



# Commitment to Constructive Dialogue Project

## Final Evaluation Report

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS USED IN THE REPORT

Agora	Agora Central Europe, an NGO based in the Czech Republic
ALA	Armenian Lawyers' Association
AUA	American University of Armenia
CEPA	EU-Armenia Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement
CCD	Commitment to Constructive Dialogue
CIVITAS	Armenian Centre for Democratic Education-CIVITAS
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
EU	European Union
EU	European Union
EUD	Delegation of the European Union to Armenia
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GoA	Government of Armenia
HR	Human Resources
ICHD	International Center for Human Development
KII	Key Informant Interview
LSG	Local Self-Government
LSGB	Local Self-Government Body
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OTR	Off the Record
RA	Republic of Armenia
SME	Small and Medium Entrepreneurship
SME Association	SME Cooperation Association
SRC	State Revenue Committee
THM	Town-Hall Meetings
UCA	Union of Communities of Armenia

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The EU funded “Commitment to Constructive Dialogue” project was implemented from 2016 to 2019 by a Consortium of partners led by the Armenian Lawyers’ Association and consisting of Agora Central Europe (an NGO from the Czech Republic), the Armenian Center for Democratic Education-CIVITAS, the International Center for Human Development, the SME Cooperation Association and the Union of Communities of Armenia. Overall objective of the Project was to strengthen the CSO influence on public policy development and implementation in Armenia. The Specific Objectives of the Project aimed at strengthening the ability of CSOs for building coalitions and their capacity for constructive and strategic policy engagement with local and central government partners.

This evaluation was initiated to assess:

**Project relevance:** To what extent are the Project activities relevant to its objectives and targets, Government and donor priorities and CSO needs?

**Project Efficiency:** How efficient were the Project activities?

**Project Effectiveness:** To what extent were the Project Objectives met?

**Project Impact:** What was the impact of the Project implementation on its direct and non-direct beneficiaries and partners?

**Project Sustainability:** To what extent was the sustainability of Project Outcomes ensured?

## **Relevance:**

The analysis and comparison of data collected through secondary and primary sources clearly show the linkage between and contribution of the Project Objectives to the GoA priorities defined in the Armenia Development Strategy for 2014-2025 as well as GoA and EU mutual priorities set out in CEPA signed between the sides in 2017. The Project’s specific conceptual aspects, such as development of evidence-based public policy, inclusion of civil society in public monitoring, as well as the specific issues under the sectors targeted by the Project activities are examples, where the Project contributed to the aforementioned priorities. As revealed through the FGDs with the targeted CSOs, the project interventions, especially the capacity building component, was also in line with CSO needs. The review of the Project design showed that it had clear Logical Framework where the set Objectives reflected the gaps described in the Application with regard to the overall ability of CSOs to influence public policy and implementation in Armenia. Meantime, the set Outputs and Activities demonstrated a clear path to the Theory of Change described in the Application. Lack of quantitative baseline measurement for few indicators made it challenging to measure exact change during the evaluation, however application of certain methodology enabled to address the issue.

### Efficiency

The Evaluation shows that the Project was sufficiently agile in terms of responding to emerging CSO needs and necessities during the implementation. Accordingly, some of the Project activities, e.g. provision of consultancies, enhancement of the Incubators' outreach, advocacy efforts in the CSO-associated legal framework, were identified during the Project implementation stage and acted upon. The Project was responsive to the new realities in the country caused by the political changes. Certain readjustments to the initial plans were made by the Project to address topics and agendas of high demand and interest. The Project management through Consortium was smooth and ensured that comparative strengths of each member were utilized for the best interest of the Project. At the same time, it was noted that the efficiency could have been increased if the financial restrictions and requirements of the Donor were more flexible.

### Effectiveness

As mentioned above, the specific objectives of the Project aimed at strengthening the ability of CSOs of building coalitions and their capacity for constructive and strategic policy engagement with local and central government partners. Triangulation of data collected during this Evaluation through secondary and primary sources (quantitative and qualitative) shows that the Project has successfully achieved and overachieved these objectives and set indicators.

#### Outcome 1: Ability of CSOs to build coalitions is strengthened

As a result of Project implementation 116 versus planned 100 CSOs participated in coalition-building capacity building activities; and 225 versus targeted 120 CSOs became members of 15 Coalitions. It is noteworthy that in both cases the targets set for women led organizations were significantly overachieved. Specifically 126 versus planned 48 women led CSOs became part of Coalitions, and 71 versus planned 40 participated in coalition building trainings. Application of pre-post multiple choice tests, through which both theoretical knowledge and practical skills were assessed, showed that among the training participants the Project registered knowledge increase on coalition building among 86.2% of participants versus targeted 70%.

The qualitative data collected through focus group and small group discussions also reveals high level of satisfaction of CSOs from the capacity building opportunities provided by the project. According the CSOs, the trainings and consultations provided within the framework of the Project were useful and effective. Most of them highly appreciated the quality of the provided trainings and topics covered. They highlighted knowledge and skills on coalition-building obtained due to the Project as very important for them.

#### Outcome 2: Ability of CSOs to focus on constructive and strategic policy engagement with local and central government partners is enhanced

The Project implementation resulted in 116 CSOs versus planned 100 participating in the trainings on constructive policy engagement. Out of these CSOs, 71 were women-led which again shows significant overachievement of the set target. Similarly, the pre-post tests revealed

that knowledge and understanding increase was registered among 87.5% of participants versus targeted 70%. Overall, 187 working meetings/policy discussions were organized with the central government and local self-governmental bodies providing opportunity to 156 versus planned 120 CSOs to directly engage in dialogue with the policy makers at national, regional and local levels. According to the focus group discussions and small group discussion conducted with the CSO representatives, among the core competencies gained they refer to, are the constructive policy engagement practices. The CSO representatives highlight their improved knowledge and skills on the monitoring and evaluation tools, development of the monitoring plans, analysis of policy reforms and policy gaps, as well as building relationships with the governmental bodies. In addition, CSOs reported improved capacities in advocacy and enhanced skills to efficiently engage in constructive dialogue with the governmental and local self-governmental bodies.

### **Sub-grants**

One of the biggest components of the project that contributed to both Outcomes was sub-granting. A total of 47 sub-grants were allocated to CSOs and CSO Coalitions/Networks. The purpose of sub-grants was to facilitate the coalition building process, strengthen the coalition capacities, carry out evidence based advocacy to influence public policy as well as conduct public policy monitoring at local and regional levels. In order to develop, advocate and implement public policies in cooperation with the respective state bodies, the Coalitions and CSOs have signed overall 44 Memorandums of Understanding with the Government, LGs and the Parliament. In the scope of the memorandums, working groups were formed which created a platform for CSOs to apply the knowledge gained and carry out evidence based advocacy for improved public policy, successful examples of which, also acknowledged by the Government representatives, are described below in the respective section.

According to the CSOs participating in the focus and small group discussions as well as according to the key informant interviews, the sub-grant projects significantly contributed to the specific objectives of the Project. The majority of CSOs reported that while implementing the sub-grants they not only achieved their own set objectives, but often overachieved those as well as achieved unplanned positive results. Some of the CSOs mentioned that they broadened the initially defined scope and objectives of the research through application of additional research methods, enhancement of sample size and geography. Others broadened and deepened their advocacy efforts, applied additional awareness raising measures, organized public consultation meetings and enhanced the scope of collaboration with the different governmental and non-governmental entities.

### **Challenges**

The essential challenges for the Project effectiveness included frequent turn-over among the national and regional government representatives and decision makers, communication issues with EUD in the initial phase of the Project, as well as insufficient project duration for achievement of the intended advocacy efforts.

### **Impact**

Research conducted in the scope of EU “Strong CSOs” in 2016, as well as other studies suggested that CSO influence on public policy development and enforcement is quite low in Armenia. Thus, the overarching goal of this Project was to enhance the CSOs influence on policy development and implementation at national, regional and local levels. A phone based survey was conducted among 110 CSOs participating in the Project to identify: A) CSOs’ opinion on level/extent of CSO influence on public policy in Armenia in general; B) CSOs’ self-assessment of their own ability to influence the public policy in their respective sectors. The survey results show that **52%** of the CSOs versus planned 50% think that currently the CSOs have **sufficient and/or strong** influence on public policy in Armenia. Twenty percent (20%) of the surveyed CSOs assessed the current influence level as “strong”, 32% - as “sufficient”. At the same time, **24%** instead of targeted 50% of CSOs participating in the project reported that their own capacities enable them to have **significant** influence on public policy in their respective sectors. Another 55% of CSOs reported being able to influence public policy, thus resulting in 79% thinking that they can and/or can have significant impact on public policy development and implementation. It is also noteworthy, that the survey results related to both of the above aspects show that women-led CSO representatives are more optimistic with regard to CSO influence level in Armenia as well as more confident on their own ability to influence public policy development and implementation compared to men led CSOs.

The qualitative data collected support this conclusion, since the majority of CSOs participating in the focus and small group discussions reported that their capacities to influence the public policy have improved due to Project activities. Most frequently, CSOs outlined that it is due to consolidation of resources and capacities of different CSOs under the coalitions. According to them, it is more influential and visible when many CSOs speak with one voice raising the same issues. Some of the CSOs indicated that despite the Project is completed they still continue to be active in their sectors and promote the agendas developed during the Project. As concrete examples, they mentioned the concept paper on social entrepreneurship, activities in the SME development strategy, its monitoring and evaluation, introduction of Business Ombudsman office, legislative changes in mass media and television, etc. More examples, which were also highly appreciated by the interviewed Government representatives are presented below in the respective section.

It is worth mentioning that CSOs also reported improved relationships with the governmental entities and local self-governmental bodies. According to them, the Project enabled to widen and deepen the collaboration network and increase the CSO visibility and recognition among the state entities. The interviewed Governmental representatives also confirmed that the relationships between the CSOs and governmental entities is strengthened. Some of them mentioned that they highly appreciate advocacy efforts undertaken by CSOs based on the evidence and research.

Thus, it can be concluded, that overall the Project had strong impact in bringing positive dynamics in terms of CSO role in Armenia, has registered a number of successful examples of actual legislative improvements as a result of CSO led evidence based advocacy, as well as has resulted in strengthened relationships between CSOs and the Government at local, regional and national levels.

## Sustainability

This evaluation has revealed that one of the successful areas of this project is the Sustainability of the Action. Initially the project has described its sustainability strategy focusing on: A) Technical and institutional capacity of targeted CSOs; and B) Policy level changes.

**Technical and Institutional Capacities:** The effectiveness section above describes measurable change in technical and institutional capacities of the targeted CSOs, which is also backed up by qualitative data. In addition, the evaluation revealed that the training course initiated in the scope of the project at the American University of Armenia, will continue after the Project and will provide training for free to interested CSOs. At the same time, the Project has created its own web site, which, along with preserving all the project information for institutional memory and for use by other interested stakeholders, suggests an e-learning platform where CSOs can access all the training materials (to be updated also in the future) and can also pass a self-assessment test to better understand their own capacities.

Despite the fact that fundraising and financial sustainability remain as number one challenge for CSOs' future operation, **all** the CSOs that participated in the focus and small group discussions mentioned that they would continue their activities after the Project end. Vast majority of CSOs evaluated their technical and institutional capacity as sufficient to continue their operation. As for the Coalitions, at the moment of evaluation all 10 Coalitions approached were active. Moreover, 15 CSO Coalitions, with 260 member organisations, signed a Declaration of Cooperation and formed "Constructive Dialogue Network of Armenian CSOs" to join their efforts in the future to address important issues of public need. In addition, all Coalitions have signed Memorandums and Agreements with the respective governmental entities which will remain in force after the Project ends.

**Policy Level Change:** The Project has registered substantial success in influencing legislative improvements, which will have sustainable impact in the future. For example, in December, 2019, the GoA approved the draft law on amendments to the "Law of the Republic of Armenia on Non-Governmental Organizations" submitted by the State Revenue Committee. The draft law has been developed by the Working Group on "the Issues of Transparency and Accountability Provision of NGOs and Foundations" established in the scope of this Project.

Another example is approval of the "Anti-Corruption Strategy of the Republic of Armenia and its Implementation Action Plan for 2019-2022" by the GoA in October, 2019. The CSO Anti-Corruption Coalition and the Armenian Lawyers' Association extensively cooperated with the Ministry of Justice throughout the whole process of the Strategy development. As a result of this engagement, 101 out of 133 recommendations provided by the Coalition and the ALA were fully and/or partially included in the final Strategy.

Judicial and Legal Reforms' Strategy of the Republic of Armenia approved by the GoA in October 2019 is another successful example of state-civil society constructive dialogue organized within the frames of this Project. The Strategy is informed by a number of recommendations and discussions organized throughout the Project. It is also worth mentioning that the Objective 2 of the Strategy on "Establishing real democracy and strengthening the rule of law through the



application of transitional justice tools” has extensively relied on the ALA Report on “Applicability of the Mechanisms of Transitional Justice in the Republic of Armenia in the Light of International Experience” developed in February 2019.

One of the most significant policy level changes that was influenced in the scope of this Project is inclusion of the civil society in the Government’s mid-term expenditure planning process. Back in March 2019, the **Secretariat of the “Constructive Dialogue Network of Armenian CSOs Coalition”** has raised the issue of involvement of CSOs in the budgetary process with the 1st Deputy Minister of Finance. This initiative was welcomed by the Government and accordingly, the ALA has organized and coordinated more than two dozen public consultations with state bodies involving CSOs. As a result of public discussions, comments and recommendations from sectorial CSOs were presented to public authorities and many of them were accepted. As a result of this successful cooperation, the Ministry of Finance has informed the Project Secretariat, that a **draft schedule approved by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia on 2021 Budgetary Process already envisages that, prior to submitting budget applications to the Ministry of Finance, applicants should submit their applications, including accounting justifications for the discussion with CSOs by organizing public discussions.** Thus, the Project introduced this new mechanism, which will continue after the Project and will ensure that CSOs have enhanced opportunities to influence policies and budgets.

All these efforts directly and indirectly contribute to enhancement of the environment for CSO operation and CSO sustainability.

**Transformed Relationships:** Strengthened cooperation between the Government and civil society is acknowledged both by CSOs and the Government representatives. Moreover, there is a mutual interest to continue and further develop these relationships and the Project has contributed to the established sufficient platform for it. The Project has also contributed to transformed role of women led organizations through promoting and encouraging their participation in each component of the Project. As a result, the visibility and recognition of these CSOs has increased along with their self-confidence in their ability to play a significant role in public policy development and implementation.

