



Proiect finanțat de
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STUDY
" STATE OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS FROM THE NORTH DEVELOPMENT REGION"

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APPRECIATIONS

The study "State of Civil Society Organizations from the North Development Region" was carried out as part of the project "Engaging Citizens and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in decision-making and sustainable local development". The project is carried out within the framework of the project "Citizen`s empowerment in the Republic of Moldova", financed by the European Union and implemented by the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ).

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ABBREVIATIONS:

LPA—Local Public Administration

PSA—Public Services Agency

NBS—National Bureau of Statistics

CC—Civil Code

FG—Focus Group

LAG—Local Action Group

GIZ—German Agency for International Cooperation

II — In-depth interview

MARDE—Ministry of Agriculture, Regional Development, and Environment

MECR — Ministry of Education, Culture and Research

NCO—Non-commercial organization

NGO—Non-governmental organization

CSO—Civil Society Organization

NDR — North Development Region

RM — Republic of Moldova

Sida—Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency

EU—European Union

USAID—U.S. Agency for International Development

STS - State Tax Service



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I. METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

The study aims to map CSOs from the North Development Region (NDR) and to assess their situation in terms of financial sustainability, regional cooperation, involvement in decision-making process and community mobilization in order to formulate findings and recommendations for the development of civil society from the NDR.

Objectives of the study:

- Desk research of public policies and regulations regarding CSOs;
- Assessment of the overall situation of CSOs from the NDR;
- Collecting examples of good practices and learned lessons regarding the involvement of CSOs in the decision-making process, planning and monitoring of public services in the communities.
- Analysing of examples of cooperation at local/regional level between CSOs, LPAs, businesses and members of the community.

To achieve the objectives of the study, following sociological methods have been applied:

- Desk research of the legal framework, policy documents and existing national statistics regarding CSOs;
- Quantitative study – CATI survey;
- Qualitative study – in-depth interviews and focus groups.

The desk research included the analysis of sociological studies regarding CSOs, analysis of the legal framework and existing statistical data for the NDR: number of CSOs, geographical distribution, period of activity, fields of activity, income structure, etc. As a result of the requests submitted to state institutions, data were obtained from: State Tax Service, National Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Education, Culture and Research, National House of Social Insurance and Public Services Agency.

Quantitative study

In order to conduct the CATI survey, two databases were accessed for sampling and mapping the CSOs from NDR:

- 1) Database of the Public Services Agency, which lists all registered organizations from Moldova;
- 2) Database of the National Bureau of Statistics, which lists the organizations that submit the annual statistical report to the NBS.

These databases have been supplemented with (contacts) data held by CICO. As a result of data compilation from three sources, a list of 230 CSOs from the NDR has been created, which served as a contact basis for the study. All CSOs from the contact list were subjects of data collection, being contacted by phone to fill out the mapping questionnaire:

- a) By phone, through an interview conducted by an interviewer;
- b) Online, a mapping questionnaire being provided upon request.

There were established successful contacts (which filled the mapping questionnaires) with 103 organizations. For the rest of organizations, data could not be collected.



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Qualitative study

The qualitative research was carried out to supplement the information provided by the quantitative research, and in the light of the studied issues to target some specific categories of respondents, which proportion is too small to be analyzed in quantitative samples.

The research included 5 focus groups and 56 in-depth interviews (II) conducted with the individuals from 12 territorial administrative units (rayons).

In line with the research objectives, two main criteria were established for the organization of group discussions: the first relates to the region (were invited respondents only from the 12 administrative-territorial units covered by study), and the second criterion concerns involvement of respondents in community activities. Other criteria that were taken into account in order to ensure the heterogeneity of the groups were related to gender, age and profession of the respondents. The selection of participants for group discussions was carried out using the snowball method.

The snowball method was also used for the in-depth interviews as to include in the sample relevant categories of respondents: CSOs, local public authorities (LPA), businesses and media representatives.

Data collection was performed based on interview guides adapted to each category of respondents. For in-depth interviews, interview guides were adapted to each discussion, depending on the interviewee's experience.

