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# **Civic Engagement in Local Governance (CELoG) Program**

**Annual 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  
PAARA- Public Administration Academy of the Republic of Armenia  
TARA - Territorial-Administrative Reform in Armenia  
TIAC - Transparency International Anti-Corruption Center  
YB- Youth Bank  
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 Program 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 second 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

The second year of the project was accompanied with a number of political developments that had significant influence both on the general situation in the country as well as the LG sector in particular. The beginning of the reporting period went in parallel with the preparation and organization of the Constitutional Referendum, which among other consequences, led to changes in the Electoral Code and the LG legislation.

Another important process that directly relates 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 Laws on Administrative Territorial Division and on Local Self-Government.<sup>1</sup> The first elections in consolidated communities took place in February 2016 and were followed by the political decision to consolidate a bigger number of communities, this development transformed the consolidation of communities from a pilot project to a reform that has the potential to cause more significant transformations in the LG system.

During the previous reporting period the state institution responsible for the LG policy – the Ministry of Territorial Administration – was merged with the Ministry of Emergency Situations and a new minister was appointed. About a year after that, the ruling Republican Party and ARF Dashnaktsutyun reached a political agreement on forming a government coalition. As part of the deal three ministerial posts were assigned to ARF. On February 24<sup>th</sup> 2016 the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Emergency Situations was demerged into Ministry of Territorial Administration and Development (MTAD) and Ministry of Emergency Situations. ARF Dashnaktsutyun representative David Loqyan was appointed the new Minister of MTAD. These decisions resulted in slight shift of the planned activities and the configurations of communities that were planned to be consolidated. Also since a need to have additional explanatory communication with the new Minister on the whole concept of community consolidation appeared.

Another important development was of course the April War that affected all aspects of social, political and economic life in Armenia. 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.

After the amendments made by the National Assembly on June 17, 2016 in the RA Law on Administrative territorial division to consolidate 15 community clusters in addition to the first three ones, the number of consolidated communities increased to 140 (22 communities within the first 3 clusters and 118 in 15 new clusters). After the consolidation of 15 clusters was legislated by the NA, CEC appointed the dates of local elections in these newly formed communities. This made the local elections on September 18<sup>th</sup> and October 2<sup>nd</sup> extremely important. For the first time the local authorities elected in consolidated communities became the local decision-making bodies in these multi-settlement communities for the next 5 years. In addition to this the role of the community council for the population of the settlements increased since the community council members would be the major representatives of particularly smaller settlements in their LG.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://parliament.am/register.php?AgendaID=400&day=13&month=11&year=2015&lang=#13.11.2015>

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).

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.

Local elections in a number of communities including consolidated ones can also be considered as an important development, since these were the first local elections after the constitutional changes and after the adoption of the new Electoral code. These elections were particularly important in Gyumri and Vanadzor since for the first time the local elections in the two cities were held in majoritarian system. This change was largely criticized by the political opposition and civil society actors due to the fact that indirect elections of the Head of Community would distance the community head from community members.

In September 2016 the Law on Financial Equalization was adopted by the National Assembly which is another important legal act for the LG system. CFOA has actively worked on this law and CELoG activities were aimed at making sure that the law is adopted with the provisions that create better opportunities for communities. The law was adopted with a three year transitional period which means that its provision will fully function starting from the fourth year of adoption.

Finally the latest development that took place in Armenia during the reporting period was the resignation of Prime-Minister Hovik Abrahamyan that took place on September 8<sup>th</sup> and appointment of Karen Karapetyan as the new head of the Government on September 13<sup>th</sup>. Taking into account that the next Government will be formed after the Parliamentary Elections in May 2017, the new Government has only 7 months to illustrate performance and address numerous issues that exist in Armenia.

## Summary of Conducted Activities

During the second 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*

### **1.4 Development of methodological materials to be used in the trainings and monitoring (CFOA, AJC)**

In order to ensure effective functioning of the newly established advisory bodies adjunct to mayors, CFOA has developed the training methodology for the advisory bodies in 35 target communities. The methodology sets goals and objectives of the training, its target audience, major topics, deductive materials, training methods and tools, as well as the performance evaluation tools.

The methodology contains 9 topics which are covering issues on LG in general, public participation, budgeting, monitoring and etc. Each topic has relevant supporting materials that will be handed out to training participants. The draft version of the methodology has been sent to USAID for feedback and has been revised based on received comments and suggestions.

**Data indicators:** Methodology for training of the advisory bodies developed

### **1.5 Trainings for the target community activists on data utilization and citizen journalism (EPF, CRRC)**

EPF in cooperation with MIC and MICE project has conducted training on media literacy for EPFs InfoTun network. Representatives from all 8 InfoTuns participated in the training and had the opportunity to learn about methods and tips for analysis and dissemination of information received from media outlets. Another training conducted jointly by CELoG and MICE project for InfoTuns was a webinar dedicated to LG reform. CFOA expert Knarik Ayvazova introduced to InfoTun representatives and beneficiaries the major developments in LG sector.

During the reporting period CRRC has developed a module on data utilization and presented to consortium members. After the discussion of the module it was decided to divide the data utilization training into two phases. The first phase will be more comprehensive and detailed and will be organized for the CELoG consortium members. The second one will focus more on practical aspects of data utilization and will be conducted for the representatives of the regional CSOs and media. After this discussion CRRC has redesigned its module and split it into two parts. The trainings will be organized during the next reporting period.

**Data indicators:** 2 Trainings on Media Literacy and LG reform organized for InfoTuns, 2 modules on data utilization developed.

### **1.7 Journalists trainings on LSG (YPC)**

During the reporting period YPC organized 4 trainings and one briefing for journalists on various aspects of the LG reform.