# INTRODUCTION

The “Commitment to Constructive Dialogue” project with a total budget of 2.222.256 million euros was implemented with the financial support of the European Union by a Consortium of partners consisting of the Armenian Lawyers’ Association, Agora Central Europe (an NGO from the Czech Republic), the Armenian Center for Democratic Education-CIVITAS, the International Center for Human Development, the SME Cooperation Association and the Union of Communities of Armenia. The Project implementation started in December 2016 and lasted for three years.

The project was designed back in 2016 based on the analysis of the available information as well as studies related to the capacity of CSOs in Armenia to influence public policy. The project design considered the recommendations of the independent researches, expert opinions as well as the experience of consortium members in this field, particularly focusing on the flowing needs identified at the time:

- CSOs have little impact on government policies
- Opportunities for networking and collaboration are not being exploited
- There is a difference in capacity between Yerevan-based and marz-based CSOs, with the latter requiring more intense support
- The ability of CSOs to conduct monitoring and evaluation should be strengthened
- Provision of a common working space for CSOs, particularly in the regions, is recommended

Thus, the project defined its overall objective to be enhancement of the influence of CSOs on the public policy process. Two specific objectives were designed to contribute to the achievement of the overall Objective: a) strengthen ability of CSOs to build coalitions, and b) strengthen the ability of CSOs to focus on constructive and strategic policy engagement with local and central government partners.

The main groups targeted by the project were civil society and government stakeholders at local, regional and national levels operating in the following nine sectors: public finance management, human rights, justice, business, education, agriculture, economy, energy and social sector.

The key components of the project included:

- Capacity building of CSOs in a range of skills including monitoring, evidence-based policy analysis, CSO-government dialogue, coalition building;
- Establishment of CSO incubators at strategic locations;
- Provision of small and big scale sub-grants to marz-level and Yerevan based CSO, for public policy monitoring, coalition building and enhancement of capacities as well as for evidence based policy influence

- Other, including but not limited to legal consultations for CSOs, town hall meetings with engagement of local and national level decision makers, etc.

# 1. EVALUATION PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

**The Purpose of this evaluation** is to study the activities performed in the scope of the EU-funded “Commitment to the Constructive Dialogue” Project and to assess their contribution to the objectives and targets defined by the project. In addition, this Evaluation aimed at collecting and analyzing data on challenges faced during the project implementation and providing evidence based recommendations. The Evaluation report audience includes EU Delegation in Armenia, the implementing partners as well as CSOs.

The specific objectives of the Evaluation include assessment of the:

**Project relevance:** To what extent are the Project activities relevant to its objectives and targets, Government and donor priorities and CSO needs?

**Project Effectiveness:** To what extent were the Project Objectives met?

**Project Efficiency:** How efficient were the Project activities?

**Project Impact:** What was the impact of the Project implementation on its direct and non-direct beneficiaries and partners?

**Project Sustainability:** To what extent was the sustainability of Project Outcomes ensured?

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The evaluation methodology is guided by its aim and objectives. The data was collected from primary and secondary sources. Research methods included document review, focus group discussions, key informant interviews, and a phone based survey among targeted CSOs. Overall, 6 focus group discussions and 15 small group discussions have been conducted among Project implementers and direct beneficiaries, and 6 key informant interviews with stakeholders. Phone based survey was conducted among 110 beneficiary CSOs.

**a) Study of the Project documents:** The following list of documents was reviewed in the scope of evaluation.

- Description of the Project, application form submitted to the EU
- Project Logical Framework Matrix
- Project Activity Plan
- Project Monitoring and Evaluation Plan
- First and Second Interim Narrative Reports of the Project
- Project result summary documents
- Capacity building pre-post tests

- Other relevant documents and papers

**b) Focus Group Discussions:** In total, 6 FGDs were conducted among different target groups based on an open-ended questionnaire as follows:

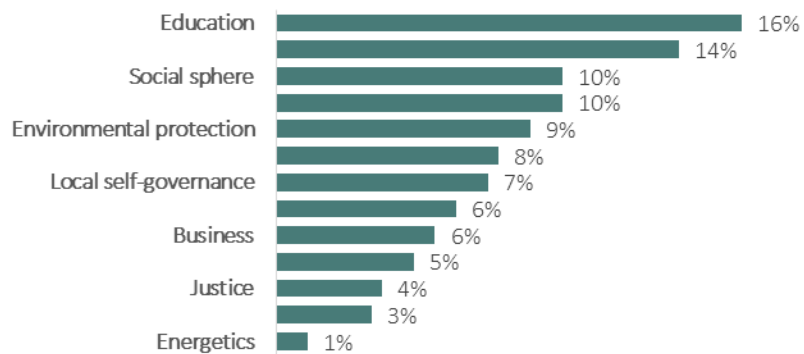
- 1 FGD among the ALA staff members
- 1 FGD among representatives of the Consortium member organizations
- 3 FGDs among Coalition member CSOs
- 1 FGD among Incubator member CSOs, which failed to receive small-grants.

**c) Key Informant Interviews:** The aim of this method was to get in-depth insights from selected knowledgeable stakeholders based on an open-ended questionnaire. Key informant interviewees included an EU representative and six governmental representatives from different Ministries, engaged in the Project Actions in some capacity and who have knowledge on the topic. Overall, 6 key informant interviews were conducted.

**d) Small Group Discussions:** 15 small group discussion were conducted among beneficiary CSOs based on an open-ended questionnaire. The small group discussions were inclusive of CSO staff, such as Head of CSO, Project managers, assistants and other representatives who were somehow engaged in project implementation processes.

**e) Telephone Interviews:** To collect quantitative data on the Project effectiveness and impact, a telephone survey was conducted among final beneficiary CSOs. Accordingly, 110 CSOs participated in the survey, among them 63% were women-led CSOs. Figure 1 reflects the sectors of the operation of the surveyed CSOs<sup>1</sup>. Respectively, CSOs participated in the survey were mainly involved in education, human rights and social spheres.

*Figure 1. The sectors of the activities of the surveyed CSOs*



For all qualitative interviews a brief analysis structure was developed in advance per main themes which enabled for identification of trends. The collected quantitative and qualitative

<sup>1</sup> Data is aggregated in case CSOs are engaged in several sectors

data was compared with the studied secondary data ensuring data triangulation. Data quality was ensured through checking 25% of all transcripts against the interview recordings to ensure 100% accuracy.

The findings of the evaluation are described below by evaluation objectives: Project Relevance, Efficiency, Effectiveness, Impact, Sustainability, and Lessons Learnt and Recommendations.

The key research questions, information sources and data collection methods are introduced in the Table below:

Objective of the assessment	Key aspects	Target Group/information sources	Data collection methods used
<p><b>Project Relevance</b></p> <p>To what extent are the Project activities relevant to the Project objectives and targets, Government and donor priorities and CSO needs?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ To assess the Project relevance to the strategies and policies of the RA Government and donor organization.</li> <li>✓ To assess whether the Project clearly identified current issues, analyzed lessons learnt from previous experience and ensured their link to the on-going activities.</li> <li>✓ To assess whether the Project clearly defined project aims as well as objectives, outputs and program of the interventions/activities aimed at reaching the targets.</li> <li>✓ To assess whether the Project developed a clear and efficient logical framework incorporated within the activity plan and resource timetable.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Project Documents</li> <li>✓ EU strategy, Government Programs</li> <li>✓ Organizations involved in the Consortium</li> <li>✓ ALA staff</li> <li>✓ Partner organizations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Study of the Documents</li> <li>✓ Focus Group Discussions</li> <li>✓ Key Informant Interviews</li> </ul>
<p><b>Project Effectiveness</b></p> <p>To what extent was Project effectiveness maintained?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ The quality of daily management of the budget, including whether the non-sufficient budget was a factor or not.</li> <li>✓ Whether the Project implementers were agile in the case circumstances changed.</li> <li>✓ How the inter-relations between all members of the Consortium and donor organizations were regulated?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Project Documents</li> <li>✓ Project Reports</li> <li>✓ Members of the Consortium</li> <li>✓ ALA staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Study of the Documents</li> <li>✓ Focus Group Discussions</li> </ul>
<p><b>Project Efficiency</b></p> <p>How efficient were the Project activities?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Were the intended results of the Project reached and what is the efficiency of the Project for direct and non-direct beneficiaries and key stakeholders?</li> <li>✓ Were the assumptions and risks adequately and comprehensively assessed at the result level? Were there any unexpected external factors? To what extent was the Project management agile in terms of reaching its objectives?</li> <li>✓ What were the key challenges of the Project and how were they resolved?</li> <li>✓ What was the level and format of the support the Project received from the key stakeholders, including GoA, EU (Head office and country office), etc.?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Project Documents</li> <li>✓ Members of the Consortium</li> <li>✓ ALA staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Study of Documents</li> <li>✓ Focus Group Discussions</li> <li>✓ Small group discussions among the staff of the selected CSOs</li> </ul>
<p><b>Project Impact</b></p> <p>What were the impacts of the Project among its direct and non-direct beneficiaries and partners?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ To what extent were the targeted objectives reached and to what extent was it the result of the undertaken activities within the framework of the Project?</li> <li>✓ In case of unexpected factors what was their impact on the overall outcomes?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Incubator member CSO that did not receive grants</li> <li>✓ Experts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Telephone survey among beneficiary CSOs</li> <li>✓ Key Informant Interviews</li> </ul>
<p><b>Project Sustainability</b></p> <p>How was the sustainability</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Ownership towards Project results and its achievements. E. g., to reach the defined objectives, what kind of consultation did the stakeholders receive? Did they agree with the consultation and how did they appropriate the</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ CSO Coalitions</li> <li>✓ CSOs implementing grant sub-project</li> </ul>	

of the Project ensured?	<p>consultation during the Project implementation?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Political support and responsibilities of stakeholder institutions: to what extent are the donor's and state entities' priorities relevant to each other? In case of political changes, what were their practical consequences?</li> <li>✓ To what extent did the state, sectorial and budget policies impact the Programme both in a positive and negative way?</li> <li>✓ The level of support from the state, public, business and civic society organizations. To what extent did the Project influence legal initiatives?</li> <li>✓ Social and economic factors: did the Project collaborate with formal and informal government structures, public systems? Was the aim at changing social/economic factors or structures/systems achieved and how were these changes perceived by the target groups and other stakeholders? To what extent is this based on the factor analysis? To what extent were the direct and indirect stakeholders involved in the design and implementation phases? What are the relationships between the Programme staff and the stakeholders?</li> <li>✓ Were cross-cutting issues, such as gender equality, environmental impact and good governance considered during the entire period of project implementation?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Final beneficiaries of the grants</li> <li>✓ Partner organizations</li> <li>✓ EU Project focal point</li> </ul>	
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## 3. KEY FINDINGS OF THE EVALUATION

### 3.1 PROJECT RELEVANCE

#### 3.1.1 RELEVANCE OF THE PROJECT TO THE PRIORITIES OF THE GOVERNMENT OF ARMENIA AND THE DONOR

The results framework and the strategies that currently define the development priorities for Armenia encompass the Armenian Development Strategy (ADS) covering the period of 2014-2025, and government programs for the next four to five years, focusing on the country's main development challenges. Armenian Development Strategy (ADS) is the country's main socio-economic development strategy defining the long-term development vision of Armenia. Meanwhile, four to five year government Projects serve as the mid-term planning framework and mid-term national development plan.

In 2016, when the Consortium developed the Project idea and applied to the open call announced by EU, the Government Program for 2016 was in action. At the same time, the Government developed a new program covering the period of 2017-2022. However, after the turning point of political developments in April-May 2018, better known as "Velvet Revaluation", the Government Program for 2017-2022 ceased its actions and two new Government programs came into force: Government program for 2018 and Government Program for 2019. During the implementation of the "Commitment to Constructive Dialogue" Project from 2016 to 2019, three changes in the governments took place in Armenia: two Governments under the rule of the Republican Party and the current Government of new ruling "My Step" Alliance. The newly formed government and the local authorities announced themselves to be more responsive to CSOs' advocacy activities and open to cooperation.

The Armenian Development Strategy (ADS) – as the country's main socioeconomic development strategy defining the long-term development vision of Armenia – has not been updated since the dramatic political changes that started in 2018. The priorities and main objectives defined in ADS state: "Activities aimed at the institutional modernization of the public administration system will adhere to the adopted fundamental policies and will be geared towards improving public efficiency, growth of public resources and their targeted use, improvement of service quality and accessibility, reduction of corruption, transparency of decision-making, and **increased civil society participation in these processes**". Accordingly, it aims to ensure active participation of the civil society in the process of decision-making, considering it one of the priorities for the country.

The common priorities of GoA and the EU as a donor are reflected in the "Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement" (CEPA) signed between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community and their member states, on the one side, and the Republic of Armenia, on the other side. Article 86 of CEPA states that "the Parties shall encourage the involvement of all relevant stakeholders, including civil-society organizations and in particular social partners, in the policy development and reforms of the Republic of Armenia and in the cooperation between the Parties under the Agreement". The other objectives of the CEPA

include facilitation of the process of institution-building and the consolidation of civil-society organizations in various ways, including inter alia: advocacy support, informal and formal networking, mutual visits and workshops, in particular with a view to improving the legal framework for civil society.

According to the Project Application, the overall objective of the Action was to enhance the influence of CSOs on the public policy process, and the specific objectives were to strengthen the capability of CSOs to build coalitions and to strengthen their ability to focus on constructive and strategic policy engagement with local and central government partners. The defined objectives are fully relevant and significantly contribute to the mutual priorities set out in the CEPA (Article 103 of the Chapter 21 of the Agreement), according to which GoA and the EU agree to be in charge of enhancing civil-society participation in the public decision-making process, in particular by establishing an open, transparent and consistent dialogue between public institutions and civil society.

“We did cover all the main areas we are working in. So, from our end, whatever we do in the EU Delegation in Armenia and EU as a whole, we do want to have civil society component, so this project did cover the main priorities for EU.

**Quote from the KII, EUD representative**

“According to our discussions with the Heads of the Program of EU Delegation... the relevance to the EU priorities which are implemented jointly with GoA should be ensured. Of course, our Project aimed at monitoring the defined spheres, change of the public policies, however, the key component was the capacity building of the civic society. We covered the target sectors which are priorities for both the EU and GoA, for example, gender sensitive budgeting, public budget and etc. Those are EU priorities, however, they are also targets of the Government Project”.

