

SIDA Open door grant competition and implementation of grant projects

EPF has utilized the sub-granting scheme as one of the ways to boost the capacity of civil society to lead the democratization processes, to advance their own thematic agenda, to create new content and innovative solutions for serving the needs of the society. During the CS Support Project implementation, EPF announced an Open Call for Sub-Grant Scheme and invited InfoTun Network to participate in the Invited Sub-Grant pool.

The Open Door Sub-Grant scheme was comprised of two stages: (1) a submission of concept notes, (2) submission of full applications by short-listed applicants. The evaluation committee was receiving the concept notes from the program teams. During the whole period of project implementation, EPF received more than 120 project proposals from Yerevan based and regional organizations with diverse thematic directions. In total, 46 projects were implemented (36 Open-door and 10 Invited grants of InfoTuns). The Evaluation committee and EPF program team worked with short-listed applicants to improve their project ideas for the full application stage. As one of the ideas was to support as many new CSOs and new ideas, as possible, EPF program team launched on a mentoring and accompaniment process for all 46 sub-grant recipient organizations and individuals, in order to strengthen the project implementation, to improve the institutional systems of these organizations, and to network and enhance the impact of projects within similar thematic scopes. Thematic areas of sub-grants fall within the categories of: Human Rights, Crisis response, Urban/Community and Environmental policies, Education, Culture, Media, Entrepreneurship, Economic and Social policies, Gender equality, and others.

Below is the description of the activities and the progress made within the projects. For the purposes of the ease of understanding, we group the supported projects under five large categories: Rapid Response (9 projects), Human Rights (10 projects), Environment (6 projects), Background Support (7 projects), and Economy and Community (4 projects). These are conventional categories, because many projects have had also impact on communities, a rapid response component, targeted youth, judicial reform, the media etc. The titles of some of them are self-explanatory, the Rapid Response category contains projects related to the war, trauma and security issues, and Background Support relates to the projects that were supporting civil society or another target group for their activities to become more effective.

Rapid Response

Public Agenda Journalists NGO, “Peace Messages Distortion Mechanism and How to Combat it”,

Budget: 5,780,000 AMD

Duration: June 2021 - October 2021

Project description: Recent events in Armenia have once again demonstrated that one of the main reasons for troubles and misfortunes is the inability to provide a civilized environment for constructive and healthy nation-wide public discussions, as well as the incapacity of avoiding

naming people ‘traitors’ or ‘heroes’. This situation results in lack of acceptance of rational thoughts and ideas. Messages about peace are also being trapped in this nexus. The research project aimed at finding answers to the following pressing questions: Why the democratically formed new government in Armenia, just like the previous ones, refused to discuss the prospects for peace with the society and form a new discourse, instead of tightening its rhetoric and positions in the negotiation processes? What factors have influenced the notion of peace and what mechanisms were used to undermine them? Who were the initiators and main protagonists obstructing the peace narrative? Which segment of the population was the main target of these mechanisms and what tools were used? Is it possible to transform the environment of public discussions, to create a public agenda that can replace the ‘private-clan-group’ agenda and neutralize attempts of presenting it as a public one? The project studied the internal information war, its cause-and-effect relationships.

Activities and Results: The program was launched in June 2021. In the first month, the project implementation team was formed, 7 experts were selected:

- Ashot Meliqyan- Chairman of Committee to Protect of Expression
- Boris Navasardyan- President of Yerevan Press Club
- Levon Barseghyan- **Founder and Chairman of “Asparez” Journalists’ Club**
- Mesrop Harutyunyan- **Writer, Journalist, Media Expert**
- Nouneh Sarkissian- Head of the Media Initiatives Center
- Samvel Martirosyan- Lecturer, information security expert
- Seda Muradyan- Co-Founder and president of the Public journalism NGO

The selection was followed by the development of the questionnaire of the first stage of the three-stage discussions by the Delphi method; the questionnaire was prepared and sent to the experts at the beginning of the second month of the program. Overall three phases of questionnaire development and submission took place. The answers and expert conclusions collected during the August-October months of the project were brought together for further analysis.

The final research, along with other findings, concludes that narrow party propaganda prevailed in the media sector in the war context, and this propaganda was particularly waged by the former authorities who used the war as an important occasion to regain power. Apart from this, external, especially Russian influence was visible in the media sector, and the association of that line of propaganda with the above groups was clear, especially with an aim to annihilate or discredit the paradigm of peace.

4Plus Documentary Photography Center, “Post-war post-truths,”

Budget: 10,220,000 AMD

Duration: September 2021 - April 2022

Project description: The goal of the project is to document and reveal through visual narratives the hidden post-war issues and the unspoken side of reality in the aftermath of the conflict.

Main objectives of the project are:

- To identify and raise awareness about the social and psychological trauma of those affected by the war (widows, missing persons, parents of captives, the disabled, servicemen, displaced persons, people who have undergone life-changing changes in the aftermath of the war).
- To ensure ethical coverage and publication of stories explored in frames of the project.
- To ensure internationalization of the existing problems and awareness of the international community on topics concerned.

Activities and Results:

1. Creation of six photo stories by six photographers covering post-war realities; publication on 4Plus website and social media. Through regular meetings all six topics were identified and developed during the initiation stage with the involvement of Sara Terry, international editor, documentary photographer, filmmaker and founder of the Aftermath project. Approaches on how to develop and present visual materials and texts were developed with the team and local text editor. 2. Social media outreach plan was designed and implemented to enhance the project outreach. Detailed quantitative information has been presented. In one project, one can see a displaced family seeking to rebuild a sense of normalcy and security. There, a villager living on a newly defined separation line, struggles to maintain the way of life. People understand that aftermath is the next chapter; that aftermath is, in fact, the prologue of the future. Nazik Armenakyan, head of the organization, has presented her photo story in the frames of PechaKucha Yerevan - PechaPKN 45: Art Stories event on 11 October, 2022. The project also participated in exhibitions, including the EVN Report international Media Festival.

Project [materials are available via this link.](#)

Open platform NGO, “DOK & THEATRE. A platform retelling modern text,”

Budget: 9,994,366 AMD

Duration: August 2021 - April 2022

Project description: The aim of the project is to create a forum (stage) of creative art and documental plays (performance, video-performance etc.). The platform and this innovative format aimed to create an opportunity for artists to reflect on recent pivotal developments in Armenia, such as the 44 days War, the Covid-19 pandemic, and the Velvet Revolution in 2018. At least six performances were played as a part of the project, which reflect the recent developments. Performing art aimed at enabling reflection and reevaluation of the past and future. The project experiments to bring the online discourse to offline space, create

communication environment and boost effective public discourse and debate. The Doc and theater project is an attempt to create a documental theater in Armenia.

Activities and Results: Visibility materials of the project were produced and Facebook page was created. The [announcement](#) for scripts competition was disseminated via social media. In addition to online dissemination, the project team was actively promoting the chance to participate in the competition among young artists. A Selection committee was established with the following experts on theater and arts: Ara Nedolyan, Armen Ohanyan, Zaven Boyajyan, Zaruhi Hovhannisyan. In total 10 applications were received. The Selection committee approved 5 scripts for performance. The quantity of received applications indicates that there is a lack of information about the opportunities for performing art, and the creation of this platform can help addressing this issue.

All five performances took place during December 14-18, 2021. It is important to highlight that thanks to the new equipment that Open Platform received, they are now capable of producing new and additional performances. For instance, recently they performed a play on domestic violence. In addition to this, they managed also to organize performances in the regions thanks to the fact that they have an equipment and can organize regional events as well. Two performances were organized in the regions, one in Syunik. Thanks to the project, new format and offline discourse on current issues reached to regions as well.

Haverzh NGO, “Rethinking the code of conduct in media covering war and post-war crisis”

Budget: 8,871,000 AMD

Duration: December 1, 2021 - May 2022

Project Description: In post-war situation, the operation of the media has become more important. It is imperative to monitor the quality and impact of the content, ethical procedures during the content creation process, as well as coverage of sensitive topics and conflicts. The project aims to enhance the media quality of responsible coverage in war and post-war crisis situation, and encourage free and objective coverage of mass media. The goal of the project is to sensitize the media sector to the war and post-war crisis situations, to promote free work of the media. The project aimed at developing a methodology for assessing the problems in media sphere, related to the coverage of war and the post-war crisis, create a manual on increasing media sensitivity while covering these issues, as well as develop guidelines for working with conflict affected people in the war and post-war situations.

Activities and Results: The Project team analyzed media articles covering issues related to soldiers and their families in the war and post war situations. They developed a methodology of the analysis and identified media outlets to observe the quality of their production from the perspective of sensitivity issues. Based on the media analysis a guidebook was developed and published. The guidebook offers ethical norms that should be followed by the journalists and

media outlets to properly work with conflict affected soldiers and their family members. The guidebook is unique since there is no any similar handbook in Armenian language aiming to sensitize the media sector on these issues.

One of the recommendations covers guidelines on working with children and adolescents from families affected by the recent war, ways to uncover their stories such as requesting approval from family member to use their photos, etc.

“Visual Innovation Studio”, “Post-war stories”

Budget: 7,999,250 AMD

Duration: February 1, 2022 - June 30, 2022

Project aim: In the aftermath of the 44-day war, to give an opportunity to those who experienced the war particularly the young people, to share their stories, as well as to use this opportunity for post-war trauma therapeutic influence. The stories will be useful also to preserve the memory of the events for the future.

Project description: A contest of short documentaries and video stories was announced for novice content creators from the regions of Armenia, Yerevan and Artsakh. Video products reflecting on human stories that were ousted from public discussion about a year and a half after the 44-day war in Artsakh or on well-known stories with new approaches were created through the eyes of young people.

Activities and Results: VIS announced a call of participation for shooting short documentaries covering post war situation in Armenia through story-telling. Up to 30 applications were received and reviewed. 11 applicants were shortlisted. Individual consultancy was organized for each of the selected applicant who later on developed the scenario for their documentaries. 11 videos were produced and public presentation was organized on October 21, 2022.

The main geographic areas were the regions most affected by the war. Documentaries cover human stories, social-economic consequences, displaced families, life in the bordering communities, etc. The documentaries were also broadcasted by Civilnet, Azatutyun TV, Boon TV. Live discussions were held in the regions through InfoTun Network. The uniqueness of the video stories was that the authors are young people who present the post-war trauma and consequences of war through their personal stories or by presenting the stories of other people. Authenticity and hidden stories received quite huge attention. In total, all the videos together reached to about 621,000 views. The 6 presentations in InfoTuns were quite successful since the public presentations were conducted by the authors and main characters attended the presentations which insured lively discussions. In particular, events were held in Martuni InfoTun, Ararat InfoTun, Goris InfoTun, Vayk InfoTun, Vanadzor InfoTun, Gyumri InfoTun. In total, 124 people participated in regional presentations.

One of the documentaries “The road of bread” authored by Ani Antonyan was presented at the “Women” (Կին) festival and received audience reward.

The numbers of video stories are presented below:

- [«Վերադարձ հայրենի Շինուհայր. մեղվապահ եղբայրները»](#) 66,800 views (Civilnet)
- [«Մեր անցյալի խաղերն ու մեր ներկայի պատերազմը»](#) 35,874 views (Civilnet),
- [«Տարհանված հարազատները միավորվել են Դահրավում»](#) 117,400 views (Civilnet)
- [«Կյանքը երկու տեղահանությունից հետո»](#) 40,400 views (Civilnet),
- [«Հետպատերազմյան թիթեռներ»](#) 6786 views (Civilnet)
- [«Ակների սարի սեզոնը»](#) 194,000 views (Radio Liberty Armenia),
- [«Սզների սահմանապահը»](#) 134,000 194,000 views (Radio Liberty Armenia)
- [«Հացի ճանապարհ»](#) 14,500 194,000 views (Radio Liberty Armenia)
- [«Պատերազմով անցած եղբայրություն»](#) 6551 views (Hetq Media Factory)
- [«Թռիչք հոսպիտալից»](#) 595 views (NEWS.am)

Aghasi Tadevosyan, “Oral stories about the war: Lessons learned”,

Budget: 4,996,000 AMD

Duration: May 15, 2021 - January 14, 2022

Project description: The second Nagorno-Karabakh war was characterized by the powerlessness and insignificance of humans in the face of technology, the use of modern technical means that caused fear and horror, the brutality of human annihilation, intensity (the large number of casualties in a short time), and several other features that left a heavy and traumatic mark on people. The crises response measures generally assess refugees' needs and provide humanitarian assistance. One of the significant problems - the longer-term support for the health and rehabilitation of veterans and the society as a whole, received limited attention. The soldiers who went through the horrors of war, who have borne the heavy burden of this cruel experience, have accumulated information and experience that, if recorded, will have an impact on the structure of rehabilitation processes as well as on understanding the real consequences of the war. The issues of documentation of the war, the study of its consequences, and the influence on changing people’s worldviews, values, attitudes, and views towards war and peace are not addressed the way they should be. The changes in the attitudes of the veterans’ family members and relatives, changes in values, and the factors that shape them, in general, are also important to study. The main goal of the research project was to study the impact and

consequences of the recent NK war on ex-combatants, both in terms of the traumatic repercussions it left and the transformations of veterans' values and worldviews. Qualitative research via in-depth semi-structured interviews was conducted in order to record the oral stories and study the issues raised above through qualitative materials.

