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

MINUTES no 3

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Event: Steering Committee Meeting of the Action "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: Lilia Hincu, citizens' empowerment advisor, 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. Christian Ballaro, the representative of the European Union Delegation to the Republic of Moldova, addressed the participants with a greeting message. He reminded the essence of the Local Grants Programme (LGP) – to empower citizens, to help them participate in the EU funded infrastructure projects. He underlined that all the EU investments in the Republic of Moldova are made in the benefits of the people, therefore it is important for the people to take the lead and ownership of the processes, be responsible for the swift and transparent implementation of those investments, which will require a strong commitment from the citizens once they are finalised.

Mr. Ballaro expressed his gratitude to all involved actors for the progressing implementation of the Action, despite the pandemic and the actual difficult situation. The Action is in the last mile, the sub-granting procedure was completed, but also is in the most crucial stage of ensuring the successful implementation of the local initiatives. The EU visibility should be acknowledged, and the message about the value of EU investment in the civil society of Moldova should be passed to the final beneficiaries. However, the success of the Action is in its legacy: once the Action will be over, the results shall be taken by citizens, by CSOs, by LPAs. The essence is to not need any more EU funding, to be able to initiate some things that will last much longer than the life of the project.

Mr. Ballaro congratulated GIZ and partners for the Action's website, and for the elaboration of the map of LGP interventions covering almost all the territory of the Republic of Moldova, which gives

the sense of the commitment from EU and excellent cooperation with GIZ and other partners. This result should contribute to fostering the networking of CSOs. The objective of the Action is not for CSO to replace the public authorities, but to increase the synergies and to have strong and effective public services delivery. The CSOs are expected to increase the ownership and to help the donors and the public authorities to improve the situation to the benefit of the citizens.

He also expressed confidence that in the next period, after the relaxing of the pandemic, will be organised and seen many events to celebrate the successful completion of the local initiatives that were funded. The EU Delegation keeps close cooperation with all the partners, even beyond the Action, and stand ready to support the empowering the citizens even further in the future.

Mr. Igor Malai, Head of the Regional Development Policy Department at the Ministry of Agriculture, Regional Development and Environment (MARDE), welcomed the participants and thanked the European Union Delegation and GIZ for their contribution over the years to improving lives of the citizens of the Republic of Moldova. The EU support is expressed through specific action felt by citizens from all regions of the Republic of Moldova. The EU approach of “let’s do it together” is appreciated and represent the main goal of the project. MARDE appreciates a lot the Action, because it is impossible to ensure the sustainability of the infrastructure investments without the citizens’ ownership over the goods created.

Mr. Malai mentioned and appreciated the considerable visibility of the Action and of its activities in the social media and also expressed the hope that, after the let-down of the pandemic restrictions, it will be possible to meet people directly, within offline events, and feel their emotions and opinions.

Mr. Achim Mortier, the representative of the German Embassy in the Republic of Moldova, welcomed the members of the Steering Committee and thanked the partners for their support in implementing this Action.

He mentioned that civil society organisations have an important role of promoting qualitative local services delivery, but also in building partnerships with local authorities to maintain these services. In the same context, he mentioned the important role of media organisations to inform people and to keep on the public agenda the topics related to public services delivery, environmental issues and challenges, but also the good practices to be applied in local communities.

Mr. Mortier stressed that improving living conditions for the inhabitants of the Republic of Moldova and empowering citizens for an active and constructive participation in decision making process remains among the main targets of the European Union and the German Development Cooperation.

CSO Action implementation – progress and achievements

Ms. Elena Spinu, GIZ, presented the main achievements of the Action during October 2020-April 2021. Among the most significant achievements were mentioned:

- partner CSOs targeted capacity development;
- the process for selection of organisations awarded with grants under the second call for Local Grants Programme (LGP) in all four regions and for media and communication;
- all the 18 EU-funded infrastructure projects covered by activities from local grants;
- the overall progress of LGP implementation;
- visibility events and materials;
- 12 regional networking events;
- CSO Action website upgrading and populating the resource page.

The main activities planned for the next period were presented (*PPT presentation attached*). Among the most significant are:

- support LGP beneficiaries to successfully finalize local projects;
- support partner CSOs and LGP beneficiaries in ensuring good communication and visibility of EU-financed activities;
- increase visibility of the EU support among pupils from the 8 target schools benefiting of EU-funded EE infrastructure projects;
- support LCCs in monitoring the on-going EU-funded infrastructure projects;
- networking of CSOs within and between regions.

Partner CSOs presentation and activities for the next quarter

The five partner CSOs presented their main results achieved, as well as the challenges they faced during the reporting period. Among key results the following were presented:

- Fully, 106 local initiatives awarded with grants (including 29 grants under second call for proposals), with 15 small projects already finalised.
- Enhancement of local CSOs capacity in the field of community mobilisation, visibility and communication, networking and public service delivery.
- Current implementation of 17 media CSOs local projects for increased communication and awareness of EU-funded investment projects and sustainable service delivery is going successfully.
- Current implementation of 74 local CSOs local projects in the 4 Development Regions to mobilize citizens to participate in decision-making, monitoring of public service project implementation or awareness raising on related environmental issues is successful.

