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Civic Engagement in Local Governance (CELoG) Program

Quarterly Progress Report

Reporting period: 1 January-31 March 2017

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

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AJC - Asparez Journalists' Club
CRRC - Caucasus Research Resource Centers-Armenia
CELoG - Civic Engagement in Local Governance
CoP – Chief of Party
CSO - Civil Society Organization
CFOA - Communities Finance Officers' Association
EPF - Eurasia Partnership Foundation
FoI – Freedom of Information
GOAM - Government of Armenia
ISTDC - Information Systems Development and Training Center
LG - Local Government
LSG - Local Self-government
MAB - Management Advisory Board
MICE - Media for Informed Civic Engagement
MIC - Media Initiatives Center
MMIS - Municipal Management Information System
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
YPC - Yerevan Press Club

POLITICAL CONTEXT

The major development of the reporting period that has influenced not only the project and LG sector but also the whole political, social and economic situation in the country was the preparation for the Parliamentary elections.

The pre-electoral campaign was particularly interesting for the CELoG project from the point of view of proposals of political parties on LG sector reform. Unfortunately the overwhelming majority of political parties didn't have a separate part dedicated to the LG sector in their political programs. Many parties didn't have a single proposal on the reform of the LG system. Proposals that existed in few political programs were rather declarative and did not contain a conceptual approach on improvement in the system, none of the parties discussed mechanisms of increasing community budgets, fostering inter-community cooperation, sustaining the role and responsibilities of Community Councils and other important issues that exist in the sector.

One of the major reasons for this unpleasant situation is that the political programs are devaluated in public perception. The low level of political culture and political discourse, lack of public trust towards political processes does not create the environment necessary for constructive exchange of arguments between different political structures on any sector.

The second important reason for this situation is the lack of understanding and lack of effective solutions on LG system among the political parties in Armenia, the LG sector is somewhat separated from other sectors and are more associated with local elections. This means that the LG discourse should be promoted on the level of political parties and LG literacy among the political parties should be addressed.

Another important development during the reporting period was the initiative of the Prime Minister of Armenia to involve communities in the process of economic development plans and identification of most active municipalities to be involved in economic projects of the Government. This positive step however creates several discrepancies since representatives of some of the state institutions implement activities far beyond their official authority particularly set deadlines and apply with requests to local authorities.

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

During the reporting period EPF has developed and announced a call for applications to conduct Organizational Activity Seminar (OAS) using the Methodology of Systemic Thought Activity (MSTA). The OAS was initially planned for the period covering the current reporting period however due to the per-electoral period, as well as due to the fact that CELoG has planned several public events for February-March 2017 that involved either CFOA or EPF or both organizations, after consulting with CFOA EPF team has decided to reschedule the event for late May 2017. The deadline for submission of proposals is April 25th and after the receipt of proposals EPF will form Evaluation Committee to select the winner.

Activity 1.5 Trainings for the target community activists on data utilization and citizen journalism (EPF/CRRC)

After conducting a training on data utilization for consortium member organizations CRRC has launched the series of trainings on data utilization for project beneficiaries. The 1st training with the modified version of the module with SPSS package was delivered by Naira Vardanyan the CRRC-Armenia Program Manager for Data Initiative with support of Mariam Arakelyan, the CRRC-Armenia Program/Research Assistant. The training was held on 28 February in Armavir Development Center with 14 participants coming from local NGOs, InfoTuns, regional authority/marzpetaran’s representatives, students, etc. The 2nd training for the Consortium members was delivered on March 30, 2017. The training was held in Gyumri with the support of Shirak State University (venue) and Gyumri Youth Initiatives Center (dissemination of announcement). Representatives of local NGOs and LSGs (17 in total) participated in the training. As a follow-up, the participants emphasized the need and importance of suchlike trainings and expressed their wish to participate in new trainings.

1.7 Seminars and briefings for journalists on LSG (YPC)

On February 25-26, 2017 YPC has organized a seminar in Aghveran on the “Problems of LSG Sector in the target of Coverage of Parliamentary Elections Campaign” with involvement of more than 40 participants. Representatives of political parties, NGOs and media of Armenia have discussed the current state of LSG reforms and the importance of LGS issue during pre-election campaign, LSG reforms on the agenda of



election programs of campaigning political parties, cooperation of media and LSGs during pre-election campaign, media coverage of elections and new Electoral Code. YPC has also presented the preliminary monitoring results of pre-election campaign conducted by (see event agenda in Annex 1).