Data collection period: June-July 2020.

Research limitations:

- Due to the pandemic and national restrictive measures, the research plan was modified and data were collected online and/or by phone. This made it difficult to identify some research subjects;
- The general population has limited knowledge about the activities of CSOs, and about their presence in the community/rayon;
- The findings of the qualitative research represent phenomena and trends in the society; therefore, these cannot be generalized/standardized.



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II. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The study "State of Civil Society Organizations from the North Development Region" was carried out by the Private Institution "Centre for Organizational Training and Consultancy" (CICO) at the request of NGO "Pro Cooperare Regionala" and NGO Centre for Social and Medical Home Assistance "CASMED" within the project "Citizen's empowerment in the Republic of Moldova", financed by the European Union and implemented by the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ).

This study aims at supporting development and capacity building of local CSOs and at increasing their involvement in the process of participatory planning, monitoring of procurement and ensuring the sustainability of investments in local infrastructure. It also aims at supporting sustainable socio-economic development of local communities based on people's needs, by providing grants to civil society organizations to implement innovative ideas in priority areas.

The general objective of the study is to map CSOs from the North Development Region (NDR) and to assess their situation in terms of financial sustainability, regional cooperation, participation in the decision-making process and community mobilization by outlining conclusions and recommendations for the development of civil society from NDR.

To achieve the objective of the study, the following research and analysis methods were applied:

- Desk research of the legal framework, policy documents and national statistics regarding CSOs;
- Quantitative study – CATI survey among CSOs from NDR;
- Qualitative study – individual interviews and focus groups with relevant stakeholders.

Main findings:

The general state of the CSOs from the NDR – the legal framework of the Republic of Moldova is fostering the development of CSOs and allows three distinct forms of association: public associations, foundations and private institutions. 1,396 CSOs have their legal address and/or operate in the NDR, which represents about 13% of the total number of organizations registered in Moldova. The vast majority of them are public associations - 1,356 (of which 36 are water users' associations), 31 foundations and 9 private institutions.

The relationship between CSOs and citizens and civic activism of citizens – most of the citizens mentioned being concerned about their community, because "they live here with their families and want a better life for them and their children". However, even though citizens expressed their interest in addressing local problems, the survey data shows that most CSO representatives from NDR (81.2%) consider the involvement of the population at the local level as being low and very low.

Financial sustainability of CSOs - financial viability/sustainability is the least developed area and one of the main problems of the associative sector from Moldova. The state policy for supporting the CSOs is implemented at the local level as well by LPAs, but there is a limited practice of contracting the CSOs' services by LPAs. This area is not fully exploited, the financial support from LPAs is rather limited, and their funding opportunities are modest.

The relationship between CSOs and public authorities – partnerships between CSOs and public authorities supports active involvement and distribution of responsibilities, which leads to addressing local issues with a maximum efficiency. Public authorities are aware of the importance



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of involving CSOs in solving problems of local communities and, therefore, LPA supports the development of existing cooperation mechanisms. One of the key factors that maintain a high interest of LPA in creating partnerships with CSOs for addressing local issues and contributing to community development is the targeting of external funding to CSOs.

The relationship between CSOs and business – in order to enhance the collaboration with businesses, CSOs must be consistent in their activities, be transparent, promote their results, and give credit to those who have contributed. Failures and miscommunication of CSOs in the implementation of projects and activities can lead to mistrust and disappointment of business sector towards civil society. CSOs have to show a high level of commitment and to communicate in an efficient way.

The relationship of CSOs and mass media – CSOs use mostly online sources and social networks for the promotion of their activity, whereas traditional media is not perceived as an important channel for the communication activities. The online ways of promotion are seen as more popular, more accessible and with a higher potential that can direct targeted information to beneficiaries, volunteers and the community. The online environment remains, in fact, the primary channel for promoting CSOs, while traditional media often address topics coming from CSOs without recognizing the associative sector as a distinct element of the society.

