

**CSO engagement modality in the implementation of SDGs in
Armenia:**

'No Poverty' and 'Gender Equality' in focus

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ACRONYMS

CRRC	Caucasus Research Resource Center
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
EU	European Union
FG(D)	Focus Group (Discussion)
GONGO	Government Organized Non-Governmental Organization
IC	Interagency Commission
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
NCSD	National Council on Sustainable Development
SCRA	Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia
RA	Republic of Armenia
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
UN	United Nations
UNRC	United Nations Resident Coordinator
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

CONTEXT

On September 25th, 2015 UN General Assembly in New York adopted a resolution on new global agenda entitled: “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”. Armenia is among the countries which has adopted the agenda and created a road map towards the nationalisation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The Sustainable Development Agenda has been formed based on the outcome of previously implemented agendas of Millennium Development Goals. The resolution states that SDGs “... seek to build on the Millennium Development Goals and complete what they did not achieve. They seek to realise the human rights of all and to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. They are integrated and indivisible and balance the three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, social and environmental.”¹

The resolution asserts that to achieve implementation of the 2030 Agenda, Global Partnership must be ensured²: “It will facilitate an intensive global engagement in support of implementation of all the goals and targets, bringing together Governments, the private sector, civil society, the United Nations system and other actors and mobilising all available resources.”³ In addition, the resolution acknowledges the role of various stakeholders in the process of SDGs implementation including Civil Society Organisations (CSO). Multi-stakeholder cooperation is crucial due to the complexity and ambitiousness of SDGs implementation. Section 17.17 of the resolution encourages and promotes multi-stakeholder partnerships such as, effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships.

The main beneficiary of the 2030 agenda is the Government of Armenia and the aim of this study is to understand the level of engagement of CSOs in the stage of SDGs implementation. It should be noted that CSOs in Armenia have limited influence over public policy and opinion.⁴ According to the EU country roadmap⁵, the limited impact of CSOs in Armenia is the result of several causes, including the lack of adequate institutional and professional capacity in CSOs; competition for limited grants among CSOs, and creation of “GONGOs” (Government-organised Non-governmental Organisations). These are created by some state authorities and ruling elites to secure foreign funding or to ensure that the participation of civil society organisations in policy making reflects their views, and legal environment impediments.⁶

¹ See here: http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E [Available on May 8, 2018]

² See here: http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E [Available on May 8, 2018]

³ Ibid

⁴ See here:

http://www.crrc.am/hosting/file/_static_content/projects/CSO%20DePo/CSO%20Market%20Research%20Summary_English_final.pdf [Available on May 8, 2018]

⁵ See here: https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/20141027_eu_armenia_cs_roadmap_en_0.pdf [Available on May 8, 2018]

⁶ Armenia: EU Country Roadmap For Engagement with Civil Society, 2014–2017, pp. 2-3

About Armenia's Millennium Development Agenda and its' outcome (2005-2015)

As a part of the Millennium Development Agenda, Armenia identified and committed to fulfil 16 national targets under the eight MDGs. In order to measure the implementation of targets in the process of MDG nationalisation, 65 indicators were composed. Out of the total 65 indicators, Armenia achieved 22. However, there was good progress towards 10 of the non-achieved indicators. In total, Armenia failed to achieve half of the national indicators (30 out of 65 indicators). There are three indicators for which the measurement is difficult to determine due to lack of accurate data or identified quantifiable measures. It is important to note that the assessment of the performance of the country towards meeting its commitments and achieving MDGs is not measured in general terms, but in achieving concrete national indicators committed by Armenia under each target⁷.

MDG1: Eradicate extreme Poverty and Hunger

Armenia has achieved only half of the indicators under MDG 1 (Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger) (UNDP, 2015). While Armenia has managed to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, the poverty level remains high, with 30% of population living below the poverty line. However, results concerning ensuring productive employment and decent work for all are mixed at best. Whilst unemployment has reduced from 31.2% in 2005 to 17.6% in 2014, 40% of all labor resources of the country are economically inactive. Most extremely poor individuals live in small urban settlements outside Yerevan.

