatory mechanisms.

CRRC-Armenia also joined Asparez Journalists’ Club for their series of presentations to community representatives, and conducted the survey major findings’ presentation to Gyumri, Armavir, Hrazdan and Vanadzor.

On 8 June 2016, Asparez Journalists’ Club presented the interim results of the LG monitoring, based on official inquiries sent to LGs, at the Congress Hotel (Annex 1). The event was also used as an opportunity for CRRC-Armenia to present the findings of the household survey (see Annex 2 for the agenda). The joint event hosted around 30 representatives of civil society, media and state institutions. Presentations were followed by a Q&A session and discussion.

Activity 1.7 Seminars for journalists (YPC)

During the reporting period, Yerevan Press Club organized 2 seminars/workshops for media outlets. Both workshops were organized in Aghveran. The first one was held on 8-10 April 2016 and was entitled “Current Problems of Local Self Government in the Context of the Amendments to the RA Constitution and the Electoral Code,” with the participation of 32



journalists and media experts, who were representing national and local media (10 from local media and 22 from Yerevan).

Both traditional and alternative media outlets were presented from different cities of Armenia such as Sevan, Vanadzor, Goris, Gavar, Noyemberyan, Abovyan, Armavir, Metsamor and Yerevan. The list of media representatives includes the following outlets: STV1, DeFacto, Slaq.am, MIG TV, Goris Press Club, ArmavirInfoTun, A1plus, Shoghakat TV, Hraparak, Asparez, ChorrordIshkhanutyun, Newline.am, MIG TV, Slaq.am, H1, Aravot, Hamaynk-Hamategh, Media Center, H2 etc.



The main issues discussed included the process of reforms in the sphere of local self-government, reform of local self-government bodies in the context of the amendments to the RA Constitution and Electoral Code, key issues of communities' enlargement, coverage of local self-government bodies' elections, local self-government bodies' commitment to ensure

the transparency and accountability in their work, and the role of InfoTuns (information centers) in ensuring civic engagement (see Annex 3 for the agenda in Armenian).

The second seminar held on 17-19 June 2016 was entitled "Civic Engagement in Local Self Governance: New Challenges and Issues." The participants (40 in number) included representatives of Armenian local self-government bodies, NGOs and media (17 regional and 8 Yerevan media). Both traditional and alternative media outlets were present from different cities of Armenia such as Vanadzor, Ijevan, Gyumri, Abovyan, Jermuk, Ararat, Ashtarak, Sevan etc. The list of media representatives included the following outlets - Armlur, Zhoghovurd, MIG TV, Hraparak, Time.am, A1plus, Aravot, Ijevan TV, Gala TV, STV1 TV etc. The main issues discussed included new challenges in the process of reforms in local self-government, new draft laws on amendments to the Armenian legislation



and main issues of local self-government, the possibility of civil society engagement in the decision-making process, improvement of mechanisms of civic engagement in the community governance information system, civic engagement in the process of development and adoption of the new RA Electoral Code, corruption risks in local self-government bodies (see Annex 4 for the agenda in Armenian).

Activity 1.10. Cooperation with other development actors and other consortia (CFOA, EPF, AJC)

The Consortium continued its cooperation with other USAID-funded consortia and other actors working in the sphere of LG reform. Several cases of cooperation were registered during the reporting period.

The official opening of Ararat and VaykInfoTuns was used as an opportunity to present not only CELoG, but also the MICE and DePoPrograms as well as disseminate materials related to all three Programs. Another case of cooperation between CELoG and MICE Programs was the organization of a joint webinar on the LG system for the InfoTun Network where the technical side of the organization was carried out by the MICE Program and expertise was provided by CELoG expert Knarik Ayvazova.

CELoG continues to disseminate its materials widely to all major partners involved in the sector, as well as invite all respective partners to its public events.

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

During the reporting period, ISDTC organized two trainings on portal administration for CELoG members. All partners that took part in trainings were familiarized with the internal structure of the portal and taught how to navigate within the admin part, and how to upload information onto the portal.

ISDTC has completed the process of presenting the preliminary data on the portal. This process was accompanied with technical work related to bug fixes, improvement of minor technical problems.