The briefing was organized with participation of CELoG international experts and in cooperation with Media Initiatives Center implementing MICE project. Below list illustrates the topics of each training and number of participants:

1. “Current Problems of Local Self Government in the Context of the Amendments to the RA Constitution and the Electoral Code,” 32 journalists and media experts, (10 from local media and 22 from Yerevan).
2. “Civic Engagement in Local Self Governance: New Challenges and Issues.” 40 journalists and media experts (17 regional and 8 Yerevan media).
3. “Current Issues of Local Self-Government Sector”. The participants (41 in number) listed representatives of Armenian state structures, local self-government bodies, political parties, NGOs and both traditional and alternative media (18 in total, mainly from regional TV stations and newspapers).
4. “Local Self Government Elections in the context of Reforms to Local Self Governance Field”. The participants (42 in number) listed representatives of political parties, NGOs and both traditional and alternative media of Armenia (22 in total).

**Data indicators:** 1 briefing and 4 trainings on LG for traditional and alternative media.

### **1.9 Ensuring the quality and user-friendliness of texts, media materials and web materials (EPF)**

During the reporting period EPF has supported CELoG partners in development of various texts and materials.

EPF assisted CFOA staff in preparing and announcing of the call for proposals for small grants competition to be announced by CFOA in April. EPF also assisted CFOA staff in developing the content of these documents. Namely the recommendations on possible directions, spheres and types of activities developed during EPF’s Organizational Activity Seminar during the first program year were widely reflected in the RFA.

EPF also consulted AJC on redesign and revision of the quarterly newsletter. EPF staff held several consultations with AJC team and discussed possible improvements that may make the quarterly newsletter more user-friendly and dynamic. The new concept for the AJC newsletter was introduced to CFOA and USAID and approved. In April 2016 the re-branded newsletter will be issued.

In addition to the above mentioned EPF has assisted CFOA in development of project quarterly reports, as well as handouts and presentations for dissemination among the stakeholders during project events.

**Data indicators:** Quality of CELoG textual products improved



### **1.10. Cooperation with other development actors and other consortia**

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

During the strategic consultation organized by EPF for its InfoTun network, representatives of other USAID funded consortia were invited to introduce their programs. Moreover, since InfoTun network is actively involved in both CELoG and MICE projects, the process of the development of the strategy reflected a combination of objectives of both projects.

Another case of cooperation between CELoG and MICE projects took place during the local elections in Tatev, Dilijan and Tumanyan communities. Both projects were involved in monitoring the process each in its own capacity. This involvement created a natural ground for cooperation, particularly in cases where there was a risk of violations. In such cases representatives of the CELoG monitoring group alerted colleagues from the MICE.

CELoG continued cooperation with MICE project during the visit of international experts invited by CFOA. The two projects have jointly organized a press conference for representatives of media outlets taking part in CELoG trainings and briefings and MICE project's target media outlets (More details available in description of the Activity 1.7 above).

While developing CELoG web portal, ISDTC has consulted with CSO DePo project led by EPF in terms of DePo's experience in development of hkdepo.am website. This cooperation resulted in adding of experts section in the CELoG portal.

Cooperation with other partners also took place during the reporting period. In June 2016, CELoG was invited to take part in the annual meeting of organizations involved in the implementation of LG reform in Armenia held by GIZ. CELoG team introduced Program activities and major outcomes of the first Program year. The meeting was followed by an agreement to involve CELoG consortium in the network facilitated by GIZ on regular basis.

**Data indicators:** Effective cooperation between CELoG and other USAID funded projects, as well as LG sector stakeholders takes place for mutual benefit.

### **1.11. Development of internal electronic management system for consortium (ISDTC)**

During the first project year the consortium has created internal communication mechanism via establishment of two thematic e-mail groups and a Facebook group. During the development of the portal ISDTC has created an internal communication system that will start functioning in the third project year. This system is integrated in the portal and will allow CELoG staff not only exchange messages but also receive short notifications, upload information, share files, etc.

**Data indicators:** Internal management and communication system developed and ready for use

### **1.12. Identification and localization of IT tools for decentralization existing in other countries**

## **(ISDTC)**

During the reporting period ISDTC has worked on identification and localization of IT tools of other countries. After the study tour to Estonia organized by EPF ISDTC has developed 22 practical suggestions that may increase the effectiveness of the e-governance component in LG system. These suggestions include such ideas as participatory e-budgeting, distant services for people with limited mobility, system of electronic notifications, online receipt of documents (such as permissions and references, etc.). During the next reporting period ISDTC will both continue collection of such ideas and work on localization of most relevant tools in Armenia. EPF will also organize a presentation of the results of the study trip to Estonia during which each of the trip participants will introduce the proposals related to their field of activity that were developed thanks to the trip.

**Data indicators:** 22 ideas on improvement of LG e-governance system identified

### **1.14 Consortium retreat and annual meetings (CFOA, All Partners)**

In order to ensure effective internal communication and planning CELoG continued strategic meetings in the midst and end of the project year. The mid-term meeting of the project took place in April 2016 and was hosted by AJC in Gyumri. This meeting took place immediately after the April War and apart from other issues was aimed at discussion of possible impact of the War on project activities.

The agenda of the meeting was quite inclusive. Consortium members updated each other about their project components, introduced successes and problematic issues. The three most burning issues - draft Electoral Code, LG developments and April War were presented by Levon Barseghyan, David Tumanyan and Gevorg Ter- Gabrielyan respectively.

The Consortium retreat took place on September 8-9, 2016 with the involvement of staff members from all Consortium organizations.

As it happened at the end of the first project year the second retreat was also aimed at summing up the results of the passing year activities and planning of the third project year. The draft action plan was introduced to the consortium members and discussed.

