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

MINUTES no 4

- Date:** 24 November 2021
- 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:** Renata Gradinaru, citizens' empowerment advisor, GIZ
- Distribution list:** Delegation of the European Union (EU) to the Republic of Moldova, Ministry of Infrastructure and Regional Development of the Republic of Moldova (MIRD), National Council of NGOs, Regional Development Agencies (North, Center, South, ATU Gagauzia), partner Civil society organizations (CSOs).

Opening speech

Mr Igor Malai, Head of the Regional Development Policy Department under the Ministry of Infrastructure and Regional Development, greeted the participants and noted that the Action is in the last mile, which means it is time to draw conclusions and take stock. He stressed that activities requiring citizen engagement should not stop here, contributing thus to regional and local development and monitoring of actions taken by the Government and the Ministry. This way, citizens are convinced that such actions are in line with their expectations and planned achievements.

Mr Malai emphasized that 'Citizens' Empowerment in the Republic of Moldova' Action had this very impact, namely to bring the needs closer to the possibilities and achievements. He also mentioned that during the meeting, the elements achieved along the way would be put on the table, wishing the participants success in the given activity.

Ms Valentina Plesca, Head of the Citizens' Empowerment and Capacity Development Unit under the MLPS/GIZ, expressed her gratitude to the Ministry and the Regional Development Agencies for the collaboration and partnership established under this program. She mentioned that during the Action, very good relations were established with the Regional Development Agencies, and this Action brought topics related to the improvement of local public services on the agenda of citizens and Mass media involved in the Action.

Ms Matilda Halling, EU Delegation Program Officer sent particular thanks to the German Development Cooperation through GIZ for its excellent cooperation in this Action, as well as to local authorities, civil society organizations and all citizens involved in the successful implementation of the grants programme.

Ms Halling noted that such results led to the achievement of so many objectives. In recent months, she has had the pleasure of participating in several regional final events, as well as paying several visits to grant beneficiaries. These results are quite inspiring, citizens have faced challenges participating in monitoring local governance and implementing smart solutions in the territory, including in infrastructure and green transition projects.

Ms Halling said that the European Union had invested around five Mio EUR in the program and was very satisfied with the results. Despite the challenges caused by the pandemic, the citizens managed to implement local projects successfully.

Ms Plesca specified that during the 3 years of implementation of the Action, GIZ truly felt the support from the European Union Delegation team and thanked for prompt approvals and guidance.

'Citizens' Empowerment in the Republic of Moldova' Action implementation – progress and achievements

Ms Elena Spinu, MLPS/GIZ advisor, presented the conclusions of the mechanisms and approaches applied by GIZ team, as well as the indicators reflecting the success of objectives achieved under this Action.

The mechanism by which grants were awarded to the 5 regional partner organizations contributed to developing the operational and technical capacities of the partners and 100 local organizations that benefited from the grants, 15 of them being newly registered. These organizations have successfully implemented 110 projects across the country in the priority areas of the Action: participatory planning (8), water supply and sewerage (15), solid waste management (26), energy efficiency (20), environmental protection (18), Mass media and communication (23).

The results of the participatory planning were presented, where over 1700 men and women were involved in training, planning, developing, updating and monitoring local plans and strategies, in approving rates taking into account the needs of vulnerable groups and actively participated in the meetings of Regional Development Councils.

The results of the monitoring activities were also presented, where members of local citizens' committees were trained, guided and involved in monitoring public services and the 18 EU-funded investment projects, as well as local infrastructure projects.

Over 156 information campaigns organized in more than 200 cities and villages raised awareness of more than 170 thousand citizens regarding environment and issues related to local public services.

Partner CSOs presentation and progress of activities in the regions

The five partner CSOs presented conclusions, impacts, challenges, and recommendations that could be useful for the implementation of other projects in support of citizens and civil society organizations.

The main results of the implementation of the Local Grants Programme are:

- civic attitude and social responsibility have been initiated and promoted;
- citizens have formed informal groups, such as local committees, ECO patrol, action groups, monitoring groups;
- interest in and responsibility towards the use of public money have been generated;
- many young people, boys and girls equally, including pre-school and school-age children have been involved;
- partnerships between citizens and LPAs have been strengthened;
- innovative elements in the localities have been applied: solar batteries, photovoltaic panels, equipped laboratories, etc.);

- access to quality public services (water and sewerage, waste disposal, public lighting) has been improved;
- support to vulnerable groups during the COVID-19 pandemic has been provided;
- local associative sector has been strengthened.