**Quote from the focus group discussion, ALA representative**

In addition to the Project’s overall and specific objectives being in line with the mutual priorities set out by CEPA, the sectors covered by the Action were also identified referring to mutual agreements and strategic plans of the donor and the Government. Particularly, according to the reports provided by ALA the following documents were considered while finalizing the list of priority sectors and issues to be covered by the Project:

- Eastern Partnership - Focusing on key priorities and deliverables (the “2020” document)
- Financing Agreements and related documents provided to ALA by the EUD
- The Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (“CEPA”)
- Government policy commitments as expressed in strategies, roadmaps, annual plans etc.
- CSOs’ assessments of priority issues, based on the mapping study conducted by the project in 2017.

Initially the Project had envisaged three sectors to be covered: justice, education and business, however, upon the request of the EUD the scope was widened to 9 sectors in total. It was agreed to revise the project approach and to link the choice of sectors and issues even more closely to

EU priorities, also bearing in mind that in the intervening period the CEPA agreement was signed by the EU and Armenia. The mapping process therefore explored the feasibility of engagement in additional sectors, based on a number of factors, including EU and Armenian government priorities, CSO' capacity and the competencies of the consortium partners. The inception report set out a total of 22 possible sectors (including the three already selected and listed above), and based on its feasibility analysis and consultations, the Project reduced these to the following 9: Public Finance Management, Human Rights, Justice, Business, Education, Agriculture, Economy, Energy, Social Sector: social inclusion of children with disabilities.

In its "Strategy for the Future Development of the Project" the Consortium provided rationale for each section identified. Accordingly, current situation, EU policies and CSO engagement aspects were analyzed for each sector, based on which sector-specific issues were identified to be targeted through Project activities.

"The nine sectors we have selected involve a wide range of aspects which correspond to Government priorities. The other aspect of the relevance refers to the development of evidence-based public policies, defined as a priority by the Government. The Government always claims that it needs evidence-based public policies, and I think we met this requirement"

**Quote from the focus group discussion, representative of the Consortium Member CSO**

According to the Key Informant Interviews conducted among Government representatives, the specific targets of the sub-grants provided in the scope of the Project, were also in line with the Government priorities and on-going programs and activities. For example, research conducted in the SME sphere by the Armenian Business Coalition within the framework of the "New SME Development Strategy for Armenia" sub-grant Project served as a baseline paper for development of the SME strategy from 2019 to 2022. As for the judicial reforms, the current government attaches importance to improving the coordination mechanism for implementing the anticorruption strategy and action plan, and enhancing its efficiency, as well as to more active participation of the civil society in the coordination and implementation of the fight against corruption, also a target field of the Project. The other targets of the sub-grants which were in line with government priorities include criminalization of unjust enrichment, transitional justice, renewable energy and energy efficiency, territorial reforms and administration, public procurement reforms, etc.

"I think that the Program was efficient and perhaps completely corresponds both to the targeted objectives and priorities of the Government of Armenia. As for our entity... I can claim that our entity had several cross-cutting aspects of joint work and we even had some benefits regards this cooperation... the cooperation aimed at the development of pre-school education in rural areas which is currently a priority sphere of the Government".

**Quote from the KII, Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport representative**

“In terms of inclusiveness the Project had many benefits and overall it corresponds to the Government priorities. Though the Project was designed before we had clear priorities defined, the overlap is obvious... for example, the research on SME sector served as a baseline paper for the development of the SME strategy... we used the research as an evidence to ground what we knew a priori”.

. Quote from the KII, Ministry of Economy representative

## HIGHLIGHTS

- The overall aims and objectives of the Project, which include enhancing CSOs’ influence on the public policy development process and strengthening of their capacities, are fully in line with and contribute to GoA priorities, defined in the overarching document – Armenia Development Strategy for 2014-2025. They are also relevant to the EU and GoA mutual priorities set out in CEPA signed between the sides in 2017.
- The Project’s specific conceptual aspects, such as development of evidence-based public policy, inclusion of civil society in public monitoring, etc., are in line with GoA priorities and have adopted best practices.
- The sectors of the actions, as well as specific issues under the sectors targeted for further activities, are linked to GoA and EU mutual priorities set out in CEPA, signed between the sides in 2017.

### 3.1.2 RELEVANCE OF THE PROJECT TO CSO NEEDS AND PRIORITIES

As mentioned above the design of the project has considered analysis of the baseline situation of the CSO needs referencing to two key researches in the sector: “Capacity Building Needs Assessment of Civil Society Organisations in Armenia” report developed under the EU-funded “STRONG Civil Society Organisations for Stronger Armenia” project in April 2016, and “CSO Sector Market: Comprehensive Research Results” report developed under the USAID-funded CSO Depo Project in December 2015. Accordingly, the analysis identified CSO capacity development needs including CSOs’ little impact on government policies, low capacities for communication and external relations, lack of platforms for discussion and knowledge exchange between CSOs and other stakeholders, such as the government, lack of CSOs’ skills in evidence-based policy analysis, monitoring and evaluation, underexploited opportunities for networking and collaboration, as well as gap in capacities between Yerevan-based and marz-based CSOs, with the latter requiring more intense support. As the reviewed documents, as along with qualitative data collected through FGDs and KIIs shows, the Project designed and implemented numerous activities addressing those needs. The Project focused on CSO capacity development in the areas of policy analysis, monitoring and evaluation, constructive dialogue, establishment and strengthening of CSO coalitions, EU best practices in the targeted sectors.

To cover CSO needs, such as the lack of platforms for discussion and knowledge exchange among CSOs and with other stakeholders, including the government, low communication and external relation capacities, the Project focused on developing CSOs communication skills, encouraging networking through incubators, as well as creating platforms for CSO-government dialogue. The differences in the capacities between Yerevan and marz-based CSOs were also considered both in the grants component and facilitation of incubators.

“From the very beginning we conducted an assessment of the organizations. We did enormous work. We developed various questionnaires and guidelines and involved NGOs, coalitions, state entities, local self-government bodies and experts in focus group discussions through which we identified CSO needs. Finally we combined the identified needs with the EU priorities. Of course we also did a desk review. Accordingly we identified four groups of capacities to be targeted further: coalition building, monitoring, policy development and CSO-government dialogue”.

In addition, within the framework of the Project a comprehensive mapping of donor-funded projects was undertaken to ensure synergies with other projects and to avoid duplication. Particularly, EU-financed actions with CSOs (Bridge for CSOs, STRONG CSOs for Stronger Armenia) were duly considered as confirmed by ALA staff members and representatives of the consortium CSOs during the focus group discussions.

Overall the focus and small group discussions with CSOs as well as KIIs reveal that the capacity building opportunities and the consultancies provided in the scope of the Project filled in the existing gaps in competencies and skills of the organizations. Some CSOs specifically highlighted

project proposal development, collaboration with the governmental and non-governmental bodies, creation of coalitions and networking, as their priority needs addressed through the Project. The CSOs that participated in the advanced trainings highly appreciated the capacities gained in the coalition-building theory indicating that generally knowledge and skills were new for them.

“As a person who has an NGO background I can surely claim that the Project directly meets civil society needs, especially for those CSOs that target cooperation with government or local entities in their agenda. There is a need to develop a culture and competencies of constructive dialogue either through the fieldwork or policy-oriented activities. These are two completely different aspects: to have the development of constructive dialogue as an idea and to realize it in practice. I am glad to see that the Program targeted the realization of these ideas”.

**Quote from the KII, representative of the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport**

As competencies, that still need further enhancement the CSOs highlighted fundraising, financial management, strategic planning and institutional development, HR management, time management skills, PR and media literacy, management of public budget, etc.

### 3.1.3 RELEVANCE OF THE PROJECT ACTIVITIES AND OUTPUTS TO THE SET OBJECTIVES

The review of the project application, the Logical framework, the M&E Plan and the action plans

“We have worked in our sector for years, however we had no knowledge on public budget and we did not know what is evidence-based policy. This knowledge will help us a lot in our future activities.

demonstrates that there was a clear path towards the Theory of Change described in the application. The set Outputs and Objectives echoed the needs described in the application and indicators were specific, measurable and realistic. However it should be mentioned that for few Objective level indicators, there were quantitative % increase targets set, while there was no baseline for these indicators. Although the risks and assumptions were generally discussed in the Logical matrix, however they were not fully reflected in and addressed through the risk mitigation plan. Although, it is acknowledged that the likelihood of certain risks to happen was quite low at the time, a mitigation approach could be of help, if planned initially. As for the activity planning, it was mentioned both by the implementing organization and acknowledged by the Donor that in the beginning there were some communication issues that resulted in some changes in and delays of the initial plan, however all parties confirmed that this challenge was overcome and did not impact the overall implementation of the project.

“Yes, the 1st part of project implementation was a bit on hold, we did not know which way to go, then we found the way and increased our participation. The second part I think was much more successful. Miscommunication and lack of common objective were the main reasons. Although the award was signed but still there was a need to sit down and fine tune the objectives to be achieved.

Quote from the key informant interview, EUD representative

## HIGHLIGHTS

- The objectives and main interventions of the project reflected the CSO needs as per the analysis of existing independent studies of CSO capacity gaps.
- Relevance of the Project to CSO needs was overall confirmed by qualitative data collected through FGDs and KIIs.
- The parallel CSO-oriented Projects were duly analysed and considered during the lifecycle of the Project in order to escape duplication of the activities and to fulfil the gaps of the CSO needs and capacities.
- The Project set clear and well-grounded Outputs and Objectives, with respective activities and indicators, showing the Project’s pathway to its Theory of Change.
- The Risks and Assumptions part of the Application should be discussed and planned with the same depth as the other sections.

## 3.2 EFFICIENCY

In order to evaluate the Project Efficiency, the evaluation assessed its agility and responsiveness, including the budget management aspects, as well as successes and challenges linked to the Project management through a Consortium of six CSOs.

### 3.2.1 PROJECT AGILITY AND RESPONSIVENESS

The qualitative data collected through this evaluation reveal that overall the Project was agile and responsive to the changes happening during the Project implementation. Particularly, the Project demonstrated responsiveness with regard to the CSO needs emerging during the Project implementation; to the increased interest of CSOs to participate as well as respond to the topics and agendas of high demand due to political and environmental changes in the country.

The Project was agile in terms of responding to CSO needs and CSOs' willingness to participate in the Action through increasing the outreach of the different components of the Project. For instance, in the scope of the CCD project it was envisaged to have 50 CSOs joining the established Incubators. Taking into account the high demand of CSOs to be part of Incubators, the CCD team increased the number of participants from 50 to 70. One additional Incubator was organized in Yerevan based on CSO needs and requirements. Another example of the Project agility includes increasing the number of THMs to be conducted. It was foreseen that 9 THMs would be organised by CCD project consortium member, ICHD. Finally, in order to ensure the project efficiency, as a result of multiple discussions, it was decided to organize 18 THMs in total.

The Project was responsive to the on-going political changes and to the changes in the overall legal environmental related to the CSO sector. For instance, a CSO-Government Conference was organized on the "The Possibilities of Introducing Mechanisms of Transitional Justice in the RA in the Light of International Experience," which was in line with the on-going political agenda after political changes in April-May 2018. In October 2017, the CCD team initiated a dialogue with the SRC on the issue of tax regulation and the potential financial burden of NGOs under the new Law. In 2019, a working group was created based on a CCD recommendation to discuss issues related to transparency and accountability of NGOs and foundations. Based on the recommendation of the CCD expert team, the SRC Chairman signed the Order N 102-N "On Approving the Exemplary NGO Activity Report Form, Order of Its Completion, Order of Report Publication and the Order of Submission to the State Revenue Committee Adjacent to the RA Government and Revocation of the RA SRC Chairman's N 59-N decision of 13 February 2018." The previous order intended an additional illegal obligation on NGOs that use public funds to submit reports on the use of non-public funds as well. The new order fully corresponds to the RA Law on NGOs (the old one was unlawful as it contradicted the law). Another example of the high-responsive practice to the emerging needs of CSOs was the collective effort aimed at the cancellation of the draft Law on the institution of volunteering which was attempting to restrict the activities of non-profit organizations, in addition to providing leverage to the state to control their activities. It was also decided during the Project implementation stage that consultations would be provided to nearly 300 NGOs after the "Law on Public Organizations" was adopted.



Accordingly, the project provided advice and consultancy to NGOs requiring re-registration under the law, as well as to newly-formed ones.

Some of the topics of events and studies have been chosen by the CCD team based on the current situation in Armenia, NGOs' needs as well as draft laws/secondary acts of the targeted sectors published on e-draft.am during the Project implementation period. In addition, ALA and its partners consistently conducted advocacy campaigns in order to either adopt or discuss the expediency of the provided recommendations with the governmental bodies. This was not envisaged by the Project but contributed to its overall Objective. In response to high interest and demand among CSOs, the CCD team initiated discussions on some additional topics, e.g. a workshop on "Cooperation and Empowerment of CSO Coalitions", "Right to Be Forgotten and Reports of Mass Media on Crimes as a Pretext to Initiate Criminal Cases", a meeting-discussion on the concept of "Amicus Curiae" institution and the possibility of its implementation in Armenia.

"The topics of the conferences and seminars had not been identified beforehand. It was due to the Project flexibility that we managed to define them responding to the emerging needs. For example, "transitional justice"... We did not have any statement on the "transitional justice" but we initiated studies and activities on this topic after the Prime Minister's announcement, also taking into account that we cover justice as a sector. We presented the results of the studies during Parliamentary hearings. In this regard, I can claim that the Project management was agile enough".

Quote from the focus group discussion, ALA representative

At the same time, according to the ALA representatives and representatives of the Consortium CSOs, the Project agility somewhat suffered due to restriction defined by Donor for budget procedures. Particularly, there was a restriction for expenditures directed to human resources. The set requirements limited the flexibility of the Project to use savings. According to ALA representatives more human resources were needed to cover 9 sectors efficiently. There was also a restriction regarding the number of staff involved for Project implementation. Changes in initially envisaged financial management model of the Project due to the Donor's request also created some challenges according to the FGD participants.

"The project management model should first serve the project Objectives. We had to centralize the financial management just to make it easier for the Donor, while this should not be the approach, since all the Consortium member CSOs are reliable organizations. But we understand that this is a Donor requirement and we have to comply".

Quote from the focus group discussion, Consortium representative

## HIGHLIGHTS

- The Project was agile in terms of responding to emerging CSO needs and necessities. Accordingly, some of the Project activities, e.g. provision of consultancies, enhancement

of the Incubators' outreach, advocacy efforts in the CSO-associated legal framework were identified during the Project implementation stage and acted upon.

- The Project was responsive to the new realities in the country caused by political changes and addressed topics and agendas of high demand and interest.
- The Project management efficiency could have been increased provided the financial restrictions and requirements of the Donor were more flexible.