Cooperation between CSOs from the NDR - partnerships between CSOs exist more at the level of national platforms organized by field of activity or target group of beneficiaries, and less at the local or regional level. CSOs from NDR are often establishing partnerships for the implementation of activities and projects which cover more communities or regions. The key factors that stimulate local partnerships are the common fields of activity and the similarity in service provision. Most of the collaborations are among CSOs, which work in similar fields.

General conclusion

The civil society from the NDR of Moldova is in a rather difficult situation from the institutional, financial, legal point of view. CSOs from north have to increase their public image as well. Civil society is developing together with government institutions, business environment, the state in general, and of particular importance in this process is the cross-sector collaboration. One of the most effective mechanisms for tripartite collaboration between LPAs – business environment - CSOs was mentioned as being the Local Action Groups (LAGs), a unique, effective and viable mechanism of cooperation with a high perspective for economic development.

III. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CSOs from NDR of Moldova often face with institutional, financial and image problems. Despite these shortcomings, the associative sector continues to operate in the public interest, even though public opinion is often ignorant and reluctant towards this sector.

Although there are about 10,725 CSOs in Moldova, only 13% of CSOs are based or active in the NDR. The active number of CSOs from north is even smaller, representing only 11% (161 CSOs). This shows a high gap between the general state of the CSOs from NDR and the central area of Moldova/Chisinau, where most resources and active CSOs are concentrated.

CSOs in the NDR have different levels of development, and they need the support, experience and knowledge of resource organizations, as well as institutional support in different fields. In addition, according to the data and arguments presented in the study, it was found that the current



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legislation needs additional amendments in order to correspond to the realities and needs of the civil sector.

Although LPAs have stated their openness to cooperate with CSOs, by launching various mechanisms, initiatives and support, the results of support activities are still modest. An explanation for such limited achievements is a weak application of the mechanisms. Shortcomings exist in terms of involving CSOs in the process of public consultations and decision-making process, the civil society being kept at a certain distance from the actual decision-making process.

The state and local public authorities provide minimal financial support compared to external donors, which makes CSOs dependent on these resources. The financial sustainability of CSOs should not be limited to financial support from international donors or civil society will become even more vulnerable, and if the authorities limit these resources, the vulnerability of CSOs can even increase. For this reason, CSOs must rely on alternative local funds, contracts from the state, financial support from the business environment, and on the development of their own economic activities and on the provision of services (including percentage designation and membership fees).

The involvement or participation of citizens in the administrative act is especially important for the "health" of the administrative system. Good governance can only take place with the support of citizens. Citizens become more motivated and interested in the administration process when they are more involved and see the results of their participation. The participation of stakeholders in the decision-making process is an element that contributes to the sustainability and public perception of these decisions and ensures transparency of public policies.

Citizens want to be informed about the use of public funds, to take part in decision-making processes and to contribute to a normal functioning of society; and state institutions and authorities must take a proactive attitude and to address people needs. A transparent and open decision-making system should be a priority on the agenda of the public authorities, whether by maintaining an ongoing dialogue with citizens or optimizing the practice of social dialogue, both face-to-face and online.

The main levers to encourage people to engage in an active manner in social activities are by: ensuring transparency of activities; communicating to inform and persuade people; promoting personal examples; increasing the self-confidence of the population; establishing in a participatory manner the priority areas and the problems to be solved.

This research also highlighted some existing issues in the relationship between CSOs and the business environment. Despite this, cooperation has a strong potential, the business environment is open for collaboration and support to civil society, but the interest would be much higher if this cooperation was mutually beneficial, as in the LAG partnership between local public authorities, business environment and CSOs.

Civil society develops together with state institutions, representatives of the business environment, and the state. The efficiency of the civil sector can generate evolutions in other sectors or vice versa. Consequently, the consolidation of the non-governmental sector will have a positive effect on the other two sectors, contributing both to the development of communities and to the democratization of society.

