SUMMARY

Workshop for Cooperation and Strengthening of CSO Coalition Sub-Grantees in the Scope of the "Commitment to Constructive Dialogue" Project

Aghveran,

February 14-16, 2019

On 14 February, a three-day workshop on Cooperation and Empowerment of CSO Coalitions organised in the framework of the EU-funded "Commitment to Constructive Dialogue" (CCD) project was launched in Aghveran.

The Project Manager, President of the Armenian Lawyers' Association of Mr. Karen Zadoyan mentioned in his welcoming speech that the work and activities of the projects implemented by the nine coalitions which is aimed at the development of the coalition and finding ways for cooperation with other coalitions will be presented and discussed during the workshop.

"As a result of these discussions, at the end of the workshop, we will decide together to have a vision, concept or roadmap for cooperation that will be elaborated and documented," Karen Zadoyan said.

Mr. Hakob Avagyan, Vice-President of the CCD implementing consortium member SME Partnership Association, highlighted the importance of having strong civil society coalitions. "I have always said that the development of the country depends on the counterbalances, if we can create such counterbalances we will have a good country. We need to have strong CSO coalitions that can survive and influence on public policies," he said.

Mr. Armen Galstyan, Executive Director of the International Center for Human Development, which is also member of the CCD project consortium, emphasized the importance of such workshops, during which the communication became the basis to "holding hands" for consolidation.

Further the representatives of six coalitions presented the projects implemented within the framework of sub-grants provided in the scope of CCD Project, the issues encountered during their implementation, after which the issues raised and the options for joint solutions were discussed.

The main focus of the discussion was the development of policies in the sectors, dialogue with the government and local self-government bodies, and ways to strengthen the coalition.

PRESENTATION OF SUB-GRANT PROJECTS IMPLEMENTED IN THE SCOPE OF THE CCD PROJECT

Agricultural Alliance of Armenia

Vadim Uzunyan, "Participatory Policies – Sustainable Agriculture" Project Manager, presented the program implemented by the Agricultural Alliance of Armenia.

He noted that the obligations of the alliance within the framework of the projects were fulfilled. As an achievement, within the scope of the project he presented that the hall meetings were held in all four marzes of Armenia, with participation of stakeholders of the sector: in total 314 participants. As a result about 1,500 proposals and applications related to the discussed issues were received. The latter were coordinated, distributed into five directions and on their basis the project experts prepared conceptual documents that will be published soon. A letter was sent to Deputy Prime

Minister Tigran Avinyan about a week ago with request to submit and discuss these documents with the Government, but there is no response yet. However there is a response from the National Assembly and there will be a meeting in the near future.

Notably, Vadim Uzunyan mentioned that at the present stage of the project implementation, the work with the government is an obstacle. For example, a farmer's congress was scheduled for January 24; unfortunately the Minister of Agriculture was dismissed by that time. And in general, the uncertain situation with the current government structure is an obstacle for a number of activities.

Vadim Uzunyan also said that all the commitments of the Alliance in the scope of the project were ready and they were looking forward o the establishment of a "bridge" to present them and discuss through the meeting, and added, "It's a crucial issue right now."

Inter-Regional Coalition, dealing with the Problems of Children with Disabilities

Naira Arakelyan, "For Quality and Accessible Inclusive Education and Social Support" Project Manager presented the program implemented by "The Inter-Regional Coalition, dealing with the Problems of Children with Disabilities."

She noted that as a result of recent legislative changes special schools were closed and children with special needs should attend the inclusive schools. However, schools have problems with adapting to children's needs. In the scope of the project meetings were held in4 ministries - the Ministry of Healthcare, the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Territorial Administration in order to discuss possibilities to conduct monitoring and address the problem.

There was an objective to conduct monitoring in such schools. However, according to Ms Arakelyan, during the meetings they were told that the authorities are well aware of the problem and it would be better to allocate those funds to the ministries in order to solve the problem rather than to provide it to conduct monitoring. There was an impression that they did not want to raise the issues.

However, the Ministry of Education and Science not so easily but eventually, a permission to conduct monitoring was obtained from the Ministry of Education and Science. The monitoring has been conducted and the issues were identified. At present meetings in *Town Hall* and *Chatham House* formats are being prepared, after which proposals on reforms will be elaborated and submitted to the government.