Activities and Results: In May-August, the literature on war anthropology was studied, and two questionnaires for in-depth individual interviews were developed and tested. The sample of the survey was specified, the interviewers were selected and the field research work started in the first half of July.

In August-October, 60 in-depth interviews were conducted, in the city of Yerevan, the adjacent settlements, Goris, Gyumri, and Vardenis. The recorded interviews were transcribed. The research has been presented for couple of times, the author presented the findings on TV as well, and the final product is [available online via this link](#) and will be printed.

Usually the political, intellectual and other elites play the role of representing and “moralizing” the war. They are not mainly direct participants in the war. They have their interests in the war and “big” ideas that hide these interests. The anthropology of war presents the war from the position of the participants, gives them the opportunity to participate in presenting the reality of war. It allows to approach the reality of people that experienced the war literally on their own bodies. The research presents three main issues: the description of the war from the participants' point of view, the experience of the war, the fears, the moral perceptions and the consequences of the war on the person who lived through it. This war was special with its intensity and scale of the human - technology confrontation. The study also addresses this issue as well as the changes that took place as a result of the war.

The research found out, inter alia, that the understanding of patriotism has changed among the soldiers participated in the war. Many believe now that being a responsible citizen such as not littering in the streets, is patriotism too, whereas before the war they thought that patriotism is about knowing the great past of the nation of several millenia ago. [The research study is available online with the following link.](#)

As a result of this project, Aghasi Tadevosyan was also contacted by Shushan Karapetyam, head of Armenian Program at University of South California. She is also focusing on criminal sub-culture in the Armenian society. Aghasi Taedovosyan will write an article about criminal sub-culture and its impact in Yerevan, and Shushan will write about the same phenomenon in LA. The articles will be published in international peer-reviewed journal. Aghasi Tadevosyan also received feedback and interest towards his research on war and its consequences from two Universities: Armenian Studies Center, University of Berkley and American University of Armenia, Political Science and International Affairs.

As a part of CS Support project, Aghasi Tadevosyan applied for extension to publisize some of the CS Support general project funded sub-grants and their outcomes, in particular:

- Social and humanitarian consequences of the war (Aghasi Tadevosyan)
- The dictionary/glossary of criminal sub-culture and the impact of the sub-culture on the social interactions within the society (Nikol Margaryan)
- The role of non-formal “dispute resolvers” in Shirak region (Gyumri InfoTun)
- Bibliotherapy as a mean for mental well-being among wider society for post-trauma and stress healing (PEN International)

Please see the descriptions of these projects below.

The Aghasi Tadevosyan project extension aimed to identify and disseminate main messages and policy recommendations from these projects both for policy-makers and wider society including civil society organizations.

The key messages from the above mentioned four projects are the following:

- 44-day war’s veterans: The war of 2020 completely changed the perception towards war, peace and patriotism. The peace discourse is not in contradiction with the concept and philosophy of state and security building, to the contrary, it can boost favorable environment for creativity and development. The key message from the war veterans regarding patriotism is the shift of mindset: patriotism is not about pathetic words, it is about everyday activities and steps towards sustainable and developed state and society. These two key messages are interlinked: state and security building are possible through real patriotism: caring for the state and society on a daily basis.
- Criminal sub-culture: TV programs and discussions on Boon TV presented research findings according to which criminal subculture appeared in Russian-Soviet criminal environment and penetrated into Armenia in 1950s. It was rooted in the urban districts and streets and had important impact during the USSR years and afterwards. This phenomenon had especially negative consequences for public and societal values by criminalizing those values. This tendency is especially typical for the post-soviet phase. The key message is that the society and state should confront and change the criminal culture at every level.
- Bibliotherapy: the main message of TV programs on Boon TV was to, firstly, discuss bibliotherapy as an important means to create an environment for mental well-being for a wider society, and secondly, increase the capacity of the professional community to deal with mental well-being by presenting this approach to librarians and social workers.
- “Dispute resolvers” – the program on Boon TV discussed and presented the research study on non-formal dispute resolvers at the community level. One of the key messages was that these non-formal institutions are not resolving conflicts, they address these

issues sporadically and are based on patriarchal approach, based on power and authority, rather than engage conflicting sides in an equal and just way.

In total, 7 TV programs and 3 articles were produced and published.

As a result of the project extension, a series of 7 TV programs was produced and streamed on Boon TV during April- May 2023 under the TV program line called “Boon talks: Anthropology”

1. Nikol Margaryan, cultural anthropologist, ethnographer, topic: criminal slang on the urban district level.
2. Gayane Hakobyan, sociologist, institution of “dispute resolver” and the problems related to it especially in rural areas.
3. Levon Abrahamyan, Cultural anthropologist, ethnographer, topic: the fight against criminalists at the urban district level.
4. Vahram Martirosyan, novelist, writer. topic: social and cultural consequences of the war, the cultural aspect.
5. Ani Kojoyan, expert on communication and gender issues, topic: bibliotherapy and its introduction in Armenia.
6. Harutyun Vermishyan, sociologist, topic: public perceptions of the consequences and challenges of war.
7. Sona Manusyan, psychologist, topic: psychological problems caused by the war and its consequences.

4 articles on criminal slang and sub-culture were published authored by Nikol Margaryan:

- <https://www.aliqmedia.am/2023/02/24/104168/>
- <https://www.aliqmedia.am/2023/02/28/104498/>
- <https://www.aliqmedia.am/2023/03/04/104830/>
- https://infocom.am/hy/article/98084?fbclid=IwAR2DqEUudM8i0iSxAlsMGIbmXS7KHjk9kg6Xkj2h_sdoDoOwzhTl1glERDU

After publicizing this content via Boon TV and media articles, Aghasi Tadevosyan was contacted by Mkhitar Sebastatsi Educational Foundation to conduct sessions with the high school students.

This project was experimental in terms of how to present key messages and findings to wider public from the academic and policy research and findings. The project allowed for the CS Support program’s some subgrant projects’ results to be widely disseminated among the public and to stay on-line for further use.

Civilitas Foundation, “Raising public awareness and promoting participation in the electoral and post-election period”,

Budget: 9,910,900 AMD

Duration: June 2021 - November 2021

Project description: The project was a rapid response to snap parliamentary elections in Armenia. The aim of the project was to raise citizens’ awareness of political processes, so that they are well informed and participate in the elections by taking into account the content of the programs the candidates offer.

Activities and Results: There was an urgent need of balanced and verified coverage of political process to ensure that the public gets some unbiased information on political parties, the ongoing developments in the country and the elections-related developments.

Civilnet actively covered the election campaign and developments in the country before, during and after the elections through several formats. Several interviews were conducted with ruling and opposition parties, experts and activists. The interviews aimed at presenting agendas of the parties, their approach to the priorities of the country. Before the elections, Civilnet initiated the first public discussion with six political parties and alliances. From those invited, Civil Contract and Armenia Alliance (main contenders) refused to participate. The public discussion was attended by civil society representatives and different political groups. By the end of the project the second and closing public discussion was organized covering the border security issue. The discussion was attended by Hayk Mamijanyan, from I have an Honor Alliance, Arthur Ghazinyan from Armenia Alliance, Tigran Grigoryan, Expert and Hrant Mikayelyan, expert. The main topic of public discussion was meetings of heads of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Russia in Sochi, demarcation and delimitation.

During the reporting period, before and after elections, Civilnet organized 3 debates between political parties and alliance representatives. The first debate was attended by the MP candidates from Armenian National Congress and Citizens’ Decision parties. The main topic of the debate was the hate speech and environment before the elections, and secondly, the Nagorno-Karabakh issue and its future. The second debate was attended by the representatives from I have an honor and Homeland of Armenians parties. The main topic of the discussion was the official request to the Constitutional Court to cancel the results of snap parliamentary elections. Finally, the third debate was attended by representatives from Bright Armenia (Armen Eghiazaryan) and Citizens’ Decision (Mikayel Nahapetyan). They were discussing post electoral situation in the country, political developments, new parliament and the challenges of the country for the next years.

Since the grant period coincided with local elections too, Civilnet also covered these elections which had quite high rate of interest after the parliamentary elections. In addition to local elections and security issues, Civilnet also covered ongoing reforms in the country: judicial, public administration, economy etc.

Through the project Civilnet has produced 51 vides and 51 interviews. Cumulatively, the media products produced by CivilNet have been accessed more than 597,000 times on YouTube channel and more than 3,619,000 times on Facebook.

Boon foundation in consortium with Progressive Social Technologies NGO, “Policy and policies: BUN talks”,

Budget: 20,460,000 AMD

Duration: August 2021 - March 2022

Project description: The project aimed at increasing the effectiveness of public policy development processes through triggering constructive dialogues between civil society and state representatives on the issues of public importance. It is expected to achieve the following objectives: independent, inclusive and content-directed environment of dialogue between the state and civil society representatives; the project aimed at ensuring idea generation and increasing public awareness on current public policies and discourses.

At the beginning of the project, closed discussions of civil society and state representatives were held. Topics were identified for “Talks on public policies.” Experts were identified and involved in each broadcast depending on the topic chosen.

Activities and Results: 12 closed discussions were held between CSOs and state representatives in order to reestablish trust and take forward the reform agenda. The following topics were addressed:

1. Armenia’s sovereignty in the context of international relations;
2. Effectiveness of the state institutions and the vision of the state development process;
3. The demographics in Armenia, tendencies, challenges and possible actions;
4. Role of media;
5. Constitutional reforms;
6. Judicial reforms;
7. Consolidation and decentralization;
8. Consolidation and decentralization;
9. Primary education;
10. Armenia and the Diaspora;
11. Economic Development;
12. Higher education.

Each event engaged 8-12 participants representing civil society, expert community and state representatives. The closed format of the meetings allowed participants to discuss the most sensitive issues and point out major issues that existed in the field. After each event the project team develops a brief description of the events with no names and references (the Chatham House rule) and disseminated it among the participants. The trusted and enabling environment

fostered fruitful discussions and cooperation which was quite challenging after 44 days of war and state crisis.

7 TV programs were streamed during April-May under the headline of “Boon Talks: Policies”:

1. Lusine Kharatyan, topic: Introduction of bibliotherapy in Armenia, policy approach to address the post-war trauma.
2. Abraham Artashesyan: the risks associated with the “Conflict resolvers” and their practices.
3. Gayane Hovakimyan: the role of social institutions (family, education, army, penitentiary institutions) in preventing the spread of criminal behavior.
4. Nare Hovhannisyan, human rights defender, topic: Access to education and policy issues for convicts in Armenia.
5. Arshak Galstyan, lawyer: Problems of transition from punitive justice to restorative justice.
6. Zaruhi Hovhannisyan, human rights defender: Basic needs and socio-psychological condition of the displaced, policy issues.
7. Ruben Sargsyan, Deputy Minister of Social Affairs, topic: state approach and policies for capacity development for war veterans and persons displaced from Artsakh.