Apart from these meeting the consortium held periodic and ad hoc board and staff meetings.

**Data indicators:** 2 strategic meetings held in the middle and at the end of the project year, periodic board and staff meetings to discuss ongoing issues held regularly throughout the year.

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

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

During the reporting period CFOA has published monitoring reports in two volumes - 2012-2013 and 2014 respectively. The two volumes were presented to public on November 3, 2015 with participation of around 45 participants, including representatives of the MTAES, LGs, local and international CSOs and experts.

The following report on monitoring of decentralization and LSG reform for 2015 was developed in 2016. The format of the report and format of its presentation on September 6 remained the same as it was for the previous reports, which enables consistency and having comparable data for the years monitored. In parallel with that CFOA started discussions with CRRC on development of a composite LG index on the basis of the reports and studying methodologies existing in other countries and/or in other sectors for development of a similar index. It is anticipated the 2016 report will already have its index system.

**Data indicators:** Reports for 2012-2013, 2014 and 2015 published and presented.

### **2.1. b Monitoring of local elections in three consolidated communities (CFOA, EPF, YPC, AJC).**

After the Constitutional referendum the local referenda on community consolidation is not any more required. Since the project had funds in the budget allocated for monitoring local referenda, the project management sought and obtained USAID concurrence to use these funds for monitoring local elections in consolidated communities. The first phase of local government elections in consolidated communities took place in February 2016 in Tatev, Dilijan and Tumanyan.

The consortium has mobilized its member organizations EPF, CFOA, AJC and YPC to organize monitoring missions in all three communities. AJC provided its partners with badges allowing monitors to be present in the polling stations, YPC, CFOA and EPF were responsible for organization of the missions in Tumanyan, Tatev and Dilijan respectively. EPF has mobilized its InfoTun network for recruitment of monitoring participants. As a result all 34 polling stations in three consolidated communities were covered. Ninety-two representatives of the CELoG consortium were present in polling stations from the opening till the end of account. Three mobile groups traveled from station to station and coordinated the overall process of monitoring. After the monitoring process was completed CELoG has developed the report and submitted to USAID (See Annex 1).

The second phase of monitoring took place during September 18th and October 2nd elections. CELoG has selected Urtsadzor, Noyemberyan, Zaritap and Jermuk communities for monitoring.

Since these elections took place on the borderline of the second and third years of the project, the report on monitoring the local elections in the fall will be submitted during the next reporting period.

**Data indicators:** Monitoring of LG elections in five consolidated communities organized with involvement of 127 monitors.

## **2.2. Annual media awards (YPC)**

The jury consisting of representatives from consortium members as well as media experts has been monitoring media publications on LG reforms since the October 2015. At the same time YPC staff members continued informal limited media coverage monitoring to identify media outlets and journalists that are involved in the coverage of local government reforms. In addition, YPC was contacting other media experts for their opinion on respective media coverage. Compared to the previous year, in the second year of the project there was a bigger amount of media pieces dedicated to the issues of LSG. This fact among others can be explained by the activities of YPC in the frames of CELoG program, as well as by the work of the whole consortia. In contrast to the last year, this time YPC with the help of media experts selected four finalists for to be awarded during the official ceremony. The award ceremony was held on July 18 and was combined with the 21st anniversary event of YPC.



“Kotayq” newspaper reporter Agnesa Hovakimyan, who has been working in journalism for 38 years, received an award for her long and dedicated work in the regional press (mostly writing for “Kotayk” print newspaper). Freelance journalist Gayane Mkrtchyan (previously ArmeniaNow) was awarded for consistent coverage of the important issues of life in the regions. Araratnews.am journalist Shoghik Galstyan received an award for her active coverage of local self-governance topics. And finally, Goris Press Club was given an award for best publicizing the reform of local self-government bodies.

**Data indicators:** Four media representatives received awards in four nominations for covering LG sector

## **2.3 Collection, classification and placement of materials related to budgets, policy and legal changes and amendments, suggestions on reform improvement on [www.publicdata.am](http://www.publicdata.am) (AJC)**

During the reporting period AJC has conducted large amount of work in terms of applying the law on FoI in requesting local authorities for information related to community budgets, development plans, community council decisions, etc. AJC has developed and disseminated formal requests for information to all LGs and received 908 replies. Only 7 LG did not provide proper responses to information requests.

The receipt of responses was often a long lasting process of exchange of correspondence, phone calls etc. Upon collecting all the responses, AJC conducted analysis of answers and developed a

report. (See Annex 2 attached). This report will be presented in all regions of Armenia and Yerevan, as well as placed on publicdata.am website after final restructuring of the latter.

**Data indicators:** Information requests/ questionnaires submitted to 915 LGs, receipt notifications from 908 LGs, full of partial replies received from 323 LGs, monitoring report developed.

#### **2.4 Public discussions of 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. In order to increase the effectiveness of this process CFOA has contacted 35 large rural and urban target communities and assisted those in organizing of these hearings in accordance with the procedures on public hearings and discussions developed in the first project year. CFOA experts provided support in preparing of the presentation material for the event and participated in the hearings in 28 communities. There were cases when in two communities the public hearing took place on the same day, so it was impossible to be present in all hearings.

The hearings were mostly organized in the municipal halls during the period of December 2015-January 2016. The notice about the event was disseminated via information boards, community official web sites and Facebook.

**Data indicators:** Assistance in organization of public hearings on community budgets in 28 target communities provided.

#### **2.5. Market research on improvement of community e-governance systems (ISDTC)**

In order to receive public feedback on improvement of the municipal e-governance system, ISDTC has conducted series of activities and meetings. They were aimed at receiving feedback from the system users, as well as introducing the system to wider circle of potential users. ISDTC looked for proposals on further improvement of user-friendliness of community websites and MMIS system.