### 3.2.2 CONSORTIUM EFFICIENCY

The consortium implementing the grant Project was composed of 6 organizations. There were no affiliated entities. The Consortium member organizations included:

- Armenian Lawyers' Association ("ALA") (lead implementer),
- Armenian Centre for Democratic Education-CIVITAS ("Civitas"),
- SME Cooperation Association ("SME Association"),
- International Center for Human Development ("ICHD"),
- Union of Communities of Armenia ("UCA"), and
- Agora Central Europe ("Agora"), an NGO based in the Czech Republic.

According to the First and Second Interim Reports, relations among Consortium member organizations were positive. The lead implementer organized weekly meetings attended by consortium members (as far as Agora was not based in Armenia, the lead organization conducted meetings with Agora via telecommunication means on a regular basis), where the project progress and plans were discussed. Representatives of Consortium member CSOs participated in a range of project activities, and took turns to present the project to participants

"The management was really good. We constantly had meetings and consultations at the office led by ALA. During these meetings we planned future activities, next steps, as well as set out accountability mechanisms... for what we are accountable as implementers and for what the beneficiary CSOs are accountable... we tried to efficiently supervise everything. "

**Quote from the focus group discussion, representative of a Consortium member CSO**

of various events.

The secondary data is also verified through the focus groups discussions conducted among the ALA staff and representatives of the consortium-member CSOs, and the EUD Representative stating that meetings and consultations were conducted on a regular basis to ensure a common approach and effective implementation of the Action. Thus, on a weekly basis, issues and activities of the project were mapped out and a division of responsibilities between the consortium members was agreed on. The representatives of the Consortium-member CSOs indicated, that despite there being a division of responsibilities between the members, each member was well informed about the activities undertaken within the framework in other sectors. According to them, the division of resources, functions and responsibilities was well-organized and efficient. This was also stated by the EU representative, despite the mentioned miscommunication and delays in the initial phases of the project implementation.

More detailed overview of consortium members' role in project implementation is presented below.

Management by consortium was efficient, from that point of view we do not have any concerns. For EU it is feasible to work through umbrellas like this consortium and this is why we have sub-grants. It is difficult for us to work with 55 organizations, thus we sign contract with one big organization or as in this case with consortium to organize the project more efficiently. In the case of this project I think they did their job, every single consortium member had a clear role in the action and we did not see any major challenge for consortium.

**ALA:** The lead implementer organized weekly meetings attended by the consortium members (as far as Agora is not resident in Armenia, they have not participated in the meetings. However, the lead organization has been conducting meetings with Agora via telecommunication means on a regular basis) in which project progress and plans are discussed. Apart from participating in a range of project activities, the beneficiaries have also taken turns to present the project to the participants of the various events. In addition, ALA mentoring the human rights, justice and public finance management sectors CSOs participating in the incubator facility, mentoring the human rights, justice and public finance sectors CSO coalitions, assisting coalitions strengthening and dialogue processes with government stakeholders in those sectors, as well as engaging in and supporting the development of policy papers in the human rights, justice and public finance sectors.

**Civitas:** Civitas is respected as an experienced stakeholder in the education sector as well as a good team player, and has played an active role in a range of activities, including the finalization of CSO mapping activities, where it identified education sector CSOs and key issues in the education sector, as well as organizing CSO-LSG Forum, and organizing and taking part in a number of thematic discussions in Yerevan and the marzes. Civitas leads the education and social sector activities, including mentoring education and social sectors CSOs participating in the incubator facility and mentoring the education and social sectors CSO coalition, as well as engaging in and supporting the development of policy papers in the education and social sectors, as well as participating in education sector CSO-government dialogue events.

**SME Association:** SME Association is acknowledged to be an active NGO in raising and pursuing a range of reforms in the business sector, and it engages well in consortium discussions. Like Civitas, it has taken part in various activities during the second year, including the final mapping process. It has taken an active part in a range of activities including the final mapping process, and mentoring business and agriculture sectors CSOs participating in the incubator facility, mentoring the business and agriculture sectors CSO coalitions, assisting coalitions strengthening and dialogue processes with government stakeholders in those sectors, as well as engaging in and supporting the development of policy papers in the business and agriculture sectors.

**ICHD:** ICHD brings its considerable experience in project management to the consortium discussions. Its role in the project has been reduced from scope initially envisaged in the project proposal, but this has not impacted on its relations with the other consortium members. Like other consortia members, ICHD has taken part in various activities during the second year, and organized THMs and OTR meetings.

**UCA:** UCA combines project management experience with an excellent understanding of the potential of the project within the political realities of local government development, and it shares this experience with the other consortium members. It has taken an active part in a range of activities including the final mapping process, and mentoring economy and energy sectors CSOs participating in the incubator facility, mentoring the economy and energy sectors CSO coalitions, assisting coalitions strengthening and dialogue processes in those sectors, as well as engaging in and supporting the development of policy papers in the economy and energy sectors. UCA has also organized CSO-LSG forums.

**Agora:** Based in the Czech Republic, Agora representatives have visited Armenia once during the second year of the project, as well as provided extensive training to the other members of the consortium and CSO Coalitions' members. When not in Yerevan, the representatives have been in regular contact with ALA to discuss project progress and inputs.

*Source: CCD Second Interim Report*

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Relations among Consortium member organizations were positive: division of responsibilities between the consortium members was agreed on and progress tracked regularly in a participatory manner.

### 3.3. EFFECTIVENESS

This section of the evaluation explores the extent to which the Objectives set by the Project were achieved, what the challenges and the lessons learnt were. The specific objectives of the Project were to strengthen the ability of CSOs to build coalitions and to strengthen the ability of CSOs to focus on constructive and strategic policy engagement with local and central government partners.

#### 3.3.1. ABILITY OF CSOs TO BUILD COALITIONS

The achievement of this specific objective was assessed through quantitative measurement of the indicators defined under the Outcomes as well as through collection of respective qualitative data and review of relevant documents.

Outcome 1: Ability of CSOs to build coalitions is strengthened	
Indicator 1.1 Indicator 1.2	Proportion of CSOs participating in networks and coalitions Number of women- and men-led CSOs with experience of participating in national coalitions
Baseline:	“Out of 150 CSOs, 110 CSOs did not mention any network, platform, or coalition they participate in” (CSO engagement mapping study, 2014)
Target :	120 CSOs with experience of participating in national coalitions out of them minimum 48 women-led
Achieved:	225 CSOs have become members of 15 Coalitions out of them 126 women-led and 99 men-led
Indicator 1.3	Number of women- and men-led CSOs undergone training on coalition-building
Baseline:	ALA conducted basic training on coalition building in 2014 for 100 CSOs
Target	100 CSOs minimum 40 out of them are women-led
Achieved:	116 CSOs undergone training on coalition-building 71 out of them were women-led and 45 were men-led CSOs.
Indicator 1.4	Level of understanding of women- and men-led CSOs on coalition-building theory
Baseline	ALA conducted basic training on coalition building in 2014 for 100 CSOs
Target	Measurable improvement in understanding of 70% of women- and men-led CSOs attending trainings on the theory of coalition building.
Achieved	86.2% of the involved CSOs attending trainings improved their understanding on coalition-building theory

According to the CSO engagement mapping study conducted in 2014, 110 out of 150 CSOs did not mention any network, platform, or coalition they participate in. To address this gap, the Project suggested to build the CSOs capacities in coalition building and to facilitate that process. As the table above shows, the project overachieved all the targets set for the indicators under this Outcome.

In the scope of this project, nine sub-grants were provided to the CSOs to build coalitions and to enhance their impact on the public policy processes. Another phase of 9 sub-grants followed, providing the coalitions to strengthen and develop their technical and institutional capacities. The small grants were provided to the CSOs to implement public monitoring and advocacy at the local, regional and national levels. Though not mandatory, CSOs were welcomed to established coalition under this component as well. Five CSO incubators with 70 participant CSOs, were established in Yerevan and in 4 strategic marz level locations. Thirty three CSOs out of 70 Incubator members are now members of the Coalitions built/developed in the scope of the project.

Thus, the overall number of CSOs membering 15 Coalitions became **225 instead of 120** as initially targeted by the project. One of the notable achievements of the Project is active engagement of women led CSOs. The actual achievement of the project with regard to women led organizations participating in Coalitions was significantly overachieved reaching **126 instead of planned 48**.

One hundred and twenty five (125) representatives of 116 CSOs have participated in the certified training (both main and advanced trainings) at the AUA covering coalition-building topics. Hundred and eight (108) CSOs out of which 66 women led, participated in the main training and 16 CSOs, out of which 9 women-led, participated in the advanced trainings. Forty six (46) out of 116 trained CSOs became members of 10 Coalitions built/developed in the scope of the project. Accordingly, the Project exceeded the target set involving **116 versus planned 100 CSOs** in the trainings covering coalition-building topics. And again, the target set for women led CSOs was significantly overachieved resulting in **71 versus 40 women-led CSOs** participating in trainings on coalition-building.

To measure the progress in knowledge and skills among the CSOs that participated in capacity building opportunities and received consultations in the scope of this Project, a questionnaire for CSO capacity evaluation was prepared and used during the Project implementation. Seventy (70) CSOs participated in the evaluation, of which 21 from Yerevan, 15 from Gyumri, 13 from Vanadzor, 11 are from Gavar, and 10 are from Kapan. The questionnaire addressed 4 main components: monitoring of the public budgets and policies, development of the evidence-based public policy, establishment of coalitions, and CSO-government dialogue. Each section included 6 questions 5 out of which aimed at measurement of the theoretical knowledge and one assessing the practical skills. Multiple choice testing approach was used suggesting overall 41 correct and 44 incorrect options.

The analysis of the completed pre- and post-tests revealed that: the share of the selected correct answers increased by **24% (from 66% to 89%)** while the share of the selected wrong answers decreased by **16% (from 28% to 12%)**. The proportion of the correct answers increased among 93% (65) of CSOs participating in the pre-post-tests, while the proportion of wrong answers decreased among 87% (61 CSOs) of respondents. The results are shown on the table below:

Yerevan/Marz	Pre-test		Post-test	
	Number of the selected correct answers	Number of the selected incorrect answers	Number of the selected correct answers	Number of the selected incorrect answers

Yerevan	583	277	732	153
Vanadzor	327	143	493	40
Gyumri	420	198	540	70
Kapan	263	113	397	50
Gavar	298	138	403	46
Total	1891	869	2565	359
Share among the total answers	66%	28%	89%	12%

For the sake of the indicator 1.4, the results of the pre-post tests were also separately analysed for the section on “Creation of Coalitions”. The analysis shows that the share of the selected correct answers increased from 70% in the pre-test to 91% in the post-test (increase of 21%), while the share of the selected wrong answers decreased for 10%. According to the CCD Second Interim Report, **86.2%** of all CSOs attending trainings on Coalition Building improved their understanding by **29%**. Particularly, 80% of those who participated in the AUA main course on Coalition improved their understanding by 25%, and 87.5% of CSOs participating in the advanced course improved their understanding by 33%.

The qualitative data collected through focus group and small group discussions also revealed high level of satisfaction of CSOs from the capacity building opportunities provided by the

“The model of Incubators was quite appropriate especially for the newly created organization who started their activities in the local communities as it enabled them to develop and strengthen their institutional capacities and adopt proper procedures and follow good-practices from the very beginning. Announcement of grant program was also useful for them as they were able to apply theoretical knowledge they gained practically”.

Quote from the small group discussion, CSO representative from Syunik

project.

According the CSO representatives, the trainings and consultations provided within the framework of the Project were useful and effective. Most of them highly appreciated the quality of the provided trainings and covered topics. They highlighted knowledge and skills on coalition-building obtained due to the Project as very important for them. Some of the representatives of the CSOs stated that they did not have any knowledge on Coalitions before the start of the Project. In addition, the Incubators’ role in facilitating the networking between the CSOs and peer-to-peer learning was acknowledged and appreciated.

“I highly appreciate the Incubator’s activities. The selection of the experts was quite successful as they were people who have rich background in the sector and achievements. The experience they shared with us was quite useful and interesting, as it was not just a banal truth but full of new information. We learned how to predict and consider potential risks and how to escape from the failures”.

Quote from the small group discussion, CSO representative from Yerevan



“First of all I participated at the trainings organized at the AUA. I received information on coalitions, etc. I am an expert at local self-governance sphere, however, I was unaware about the coalitions, and I had no experience of organizations of CSO activities and creation of networks. However, I can claim for sure that the one-week trainings were very efficient. In really in this short period of time I received necessary knowledge to organize the processes. Based on the trainings and project results we concluded that we need specialized coalition of local self-governmental specialists”.

Quote from the small group discussion, CSO representative from Syunik Marz

Another proxy indication of the success of the trainings is establishment of 6 additional coalitions under small grants taking into account that for the small grants, it was not mandatory and it was not the main purpose. Thus, this is an example of unintended Outcome of the project which enhanced the impact of overall public policy monitoring and influencing efforts.

#### HIGHLIGHTS

- All the Indicators set to assess achievement of the “Ability of CSOs to build coalitions is strengthened” outcome were overachieved:
  - ✓ 225 versus planned 120 CSOs have become members of 15 Coalitions
  - ✓ 116 versus planned 100 CSOs received training on coalition-building
  - ✓ 86.2% of the involved CSOs attending trainings improved their understanding on coalition-building theory versus targeted 70%
- Notable achievement was registered with regard to participation of women led CSOs, resulting in almost 2 times more women led organizations benefitting from project activities than planned
- CSOs were highly satisfied with the capacity building opportunities provided by the project.

#### 3.3.2 ABILITY OF CSOs TO FOCUS ON CONSTRUCTIVE AND STRATEGIC POLICY ENGAGEMENT WITH LOCAL AND CENTRAL GOVERNMENT PARTNERS

The achievement of this specific objective was assessed through quantitative measurement of the indicators defined under the Outcomes as well as through collection of respective qualitative data and review of relevant documents.

