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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 third year of implementation of CELoG project was rich with developments both in LG sector and in wider spectrum of social, political and economic life of Armenia.

After the constitutional changes the necessity to adapt the regulatory framework to newly established parliamentary system raised necessity for revision of legislation including LG legislation. In this respect it should be mentioned that there were several revisions on the RA Law on Local Government that were aimed at bringing the regulatory framework in accordance with the requirements of the new Constitution. Being the major legal act regulating the local government sector, its changes have key importance for the project and CELoG is following the process and submitting suggestions to the MTAD on a regular basis.

Another important development during the reporting period was the introduction of the new Government program which contained a chapter on LG. Plans of the Government on LG particularly included consolidation of 18 new community clusters in 2017. The bill submitted to the parliament and adopted in June 2017 consolidated 325 communities that resulted in forming of 34 community clusters. Compared to previous phases of consolidation, this time the government's planning process was not transparent. No discussions were held either with communities or with the civil society and expert community during the design of the clusters subject to consolidation. The clusters were designed solely by the MTAD, the discussion of the process at the NA took place with no proper request for opinion of communities, subject for consolidation. As a result the population of the communities have learnt about the process only post factum.

Parliamentary elections that took place on April 2nd were of course a major development for the whole country during the reporting period. The elections were particularly important since these were the first elections after the change of the government system to parliamentary republic. It should be mentioned that unfortunately the overwhelming majority of political parties didn't pay serious attention to the LG reform in their electoral 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 to improvement of 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.

In terms of the activities implemented by the executive authorities the initiative of the Prime Minister of Armenia to involve communities in economic development planning and identification of most active municipalities to be involved in economic projects of the Government is worth mentioning. 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 submit requests to local authorities.

The new program introduced by the Government and adopted by the parliament after April elections particularly stated that the consolidation of communities will continue and it is expected to finalize the process by 2019. The Government Program also envisions continuation of decentralization process through gradual delegation of disaster prevention, phytosanitary, primary healthcare, veterinary and other services to local authorities¹. It should be noted though that the program does not clearly formulate the implementation of these activities and does not indicate the fiscal decentralization as a precondition for effective decentralization of the above mentioned services. The Program also declares that further steps will be implemented to promote inter-community cooperation particularly through inter-community unions, however it is not clear how these steps will be implemented and which areas of inter-community cooperation will be targeted.

¹ RA Government Program 2017-2022, pp. 12-15, available at <http://www.gov.am/files/docs/2207.pdf>,

Summary of Conducted Activities

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

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

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

According to the initially submitted proposal and the annual work plan for the third project year EPF has organized the second Organizational Activity Seminar that took place in Aghveran on September 8-12. The second OAS was entitled “Society and Local self-government: Development Perspectives” and involved 60 participants representing LGs, CSOs, community activists, media representatives and experts. The 4-day event was designed in accordance with Methodology of Systemic Thought Activity (MSTA) and offered participants to discuss issues from five particular perspectives: City and Village, Market, Infrastructures and structures, Governance and self-governance, Community and the world- the world of the Community. During each working day the groups were offered to discuss the topic of the day from the above mentioned positions. The final day of the event was dedicated to development of project ideas based on the discussions. The report of the OAS developed by the team of game technologists will be submitted to EPF and afterwards presented to the consortium, USAID and wider audience in October-November 2017.

Data indicators: 60 participants, 4 days, 5 group reports, 1 general report

1.4b Public hearings on Pressing Community Issues (CFOA)

During the reporting period three public hearings on pressing community issues were organized in Vedi, Yeghegnadzor and Dilijan communities.

Overall 125 participants (56 men, 69 women) were involved in these events, representing LGs, local CSOs, community activists, students, representatives of various community institutions. The

hearings were moderated by CFOA experts and were aimed at revealing most important issues of community importance.

In case of Vedi the three major issues that were identified were related to playground, drinking water fountains and the roads to the school. These issues were separately discussed with the local authorities.

In case of Yeghegnadzor from the number of issues presented and discussed the most burning ones related to sanitary conditions of the community, particularly to the location of the garbage cans, and the improvement of the park. The last one was selected as a priority and the students of Yeghegnadzor Branch of the Armenian State University of Economics agreed to participate the cleaning and improvement works.

The public hearing in Dilijan community took place in Haghartsin settlement the most pressing issue that was discussed related to the necessity of renovation of the bridge.

It is planned to involve local activist in initiating the collection of signatures to launch the process of submission of petitions to LGs on selected issues.

Data indicators: 3 hearings, 125 participants (56 men, 69 women), 6 issues identified and discussed in detail.

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

During the reporting period CRRC continued delivering trainings on data utilization. In general 5 trainings were organized in Yerevan, Vanadzor, Armavir, Ijevan and Gyumri for consortium members, InfoTuns and regional CSOs.

In addition to these trainings two additional trainings with further consultations were held for Gyumri and Armavir InfoTuns that were tailored to the particular needs of both to conduct community surveys. In case of Armavir, CRRC supported the InfoTun in finalizing the research aimed at identifying priorities for Noravan Community. In case of Gyumri the assistance of CRRC was aimed at conducting a survey on public transportation usage in Moush 2 district. In both cases

apart from theoretical knowledge InfoTun activists have gained practical skills in development of research questionnaire and representative sample, as well as analyzing survey results.

During the reporting period EPF has organized a planning session for InfoTuns that was not only aimed at planning annual activities but also had training components providing information on LG reform, civic journalism, storytelling and report development.

Data indicators: 5 trainings on data utilization 51 participants (15 male, 36 female), two practical trainings on survey implementation to Armavir and Gyumri InfoTuns, 1 planning-training for InfoTuns on civic journalism and storytelling 19 (4 male, 15 female).

1.7 Journalists trainings and briefings on LSG (YPC)

YPC has organized 2 trainings during the reporting period for traditional and electronic media representatives.