The news section currently allows the categorization of materials based on topics; all talk shows produced by YPC have been uploaded to the Videos section of the portal; the Photo Albums section currently includes photos from different events of the CELOG Program with respective descriptions; the Library section contains links and uploaded files with textmaterials related to the LG reforms. More detailed information about the materials uploaded to the portal can be found in Annex 5. It is planned to officially launch the portal during the next reporting period.

ISDTC also continued the moderation of the Facebook page of the Program. ISDTC and other partner organizations posted information related to the Program and to the LG sector in general. Detailed statistical data on the FB page can be found in Annex 6.

1.14 Consortium retreat and annual meetings

On 21 April 2016, the CELOG consortium held its board meeting and extended staff meeting which was hosted by AsparezJournalists’ Club in Gyumri (see Annex 7). The aim of the event was to discuss the current state of the Program, introduce major findings of partners, and discuss further activities, as well as to reflect on the consequences of the April War on the Program and the LG system, and identify possible changes and additions that may happen in this respect.

During the meeting, all partner organizations were given an opportunity to introduce their activities and express their opinions on the current situation in the country. After the presentation and discussion, three major topics - the Electoral Code, LG developments and April War - were represented by Levon Barseghyan, David Tumanyan and Gevorg Ter-Gabrielyan respectively (see Annex 8 for the meeting notes).

Objective 2: To strengthen civil society’s capacity to monitor the central and local government institutions and officials, and the implementation of the decentralization reform

2.1. Monitoring of implementation of decentralization and LSG reform (CFOA)

CFOA experts are finalizing the reports on the monitoring of decentralization and LSG reform for 2015. The format is the same as it was for the previous reports, which enables consistency and having comparable data for the years monitored.

The report will be ready in the next reporting period. It will be published and presented to a wide range of shareholders including representatives from central government, local governments, civil society organizations, academics, experts, etc. There have been preliminary consultations with CRRC in terms of developing methodology for index development.

Activity2.3 Collection, classification and placement of materials related to municipal budgets, policy and legal changes and amendments, suggestions on reform improvement at www.publicdata.am (AJC)

During the reporting period, AJC conducted the analysis of the collected official inquiry results and, based on the data received from municipalities, developed an interim report that was presented in all 10 *marzpetarans* and at the MTAD. The report indicates the level of transparency of municipalities based on their ability to reply to official inquiries regulated by the RA law on Freedom of Information.

The presentations held in the regions hosted not only representatives of municipalities and regional administrations, but also local media, CSOs and experts.

In addition to the presentations, AJC held around 600 phone conversations with representatives of different municipalities as a follow up to official inquiries. These phone calls were aimed at receiving additional information, as well as explaining the consequences of not providing information in accordance with the regulations of the law on Freedom of Information.

Activity 2.7. Development and advocacy of recommendations on improvement of the

reform process CFOA)

Due to the fact the process of development of the new LG law was postponed to September 2016, it was decided to move the second visit of international experts to the first quarter of the third program year, so that the discussion of the draft law by the consortium fits the timeline of the government.

2.8. Analysis of draft legal acts on decentralization and LSG, and development of recommendations (CFOA)

On 18 April 2016, the Government of Armenia approved the draft Tax Code. Since the Code defines the local taxes (property tax for immovable objects and tax for transportation means) as well, CFOA made an analysis of the Code and developed a statement which particularly refers to the inconsistencies between the Code, the Constitution of the Republic of Armenia and the European Charter on LSG.

The draft Code suggests that the local authorities can increase the rate of tax up to 10%, while the Constitution and the European Charter on LSG imperative stipulate to give the right to the LSG to define the rate within the given statute. Hence, the current statement in the Code will not motivate the municipal council to make decisions on the rate; rather, the default tax rate will be used. This issue becomes particularly problematic due to the fact that local authorities are lacking autonomy and will have little motivation in defining rates specific for their particular communities without any directive from the central authorities.

Objective 3: To increase citizens’ access to independent and reliable information on the decentralization reform

Activity3.1a Introduction of legal, policy and participatory aspects of decentralization in 35 larger communities, trainings for local Advisory Bodies (CFOA)

CFOA continued the set of three-day trainings for the advisory bodies of the 35 target municipalities. The trainings were organized according to the developed methodology. The training module defined the topics of the lectures and deductive materials. In total, there were 9 topics, which covered the issues of public participation, providing knowledge on legislation, budgeting and community planning.

