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Project Steering Committee Meeting Citizens' Empowerment in the Republic of Moldova

MINUTES no. 1

- Date:** 24 October 2019
- Event:** Steering Committee Meeting of the project "Citizens' Empowerment in the Republic of Moldova"
- Moderator:** Valentina Plesca, Head of Citizens' Empowerment and Capacity Development Unit, GIZ
- Participants:** The list of participants is attached
- Minutes drafted by:** Eugen Lupascu, advisor on regional development, GIZ
- Distribution list:** Delegation of the European Union (EU) to the Republic of Moldova, Ministry of Agriculture, Regional Development and Environment of the Republic of Moldova (MARDE), National Council of NGOs, Regional Development Agencies (North, Centre, South, UTA Gagauzia), partner civil society organizations (CSOs).

Opening speech

Mr. Gintautas Baranauskas, representative of the Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Moldova, addressed the participants with a welcome message. He pointed that the project "Citizens' Empowerment in the Republic of Moldova" is another step made by the EU to improve the quality of life for citizens of Moldova. The project comes to further support local initiatives in specific sectors: water and sanitation, energy efficiency, waste management, etc.

In recent years the European Union and other donors have invested significant resources to improve the infrastructure. Involving citizens is very important to make these investments sustainable. The empowerment of the citizens is meant not only to ensure the function of "watch dog" and contribute to the prevention of corruption, but also to strengthen the community ownership. Mr. Baranauskas expressed confidence that the project will bring tangible results for many citizens of Moldova.

Mr. Sergiu Gherciu, Secretary of State in the Ministry of Agriculture, Regional Development and Environment, welcomed participants and thanked the EU Delegation, German Embassy and GIZ for the contribution to improve living conditions of Moldovan citizens. Mr. Gherciu stressed that this project is particularly important, as it coincides with the MARDE efforts to ensure the investments made meet the real needs of citizens. A milestone is Moldova's Government initiative to fight corruption at all levels, which is not possible without citizens involvement. The project could come as support to the Government in achieving this goal. The constructive involvement of citizens, men and women, vulnerable groups, in all the processes of planning, design and implementation, allows to hold local authorities responsible and reduce corruption. It is important that

the project will contribute to raising awareness on environmental issues, as well as socio-economic and financial issues related to local public services.

Presentation of the project - the implementation mechanisms, progress to date, visibility of the project

Ms. Christina Otto, manager of the GIZ project “Modernisation of local public services in Moldova”, presented the purpose and objectives – empowering citizens through constructive participation of civil society organizations (CSOs) in local, regional and national decision-making. This will be achieved by the partner CSOs selected to operate in the regions. Partner organisations will award sub-grants to local CSOs to implement local projects, build capacity of local CSOs and support creation of CSOs networks in the regions. Also, the project will ensure synergy with other projects funded by the EU or other donors. (*PPT presentation is attached*).

Ms Elena Spinu, GIZ advisor on citizens empowerment, presented the project main achievements during January-September 2019. The most significant ones are: the events to launch the project in all four regions; selection of partner organizations (4 regional CSOs and one CSO on media); Operational Manual developed for partner CSOs and the Applicants Guide developed for local CSOs; a training on project implementation with selected partners; developed project visibility materials; and the project web page that will allow online application for grants, etc.

The main activities planned for the next period were presented: launch of the Local Grants Programme in regions and at national level (estimated for 15 November 2019); launch of the online application platform www.eu4civilsociety.md and organisation of information sessions; assessing the capacity development needs of partner organizations; financial training for partner CSOs; creation of evaluation committees and selection of the first grantees; the award of grants to selected local CSOs; and identification of Regional Development Councils (RDC) representatives as members of the project Steering Committee (*PPT presentation is attached*).