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

During the reporting period the first meeting of the consortium communication team was organized. The aim of the meeting to evaluate the project products for the communication point of view, understand how the project products are being communicated with the audience, conduct the mapping of the CELoG product addresses and identify new mechanisms of external communication. Several important decisions were made during the meeting. Particularly it was decided to develop a centralized contacts database of the project, develop and design project portfolio that would be periodically updated, disseminate periodic electronic digest among the project beneficiaries, as well as develop a cover design for project products that would unite all products under same brand aimed at increasing the project visibility.

The meeting resulted in development of draft communication action plan and the consortium management team has started implementation of action points identified during the meeting.

In addition to the above mentioned, EPF is in process of designing of the manual for the process of submission of petitions developed by CFOA. It is planned to have the final version of the manual by the end of May 2017 which will be followed by a series of ToTs for InfoTuns.

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

During the reporting period the consortium continued cooperation with other USAID funded consortia. One of the major cooperation examples for the reporting period was the development of and conducting of the training-retread organized by EPF for CFOA. This event was designed and implemented jointly by EPFs CSO DePo and CELoG teams. CSO capacity building training methodology developed within the framework of CSO DePo project as well as the results of the CFOA evaluation with Capacity Enhancement Tool conducted during the first project year were used during the development of the training agenda. The team of trainers/facilitators was also combined from the two teams.

The consortium has also continued its cooperation with MICE project. During the reporting period joint planning visits to all 8 InfoTuns were conducted. The aim of the visits was to develop activity plans for both projects tailored specifically for each InfoTun with a clear separation and clearly identified linkages between activities to be implemented within the frameworks of CELoG and MICE projects. These visits were both a follow up meetings after a general InfoTun meeting conducted in November 2016 as well as a monitoring visit.

Another important tradition of cooperation with MICE project that continued during the reporting period was periodic provision of LG related expertise by CFOA experts to MIC during the development of TIMatica TV program and other initiatives of MICE project.

1.12 Identification and localization of IT tools for decentralization existing in other countries (ISDTC)

During the reporting period ISDTC continued to study and analyze the applicability of IT tools used worldwide in work of LGs and CSOs. Tools for converting files, archiving and protecting data were studied. After final classification these tools will be presented to CSOs and LGs (See Annex 2 for the full list of identified tools).

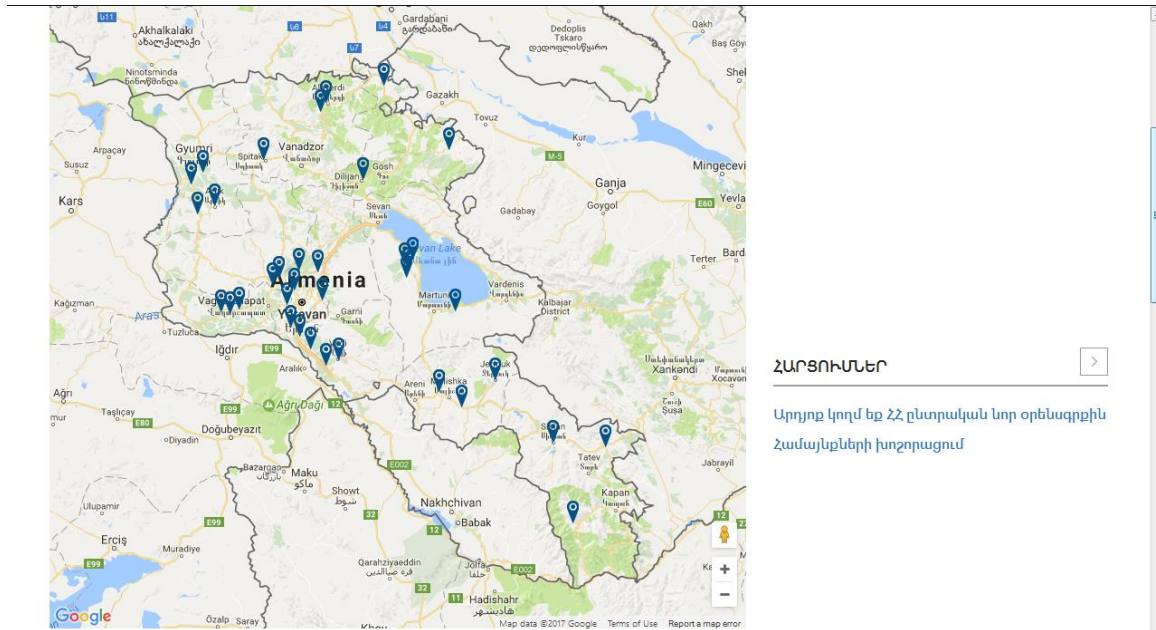
On February 28th ISDTC has organized a workshop dedicated to the issue of electronic management tools and development of community websites attended by 16 participants from LGs and CSOs. (See Annex 3 for the event report)