The first one, entitled “LG Sector in the Media coverage of Parliamentary Elections Campaign” held on February 24-26, 2017 in Aghveran, Armenia. The participants (46 in number) listed representatives of political parties, NGOs and media of Armenia. The training was dedicated to discussion of current state of the reform of local self-government sector and the importance of touching upon that topic in the parliamentary elections campaign.

The training also addressed such topics as proposals of political parties and alliances on reforms in LG sector in their electoral programs on the example of the “Armenian Renaissance” party and “Ohanyan-Raffi-Oskanian” bloc; cooperation of Community Councils and journalists during the pre-election promotion; peculiarities of voting by territorial lists of the parties/blocs and coverage of elections by local media; preliminary results of YPC monitoring on the coverage of parliamentary elections.

Second seminar, entitled “Amendments to the RA Law “On Administrative-Territorial Division of the Republic of Armenia” and their Coverage by the Media” was held on June 11-13 in Aghveran, Armenia. The participants (23 in number) listed representatives of Armenian state institutions, CSOs and media. Main issues discussed: amendments to the RA Law “On

Administrative-Territorial Division of the Republic of Armenia”; media coverage of local government activities as a means of raising civil society awareness; experience of cooperation between local governments and media; “Press Club” TV program cycle, aired in the framework of “Civic Engagement in Local Governance” project (review of the previous TV season); second stage of community enlargement – advantages and disadvantages; coverage of the community enlargement process by the media.

During the reporting period YPC has organized one briefing that took place on September 27, 2017 in Best Western Congress hotel, Yerevan. The briefing was aimed at introducing the “The RA Local Self-Governance Index for 2015 and 2016” developed jointly by CFOA and CRRC to media and civil society representatives. The event hosted 20 media and CSO representatives, including journalists from Aravot daily, H2 TV Company, Yerkir Media TV Company, Deutsche Welle, Hamaynq-Hamategh newspaper, Armtimes.am etc. All the listed media outlets were included in the process of monitoring that was implemented by YPC experts while defining the candidates for the Annual Media Award.

The Index was presented by Vahan Movsisyan, CFOA Chairman, Vahram Shahbazyan, CFOA Expert Team Leader and Sona Balasanyan, Research Director of CRRC-Armenia.

Data indicators: 1 briefing (20 participants) and 2 trainings (69 participants) on LG for media representatives and CSOs.

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

During the reporting period the consortium continued internal communication aimed at ensuring quality of project products. EPF worked closely with AJC on the quarterly newsletters and circulated drafts among its communication team to collect feedback which was submitted to AJC before the release. EPF also assisted CFOA to design the presentation of the project for the three meetings with the newly elected community heads, as well as assisted ISDTC in organizing the discussion on cyber security. EPF also started forming the communications team of the project to work on branding of project products as planned by the third year work plan of the project. EPF has conducted an internal brainstorming on CELoG communication strategy and afterwards

requested all consortium member organizations to assign their staff members for the communication team. The mailing group has been created and the first meeting of the communication team took place to discuss the major activities to be undertaken to ensure effective external communication. The meeting resulted in development of communication action plan and the consortium management team has started implementation of action points identified during the meeting. The communication team is reporting to the Consortium management team on the ongoing activities and receives feedback from the CoP and the rest of the team.

EPF has designed the manual for the process of submission of petitions the content of which was developed by CFOA, recorded three [video](#) lectures on LG reform, created database of contacts and developed a concept for introductory multimedia clip that will brief the wider audience about the project achievements and future plans. EPF has also started to design CELoG branded folders and bags that will be used for dissemination of project products during events of field visits.

In communication with ISDTC EPF has granted InfoTuns some admin functions allowing the InfoTun coordinators to post all InfoTun events on celog.am portal calendar in a timely manner.

In addition to the above-mentioned, EPF team is in day-to-day communication with consortium members reviewing their materials and follows the posts on the celog.am web portal on a regular basis.

Data indicators: Manual design, 3 video lectures, contacts database with around 1400 contacts created, communication action plan developed, design of project promotion materials launched.

1.10. Cooperation with other development actors and other consortia

During the reporting period the Consortium continued its cooperation with other USAID funded projects. Particularly, during the InfoTun meeting MICE and One Armenia projects were involved. The involvement of MICE project was more substantial due to InfoTun component in both projects so the meeting was also aimed at effectively planning InfoTun Network activities within the framework of both projects to avoid overlaps and make the activities complementary.

The presentation of USAID My Armenia project was followed by a meeting between project staffs to discuss possible cooperation it was decided to involve InfoTun activists in My Armenia project activities in the regions and disseminate information about the project through CELoG media.

In addition to InfoTuns, CELoG is providing the necessary professional expertise to MICE project for their LG related media production on a regular basis.

CELoG also cooperated with TI-Armenia during monitoring of local elections, particularly during local government elections on October 2, 2016. The consortia coordinated their activities in terms of sending observers to polling stations to avoid overlaps and cover as many polling stations as possible.

CELoG cooperated with CSO DePo project during the implementation of the training-retreat organized by EPF for CFOA. During the retreat EPF team used the CSO capacity building training methodology developed within the framework of CSO DePo project. While developing the retreat-training agenda EPF used the results of the evaluation conducted during the first project year through application of CSO DePo Capacity Enhancement Tool. The team of trainers/facilitators was also combined from the two teams.

During the reporting period Mardamej Social Innovation Camp was another major case of cooperation between CELoG and MICE projects. The event took place on April 28-30 in Aghveran and gathered around 60 young people with innovative ideas recruited by InfoTuns.

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

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 sector. 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.).

After the development of initial recommendations ISDTC continued to study and analyze the applicability of IT tools used worldwide in the work of LGs and CSOs. Tools for converting files, archiving and protecting data were studied. ISDTC has studied international experience, local legislation, consulted with experts and LG staffs working on IT systems and developed a report with 116 recommendations classified into the following categories: MMIS new components, MMIS improvements, cybersecurity, upgrade of existing e-governance tools and creation of new e-governance tools (See Annex 1 for details).