Human Rights

Journalists’ Club “Asparez” NGO, “Ensuring Effective Judicial Production,”

Budget: 9,980,000 AMD

Duration: September 1 2021 - April 2022

Project description: In 2020, the government adopted a system of vetting for judges, and established a Commission for the Prevention of Corruption, which replaced the Ethics Committee of High-ranking Officials, and is vested with more extensive powers, including delivering conclusions about candidates for judges. However, these reforms are considered insufficient to build a credible and independent judiciary. Trials in non-complex civil cases last 4-6 years, and the first hearings of appeals are scheduled in 1- 1.5 years from the date of receiving the application. On average, each judge currently has a backlog of more than 100 cases. Due to the workload, as well as other issues, the court sessions are frequently postponed, the verdicts are made later than the set terms. There are many cases when the courts delay the examination of civil cases so much that one of the parties rejects the lawsuit or dies. The goal of the project is to increase the efficiency of the judiciary in Armenia. In at least 13 courts in 6 regions (Shirak, Lori, Tavush, Armavir, Vayots Dzor, Syunik) and in Yerevan, a monitoring was implemented concerning the timing of court hearings, the condition of court buildings, furniture, equipment, software, working conditions, the capabilities and needs of judges and support staff.

In addition, following the request of the Ministry of Justice it was decided to conduct the assessment of the capacity, efficiency and needs of the Public Defenders' Office institution.

The study of the work of the judiciary reveals the obstacles that hinder the effective administration of justice. Recommendations to address the identified issues are developed and presented to the stakeholders. As a result, professionals working for the judicial system; MPs, Ministry of Justice, Judicial Department, Public Defender's office, may use the analysis and recommendations for policy changes and decision making, while NGOs may use it for advocacy and lobbying activities.

Activities and Results: Asparez NGO recruited an expert for the development of the methodology of the study. The expert was responsible for the development of the study methodology, participation in the seminar for young people in regions who conducted field monitoring activities, supervision of the monitoring, and preparation of the final study.

Together with the coordinators of regional youth centers, recruitment of young people who were going to be involved in the project was conducted. Monitoring of building conditions of these courts was conducted: Tavush, Shirak, Lori, Syunik, Armavir, Vayots Dzor- courts of first instance, Shirak Administrative Court, and Yerevan Court of Appeals, Administrative Court, and Court of Insolvency. The monitoring also covers the following: Review of the logistical and working conditions and needs of the Public Defender's Office; The efficiency of datalex.am website; Quantitative analysis of opinions of citizens related to judicial administration, accessibility of courts, judges' professional qualities and manners, speech and behavior, including emotional intelligence during the court proceedings. The finalized version of the report will be presented to the public.

Rights and Freedom Center NGO, "Appealing the sentences of persons convicted on political grounds"

Budget: 5,680,000 AMD

Duration: November 2021 – June 2022

The **goal** of the project was to contribute to the improvement of the criminal justice system by creating precedents of acquittal and contributing to the prevention of the possibility of criminal prosecution of people for political views. The objectives of the project are to contribute to 1) acquittals of persons prosecuted for political views in RA after 2008, 2) recognition of violated basic rights, 3) restoration of justice.

This project is addressing the March 1, 2008 events, when during a public uprising against rigged elections ten people were killed, emergency rule established, and several hundreds arrested and prosecuted. Justice is not restored yet, despite the 2018 revolution that promised the reevaluation of these events.

Activities and Results. During the implementation of the project, appeals of verdicts issued against persons subjected to criminal prosecution due to political views after 2008 were submitted to the courts of appeal and cassation. The organization submitted 31 cases to the cassation court and 25 cases to the court of appeal, as a result of which there are now 5 precedents of acquittal. The rest of the cases submitted are still in process, and it is unclear as of now how many more precedents of acquittal may be a success. Thus, the program contributed to the recognition of the violated rights of the mentioned persons and the restoration of justice.

“Right Side” Human Rights Defender NGO, “Legal and psychological support to LGBTQI community”

Budget: 2,160,000 AMD

Duration: August 2022 – November 2022

The project goal was to contribute to legal and psychological protection of LGBTQI community through provision of legal and psychological support, as well as decrease hate speech and discrimination cases towards LGBTQI people by registering victories in the courts.

Within the project framework, the Right Side NGO conducted four key activities:

(1) Provision of psychological counseling and support to LGBTQI individuals across all regions of Armenia. A total of 226 individual and 4 group psychological consultations were conducted, addressing various clinical cases such as depression, anxiety disorders, panic attacks, physical and psychological abuse, domestic violence, emotional challenges related to hormone therapy, and difficulties stemming from discrimination. The psychologist employed techniques such as cognitive-behavioral therapy, art therapy, and other therapeutic approaches. As a result, 89% of the participating community members experienced positive outcomes, including overcoming emotional challenges, reducing self-stigma and self-discrimination, building self-confidence, acquiring resources to combat future discrimination, resisting anti-LGBTQI pressures, and reintegrating into everyday life.

(2) Provision of legal consultancy and support to 273 LGBTQI individuals from all regions of Armenia. Assistance was provided through phone calls, online, and in-person meetings at the organization's office or other convenient locations. The support addressed issues related to interactions with law enforcement, state bodies (such as the Ministry of Internal Affairs and local government), service sector discrimination, and problems within personal relationships or family dynamics. Throughout the program, over 210 individuals received guidance, 87% gained knowledge about their rights, 64% obtained tools for rights protection, and 81% reported feeling more protected.

(3) Legal representation for 92 LGBTQI individuals from all regions of Armenia. This involved supporting individuals in criminal proceedings, court cases, and interactions with legal institutions. The organization assisted transgender individuals in changing their passport names and helped resolve various issues related to military commissariats and ministries in Yerevan and

regional areas. As a result, LGBTQI individuals experienced increased legal protection, a reduction in discriminatory incidents and violence, and the NGO gained the ability to continue strategic court cases.

(4) Preparation of a legal brief on cases of gender and sexuality-based discrimination and violence and shared with local and international institutions. These efforts aimed to raise awareness about the ongoing violence against the LGBTQI community and advocate for necessary legislative changes.

Non-discrimination and Equality Coalition, “Youth for Equality: Promoting an inclusive culture among young people in the regions of Armenia.”

Budget: 9,562,000 AMD

Duration: November 15, 2021 – November 30, 2022

Project Description: The main goal of the project was to expand the scope of anti-discrimination practices across Armenia, involving the regional youth in the fight against discrimination.

One of the sub-goals was to raise awareness among young people in different regions about various forms of discrimination, direct and indirect, double or multiple forms of discrimination, and to some extent promote a culture of equality and inclusion in their communities, including positive changes in information channels, media, language, etc.

Activities and Results:

A survey was conducted in selected regions, which determined the knowledge of the target audience, the level of awareness on issues related to discrimination and inclusion and the needs in terms of knowledge about it. According to the survey results, discriminatory practices among young people employed in the educational environment - pedagogues, psychologists, social pedagogues and others, are clearly manifested and have value-normative bases. They often have certain ideas of “normalcy,” value orientations, moral codes and standards, which create prerequisites for direct and indirect discrimination. Discriminatory practices in the educational environment in the regions of Armenia are most often manifested on the following grounds: (1) physical and mental abilities of the student, (2) gender, (3) religious affiliation, and (4) family social status. The study enumerates the trajectories of the emergence or reproduction of discriminatory practices in the educational environment.

Based on the results of research, a training agenda for young people was created. Young people were trained with the help of experienced trainers from non-discriminatory groups, for the participants to become more aware and sensitive about discriminated and non-discriminated social groups. Presentations and screenings of thematic films of both local and international production were organized, discussions were held with the authors of these films, as well as debates on the problematic topics that were discussed during the trainings and film screenings.

Disability Rights Agenda NGO, “Effective and full participation in policy development and monitoring procedures”,

Budget: 9,732,000 AMD

Duration: July 2021 - February 2022

Project description: People with disabilities often do not have the opportunity to participate in the development, implementation and monitoring of policies regarding the people with disabilities. These barriers have become more evident due to the health, socio-economic and communication problems caused by COVID-19 pandemic, and the deep crisis in various areas of life following the war in 2020. The combination of these two factors has led to the severance of the connection between the bodies of the public administration system and the organizations of persons with disabilities, which endangers the participation of persons with disabilities (both as a principle, and as a right) in decisions affecting their lives and well-being. This project offers a number of consecutive complementary actions to ensure that the participation of persons with disabilities and relevant acts developed are rights-based. The goal of the project is to support the rights of persons with disabilities through participatory development, implementation monitoring and evaluation of the comprehensive social inclusion program for persons with disabilities. Project objectives are as follows: (1) Assess the National Comprehensive Program for 2017-2021 on the Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities and make suggestions for the improvement; (2) Support the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs for the participatory and accessible development of the National Comprehensive Program for 2021-2026; (3) Develop the organization's institutional capabilities of monitoring and advocacy (including through the development of necessary procedures, tools, and formats) and increase the visibility of the organization.

Activities and Results: At the beginning of the project, the organization hired experts to support the implementation of the project. To achieve the first objective - evaluation of the implementation of the Comprehensive Social Inclusion 2017-2021 Program for Persons with Disabilities, data processing based on a methodology, developed to evaluate the Program, has been launched and continued. The information on the implemented works of the Program has been studied and classified according to the activities. A focus group discussion was held with the civil society organizations that, according to the reports received by the government, participated in the implementation of the complex program. The preliminary structure of the report has been approved and discussed with the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs.

The second component of the program includes ensuring the direct participation of persons with disabilities in the development of a comprehensive social inclusion program for people with disabilities in 2022-2026. In this regard, [consultations](#) with NGOs were held. In particular, a consultation was held with the “Equal Rights, Equal Opportunities” NGO, attended by 15 people. Recommendations made as a result of the previous consultations (3 group and 6 individual) were included in the draft of the Program.

Best practices include establishing accessibility monitoring mechanism, introducing Armenian text to speech and speech to text technology, a mobile ballot voting system, a system for psychiatric advance directives, providing psychological services in the maternity hospitals to help mothers of newborns with disabilities, etc.

The purpose of the new component of the project (extension) is to support the provision of the rights of people with hearing problems and the formation of a system of services in Armenian sign language. The Government expressed its commitment to fund a new program of Armenian Sign Language (ArSL) Interpretation and initiate a new educational program of ArSL interpreters.

Although not fully according to the suggestions, the Strategy was adopted by a Government decree.

Center for Legal Initiatives NGO, “Contributing to the effective implementation of the right to education of prisoners”,

Budget: 6,867,000 AMD

Duration: June 2021 - November 2021

Project description: The right to education of persons deprived of their liberty is enshrined in the legislation regulating the penitentiary system. In addition, the Armenian government has repeatedly stated that it is pursuing a policy of re-socialization, one of the important components of which is the implementation of steps to realize the right of persons deprived of their liberty and the introduction of new vocational education programs. However, the right to education of prisoners is not effectively exercised; this is due to legislative, practical and a number of other issues. The proposed project contributed to the solution of these issues by identifying and publicizing issues related to the right to education of detainees, improving relevant legislation, resolving practical issues, and promoting cooperation between institutions concerned.

The goal of the project was to promote the proper implementation of the principles adopted by the state concerning the exercise of the right to education of prisoners. In order to achieve the goal, the following actions were envisaged:

- To study the legislative-practical obstacles to the realization of the right to education of persons deprived of their liberty, and their impact at the individual level.
- To raise public awareness on the identified issues.
- To develop recommendations for improving the situation based on the results of the study.
- Conduct advocacy for the solution of the identified problems.

Activities and Results: After the [launch](#) of the project, the following activities have been carried out by the grantee: (1) A study on Education in penitentiary institutions. To prepare the report, an extensive process was undertaken. Over 150 documents were thoroughly studied and

qualitatively analyzed. Forty written requests were submitted to relevant institutions to gather information about the measures and programs implemented to safeguard the right to education for incarcerated individuals. In order to capture the perspectives and recommendations of the project beneficiaries and key stakeholders on the main issue, 10 questionnaires were developed. These questionnaires formed the basis for conducting in-depth interviews with 60 stakeholders. The findings from the document analysis, written surveys, and in-depth interviews were combined to create the research report. The examination of international experiences revealed three main approaches to public education in prisons. It can be implemented by the Ministry of Education within the institution, individuals may be allowed to attend external schools while returning to the institution, or the institution itself may organize the education. In Armenia, a mixed form is observed, where the foundation handles the administrative aspect while the Ministry of Justice ensures education according to the standards set by the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sports.