Currently, the majority of municipalities from CELoG target communities have attended the trainings. To be able to conduct the training within a relatively short time frame, CFOA involved an additional expert with the approval of USAID. This made it possible to have two teams of experts and organize trainings in two municipalities simultaneously.

The trainings were mostly conducted in the city halls. The participants of the trainings were members of the advisory bodies, CSO representatives and local officials. Each training involved approximately 20-25 participants. The table below introduces the number of participants during each seminar, gender breakdown and communities where seminars were held.

	Seminar/Community	Female	Male	All participants
1	Vedi, Vosketap	7	16	23
2	Ashtarak, Oshakan	20	14	34
3	Parakar	18	9	27
4	Metsamor, Mrgashat, Sardarapat	13	1	14
5	Yeghvard, Qasax	15	5	20
6	Alaverdi, Odzun	12	11	23
7	Alaverdi, Odzun	17	7	24
8	Goris	16	4	20
9	Spitak	14	11	25
10	Akhuryan, Azatan	15	13	28
11	Artik, Maralik	14	9	23
12	Byureghavan, Jrvej	13	11	24
13	Qajaran	12	15	27
14	Sisyan	18	7	25
15	Eghegnadzor	14	7	21

16	Gavar, Vardenik	13	16	29
17	Noratus, Sarukhan, Karmirgyugh	7	13	20
18	Berd	14	8	22
	Total	252	177	429

Activity3.2. Small grants to target communities, InfoTun and Youth Bank networks for monitoring (CFOA, EPF)

CFOA Small grants

Starting from the second year, CFOA began the small grant program. The grants are designed for the CSOs and LSGs to foster public participation at the local level.

Prior to the announcement of the competition, CFOA developed the RFA with the support of EPF to ensure that the call was precise and clear regarding the goals and objectives of the grants.

The call for applications was made on 14 April 2016. The information was disseminated via the CFOA web site, CELoG Facebook page, as well as announced during the trainings in the communities.

Additionally, on 21 April 2016, an orientation meeting was organized at the EPF premises with representatives of the interested organizations.

There were more than 60 proposals received in response to RFA. In order to organize transparent and unbiased selection, the evaluation process was divided into two stages. During the first stage, two groups of experts evaluated the applications (30 per group) in a way that each application would be evaluated by two experts. During the second stage, the selection committee reviewed the shortlisted applications based on the recommendations of the two expert groups. The experts in the subgroups reviewed the proposals and prepared comments on them. The top 6 proposals were selected and 4 were placed in a waiting list.

After the selection process, a meeting with the winning organizations was organized where the details of the proposed projects and budgets were discussed.

InfoTun Network

During the reporting period, the InfoTun network operating in 8 regions of Armenia conducted their activities as planned during the InfoTun strategy meeting held on February at

the EPF premises. Overall, InfoTuns organized 39 events with the participation of 535 people. The gender distribution of the participants was as follows - 305 female and 230 male. All InfoTuns have their FB pages and blogs, where they actively cover community issues, community council sessions and meetings, share training announcements and InfoTun activities.

Two newly established InfoTuns in Ararat and Vayk completed their design stage and officially marked their opening ceremonies on 8 and 13 June respectively. During the opening ceremony of the Ararat InfoTun, the overall number of attending people was 59. The InfoTun event was attended by USAID representatives, the Mayor of Ararat city, CELoG consortium representatives, InfoTun coordinators, young people and students, civil society and media. The opening ceremony of Vayk InfoTun was also impressive and remarkable with 40 attendees, which included the USAID, CELoG, media and civil society representatives etc. The representatives of Martuni and Syunik InfoTuns shared their success stories and experience with newly established InfoTuns and event guests.

Before the official launch of the InfoTuns, both Ararat and Vayk InfoTuns were already working in their communities. On 26 and 27 April, within the Media for Informed Civic Engagement Program, EPF representatives conducted the Mardamej event at the Vayk and Ararat InfoTuns respectively. As a result, 2 projects from each community were awarded small grants for implementation. The name and description of the projects for each of the InfoTuns is presented below.