During next reporting period ISDTC will organize a presentation for consortium members, which will be followed by official presentation of the reports. It is also planned to establish cooperation with Digital Armenia Foundation that is aimed at forming a common digitized environment on the basis of modern information technologies applied in all areas of governance.

Data indicators: Comprehensive report on improvement of e-governance systems with 116 recommendations developed

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

During the reporting period the consortium held one board meeting, periodic communication team meetings and organized a retreat to sum up the activities of the third project year and discuss the fourth year activity plan.

Board meeting was organized on July 1st after the announcement of the third phase of consolidation by the Government. CELoG CoP Vahan Movsisyan introduced the situation and major concerns related to the lack of publicity in designing the clusters. The presentation was followed by discussion of possible activities and reactions from CELoG. It was decided to use CELoG newspaper for announcing the attitude of the consortium towards the process, to continue advocacy work with the MTAD and to organize a discussion with involvement of a wider circle of CSOs and representatives of MTAD. It was proposed to use the National Platform of the Eastern

Partnership Civil Society Forum for this purpose. The event took place in September and hosted around 60 CSOs. The MTAD was represented by Deputy Minister Vache Terteryan.

The Consortium retreat was held in September 2017. Prior to the retreat the draft Work Plan for project year 4 was disseminated among consortium members. During the retreat the activities of the passing year were discussed and the results of mid-term evaluation conducted by project team were introduced. This was followed by the discussion of the year 4 Work Plan which was finalized based on the feedback received from consortium members and submitted to USAID for approval.

In addition to the above mentioned, the consortium management team held periodic meetings in various configurations to discuss particular project components, issues related to the communication, monitoring and evaluation etc.

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

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 teams working for CELoG and CSO DePo. The event consisted of consecutive sessions addressing such issues as working with texts, expert knowledge vs. generalist approach, team work and delegation. The event was designed to contribute both to building CFOA's capacities as a consortium lead and as a general capacity building exercise.

Data indicators: 2 day strategic retreat/training organized for CFOA staff by EPF team.

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 continued the process of development of annual monitoring reports. CFOA published the 9th book on Local Self-Government in Armenia that presents the major tendencies in the LG sector and makes an assessment of the situation for 2016.

The Monitoring was implemented in accordance to the methodology used during the development of previous reports. It has 7 Chapters covering different aspect of LSG, such as Administrative-Territorial Division, Finance, Democracy, and Public Services and so on. It is published in both Armenian and English languages in 500 copies. It will be distributed to main stakeholders including the MTAD, Center for Strategic Initiatives, National Assembly, universities, partner organizations and others.

During the third project year CFOA and CRRC started to discuss the methodology of developing the local government composite index for the annual monitoring reports on LG reform implementation. The goal was assessing the sector’s performance through a composite score. CFOA has analyzed the existing methodologies of scoring LG performance in other countries, as well as application of composite indexes in other sectors in Armenia.

Based on these studies the joint CFOA and CRRC team developed a list of indicators to address [12 principles](#) of LSG Good Governance. Overall 52 indicators have been selected for measuring the progress of five areas and 20 functions of LSG in Armenia.

Based on this methodology the CFOA team calculated LSG Index for 2015 and 2016. The comparison between 2015 and 2016 shows certain regress in the score from 4.40 to 4.24. One of the major reasons of the decrease was the necessity of improvements in legislation after the Constitutional changes that were not made to the full extent, another reason was decreased share of the LG expenditures in the 2016 GDP as compared to the previous year.

Data indicators: Report for 2016 and index for 2015-2016 developed and presented.

2.2. Annual media awards (YPC)

YPC project team continued reviewing of media materials dedicated to the local self-governance to prepare suggestions to the Annual Award-2017 jury as well as provided consultations to the publication of “Hamaynq-Hamategh” monthly. Prior to the ceremony, monitoring of Armenian media was implemented. In its frames about 150 materials were considered as relevant to the award thematic and criteria. Those were broadcast in 23 TV/radio channels (15 of which regional), 6 print and 11 online outlets.

After the preselection process YPC team submitted names of potential candidates to the Award jury for consideration, which shortlisted several candidates for the Award. The shortlisted candidates’ names were discussed with Consortium partners and the final decision was made. Two awardees were selected by the Jury.

On July 18 2017 media award ceremony was held in Best Western Congress hotel premises. The event was combined with the 22nd anniversary event of YPC.

Yeranuhi Soghoyan, Hetq journalist, received an award for being faithful to the topic of LSG reforms during the whole year. The award was handed over by the editor of "Hamaynq-Hamategh" newspaper Arevhat Grigoryan.



Second awardee of CELoG Project was Ankyun +3 TV Company from Alaverdi for consistent coverage of community and local self-governance issues. Vahan Movsisyan, Chairman of CFOA, handed over the award to Anjela Mamajanyan. The TV Company is always addressing the problems and issues of LSG in its [news section](#).

Data indicators: 150 materials developed by 23 TV/radio channels, 6 print and 11 online outlets preselected, 2 nominees awarded.

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 (AJC)

During the reporting period AJC has developed and presented the 2017 LG transparency report based on the process of collection of information from LGs through official inquiries. Several stages of information requests were followed by the development of report and entries on the www.publicdata.am website. After the draft report was developed 10 regional presentations were held in all marzes of Armenia. Based on the feedback received from the consortium and the results of discussions during the regional presentations the report was finalized and presented in Yerevan for representatives of civil society, media, central and local authorities.

It is worth mentioning that the existence of two consecutive reports for 2016 and 2017 allows making cross-year comparisons and identifying major issues related to the transparency of LGs. Among these issues the outstanding ones are lack of knowledge about FoI principles among LGs, lack of organizational capacities in LGs and lack of political will among heads of communities. It is also worth mentioning that communities of Lori region are significantly different from other regions in terms of ability to respond to official inquiries. (See Annex 2 for final report)

Data indicators: 2017 LG transparency monitoring report developed and presented, 11 presentations involving 315 participants (193 male, 122 female) organized in all regions of Armenia and in Yerevan.