Partner CSOs presentation and activities for the next quarter

The five partner CSOs presented the goals, objectives and expected results of the proposed projects and activities planned for the next quarter (*PPT presentation is attached*):

- For North development Region: AO “Pro Regional Cooperation” and AO “CASMED”;
- For Centre development region: Association for Efficient and Responsible Governance (AGER) and ADR “Habitat”;
- For South development region: IP CRAION CONTACT-Cahul;
- For ATU Gagauzia development region: European Center “Pro-Europa” in Comrat and CONTACT Center;
- For outreach and communication: Independent Press Association (API)

Comments and discussions on the status of the project

Ms. Victoria Neaga, project manager on civil society at the Delegation of EU in the Republic of Moldova, given the EU Delegation experience on sub-granting civil society organizations, came with several recommendations:

- Partner CSOs to put extra effort to revise the number of regional information sessions planned and organise information sessions in the areas where civil society is not sufficiently developed and active. Representatives of the EU delegation will try to participate at these events.

- Project visibility should be ensured not only by traditional methods (brochures, banners, flyers), but also by encouraging creative and innovative activities to promote European values. European values are to be promoted not only API, but also by the other partner organizations.
- CSO partners to consider using a common title of the project – inspiring, short and easy to remember. The title must link all the interventions of the partner organizations and avoid identifying a project with the organization that implements it.
- GIZ, together with partner CSOs, to develop a strategy to ensure the sustainability of results at the local level. During local project proposals evaluation, it is recommended to carefully review how CSOs propose to ensure sustainability.

Ms Valentina Plesca, head of unit for citizens empowerment and capacity development, GIZ, informed that the project has the necessary tools to ensure sustainability of results, especially for projects with infrastructure. According to the Applicants Guide, grant recipients will be required to describe in the project proposal the final owner and responsible for infrastructure maintenance. It is to assure that the local public authorities (LPAs) will take over any infrastructure and an assigned operator will effectively manage it. This will be explained to prospective applicants during the information sessions.

Mr. Christian Ballaro, representative of the Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Moldova, underlined the importance of ensuring sustainability, especially by the partner CSOs. This project is closely related to many other investment projects financed by the EU. As a result, partner organisations should provide guidance and tailored trainings to local organizations and citizen groups how to make change sustainable. Mr. Ballaro stressed on the following:

- The visibility of the project and its donor is an obligation and must be a priority of the GIZ and its partner organizations. EU and the German Cooperation logos must be present in all documents and presentations, internal or external. All existing or newly created web platforms must be connected to the project web page, www.eu4civilsociety.md. Likewise, it is required to adopt a similar style and vision for web pages and visibility materials. In this way, the project will be perceived by the beneficiaries as a joint one, with a common approach.
- Efficiency of the efforts and resources. Project partners must ensure synergy in activities, teamwork, leveraging on other organizations and their capabilities, as well as mutual empowerment partners involved in project implementation.
- Effectiveness of the interventions. The project should implement specific actions to increase citizens' understanding of the opportunities offered. Interventions and actions must influence the society, and the bureaucratic process must be translated into plain and clear language for citizens. In relation to other investment measures currently implemented with EU funding, it is important for people to be involved, to understand the opportunities offered and to use this infrastructure, in order to achieve true development and well-being.
- Visibility must be viewed as an opportunity, and the approach to communication and visibility must be strategic. A short message, for example, “Be the change!” as proposed by AGER could be the message visible in the project. The project webpage can be a tool for increasing efficiency, facilitating the process and avoiding corruption.

Mr. Tomasz Horbowski, Solidarity Fund PL Moldova, made a few important points:

- To ensure the sustainability of citizens involvement. Creation of networks of local CSOs could provide the opportunity to ensure the continuous process of involving citizens.
- To review the role of Regional Development Councils, which could have an operational role in implementation of projects and guarantor of projects sustainability.

- To ensure synergies with other development partners. A technical and operational discussion between the partners could be considered.