MDG3: Promote gender equality and empower women

Gender equality remains a key issue in Armenia, ranked 102 out of 144 countries on the Global Gender Gap Index 2016. Armenia has not achieved its targets in promoting gender equality and empowering women. In 2013, the employment rate of women was 46%, compared to 62% of men. It is reported that women are significantly less involved in decision-making positions in economic and business, and the political life of the country.

⁷See here:

http://un.am/up/library/MDG%20NPR_15_eng.pdf [Available on May 8, 2018]

METHODOLOGY

This study is aimed at monitoring and evaluating the commitment of the Republic of Armenia to the implementation of SDGs (focus on SDG#1: 'No Poverty' and SDG#5: 'Gender Equality') in the context of the environment enabling CSOs to engage in it.

The method chosen by CRRC-Armenia is to conduct qualitative research via key informant interviews and focus group discussions with stakeholders of the nationalisation process. To achieve this, interview and Focus Group Guides (*Annex 1 and 3*) have been produced. Given that Goal 1 and Goal 5 have been selected, social (1), legal and democratic equality (2) subgroups of Inter-Agency Committee⁸ were studied. The social subgroup was co-chaired by the Deputy Minister of Labour and Social Affairs; the Deputy Minister of Healthcare responsible for nationalisation of SDG 1, 2, 3 and 17⁹; and the legal and democratic equality subgroup was co-chaired by the first Deputy Minister of Territorial Administration and Development and the Deputy Minister of Justice in addition to being responsible for SDG4, 5, 10, 16, 17.¹⁰

Fourteen (14) key informant interviews have been conducted (*See Annex 2 for the list of interviewees*): 4 Government representatives, 3 representatives from UN Armenia, 1 affiliate to both UN and Government, and 6 CSO representatives. This share of representation was defined to keep the balance of opinions from different stakeholders and participants of nationalisation process. The key interviewees have been identified based on the desk study, as well as, on attendee lists received from the subgroup coordinators. Overall, 17 potential key-informants have been contacted. 1 out of 16 rejected his/her participation and 2 others have postponed interviews several times. Thus due to project deadlines, those interviews could not be conducted.

Four Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were planned, but, because of the lack of interest from CSO representatives, as well as the internal political situation, only two could be conducted. One focus group was conducted with the CSO representative members of the social subgroup, the other with the CSO representative members of the legal and democratic equality subgroup. E-mails were sent to the CSO representatives based on the attendee lists of meetings on SDG1 and SDG5 provided by subgroup coordinators, as well as, the contact list of open call

⁸ Inter-Agency Committee and its' working subgroups were established to coordinate and implement SDGs nationalization process, for details see p.8

⁹ According to the information provided by the coordinator from the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs seven meetings took place with once a month regularity in the time period of June-December 2017. First three meetings of SDG1 and 2 were held jointly, and starting from September meetings of all: SDG 1, 2, 3 and 17 were conducted together without separation by specific goal.

¹⁰ According to the information provided by the coordinator from the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs seven meetings took place with once a month regularity in the time period of June-December 2017. First three meetings of SDG1 and 2 were held jointly, and starting from September meetings of all: SDG 1, 2, 3 and 17 were conducted together without separation by specific goal.

applicants¹¹ provided by the representative of the Prime Minister's staff. CRRC-Armenia prioritised active participants from the CSO representatives in subgroup discussions; however, it also welcomed those who participated once or twice, or have registered but decided not to participate.

Overall, 66 CSO representatives were contacted. 31 contacted for the FGD on SDG1, 6 participated in the discussion, 7 were ignorant of the SDGs nationalisation process or did not attend any meeting, 12 were unable or refused to take part in the FGD, and 5 were unavailable or did not respond to the invitation. One requested to be interviewed individually (*interview was conducted*).

Of the remaining 35 contacted for the FGD on SDG5, 4 participated in the discussion, 6 were ignorant of the SDGs nationalisation process or did not attend any meeting, 16 were unable or refused to take part in the FGD (most of them didn't work on gender equality and supposedly some of them did not attend the meetings), 3 were unavailable or did not respond to the invitation, and 1 requested to be interviewed individually (*the interview was conducted*). Considering that only four CSO representatives could participate in this discussion, it would be more appropriate to classify the session as an expert (rather than focus) group discussion. The quality of data received was the justification for keeping this data in the analysis.