(2) Four promotional videos have been prepared on the topic and posted on the organization's website and social media pages. The filming of videos took place in selected penal institutions where educational programs are frequently organized, locations included the Abovyan, Artik, and Armavir prisons. The videos covered general education, higher or post-secondary education, and non-formal educational programs. Two videos focusing on general education were shot to showcase the educational opportunities offered by the Artik Evening School and the Legal Education and Rehabilitation Program Implementation Center. Three inmates participated in filming, two serving life sentences.¹

(3) A series of four press conferences were organized, attended, in addition to press, by 11 representatives: from the Ministry of Justice, the penal service of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Unified Social Service, the Center for the Implementation of Legal Education and Rehabilitation Programs, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Abovyan and Armavir Correctional and Custodial Institutions, and the Urartu University of Practical Psychology and Sociology.²

On February 14, 2023, the “Education in penitentiary institutions. Concluding discussion on challenges and perspectives” conference took place with a higher-than-expected attendance. Over 60 representatives from various decision-making, policy-making, and interested institutions participated in the conference. The conference focused on the joint efforts required by international, state, and local structures to enhance the effectiveness of education in penitentiary institutions. The officials presented sectoral legislation reforms, outcomes of implemented

¹ The videos are available on YouTube and Facebook, by the following links: <https://youtu.be/BDj6HA2gPKE>, <https://www.facebook.com/legalinitiativesngo/videos/580959899800313>, <https://youtu.be/UrZWeg0misw>, <https://www.facebook.com/legalinitiativesngo/videos/421530462956485>, https://youtu.be/_3Wbgu4BWa8, <https://www.facebook.com/legalinitiativesngo/videos/914222369282351>, <https://youtu.be/wAq8gk2pBQI>, <https://www.facebook.com/legalinitiativesngo/videos/3454912054786766>.

² Links to the press-conferences and articles available at: <https://prisoninitiatives.am/news/18641/>, <https://prisoninitiatives.am/news/18672/>, <https://prisoninitiatives.am/news/18802/>, <https://prisoninitiatives.am/news/18966/>.

strategic plans, actions taken to improve education in newly developed strategies, educational programs conducted by governmental and NGOs, statistical data, gaps and efforts to address them. University institutions shared insights on organizing higher or post-university education for incarcerated individuals, highlighting legislative and technical challenges. Imprisoned individuals shared their personal experiences and recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of educational programs. The conference received significant media coverage.³

During the implementation of the project, according to the order No. 129-A of the Minister of Justice from March 24, 2022, the Center for Legal Initiatives human rights was included in the advisory group for the revision of the draft of the Penal Code. As a result of the project, the following formats of higher education organization have been defined: by distance, part-time and remote. Convicts, who turned 19 while serving their sentence, were given the opportunity to receive general education. A provision has been made that the initial vocational education or vocational training of convicts, who do not have a profession can be organized at the expense of the state budget.

Intra Psychological Club NGO, “For the benefit of a healthy society: Preventing violence in schools”,

Budget: 9,717,400 AMD

Duration: July 2021 - February 2022

Project description: A significant part of students aged 13 to 15 worldwide – around 150 million – report having experienced peer-to-peer violence in and around school, according to a new report released by UNICEF. The consequences of bullying can be severe and irreversible, but the dangers of bullying are not fully realized or discussed in the Armenian schools, with parents, students and teachers, as well as in media. When bullying is considered a normal practice, for example the use of power over the “weak,” or the manifestation of force for solving problems and impunity for such actions take place, this may lead to broader violent practices in the society. Bullying needs to be stopped, but just as it is difficult to cure an entire school from epidemic, it is difficult to “cure” the ‘habit of violence’. It requires a whole package of actions, with the participation of psychologists and the readiness of the staff. One way to go is to prevent it by raising awareness, involving all possible target groups. The goal of the project is to raise the level of awareness of students and teachers from 20 schools in Shirak region about bullying and to provide psychological support to those bullied. The objectives of the project are as follows:

- To ensure the existence of appropriate methods of prevention and solving problems in schools.

³ Media coverage available at: <https://prisoninitiatives.am/mediaaboutus/26502/>, <https://prisoninitiatives.am/mediaaboutus/26511/>, <https://youtu.be/UsPHAYL3AvY>, <https://youtu.be/Blw1PxATm8c>, [https://youtu.be/zrKe\]kpJD6k](https://youtu.be/zrKe]kpJD6k), <https://prisoninitiatives.am/news/26572/>.

- To support the students who voice about violence, change the culture which condones violence in school classes and communities.
- Make school security solutions and practices more effective and targeted.

Activities and Results:

- A 2-day training course for the NGO staff was conducted to make them more sensitive towards the issues addressed by the project. Six employees took part in the training course.
- A hotline has been set up to support and provide psychological support to students in schools who bullied or became targets of bullying. The information about the hotline was disseminated in the schools of Shirak region (including but not limited to those targeted in this project), and in secondary professional and higher educational institutions.
- 200 information posters were printed and shared, 3,000 information leaflets on the bullying prevention and hotline service have been printed and distributed. The posters have been used in schools of Shirak region (including but not limited to those targeted in this project), in secondary professional and higher educational institutions.
- Awareness-raising meetings on violence prevention were held in 20 schools. A meeting in each school for parents and teachers was held, 194 teachers and 209 parents participated.
- One-day [trainings](#) for the development of emotional intelligence and empathy were conducted for 212 students in 20 schools, during which students learned about skills of self-perception, self-management and effective communication.
- [A press-conference](#) and a [radio program broadcast](#) were held to raise the visibility of the project.
- 4 anonymous stories of abused students in schools have been and published.
- A study has been conducted. In-depth interviews were conducted with 20 school principals and 20 teachers, including from rural communities. 1000 students aged 10-18 (face to face and online) in schools of Gyumri and Shirak region (including rural communities), as well as 50 parents participated in an anonymous survey (on violence, causes, prevention and other issues). The study resulted in advice on establishing clear procedures for recording and addressing incidents of violence in schools, ensuring positions for qualified psychologists in schools, establishing criteria for social-psychological learning skills from preschool through senior year of high school, and conducting training courses on child rights among teachers.

For equal rights NGO, “Promotion of legal mechanisms to ensure freedom of speech in the RA”

Budget: 9,985,000 AMD

Duration: October 2021 - November 2022

Project description: The aim of the project was to raise the issues in the spheres connected with freedom of speech and fight against hate speech; to guide solutions through creating a common platform for politicians, experts and stakeholders, enabling them to hold discussions and constructive debates for exchanging their ideas.

Activities and Results: The project has established a novel platform for collaboration with key stakeholders in the Republic of Armenia to advance improved legislation on media. This platform operated in two directions: firstly, engaging with experts and CSOs on the ground to analyze the research produced within the project, identify gaps in the field, and develop a shared policy package for lobbying policymakers; secondly, fostering direct cooperation with policymakers, including the Ministry of Justice and Members of Parliament. This collaboration was formalized through a memorandum of understanding signed between the government, National Assembly, and CSOs. The discussions on the new media bill influenced the project's scope and urgency, aligning its activities with the advocacy for and development of a better law. The project holds the potential to contribute significantly to the ongoing reform process, with the new law expected to be discussed and ratified in 2023.

The research conducted in frames of the project encompasses key areas such as analyzing the legislative regulations and challenges of the media, evaluating the significance of financial and ownership transparency, examining international regulations and experiences, proposing legislative reforms, studying international practices in self-regulatory bodies, preparing recommendations for implementing best practices in Armenia, and developing an amendment package for the law.

The project hosted 11 events. (1) Closed meeting on January 11 with the Minister of Justice, NGO representatives, and members of Parliament to discuss a new media bill. The outcome was an agreement to collaborate on the bill, (2) Closed discussion on January 21 at the Article 3 Human Rights Club to address conceptual issues related to changing the media law, (3) Closed meeting on March 15 in Parliament with policymakers and CSOs to discuss the main directions of the new media bill, (4) Public discussion on April 1 titled “Information War: Targets and Aims of Disseminating Fake News in Crisis Situations,” addressing current challenges in Armenia, (5) Closed discussion on April 12 focused on hate speech in Armenia, including its causes, legal regulations, and potential solutions. The discussion included a presentation by an international law specialist, (6) Closed discussion on May 10 to explore effective mechanisms for combating hate speech and fake news, (7) Third closed meeting with policymakers on June 10, where the research findings were presented and discussed. The goal was to seek support for a better media law, (8) Public discussion on June 17, addressing the issue of regaining trust in the mass media. Several speakers shared their perspectives, based on research indicating a decline in public trust, (9) Closed discussion on June 21 to review the final draft of the research, incorporating input from CSOs, policymakers, and representatives from the Committee of TV and Radio of Armenia, (10) Public discussion on October 7 titled “Hybrid Warfare: The Targets

of Information War and the Measures to Fight against Them,” featuring speakers from various organizations, (11) Closed discussion on November 24 regarding proposals for legal changes related to hate speech and restrictions on media dissemination. Participants included representatives from CSOs, Parliament, and legal experts.

Alvan Tsaghik NGO, “Unhindered education. New opportunities,”

Budget: 8,280,000 AMD

Duration: October 1, 2021 - May 2022

Project description: Criminal subculture is a serious challenge to societal development. It has manifested itself in almost every aspect of social relations in Armenia. The penitentiary institutions still remain the main source of ‘reproducing’ criminal subculture. The project aimed at contributing to the reduction of the negative influence of criminal subculture by reforming the educational rights of detainees in PI “Artik” and creating new opportunities in terms of new professions and skills.

Activities and Results: During the reporting period, agreements were made with the “Artik” penitentiary, as well as cooperation was developed with the RA Ministry of Justice, which will contribute to the smooth running of the project. A questionnaire was developed by the project expert to conduct a survey among convicts in the penitentiary, the purpose of which is to assess the educational needs and basic skills and capacities of the convicts. 58 convicts took part in the survey.

The project team had meetings with the Head of the Department of Criminal Legislation, Penitentiary and Probation Policy Development and the Head of the Department of Social, Psychological and Legal Affairs of the Penitentiary Service. They were informed about the project activities and expressed their readiness to support the implementation of the project.

The surveys were analyzed and summarized in the program report, due to which the educational opportunities of the convicts, the motivations for acquiring a new profession, the most preferred skills and types of professions were highlighted.

The imprisoned persons had the opportunity to participate in the educational process, acquire new skills, which will contribute to their resocialization after the end of the sentence. The following courses were implemented: “Construction works for interior decoration,” “Computer literacy,” and “Furniture making.” 46 convicts participated in the trainings. Only men serve the sentence in this penitentiary. The distribution in the aforementioned courses have been done based on the preferences of the inmates identified during the survey. The Computer literacy courses were attended by life convicts from closed, semi-closed regime, whereas the other convicts signed up for construction work and furniture-making courses. Given the closed regime and procedures regarding life convicts, each course for these inmates lasted two hours, with courses held twice a week for four months. As for the furniture-making and construction work for interior decoration, each course lasted for up to 4 hours, twice a week, for 2 months.

Certificates were provided to all convicts attending the courses. There is a willingness from the Penitentiary Service to sign a memorandum and implement such a program in penitentiary institutions in other cities as well.

“Pathway to” NGO - “Promoting inclusion among the youth in Armenia”

Budget: 7,500,000 AMD

Duration: November 2021- May 2022

Project Description: In local decision-making processes, people with disabilities are often not taken into account, sometimes even when the decision directly concerns them. The goal of this project was to increase the level of inclusion of young people with and without disabilities in the participatory governance processes in Armenia.

Activities and Results: The project promoted inclusion and participatory decision-making culture at the local level in Yeghegnadzor, Malishka, Gladzor communities of the Vayots Dzor region through trainings and workshops for 15 young people (2 of whom have disabilities); and through raising the awareness of young people with and without disabilities, those interested in community life, and local decision-makers through accessible materials, such as the guideline on [Inclusion of youth participation in the decision-making process](#) created and published by the above-mentioned 15 young people.

At the conclusion of the camp-workshop – the primary action of the project, a public discussion was organized, bringing together workshop participants, project team, and representatives from the Yeghegnadzor enlarged community. During the discussion, recommendations and actions were developed, leading to the resolution of some issues raised by the young participants. Following the public discussion, the project experts finalized the content of the manual and the script for the video clip, which marked the next stage of the project. The printing of the manual commenced thereafter.

While the project primarily focused on the youth of the Yeghegnadzor community, it was equally important for the project to raise awareness among young people in other regions of Armenia on topics related to discrimination, stereotypes, inclusion, persons with disabilities, and their rights. To achieve this, five online and offline meetings were organized, including showcasing success stories, screening relevant movies, and conducting interactive discussions.