During the report period ISDTC in cooperation with EPF has organized two discussions/presentations of the MMIS system with participation of representatives of LGs, central authorities, regional CSOs and USAID funded consortia. The first presentation of the MMIS system was followed by discussion and collection of feedback from the audience that was analyzed and applied where possible. The suggested changes were introduced to the audience during second presentation.

Series of presentations of community official websites was organized in 6 EPF InfoTuns (Ararat, Vayk, Goris, Ijevan and Armavir). Each presentation was followed by group discussions. They were aimed at identifying a burning community issue and addressing this issue to local authorities via websites. The second group of participants developed suggestions for improvement of community websites and also addressed them to local decision makers electronically. InfoTuns will follow up these processes and report on progress to the consortium.

ISDTC has also organized similar presentation in cooperation with CFOA in Ashtarak community.

**Data indicators:** Feedback on improvement of LG related IT tools discussed during 2 presentations of MMIS system and 6 presentations of community websites at InfoTuns. 12 Initiatives on addressing LG issues via IT mechanisms launched.

### **2.7. Development and advocacy of recommendations on improvement of the reform process (CFOA, All partners)**

In the scope of this activity CFOA hosted two international experts to ensure that international experience and best practices are taken into account during the reform implementation in Armenia. Pavel Swianiewicz, Head of the Department of Local Development and Policy, Faculty of Geography and Regional Studies, University of Warsaw, EU expert on financial and regional issues and Anthony Levitas, Senior Fellow, Watson Institute for International Studies, Brown University, have visited Armenia under this sub-component. Their mission was to consult CFOA experts on local self-government related provisions in the recently amended constitution, draft electoral code, as well as organization of local self-government in multi-settlement communities.

One of the two experts – Tony Levitas - was focused on issues of local finance, financial equalization; methodologies of financial management of multi-settlement and single settlement communities, financial accountability and public monitoring tools, mechanisms for proportional distribution of resources for multi-community settlements, as well as design of predictable, adequate, equitable and accountable transfer systems on the local level and participatory investment planning and financial reporting. Pawel Swianiewicz's areas of interest were in decentralization, public participation mechanisms, transparency and accountability of the decision making process on local level, mechanisms of organization of local government for multi-settlement communities, participatory processes for large single settlement communities.

During the visits the experts had several meetings with the state officials, USAID representatives, Consortium members, students of American University of Armenia and Public Administration Academy of the RA.

The experts had prepared Policy brief, which was submitted to the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Development and Parliamentary committee on Territorial Administration and Local Self-government (Annex 3). It can be stated that the document helped to synchronize the viewpoints of the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Development and Local and International experts, which helped to have effective recommendations to the laws.

The second visit of the international expert to Armenia was planned in the second year. However, 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 third project year, so that the discussion of the draft law by the consortium fits the timeline of the government.

**Data indicators:** One policy brief developed and submitted to decision makers. Viewpoints of the Ministry and Local and International experts were synchronized.

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

CFOA made an analysis and prepared recommendation for the draft Law on Local Self-Government that was adopted in May, 2016. The law was amended based on the Constitutional requirements. The CFOA experts prepared 71 recommendations and submitted them to the Government of Republic of Armenia. Furthermore, since the revised draft still had number of concerning statements, CFOA prepared and disseminated a statement. It was sent to the President, National Assembly, Government and Ministry of Territorial administration and Development. Throughout the year CELoG was lobbying for these proposals and as result 34 proposals and comments were incorporated in the law. Despite the fact that some of the concerning statements still remain the consortium continues lobbying for their improvement.

The consortium was also actively following the process of development of the new Electoral Code. CFOA and AJC have developed recommendations on improvement of the Code and after discussion within the consortium these proposals were submitted to the Government and the National Assembly via various channels. The consortium has submitted its recommendations to the decision makers as well as participated in the process initiated by the National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum. In addition CELoG recommendations were communicated to the Venice Commission both in written form and during a meeting with the Commission representatives in Yerevan.

Along with the draft Law on LG that was developed after the Constitutional changes and adopted in May 2016 the Government developed the Law on Inter-community unions, which was also analyzed by CFOA experts. The appropriate recommendations were developed and submitted to the Government. (See Annex 4 for recommendations to the Law on LSG, Law on Inter-community Unions and statements of draft laws are attached). Since the law is still in circulation it is hard to estimate the exact number of CELoG proposals that are taken into account.

**Data indicators:** Three sets of recommendations were developed and submitted to the decision makers. 34 recommendations out of 71 submitted were incorporated in the Law on LG.

## **2.9. Scanning of international experience on public participation in LSG and recommendations on localization (EPF)**

Within the framework of Civic Engagement in Local Governance (CELoG) program a tour to study Estonian experience in LG reform and community amalgamation was organized for representatives of the consortium member organizations. Seven representatives of CELoG traveled to Estonia on September 11-15.

The agenda of the visit was structured in a deductive way so that the participants would first receive general information about LG sector and afterwards particular aspects of the reform. The study tour consisted of meetings with experts in LG sector, representatives of central and local authorities and civil society organizations.

The meeting with the head of GeoMedia organization which is one of the leading consulting

entities in Estonia on LG issues allowed participants to see the general picture of the reform process its major logic and main activities. Meeting with representatives of Network of Non-Governmental Organizations gave the civil society perspective on LG reform. Representatives of the Union of Municipalities introduced the process of community amalgamation and attitude of LGs to the process. Taking into account the Estonian experience in using IT tools in government, the study tour also included meeting with the representatives of e-Governance Academy. This provided an opportunity to study their projects in involving citizens in the local government via application of various electronic participation mechanisms. The perspective of central authorities was introduced by the representative of Ministry of Finance that is one of the major central institutions dealing with the process of local government and community amalgamation. CELoG team also visited Viljandi and Laane Nigula communities and learnt their experience in community amalgamation, participatory mechanisms they use, as well as visiting various community institutions and learning about their functioning in detail.