Outcome 2: Ability of CSOs to focus on constructive and strategic policy engagement with local and central government partners is enhanced	
Indicator 2.1	Number of women- and men-led CSOs received advance training on

	<b>constructive policy engagement</b>
<b>Baseline</b>	“CSO collaboration with state authorities is moderate” (EU CSO engagement mapping study, 2014)
<b>Target</b>	100 CSO participants of trainings on constructive policy engagement out of them minimum 40 women-led
<b>Achieved</b>	116 CSOs participated in the trainings at the AUA among them 71 women-led CSOs. Out of them, 108 participated in the main training, among them 66 women-led and 16 in the advanced training, among them 9 women-led
<b>Indicator 2.2</b>	<b>Level of understanding of women- and men-led CSOs on constructive policy engagement practices</b>
<b>Baseline</b>	“CSO collaboration with state authorities is moderate” (EU CSO engagement mapping study, 2014)
<b>Target</b>	Measurable improvement in the understanding of 70% of women- and men-led CSOs attending trainings on constructive policy engagement practices for 15 CSOs out of them minimum 6 women-led.
<b>Achieved</b>	87.5% improved their understanding by 33%.
<b>Indicator 2.3</b>	<b>Number of women- and men-led CSOs participating in policy discussions with central government and local government</b>
<b>Baseline</b>	“CSO collaboration with state authorities is moderate” (EU CSO engagement mapping study, 2014)
<b>Target</b>	120 CSOs participate in policy discussions with central government and local self-governmental bodies out of them minimum 48 CSOs are women-led
<b>Achieved</b>	156 CSOs out of them 58 women-led participated in meetings/policy discussions with central government and local self-governmental bodies

As the table above shows, all indicators under this Outcome were overachieved.

As described in the previous section under Outcome 1, **116 versus planned 100 CSOs** participated in trainings on constructive policy engagement. Among this 116 CSOs, 108 participated in the main training (66 women-led), 16 in the advanced training (9 women-led). As for the Incubator trainings, those covered **70 CSOs versus planned 50**, of which 34 women-led versus planned 20.

Indicator 2.2 targeted measurable improvement in the understanding of 70% of women- and men-led CSOs attending trainings on the **theory of constructive policy engagement practices**. Nine winning consortia representatives passed advanced capacity building training course at the American University of Armenia. In addition, 5-day training course was conducted by Agora experts on following topics: “Cooperation of non-profit non-governmental organisations and government in the Czech Republic, “Development of public policies and dialogue”; “Lessons learned from the operation of the incubators facility.”. Participants (coordinators and mentors of the incubator facility, as well as representatives of the coalitions) learnt from Czech experience and became familiar with ROMA methodology. Through theoretical and practical sessions the

participants learned how to formulate and implement policy objectives. Throughout the training courses, the project implementing team continuously received feedback from participants, which enabled them to readjust the content and methods of the trainings to ensure their effectiveness and quality.

In total, 17 people from 16 CSOs participated in the advanced training course provided by AUA among them 10 women and 7 men. According to the Second Interim Report of the Project presenting the results of the pre-post tests, knowledge increase is registered among **87.5% (14 out of 16) of CSOs versus planned 70%**. The knowledge of 76% of participating individuals (13 out of 17) or 75% of participating CSOs (12 out of 16) has increased in the areas of “Forming CSO-Government and CSO-LGB Dialogue” and “CSO Coalition Building and Development.” CCD Second Interim Report also recorded that knowledge of 82% of participating individuals and 81% of participating CSOs has increased in the areas of “Identification of Public Policy Issues, Development and Analysis of Evidence-Based Policies, and Implementation of Public Policies.”

In addition, the CCD team also recorded knowledge increase among Incubator member CSOs participating in trainings on constructive policy engagement practices. Ninety three (93%) of 70 CSOs trained, out of which 34 women-led, improved their understanding by 23,5%.

According to the focus group discussions and small group discussion conducted with the CSO representatives, among the core competencies gained as a result of the trainings which refer to the constructive policy engagement practices, the CSO representatives highlighted their improved knowledge and skills on the monitoring and evaluation tools, development of the monitoring plans, analysis of policy reforms and policy gaps, as well as building relationships with the governmental bodies. In addition, CSOs reported improved capacities in the advocacy and enhanced skills to efficiently engage in the constructive dialogue with the governmental and local self-governmental bodies.

“We were interested in the development of youth policy. I can say that we knew nothing on this before the start of the Project as well as we were unaware how the policy development processes happen. We were introduced to everything, starting from bureaucracy ending up with the policy development. Before the training we had no experience in implementation of any policy-related project. This was our first attempt and I think that it was quite successful. We have already reached visible results, thus I can claim that knowledge and skills we gained through trainings were useful and efficient”.

Quote from the small group discussion, CSO representative from Gegharkunik Marz

“Within the framework of Project I participated in 2 trainings organized jointly with Czech CSO Agora. It was really efficient, especially in terms of organization of advocacy processes with state entities, we learnt new approaches, technologies and it was very useful. I can say that in Armenia we do not have that type of experience... of course we have advocacy, I am trainer, however that type of advocacy which is continuous, long-term and is based on the dialogue... it was really good experience..”.

Quote from the small group discussion, CSO representative from Syunik Marz

Under the Indicator 2.3 the Project reported **156 versus planned 120 CSOs** participating in the meetings/policy discussions with central government and local self-governmental bodies. Out of these 156 CSOs 75 were women-led. Overall, 187 working meetings/policy discussions were organized with the central government and local self-governmental bodies:

- 70 working meetings/policy discussions with the participation of 42 CSOs (21 women-led) were organized by the sectoral Coalitions;
- 42 meetings/policy discussions with participation of 70 CSOs (34 women-led) were organized by the CSO Incubator member CSOs;
- 71 meetings/policy discussions with participation of 35 CSOs (18 women-led) were organized by the CSOs implemented small sub-grant projects;
- 4 meetings/policy discussions with participation of 9 CSOs (2 women-led) were organized in the scope of the CSO-SRC working group.

Various meetings in the scope of Incubators were organised for their participants with the stakeholders and respective institutions, including Ministries, Agencies, Marz (Regional) Administrations, and Communities. During the mentioned meetings, the CSOs got familiar with the main issues existing in the 9 project target sectors, discussed the reforms and public policies to be developed, implemented or improved in each sector, as well as the activities foreseen in the Incubator Strategy. Overall, 22 meetings were organised in various communities, including Yerevan.

In the scope of the Project 5 CSO-Governments conferences were organized, including topics on possibilities of introducing mechanisms of transitional justice, current state and development prospects of trade unions, etc. In addition, 5 LSG-CSO Forums were organized, including topics on legal powers of the LSGBs in the field of pre-school and secondary education, role of LSGBs in economic development, CSO and LSG cooperation and CSOs' participation in local self-governance in the context of LSG reforms.

As seen from the general efforts of the Project aimed at improving the legal and regulatory framework directly associated with the CSO sector, the Project articulated CSO community's comprehensive understanding of how a favourable framework can enhance CSOs' effectiveness and sustainability. For instance, as result of suggestions submitted by the project and a seminar hosted by the project attended by CSOs and representative of the Ministry of Justice and the National Assembly, amendments to the NGO Law were adopted, making it easier for non-profit unions of legal entities to undergo the re-registration process. Within the framework of one of the sub-grants, several CSOs made efforts to improve the new government's long-term vision on social entrepreneurship. The project hosted a discussion on the draft law on volunteering, with the participation of interested NGOs and a representative from the Ministry of Labour and Social Issues, to clearly voice their dissatisfaction with the draft law. In 2017 the project initiated a dialogue with the State Revenue Committee on the issue of the tax regulation and potential financial burden of NGOs under the new law. CCD worked with over 100 partner CSOs to engage in constructive dialogue with the SRC on the creation of the CSO-SRC working group, which will

focus on CSO accountability and drafting amendments to the laws on Public Organizations and Foundations.

According to the key informant interview with the governmental representatives overall the Project received support from the key stakeholders, including GoA and local self-governmental bodies. For example, the representatives of the Ministry of Economy highly appreciated the Armenian Business Coalition efforts to promote Concept Paper on Social Entrepreneurship highlighting that constructive dialogue between the sides was achieved enabling effectiveness of the joint activities. According to the representative of the Ministry of Territorial Development and Infrastructure the studies conducted on the provision of communal services in the consolidated communities identified issues at the local level which are currently under discussion at the Ministry.

### **Sub-Grants**

One of the biggest components of the project that contributed to both Outcomes was sub-granting. A total of 47 sub-grants were allocated to CSOs and CSO Coalitions/Networks. In total, 18 of them were awarded to CSO Coalitions/Networks in 9 target sectors. It should be noted that the allocation of sub-grants to Coalitions/Networks was organised through 2 phases. Hence, in the 1<sup>st</sup> phase 9 sub-grants were allocated to CSO Coalitions/Networks for public policy monitoring and improvement (development, revision and advocacy) and additional 9 sub-grantees were allocated to the same 9 Coalitions/Networks for building/developing their capacities in the 2<sup>nd</sup> phase.

At the same time, in order to develop, advocate and implement public policies in cooperation with the respective state bodies, the Coalitions and CSOs have signed overall 44 Memorandums of Understanding with the Government, LGs and the Parliament.

In total, 9 Coalitions created working groups in different formats. In the scope of the project, the following formats of Government/LSG-CSO working groups have been formed: working groups created by the order of the head of the relevant agency, groups formed with specific participants, cooperation memoranda. Each CSO in the mentioned working groups implemented public policy development and carried out the advocacy of their application at this stage.

According to the CSOs participating in the focus and small group discussions as well as according to the key informant interviews, the sub-grant projects significantly contributed to the specific objectives of the Project. The majority of the CSOs reported that while implementing the sub-grants they not only achieved their own set objectives, but often overachieved those as well as achieved unplanned positive results. Some of the CSOs mentioned that they broadened initially defined scope and objectives of the research through application of additional research methods, enhancement of sample size and geography. The others broadened and deepened their advocacy efforts, applied additional awareness raising measures, organized public consultation meetings and enhanced the scope of collaboration with the different governmental and non-governmental entities.

Some illustrative projects implemented within the framework of the sub-grants allocated to the coalitions and small grants allocated to the CSOs and CSO coalitions are presented below.

Within the framework of small grant project “Local Democracy Development and Research Centre” NGO implemented “Protected Beneficiary Family and Informed Citizen” project which aimed at the protection of the interests of beneficiary families when one of their members is temporarily employed. According to the current regulations the family stops to receive benefits in case one of the family members is employed or temporarily employed. This regulatory gap was several times highlighted by the Prime Minister of Armenia, however the GoA did not adopt any regulatory changes so far in this regards. The Project studied the issue involving experts, employers, families which receive benefits based on expert interviews and focus group discussions methods. In addition, an analysis of the legislation on state benefits was conducted. According to the results, a list of recommendations aimed at improvement of the regulatory framework was developed. The results of the study as well as proposed solutions were published. The Project team discussed the issue with the Parliament members and The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. A Memorandum was signed between the sides. According to the Memorandum while updating the regulations of family benefit system the Ministry should take into account the provided recommendations and opinion of the NGO should be considered.

“I can surely claim, that we completely achieved the targeted objectives. Our grant project’s budget was only 5 million AMD within the framework of which we completely studied the issue focusing on Yerevan and Shirak region, which is the poorest one among the others. We discussed the issue with the legislative and executive bodies, Parliament members and the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs respectively. We signed a memorandum which ensures that our recommendation will be taken into account when changing the regulatory framework. I think that the results are great taking into account the projects’ small budget”.

Quote from the small group discussion, Representative of “Local Democracy Development and Research Centre” NGO

“Agat” Centre for Protection of Rights of Women with Disabilities NGO, based in Gyumri, implemented “Persons with Disabilities Are Protected from Domestic Violence” small sub-grant project, which was aimed at promoting elimination of discrimination against persons with disabilities, especially women, and to prevent violence.

The Project exceeded the initially targeted objective in several perspectives. According to the project proposal, a package of recommendations were to be developed only for the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs and Ministry of Justice. However, the Project team prepared recommendations also for the Ministry of Healthcare. The Project did not envisage monitoring

“The Ministry implemented reforms in this sector and trainings were provided to the state entities. I am sure that owing to our project the role of the people with disabilities will be enhanced, as well as the Government will improve its vision on how they should meet special requirement of the people with disabilities. I know that the Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs always refers to our study and our project as a good example during her meeting in the regions. She refers to our study as an evidence to claim that we have problems in this sector. Therefore, I can surely claim that we reached our objectives and we will have positive changes in this sector”.

Quote from the small group discussion, Representative of “Agat” Centre for Protection of Rights of

and interviews among the representatives of the state entities, however, they were also involved in the study. The Project assessed the capacities of the different state entities to deal with the people with disabilities. The study sample was enhanced, including additional regions as well as people with different types of disabilities were involved in the study. The study was appreciated by the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, which referred to it in their annual report.

Under the big sub grant Armenia Business Coalition implemented “New Strategy for Effective Development of SME Sector in Armenia” Project. The objective of the project was to develop and submit to the Government of Armenia a widely debated, well-grounded and partially-tested draft of the new SME sector development strategy 2019-2021, which will be essential for the effective organization of the further development of the SME sector in Armenia. Besides, the Project aimed at introduction and establishment of the business ombudsman institution in the SME sector, improvement of the social entrepreneurship policy in the SME sector, as well as promotion of the social entrepreneurship education.

The sub-project exceeded its targeted objectives from several perspectives. The project raised SMEs’ awareness on how to enter to the European markets. Initially the project proposal envisaged small assessment which would include assessment of the current SME strategy and focus group discussions among the SME representatives. With regards to the voluntary efforts, the Project enhanced the scope of the research covering not only assessment of SME strategy, but also overall SME need assessment in the country. Accordingly, the Project team conducted 330 interviews with the SME representatives, qualitative interviews and expert interviews with the sectorial key informants.

“The Research was highly appreciated by the Ministry of Economy. We were told that they used our research as evidence while developing new SME strategy. We created a working group which is currently working with the Ministry of Economy. We developed a list of recommendations which will be addressed by the new strategy. Besides, adoption of Social Entrepreneurship concept paper is priority for us and it is envisaged for the first year of the Strategy”.

**Quote from the focus group discussion, Representative of Armenian Business Coalition**

## Challenges and lessons learnt

The essential challenge for the Project implementation was frequent turn-over among the national government representatives and decision makers due to the political changes and instability. Three Governments changed during the three year of project implementation. Accordingly government representatives also changed in some working groups which

“I remember that we were implementing our Project parallel to the political transitions. Within the framework of the Project we had three different meeting with the Regional Governor office (Marzpetaran). One official was replaced with another almost every week and every time we had to explain the aim of our Project from the very beginning”.

**Quote from the small group discussion, Representative of CSO from Yerevan**

significantly prolonged the process of achieving results. Almost all representatives of the beneficiary CSOs and Project implementer CSOs indicated that although the risk of political instability was recognized from the beginning of the project design as an important factor that could hinder the implementation, the likelihood of that risk was estimated very low at the time.