ISDTC has continued presentations of community websites for community members. During

the reporting period two presentations in Ararat and Gegharqunik regions were organized. (See Annex 4 and Annex 5 for the event reports)

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

During the reporting period the web portal has been updated on a periodic basis by consortium member organizations. All pages of the portal were updated and new materials were posted.



The Map page was added with the pins of all target communities and official websites of the municipalities. The Table below illustrates the disbursement of materials by sections of the portal (See Annex 6 more details).

N	Page title	Number of posts for the previous reporting period	Number of posts as of 14.01.2017	Number of posts as of 01.04.2017
1.	News	58	90	121
2.	Announcements	11	14	29
3.	Calendar	7	15	30
4.	Reforms	10	10	13
5.	Surveys	3	3	3
6.	Documents	4	4	7
7.	Library	6	10	13
8.	Reports	7	7	7
9.	Videos	18	32	55
10.	Pictures	4	7	10
11.	Legislation	17	21	21
12.	Official newspaper	9	12	14
13.	FAQ	14	15	15

14.	Registered Users	45	47	50
15.	# of visitors			10841

The Facebook page of the project was also intensively updated during the reporting period. Materials related to the project and LG reform were placed by the consortium members, events for all public activities of the project were created. During the reporting period the page was visited by approximately 3500 users

The number of Facebook page likes has increased to 3039 (3025 during the past reporting period): The geography of page visitors includes 45 countries among them 1667 from Armenia, 254 from USA, 137 from Italy, 121 from Germany, 97 from Russia, 75 from India, etc.

49 % of FB page fans are female and 51 % are male, the biggest age group (34%) are 25-34 year old users. (See Annex 7 for more details).

1.14b Capacity building workshop for CFOA (EPF)

On March 3-4 EPF has conducted a workshop-retreat for CFOA staff. The aim of the event was to help CFOA in development of its management and communications skills, discuss the perspectives of future development. The event agenda was developed based on discussions with CFOA staff and joint work of EPFs CELoG and CSO DePo teams. The event consisted of sessions addressing such issues as working with texts, expert knowledge vs. generalist approach, team work and delegation. The event was designed to contribute both the building CFOA’s capacities as a consortium lead and as a general capacity building exercise. (See Annex 8 for the event agenda).

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

2.1a Monitoring of implementation of decentralization and LSG reform (CFOA, CRRC)

During the reporting period CFOA and CRRC have actively worked on development of the methodology for LG Index that will be based on the CFOA LG monitoring reports.

CFOA-CRRC team of experts developed a list of Indicators to address 12 principles of LSG Good Governance. So far, 58 indicators have been developed and of them 44 are initially agreed, the rest 14 still needs to be discussed. Also, the forms for assessing the indicators (on 0-to-10 scale) have been agreed and shared among the expert team members. From the beginning of 2017 in addition to the qualitative evaluation of the LG system by CFOA the sector assessment will also be implemented based on the composite index developed jointly by CFOA-CRRC teams.

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

During the reporting period AJC has filed law suits against municipalities that have violated the Law on Freedom of Information and did not provide AJC with the requested information during the process of development of LG transparency reports. It is planned to continue the process of exercising of the right for freedom of information with application of all available mechanisms. Once the LGs receive the law suits they will have to either provide the requested information or to continue discuss the issue of not providing the requested information in court.