The study tour gave the participants an opportunity to receive first-hand information about the LG system from all major stakeholders, as well as to reflect on the current situation of the reform in Armenia evaluate its positive and negative tendencies, achievements and shortcomings. Based on the results of the trip all participants will present brief reports on possible application of collected knowledge in Armenia that will be used during the implementation of the project.

The report will be presented during the next reporting period during the briefing that will be organized for sector stakeholders.

**Data indicators:** Study tour to Estonia for consortium member organizations implemented. Meetings with representatives of local and central authorities, civil society and expert community held. Visits to two consolidated communities conducted. Possibilities of the use of Estonian experience identified.

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

### **3.1a Introduction of legal, policy and participatory aspects of decentralization in 35 larger communities, Trainings for local Advisory Bodies (CFOA)**

CFOA completed the set of three-day trainings for the advisory bodies of the 35 target municipalities. The trainings were organized according to the developed methodology (See Activity 1.4. for details).

In order to conduct these trainings within a relatively short time frame, CFOA involved an additional expert with the approval of USAID. Two teams of experts organized 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 which attended the seminars.



	Seninar/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	Goris	17	7	24
8	Spitak	16	4	20
9	Akhuryan, Azatan	14	11	25
10	Artik, Maralik	15	13	28
11	Byureghavan, Jrvej	14	9	23
12	Qajaran	13	11	24
13	Masis, Mkhchyan	12	15	27
14	Sisian	18	7	25
15	Yeghegnadzor	14	7	21
16	Gavar, Vardenik	13	16	29
17	Noratus, Sarukhan, Karmirgyugh	7	13	20
18	Berd	14	8	22
	<b>Total</b>	<b>252</b>	<b>177</b>	<b>429</b>

(See Annex 5 for the short narrative report on trainings)

**Data indicators:** Trainings in 18 communities organized for 429 participants

### **Activity 3.1b Introduction of community consolidation concepts in 18 target communities (CFOA)**

During the project year one the project introduced the community consolidation concepts in 22 communities in Tatev, Dilijan and Tumanyan clusters. In the second year CFOA has selected 3 other community clusters consisting of 19 communities in total to continue the process. CFOA team of experts visited Urtsadzor, Ayrum and Noyemberyan communities, had meetings and presentations with the local authorities and citizens.

**Data indicators:** Community consolidation concepts introduced in 19 communities.

### **3.2. 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 announced 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. The best 6 proposals were selected and 4 were placed in a waiting list. As a result 7 organizations and appropriate projects have been selected to be funded (See Annex 6 for the list of organization and project short description).

### **EPF InfoTun Network**

During the reporting period EPF has launched its InfoTun component to ensure more active involvement of local civil society activists in the process of project implementation. In February 2016 EPF conducted a planning meeting with InfoTun representatives and discussed the framework of activities to be implemented. After the development and signing of respective grant agreements InfoTuns network operating in 8 regions of Armenia conducted their activities as planned by their activity plans.

Overall the number of events organized by InfoTuns is 88 and the number of participants is 1107. Gender distribution of the participants is the following: 718 female and 389 male. All InfoTuns have their FB pages and Blogs, where they actively cover community issues, community council sittings and meetings, share training announcements and InfoTuns' activities. (See Annex 7 for the detailed description of InfoTun Activities)

### **EPF Youth Bank Network**

Prior to launch of its Youth Bank component within the framework of the CELoG project EPF has recruited and trained the new generation of Youth Bankers. As a result Youth Bank committees were formed in 9 communities of Armenia (Dilijan, Ijevan, Vanadzor, Goris, Gyumri, Yeghegnadzor, Ararat, Martuni and Armavir). After the recruitment and training processes were completed the Youth Bank network launched the process of announcement and awarding of small community grants to its beneficiaries. As a result 31 projects were implemented in 21 settlements of Armenia. (See Annex 8 for detailed description of Youth Bank projects)

**Data indicators:** 60 small grant proposals received by CFOA, 7 projects supported, 1107 beneficiaries involved in InfoTun activities in 8 communities, Youth Banks launched in 9 communities, 31 Small community projects implemented in 21 settlements.

### **3.3.a Supporting petitions to *avaganis* through collection of signatures in communities (CFOA)**

CFOA initiated the first exercise of applying to community councils with a petition. This is one of the direct mechanisms of public participation in local governance which is relatively new in Armenia. Thus, CFOA involved local experts to support the process of development of petitions and application to community councils.

Spitak, Alaverdi and Noyemberyan communities were selected to pilot petitioning. CFOA local experts conducted meetings in the mentioned communities with involvement of active citizens and CSOs. The goal of the meetings was to present the initiative and define the community issues. Each community initiative has selected one important issue to pass to the Community Council. Noyemberyan and Spitak initiatives have applied to their Community Councils with a proposal to build playgrounds for children in public parks and Alaverdi initiative proposed to extend the operation of public transport to later hours.

All three petitions were developed and submitted in accordance to the requirements of the procedure, were included in the Community Council meeting agenda and discussed. Councils passed decisions with regards to these petitions and made necessary arrangements to satisfy requirements. These cases will become the basis for the handbook that will be developed jointly by CFOA and EPF during the next reporting period.

**Data indicators:** Process of submission of petitions to community councils practiced in 3 communities of Armenia, issues raised in petitions included in the Community Council agenda and satisfied by the latter in all three communities.