Ms. Plesca mentioned that CSOs members of RDCs could be the basis for creation of networks in the regions. As result of recent general local elections, MARDE initiated the process for creation of the new RDCs, therefore CSOs should be encouraged to participate in the competition for selection as RDC members, which is to be initiated by MARDE and RDAs shortly.

Mr. Igor Mironiuc, the representative of IREX/USAID program „My Community”, following the ideas shared by Mr. Tomasz Horbowski recommended the following:

- To avoid duplication of activities and topics covered by various foreign assistance programs and projects. A closer coordination and analysis of every project interventions will be useful to ensure efficient use of resources and avoid confusion among citizens;
- To set up a mechanism for the exchange of information and efficient tools on work with citizens and LPAs between various assistance programs, as well as exchange on achievements and challenges in work with LPAs and citizens in targeted communities;
- To identify ways to institutionalize citizens' initiatives. A network of 1070 public libraries supported by IREX / USAID through the “Novateca” project, which have the necessary infrastructure and equipment, could serve as information centres and good platform for institutionalizing citizens' initiatives.

Mr. Ballaro pointed out that synergy is the key to success. The web platform created by GIZ could be an effective tool in this context. If extended, it can be offered as a platform for other development partners, including to MARDE, for planning, information exchange and communication.

Ms. Plesca suggested to partner CSOs to organize periodic, possibly quarterly, meetings with development partners and external assistance projects to exchange information and experience.

Mr. Igor Malai, head of department for regional development policies within MARDE, highlighted that the project comes to meet the needs not only of the citizens in communities, but also the needs of public institutions such as MARDE. The experience of recent years demonstrates that attempts to involve CSOs in regional development process and decision-making were unsuccessful. Support from the European Union must be effectively used. MARDE wants CSOs to be involved in the RDC meetings, but also to launch initiatives to stimulate the processes of regional development.

Mr. Malai's recommendations and requests were as follows:

- Support MARDE in the process to select CSOs as members of RDCs by informing organizations of opportunities to be involved in regional decision-making and promoting regional development. The first opportunity is to consult the new paradigm of regional development and policy on urban development;
- Apply the principle of concerted efforts, so as partner CSOs promote the EU assistance to the regional development;
- Partner CSOs to offer trainings on mobilizing citizens and involvement in decision-making and projects implementation and monitoring;
- Information on the project to be shared on the RDAs and MARDE websites;
- Use RDC meetings as a platform to coordinate development partners interventions.

Ms. Plesca confirmed that the trainings planned will address both the proper use of funds, and the application of various innovative tools of citizens engagement. Also, once the project webpage is functional, GIZ is open to exchange banners with institutions involved, and documents, such

as Applicants Guide can be placed on the webpages of institutions that want to promote the project.

Closing remarks

Mr. Gintautas Baranauskas in his closing speech appreciated the results achieved so far by the project. The discussion proved to be important to all involved, including in terms of identifying interventions that need to be improved to reach sustainable results.

Decisions

1. GIZ and partner CSOs will use the EU and German Cooperation logos on all documents, materials and platforms developed and will ensure good visibility of the EU project and its contribution at local, regional and national level. The partner organizations will use styling and visibility tools in line with those developed by GIZ, for a common visibility of the project at national level and in regions.
2. The EU Delegation will organize a meeting of the Delegation's communication team with GIZ and partner CSO on media, for cooperation on strategic communication and visibility.
3. Regional CSOs will organise information sessions on Local Grants Programme in areas where civil society is not sufficiently developed and active. GIZ and partner organizations will present to the EU Delegation a list of events to be organized until the end of the year.
4. Events organized by partner CSOs will allow time for announcing the competition launched by MARDE for selecting CSOs as members of the RDCs.
5. GIZ, together with partner CSOs, will ensure that the requirements related to the sustainability of interventions included in the Applicants' Guide will be followed by grant beneficiaries.

Annexes:

1. Agenda of the Steering Committee meeting
2. PPT presentation of the project and partner organizations