Ms Arakelyan mentioned that they had noticed a problem, which is related to the fact that no research had been conducted related to the existing problems in different settlements, the NGOs working in those settlements and the services provided. At the same time there is no procedure how the State allocates grants. The proposal of their coalition to establish such procedure has been accepted.

Coalition of CSOs for Sustainable and Transparent Energy Development

Astghik Pasoyan, "CSOs for Sustainable and Transparent Energy Development" Project Manager presented the program implemented by the Coalition of CSOs for Sustainable and Transparent Energy Development which has been created in the framework of CCD Project.

She said that during their activity they have always been supportive of constructive dialogue with all interested parties of the sector, have elaborated legislative proposals which have been adopted.

The coalition works in the direction so that in addition to the systemic energy, the Government conducts the demand management and considers the "non-traditional" energy sectors as well.

Creating a platform for the dialogue with the Government was an urgent issue for the Coalition as well, because there were changes of the officials in the ministry and "there may always come a person who would not be able to understand the system."

Women's participation is a sectoral issue as well. Often, there are only one or two women among the 40 people gathered around the table, whereas the major part of the energy consumers are women.

She noted that they had organized a regional summit on the issue, and as a result it is planned to create an interregional sectoral coalition/network.

The problem is that journalists often are reluctant to cover sectoral issues. And the coalition's achievement in this direction is that it has been able to sign a cooperation agreement with Armenpress Agency, which will periodically cover the coalition's activities.

As a successful outcome she mentioned that they have developed a proposal on conducting energy-efficient procurement in the sphere of public procurement, which have been included in the Government Program as a result of advocacy and constructive dialogue.

Armenian Business Coalition

Mr. Gagik Vardanyan and Ms Satik Badeyan, members of the consortium "Armenian Business Coalition" created in the scope of the CCD Project presented the "New SME Development Strategy for Armenia" Project implemented by their coalition.

It was mentioned that there are many things to do, especially in the case of a new government, when it is announced about a revolution. The business revolution, first of all, means an improved business environment.

Pilot offices of the Business Ombudsman have already been launched in Gyumri and Gyumri in the scope of the project, and there is a high flow of SME there. The raised issues will be coordinated and it will be clear whether they are the result of legislative gap or implementation of regulatory norms.

These observations will also be included the SME Draft Strategy, which the Government will propose.

The coalition cooperates with the government in the in the development of a draft strategy, as well as development of a concept of social entrepreneurship for inclusion in it.

By this moment, the position of the government, especially the Ministry of Economic Development and Investments, on the concept of social entrepreneurship is unclear. It is not known at what stage the draft concept presented to the public discussion is.

The coalition has also started cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science related with the possibility to conduct trainings on social-entrepreneurship and individual entrepreneurship in schools.

Armenian Educational Network

Mr. Artashes Torozyan, "Social Partnership and Education: Community-Based Prospects for the Youth" Project Manager presented the program implemented by the Coalition "Partnership for the Promotion of Education", which has been created in the scope of CCD Project.

He mentioned that they have identified two key sectoral issues related to insufficient communication between education sector and labour market, as well as with the issue of professional counselling in general education institutions

They have developed a model of social partnership which is a justified document, discussed and community councils were created. Local governments, particularly Sisian and Goris municipalities have shown great interest, and at the end of last year Memorandums of Cooperation were signed. As a result of these memorandums the municipalities were had undertaken commitment to provide financial and organizational support.

City hall format and other meetings to explore and identify sectoral issues and present recommendations.

There was a problem with starting a dialogue with the Ministry of Education and Science and the Ministry of Territorial Administration, but it was resolved.

HamaZarK Coalition

Mr. Haykaram Dremyan, "Participatory monitoring for the Establishment of Smart Communities in Armenia" Project Manager presented the program implemented by HamaZarK Coalition, which has been created in the scope of CCD Project.

He noted that currently there is an objective of cooperating with the government on the issue of having smart communities. For example, since 2016, the concept of "smart city" already exists, but the communities are not aware of it. They suggest that candidates for the position of community heads include recommendations in their programs. He presented an example that none of the candidates to the position of community head of the Ashotsk was aware what the smart community was, and one of them answered that "it is the existence of the gifted children". Meanwhile, the smart mechanism means for example that there is a proper technique at the bus stops that will show information on the movement of transport and traffic.