### **3.3.b Public hearings on pressing community issues (CFOA)**

CFOA supported organization of 2 public discussions on most burning community issues in Alaverdi and Vedi communities. For the case of Alaverdi the hearing was linked to the process of development and submission of petition to the Community Council and was aimed at fostering the initiative and supporting the establishment of the dialog between active group and local authorities. The discussion took place in Alaverdi city hall on 22 June, 2016 with the participation of head of municipality, council members, LG staff, and CSOs (18 participants).

The second discussion took place in Vedi. There was a direct request from the head of the municipality and staff to organize such a meeting to discuss the current changes in legislation regarding Law on Local Self Government, Financial Equalization, Inter-municipal unions and etc. CFOA experts visited the community on 28 September, 2016. Overall 21 participants attended the hearing representing LG staff, Vedi community union, former head of consolidated communities and SCO representatives. (See Annex 9 for the meeting reports)

**Data indicators:** 2 public hearings on burning community issues organized, 39 participants.

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

During the reporting period ISDTC has completed the development of the celog.am web portal. This process included coding, web design, uploading of information, purchase and establishment

of servers, purchase of domain and hosting, organization of trainings for consortium members on portal administration. Starting from the third project year the portal will become the major web platform of the project.

During the second year Hamaynq-HaMaTegh («Համայնք Հասցեագր») monthly newspaper was regularly published in 3000 copies each. It was disseminated free of charge. The newspaper was sent by regular mail to the communities, government agencies and partner organizations, as well as disseminated during the Consortium's public events. The electronic version of the newspaper issues is available on CFOA website and CELoG web portal.

The newspaper includes news about the CELoG program and major developments and news in the LG system. Articles and interviews about the CELoG activities, the community amalgamation process, perspectives of reform of the LG system, etc. were included in these issues.

During the reporting period AJC has developed 4 and disseminated 3 quarterly newsletters. Due to repeated criticism from USAID on the quality of this product and after internal discussions within the consortium, it was decided to make several changes in the newsletter's concept and design. It was decided to produce it only in Armenian and add several thematic sections, such as introduction to important legal changes, introduction of CELoG target communities, success stories etc. As a result there was a visible improvement of the quality of the newsletter in terms of the relevance of materials, language quality and structural design. During the reporting period three issues were developed and issued in reworked format.

During the reporting period EPF has produced two short animations entitled "*Where a person stands*" («Մարդու տեղը» in Armenian) general introducing the essence of local self-governance. The animations were introduced to consortium members and are actively used during consortium events. The short stories are also uploaded on various platforms of the consortium and are actively disseminated via Facebook. The YouTube versions of the animations have collected more than 650 views during the 5 month period. The animations are shown during trainings organized by consortium members, used by InfoTuns during their events. During the next periods of the portal the consortium will work on wider dissemination of the cartoons.

**Data indicators:** celog.am web portal developed and ready for operation, 12 issues (3000 copies each) of Hamaynq-HaMaTegh monthly issued and circulated, 4 issues of AJC Newsletter developed 3 issues circulated, 2 short animations developed by EPF and disseminated among project beneficiaries, scripts of 2 short animations developed.

### **3.5. TV talk shows regional broadcast (YPC)**

During the reporting period YPC continued to develop and broadcast series of TV talk shows covered nationally. It also developed and broadcasted series of regional (marz-level) talk shows dedicated to various aspects of the LG reform. In total 13 national and 4 regional talk shows were developed and broadcasted during the second project year. Below are brief descriptions and links to all talk shows:

### [#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.

Duration: 40 minutes.

Topic: “Discussion of the constitutional reforms.”

Program host: Boris Navasardian, YPC President

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

### [#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.

Duration: 40 minutes.

Topic: “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

### [#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.

Duration: 40 minutes.

Topic: “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

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

The talk show was filmed on January 25 and broadcast via Yerkir Media on Tuesday, January 26 at 18:40 and was rebroadcast on Wednesday January 27 at 11:40.

Duration: 40 minutes.

Topic: “LSG election year: Tasks and issues of media and NGOs”.

Program host: Boris Navasardian, YPC President

Invited speakers: Mikayel Hovhannisyan, Program Manager at Eurasia Partnership Foundation, Arevhat Grigoryan, Editor of “Hamaynk-HaMaTegh” monthly newspaper, Levon Barseghyan, President of Asparez Journalists’ Club, member of Gyumri city Council of Elders, Armen

Grigoryan, Elections' Program coordinator, TIAC

**#12 “Mamuli Akumb-HaMaTegh” TV talk show**

The talk show was filmed on January 28 and broadcast via Yerkir Media on Tuesday, February 2 at 18:40 and was rebroadcast on February 3 at 11:40.

Duration: 40 minutes.

Topic: “The role of public information in LSG reforms”.

Program host: Boris Navasardian, YPC President

Invited speakers: Sara Petrosyan, Journalist at Hetq.am online newspaper, Grisha Khachatryan, President of Information System Development and Training Center, Voskan Sargsyan, Editor of “Tesankyun” newspaper in Tavush region, Heriknaz Harutyunyan, YPC editor

**#13 “Mamuli Akumb-HaMaTegh” TV talk show**

The talk show was filmed on February 2 and broadcast via Yerkir Media on Tuesday, February 9 at 18:40 and was rebroadcast on February 10 at 11:40.

Duration: 40 minutes.

Topic: “The role of InfoCenter in LSG elections”.

Program host: Boris Navasardian, YPC President

Invited speakers: Susan Shahnazaryan, President of Goris Press Club, Varsik Nerkanyan, Ijevan InfoCenter coordinator, Zara Nikoghosyan, Vanadzor InfoCenter coordinator, Yeghiazar Davtyan, Martuni Community Women's Council coordinator

**#14 “Mamuli Akumb-HaMaTegh” TV talk show**

The talk show was filmed on February 15 and broadcast via Yerkir Media on Tuesday, February 16 at 18:40 and was rebroadcast on February 17 at 11:40.