Once the printing of the manual was completed, the project team conducted a presentation event to officially launch the complete manual and showcase the video clip. The presentation was attended by representatives from civil society organizations, local government, state administration, as well as other interested individuals, including co-authors of the materials, young people with and without disabilities, experts, and public activists. At the conclusion of the presentation, physical copies of the handbook were distributed to the attendees, while an

electronic version of the manual was made available to those who were unable to attend. This ensured wider distribution and accessibility of the manual.

The project succeeded to promote inclusion and the participatory culture of decision-making in the aforementioned communities. Overall, the project targeted about 200 people during its implementation (including public discussions, workshops, presentations).

Environment

ALT TV, “Preventing the desertification of the Ararat Plain,”

Budget: 6,694,500 AMD

Duration: October 1, 2021 - May 2022

Project Description: The Ararat Plain has faced an ecological catastrophe. The mismanagement of water resources leads to the transformation of the semi-desert landscape into a desert. The aim of the project was to prevent the decrease of the Ararat artesian basin and the desertification of the Ararat Plain by developing public awareness about the current situation.

Activities and Results: The project team studied the settlements that are located in the Ararat artesian base (Armavir and Ararat region); the mechanical and fountain deep wells were studied, particularly deep wells were registered based on the types and belonging. Additionally, reserved and not functional wells were registered too. The project team received the list of water use permits with the indication of the volume to be used from the Ministry of Territorial Administration. The Armavir and Ararat regional administrations shared information about the fish farms and the volumes for each marz. Project team finished the investigation and developed media product presenting all the details, risks and corruption cases. The shared product had 20,000 views. The findings were shared with the Ministries, such as Economy, Environment, Territorial Administration.

The Ministry of Economy initiated a meeting inviting ALT TV representatives and Ministry of Environment. The findings of the investigation were discussed. The representatives for Ministries mentioned that ongoing issues with the water resource management are related to the lack of legislative mechanisms. However, they were reluctant to speak about the fisheries and how they manage water resources in these areas. In this regard, additional investigation is needed inside those fisheries since they possess 76% of waters in Ararat P. The ALT TV project team was contacted by Institute of Water Problems and Hydro-Engineering with positive feedback.

“Heqiatereen” mobile interactive puppet theatre, “A modern fairy tale in a magic suitcase”

Budget: 4,970,000 AMD

Duration: April 15, 2022 - September 15, 2022

Project description: The project aims to introduce crucial ecological issues through interactive performances to children living in the regions of Armenia, as well as to develop their critical thinking skills on the topic.

Activities and Results: Team members worked on writing a fairy tale, which introduces important environmental issues of the 21st century: pollution and waste management. Special decorations and puppets were designed and made for the performance. In order to ensure the proper implementation and organization of performances, the project team worked closely with the network of Infotuns, which are located in 10 regions of Armenia. Performances were conducted in Ararat, Armavir, Goris, Ijevan, Martuni, Vanadzor, Vayk, Gyumri, Hrazdan and Talin. About 300 children 4-6 years old attended the puppet performances.

A short video introducing the project is produced, and the fairy tale with illustrations about the environment is designed and published. It is being distributed by EPF and Heqiatere team to kindergartens and educational centers.

By the end of the project, a short video introducing the process of the project was produced.

By using puppets and interactive performances, the project has made environmental issues accessible and engaging to children, inspiring a sense of curiosity and interest in the topic. Through the use of creative storytelling and audience participation, the project encouraged children to think critically about their own actions and the impact they have on the environment. This helped foster a sense of responsibility and encourage positive behaviors, such as recycling, reducing waste, and conserving resources. The project also has had a wider impact on the community by promoting sustainability and encouraging greater engagement with environmental issues. Infotuns in all regions of Armenia serve as a platform for community actors, young people and other interested groups to raise their concerns, issues and find relevant solutions, and supported the successful implementation of this project.

See more about Infotuns below.

“Cultural & Social Narratives Laboratory” NGO, “Getar: Urban Transformations, Human Rights & Environment Told Through the Collective Memory of a River”,

Budget: 9,985,000 AMD

Duration: May 2021 - January 2022

Project description: The project addresses the issues of environment, urban planning and development, as a cross-cutting process affected by corruption and human rights violations, through one specific case study of the Getar river. This interdisciplinary project is a research of collective memory of The Getar River, the history of its transformations largely based on human rights violations, the significance and the role the river had/has in the context of the development of the urban space of Yerevan. Getar, a partially closed river, which crosses the historical and residential center of Yerevan, remains a significant artery both for the ecosystem of Yerevan and for the memory and identity of its residents. Water and other natural resources in Armenian

towns have not been sufficiently studied, importance and many issues of natural resources in the urban space have not been presented to the general public using modern media. The pollution of water resources, their neglect by the authorities and illegal exploitation by business interests led to a crisis in ecology and urban planning. As a part of the project, an in-depth study of one specific object of urban space - the Getar river was conducted. This will help to avoid abstract generalizations regarding issues of natural and urban environments. The results of the study will be presented through a book, visualizations, oral stories etc. and through public discussions on this topic. Revealing and preserving the memory of Getar in the context of everyday life is emphasized in the project.

Activities and Results: CSNL created project [website](#) and published [the book](#). The website presents the main structure of the research, and audio and video materials. The project website is bilingual with Armenian and English content. The team analyzed documents from the National Archive the museum of Yerevan Municipality. As a part of the project 5 people were engaged to develop narrative texts based on the interviews and archival materials. Throughout the implementation of the research it became obvious that the collected material will become the first in its kind comprehensive data on the issue. The interviews and findings from the residents of the areas surrounding Getar were very rich with information with unique photo and video materials. The project team walked around the river in the areas of Khorenatsi, Getar and Nar-Dos streets, spoke with the oldest residents of these areas. The main sections of the book are the following: Getar, the open memory of closed river; Closed rivers and urban space; Getar in between private and public spaces; Ecological and environmental importance of the river; River as a feminine space. Some abstracts from the interviews were published in social media to ensure a wider outreach of the project. Public presentation of the book will be organized in June. The idea of the Getar project was applied in Ijevan for Aghstev river. Ijevan InfoTun and CSNL NGO have been successfully cooperating to create a visual of Aghstev river as a recreational area.

BirdLinks Armenia NGO, “Transferring the Hunting in Armenia into Responsible and Sustainable mode”,

Budget: 9,438,000 AMD

Duration: July 2021 - February 2022

Project description: Many specific legislative measures regarding the protection of the environmental resources, including the biodiversity and the birds in Armenia are often considered not a high priority, and the role of CSOs becomes especially important in reviewing specific policies and guidelines, improving those and enforcing their implementation. There are 18 species of birds allocated for legal hunting (so called game birds). The responsible and sustainable hunting management assumes that during seasonal harvest of these game birds their populations should not decline and none of the protected species should be shot by mistake. The goals of the project are: 1) to introduce new State Exam for obtaining the hunters’ licenses. The

main focus of the exam is testing the knowledge of the applicants on hunting rules and their skills on recognition of game birds and their differentiation from the protected species; and 2) to reshape the current public hunting lands, cutting out the areas of international conservation importance.

The proposed activities aimed at enabling a positive disposition by the Ministry of Environment of RA and an agreement to change the hunting legislation related to these two issues.

BirdLinks Armenia NGO tracked the consistency of the Ministry's position in promoting the proposed changes in legislation and developed and tested the Exam for Hunters and the appropriate training for Hunters.

Activities and Results:

As a part of the project, the structure of the Exam for obtaining hunting licenses is developed and accepted by the Ministry of Environment (Sevak Baloyan – Bioresource Management Department; Voskehat Grigoryan, Aram Aghasyan, Tatevik Zuerker-Tamazyan, Tigran Asatryan, Arpi Panoyan – Specially Protected Areas of Nature and Biodiversity Policy Department; Lusine Avetisyan – Strategic Policy Department;) and the Hunting Unions. It consists of eight options; each has 70 questions (560 questions in total). It is made in PPT format and is ready for paper based implementation in a computer class, as well as for digitizing, using Moodle or other software.

The Training course consisting of 10 lessons (each of one-hour duration) that teaches hunting rules and identification of 18 game birds and 37 look-alike protected species is prepared and tested on 89 hunters of Yerevan, Armavir, Vayots Dzor, and Shirak provinces. Results show that an Exam that couldn't be passed before the training – can be passed after it. The draft amendments in the RA Law “On Hunting and Hunting management” have been prepared in close cooperation with the Ministry of Environment, Environmental Protection and Mining Inspection Body of RA (Armen Arabyan, Department of Inspection of Fauna), and the international team of Twinning Project “Strengthening the capacity of the National Assembly of Armenia to further support CEPA oversight and implementation” (Jindrich Chlapek, Tereza Kusnirova, Paula Filipova, Czech Republic). The amendments are ready for submission to the Parliament for further proceeding.

Using 394 responses from the hunters, the project team analyzed the use of the Public Hunting Lands and assessed risks for 129 water bird species, which occur in the areas of overlap of the Public Hunting Lands and international priority areas for bird conservation. The data is processed into maps, and the results are formalized into the article “Influence of Public Hunting Lands on the water birds of internationally recognized priority conservation areas in Armenia”, which is submitted to the [Journal of Wildlife Management](#). The obtained results identified risks for a number of priority bird species, but also have revealed the unevenness of use of the public hunting lands, which creates issues of overexploitation of the fauna of certain wetland and

terrestrial areas. In addition, the results have been used for: (1) Re-assessment of existing Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs), the article [“Revision of Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas of Armenia”](#) is published in International Journal of Zoology and Animal Biology and leads to a collaborative project on updating the information on IBAs with BirdLife International; (2) Assessment of conservation importance of Teksar Mountain, the article “Evaluation of Importance of Teksar Mountain of Armenia for Bird and Butterfly Protection” is published in International Journal of Zoology and Animal Biology and leads to advocacy campaign, which stopped the metal mining project in Vayots Dzor at the stage of public hearings; (3) Assessment of conservation status of Marbled Teal (globally threatened duck species) in Armenia and Turkey, the article, tentatively named “Conservation status of Marbled Teal (*Marmaronetta angustirostris*) in Armenia and Turkey” is passing the last stage of preparation in cooperation with the partner organization Kuzey Doga NGO (Turkey); (4) Assessment of conservation status of Ferruginous Pochard (another globally threatened duck species) in Armenia and Turkey, like in previous case, the article tentatively named “About state of Ferruginous Pochard *Aythya nyroca* in Armenia and Turkey” is at the last stage of preparation in cooperation with the partner organization Kuzey Doga NGO (Turkey); (4) Assessment of conservation status of Whiteheaded Duck (another globally threatened duck species) in Armenia and Turkey, like in previous case, the article tentatively named “Status and conservation of White-headed Duck *Oxyura leucocephala* in Armenia and Turkey” is in progress in cooperation with the partner organization Kuzey Doga NGO (Turkey)

The new maps for the Public Hunting Lands have been outlined with the main aim of excluding the international priority conservation areas from the hunting grounds. However, since the 3 analyses (see above) identified unevenness of the use of the Public Hunting Lands, it was suggested by the Ministry of Environment to develop a new project, aimed at designing scientifically justified public hunting lands, which will reduce the existing overexploitation of some of these areas.

The international scientific and environmental policy community is being informed by the results of the project, as the published articles are being shared through: Focal Point of Bern Convention in Armenia, Focal Point of Convention on Biological Diversity, Focal Point of Convention on Migratory Species, Network of Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA), Species Survival Group of International Union for Conservation of Nature (SSG IUCN), Threatened Waterbird Specialist Group of World Wetland Trust (TWSG WWT), World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF Armenia), Caucasus Nature Fund (CNF), BirdLife International, and European Bird Census Council (EBCC).

The information on Important Bird Areas (IBAs) of Armenia on the website of BirdLife International is old and outdated. Sharing Birdlink’s work on review of the existing IBAs and evaluation of the new IBAs resulted in beginning of a collaborative initiative with BirdLife’s division on Europe & Central Asia. The initiative is dedicated to update of the information on IBAs of Armenia in the online platform of BirdLife International. The absence of a centralized

database on biodiversity in the country creates a wide variety of opportunities of speculations within the Environmental Impact Assessment processes. One of such opportunities was a recent proposal for development of a metal mining project in Vayots Dzor province. However, Birdlink's assessment of conservation importance of Teksar Mountain filled out that gap of data and allowed development of joint efforts with WWF Armenia and stop the metal mining project at the stage of public hearings. In fact, the existing Public Hunting Lands have been designed without considering the real distribution of game animals. When we identified such a discrepancy and presented it to the Ministry of Environment, the Ministry suggested us to support the design of the new Public Hunting Lands, which will be scientifically justified.