2.4 Public discussions of 35 annual community budgets (CFOA)

CFOA assisted the target communities in organization and implementation of the public hearings of the community budgets and community development plans. As in the previous year CFOA experts have preliminarily contacted heads of communities to offer expert assistance in preparation of brief budgets and presentation materials. The experts also encouraged heads of communities to

involve community members and organize the discussions in accordance with the requirements of the procedures on citizens' participation adopted by community councils.

On the hearing day the CFOA experts visited the communities to provide any technical assistance if necessary. 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 CFOA assisted to organization of budget hearings in 29 communities and to the discussion of the five-year development plans in 21 communities. Around 780 participants (43% male, 57% female), including representatives of community council members, LG staffs, community structures, as well as community activist attended the events. CFOA encouraged LGs to spread information about hearings throughout the community to ensure participation of ordinary citizens in the hearings.

Data indicators: Assistance in organization of community budget hearings in 29 communities and five-year development plans in 21 communities provided.

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

Due to the fact that the comprehensive report on improvement of the local e-government systems contains significant amount of information, ISDTC has proposed to capitalize the most marketable recommendations through establishing partnerships with private sector representatives. In order to make sure that the partnership between the LG and ICT sectors are effective, ISDTC proposed the Consortium management to launch the process of establishing market connections in sphere of e-services on local level after the finalization of the report. This proposal was discussed and approved during the consortium retreat and the implementation of this project component was moved to project year 4.

Data indicators: Recommendations on improvement of LG e-governance systems developed and will be used as a basis for establishing partnerships with private sector representatives.

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

In May 2017 the Government of Armenia proposed the consolidation scheme for the next 325 communities to form 34 new clusters. [Amendments](#) to the Law on Administrative Territorial Division were developed by the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Development and were analyzed by CFOA experts. Based on the analysis CFOA has submitted recommendations mainly referring to the design of the clusters illustrating that the justification of the design of new clusters was poor and lacked analysis of economic and administrative consequences of consolidation, as well as proposing alternative solutions on redesigning the clusters.

CFOA used several channels to deliver appropriate messages to the decision makers on the necessity to re-design the proposed community clusters. There were number of meetings with the representatives of the MTAD, where the CFOA experts were able to address their concerns over the process. Other meetings were held with the Chairman of the Standing Committee on Territorial Administration, Local Self-Government, Agriculture and Environment, as well as Parliament Members. Moreover one of the Press Club-CELoG TV talk shows with participation of the Minister of TAD was dedicated to this issue. CFOA team has also published a separate editorial in “Hamaynq_HaMaTegh” monthly that was dedicated to the issue and introduced major arguments calling for redesign of some clusters. These activities resulted in redesign of 4 most problematic clusters (Nor Yerznka, Ijevan, Jambarak and Yeghegnadzor).

CFOA had an opportunity to express the concerns on consolidation process during the EaP CSF Armenian platform. In its session of the platform the Head of the EU Delegation to Armenia, Ambassador Piotr Świtalski, First Deputy Minister of Territorial Administration and Development, as well as representatives of international organization supporting the TARA were invited. CFOA Chairman Mr. Movsisyan had a presentation on the major issues in consolidation process.

Data indicators: Advocacy on improving the design of the consolidated clusters resulted in re-design of 4 most problematic ones.

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

During the year the Law on Local Self-Government, Law on Intercommunity Unions, Law on Equalization and Law on Administrative Territorial Division were the major acts targeted by CFOA experts.

In 2016 the Law on Local Self-Government has been amended entirely. The amendments were imposed by the Constitutional changes in 2015. The amended Constitution included a number of new concepts, approaches and definitions that needed to be incorporated in the law. However, there were also several misleading points in the Constitution that created certain discrepancies in terms of legislative adjustments. Namely the formulations on Inter-Community Unions legal status in the new Constitution were not reflected in draft law, also the electoral mechanisms for LG elections described in the amended Constitution are very vague and can be misinterpreted. CFOA expert team analyzed the law and made statements and recommendations highlighting the shortfalls and drawbacks of the law.

Improvement of the mechanism of establishment of Inter-Community Unions was also among the requirements of the new Constitution. After the Government proposed the draft law CFOA organized 3 discussions with participation of target LG representatives, experts and regional CSOs. Based on the discussions and the analysis, the recommendations were prepared and submitted to MTAD. These activities had a major impact on the fact that the Government decided to withdraw the draft from circulation and make necessary improvements.

Regarding the Law on Equalization, CFOA had several meetings with the representatives of MTAD to present its own approach to the new formula for calculating equalization grants that takes into account both the income capacity and spending needs of the community. The experts presented the major principles that should be applied and factors that should be taken into account during the calculation of the grant amount.

The Law on Administrative Territorial Division was analyzed in light of the community consolidation process. CFOA revealed several inconsistencies with the approved concept and made statement that was submitted to the MTAD and also was publicized through Hamaynq-Hamategh newspaper and YPC talk show. Four of these recommendations were taken into account and corrective actions have been taken.

From July 17 to 21, 2017 CFOA hosted its international expert Pawel Swianiewicz. The visit was organized due to the changes in legislation mentioned above and the third phase of consolidation. A number of meetings and discussions were held that allowed CELoG international expert to share his expertise and international experience and best practices on reforms.

Data indicators: Three sets of recommendations were developed and submitted to the decision makers, consultations with involvement of international experts and decision-makers organized.

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

In November 2016 representatives of the Union of Municipalities of Estonia have visited Armenia. Since this organization has assisted EPF in organizing study tour to Estonia, EPF supported Estonian colleagues during their visit to Armenia. Namely EPF has organized a meeting with consortium members and MTAD representative at EPF office on November 15, on November 16 representatives of the Estonian delegation visited Vayk InfoTun and Vayk municipality and met with LG representatives as well as local civil society actors.