- InfoTun: Vayk
- Name of the project: I rate
- Duration of the project: 6 July 2016-30 September 2016
- Amount of the project: 250,000 AMD

Description of the project: The aim of the project is to create an online platform to rate the community services provided by the LSG and draw the attention of responsible LSG representatives to these issues. It will ensure the engagement of people in solving community issues.

- InfoTun: Vayk
- Name of the project: Interactive budget

- Duration of the project: 6 July 2016-30 September 2016
- Amount of the project: 250,000 AMD

Description of the project: The aim of the project is to create an interactive budget of the community and promote it through online platforms. The project will raise awareness of the community budget within the society.

- InfoTun: Ararat
- Name of the project: Info board
- Duration of the project: 6 July 2016-30 September 2016
- Amount of the project: 250,000 AMD

Description of the project: The aim of the project is to install an Info Board in Ararat village which will cover LSG activities, thus raising awareness of community decisions.

- InfoTun: Ararat
- Name of the project: Several squares
- Duration of the project: 6 July 2016-30 September 2016
- Amount of the project: 250, 000 AMD

Description of the project: The aim of the project is to create an online platform (blog) to rate LSG services in Ararat city. The results will be presented to the responsible LSG representatives to improve the quality of services.

The InfoTun and Mardamej project coordinators participated in the training organized by EPF aiming at presenting the project implementation and reporting to the coordinators.

The Ararat and VaykInfoTuns created FB pages where they actively post and share information about InfoTun events, the CELoG program, community issues, local governance etc. The number of followers of the Ararat InfoTun Facebook page is 113 and for VaykInfoTun Facebook page this figure is 401.

During the reporting period, ArmavirInfoTun organized 5 events including presentations, debates, and discussions within the CELoG Program. The topics of event aimed at increasing public awareness of LSG legislation, the community budget, 4-year development plan, public participation mechanisms as well as revealing community issues, discussing them and

findingsolutions. The overall number of participants in the events organized by the ArmavirInfoTun within the CELoG program is 52.

The total number of events and activities conducted by MartuniInfoTunis 9 which included CELoG program presentations in 4 communities - Gavar, Sarukhan, Noratuz and Karmirgyugh. The MartuniInfoTun organized meetings with active groups in the mentioned 4 communities, who were presented the CELoG program, expectations and the directions of the planned training courses.

The InfoTun also organized Media Literacy trainings for the active groups in Gavar, Sarukhan and Martuni. Overall, the number of the participants in the trainings and events organized by the MartuniInfoTun is 26.

During the reporting period,VanadzorInfoTun conducted 5 events and trainings which included 3 community visits to Spitak, Margahovit and Dsegh, and 2 trainings on participatory mechanisms and community budgets. During the community visits, 3 active groups were formed which presented the possibilities of participating in community council hearings; enhancing youth participation in community council activities. Requests for the participation of these active groups in Community Council meetings was prepared and sent to the heads of the Spitak, Margahovit and Dsegh communities. The total number of participants in the events organized by VanadzorInfoTun was 61.

Within the project, a closed working group was created in Facebook for young people from Vanadzor, Margahovit, Spitak and Dsegh. VanadzorInfoTun coordinators and group members post information about the CELoG program, event announcements, community news and useful files and information about LSG.

During the reporting period, 4 events took place at IjevanInfoTun which included two trainings and 2 meetings. One of the trainings covered the issue of “State procurement in the health sector and institutions.” The main attendees of the event were civil society representatives, beneficiaries of IjevanInfoTun, Ijevan Youth Bank and others. The other training covered the topics of LSG functions, evaluation of public services and public participation. The participants actively discussed the mechanism of enhancing youth participation, and the mechanisms to improve public services.

The IjevanInfoTun organized a meeting with the initiative team of the “I am a decision maker in my city” project. It was realized as part of the Mardamej SIC implemented by the MICE Program. The project “I am a decision maker in my city” monitors Ijevan budget. IjevanInfoTun provided the necessary information to the team to design and implement their project.

During the EU delegation visit to the EPF Northern branch, the IjevanInfoTun coordinators and representatives also presented their activities within the CELoG project. The overall number of participants in the events organized by IjevanInfoTun is 69.