Further Sustainability of the project: Armash Wetlands is one of the richest areas with waterbird fauna. This site is already designated as IBA, Candidate Emerald Site and AEWA Site. As Birdlink's study shows, the area is under strong pressure of hunting and certainly deserves to be included into Protected Area. With that idea in mind, Birdlink NGO developed a new project on designation of Armash Wetlands as Protected Area, in cooperation with the Czech Nature Conservation Agency. Sharing the results of the current project with AEWA Technical Committee and Aarhus University of Denmark allows to begin developing a new project, aimed at digitizing the Hunters' Exam and the Training Course, in collaboration with these two institutions. The continuous discussions with the Hunting Unions helped in identification of the new issues related to poaching and negative influence of herbicides (on hare, partridges, and quails). Further elaboration of the issue brings to development of two new initiatives: (1) joint efforts of Hunting Unions, Ministry of Environment, and Environmental Protection and Mining Inspection Body on reducing the identified ways of poaching and (2) cooperation in the frames of reviewing the use of herbicides and replacing the dangerous ones with other environmentally friendly methods of weed suppression.

“The sun shines for everyone” NGO, “Yard-community-ecosystem”

Budget: 8,830,000 AMD

Duration: December 1, 2021 - July 2022

Project Description: The main goal of the project is to create a community culture of street animal care by creating a network of dedicated volunteers. The project aims to establish an institutional framework of cooperation with the local and central authorities (police and patrol services, municipality), which is necessary for the protection and care of street animals.

Activities and Results: The project resulted in a thorough analysis of the policy and legislative framework concerning stray animals, change in attitudes towards stray animals, as well as installation of five shelters for stray animals across several neighborhoods.

The comprehensive analysis of the policy and legislative framework aimed at regulating the problem of stray animals encompasses recommendations touching upon several crucial gaps. The recommendations include the necessity of creating a specialized state-run service dedicated to

Animal Control and ideas regarding the center’s funding and sustainability; establishment of correct procedures and sequential approach to adopting and implementing an animal welfare and handling policy. This includes advocating for the imposition of small taxes on pet owners whose pets are not sterilized. Additionally, establishment of a system that would guarantee the cooperation with volunteers and volunteer networks on legal basis was recommended.

The project team conducted an in-depth study of the successful dog population management practices in Sri Lanka, considering it an international best practice. The findings from this research were compiled into a comprehensive report, which will be utilized to advocate for legislative improvements.

One notable accomplishment of the project was the installation of five shelters for stray animals within various yards; these shelters are diligently maintained and safeguarded by the dedicated project volunteers. This intervention had a significant impact on the attitudes of local residents, leading to a more tolerant and compassionate attitude towards stray animals.

To raise awareness about the issue and ensure the visibility of the project's interventions, a comprehensive communication campaign was implemented by the project team. As part of this effort, 12 short informational videos on various aspects of animal welfare were produced and disseminated through social media (see the videos below), YouTube and the organization’s website. The project team collaborated with Alik Media and participated in two interviews⁴ to highlight the challenges faced by stray animals and advocate for their protection. The project has also produced two articles: on animal protection⁵ and on new interventions of the Yerevan Municipality⁶ regarding animal welfare, which were published on news.am website and disseminated through social media.

Furthermore, the project team had meetings with the “Stray Animal Neutralization Center” community organization to discuss a number of problems that exist in the field and require the introduction of certain state-level mechanisms to resolve them.

Short informative video	Link
It's not their fault, it's our fault	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R9oVT7Z_yq4
CC 258. Two articles on cruelty to animals	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yqqh-Ny9ulk

⁴ See interviews here: <https://www.aliqmedia.am/2022/06/27/69150/>;
<https://www.aliqmedia.am/2022/07/27/74270/>

⁵ Animal protection: On the occasion of Human Rights and Animal Rights Day
<https://news.am/arm/news/676537.html?fbclid=IwAR36OY2zL7n2OKm0ztFwiPr7NZi52h6qUCmaLsnF2Eohjkd8Ae08OAHy0xo>

⁶ Tax for compassion. What do the innovations initiated by Yerevan Municipality promise pet owners? <https://news.am/arm/news/670194.html>

The instinct and right of self-defense of the dog and man	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mRlm2eJviy4
What to do if the cat is lost?	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sBuJa9mAW8w
Cats don't always land on four paws	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5lYyh0CdDeQ
If not you, then who?	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2c0YHznj9CA
What to do if the dog is lost?	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mJgAEh2aOg4
What to do if you witness animal cruelty?	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F7ltZJY4LjI
How to protect yourself from a dog attack?	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8bIUh54eaL0
Four steps to keep your cat from falling out the window	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cquLSSfW5Ko
Seven steps to protect yourself from a dog attack	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qpRCnWD53XA
Easy steps to help homeless cats	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n3_G8fETeRY

Youth Cooperation Center of Dilijan (YCCD) NGO, “Increased citizen participation in urban planning processes,”

Budget: 9,672,000 AMD

Duration: October 1, 2021 - May 2022

Project description: The project aimed at identifying the problems of using public spaces and get the real picture of urban planning in Dilijan through data analysis, monitoring, interviews, research on urban planning, as well as raising public awareness and participation of civil society in urban planning decision-making processes through various public actions.

Activities and Results: YCCD launched project activities in the following directions: planning of activities with partner organization Urbanista, conducting desk research and data collection, getting in contact with local authorities and the departments responsible for urban development. In November 2021, YCCD project staff together with Urbanista initiated a meeting with the deputy head of Dilijan community to present the project.

YCCD inquired information from the Dilijan municipality in order to gather relevant data on public spaces that were passed to private sector, to measure the scale of public spaces that are run by private sector, and the level of private investments in public spaces. The project team organized focus group discussions and in-depth interviews with local policy makers, community council, civil society representatives etc. As a result of the project and advocacy activities, the Dilijan municipality renamed the name of the consultative body by including management of public spaces in addition to the urban planning. Finally, the municipality opened up the consultative body for including other members including civil society organizations as well, the announcement was posted online on Dilijan municipality website. This was the first time that the

recruitment for consultative body was open and transparent. The announcement for application [is available online with the following link](#). Two members of the YCCD organization have already applied for the membership. Since the project achieved quite impressive results and the discourse on public space started to be discussed it was decided to extend the project and engage wider public into discussions of how they would like to see their city taking into account the business and tourism taking over the city. YCCD organized a public discussion on specific thematic directions engaging about 100 people. The public opinion of future Dilijan was collected and a report was developed and submitted to municipality. YCCD is actively in touch with Dilijan municipality to follow up on the recommendations. After the event [Dilijan Art college discussed the results](#) with the students to brainstorm how the college can be a part of the community development. [The event was covered by Tavush TV](#).

“Eco right”, “Economical use of groundwater resources in small mountainous areas”

Budget: 9,995,000 AMD

Duration: March 1, 2022 - August 31, 2022

Project Description: The goal of the project was to increase the efficiency of water resources usage in mountainous areas, contributing to the regulation of social and environmental issues.

The objectives of the project were:

1. Develop a methodology for inventory of mountain springs and evaluation of their qualitative-quantitative indicators, and apply in target communities.
2. Based on the identified problems and research findings, develop recommendations for professional legal regulations on the effective management of mountain springs.
3. Based on the recorded data, develop a policy summary to meet the drinking water needs of small settlements in the process of community consolidation.

Activities and Results: The Eco Right project team conducted a field study in Kalavan and Barepat settlements, where new spring water spots were identified. Water samples were collected for laboratory analysis. It turned out that the water coming from the mountainous areas is not in compliance with the drinking water standards, but some of the families are not aware and are using it. In addition to the field work, Eco Right initiated legislative activities such as studying LG law and its functions for providing water especially for smaller settlements and communities. The report was discussed with LG representatives. All the findings of desk research were presented to the Constitutional Commission under the provision of right to access to drinking water. If the access to drinking water is included in the Constitution, it will give a chance to amend the legislation.

Since the water supply is centralized, the local authorities do not have any obligation to ensure its provision. On the other hand, because of the lack of legislative regulations not all settlements have access to drinking water.

The project team conducted comprehensive desk research in terms of regulatory framework of water supply in communities, how consolidation of communities affected water supply for smaller settlements, it conducted comprehensive data and evidence collection, developed methodology to assess water resources based on scientific methodologies and calculation means. The developed manual and methodology are applicable to other communities as well.

The findings of the data and evidence of water resources in Kalavan were submitted to the Tshambarak community for their consideration. Based on these concrete and evidence based calculations on water resources, municipality applied to the government for subvention funding to install new water channels. The project was approved by the Government and the subvention is granted to Tshambarak. Thus the project registered several successes: a subvention project based on the project findings was approved, a scientifically valid methodology and a manual for water resources assessment were developed, the water access issue was raised at the level of constitutional amendments discussions, and the discourse of right to water was discussed among the LG, expert and constitutional amendment expert group.

Background Support

**Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography of the National Academy of Sciences,
“Explanatory dictionary of criminal speech”**

Budget: 8,403,000 AMD

Duration: November 15, 2021 - August 15, 2022

Project Description: The goal of the project is to compose an explanatory dictionary of most common concepts and expressions in criminal jargon, which can help reduce the impact of criminal or similar behavior among teenagers and young people.

Activities and Results: The project team conducted desk research to identify relevant words and expressions for the dictionary. The initial list of words was identified. The project team closely examined the history behind each word, how it came into use, the meanings and other relevant information. Two analytical articles of the authors conclude the publication. The dictionary will be used as a means to discuss the culture of violence and its roots.

The results of the project, dictionary and the impact and consequences of criminal slang were presented to public in various formats: the project team was interviewed on Boon TV and Public Radio, 2 academic sessions were conducted for students at the Academy of Sciences and Yerevan State University: [YSU, Department of Social Sciences](#). The YSU event was attended by 50 students. Two articles were published on Infocom covering the criminal slang issue in Armenia.⁷ Aghasi Tadevosyan and Nikol Margaryan [were interviewed on Public Radio](#), Vernatun program, that has 4000 followers only on youtube.

⁷<https://infocom.am/hy/article/93919?fbclid=IwAR3aZ8vY0Ojn037DEGzcRdpvMkh0dvobmYaGFd9Qto-8ecKkB9R0icVpkVI>

The dictionary was presented to wider public on June 14, 2023 on the day of commemorating the victims of Soviet oppressed. The final version of the dictionary [is available online](#) as well as in a print form.

“PEN” cultural NGO, “Bibliotherapy as a way of overcoming post-war trauma”

Budget: 11,994,000 AMD

Duration: April 1, 2022 - November 2022

In the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic and the 44-day war in Artsakh, a multi-component crisis situation has emerged in Armenia. This large, multi-layered crisis requires a sound and well-thought solution, namely, through art and particularly literature, in the partial overcoming and mitigation of public trauma. Accordingly, the goal of the “Bibliotherapy as a way of overcoming post-war trauma” project implemented by “PEN” cultural NGO was to contribute to the overcoming of post-war trauma in Armenia through bibliotherapy.

The project had two main components: 1) localization and popularization of science-based bibliotherapy practices and 2) creation of an informal community/network of bibliotherapy advocates.

1) Localization and popularization of science-based bibliotherapy practices

One of the major results that was achieved through the first component was the availability of Armenian language literature regarding bibliotherapy. The result was achieved through engaging four researchers to conduct three research studies: 1) Sona Manusyan, psychologist. ‘Analytical report: The Psychological Foundations of Bibliotherapy, the Scope of its Application, the Prospects and Limits of its Localization in Armenia,’ 2) Ani Kojoyan, Lusine Karamyan, social work. ‘The Anatomy of Bibliotherapy: The Prospects of Using Bibliotherapy in the Armenian Practice of Social Work,’ 3) Agassi Tadevosyan, cultural anthropologist, ‘Man After the War. Anthropological Observations on the Possibilities of Bibliotherapy.’

Following the research, psychologist Sona Manusyan prepared a list of literature, through the partial translation of which a manual was developed (available as a PDF). The parts of research studies have also been translated and will be uploaded on the “PEN” cultural NGO’s website.