The other challenge that the Project faced included delays in receiving approvals from the EUD for various project documents, which resulted in delays in implementation, e.g. the first round of sub-grants was planned for the 1<sup>st</sup> year of implementation. Sub grants were to be awarded to CSO coalitions, and the incubator facility, which would enable the first group of 25 CSOs to have sufficient time to gain practical expertise in policy development and dialogue. As a result, only limited progress has been made during the initial stages of the Project implementation, which however was sorted out at the later phases.

CSOs also highlighted that the Project duration allocated was not sufficient for the planned activities. Accordingly, CSOs had to exert additional efforts to achieve the targeted results within the defined deadlines. This was coupled by delays when receiving responses from the governmental and local self-governmental bodies. According to the CSOs, advocacy efforts were time-consuming and extension of the Project durations would enhance its outcomes.

“Time” was the main challenge. The advocacy and policy development are really time-consuming processes and it is not feasible to reach real results during a year. In fact we did a lot of work during that year, however advocacy is a long-term process and it would be better to have a project with 2-3 years duration. It will really enhance the efficiency.”

Quote from the small group discussion, Representative of CSO from Syuniq Marz

Among other challenges the CSOs highlighted were poorly developed databases and poor statistics, lack of official information on the topics to be studied, difficulties while working with some of the Ministries. Some CSOs also mentioned that ensuring 10% of investment from the CSO end was challenging as CSOs did not have free resources to allocate for this purpose.

According to the CSOs the Project implementer team was quite responsive to the emerging challenges CSOs face during the Project implementation. Project implementer team provided necessary assistance to the CSOs to overcome faced problem in timely manner.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- 116 versus planned 100 CSOs participated in trainings on constructive policy engagement. Nine winning consortia representatives passed an advanced capacity building training course.



- CSOs reported improved capacities in the advocacy and enhanced skills to efficiently engage in the constructive dialogue with the governmental and local self-governmental bodies.
- Overall, 187 working meetings/policy discussions were organized with the central government and local self-governmental bodies. In total, 156 CSOs participated in the meetings/policy discussions with central government and local self-governmental bodies.
- Overall the Project received support from the key stakeholders, including GoA and local self-governmental bodies.
- The sub-grant projects significantly contributed to the specific objectives of the Project. Some of the projects not only achieved the set objectives, but often overachieved those and reached unplanned positive results.
- The essential challenges for the Project implementation was frequent turn-over among the national and regional government representatives and decision makers, delays in receiving approvals from the EUD for various project documents, short and insufficient project duration for achievement of the intended advocacy efforts.

### 3.4 IMPACT

This section of the evaluation explores on the overall impact of the Project focused particularly on the overarching goal of the Project which was to enhance the influence of CSOs on the public policy processes in Armenia.

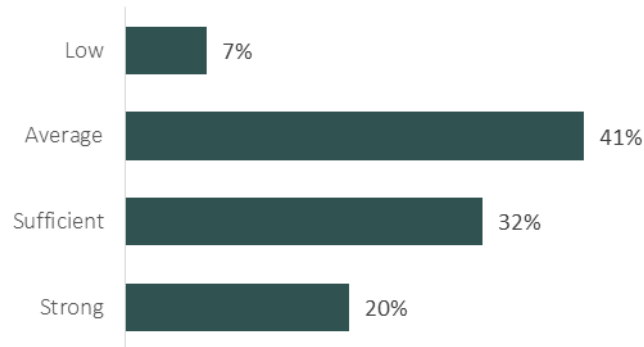
#### 3.4.1. CSOs’ INFLUENCE ON PUBLIC POLICY

The progress towards and contribution to the Project goal was assessed through quantitative measurement of the Project indicators as well as through collection of qualitative data and review of respective document. Research conducted in the scope of EU “Strong CSOs” in 2016, as well as other studies suggested that CSO influence on public policy development and enforcement is **quite low** in Armenia. Thus, in the scope of this project, apart from building the CSO’ capacities, big scale grants were provided to the sectorial national coalitions aimed at strengthening the CSO influence on the public policy. The Coalitions were to identify key issue/s in their respective fields, conduct monitoring and research to present evidence based conclusions and recommendations to state bodies. Small scale grants were allocated to the marz-based CSOs to undertake monitoring of public policy at the local and regional levels.

Outcome: To enhance the influence of CSOs on the public policy process	
<b>Indicator 1</b>	<b>Extent of women- and men-led CSOs’ influence on public policy</b>
<b>Baseline</b>	“little impact on government policies” (EU “Strong CSOs” report, April 2016)
<b>Target</b>	50% increase of women- and men-led CSOs’ influence on public policy in the target sectors
<b>Achieved</b>	52% of the surveyed CSOs assessed the extent of the influence on public policy as sufficient or strong
<b>Indicator 2</b>	<b>Number of women- and men-led CSOs reporting significant influence on public policy in the target sectors</b>
<b>Baseline</b>	“little impact on government policies” (EU “Strong CSOs” report, April 2016)
<b>Target</b>	50% increase
<b>Achieved</b>	24% (26 CSOs out of 110 participated in the telephone survey) reported to have significant influence on public policy in the target sectors among them 16 CSOs women-led (overall 79% mentioned that they are able to and/or able to significantly influence public policy)

In order to measure the above indicators, a phone based survey was conducted among 110 CSOs participating in the project. Accordingly, the CSOs were asked to assess the level/extent of CSO influence on public policies in Armenia on the scale from 1 to 4 (low, average, sufficient, strong). Taking into account that the secondary source suggested that the baseline for this indicator was “low”, it was decided that the overall % of answers stating “sufficient and/or strong” will be counted in the end-line value of this indicator. Accordingly **52% of the CSOs versus planned 50%** stated that currently the CSOs have sufficient and/or strong influence on public policy in Armenia. Twenty percent (20%) of the surveyed CSOs assessed the current influence level as “strong”, 32% - as “sufficient”. At the same time most frequent answer (41%) was that the

influence is still average, meaning less than satisfactory, and 7% of the respondents think that



the extent of CSO influence on public policy in Armenia is still low.

FIGURE 2. THE LEVEL/EXTENT OF CSO INFLUENCE ON PUBLIC POLICY IN ARMENIA ACCORDING TO THE CSOs PARTICIPATING IN THE TELEPHONE SURVEY

It is noteworthy that according to the survey results, women-led CSOs more frequently state that CSOs in Armenia have sufficient or strong influence on public policy than men-led CSOs. Accordingly 58% of women-led CSOs assessed CSOs' influence to be sufficient and strong, while only 42% of men-led CSOs reported these results (Figure 3).

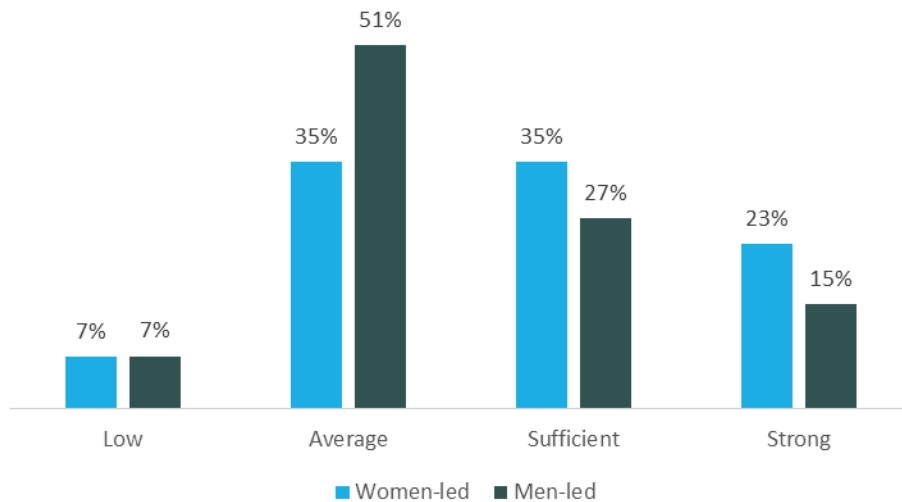


FIGURE 3. THE LEVEL/EXTENT OF CSO INFLUENCE ON PUBLIC POLICY IN ARMENIA ACCORDING TO THE WOMEN-LED AND MEN-LED CSOs PARTICIPATING IN THE TELEPHONE SURVEY

CSOs participating in the phone-based survey were also asked to evaluate their own abilities to influence the public policy in a scale of 1 to 4 (not able to influence, can have limited influence, are able to influence, are able to have significant influence). Twenty-four percent (24%) versus targeted 50% of CSOs (26 out of 110) reported that their capacities enable them to have significant influence on public policy in their respective sectors. It is worth mentioning that 16 (62%) out of 26 CSOs that evaluate their ability to influence as significant are women led. Accordingly, 55% of CSOs reported being able to influence public policy; 20% think that they can have limited influence and only 1% of CSOs stated that are not able to have any influence at all (Figure 2).

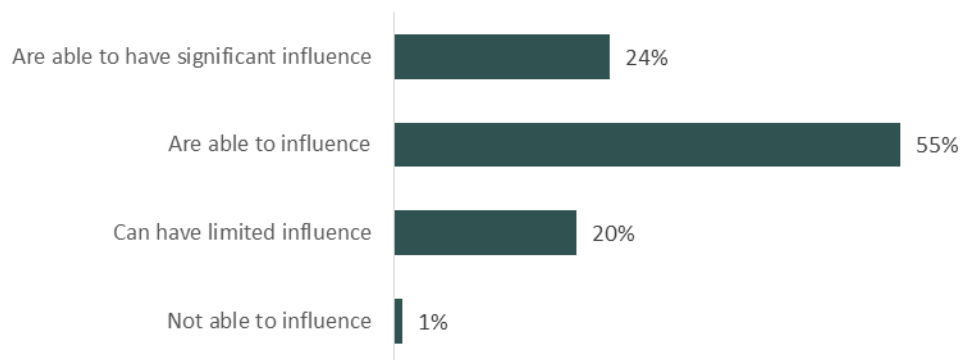


FIGURE 4. THE ASSESSMENT OF CSOs CAPACITIES TO HAVE INFLUENCE ON PUBLIC POLICY ACCORDING TO THE CSOs PARTICIPATED AT THE TELEPHONE SURVEY

Again, women-led CSOs more frequently mentioned that they are able to influence on public policy (61%) in comparison to the men-led CSOs (46%), while from the perspective of significant influence the share of women- and men-led CSOs is almost the same.

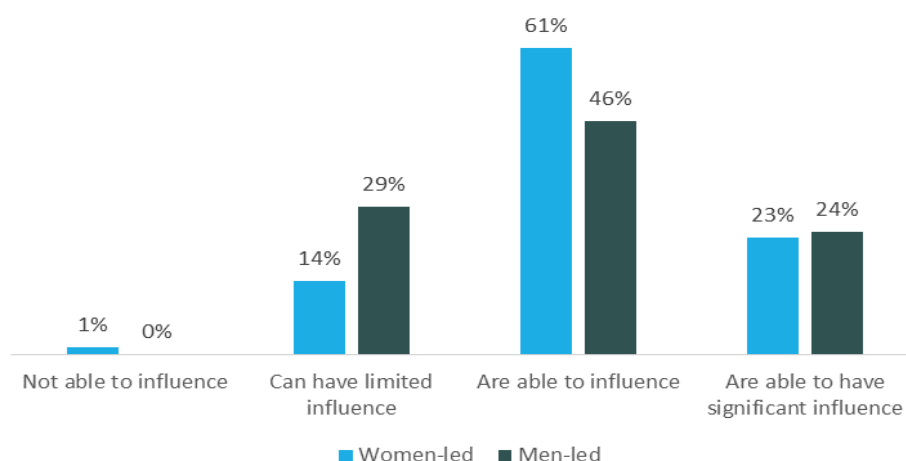


FIGURE 5. THE ASSESSMENT OF CSOs CAPACITIES TO HAVE INFLUENCE ON PUBLIC POLICY ACCORDING TO THE WOMEN-LED AND MEN-LED CSOs PARTICIPATED AT THE TELEPHONE SURVEY

In general, CSOs participating in the focus and small group discussions reported that their capacities to influence the public policy have improved due to Project activities and their particular roles and responsibilities undertaken within the framework of the Project. Most frequently, CSOs outlined that their influence on public policy has increased due to consolidation of resources and capacities of different CSOs under the coalitions. According to them, it is more influential and visible when many CSOs speak with the same voice raising the same issues.

In some cases, the CSOs participating in the focus or small group discussions had difficulties to assess whether their activities had any impact on the public policies as the policy development procedures are still on-going at the relevant governmental bodies. However, most of them predict that recommendations and suggestions submitted by them will have certain influence on the policy development processes. Some of the CSOs indicated that despite the Project is completed they still continue to be active in their sectors of activities in terms of promoting agendas developed during the Project. As concrete examples, they mentioned the concept paper on social entrepreneurship, activities in the SME development strategy, its monitoring and evaluation, introduction of Business ombudsmen office, law changes in mass media and television, etc. Several CSOs indicated that it is difficult to assess their achievements due to lack of follow-up and monitoring from their side after Project completion.

“We have planned reforms in 4 aspects: Law on Advertisement, Law on Television and Radio, Law on Mass Media, Law on Taxes and Duties. We plan to make essential changes to enable public television to broadcast social advertisements. The current legal regulations are not beneficial for them. Besides, we need to engage also commercial televisions. They should also have some tax excuses to broadcast social advertisements. Our organization will have significant impact on the governmental and public sector in this regard”.

**Quote from the small group discussion, CSO representative from Yerevan**

“... I hope so, because in terms of legal changes the legal reforms on family benefit system is not in the agenda yet e.g. the package is not included in the parliamentary discussions yet. But I think that the recommendations provided by us on this regard will be accepted and will be discussed during the parliamentary hearings. I am sure because we had meetings with the Parliament members, we discussed the issues with them, they have participated in the events we organized, we signed a memorandum on this regard”.

**Quote from the small group discussion, CSO representative from Yerevan**

CSOs and other stakeholders participating in the key informant interviews and focus group discussions highlighted several sectors, where the Project’s influence on public policy was tangible and policy changes were visible. This includes policy changes related to violence against people with disabilities, state subvention programs in the agricultural sector, consideration of energy efficiency during the public procurements, transitional justice, anti-corruption strategy,

reforms in the judicial system, law on local self-governance, etc. In these sectors, recommendations provided by the coalitions were fully or partially taken into account by the governmental bodies while making amendments in respective legal or regulatory frameworks. For example, with regard to the “CSOs for Sustainable and Transparent Energy Development” Project under energy sector the Ministry of Finance accepted regulation to consider energy efficiency aspects while conducting public procurements.