During the reporting period, SyunikInfoTun organized 4 events and launched initiatives in Goris. Starting from April 2016, the active group members of Goris launched the “Improved Sidewalks” initiative by taking photos of more than 300 sidewalks of Goris city. The team met with expert YashaKhachyan to discuss and reveal the issues and shortcomings of the sidewalks. The team published information about the initiative through social media. The community authorities learned about it and suggested a meeting at the Goris Press Club to discuss possible cooperation and find joint solutions to solve this problem. The initiative group presented its findings to the experts, lawyer and representatives of Goris municipality, the spokesman of the head of the Goris community and others. The initiative group sent a formal query to Mayor of Goris Vachagan Adunts about the amount that the 2016 community budget appropriated for maintenance and repair of sidewalks. The team also organized a petition to include this issue in the agenda of the community council meeting.

The result of the initiative can already be seen. Recently, the spokesman of the Goris municipality posted photos of the sidewalks of Goris being cleaned, bearing the title “Let’s clean and keep our Goris clean.”



SyunikInfoTun also organized a discussion with Transparency International expert Armen Grigoryan to discuss the election process in Armenia. He presented the issues related with these processes and possible solutions through public

participation. Another event that covered LSG and public participation was organized by the Goris Press Club and SyunikInfoTun within the “Public oversight” project on “How to participate in LSG,” which aimed at enhancing the capacity of active groups and engage them in local governance. The training was conducted by Levon Barseghyan from Asparez Journalists’ Club.

Within the CELoG program, CFOA has engaged the members of active groups in the trainings such as “Participatory diagnosis and planning tools” organized by GIZ in cooperation with the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Development of RA on 11-12 May in Halidzor. Within the same project the active group members of Shinuhayr and Halidzor participated in the seminar “Design and administration of 4-year plan of community development” in Tatev.

Civic journalists of SyunikInfoTun continued covering the community consolidation processes, presenting positive and negative consequences of the consolidation in Tatev, Community Council meetings, community issues etc.

GyumriInfoTun organized 4 trainings in 4 educational institutions on the topic of “Local governance and media.” The training was conducted at the Armenian State University of Economics Gyumri Branch as well as schools number 8, 21 and 11 of Gyumri. The first part of the trainings covered LSG and Human Rights where the students and pupils learned about their rights and obligations. The training was conducted in an interactive way, screening a UN cartoon about fundamental human rights and the movie produced by Eurasia Partnership Foundation “One Society One Right.” During the second part of the training -“Where does the citizen stand”-the first and second episodes of animated films were screened.

As a result of these trainings, 5 groups were formed who were invited to visit Gyumri municipality. The students were presented the role and functions of the municipality; visited different departments such as urban development, financial, youth and culture etc. The total number of participants in these trainings was 82.

This reporting period was dedicated to community development project selection and small-scale funding allocations. The YouthBanks implemented planned activities that aimed to increase youth participation in community life.

Youth Banks

During the previous reporting period, nine YouthBanks gathered applications from youth aged 18-25, proposing ideas on how to develop their communities and enhance youth participation in civic governance.

As a result of the evaluation process which implemented fully in compliance with the YB and EF regulations, **31 small scale community projects were financed.** YBs contacted all unsuccessful applicants in order to inform them about the selection results and explain the selection process.

YouthBank training on financial management and monitoring

In order to ensure efficient implementation of the projects, YB members were invited to a one-day training on financial management and monitoring. During the training, YB members shared their experiences, presented the selected ideas and learned how to manage the financial expenses of YBs and financed projects. Lilit from Ararat YB presented the challenges of distributing the finances between the projects: YB members wanted to reduce the budgets for 2 out of 3 projects and have a larger budget for public park renovation. After some discussion, they found a good solution. They renegotiated the budget with one of the applicants, who wanted to conduct IT courses for local young people, and suggested an in-kind contribution from YB for him. As a result, they managed to increase the budget for park renovation. HasmikGrigoryan, a representative from CFOA, was also invited to the training and contributed some valuable insights.