On December 19 EPF organized briefing on the study trip to Estonia that took place in September 2016. The briefing was organized for consortium member organizations, other USAID funded consortia, representatives of LGs, central authorities and civil society. Representatives of EPF, ISDTC and CFOA presented major findings from the study trip and mechanisms of their possible implementation. Apart from general comments and remarks related to the overall process of the decentralization reform and community consolidation processes that is taking place in Estonia, consortium members introduced some very practical proposals on how the Estonian experience can be applied in Armenia. Each of the consortium members has developed a brief report on application of the Estonian experience in their sphere of activity. After the presentation the report was disseminated among partners. The particular cases of Estonian experience were used by ISDTC in development of the list of recommendations on improvement of the e-governance system, as well as during the development of the LG Index methodology. Another Estonian success story on participatory budget planning is included in the activities of the Martuni InfoTun project year 4 activities.

Data indicators: Presentation of the study tour conducted, report on study tour developed and disseminated.

2.10 Shadow report and an alternative roadmap (EPF)

During the reporting period EPF in consultations with CFOA has identified the topic of shadow report and announced a call for expression of interest. The topic of the report was defined as Shadow report on management of municipal property in consolidated communities Tatev, Dilijan and Tumanyan. After the selection of winning candidate in accordance with EPF rules and regulations the team of experts started to work on the report. At the present stage the team of experts has finalized the field work and is currently working on the draft. It is anticipated that it will be submitted by mid-November.

Data indicators: Shadow report call announced, winner selected, field visit conducted.

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

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

CFOA Small grants

During the reporting period CFOA was working on both finalizing the 5 small grants awarded during the first round of support to local initiatives in 2016 and launching the second one.

The grants awarded during the first phase were aimed at promoting the public participation in Gavar, Akhuryan, Metsamor, Arshtarak and Qajaran communities. Within the framework of these small projects various events including public discussions, meetings, and festivals were organized. Sub-grantees have developed various information materials such as flyers, booklets, and brief budgets. It is planned to organize a presentation of most successful projects during the 4th year of project implementation.

During the third project year CFOA has announced the call for second round of small grants. After the evaluation process 5 projects were selected out of 42 total applications. The implementation of the second wave of small grants will start on October 1st 2017.

EPF InfoTun Network

In the beginning of the project year EPF has organized a strategic meeting of all InfoTuns that were aimed at evaluating activities conducted during the previous year and planning activities of the project year 3. This event was followed by planning visits to each of 8 InfoTuns to develop a detailed action plan for annual activities.

During the reporting period 8 InfoTuns organized and conducted 155 events, trainings, discussions under the CELoG program. In total 1647 people participated in these activities: 1104 female and 543 male. The activities of InfoTun include LG related training/ discussion organization and hosting, dissemination and localization of CELoG program products and finally developing and following InfoTun based initiatives that were designed for each InfoTun separately in consultation

with EPF CELoG team and InfoTuns beneficiaries. Moreover they continue covering the activities of the local authorities through various social media platforms, broadcasting community council hearings and raising the most burning issues in their communities.

In the reporting period InfoTun Network continued to provide knowledge and information to its beneficiaries about the LG sector through various CELoG products such as CELoG animations and series of online talks on Local Governance as well as through hosting trainings and events. (See Annex 3 for detailed description of InfoTun Activities).

EPF Youth Bank Network

After the Youth bank committee meetings the announcement of small community project opportunities was made by 10 youth bank committees in their home communities. The announcement resulted in 132 proposals received in total. Youth bank committees started evaluation projects and preselected potential winners. After the selection process was completed a gathering of YB committee members took place in EPF and each project was discussed with EPF staff to make final adjustments. The aim of these meeting was to make sure that the selected projects were complying with the logic of CELoG project. However due to certain delays in the announcement and the final decision making the process of awarding and implementation of YB projects was postponed to project year 4.

Data indicators: 5 small grant projects concluded, 5 new projects awarded, 1505 events with involvement of 1647 participants implemented by InfoTuns, 132 YB project proposals received, 33 awarded.

3.2.b CELoG Research Fellowships (CRRC)

The second cycle of CELoG Fellowships started on March 2017 under the mentorship of CRRC-Armenia staff (Dr. Tigran Matosyan). Five young researchers selected in close cooperation with the CFOA experts to participate in the CRRC-Armenia's "CELoG" fellowship program finished their researches and submitted their final papers. Topics of their research were as followed:

1. “The Quality of Local Services and democracy in Armenia: does the community size matter?” by Arman Gasparyan;
2. “Education and Gender as Factors for Awareness on Local Governance. qualitative research in Yerevan” by Arthur Babayan;
3. “Determining Factors of Voters’ Participation in Local Elections of Community Head in Armenia” by Lena Mamikonyan;
4. “Public Awareness and Participation in Local Self-Governance: Multidimensional Approach” by Sonya Msryan;
5. “Respect for informal community authorities (“*taghayin heghinakutyunner*”) and participation in local governance in Armenia” by Ofelia Grigoryan.

During the fellowship program, fellows received systematic guidance from CRRC staff (Tigran Matosyan and Mariam Arakelyan, in particular) in order to accomplish successfully their research. Brief information on the content of the expected papers is available on [CRRC-Armenia website](#). It should be noted that apart from presentations and dissemination of papers organized by CRRC one of the papers on quality vs quantity in LG sector was presented to the participants of the OAS organized by EPF in September 2017.

Data indicators: 5 fellowships awarded, 5 research papers developed.

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

During the third year of the program, CFOA supported three initiative groups in submitting petitions to Community Councils. Based on the gained experience CFOA has developed a Manual on Organization and Submission of Petitions at Local Level which will allow active citizens and CSO’s to effectively implement such initiatives.

This manual will be used to launch the process of petition submission in other target communities as planned by the work plan, as well as will serve as guideline for ToT to be organized jointly by CFOA and EPF for InfoTun network and will allow the latter to disseminate knowledge on the process of submission of petitions in their communities.