Besides the Project’s general conceptual correspondence to CSOs’ needs and priorities, the Project was also responsive to CSOs’ needs which emerged during the project implementation phase due to changes in the political or legal environment. For instance, during the Project life-cycle, the legal environment regulating the sector of non-profit organizations was significantly changed. Accordingly, CCD lawyers have provided legal advice to **302** NGOs through **573** advice sessions which were required to re-register under the law, as well as to newly-formed NGOs. Besides advice sessions, the project lawyers assisted in drafting charters and other registration documents such as minutes, applications for NGOs, providing organizations with samples of service provision contracts, volunteer labour contracts, etc. As a result, **37** new NGOs were registered, and 54 existing NGOs were re-registered. In addition to this, ALA and consortium partners held 19 trainings in Yerevan and marzes covering the topics directly associated with CSO operation: new NGO legislation, NGOs' social entrepreneurship regulations, volunteering regulations for NGOs, as well as public participation in local self-government.

The participants also highlighted that the Project had significant impact on various reforms, including the business sector and regulations of the non-governmental sector. Action plans developed under the Project led to policy reforms in social sector, as well as business, justice and education sectors which have their social dimensions. Particularly, the Project influenced improvement of the social entrepreneurship policy in the SME sector, development of the concept documents aimed at the introduction and establishment of the business ombudsman institution, etc.

An example of how the Project through its sub-grants made an attempt to influence on public policy is introduced below:

Under “Social Sector: Social Inclusion of Children with Disabilities” sector “For Quality and Accessible Inclusive Education and Social Support” project aimed at social inclusion had been implemented. The project aimed at improving the quality and effectiveness of educational services provided by general inclusive education institutions and social services, provided by community based support centres in 4 marzes of the RA, increasing CSOs’ impact on the development and implementation of public policies in these areas. In order to improve public policies in the sector, 2 concept documents on social inclusion, support and cooperation were developed on the baseline issues of introducing inclusive education, improving the activities of community support centres and enlarging cooperation.

Members of civilian groups who participated in training sessions carried out monitoring of inclusive education in four target regions - Armavir, Gegharkunik, Kotayk and Vayots

Dzor, according to which an assessment report was prepared. Within the framework of the Project needs assessment of community support centres was also administered. Inter-Regional Coalition to Deal with Issues of Children with Disabilities was created. Accordingly, the Coalition had working meetings with the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, Deputy Minister of Education and Science (currently Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport), Deputy Minister of Health and other governmental representatives. The main results of studies carried out in the community centres for social support were presented to the Deputy Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, an agreement was reached to discuss them in greater detail in the future. Working groups were formed in 4 regions: Armavir, Gegharkunik, Kotayk, Vayots Dzor. Sectorial stakeholders and representatives of regional administrations were involved to reveal issues in the sector and prepare recommendations. Regular assemblies of the coalition took place. Coalition organized also a two-day workshop for planning a strategy for the protection of the interests of the Inter-Regional Coalition Dealing with Issues of Children with Disabilities during which National Assembly Deputy and First Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs were present.

In addition to the CSO influence on public policy at national level, the Project had also an impact at the local level. For instance, “Youth for their Future” Project implemented by “Agape World” Youth NGO, aimed at contributing to public and active participation of youth in Tchambarak community, particularly on setting mechanisms to allow youth engagement in public finance monitoring, implementing advocacy campaigns and developing the community youth policy. Due to the Project efforts, the newly elaborated 5-year Community Development Plan of Tchambarak includes provisions on youth engagement and budget is allocated for this purpose. Another example is “Community Pulse” NGO, which implemented “Rural Tourism, Organic Agriculture” Project aiming at promotion of rural tourism in the community of Vardenik through public policy development. Through the conducted advocacy efforts the Project managed to change the 5-year Community Development Plan of Vardenik to include organic agriculture and rural tourism as a primary area of community development.

In some cases the CSOs tried to develop sustainable solutions for their influence in policy making activities. For example, “Agape World” Youth NGO initiated development of a youth policy model which is replicable for the all regions. After adaptation to the local needs and priorities the communities will be able to use the proposed model. This idea has been introduced to the former Ministry of Sport and Youth (currently consolidated with the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport) and was welcomed by them.

Some of the CSOs indicated that impact on the public policy, as well as on the legal and regulatory frameworks of the selected sectors was somehow difficult taking into account the political changes in the country, e.g. resignation of old parliament, new parliament elections, constantly changing public officials in the most of the governmental sectors, etc.

It is worth to mention that CSOs also reported improved relationships with the governmental entities and local self-governmental bodies. Some of them, especially more experienced CSOs indicated that although they used to have positive relationships with the governmental and municipal entities before the Project start, the Project enabled to widen and deepen the collaboration network and increase their visibility and recognition among the state entities. Some of the CSOs indicated that the reason for improved cooperation is that from one hand the governmental entities and especially local self-governmental bodies became more open for collaboration, on the other hand, the trust level towards their CSOs increased among the state entities due to the evidence-based advocacy efforts and involvement of experts in the policy development activities. Governmental representatives, who participated in the key informant interviews, also confirmed that the relationships between the CSOs and governmental entities is strengthened. Some of them mentioned that they highly appreciate advocacy efforts from the CSO side based on the evidences and research.

“The reputation of our NGO has increased. Currently state entities and municipalities take us seriously. Definitely I can say that our impact increased. I can claim this as I see improved attitudes of municipalities and regional administrative offices towards our organization”.

Quote from the small group discussion, CSO representative from Syunik Marz

The participants of the focus group and small group discussions were asked to describe the overall impact of the project. The CSO representatives indicated that the achieved impact can be grouped in three categories 1. Achievements of the Project as a whole in the area of strengthening the CSO influence on public monitoring 2. Specific results of the projects implemented in sectors 3. Achievements related to the organizational development of the CSOs.

Under the overall achievements of the Project CSOs most frequently highlighted is creation of dialogue with the governmental entities and consolidation of the public sector organizations' efforts.. Besides, the creation of opportunities for dialogue with local self-government bodies as well as creation of the coalitions which are in charge of identification of the sectorial issues and their possible resolutions were also highlighted by the CSOs. As an overall achievement of the Project obtaining a comprehensive knowledge on the issues for each sector was also mentioned by CSOs.

According to the CSO representatives of the focus group discussions, the specific key achievement of the Project is at discourse level, as “now everyone understands that the constructive dialogue has no alternative”. CSOs stated that “constructive dialogue” is a common term now and it is important to put it into an action.



Among the specific key achievements of the project, CSOs mentioned the comprehensive research and monitoring of the sectorial issues. This has equipped CSOs with evidence that can be used for national and local level advocacy for the future.

As achievements related to the organizational development CSOs outlined their improved capacities and deepened knowledge on development of policy papers, building coalitions and dialogue with national and local governmental bodies, as well as networking and peer-to-peer learning. In addition the increased visibility of CSOs as a result of Project implementation was also highlighted.

“The project was CSO-oriented as we were not a donor organization, rather a partner of CSOs. We just had a function of grant allocation. We are a CSO like most of them, thus we are familiar with their needs, and we know how to support them and how to understand them as we build our relationships on partnership. We did not use administrative levers which was the most important aspect to achieve the results we recoded now”.

Quote from the focus group discussion, ALA representative

According to the ALA representatives, CSOs had poor understanding and appreciation of involving subject matter experts while designing their activities and strategies. The Project created opportunity of exposure to sectorial experts and the CSOs now acknowledge its importance for enhancing the effectively and quality of their activities. Thus, the Project improved CSOs’ attitudes and practices of cooperation with experts, which in turn will contribute to the overall quality of CSO efforts in the future.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- The majority of the CSOs stated that currently the CSOs have sufficient and/or strong influence on public policy in Armenia
- Women-led CSO representatives are more optimistic with regard to CSO influence level in Armenia as well as more confident on their own ability to influence public policy development and implementation.
- The Project was responsive to the needs of CSOs emerging during the Project implementation stage as a result of legal and regulatory changes in the sphere.
- The Project overall and its various activities through sub-grants targeted specific issues, which directly or indirectly are linked to regulation of CSO field including the Law on Public Organizations and the Law on Foundations, public procurement sector, supervision of non-commercial organizations, social entrepreneurship, etc.
- CSOs as well as Governmental representatives reported improved relationships and strengthened cooperation.

### 3.5 SUSTAINABILITY OF THE PROJECT

The Project initially outlined its sustainability strategy through different dimensions: a) technical and institutional empowerment of the targeted CSOs which will last and be further utilized after the project ends; and b) policy level changes that would also include socio-economic improvements with long lasting impact. This evaluation has assessed the achievements and challenges from the viewpoint of the designed sustainability strategy.

#### 3.5.1 TECHNICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL SUSTAINABILITY

In order to strengthen the technical capacity of the targeted CSOs, the Project carried out a big number of interventions, some of which are presented below:

- AUA training course (beginner and advanced);
- Sectorial and thematic capacity building events based on the needs identified through a thorough assessment;
- Establishment of incubators;
- Provision of sub-grants.

In order to build the institutional capacity of the targeted CSOs the project supported the organizations with their strategic planning as well as with development of internal procedures and policies. In addition, the Incubators created opportunities for CSOs to build their knowledge on development of evidence based public policy improvement projects and later on, the sub-grants enabled them to apply this knowledge in the practice.

The CSOs involved in the Incubators also received trainings on the financial sustainability for better financial management and fundraising. At the moment of the evaluation, few CSOs involved in Coalitions, e.g. “WINNET Armenia” Network of Women Resource Centers, Gyumri Youth Initiative Center, the “Armenian National Health Council” coalition, “Coalition for Equal Rights”, etc. were in the process of implementing other donor-funded projects.

As the findings described in the effectiveness section show, the project resulted in measurable increase in the technical capacities of the CSOs which participated in the Coalitions, Incubators and other Project-related activities. Overall, according to the CSOs participated in this study the Project recorded improved skills in communication, policy analysis, monitoring, coalition building. The Government officials in the target sectors also had an opportunity to increase their knowledge and skills through participation in conferences, discussions, working groups, etc.

Some of the CSOs participating in FGDs and small group discussions reported that now they are able to define the vision and the main directions of their operation more precisely. For those directions they plan activities and even set targets to track the progress. Other CSOs mentioned that they gained new knowledge on the sectors and issues where they work and will use this knowledge in their future activities. In addition, the CSOs stated that they consider broader and deeper cooperation with the government and self-government bodies for the future.

“I received skills on implementation of monitoring and evaluation which I did not have before. I can surely claim that this was useful not only for me but also for the other participants of the trainings. We enhanced our experience in this sphere. We learnt also how to build networks and how to collaborate with the partners... knowledge and skills I gained will be useful for our future activities. At least I have some understanding on how monitoring and evaluation works, what type of tools do we need and how we can work with the different state bodies.”

Quote from the small group discussion, CSO representative from Yerevan

CSOs participating in the focus group discussions and small group discussions were asked whether they have sufficient professional and institutional capacities to continue their activities. Some of the more experienced CSOs, that have been active in their respective fields for years, indicated that the Project was a “step forward” towards enhancing their existing technical and institutional capacities. Most of the less experienced CSOs, e.g. Agape World Youth NGO,

“I can surely claim that our institutional capacities enhanced due to this Project. Besides, the Project improved the visibility of our NGO and enabled to construct better relationships with the governmental entities. Based on this we managed to carry out some organizational changes inside the NGO. We adopted several procedures which we did not have before. We developed these procedures within the framework of this Project which is essential investment for our organization and was a “level up” for us”.

Quote from the small group discussion, CSO representative from Shirak Marz

evaluated their own technical and institutional capacities as sufficient.

Scarce financial resources and difficulty with fundraising were highlighted by many CSOs as a key obstacle for their future activities along with the reduced level of donor funding in Armenia. Despite that, **all** CSOs involved in the focus group discussions and small group discussions indicated that they will continue their activities after the Project completion.

The focus group discussion conducted with the ALA staff revealed that the organization is open to continue provision of consultations and training to the CSOs both in Yerevan and regions in the future upon need. With its internal resource and fundraising ALA is making an attempt to implement new project conditionally called “ALA for modernization” which is aimed at creation of three CSO development loops accordingly in the South, North and Center. ALA undertook respective actions to launch this initiative which, according to them, will support the CSOs to become more sustainable and less dependent on external funding.

In addition, it was mentioned that the Project has created a web site: [ccd.armla.am](http://ccd.armla.am), which is up and running even after the project completion to ensure institutional memory and to serve as a resource for all interested stakeholders. This site which is accessible and regularly used by CSOs, not only has all the information on Project but also suggests an e-learning platform with all training materials used during the Project which will also be updated in the future. The e-learning enables interested CSOs to access the training materials and also to complete a self-assessment test to have better understanding on their capacities.

Thus, it can be summarized that from the point of technical and institutional sustainability, the Project has achieved its sustainability strategy. The evidence collected through qualitative methods, demonstrates increased capacity of CSOs that according to CSOs will be utilized in their future activities. All CSOs plan to remain active in their respective sectors despite the financial challenges. It is also worth mentioning that American University of Armenia, that led the CSO capacity building trainings, will continue to offer courses for CSOs for fee after the end of the Action, which is a significant sustainability factor that contributes to the continuity of the capacity building opportunities for CSOs.

### 3.5.2 POLICY LEVEL SUSTAINABILITY

Nine coalitions were created in the scope of this Project that currently continue to operate. Nine working groups were created which drafted concept papers and action plans for policy improvements, part of which has been incorporated into the government policies and will continue to be implemented after the Project ends.

ALA and other Consortium member organizations are continuously making attempts to advocate for and support improvements in legal and regulatory framework concerning CSO sector, specifically the ones regulating CSO financial transparency, social entrepreneurship, taxation of non-profit organizations. All these efforts are directed to enhancement of the environment for CSO operation and CSO sustainability.

For example, in December, 2019, the GoA approved the draft law on amendments to the “Law of the Republic of Armenia on Non-Governmental Organizations” submitted by the State Revenue Committee. The draft law has been developed by the Working Group on “the Issues of Transparency and Accountability Provision of NGOs and Foundations” established in the scope of this Project.

Another example is approval of the “Anti-Corruption Strategy of the Republic of Armenia and its Implementation Action Plan for 2019-2022” by the GoA in October, 2019. CSO Anti-Corruption Coalition and the Armenian Lawyers’ Association extensively cooperated with the Ministry of Justice throughout the whole process of the Strategy development. As a result of this engagement, 101 out of 133 recommendations provided by the Coalition and the ALA were included in the final Strategy.