Award ceremony

Most YBs invited community active groups and local government representatives to locally-held award ceremonies. During these events, the community development projects were presented and the nominees received symbolic certificates. Many YBs, including Dilijan YouthBank, held a big public event and invited guests from nearby communities in order to promote the visibility of the program.

Link: [Dilijan YouthBank Award Ceremony](#)

Project implementation and success stories

YouthBank members actively assisted and monitored project implementation.

Bus stop in Krashen community: Gyumri YouthBank selected a project, which was to solve a very serious issue for Krashen community members -the absence of a bus stop, where residents could board the bus and travel to other communities. Given the adverse weather conditions and the absence of a regular bus schedule, this caused a lot of inconvenience for local people. A young girl from Krashen, Hripsime Petrosyan, gathered a team of volunteers, applied and received funding from YB. Moreover, Hripsime managed to mobilize the local authorities and the Krashen population to contribute to the construction of the first bus stop in the community.

Link: [Monitoring of bus-stop construction in Krashen](#)

Another interesting example of young people trying to solve a serious community problem, which concerns the entire community, was brought to the attention to Ijevan YB by a group of volunteers. There is a spot in Ijevan, where a rather long stairway connects one of the neighborhoods with the city center, but it has no rails to hold on to or lean on while climbing up and down. This has become a major and a dangerous issue especially for older people and children, particularly during the winter season. Ijevan YB selected the project that proposed building holding rails along the stairways.

There was a group of projects funded, which promoted healthy lifestyle and recreational activities for local youth, especially given that the needs assessments demonstrated that the absence of any recreation in rural areas was a major problem. Some of those projects are described below:

- The Gyumri YB was also quite successful in building bridges between the local government authorities and community active groups. YB funded the installation of outdoor workout equipment in a park, and local authorities installed trash bins and renovated parts of the park. As a result, the park became a pleasant place for meet-ups and exercise.

Link: [Streetworkout installation in Gyumri](#)

- Martuni YouthBank decided to fund a project to purchase sports equipment for a school in Karmir village, so that school children could develop more interest in sports.

As a result of the outreach and visibility activities, local government representatives doubled the amount of funding, which allowed for an increase in sports equipment.

Link: [Monitoring of the procurement of sports equipment in the school of Karmir village](#)

- Dilijan YouthBank funded a project for developing outdoor sports activities in Dilijan. Thanks to the financial support, Martik sports club got an arm-wrestling table and organized an outdoor competition. This way, Martik sports club promoted outdoor activities and workouts.

Link: [Arm-wrestling open completion in Dilijan](#)

Other useful links:

[Armavir YouthBank Award Ceremony](#)

[Yeghegnadzor YouthBank Award Ceremony](#)

[Vanadzor YouthBank Award Ceremony](#)

[Goris YB funded project named “Physical education and recreation, all in one place”](#)

[Martuni YB funded project for enriching the Library in Martuni](#)

3.3. Supporting petitions to community councilsthrough collection of signatures in communities (CFOA)

CFOA initiated the first exercise of one of the most direct means of public participation in local governance - applying to community councils with a petition. This is a new tool in the Armenian reality and only a recent amendment to the legislation has made it possible. Thus, CFOA involved local experts to support the process of development of petitions and application to community councils. The Spitak, Alaverdi and Noyemberyan communities were selected for the pilot process of applying with petitions.

The local expert had already conducted meetings in the mentioned communities with the participation of active citizens and CSOs. The goal of the meetings was to present the initiative and define the community issues. It is planned to develop the final versions of the

petition and to proceed with the collection of the signatures during the next reporting period.

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

EPF has started the development of two new episodes from the *Where the People Stand* series of animated films. The new episodes will continue the thinking of the first two. The topics of the two new episodes will be interactions between the central and local authorities, structure and logic of community development plans. The EPF team has held interviews with CFOA experts and, based on that, developed a draft scenario which was discussed with Versus Studio, selected for development of the series. Currently, Versus Studio is working on the development of the first drafts of the film in communication with the EPF team. Once the first drafts are ready, they will be shared with consortium partners and USAID for comments.

Based on the agreement with USAID and CFOA, Asparez has developed and produced its 4th quarterly newsletter. During the Consortium board meeting, it was discussed and suggested to continue issuing the newsletter only in Armenian. AJC also continued the process of upgrading and updating its publicdata.am website. The materials are being uploaded and structural issues being solved. It is planned to have the first version of the website by the end of the next reporting period.