DAY TWO

In the First Part Presentation of Sub-Grant Projects Implemented in the Scope of the CCD Project continued

"Support for Probation" National Network

Mr. Artak Kirakosyan, presented the "Step towards Just Armenia" Project implemented by the "Support to Probation" National Network.

He noted that the biggest problem in the sphere is that all parties dealing with probation sector do not comprehend well what the *probation* is and there are about twenty people in Armenia who actually realize what it is. And there are a number of problems issuing from this..

The probation service includes reconciliation between the convict and the victim; early release: needs and risks assessment of the people; early release reports; solution of the electronic monitoring issues, for example on house imprisonment, etc. However, the current probation service is, in essence, making advisory reports on need assessment and early release.

The coalition has signed a Memorandum on Combating Corruption with the State Probation Service. It is necessary to understand, for example of what to do to make the society more secure, reducing the number of recidivism. For example, there is no clear data of what induce to a crime. It is mentioned that poverty and unemployment, but there is no official statistics on these.

Coalition for Human Rights Protection:

Ms Zhanna Alksanyan, "Human Rights , Monitoring and Publicity" Project Manager and Ms Anush Aslanyan, President of the Coalition member "Equal Rights, Equal Opportunities" presented the project implemented by the Human Rights Protection Coalition created in the scope of the CCD Project

She mentioned that a major problem with regard to hate speech and threats addressed to human rights defenders, advocates, arises when the latter do not want the topic to be raised. One of them for example mentioned that the problem can be solved only as a result of political interference, for example, when Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan would make public call.

Violence and threats against journalists have dropped dramatically.

15 structures were selected for the study of the availability of public buildings for persons with disabilities; inquiries were made on what is understood by saying accessible/available, and what conditions have been created. The people conducting monitoring were persons with musculoskeletal problems. The general conclusion is that they are not accessible.

For example, in the court building there is a security camera, having width of 70 cm, and the wheelchair width is 80-90 cm, so it is almost impossible for a wheelchair to enter the court building.

It is proposed to provide for administrative penalties for those developers who would not maintain accessibility.

"Winnet Armenia" Women's Resource Center Network:

Ms Nvart Khachatryan, "Budget for Everyone" Project Manager presented the project implemented by the "Winnet Armenia" Network of Women Resource Centers.

It was noted that the current problem is that the needs persons from vulnerable groups are not included in community budgets. And, as a result of public participation, these individuals should also present their needs and reflect them in the budgets.

They brought an example that the state provides subventions to the communities, which are mainly directed to the construction or infrastructure development, there is a recommendation to allocate means from these funds for that these funds adaptation mechanisms of the vulnerable groups as well.

Currently, mechanisms are being developed to reach them.

Network representatives have already had meetings at the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Finance.

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Armen Galstyan, Executive Director of the "International Center for Human Development" Public Organization, which is member of CCD Project implementing Consortium, presented the workshop participants the purpose, methods and outcomes of the organization of expert workshops "without the right to reference" by the International Center for Human Development.

He noted that it is important to create a "protected environment" where there are no cameras and problems for information leakage, and people can say things that they will not say in another environment. Although this does not mean that after the meeting, other people do not talk about what was said and heard, but they do not mention exactly which the person has said that. Their experience has shown that there are no such cases.

For meetings of such format it is important to select specific targeted people who have to introduce clear statements on the topic.

Public Policy Monitoring and Improvement Program of CSO Coalition (Network) as Institutional Tool

Ms Narine Mezhlumyan Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist of CCD Project presented the topic " Public Policy Monitoring and Improvement Program of CSO Coalition (Network) as Institutional Tool", focusing on the key principles of public policy, the most important principles and approaches to public policy and the overall monitoring process, as well as highlighted the role of CSO coalitions in these processes.

Mr. Marat Atovmyan, Coordinator of Mentors' Group /Mentor of Justice Sector of CCD Project presented scheme for developing integrity of the community that enables the community, its residents, activists to engage in community life, and monitor the implementation of various programs and projects.