Duration: 40 minutes.

Topic: “LSG elections on February 14: Civil society monitoring action”.

Program host: Boris Navasardian, YPC President

Invited speakers: Vahan Movsisyan, Chairman of Communities Finance Officers Association, Narine Safaryan, Educational Programs Director of Media Initiatives Center, Gayane Mkrtchyan, Journalist at ArmeniaNow, Haykak Arshamyan, Programs Manager at YPC

**#15 “Mamuli Akumb-HaMaTegh” TV talk show**

The talk show was filmed on February 29 and broadcast via Yerkir Media on Tuesday, March 1 at 18:40 and was rebroadcast on March 2 at 11:40.

Duration: 40 minutes.

Topic: “Amendments to RA Electoral Code”.

Program host: Boris Navasardian, YPC President

Invited speakers: Vahan Movsisyan, President of Communities Finance Officers Association, Lusine Hakobyan, Chairman of Europe in Law Association, Armen Grigoryan, Elections' Program coordinator, Transparency International Anti-corruption Center, Arpi Makhsudyan, Journalist at CivilNet

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

The talk show was filmed March 21 and broadcast via Yerkir Media on Tuesday, March 22 at 18:40 and was rebroadcast on March 23 at 11:40.

Duration: 40 minutes.

Topic; “LSG reforms in the context of Amendments to RA Electoral Code”.

Program host: Boris Navasardian, YPC President

Invited speakers: Levon Barseghyan, President of Asparez Journalists' Club, member of Gyumri city Community Council, Irina Vanyan, LSG expert, Ph.D in Economics, Siranush Papyan, Journalist at 1in.am and Lragir.am online portals, Arevhat Grigoryan, Editor of “Hamaynk-HaMaTegh” monthly newspaper

#### [#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.

Duration: 40 minutes.

Topic “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 Community Council, Voskan Sargsyan, Editor of “Tesankyun” newspaper in Tavush region

#### [#18 “Mamuli Akumb-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.

Duration: 40 minutes.

Topic: “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: Armen Grigoryan, Coordinator of Elections' program at the Transparency International Anti-Corruption Center, Nelli Rafayelyan, News programs editor at Shoghakat TV, Mnatsakan Harutyunyan, Director of Hrazdan TV, Ruben Hayrapetyan, Member of CFOA board

#### [#19 “Mamuli Akumb-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.

Duration 40 minutes.

Topic: “Administrative decentralization as a strategic plan of RA.”

Program host: Boris Navasardian, YPC President

Invited speakers: Vahan Movsisyan, President of Communities Finance Officers Association, Armine Tukhikyan, Chairman of the board of Urban Foundation, Mushegh Karapetyan, Consultant at the State Committee of Water Economy of the RA, Artashes Bakhshyan, Deputy Minister of the Territorial Administration and Development

**#20 “Mamuli Akumb-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.

Duration: 40 minutes.

Topic: “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, Haykak Arshamyan, Programs Manager at Yerevan Press Club, Knarik Garanfilyan, Chairman of “Family and Community” NGO

<i>TV station</i>	<i>Day of filming</i>	<i>Day of broadcast and link</i>
<i>Tsayg TV, Gyumri</i> <i>Name of the TV talk show: “Real Elections”</i> <i>Host: Nazeli Baghdasaryan</i> <i>Guests: Isabella Sargsyan, Eurasia Partnership Foundation</i> <i>Armen Grigoryan, Transparency International</i> <i>Anti-corruption Center</i> <i>Seyran Martirosyan, Sakharov Human Rights Centre, Shirak regional branch</i>	13.09.2016	13.09.2016 <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XVvtkOdRiJE">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XVvtkOdRiJE</a>
<i>ALT TV, Armavir</i> <i>Name of the TV talk show: “Bazmaket”</i> <i>Host: Anjela Stepanyan</i> <i>Guests: Boris Navasardian, YPC</i> <i>Vahan Movsisyan, CFOA</i> <i>Khachik Danielyan, ALT TV</i> <i>Nairia Arakelyan, Armavir</i>	14.09.2016	16.09.2016 <i>Will be uploaded soon</i>



<i>InfoTun</i>		
<i>Sevan TV, Sevan</i> <i>Name of the TV program:</i> <i>“Hamaynkapatker”</i> <i>Host: Suren Barseghyan</i> <i>Guests: Anahit Gevorgyan,</i> <i>Martuni InfoTun</i> <i>Vahe Sargsyan, CFOA</i> <i>Armine Ghukasyan, Sevan</i> <i>Municipality</i> <i>Arpine Manukyan, Civil</i> <i>Society representative</i>	15.09.2016	17.09.2016 <i>Will be uploaded soon</i>
<i>Lori TV, Vanadzor</i> <i>Name of the TV program:</i> <i>“Democracy starts from</i> <i>the community”</i> <i>Host: Lusine Sargsyan</i> <i>Guests: Boris Navasardian,</i> <i>YPC</i> <i>Armine Tukhikyan, Urban</i> <i>Foundation</i> <i>Narine Avetisyan, Lori TV</i> <i>Gevorg Kotanjyan,</i> <i>Helsinki Committee of</i> <i>Armenia, Vanadzor</i>	22.09.2016	26.09.2016 <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dfsClQkd2nQ&amp;feature=youtu.be">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dfsClQkd2nQ&amp;feature=youtu.be</a>

**Data indicators:** 13 national and 4 regional Talk shows developed and broadcasted.

### **3.6. Annual discussions with university students (CFOA)**

On September 27 CELoG held a meeting with the students of the Public Administration Academy.

CFOA experts presented the changes in the sphere of public administration to the students. CFOA representatives delivered lectures on various issues related to local self-governance to the PAARA students as well as answered the questions.