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

4 TV talk shows were produced and broadcast during the reporting period. All TV program links were shared on CELoG Facebook page and uploaded to the YouTube channel of YPC.

#17 “Mamuli Akumb-HaMaTegh” TV talk show

The talk show was filmed on 18 April and broadcast via Yerkir Media on Tuesday, April 19 at 18:40 and was rebroadcast on Wednesday, 20 April at 11:40. The duration of the program was 40 minutes. The topic of the program was “The capacity of border communities as a guarantee for security.”

Program host: Boris Navasardian, YPC President

Invited speakers:

- Armine Petrosyan, President of “Hay Dzmer Pap” Foundation
- Hakob Badalyan, Journalist at Lragir.am online newspaper
- Levon Barseghyan, President of Asparez Journalists’ Club, member of Gyumri city

- Council of Elders
- VoskanSargsyan, Editor of “Tesankyun” newspaper in Tavush region

#18 “MamuliAkumb-HaMaTegh” TV talk show

The talk show was filmed on 22 April and broadcast via Yerkir Media on Tuesday, 26 April at 18:40 and was rebroadcast on 27 April at 11:40. The duration of the program was 40 minutes. The topic of the program was “Local elections in Hrazdan, Talin and Spitak cities and in dozens of villages. Lessons learned from the perspective of the new Electoral Code of Armenia.”

Program host: Boris Navasardian, YPC President

Invited speakers:

- ArmenGrigoryan, Coordinator of Elections’ program at the Transparency International Anti-Corruption Center
- NelliRafayelyan, News programs editor at Shoghakat TV
- Mnatsakan Harutyunyan, Director of Hrazdan TV
- Ruben Hayrapetyan, Member of CFOA board

#19 “MamuliAkumb-HaMaTegh” TV talk show

The talk show was filmed on 16 May and broadcast via Yerkir Media on Tuesday, 17 May at 18:40 and was rebroadcast on 20 May at 11:40. The duration of the program was 40 minutes. The topic of the program was “Administrative decentralization as a strategic plan of RA.”

Program host: Boris Navasardian, YPC President

Invited speakers:

- VahanMovsisyan, President of Communities Finance Officers Association
- ArmineTukhikyan, Chairman of the board of Urban Foundation
- MusheghKarapetyan, Consultant at the State Committee of Water Economy of the RA
- ArtashesBakhshyan, Deputy Minister of the Territorial Administration and Development

#20 “MamuliAkumb-HaMaTegh” TV talk show

The talk show was filmed on 28 May and broadcast via Yerkir Media on Tuesday, 31 May at 18:40 and was rebroadcast on 3 June at 11:40. The duration of the program was 40 minutes. The topic of the program was “Current process of LSG reforms in the light of amendments to the electoral code and tax legislation.”

Program host: Boris Navasardian, YPC President

Invited speakers:

- Vahan Movsisyan, Chairman of Communities' Finance Officers Association
- David Tumanyan, Director of CELoG program
- Hayk Arshamyan, Programs Manager at Yerevan Press Club
- Knarik Garanfilyan, Chairman of "Family and Community" NGO

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

Activity 4.1. Analysis of Armenian legislative framework and international experience in terms of improving the enabling environment for CSOs on local level. (CFOA, EPF, AJC)

During the reporting period, CELoG continued its active participation in discussions of the Electoral Code in different formats. CELoG submitted its proposals to the 4+4+4 format consisting of authorities, political opposition and civil society representatives, as well as to the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum. The suggestions were also discussed at the MTAD. Despite the fact that the new Electoral Code was adopted and afterwards additional changes were made, it cannot be considered to be final both due to the statements made by the Chief of Staff of the Government D. Harutyunyan and expectations expressed by the donor community, and CELoG will continue providing its input to the decision makers.