Although 5 CSO representatives approved their participation in the third discussion which was scheduled for April 17th, none could attend because of the domestic political circumstances such as, civil disobedience accompanied by blocked streets in various locations of Yerevan, which made commuting in the city impossible.

NATIONALISATION of SDGs in ARMENIA

In July 2002, Armenia established the National Council on Sustainable Development (NCS D) chaired by the Prime Minister and the comprising government, the private sector, academia, and civil society representatives. The Council, in cooperation with international and national organisations, has produced the Rio+20 National Assessment Report (2012)¹² and the Post Rio+20 Strategy Plan (2015).

A peculiarity of NCS D is that its' creation was fostered by an NGO. The director of For Sustainable Human Development NGO Karine Danielyan, the secretary of NCS D, explained in the interview that she, on behalf of the NGO she represents, several times applied to Government of RA advocating for the creation of the NCS D. On the eve of the Earth Summit in

¹¹ According to the information provided by the employee from UNRC, there was not a selection process of organizations applied through open call. All were invited to participate in the meetings' discussions.

¹² See here: http://www.gov.am/u_files/file/Haytararutyunner/MDG%20english.pdf [Available on May 8, 2018]

Johannesburg, South Africa in 2002 and during the preparation of RIO+10 report (which Armenia committed to present in Johannesburg) Ms. Danielyan applied again to Government of RA to create the NCSD. This time her application was successful, but the council did not hold a meeting up until 2006. There were numerous attempts to communicate to the Prime Minister's office the importance of the council and its' activity. Later, at Prime Minister Tigran Sargsyan's suggestion, Ms. Danielyan as a representative of For Sustainable Human Development NGO was appointed to be the council's secretary. Some representation of CSOs was secured in the Council. However, the importance of the NCSD's activities has to be discussed and reassured with every new Government, as this process takes considerable effort. Although, the last meeting of NCSD was held on May 6th 2016¹³ and the Secretary of NCSD considered that under conditions of the 2030 agenda, Ms. Danielyan believes that the situation will be different and meetings will be conducted more frequently and effectively.

In 2012-2014, national consultations were conducted in Armenia. According to the Government of Armenia, more than 2000 ideas and recommendations on the future development agenda were proposed.¹⁴

Along with other UN member states committed to adopting and following the new agenda, on January 1st 2016 the Government of the RA enacted the 2030 agenda. A dynamic document was created as a roadmap and the nationalisation concept was shared publicly with interested stakeholders for the first time in May 2017. The roadmap states that implementation of SDGs will be based on the experience of MDG implementation. It also states that a crossing point of the 2030 agenda and Armenian Development Strategy should be defined.

One of the first steps towards the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals is the nationalisation process. Within the nationalisation process, a 5-stage process was suggested: prioritisation, integration, localisation, monitoring and reporting of the results. A Voluntary National Review of the results will be shared at a high-level political forum in July 2018.