Students were introduced to different models of financial equalization, drafts amendments to the Laws on Local Self-Government and Financial equalization as well as activities in the framework of CELoG program.

**Data indicators:** Meeting with Public Administration Academy of the Republic of Armenia students organized.

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

#### **4.1. Analysis of draft legal acts related to CSOs in LSG (CFOA, EPF)**

CFOA experts made an analysis of the legislation regulating the CSO-LG cooperation area. During the analysis two draft laws were mainly taken into account - the Draft Law on NGOs and the Draft Law on LG. Both are developed and are currently in the National Assembly.

The analysis tackles the issues on State-CSO's and LSG-CSO's relation, the mechanism of funding the CSO's. It was revealed that there is lack of transparency and accountability of official bodies which prevent effective cooperation between LGs and CSOs. The state funding to CSOs is also subject to revisions since it is rather centralized. In general there is lack of cooperation mechanisms between the LG and institutionalized civil society entities.

The analysis in partnership with EPFs study of international experience will be presented to stakeholders (MTAD, MoJ, NA) during the next reporting period.

**Data indicators:** Analysis of local legislation in terms of regulation of CSO-LG cooperation conducted.

#### **4.4. Study of the international experience on CSO-LSG cooperation and development of a report (EPF)**

During the reporting period EPF announced the Terms of Reference for conducting a study of international experience in legal and policy areas regulating the cooperation between the local CSOs and LGs. This research contract was paired with the similar research of local legislation conducted by CFOA and thus during the development of the ToR EPF and CFOA staffs consulted with each other. 16 proposals were received and Alina Poghosyan was selected as a winning candidate. It is anticipated that the report will be finalized and presented to consortium members by the end of November 2016.

**Data indicators:** ToR for conducting study of the international experience on CSO-LSG cooperation developed and announced, 16 proposals received, and winning candidate selected.

## Progress towards results

As it was predicted during the sum up of the first project year, the second year of project implementation became the launch of the utilization of project products which will however continue to be accompanied with capacity building and product development process.

Below is the description of project progress by project 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 implementation of decentralization reform.**

The progress registered under this objective is illustrated in a number of outcomes and outputs. One of these outcomes was the finalization of development of methodological materials followed by their application or introduction among project beneficiaries. Training aimed at both building the capacity of project beneficiaries and participants and more active involvement of the latter in project activities. Another important outcome was more substantial communication and cooperation with other USAID funded consortia. This was evident particularly between CELoG and MICE projects.

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

During the reporting period the capacity of the civil society to monitor LG sector started to spread from the consortium to project beneficiaries. Outcomes under this objective include both capacity building for project beneficiaries aimed at monitoring electoral and governance processes followed by monitoring of local elections, analysis of sectoral legislation and policies, study of international experience and improving the quality of media coverage via trainings for journalists and editors. The progress illustrated above is a key precondition for forming positive local precedents and popularizing them, which in its turn will have its significant impact on LG sector in general.

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

Progress registered under this objective is probably the most visible due to specific of activities implemented. Major part of activities under this activity is connected to media in the large sense of the notion. These include both TV talk shows with regional and national coverage, presentation of expert knowledge in a user-friendly format, development of alternative media and civic journalism, as well as support to local initiative. The quantitative results under this objective are the biggest among project activities and thus through this processes the project has the widest coverage and biggest inclusiveness.

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

Activities under this objective are more gradual and time consuming since they are related to

research process and are at the same time fed by other activities. Thus the major result-oriented phase of this project component will come up in coming years. During the second year the consortium started to generate products that will be used in advocacy activities. They will be mainly implemented during the third and fourth years of project implementation.

### Problems encountered

There were several organizational problems encountered during the reporting period and all have been communicated both within the consortium and with USAID AOR.

- The change of the project CoP due to health reasons created a necessity for revision of internal communication and distribution of duties
- The late notification of USAID on the planned study tour to Estonia resulted in some organizational problems connected with the list of participants of the tour
- Quality of the AJC newsletter resulted in restructuring of the newsletter from bilingual to only Armenian as well as restructuring of the Armenian version.

Overall the internal communication of the project allows to state that all issues that appear during the implementation of the project find their solutions and cause only technical difficulties and their effect on the overall progress of the project is minimal.

### A comparison of actual expenditures with budget estimates

During the second year of project implementation all project partners have savings that were discussed during the consortium retreat and reallocated for either additional activities or increase of funds for most effective ones. These suggestions were included in the third year action plan of the project and suited to USAID for approval.

Since after the consolidation of communities the number of CELoG target communities has decreased it was decided to revise the list of project target communities and add new ones. CFOA team has developed a proposal on how to address this issue. According to this proposal and due to big number of consolidated communities in Syunik region the project would cover all consolidated communities in Syunik as well as add several consolidated communities from other regions. This proposal was discussed with USAID and the new list of communities with total 43 communities (135 settlements). It was also agreed to use resources of project Rapid Response Fund in new communities upon necessity.

### Priorities for programming during the next reporting period

During the next project year the program will have several priorities.

First, CELoG consortium will continue to concentrate on work with local constituencies aiming at involving more beneficiaries, forming local positive participatory precedents and promoting communication between LGs and active community members.

Second, from the third project year the consortium will start more active and strategized work in

lobbying and advocacy focusing mainly on central authorities to ensure that the legal and policy changes made in LG sector are effective and timely.

Finally the third priority of the project is connected with the communication. CELoG consortium will further develop its communication and branding strategy to intensify the visibility of project activities and results throughout the country, as well as to make the internal communication within the consortium more organized and effective.

Expanding the geography of the communities is also a priority. Say a sentence or two about the reasons and grounds for this.