Data indicators: Three initiatives supported, manual on Organization and Submission of Petitions at Local Level developed.

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

During the reporting period ISDTC in cooperation with other consortium members has continued the moderation, promotion and improvement of the celog.am web portal. Posting of news, reports, publications, video products developed by consortium members in the respective sections of the web portal is taking place on regular basis, moreover the InfoTun network was given an opportunity to place their events in the calendar of events which made the latter more dynamic and regular. In total 355 materials were posted in different sections of the portal including news, reports, publications, announcements, etc. The total number of portal visits as of 30.09.2017 is 22506 (See Annex 4 for detailed information). ISDTC also continued to moderate the FB page which at the moment has 3083 likes. ISDTC and other consortium members periodically post information about the LG sector and the project on the page (See Annex 5 for detailed report).

During the second year Hamaynq-HaMaTegh («Համայնք ՀաՄատեղ») 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 about the LG sector. 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 the newspaper also became an important tool for expressing consortium's attitude towards major happenings in LG sector through the editorial column.

During the reporting period AJC has developed 4 and disseminated 3 quarterly newsletters that were redesigned based on USAID feedback and recommendations. Currently the quality of the newsletter is improving; the publication is enriched with diverse information about LG system and project activities. The newsletter is disseminated both in print version and electronically.

During the reporting period EPF has produced 4 short animations entitled “*Where a person stands*” («Մարդու տեղը» in Armenian) general introducing the various aspects 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 all 6 animations produced within the framework of the project have collected 1859 views. 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 further dissemination of the cartoons.

Data indicators: 355 materials posted on celog.am portal with 22506 total visits, 3083 likes on FB page, 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 and 3 issues circulated, 4 short animations developed by EPF and disseminated among project beneficiaries, 1859 total views of 6 animations on YouTube.

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 (98,000 total views) and 4 regional talk shows (15,000 total views) were developed and broadcasted during the second project year. Below are brief descriptions and links to all talk shows:

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

The talk show was filmed on Monday, October 10 and broadcast via Yerkir Media on Tuesday, October 11 at 18:10 and was rebroadcast on Friday, October 14 at 18:35. Duration of the program was 40 minutes. Topic of the program was “LSG elections”.

Program host: Boris Navasardian, YPC President

Invited speakers:

- Heriknaz Tigranyan, Legal advisor at Transparency International Anticorruption Center

- Abraham Artashesyan, Expert at Communities Finance Officers Association
- Levon Barseghyan, President of Asparez Journalists' Club
- Nune Hovhannisyan, Member of Central Electoral Commission

#22 “Mamuli Akumb-HaMaTegh” TV talk show

The talk show was filmed on Monday, October 17 and broadcast via Yerkir Media on Tuesday, October 18 at 18:10 and was rebroadcast on Friday, October 21 at 18:35. Duration of the program was 40 minutes. Topic of the program was “Financial support of LGs: Principle of financial equalization”.

Program host: Boris Navasardian, YPC President

Invited speakers:

- Vahan Movsisyan, Chairman of Communities Finance Officers Association
- Haykak Arshamyan, Representative of Citizen Observer Initiative
- Lilit Manukyan, Yerkir Today news program coordinator
- Hakob Balasyan, Byureghavan Major

#23 “Mamuli Akumb-HaMaTegh” TV talk show

The talk show was filmed on Monday, November 21 and broadcast via Yerkir Media on Tuesday, November 22 at 18:10 and was rebroadcast on Friday, November 25 at 18:35. Duration of the program was 40 minutes. Topic of the program was “Community development reforms in the light of Government's new decisions after LSG recent elections”.

Program host: Boris Navasardian, YPC President

Invited speakers:

- Vache Terteryan, First Deputy Minister of Territorial Administration and Development of RA
- Vahan Movsisyan, Chairman of Communities Finance Officers Association

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

The talk show was filmed on November 25 and broadcast via Yerkir Media on Tuesday, November 29 at 18:10 and was rebroadcast on December 2 at 18:35. Duration of the program was 40 minutes. Topic of the program was “Ahead of the 3rd Year: What kind of problems you faced and how to address them effectively in the future”.

Program host: Boris Navasardian, YPC President

Invited speakers:

- Mikayel Hovhannisyan, Coordinator of CELoG Program
- Marina Ayvazyan, Development Programs Director at Eurasia Partnership Foundation
- Abraham Artashesyan, Expert at Communities Finance Officers Association
- Grisha Khachatryan, President of Information System Development and Training Center

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

The talk show was filmed on Wednesday, December 7 and broadcast via Yerkir Media on Tuesday, December 13 at 18:10 and was rebroadcast on Friday, December 16 at 18:35. Duration of the program was 40 minutes. Topic of the program was “The Results of Sociological Survey on public participation in LGs conducted by the Caucasus Research Resource Center”.

Program host: Boris Navasardian, YPC President

Invited speakers:

- Heggine Manasyan, Executive Director of CRRC
- Tigran Matosyan, Researcher at CRRC
- Hermine Karapetyan, Grantee of CRRC
- Meri Muradyan, Grantee of CRRC

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

The talk show was filmed on Monday, December 19 and broadcast via Yerkir Media on Tuesday, December 20 at 18:10 and was rebroadcast on Friday, December 23 at 18:35. Duration of the program was 40 minutes. Topic of the program was “Vanadzor Municipality crisis. Way out discussion”.

Program host: Boris Navasardian, YPC President

Invited speakers:

- Mamikon Aslanyan, Mayor of Vanadzor
- Second speaker Christ Marukyan, Member of City Council of Elders did not show up for the program

[#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 the 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

#31 “Mamuli Akumb-HaMaTegh” TV talk show

The talk show was filmed on April 22 and broadcast via Yerkir Media on Tuesday, April 25 at 17:40 and was rebroadcast on April 28 at 16:30. Duration of the program was 40 minutes. Topic of the program was “LG financial sources”.