The main challenges posed by partner CSOs are:

- short period for implementation of the local projects; a solution could be to increase the period for implementation of the local projects up to 6-24 months;
- low capacity for implementation of projects by local CSOs, the recommendation would be to offer grants only after a round of empowerment of local CSOs;
- high complexity in carrying out projects that include construction works, it would be reasonable to include in the project budgets only the procurement of small machinery and equipment;
- uneven territorial distribution of the implemented projects, therefore it would be good to take into account the territorial factor in the process of evaluating project proposals.

Partners came up with some recommendations to empower local organizations, such as:

- ensuing an initial assessment of the local CSOs capacities and provision of training according to the needs;
- developing a common training program for local CSOs, including training related to the correct formulation and reporting of activities, results, indicators;
- requesting responsible partnerships between CSOs and LPAs/service operators, with roles clearly set out in the partnership agreements, including to ensure sustainability of the infrastructure created under the projects.

To streamline the implementation of the Local Grants Programme, the partners recommended the following:

- including both *soft* (mobilisation, education, information) and *hard* actions (equipment procurement) in the grant programmes;
- describing clearly the indicators and the method of collecting them;
- identifying mechanisms for funding non-formal initiative groups/active citizens;
- increasing the degree of participation of CSOs benefiting from grants in decision-making at the local level, including in terms of visibility;
- simplifying the reporting process for CSOs benefiting from small grants;
- encouraging the setting up of CSO Networks for a better regional dialogue-platform.

Comments and discussions on the status of the Action

Ms Plesca pointed out that challenges mentioned by the partners are shared by the whole team, that some of them must be solved in the future by the donors and the implementing organizations, and that lessons learned could be useful for more efficient implementation of other projects. *Ms Plesca* reiterated that citizens are the ones to guarantee the changes in the localities of the Republic of Moldova.

Mr Mihai Cucereanu, director at PA CONTACT-Cahul Center, specified that this Action was very important for the South Region, as it reached many localities far from the district centers, and that there is at least one organization in each district that has implemented projects. Under the Action, citizens, public administrations, public institutions were empowered, benefiting from certain improvements of the services. He concluded that society develops by empowering public associations, as they are the engine empowering citizens.

Closing speech

Mr Petru Veverita, the manager of 'Modernisation of Local Public Services in the Republic of Moldova' GIZ project, confirmed in his closing speech that the Action aimed at empowering citizens, funded by the European Union, is an important part of the MLPS project and contributes directly to achieving the key objective of the project. This objective is to improve general conditions for the implementation of regional development policy, as the main purpose is to provide support to the Moldovan authorities at central, regional and local levels, with a focus on the citizen, who is the final beneficiary of this support provided by our joint efforts.

Mr Veverita mentioned that he was impressed by the results obtained, the degree of involvement and the increased level of people's awareness and thanked everyone for their efforts. He specified that the lessons learned and the proposed recommendations could be taken over for the next actions in support of the civil society, both by the donors and by the authorities of the Republic of Moldova.

Mr Veverita hopes that the experience and knowledge gained in this process will be applied in the subsequent work of CSOs and LPAs, who may have had a lot to learn from the results of such actions.

Mr Christian Ballaro, the representative of the European Union Delegation to the Republic of Moldova, thanked everyone for the interesting results and recommendations he heard, noting that he felt part of the team. If at beginning he was a little sceptical about the possibility of implementing this rather complex program, now he can mention with certainty and pride that the results achieved are an excellent confirmation of a titanic work that has been done.

Mr Ballaro thanked first the entire GIZ team for their ability to coordinate this ambitious Action and congratulated all regional and local partners, who have successfully implemented projects, despite all the challenges.

Mr Ballaro reiterated the importance of considering all the lessons learned, the proposed recommendations and the opportunities that have arisen, as all can work as a strong encouragement of civil society to involve in investment projects related to improving infrastructure by the authorities, to ensure a better future for their children, to improve the next steps and activities.

Decisions

1. GIZ, together with the partner CSOs, will finalize the lessons learned to be included in the final Action report.
2. GIZ will hold a final visibility event to present the results and promote good practice.

Annexes:

1. Agenda of the Steering Committee meeting
2. PPT presentation of GIZ of Action results