Key recommendations

Civic activism and development



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- ❖ Development of a framework mechanism for cooperation between CSOs and LPA of level I and II, ensuring representativeness, involvement and development of local CSOs.
- ❖ Ensuring a good governance of public institutions able to apply properly the legislation on providing information of public interest.
- ❖ Ensuring the transparency of the decision-making process by all state institutions, through the proper use of the forms provided by the public consultation mechanism, through targeted information and in compliance with the terms provided by law for consultation on draft decisions.
- ❖ Increasing the participation of CSOs in the analysis and monitoring of public policies by developing the capacity of CSO members in this area.
- ❖ Diversification of the activity's areas of CSOs in accordance with community needs. Therefore, CSO engagement should not only be in line with donor priorities but also in line with the needs of citizens in the region.
- ❖ Increase the promotion and media coverage of CSO activities and projects (online, in media and in the community), providing best practice examples and presenting positive initiatives that could foster citizen engagement in activities, community projects, and volunteering.
- ❖ Capacity building of CSOs members, especially in the areas of project writing, project management and fundraising.

Financial sustainability:

- ❖ Development of mechanisms at the national level to support CSOs by LPAs, basing on best national and international practices.
- ❖ Approval of a direct financing mechanism of CSOs by the state, with uniform conditions and procedures. The mechanism shall provide the involvement of CSOs representatives in setting funding priorities, selecting process, and monitoring and evaluation of the funding programs (respecting the principles of transparency, equal access to resources and accountability).
- ❖ Planning, inclusion and allocation from the State budget and local ones of resources related to financing the activities of CSOs (grant programs, financing of initiatives of citizens and organizations), as well as to contracting services offered by CSOs, with the possibility of allocating special-purpose funds from LPA budgets.
- ❖ Inclusion in the Law on the Annual State Budget and/or approval of a mechanism or Government Decision regarding the regulation of the procedure for letting public spaces to the CSOs or public benefit organizations;
- ❖ Inclusion in the Law on the Annual State Budget of provisions related to the financing of the civil society development program, which could help to diversify the forms of direct financing of CSOs from the state, including financing of organizational development projects. Budgeting additional funds for implementing the Moldova Civil Society Strategy and the Action Plan for its implementation for the period of 2018–2020.
- ❖ Adjustment of services procurement procedures from the state budget by removing barriers for CSOs when concluding contracts.



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- ❖ Diversification of types/forms of direct financing of CSOs from the state, to strengthen partnerships with CSOs and directly contribute to their sustainable development, and to community development.
- ❖ Amendment the current legislation on facilitation of tax conditions and legislation on philanthropy, the mechanism of compensation and incentives for charity, simplification of procedures for granting tax relief etc.
- ❖ Diversification of sources of income for CSOs by focusing on alternative sources other than grants: development of economic activity and social entrepreneurship, fundraising activities from companies and individuals, 2% mechanism, crowdfunding etc.
- ❖ Provision micro grants programs for CSOs from rural areas to stimulate their activity and allow them to gain a positive and practical experience.
- ❖ Involvement of volunteers in fundraising activities and motivating them through various existing tools/methods such as issuance of volunteer certificates and cards, letters of recommendation etc.

Cooperation and partnerships

- ❖ Creation of a dialogue platform between LPA - business environment and CSOs to determine local priorities, take part in the decision-making process and enabling joint efforts that would contribute to local development and solving local problems.
- ❖ Expanding the areas of cooperation between the government and CSOs, with direct financing of projects.
- ❖ Increasing the level of cooperation between local and national CSOs through exchange of experience and best practices.

Visibility, image and media

- ❖ Raising LPA level of awareness and information on the possibilities of solving community problems in partnership with the associative sector.
- ❖ Increasing the visibility of CSOs at the local level through direct communication and involvement of local leaders in informing citizens about the activities of CSOs and their role in community development.
- ❖ Development of partnerships with local media to organize media programs and/or to invite periodically local CSOs representatives to inform citizens about the activities of CSOs in the NDR.
- ❖ Sanctioning and prevention of the directed attacks on CSOs made by public figures, authorities and politically affiliated media.



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