Program host: Boris Navasardian, YPC President

Invited speakers:

- Vahan Movsisyan, Chairman of Communities Finance Officers Association
- Ruzanna Ghazaryan, President of "Work and Homeland" NGO, Vayk
- Hakob Balasyan - Mayor of Byureghavan

#32 “Mamuli Akumb-HaMaTegh” TV talk show

The talk show was filmed on May 6 and broadcast via Yerkir Media on Tuesday, May 16 at 17:40 and was rebroadcast on May 19 at 16:30. Duration of the program was 40 minutes. Topic of the program was “Current stage of LSG reforms”.

Program host: Boris Navasardian, YPC President

Invited speakers:

- Ashot Giloyan - Head of the Local Self-Government Department of the RA Ministry of Territorial Administration and Development
- Armine Tukhikyan – Programs Director, Urban Foundation

#33 “Mamuli Akumb-HaMaTegh” TV talk show

The talk show was filmed on May 30 and broadcast via Yerkir Media on the same day at 17:40 and was rebroadcast on June 2 at 16:30. Duration of the program was 40 minutes. Topic of the program was “RA territorial policy: development perspectives”.

Program host: Boris Navasardian, YPC President

Invited speakers:

- David Lokyan - RA Minister of Territorial Administration and Development
- Vahan Movsisyan, Chairman of Communities Finance Officers Association

Regional Talk shows

Ijevan TV, “Hamayngayin khndirner”/“Community issues” talk show

The talk show was filmed on September 8 and broadcast via Ijevan TV channel on September 9. Duration of the program was 51:50 minutes. Topic of the program was “Public participation in local self-governance”.

Program host: Naira Khachikyan, Ijevan TV Director

Invited speakers:

- Vahan Movsisyan, CFOA Chairman
- Boris Navasardian, YPC President
- Narek Sahakyan, Head of Baghanis administration
- Hasmik Azibekyan, Director of Community Center for NGO Development

Hrazdan TV, “Dem ar dem” talk show

The talk show was filmed on September 18 and broadcast via Hrazdan TV channel on September 19. Duration of the program was 52:00 minutes. Topic of the program was “Public participation in local self-governance”.

Program host: Mnatsakan Harutyunyan Hrazdan TV Director

Invited speakers:

- Hasmik Kerobyan, Hamaynq-Hamategh newspaper journalist
- Abraham Artashesyan, CFOA Vice-Chairman
- Kamo Arakelyan, Children's Support Foundation Chairman
- Tehmine Badalyan, Children's Support Foundation, social worker

ANKYUN+3 TV, "[Erevak](#)" talk show

The talk show was filmed on September 20 and broadcast on September 22 via Ankyun +3 TV channel in Alaverdi. Duration of the program was 53:25 minutes. Topic of the program was "Public participation in local self-governance".

Program host: Marianna Pepanyan

Invited speakers:

- Vahan Movsisyan, CFOA Chairman
- Abraham Artashesyan, CELoG Project Coordinator
- Larisa Paremuzyan, Hetq online correspondent in Lori
- Tigran Mkhitarian, Tumanyan community Elders' Council member

SOSI TV, "[Toghatak](#)" talk show

The talk show was online broadcast on September 29 via Sosi TV channel in Kapan. Duration of the program was 36:00 minutes. Topic of the program was "Upcoming LSG elections on November 5".

Program host: Hermine Mikayelyan

Invited speakers:

- Boris Navasardian, YPC President
- Susanna Shahnazaryan, Goris Press Club Chair

- Karen Hovhannisyanyan, CFOA Expert

Data indicators: 13 national (98,000 total views) and 4 regional talk shows (15,000 total views).

3.6. Annual discussions with university students (CFOA)

At the end of the third project year CFOA with the support of CRRC organized meeting with the students. This year Yerevan State University Department of International Relations was selected. Overall 49 students participated to the event (9 men, 40 women). CRRC CEO, Ms. Manasyan open the event welcoming the students and faculty staff. Then Deputy Dean also welcomed the CELoG team and students. Mr. Shahbazyan presented the Monitoring Report for 2016. The last session was Q&A. The [event](#) took longer than initially planned which shows the interest of the students. It should also be mentioned that throughout the year many students visit CFOA, CRRC and other organizations of the consortium to receive information about the LG reform, conduct interviews, etc.

Data indicators: Meeting with Yerevan State University Department of International Relations students organized, 49 students (9 male, 40 female).

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 laws were mainly taken into account - the Law on NGOs and the Law on LSG.

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 prevents 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.

Data indicators: Analysis of local legislation in terms of regulation of CSO-LG cooperation conducted. The results of the analysis will be combined with the study of international best practices and presented to stakeholders on central and local levels (NA, MTAD, LGs and CSOs)

4.2 Development of policy recommendations regarding CSO engagement in LSG (EPF)

After the report of the study of international experience in legal and policy areas regulating the cooperation between the local CSOs and LGs was submitted to CFOA. CFOA and EPF joint team has started to combine the study of the Armenian situation with the recommendations of the EPF study. These recommendations will be finalized in the beginning of the Project year 4 and will be presented along with the two other studies on central and local levels. The presentations will focus on legal and institutional improvements proposed by the study aimed at improving the enabling environment for CSOs on local level.

Data indicators: Work on combining results of two simultaneous studies in process. The final recommendations will be presented in November-December 2017

4.3 Sensitizing community CSOs to the issues of improving their enabling environment (trainings, YBs, InfoTuns) (EPF)

Due to the delay in the process of development of the study report on LG-CSO cooperation the presentation of the recommendations on community level was postponed to project year 4. The presentations will introduce practical mechanisms of cooperation developed in the study to representatives of LGs and local civil society actors. Presentations will be followed by discussion on which particular mechanisms are applicable and helpful for each particular case.

Data indicators: Presentations moved to project year 4

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

During the reporting period EPF continued work on development of a study of international experience in legal and policy areas regulating the cooperation between the local CSOs and LGs. After the development of draft of the study it was circulated inside EPF and further work was implemented. The second draft was shared with CFOA and received comments that were addressed to develop the third draft. The final version was submitted to USAID for final comments (See Annex 6 for text of the study). During the project year 4 the study will be presented to major stakeholders.