The project team has created a comprehensive database of organizations and individuals specializing in bibliotherapy. The team is actively establishing connections with these entities and individuals and intends to share with them materials developed throughout the project. These efforts will continue even after the project's completion, contributing to the long-term impact and outcomes of the initiative.

https://infocom.am/hy/article/93476?fbclid=IwAR1K2SVynC8ZqR_Yxmu3xq93mQYBHB8yDD2aELr6r9cEM4rsuZBrnExYqnA

2) Creation of an informal community/network of bibliotherapy advocates

One notable result of the second component was the establishment of groups interested in the concept of bibliotherapy and its application. The project team organized a 3-day workshop on bibliotherapy for a potential network of book therapy advocates, including 45 writers, translators, literary critics, journalists, librarians, psychologists, social workers and others. As a result, three groups were formed which developed a knowledge-based and creative concept on bibliotherapy and a medium-term action plan. The topics that the groups were formed around were 1) Therapy through reading: bibliotherapy; 2) Therapy through writing: writing therapy; and 3) Cooperation of literary and professional communities. The results of the group works were summarized and included in the recommendations section of the research study.

The project visibility was ensured through a communication campaign conducted via social media which disseminated information about the project activities, research studies, nine videos and a 15-min long reporting film produced throughout the project. These materials played a crucial role in raising awareness and reaching a wider audience, contributing to the overall visibility and impact of the project. The videos published and disseminated through PEN Armenia's Facebook page had around 6,000 views each on average.

Another achievement of the project was the practical application and testing of bibliotherapy practices and skills. Following the workshop, two participants, Shushanna Hasasyan and Viktorya Tsaturyan, under the guidance of project psychologist Sona Manusyan, developed an approach for applying the research findings within the project to psychological practice. Additionally, the participants started to apply the bibliotherapy methods in the practical work with different people and/or groups that have been affected by the psychological consequences of the 44-day war of 2020. This implementation took place within the framework of the Educational Laboratory of Psychological Support established at Yerevan State University (YSU).

The collaboration opportunities that arose during the project enabled expanding the number of project beneficiaries and the anticipated impact. The workshop participants from the National Library of Armenia and Yerevan City Library established a collaboration to create a list of bibliotherapy literature. With some savings from the project funds, the book funds of partner libraries were replenished with relevant publications. The opportunity of introducing the bibliotherapy methods to the Educational Laboratory of Psychological Support at the Department of Psychology of YSU, created a solid ground for the project's sustainability in the long run.

#	Product	Link	Views
1	Short video: Lusine Karamyan	https://www.facebook.com/penarmenia/videos/888298842348284	7,900
2	Short video: Aghasi Tadevosyan	https://www.facebook.com/penarmenia/videos/6322768554419508	6,800

3	Short video: Sona Manusyan, researcher	https://www.facebook.com/penarmenia/videos/1145010842874374	6,900
4	Short video: Ani Kojoyan	https://www.facebook.com/penarmenia/videos/1074858833914125	7,500
5	Short video: Karen Antashyan, poet	https://www.facebook.com/penarmenia/videos/1186487728969120	5,100
6	Short video: PEN member, project coordinator Lusine Kharatyan	https://www.facebook.com/penarmenia/videos/708932690802404	6,400
7	Short video: EPF Director, Gevorg-Ter Gabrielyan	https://www.facebook.com/penarmenia/videos/805632317168439	6,800
8	Short video: PEN President Armen Hayastantsi,	https://www.facebook.com/penarmenia/videos/879068100111374	3,200
9	Video about the project	https://www.facebook.com/penarmenia/videos/1225821324726588	89

“Factum” NGO- Exiled repatriates: The text of violence

Budget: 5,625,000 AMD

Duration: November 1, 2021- February 28, 2022

Project Description: The aim of the project is to create an “encyclopedia” on the exile of 1949, when tens of thousands were exiled to Siberia, in particular, the repatriated deportees, which will comprise of factual materials: personal files, letters to authorities of USSR and Armenian SSR, applications, personal documents and family photos, oral histories, memoirs. All material will be digitized and archived.

This activity addresses the root causes of violence in the Armenian society today through conducting historical excursion of human rights violations and faate of victims of the Soviet regime repressions.

Activities and Results: The project team gathered data about the deportees and compiled a publication. The finalized book was printed and presented during the Book Fest in October 2021. The book, called “Cold Motherland” (Յուրս Հայրենիք) was distributed widely. Its distribution and discussions around it will continue.

The book is [available via the following link](#).

All rights foundation, “School on e-literacy and digital security”,

Budget: 10,000,000 AMD

Duration: August 2021 - March 2022

Project description: The goal of the project was to increase the awareness of at least 12 young people from urban and rural communities of Shirak region on e-literacy and digital security. These beneficiaries were selected not only to participate in the trainings but also to pilot the modules and also become multipliers of the training content. It was anticipated that after intensive trainings with the invited experts the participants will get acquainted with the existing multimedia tools. The grantee will continue training new groups of beneficiaries after the completion of the project since the module developed has been successfully tested.

The objectives of the project were: establishment and implementation of a school on e-literacy and cybersecurity; development of educational-awareness materials on e-literacy and cybersecurity, namely manuals and electronic posters, printed materials, and implementation of public awareness campaigns; implementation of a conference on e-literacy and digital security and its publicizing. The school organized weekly courses and aimed at enabling e-literacy safety measures while using digital information platforms. Those social networks that are more popular among young people were addressed: Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, Tik-Tok, LinkedIn, and messengers (Messenger, WhatsApp, Viber, Telegram, Signal).

Activities and Results: As a part of the project, the team finalized and disseminated the [announcement](#) for the School of E-Literacy and Digital School for the interested young people from the Shirak region. In addition to recruiting school participants, the project team was creating and disseminating materials on Social Media re digital security and e-literacy. The project team created a Tik-Tok page to reach wider audience of youth in Armenia. 8 short video stories aimed at teaching the youngsters how to use social media, what are the tools for protecting personal data etc. were produced. Social media posts and publications were shared and re-posted by many users. In addition to theoretical and educational part of the school, participants created their own content and shared via Tiktok, Instagram and Facebook. One of the posts on Tik-Tok related to media literacy and cyber security received 40K likes. In the reporting period, project beneficiaries participated in You Think 2021 24 hours long [hackathon](#) organized by World Vision as a part of EU funded “EU for Youth” project.

The project has been extended. In addition to the school, a [digital security manual was developed and published](#), and an invited expert conducted several Internet security audits for CSOs in the Shirak region to increase the resilience of their internet and digital security.

Mission Armenia NGO, “Digitization of archival documents of refugees and displaced persons in Armenia,”

Budget: 10,000,000 AMD

Duration: September, 2021 - April, 2022

Project description: The aim of the project was to finalize the digitization process of documents of those displaced from Azerbaijan from 1988-1992. According to the project, it is planned to digitize around 30.000 documents and manage 73.000 cases (available at the electronic

database), in order to better advocate with the Migration Service changes needed to address the problems of this part of the population.

Activities and Results: With the joint signature of the Project Coordinator and the relevant Department of the Migration Service, the archival documents are taken out of the Migration Service archives for digitization. After digitizing a certain number of cases, the folders are returned to the Migration Service archive. The document digitization includes the following actions: Document Scanning: After checking the information about the case in the electronic database, the documents are scanned; Downloading documents and entering data: Personal data is filled in the documents in the relevant fields of the electronic database; Development of files in the electronic database: The incompletely entered documents have been reviewed, processed, appropriate markings were made in the register and in the electronic database.

During the implementation of the project, until the middle of the second quarter the entry of cases with fewer documents was carried out, and then the entry of cases with more documents began. Overall, during the the project, 641 folders and 42,630 cases were digitized and processed in the Electronic database. The cost-extension of the project allowed for 1,700 more cases to be digitized and processed in the database, thus making the total number of cases digitized and processed during the entire project 44,330.

Vahram Martirosyan, “Mastery of writing skills”,

Budget: 3,716, 667 AMD

Duration: May 2021 - September 2021

Project description: The complexity of written communication is one of the problems that constraints free expression, the ability and willingness of people to create a content that is comprehensive, to use social media more effectively to reach wide audiences, to react on ongoing events, reforms, and legislation. These challenges influence Civil Society’s capacity to advocate professionally, and create a trustworthy content that is formulated so that it demonstrates expertise and communicability at the same time.

The written language, especially on issues of public interest, is complex or distorted, often heavily influenced by foreign borrowed vocabulary. When writing a text, many Armenians, especially those who work on civil society policy papers etc., borrow terms from other languages and try to adapt them to Armenian language, sometimes making the texts incomprehensible for their beneficiaries and audience. The biggest issue that concerns text writing is the tedious linear narration, which makes the reader an “observer” rather than a “participant” and is far away from the internationally-accepted requirements for developing a policy piece. To address this issue, the project aimed at developing a course for civil society text writers on improving writing skills of public non-fiction texts, particularly those reflecting sectoral policies, popular articles, textual presentations and analysis of research. After the completion of the course, it was envisaged that the beneficiaries of the project would be able to create logical, literate and interesting texts for

general audience, which would push the reader to get engaged in the narrated texts; beneficiaries would also learn to better edit their work. Eventually, this would result in a better presentation of the policy-related texts to the general public as well as the government. This project also aimed at ensuring that a pool of writers is available who in the future can be helpful to CSOs in preparing their public advocacy texts.

Activities and Results: During the first stage of the project, on May 27, the team announced an open call for the text writing workshop. About 40 participants applied for the workshop, 15 were selected. The trainings were organized in Yerevan, twice a week for 3-4 hours. Taking into account the situation with COVID 19, the team decided to organize the second phase of the course in a hybrid format.

The workshop had a well-thought through, interactive methodology. Before each training, specially designed agenda, training plan, texts used during the training and reading materials were sent to the participants. Each participant prepared an article on the preferred topic, which was re-edited throughout the workshop to acquire final quality.

After the workshop Vahram Martirosyan indicated several participants who have been active throughout the project. Anna Kamay and Anna Nikoghosyan both have their preferred topics to write, particularly on the issues of gender and education, but they are inclined to enlarge the scope of their interests and they can be further engaged in different activities by EPF and other NGOs.

As an added value in the project, a structured module, a comprehensive course, that can positively influence the policy communication skills of CSOs and experts, is designed by a publicist, an expert whose expertise was utilized for building Civil Society experts' capacity for impactful communication.

Literary Station NGO, “Contest for young literary critics”,

Budget: 5,508,000 AMD

Duration: September 2021 - April 2022

Project description: In the times of the rapid popularization of social media platforms and with advancement of video and ‘shorts’ contents, even for learning processes, the ability of especially young people to reflect, analyze, make argumentations or fair judgement, gets limited. The goal of the project was to motivate reading habits, develop critical and analytical thinking skills among young people from Armenia, especially from the regions, through writing reviews on the works of contemporary Armenian writers. The trainings were conducted in 4 regions: Lori, Tavush, Vayots dzor and Gegharkunik. In the first phase of the project, the announcement of the contest was circulated and the selected participants were contacted to receive the needed materials and books for the training. In the second stage, the trainings were held in the above-

mentioned regions, and the essays created by the participants were collected and assessed. And in the final part of the project, the evaluation committee finalized the results of the competition, and prizes were given to the best performing participants. An awarding ceremony was broadcasted and posted on the Internet. As a result, the participants had an opportunity to get acquainted with the effective methods of analyzing fiction, the peculiarities of critical texts, learn about the usage of critical thinking tools and methods, develop their skills in literary criticism and master their text writing skills.

Activities and Results: During the first month of the project, “Literary Station” NGO announced a [call](#) for applications from youth from regions of Vayots dzor, Gegharkunik, Lori, aged 16-35 to take part in the critical reading and analysis workshops. During August 26 to October 15, 2022, 83 applications were received, out of which, 54 applicants were from the above-mentioned regions. Applicants from Yerevan and other regions were notified that they can participate in the contest by watching thematic video materials to be prepared during the project and can submit their critical essays as soon as the call opens. The gender division of the applicants is 68 female and 15 male representatives.

In order to assess the applications, an Evaluation committee was formed. The essays submitted as part of the application procedure were assessed and as a result, the committee decided to [shortlist](#) 81 applicants and invite to the trainings.

Afterwards, works of contemporary writers were sent to Infotuns and some electronic books were shared on the website in order for participants to get acquainted with the materials.