PROGRESS TOWARDS RESULTS

Despite all external factors and escalation of violence in NK, the Program continued the implementation of its activities as planned. Moreover, the CELoG team found resources and organizational capacities to reflect on the changing situation and implemented several additional activities as well as made several changes in the emphasis of some of its components so that the current situation in Armenia is taken into account. The 3rd quarter of the second program year has significant differences from previous reporting periods, which include the active implementation of smaller initiatives by CELoG beneficiaries themselves, involvement of both LG representatives and civil society in trainings, discussions, presentations as well as implementation of small scale project via InfoTuns and Youth Banks. During the next reporting period, the first of CFOA's small grants will produce their initial results.

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.

Despite the fact that activities under this objective remain significant by their amount and meaning, this objective is gradually handing over its dominant role to activities under the second and particularly the third objectives. This can be explained by the fact that the thinking behind the Program assumes an active capacity-building phase in the beginning which is later on gradually replaced by probation or practicing of these capacities by Program beneficiaries. This fact however does not mean that activities under Objective 1 will be completed, since apart from capacity building the dissemination of products created by consortium member organizations also falls under this objective. Additionally, the number of beneficiaries of the Program is constantly increasing which means that capacity-building activities will be necessary throughout the lifetime 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.

The Program is continuing its monitoring activities and collecting more data that will allow other CELoG members and a wide range of stakeholders to systematize and analyze it,

identifying the most effective strategies and intervention approaches. The monitoring process was also an “ongoing” effect, since it makes the processes more transparent and accountable. It should be mentioned though that the negative precedents that took place during the reporting period, and were literally against the logic of decentralization, illustrate the lack of will among decision makers to implement the reform smoothly and effectively. In such circumstances, the monitoring of activities becomes even more important, since it reveals both problems and progress, and allows the society to perceive the processes more critically. It should also be mentioned that some of the monitoring components have appeared under the third objective, since there are small grant projects that target the issue of accountability of the local authorities.

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

Activities conducted under this objective have become more significant during the current reporting period. The reason for this is the fact that working at the local level and the “snowball” effect of growing the number of Program beneficiaries involved broadens both the geography and the tools of CELoG. The fact that during the current reporting period just the InfoTunshave conducted 39 various events with the involvement of more than 500 participants illustrates that the CELoG direct audience has become bigger and more involved. The next step will be the collection and multiplication of success stories since they will become the most important stimulus for Program beneficiaries both already involved and to join CELoG in the future.

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

During the reporting period, CELoG continued to take part in the process of discussion of the electoral legislation with a special focus on LG elections and the role of local civil society actors in the process. Government resists accepting proposals of the opposition and the civil society related proposed broad rights of media and observing organizations. However, there is a positive factor in the process – consolidation of civil society and the ability to discuss and combine proposals and address them jointly. This becomes an important opportunity to exercise the advocacy capacities of civil society in Armenia.

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.

- ✓ 600 follow up conversations with communities;
- ✓ Public discussions of community budgets organized in 14 communities;
- ✓ 3 issues of Hamaynk-HaMaTegh newspaper published and disseminated - 3000 copies each;
- ✓ 4talk shows developed and broadcast on Yerkir Media TV station;
- ✓ 2 trainings for advisory bodies of 4 target communities with 25 total participants conducted
- ✓ 6 small grants awarded
- ✓ 39 InfoTun events with participation of 535 community activists
- ✓ 6 Mardamej projects awarded
- ✓ 10 Youth Bank projects supported
- ✓ Petition process launched in 3 pilot communities
- ✓ 3008 CELoG Facebook page followers .
- ✓ 2 seminars for 32 journalists

PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED

There were no major problems encountered during the Program implementation process. All activities planned within the framework of the Program 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.

A COMPARISON OF ACTUAL EXPENDITURES WITH BUDGET ESTIMATES

Actual budget expenditures were mostly in line with the budget estimates.

PRIORITIES FOR PROGRAMMING DURING THE NEXT REPORTING PERIOD

There are several priorities for the next reporting period.

- To continue intensive work in target communities,
- To promote the development of local initiatives,
- To identify the list of communities and monitor local elections to be held in September
- To wrap up second year activities and identify major needs for the third Program year

All these priorities are strongly connected with the Program objectives and the current logic of its development. Thus, the consortium should think about undertaking additional steps in making local resources more active since the level of involvement of local target groups facilitates the effectiveness of all programmatic activities.

V. Movsisyan
CoP of CELoG Program
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