Building sustainable and constructive dialogue in the fields of CSO coalitions' (networks) public policy monitoring and improvement with the government, National Assembly, local government agencies, as well as building inter-sectoral cooperation of CSO coalitions/networks, implementation of advocacy activities

Ms. Syuzanna Soghomonyan, CSO-Government Dialogue Coordinator/Lawyer of CCD Project presented the successful experience of the CSO Anti-Corruption Coalition of Armenia in adopting a number of key legislative provisions.

She noted that the coalition's expert potential has played a major role in this issue international experience has been studied, recommendations have been presented, and legislative drafts were developed.

The other important mechanism was the creation of a constructive platform when a memorandum was signed between the coalition and the government in the person of the Ministry of Justice, and as a result a working group was created.

At the same time, the coalition has proposed to work with all the parliamentary forces and had meetings with all who responded to the proposal.

Mr.Armen Galstyan, Executive Director of the "International Center for Human Development" noted that they had used the mentioned mechanisms before as well.

Speaking about the work with the National Assembly, he noted that, unlike cooperation with the new MPs, in the past it was really difficult to establish cooperation directly with the MPs, which would provide opportunity to for the experts to direct the certain concrete legislative proposals on making legislative changes to the decision makers.

Mt. Emin Yeritsyan, President of the the Union of Communities of Armenia which is member of CCD Project implementing Consortium, highlighted the fact that the resources spent and their results should be adequate. For example, there may be a situation when resources are spent, the results are achieved, but it does not lead to a qualitative change.

Speaking about cooperation with local self-governance bodies, he mentioned three ways: *Partnership* where CSOs are trying to help the community or local self-government bodies delegates their powers to CSOs (for example as grants). *Participatory*, when, for example, draft legal acts are submitted to the public discussion and the recommendations on them are heard, discussed and adopted. *Networking* when CSOs have branches and networks in communities where there are no CSOs or they are weak and are supporting the local self-government bodies with their participation.

GROUP WORK

Group work was organised during the last panel of the second day. It was evaluated by the participants as useful and efficient.

The coalitions, having at core inter-sectoral cooperation opportunities, formed 3 working groups with 3 coalitions/networks in each. The composition of the working groups is presented below:
1. CSOs for Sustainable and Transparent Energy Development, Agricultural Alliance of Armenia, Armenian Business Coalition
2. Armenian Educational Network, HamaZark: Community Development and Participatory Management Coalition, Inter-Regional Coalition Dealing with the Issues of Children with Disabilities
3. Human Rights Protection Coalition, "Support to Probation" National Network, "Winnet Armenia" Network of Women Resource Centers

Inside each group, in the period foreseen in the agenda, each coalition briefly presented the main policy issues in their areas of activities, their options of solving them. They had a discussion on the presentations, tried to form visions of building inter-sectoral cooperation between coalitions, aimed at solving them.

Afterwards, the groups presented the results of group work.

Gor Movsesyan from the Agricultural Alliance of Armenia spoke on behalf of the first group. According to him, they tried to understand in their group their common interests/opportunities and do mapping, answering to the question "what?"

The common interests are:
1. Revision and improvement of the legislative framework regulating cooperatives;
2. Agreeing on the cooperation format, joint lobbying, and operation of advocacy measures;
3. Gender guidance in all joint initiatives;
4. There is expert potential in all 3 coalitions.

Then, they tried to understand their cooperation possibilities and answer the question "how"?
1. Formation of a joint working group to involve there members from coalitions (they haven't yet clarified the level: head, expert...) and reservation of provisions in the new SME strategy related to the development of cooperatives, taking into account that the idea of cooperation is present in 3 sectors: SME business, agricultural cooperatives, energy cooperatives;
2. Mutual participation in expert discussions to be held in Chatham House format;
3. Joint lobbying/advocacy in CSO-Government, CSO-National Assembly working groups, using all possible channels.

The second group results were presented by Artashes Torozyan from the Armenian Educational Network. According to the presentation, they had done mapping in the group, defined short-term and long-term cooperation issues, tried to find long-term cooperation opportunities outside the CCD project. When developing the coalition strategies, they decided to also take into account potential collaboration, possibilities of joint activities. Then, they set out cooperation principles:
1. Friendly practice
2. Sense of responsibility
3. Sense of property
4. Transparency
5. Accountability
6. Active participation

Artashes Torozyan also presented their cooperation vision, that is, to have a community with gender sensitivity (gender sensitive, simplified budget), where the issue of workplaces is solved, there are strong links between VET and job market, career advice is provided, the problems of children with disabilities are solved/are being solved, the community is smart, community issues are solved through

the use of new technologies, it has a new model of development programmes and the people living in this future community are happy.