Data indicators: Study on international experience of CSO-LG cooperation conducted, revision by EPF and CFOA implemented, final report submitted to USAID.

Progress towards results

The third project year was the most active phase of the project in terms of developing products and utilizing them on local and central levels. This happened in all project directions including supporting local initiatives, working with LGs, advocacy on central level and awareness raising activities. The process of utilizing project products was successfully launched during the third year and it is important to continue this process with the same intensity during the following years of the project.

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 achieved under this objective is illustrated through several important outcomes. Namely the tendency of making the trainings more tailored to the needs of beneficiaries and the ability of the consortium to respond to capacity building requests from beneficiaries resulted in particular cases of effective and instrumental trainings. They were followed by exercising the knowledge in practice. This happened in case of surveys in Gyumri and Noravan communities conducted by InfoTuns with the support of CRRC.

Another important indicator of progress is the constantly expanding circle of cooperation of the Consortium with various actors working in regions. Apart from cooperation with MICE and DePo projects new partnerships and cooperation cases were registered not only with the USAID funded projects such as My Armenia, but also other actors willing to implement activities on the regional level such as Wikimedia. It should be mentioned that the role of USAID in ensuring the sustainability of these cooperation cases was extremely important throughout the year. Particularly after the initial meeting with Wikimedia representatives CELoG team has circulated Wikimedia announcements about trainings among project beneficiaries.

The OAS implemented by EPF was also an important contribution to the progress under this objective, since it gave an opportunity to conduct a mid-term strategic reflection not only on the project but also of the LG sector and the general situation in the country.

Activities implemented by ISDTC during the past year under this objective are also extremely important from the local governance long-term strategy point of view since they offer a quality discourse on applying the IT tools in improvement of the governance system which is based on a combination of study of local needs and international best practices. The recommendations developed by ISDTC apart from being very practical address various aspects of the field. They can be implemented both as separate smaller scale activities and as a wide and massive reform process. The timing of producing these recommendations coincided with the launch of Digital Armenia initiative by the Government of Armenia and in case of effective communication and political will among the Government representatives ISDTC's valuable recommendations may become considered in the process of improving e-governance in municipalities.

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 third year was marked with the issuing the LG composite index developed jointly by CFOA and CRRC. This can be considered a very important outcome both in terms of effectiveness and from the point of view of the general philosophy of the project allowing to develop initially planned activities to a new level of capitalization.

Another important outcome of the project under this activity is the significant effect of advocacy implemented by CELoG and particularly CFOA expert team. It can be now stated that CELoG consortium is an important policy actor in sphere of LG reform and the opinions, comments and criticism are being taken into account by the decision makers.

Another valuable outcome under this objective is the LG transparency report developed by AJC. Not only it provides the public with information about the level of transparency among LGs but also through exercising the FoI principle makes LGs more conscious and responsible in their external communication. It also creates certain competition among LGs and marzes in terms their ability to respond to inquiries.

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

Activities under this objective have registered significant progress since the external communication of the project have delivered to the public important project products both in a targeted manner and through widespread dissemination. The statistics of Talk Show viewers, web portal visitors and FB page 'likes' illustrates public interest and demand for information produced and disseminated by CELoG. The statistics also shows that the project is able to reach its constituencies through a multicomponent communication system. This brought us to conclusion that there is a need to develop the single project brand with an aim of connecting different project products. This will increase the effectiveness of the external communication of the project and will allow further capitalization of project products.

Another extremely important outcome under this objective is the continuous growth of successful local participatory initiatives through CFOA small grants, EPF's InfoTun and Youth Bank networks. This outcome is of particular importance not only because of the practical results of these initiatives but primarily from the point of view of the development of the participatory democracy culture on local level and empowering local leadership among the community activists. The meetings and planning sessions conducted with local beneficiaries, particularly with young community activists allowed to reveal significant increase of the level of understanding of the LG sector on one hand and willingness to exercise participatory mechanisms on another.

It is also worth mentioning that the manual on petitions developed by CFOA and designed by EPF is a bright example of capitalization of project product and ensuring the sustainability of project results. This case is also important as an illustration of project abilities to reflect on achieved results and build-up of new product on the basis of already developed ones.

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

Outcomes under this objective are also significant and important. Despite the fact that the planned activities under this objective are less by quantity and by the outreach scale, the effect of the conceptualization of LG-CSO cooperation and establishment of institutional mechanisms for this

cooperation cannot be underestimated. There is already a certain level of conceptualization and joint vision on this process within the consortium. During the next project year there will be a wider circulation and discussions of this important concept with involvement of local constituencies. Deliberations will be followed by attempts to implement the concept in practice through establishment of selected mechanisms on local level.

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.

- In some cases the interconnected essence of activities causes delays in implementation of this or that activity,
- In some cases the level of involvement of consortium members in activities or events of their partners is not satisfactory,
- In some cases the event organization is lacking effectiveness which results in lower number of attendees than expected.

Overall the internal communication of the project allows to state that all issues that appeared during the implementation of the project found their solutions. They only and caused technical difficulties and their effect on the overall progress of the project was minimal.

A comparison of actual expenditures with budget estimates

During the third year of project implementation some project partners had savings and unspent funds due to delays in activities. These issues were discussed during the consortium retreat and it was decided to either reallocate funds for additional activities, or increase the funding for most effective ones. The activities that were delayed were also discussed and it was decided to move them to project year 4 in case of delays. These suggestions were included in the fourth year Work plan of the project and submitted for USAID for approval.

Priorities for programming during the next reporting period

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

- 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.
- The project external communication will become more intensive and additional efforts on branding and ensuring more effective communication will be undertaken.
- The project will intensify the work on capitalization of project products aiming at effective utilization of most successful project products after the close-up of the project.