During the reporting period AJC has continued to upload information on publicdata.am website. Each municipality has its separate entry based both on the results of information requests and information collected from other sources.

Activity 2.4 Public discussions of 35 annual community budgets and community development plans (CFOA)

CFOA assisted the target communities in organization and implementation of the public

hearing of the community budgets and community development plans. As in the previous year the CFOA experts have preliminarily contacted heads of communities to offer expert assistance in preparation of briefs budgets and presentation materials. The experts also encouraged heads of communities to involve community members and organize the discussions according to the procedures on citizens' participation adopted by community councils.

On the hearing day the CFOA experts visited the communities to be present in the event to provide any support needed in presentations and assess the participation level. For each hearing experts prepared a short report highlighting the key point of the hearing, including the number of participants, questions and suggestions made.

Overall during the reporting period the expert assisted and participated to the budget hearing in 29 communities and to the discussion of the five-year development plans in 21 communities. There were near 780 participants (43% male, 57% female). (See Annex 9 for the list of communities)

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

During the reporting period CFOA has organized three discussions on the Law on Inter-Community Unions involving representatives of municipalities of target communities, representatives of inter-community associations and CSOs. Discussions were organized in Sisyan, Vanadzor and Yerevan on January 26, February 3 and February 10 respectively. CFOA experts have introduced the draft law, explained the major provisions and collected feedback from participants. Overall 42 people participated in these events.

The feedback collected from participants was summarized and presented to the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Development. (See Annex 10 for the feedback summary table). This feedback was one of the reasons why the MTAD has called the draft law back from the Government to make necessary improvements and to resubmit it.

2.10 Shadow report and an alternative roadmap (EPF)

During the reporting period EPF has developed the call for proposals on development of shadow report on LG reform implementation. After detailed discussion with CFOA and collection of feedback from InfoTun network EPF has identified the topic of the report as the management of municipal property in Tatev, Dilijan and Tumanyan consolidated communities.

The report will allow to evaluate the current situation with the property management and the impact of the consolidation on the process. The draft call was submitted to CFOA and after the receipt of the approval the call will be announced.

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

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

CFOA Small grants

During the reporting period CFOA has conducted two monitoring visits to Ashtarak and Gavar to monitor the implementation of two small grants awarded in 2016. In parallel with that CFOA experts have developed the package for the small grant announcement. The ToR and attachments were reviewed to make changes were needed taking into account the experience of the previous year and current needs. It is planned to announce the 2017 small grant competition during the next reporting period.

InfoTun Network

In the period of January 2017- March 2017, 8 InfoTuns organized in total 43 events and 3 broadcast of community council sittings. Total number of participants is 371 participants: 247 female and 124 male.

During the reporting period EPF conducted visits to 8 Infotuns for InfoTun strategy planning for the next grant period. Activity planning discussion was being held together with InfoTun beneficiaries and civic journalist who are actively engaged in InfoTun CELoG activities and events. Each InfoTun developed list of activities based on their needs and priorities.

During the last three months **Ararat and Vayk InfoTuns** were actively engaged in the series of Media Literacy trainings. InfoTun coordinators had a TOT of Media Literacy in summer 2016 and now actively train young people in line with the rest 6 InfoTuns.

Syunik InfoTun together with the active group follows the community consolidation processes. They have conducted document analysis how the staff restructuring in the LGs of the consolidated communities was organized. The results of the analysis will be finalized during the next reporting period.

Gyumri InfoTun, together with EPF team also developed list of activities to be conducted. As

a result, Gyumri InfoTun together with its beneficiaries developed two activities to address: To extend the timeframe of transport to Mush 2 district and abandoned community areas. Working team developed the timeframe and list of activities to address these two issues.

Ijevan InfoTun CELoG beneficiaries have developed a checklist for municipality webpage based on the procedure established by the law. An evaluation of Ijevan website is being conducted by InfoTun beneficiaries and the results of the evaluation will be presented during the next reporting period.

Martuni InfoTun identified 3 most relevant activities for the next reporting period which includes the issue of local library, provision of the new building and transforming the library into an interactive and innovative place (long run objective), raising the issue of Abovyan-Kamo street through civic journalists, engaging LSGBs and business to address these issue, and finally developing a strategy of “The partner of Community” idea, which envisages engagement of local business in LSG.