The [first training](#) on developing critical thinking and analysis skills was conducted at Vayk Tourism Information Centre and hosted 4 female participants. The [second](#) one was conducted at Martuni Infotun and comprised 6 female participants. The third training was held at Ijevan Infotun hosting 3 female participants. The fourth one was organized at Vanadzor Infotun and comprised of 8 female and 1 male participants. Due to the high demand and interest among participants from Yerevan and other regions, another training was organized in Yerevan hosting 5 male and 9 female participants. After the end of the trainings, all participants were asked to fill out assessment sheets in order to evaluate the productiveness of the training and offer their suggestions for further improvements. The main suggestions included continuation of the project and extending the duration of trainings (not just one-time trainings but full courses), involvement of more regions, inclusion of poetry and biographical materials in the teaching materials, organize reading sessions and discussions, etc. The assessment sheets demonstrate that the trainings are considered highly productive. The same is confirmed by the monitoring visits conducted by EPF.

Afterwards, the participants of the trainings were invited to submit their essays starting from February 21 till March 31, 2022. The call was later extended for additional 10 days in order for participants to manage to fully analyze their selected books by following the tips of the trainers.

Overall, 31 essays were received. They were sent to the members of the selection committee, which comprised prominent writers Vahram Martirosyan, Armen Ohanyan and Anna Davtyan and were asked to evaluate them. The essays were evaluated on April 19, 2022 at EPF office. As a result of the evaluation, 6 awardee participants took winning places (1 participant for the 1st place, 2 participants for the 2nd place, 3 participants for the 3rd place), 6 other participants were given books as encouragement awards. The awarding ceremony took place on May 12, 2022 at Keerk & Co café. The event was attended by the deputy minister of MoESCS Artur Martirosyan, authors of the books critical essays were written on and civil society.

As an off-shoot of the project, an English-language collection of stories produced by Armenian contemporary writers was compiled, reflecting the cultural and political life of Armenia, which serves as a collective representation about Armenia to the international community. The book, entitled [“A drop in the sea”](#) is available both in printed and electronic formats. It has become a symbolic representation of the Sida project to the international community, being widely liked by international guests and dignitaries, Ambassadors and development leaders. The format of creative writing gives an in-depth view of the issues that Armenia faces, both its past and future. The book editor Todd S. Gernes produced a [digital video story about the book](#).

The project provided the participants with valuable opportunity to develop their critical thinking skills and hone their ability to analyze complex texts such as contemporary literature. It served as a platform to showcase their talents and gain recognition for their work, which was especially valuable for young writers who were just starting to establish themselves in the literary world. The project promoted a culture of literary criticism and analysis, encouraging more young people to engage with literature in a thoughtful and analytical way. This helped deepen the understanding and appreciation of literature, as well as foster a new generation of critical readers and writers. The project also provided a valuable platform for writers and publishers, giving them access to fresh perspectives and insights from young readers and critics. The project has had a positive impact on both the individuals involved and the wider literary community, fostering a deeper appreciation and understanding of literature and helping to cultivate the next generation of critical readers and writers.

Economy and Community

“Sebastatsiner” Foundation, “School as a center of community development,”

Budget: 8,725,000 AMD

Duration: September 2021 - December 2021

Project description: The goal of the project is to strengthen the connection between the Mkhitar Sebastatsi Educational Complex and the community through organization of various workshops offering both the community members and the students an opportunity to obtain new knowledge

and skills in an interactive environment. As a result of the project, it was expected to provide some employment opportunities for the residents of the community, giving them skills that can be used to receive new employment or establish an enterprise. The long-run aim is to establish permanent interaction between the students and teachers of the educational complex, on one hand, and the residents of the community, on the other. Thus, the major target of the project was to build conditions for the Educational Complex to acquire additional functions as a community center. This then can be used as an exemplary case to be presented to other schools for replication.

Activities and Results: The project team disseminated information about the forthcoming workshops via Facebook as well as community information campaign in the Malatia Sebastia district. The workshop organizers identified and contacted trainers for 5 workshops: photography, fashion design/tailoring, business management, applied arts (pottery making, carpet making, wood carving, accessory making), floristry, communication skills. The application was filled in by 94 interested people, of which 75 were engaged in the workshops.

After the completion of the workshops an exhibition in the Sebastatsi Educational Complex premises was organized to present the art works created during the workshops and also hand over the certificates to workshop participants. Since some funds were saved by the project team, it was decided to organize 2 additional workshops, the first one on Excel and the second one on fundraising. The Foundation plans to make the workshops periodic on annual basis. As a part of this project, Sebastatsi Foundation started to work on its online market. The crafts produced by the workshop participants will be considered for the online market. “Sebastatsiner” Foundation established close relations with another “Open door” grantee, Boon TV. Boon TV now has its own TV channel and started broadcasting TV shows. Within the TV program, they cover Sebastatsi Educational Complex’s daily operation from different angles such administration, students’ life, college and schools, the extracurricular clubs and activities. Additionally, Sebastatsi Foundations started cooperating with Martuni infoTun to share their expertise of engaging community in public life.

“Akhuryan” Community Development Association, “Competitive youth in labor market for business development,”

Budget: 8,708, 350 AMD

Duration: October 1, 2021 - May 2022

Project description: According to the official statistics on unemployment rates in 2019, even before the crises of 2020, the Shirak region was leading in the negative statistics among all regions in Armenia. Reasons behind the statistics vary: incongruity between the requirements of the market and professional qualities; strict requirements posed by the employers; giving preference to youth, and many more. The goal of this project is to contribute to the development of the labor market in the Shirak region.

Activities and Results: Throughout the project implementation, project team conducted several meetings with key actors in the sphere of employment in Shirak region, introduced the project and discussed opportunities for cooperation. The project team had meetings with the head of Development and Tourism Department at Shirak Administration, Karen Badishyan; Director of Gyumri Center for Joint Social Services, Gayane Galoyan; Director of “Adamyán and Friends” center for employment, Amalya Adamyán, and the Head of Center of Joint Social Services of Akhuryan community, Marina Khalachyan. A cooperation agreement was signed with “Adamyán and Friends” center for employment. A survey was developed for employers and potential employees. As a result of the project, the capacity building trainings were designed, applicants were selected and trainings were conducted. After the completion of the trainings, several participants were selected for paid internship and successfully completed. In total, 9 people were placed for internship. 7 interns received a job offer from host companies, 2 interns found other jobs.

Homeland Development Initiative Foundation, “Empowering a bordering populace - Aygepar Community Center”

Budget: 9,999,675 AMD

Duration: June 1, 2022 – November 30, 2022

The project aimed to establish a community and a community center in Aygepar village. A core group of nine women are engaged in income generation activities, forming a stable community within the village. The community center, equipped with necessary facilities, serves as a social hub for the women and their families. The women actively participated in decision-making, resulting in changes to income generation activities. The Aygepar Community Center is part of HDIF's wider Sari Janaparh concept, integrating with other projects in the region. Efforts have been made to introduce income generation opportunities, and plans for the center's sustainability and future development. The community is developing its own identity under the brand Aygezard. Although challenges remain, a solid foundation has been laid, and the community center holds potential for attracting further projects and contributing to the local economy. The members demonstrate confidence in decision-making and exhibit openness as a cohesive community.

The design of the project included several weeks of intensive psychosocial trainings. The core of nine women approximately half way through started vocalizing that they didn't want any more training, but wanted to start the income generation activities. This was discussed intensively with them, and the result was a shift in the nature of the trainings implemented, from more psychosocial to sewing machine training, and digital design work and training.

A particular success was the use of one psychosocial trainer from Yerevan and one from the region itself. This proved to be fruitful as an exchange of experience, ideas and content.

The administrative head (ex-mayor after the expanded community system was implemented) of Aygepar has expanded the space made available to the project by providing an extra room. Thus, the ACC now has one room for administration and meetings, while the second room is for production purposes. He was skeptical in the beginning but has seen the level of activity and thus agreed to double the space made available for the project. Local systems have been developed for creating embroidered products. A practical cooperation has been reached with the digitalization expert as well as the sewing expert, both needed for a smooth operation. There is a significant lack of trained sewing labor available in and around Yerevan for the clothing factories. It is a chronic problem. HDIF met with UNIDO's Light Industry Modernization project (LIM) to discuss this problem and how the Aygepar project can perhaps be part of a solution. The concept is that the larger factories would provide precut fabrics to the project and the project beneficiaries would sew them in a professional, high quality way. They were excited about this possibility due to the acute labor shortage. The concept is that Aygepar would start small with simple items or parts of items and deliver them to the factory in Yerevan. This requires three particular skills: sewing skills, quality control skills and logistical skills. HDIF's application to EPF for additional funding includes bringing several of the women from Aygepar to Yerevan for participation in the LIM trainings. The goal was to raise skill levels, and also get the women into the LIM network, thus enhancing the possibility of bringing orders to Aygepar.

It turns out that UNIDO has plans of expanding LIM to the regions of Armenia with the first regional hub to be in Gyumri. HDIF said that we would like to see such a LIM hub in the Berd region. HDIF and UNIDO are presently exploring this possibility. The women from Aygepar trained at the LIM center in Yerevan could potentially be involved in this new LIM center in the Berd region. HDIF is quite excited that this six month Aygepar Community Center project has the potential to blossom and expand into something much larger and more comprehensive for job creation in the Berd region.

Knowledge and Impact LLC- "Successful business responses to COVID-19 in Armenia: What are the supporting factors?"

Budget: 9,880,000 AMD

Duration: July 01 2021 - February 28 2022

Project description: COVID-19 outbreak generated unprecedented multifaceted crisis for economies all over the world. Armenia also did not stay away of the consequences caused by COVID-19, and in response to the pandemic, many businesses in Armenia have gone through transformations, such as work from home, remote operations, digitalization. In the case of some companies such changes were adopted for the first time. In this light, an in-depth exploration of innovative/inspiring business approaches in Armenia as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic is suggested by KnI LLC. The project applied a two-step methodology: a quantitative analysis (desk research) and a qualitative data collection (action research) to explore the innovative and inspiring business response to the pandemic.

The objective of this analysis was to explore the driving forces that conditioned the success of some companies to cope with the unprecedented crisis (COVID-19), to successfully implement changes, and to understand, whether or not the flexibility and agility to implement successful responses to COVID-19 are in any way cross-cutting with the following factors:

- Gender representation at the managerial level (board, head of units) and operational level (employee),
- Corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities carried out and embedded in the company strategy,
- Internal policies (rules and guidelines dealing with ethical issues, dispute settlements etc.).

Activities and Results: Within the frames of project, the sectors for case study were identified (by using data from National Statistical Services of Republic of Armenia (NSSRA)), which have been vulnerable to COVID-19, both at the early and late stages, and the 44-day war. Based on the first nine months of 2020 data it was evident that predominantly services, catering, and construction sectors are affected. The industry level aggregated data was analyzed to select the most vulnerable sectors. In order to identify the firms, data from surveys conducted by the Avedisian Center for Business Research and Development (CBRD) at the Manoogian College of Business and Economics of the American University of Armenia in May 2020 were used. Prior to primary data collection a conceptual framework was developed in order to study the underlining issues in crisis management – decision making process, CSR and internal regulations. Based on this, interview guide and questions were developed. In-depth semi-structured interviews have been carried out with 7 companies from Yerevan, Lori, Shirak and Yeghegnadzor regions. 15 interviews were conducted with representatives of 7 companies from identified sectors. Interviews were conducted with managerial position holders, unit heads and employees in case companies were large. For SMEs the interviewees were predominantly the founder/owner/manager. In-depth semi-structured interviews are based on an elaborated project-specific questionnaire allowing to gauge the expert knowledge on the underlined issues. Interviews are conducted face-to-face and, on average, last 60-90 minutes. The final report was developed, finalized and presented to experts and civil society representatives in Yerevan. Additionally, Knar Khachatryan, who is the co-author of the research presented the research findings at the event hosted by the Promise Armenian Institute at UCLA and co-sponsored by the Manoogian Simone College of Business and Economics (MSCBE) at the American University of Armenia.

An important element of the research is in the fact that the research studied the aspects that represent a more democratic context, such as the gender participation, social responsibility, planning and accountability systems, etc., as variables for evaluating business successes in a particular context of overcoming the crises.

One example of the findings of the research indicates a “gender gap”, i.e. female employee proportion and participation in the business activities, their explicit engagement in the management and decision-making process in small companies need further attention.

As an expected result, besides the research paper, there is a guideline that the research team developed for civil society representatives and government policy makers on the relevance of gender, CSR and internal procedures for company success in the situations of crises.