The *main challenges* posed by partner CSOs are:

- COVID-19 pandemic-related restrictions and insufficiently equipped organisations, especially small and medium-sized, reduce action at the local level, as well as increases the risk of not involving all targeted groups of citizens, especially vulnerable groups.
- CSOs limited knowledge of local services system, as result, low capacities to carry out activities that require the involvement of local actors and conducting infrastructure procurement processes.
- Obstacles for LPAs, particularly for those under the Cahul Territorial Treasury, in transferring financial resources as co-financing to local projects implemented with CSOs.
- Short period for implementation of the local projects awarded under the second call for proposals.

Detailed information on main results obtained, lessons learnt, challenges, and next quarter activities are presented in the *attached PPT presentations*.

Considering the above, the partner CSOs are in position to rethink their activities and had requested the extension of their project implementation deadline, to allow local CSOs to finalize all activities and achieve the objectives of the Local Grants Programme. This is also relevant considering that savings of resources were created as result of COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, but also due to MDL-EUR exchange rate within the LGP implementation.

Comments and discussions on the status of the Action. Closing remarks

Mr. Igor Malai praised the results already achieved by the CSO Action. He confirmed that a lot of activities have been taken in the regions. Many of these are welcomed by citizens and they are involved in the activities carried out. It is also to be appreciated the realisation of investment elements and promotional video spots, which were produced and published under the LGP. At the

same time, he mentioned the wish for the pandemic situation to allow to see what is known about the projects by other people than those interviewed. Because it is important for the whole locality to be involved and to promote the messages, not only the civically active people. In conclusion, Mr. Malai positively appreciated the LGP and expressed the desire for a more active exchange of information between CSOs and Regional Development Agencies (RDA) and Regional Development Councils (RDCs).

Ms. Plesca confirmed the good cooperation between RDAs and Association of independent Press. Also, she expressed the regret that the LGP implementation coincided with COVID-19 pandemic and had to face some difficulties on reaching all categories of people. In this context, *Ms. Plesca* encouraged the CSOs to disseminate all the resources of LGP, published on Action's webpage, to all people interested.

Ms. Tatiana Marin, representative of Regional Development Council South, thanked GIZ and the partners for their effort in implementing the Action, and mentioned that the LGP initiatives are creating and promoting a lot of good practices related to citizens' engagement. It is very good that the main beneficiary is the citizen and a lot of attention is paid to young people and children. Therefore, it is necessary that the LGP experience to be taken over and used by all the CSOs in the Republic of Moldova.

Ms. Plesca encouraged the members of Regional Development Councils to cooperate with regional partners and to promote the LGP results in the RDC meetings.

Ms. Christina Otto, project manager MLPS, congratulated the partners for the interesting presentations and the results achieved despite the pandemic situation. The information presented about the 106 grants offered a good understanding of the situation at the local level. *Ms. Otto* expressed her wish to be able to travel and to have the chance to participate in some of the very interesting activities.

Mr. Igor Malai in his closing remarks on the event, thanked all the partners involved in the implementation of the Action and recalled the good results and the visibility of LGP. He also asked the CSOs to cooperate with RDAs and RDCs for promoting the participation of civil society representatives in the regional development processes and applying for the membership of the Regional Development Councils.

In the closure, *Ms. Valentina Plesca* expressed the gratitude to all partners for the good results in the implementation of the EU funded Action "Citizens Empowerment in the Republic of Moldova", despite all the challenges faced. The LGP activities will be carried out by the end of September with the possibility of extension with two months. Also, there is a hope to overcome the pandemic and to be able to travel in the regions and see the results presented. The members of the Steering Committee will be informed about the eventual monitoring visits, in order to participate.

In the context of the upcoming election campaign, the regional partners were asked to make sure that, at local level, the LGP results will not be presented as own achievements by any political parties and the local CSOs will avoid the participation of political actors in the events organised within the projects.

Decisions

1. Action's implementation partners to continue and to develop the cooperation with Regional Development Agencies and Regional Development Councils, to encourage and stimulate the participation of civil society in the regional development processes.
2. GIZ and partners to promote the LGP beneficiaries' knowledge products and communication materials, published on the webpage, to be used by CSOs and all the interested actors.

3. Partners CSOs to encourage the participation of civil society representatives in the RDCs and to promote the LGP results and good practices in the RDCs meetings.
4. Partner CSOs may use any savings created for additional targeted calls and awarding of grants to local CSOs.
5. Until July 11, local CSOs to avoid any participation of representatives of political parties in the organised public events within local projects.

Annexes:

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