See Annex 11 for detailed report of InfoTun activities for the reporting period.

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

During the Program Year Two CFOA supported to the process of submission of the three petitions to Community Councils. Based on the gained experience CFOA has developed the Manual on Organization and Implementation of Petition at Local Level which will help the active citizens and CSO’s to be effective in such initiatives. The manual was submitted to EPF for final designing and work with the text in terms of making it more user-friendly.

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

The two animated cartoons developed by EPF during the previous reporting period were approved and are currently being actively used during various consortium events and disseminated via internet.

During the reporting period EPF has developed scripts for two new animated cartoons. The scripts were discussed with CFOA experts and finalized. The animators are currently working on the design. It is expected to have two new cartoons ready during the next reporting period.

CFOA has developed three issues of Hamaynq-Hamategh newspaper for January, February and March 2017. The issues contain materials on LG, CELoG activities, interviews with CELoG experts, etc.

AJC has developed 8th quarterly newsletter that was circulated among EPF, CFOA and USAID and after making the necessary changes, it was disseminated by AJC.

Activity 3.6a. 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 on YouTube channel of YPC.

#27 “Mamuli Akumb-HaMaTegh” TV talk show

The talk show was filmed on Monday, January 30 and broadcast via Yerkir Media on Tuesday, January 31 at 16:10 and was rebroadcast on Friday, February 3 at 16:35. Duration of the program was 40 minutes. Topic of the program: “The new Law on Local Self-Government”.

Program host: Boris Navasardian, YPC President

Invited speakers:

- Stepan Margaryan, Chairman of the Standing Committee on Territorial Administration and Local Self-Government of National Assembly of RA
- Vahan Movsisyan, Chairman of Communities Finance Officers Association

#28 “Mamuli Akumb-HaMaTegh” TV talk show

The talk show was filmed on Monday, March 6 and broadcast via Yerkir Media on Tuesday, March 7 at 17:40 and was rebroadcast on Friday, March 10 at 16:30. Duration of the program was 40 minutes. Topic of the program was “LSG reforms on the agenda of election programs of political parties”.

Program host: Boris Navasardian, YPC President

Invited speakers:

- Mesrop Arakelyan, representative of “Tsarukyan” Bloc
- Vahagn Hovakimyan, YELK Bloc representative
- Valery Grigoryan, Communist Party of Armenia representative
- Abraham Artashesyan, Vice-Chairman of Communities Finance Officers Association

#29 “Mamuli Akumb-HaMaTegh” TV talk show

The talk show was filmed on Monday, March 12 and broadcast via Yerkir Media on Tuesday, March 13 at 17:40 and was rebroadcast on Friday, February 16 at 16:30. Duration of the program was 40 minutes. Topic of the program was “LSG reforms on the agenda of election programs of political parties”.

Program host: Boris Navasardian, YPC President

Invited speakers:

- Arthur Khachatryan, ARF representative
- Stepan Margaryan, ORO Bloc representative
- Anahit Baghshyan, Free Democrats Party representative
- David Margaryan, Expert of Communities Finance Officers Association

#30 “Mamuli Akumb-HaMaTegh” TV talk show

The talk show was filmed on March 20 and broadcast via Yerkir Media on Tuesday, March 21 at 17:40 and was rebroadcast on March 24 at 16:30. Duration of the program was 40 minutes. Topic of the program was “LSG reforms on the agenda of election programs of political parties”.

Program host: Boris Navasardian, YPC President

Invited speakers:

- Vahan Movsisyan, Chairman of Communities Finance Officers Association
- Kamo Areyan, Armenian Republican Party representative
- Grigor Voskerchyan, ANC-PPA Bloc representative
- Vilen Khachatryan, Armenian Renaissance Party representative

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 enabling environment for CSOs on local level. (CFOA, EPF, AJC)

After the first revision of the research paper on the international experience on LG CS cooperation the second draft was submitted to CFOA for review and comments. The feedback was received from three CFOA experts and is currently being reviewed for the development of final version of the report. It is planned to present the report during the first half of the next reporting period.