They also discussed cooperation principles in the group:

1. Exchange of resources
2. Advocacy campaign (community, regional, national, international)
3. Joint monitoring
4. Cross expertise
5. Exchange of experience
6. Joint fundraising

Mr. Artak Kirakosyan from "Support to Probation" National Network spoke on behalf of the third group. According to him, after some discussions, the group first tried to understand how they could have an impact, and at which level and have stopped at the community level. Their recommendations are largely in line with the government's goals, in terms of vulnerable groups, gender component and poverty issues. According to the group, resource collection at the community level can be a lever for solving problems. They believe that the resources available in the community can be recruited so that it is possible to ensure awareness and provide services. The person will know who to apply and what service will be provided to him if he applies. They believe if they will manage to create such a link with coalitions, with a part of the community budget and a clear job description, it can solve many problems. It can be for example a Sunday school, church, non-governmental organization, but vulnerable groups would know exactly where they can apply. In the same way, a businessman, a philanthropist would know that in case they would want to obtain information where from they could be able to obtain it according to which they would realise the charity.

According to them, it will be a universal centre where vulnerable groups can be included and acquire skills.

Ruzanna Torozyan, a member of the group, added that they will also voice the existing issues together. Satik Badeyan from the Armenian Business Coalition recommended noting the possibilities of social entrepreneurship as well.

All working groups were satisfied with their joint work and found that during group work. They were convinced that it was the right idea to cooperate with the coalitions and that joint efforts would definitely lead to greater results.

When discussing the problems in the fields of human resources, management, governance, public relations, financial stability, programs and service infrastructures of coalitions/networks, the representatives of coalitions once again expressed the idea that problems would be solved in a more effective way as a result of joint efforts and activities, and proposed and discussed the issue to draft a joint declaration, and to sign it.

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CCD Project Manager, President of the Armenian Lawyers' Association **Karen Zadoyan** presented the strategic planning process and strategic plan development of CSO coalitions/networks.

He noted that in order to reach the goals of coalitions the original document, strategic plan, must be created. It is usually developed for the coming 3-5 years.

In this case, the key participants of the team first create the strategic plan group which must in average comprise 8-12 people and must analyse the strong and weak points of the organisation, its opportunities and risks. Then the vision, mission and values of the organisation are revealed. The strategic goals stem from them (mainly 2-3), the expected results are mentioned.

The coalitions' strategic plans must have the following structure: historical overview or information on the organisation, vision, mission, values, strategic goals, issues, activities, implementation period, responsible persons, results, assumptions, monitoring and evaluation, strategic process. The latter must be participatory.

DAY THREE

Ms. Syuzanna Soghomonyan, Project CSO-Government Dialogue Coordinator/Lawyer of CCD Project presented the infrastructures of human resources, leadership, governance, public relations, financial stability, projects and provision of services of coalitions (networks).

Further discussions on the above mentioned group works were held. The participants highlighted the problems existing in the six infrastructures, and the visions for their solution presented by CSO coalitions/networks.

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Further, 10 CSO coalitions discussed developed and signed the Declaration of Cooperation, deciding to establish the **"Constructive Dialogue Network of Armenian CSOs".** More than 250 CSO members are members of these 10 coalitions.

10 CSO Coalitions have signed this Declaration:

- "Support for Probation" National Network (created within the framework of CCD project);
- "Community Development and Participatory Governance Union" (created within the framework of CCD project);
- Agricultural Alliance of Armenia (is strengthened within the framework of CCD project)
- "CSOs for Sustainable and Transparent Energy Development" Coalition (created within the framework of CCD project)
- Armenian Business Coalition (created within the framework of CCD project);
- Armenian Educational Network (created within the framework of CCD project);
- Inter-Regional Coalition dealing with the problems of Children with Disabilities (created within the framework of CCD project) ;
- Coalition for Protection of Human Rights (created within the framework of CCD project) ;
- "Winnet Armenia" Network of Women Resource Centers. (is strengthened within the framework of CCD Project);

- CSOs Anti-Corruption Coalition of Armenia.