Judicial and Legal Reforms’ Strategy of the Republic of Armenia approved by the GoA in October 2019 is another successful example of state-civil society constructive dialogue organized within

the frames of this Project. The Strategy is informed by a number of recommendations and discussions organized throughout the Project. It is also worth mentioning that the Objective 2 of the Strategy on “Establishing real democracy and strengthening the rule of law through the application of transitional justice tools” has extensively relied on the ALA Report on “Applicability of the Mechanisms of Transitional Justice in the Republic of Armenia in the Light of International Experience” developed in February 2019.

One of the most significant policy level changes that was influenced in the scope of this Project is inclusion of the civil society in the Government’s mid-term expenditure planning process. Back in March 2019, the **Secretariat of the “Constructive Dialogue Network of Armenian CSOs Coalition”** has raised the issue of involvement of CSOs in the budgetary process with the 1st Deputy Minister of Finance. This initiative was welcomed by the Government and accordingly, the ALA has organized and coordinated more than two dozen public consultations with state bodies involving CSOs. As a result of public discussions, comments and recommendations from sectorial CSOs were presented to public authorities and many of them were accepted. As a result of this successful cooperation, the Ministry of Finance has informed the Project Secretariat, that a **draft schedule approved by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia on 2021 Budgetary Process already envisages that, prior to submitting budget applications to the Ministry of Finance, applicants should submit their applications, including accounting justifications for the discussion with CSOs by organizing public discussions.** Thus, the Project introduced this new mechanism, which will continue after the Project and will ensure that CSOs have enhanced opportunities to influence policies and budgets.

According to the focus group discussion with ALA staff successful implementation of the Project will encourage and motivate CSOs in other sectors (e.g. health, environment, social) to learn from their experience and adopt some of the elements of the models applied within the framework of the Project. For this purpose, the Project had strong and people-oriented PR component in place aimed at enhancement of the Project visibility and outreach.

According to the focus group discussions and small group discussions with the CSO representatives, most of the CSOs plan to continue their public policy monitoring and influencing role. Some of the CSOs indicated the list of the practical actions they plan to carry out in the future. Among these activities were further cooperation with the governmental and local-self governmental bodies, monitoring and evaluation of the achieved results, further advocacy efforts to enhance the outcomes of the projects.

“We consider conducting another monitoring of the already improved social support centers and to provide additional training for people with disabilities. Based on the research conducted by us we will be able to implement more targeted awareness raising campaigns and activities. We plan to provide training also in the centers monitored under our Project which will enable them to improve services provided by them. We continue our cooperation with the Ministry and Project continuation is visible for us”.

Quote from the small group discussion, CSO representative from Shirak Marz

CSO representatives were asked to provide suggestions regarding their perspectives on how else the Project sustainability could be ensured and strengthened. Most of the CSOs had difficulties to mention any activity. However, few of them noted that the sustainability is generally linked to the availability of financial resources. Thus, more focus on capacity building on fundraising and social entrepreneurship could be helpful. Some of the CSOs recommended to enhance awareness raising activities, reduce bureaucracy and technical part of the work to enable space for more creative work, as well as to extend the duration of the Projects enabling for time on the results' follow-up and monitoring. Some of the CSOs proposed to extend the Project and initiate CCD 2 taking into account the successful experience of the current Project and lessons learnt. CSOs indicated that second round of the Project will strengthen the achieved results of current Project and ensure viability of the established Coalitions.

### 3.5.3 SUSTAINABILITY OF INCUBATORS AND COALITIONS

Five CSO incubators with 70 incubator participants were established in Yerevan and in strategic locations in 4 marzes. Thirty three CSOs out of 70 Incubator member CSOs are now members of the Coalitions built/developed in the scope of the project. The Incubators were an important component for the capacity building of the CSOs due to organized trainings, and various meetings with the key sectorial decision makers at local, regional and national levels.

Most of the CSOs that participated in the focus group and small group discussions had difficulties to clearly answer whether or not the Incubators will continue their activities. Some of the CSOs mentioned that they will be ready to pay for the services provided by the incubators depending on the different components of services, including topics and thematic directions of the trainings and capacity building activities. Some of the CSOs highlighted that they will join Incubators in case they are able to clearly outline the benefits and outcome of joining them. Some of the CSO representatives indicated that Incubators have successfully completed their functions at this stage and there is no need to continue their activities.

Creation of coalition was the successful continuation of the Incubators' activities, therefore further efforts should be invested in strengthening the Coalitions rather than Incubators.

Nine sub-grants were allocated to CSO Coalitions within the 2<sup>nd</sup> stage for capacity building/development of their Coalitions. The sub-grant projects were launched in January, 2019 with six month of implementation period. The coalitions established by the project developed multi-annual strategies and therefore have targets to be achieved in future years. This was done intentionally to ensure that the Coalitions life-span does not end with the Project. Moreover, all Coalitions have signed Memorandums of Understanding and Agreements with the respective governmental entities, outlining future areas of cooperation.

However, the representatives of the CSOs indicated several issues with regard to future of the coalitions. Mostly, those are linked to the financing of the Coalition. Though the coalitions have strategic development plans and fundraising strategies, attracting new financial resources remains an essential challenge for most of them. Coalition representatives also mentioned that the time allocated for the 2<sup>nd</sup> phase of the sub-grants aimed at strengthening the established

Coalitions was not sufficient to achieve substantial results. After the Project completion the communication and cooperation between some of the coalition members weakened. Accordingly, CSO representatives suggest to implement 2<sup>nd</sup> phase of the Project aimed at further strengthening of the established coalitions.

“I would suggest to simplify the technical work enabling more concentration on the creative work. Otherwise, we have 6 months for the Project implementation, significant part of which we spend on implementing technical work. We were able to fully concentrate on the contextual part of the Project only after 2 months work on the technical part”.

**Quote from the small group discussion, CSO representative from Yerevan**

“We hardly managed to complete several activities as the time was too short. We were not able to increase demand on our services among the member-organizations and to set up membership fees. To successfully set up membership fees one should receive tangible benefits from participation, which is difficult to manage in short period of time. Currently, all Coalitions have developed fundraising strategies and make attempts to attract finances. It will be great to have CCD 2 to support the established coalitions for another couple of years”.

**Quote from the focus group discussion, CSO representative from Gegharkuniq Marz**

However, at the time of the evaluation the established coalitions still continued their activities. For instance, Armenian Business Platform is planning to participate in the creation of Business Platform, a platform which will enable mentoring activities for small businesses. “Armenian National Health Council” Coalition of the healthcare sector established under the small-grant project that includes 15 CSOs, has a new grant project from the US embassy. This coalition has its web-page and media outlet and is influential in terms of public policy development in the healthcare sector. “Agricultural Alliance of Armenia” continues to exert advocacy efforts to improve the legislative framework of the cooperatives. Constructive Dialogue Network is planning to organize its first meeting after the Project Completion. It is worth to mention that a minimal expenditure model for coalition functioning is developed, which is currently piloted for the Anti-corruption network. In case of success, this model will be rolled out and will enable coalitions to maintain their sustainability with minimal financial resources.

“We created a separate visuals for Armenian Business Coalition, including web-page and Facebook page. The web-page provides wide functions and is suitable for awareness raising campaigns. But currently we do not have sufficient human and financial resources to keep it functioning”.

**Quote from the focus group discussion, CSO representative from Yerevan**

In addition to the aforementioned, it should be noted that on 16<sup>th</sup> of February, 2019, 10 CSO Coalitions, with combined membership of about 260 organisations, signed a Declaration of Cooperation, deciding to establish the “Constructive Dialogue Network of Armenian CSOs”. The idea of joining the forces and putting it on the legal basis emerged and was developed during the three-day Workshop on Cooperation and Strengthening of CSO Coalitions organized in the scope of the Project. During the workshop, the representatives of nine coalitions presented to their partners the main objectives of their activities conducted under the CCD sub-grant projects and the main obstacles they face. As a result of the discussions, the participants came to the conclusion that there are great opportunities to work with each other and to have joint results. “This is a new quality partnership, and I hope it will contribute to the solution of the major and most problematic issues that exist in public life as well as in economic and social spheres,” Mr. Karen Zadoyan, President of the Armenian Lawyers’ Association, CCD Project Manager said.

The following 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 ( strengthened within the framework of CCD Project);
- CSOs Anti-Corruption Coalition of Armenia.



## Cross-cutting issues

**Environment impacts:** The Project did not assume significant adverse environment impacts, however, according to the Project Application Form, environmental aspects were considered during the project implementation and respective mitigation measures have been applied. The relevant section of the risk analysis and contingency plan described possible environmental risks, which include waste of natural resources and materials. The Programme proposed recycling or reusable materials, usage of energy saving equipment on cars used for transportation; usage of two - sided printed paper, avoiding the usage of materials when possible.

In addition, the project considered the environmental factor when developing concept papers and reform action plans. One of the projects was directed to the environmental protection and energy efficiency. “CSOs for Sustainable and Transparent Energy Development” Project under “Energy sector” aimed at the creation of a CSO coalition (network) for public policy improvement, monitoring and advocacy in the sustainable energy and climate change area and ensuring public participation in that processes. Within the framework of the project two key achievements were reached: 1. Monitoring and improvement of local government energy efficiency initiatives; and 2. Development, improvement and advancement of public policies in the community procurement process, based on best experience of norms and regulations ensuring development of energy efficiency and renewable energy.

**Gender equality:** According to the Project application form submitted to EU, the Action adopted a gender- and disability- mainstreaming approach to the identification of key issues in the sectors, as well as while holding events throughout the projects. Accordingly, for some of the indicators the Project defined special targets concerning women’s participation. Accordingly, quotas for the women-led CSOs’ involvement in the trainings, incubators and coalitions were defined. It is worth mentioning, that for all the defined gender-disaggregated indicators show that Project exceeded all the targets for women led CSOs. The trainings provided to the CSOs covered topics referring gender aspect. “Town hall” meetings conducted under the Project made additional efforts to ensure equal representation of women and men.

One of the projects targeted issues referring gender equality issues. Particularly, “Budget for Everyone” Project aimed at the development and implementation of effective child and gender-sensitive budgeting mechanisms in the local budgets of enlarged communities in Syunik, Vayots Dzor and Tavush marzes of the RA. Within the framework of this Project, analysis of focus group discussions on gender budgeting opportunities was implemented. Members of the WINNET Armenia network board had meetings with the governmental representatives where the “Budget for All” project and its objectives were presented. The project team made advocacy efforts to make accents by the government in 2019 community development Projects and allocate 10 % of the projects to gender sensitive Projects (Projects aimed at the needs of vulnerable groups, children’s and women’s problems). Besides, “Possibilities of Introducing Gender Budgeting in RA Communities” were discussed with the respective governmental and local self-governmental bodies.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- The technical sustainability of the Project was ensured through provision of multi-sectorial and multidimensional consultancy and capacity building activities, which resulted in measurable increase in technical capacities of the targeted CSOs.
- Institutional capacity of targeted CSOs also increased, especially in the areas of strategic planning. However, the fundraising and financial sustainability still remain as number one challenge for CSO' future operation.
- CSOs assessed their professional and institutional capacities to continue their activities as sufficient.
- All of the Coalitions signed Memorandums and Agreements with the respective governmental entities and continue their advocacy efforts regarding public policy development in the targeted sectors. However some of them have problems with financial resources and indicate reduction of interest of member CSOs after the Project ended.
- In total, 10 Coalitions with 260 member CSOs formed a “Constructive Dialogue Network of Armenian CSOs” to join the efforts for solution of the most important issues existing in public life.
- Relations between CSOs and government representatives at all levels was strengthened.

## 4. LESSONS LEARNT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As part of the FGDs and KII, the Project implementers, beneficiary CSOs and partners were asked about their lessons learnt from the Project and were invited to share their recommendations.

### ALA and Consortium member organizations' perspective

- CSOs do not fully acknowledge the need of inclusion of subject matter experts when doing public policy assessment.
- Some CSOs still have poor understanding on project design.
- More focus should be put on creation of new CSOs and development of their capacities.
- Capacity building of CSOs should always be based on capacity assessment and be comprehensive, not limited to the areas mentioned in the Proposal.
- CSOs should be supported for diversification of their financial sources.
- AUA current course curricula should be broadened and enriched to include: strategic planning, proposal writing, project design, monitoring and reporting, fundraising.
- Capacity development of the established coalitions should be continued.
- Avoid centralization of the financial management. Enhance the agility of the financial management of the Project to be relevant to the Project objectives and targets set.

### CSOs' perspective

- Any Project aimed at creation of coalitions should last for at least several years to ensure sustainability.
- There are processes which are external and they do not depend on the Project implementers. These type of factors should be perceived as risks and analysed beforehand.
- Working with the state entities is time-consuming as officials have their own schedule of work and working priorities. There was a need for more accurate time management from the very beginning of the Project.
- One platform of cooperation is not enough to build relationships with the Government. Several platforms of cooperation encompassing formal and non-formal means of cooperation are needed.
- Non-efficient start of the Project was registered due to delays from EU end, which slowed down the on-going activities in the first phase of the Project. CSOs lost one year before submitting sub-project applications and start of the activities, which otherwise could be used for advocacy efforts.
- Remove the requirement of investments from the NGO side.
- Provide additional financing to the Coalitions ensuring their further strengthening and impact in the selected sectors.

### Government representatives' perspective

- Follow-up the Project results and achievements. Study the practical influence of the policy changes occurred in the scope of the Project. Continue close collaboration with the Government.
- Enhance the awareness raising and outreach components of the Project. Ensure that at local levels wider participatory approaches are applied.
- Develop sub-projects' content, objectives and components based on the local needs rather than donor agenda.
- Enhance CSOs capacities in monitoring and evaluation to ensure their active and effective participation in the keeping the governmental bodies accountable. Develop CSOs analytical skills and capacities to deal with public policies.
- Explore possibilities to continue the Project to strengthen the achieved results and outcomes.

### Evaluation team's perspective

- CSOs start to acknowledge the need of involvement of subject matter experts, while doing policy assessments and developing policy recommendations. Future similar projects should stress this aspect and support CSOs to further enhance the professional quality of their advocacy efforts.
- CSOs should be supported to be more active not only in policy development but also in keeping the central, regional and local governments accountable for public policy and reform delivery. Particularly, CSO capacity could be further built in community and state budget monitoring.
- Implementation of this Project by ALA as a lead organization contributed to its sustainability, since the Association was and will continue operating in the field. Such approach could be applied by the donors in the future, i.e. to grant projects to organizations specialized in the respective fields.
- Projects of this scale should have baseline measurements in place to enable quantitative measurement of the change through the end line evaluations.