PROGRESS TOWARDS RESULTS

There are two major needs that become visible as the project products accumulate. The first is the need to make the communication of the project products more effective, institutionalized and sustainable, that will allow project beneficiaries to be more instrumental in their participation in LG process. The second need is the need to identify and apply mechanisms of institutionalizing LG-community member communication based on positive precedents. So far the successful initiatives implemented in target communities are more situational and are based on the efforts of the consortium and its partners. It is obvious that without proper institutionalization these initiatives will remain simply separate successful cases of cooperation and participation and will not provide the sustainability of participatory processes on the local level. The project has several components that are aimed at sustaining these cases and next phases of the project implementation will have this as one of the top priorities.

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 for the reporting period includes cases of substantial cooperation both inside the consortium and with other USAID funded projects. CFOA training organized at the organization’s request by EPF can be evaluated in two different capacities. Firstly, as a capacity building exercise it was fully within the logic of EPF’s role and the philosophy of CFOA-EPF cooperation within the framework of the project. Secondly, as a more conceptual process the event was a reflection on the changing role of CSOs in Armenia, the extent to which a sector-specific organization needs to adopt interdisciplinary practices, as well as the correct balance between “expert” and “generalist” sets of knowledge. The cooperation with CSO DePo and MICE projects is a bright example of coordination of activities and utilization of products and methodologies developed by different projects.

Another important progress registered under this objective was the conceptualization of the communication of project products and development of more institutionalized and impact-oriented circulation of project products. Once developed, the common CELoG brand will not only increase the visibility of the project but will also form a circle of affiliated beneficiaries, which is important in terms of mobilization of the society in the process of advocating for reforms.

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 overwhelming majority of activities implemented under this objective during the reporting period were aimed at institutionalizing the result. The further development of LG Composite Index, systematized upload of monitoring results on publicdata.am, development of the concept of the first shadow report of the project and collection of feedback from target communities and submission of these proposals to the MTAD are aimed at making the results of the project more sustainable, more referential, more institutional and more visible. Further project activities will foster this approach and ensure that effectively probated tools, products and mechanisms are institutionalized by the parties involved.

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

Activities implemented under this objective are strongly connected with the dynamics of the reporting period. Namely the TV Talk Shows produced by YPC reflect issues actualized for a particular period of time, initiatives of InfoTuns, information disseminated via AJC quarterly and Hamaynq–Hamategh are reflecting the developments and needs of particular periods. Generally speaking activities implemented and progress registered under this objective promote outcomes of activities implemented under other objectives and supply the latter with feedback. The progress registered under this objective is also supplying the other project components for the next periods.

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

The progress registered under this objective is not yet explicit since it is based on the processes going on within the consortium. However the progress is significant since during the reporting period the international experience studied by EPF expert was synchronized with the local expertise of CFOA. This activity will provide a high quality result that will be adopted to the local needs and will be tested in target communities during the next reporting period.

DATA ON PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

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

- ✓ 2 trainings on SPSS application and data utilization conducted
- ✓ 2 Presentations of municipal websites
- ✓ 3 discussion of the Law on Inter-Community Unions
- ✓ Public discussions of community budgets organized in 29 communities;
- ✓ 3 issues of Hamaynk-HaMaTegh newspaper published and disseminated - 2000 copies each;
- ✓ 1 issue of quarterly newsletter developed and disseminated
- ✓ 4 Talk shows developed and broadcast on Yerkir Media TV station;
- ✓ 2 cartoon/info-graphs finalized 2 scripts developed
- ✓ 8 Infotuns have conducted 43 activities with participation of 371; 247 female and 124 male
- ✓ 10,841 visits to celog.am web portal
- ✓ 98 new posts on celog.am web portal

PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED

There were no major problems encountered during the Program implementation process. All issues are being communicated with both the lead organization and USAID. The issue of more effective communication of project products with beneficiaries is identified and activities to boost this communication are being implemented.

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 boost the communication of project products with the wide audience of beneficiaries,
- To continue registering positive precedents via local initiatives, particularly due to the small grants pool announcement,
- To work on the institutionalization of registered success,
- To intensify work with LGs in target communities,
- To continuously comment and advocate for legal and policy improvements.

All these priorities are strongly connected with Program objectives and current logic of its development.

V. Movsisyan
CoP of CELoG Program
28.04.2017