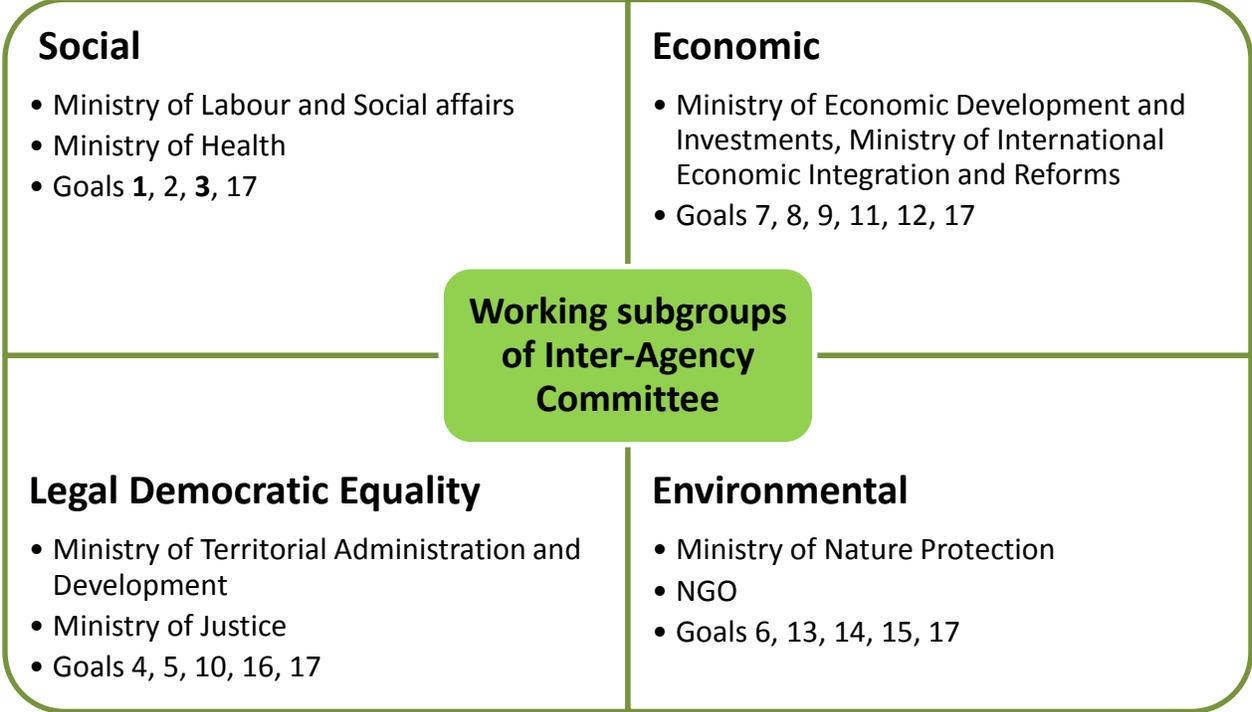
According to the N 155-A decree of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia (February 21st, 2017), under the NCSD, the Interagency Committee (IC) was established. It is governed by the Prime Minister and consists of other Government officials (the only CSO representative is NCSD secretary Karine Danielyan). IC aims at coordinating the nationalisation process. The first working meeting of the Interagency Committee took place on March 7th 2017 and was co-hosted by the Prime Minister's Office and UN Armenia Office. Following the meeting, an open call was announced to engage civil society, the private sector, and academia representatives in the SDGs' prioritization stage of the nationalisation process. In the frames of the IC and through

¹³ See here: http://www.gov.am/u_files/file/xorhurdner/kayun-xorh/KZAX06%2005%2016.pdf [meeting report, available only in Armenian, May 8, 2018]

¹⁴ See here: <http://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/armenia.pdf> [Available on May 8, 2018]

this open call, four working subgroups were created: Social, Economic, Ecological, and Legal and Democratic Equality (see the Figure below). In fact this is the only institutionalised platform where not only Government representatives, but also CSO, private sector and academia representatives could engage in the nationalisation process of the 2030 Agenda of the RA Government. According to the director of SDG Innovation Lab¹⁵, Erik Gyulazyan, the format of working subgroups was finalised after several discussions. Considering that the main beneficiary of SDGs’ implementation is the Government of Armenia and that the 2030 agenda complements the agenda of the overall development of Armenia, it would be beneficial to have an inclusive platform to encourage all interested stakeholders to be part of the SDGs nationalisation process. According to the roadmap, each subgroup had to conduct meetings at least once a month in the time period of March-May, 2017.

Figure: Working Groups of Interagency Committee to coordinate the SDG 2030 nationalisation process in Armenia



¹⁵ Armenia National SDG Innovation Lab was established jointly by the RA Government and UN Armenia to accelerate SDG implementation in Armenia through innovative methodologies and available expertise. See here: <http://www.un.am/en/news/657> [Available on May 8, 2018]

CSOs ENGAGEMENT in the SDGs NATIONALISATION PROCESS in ARMENIA

Early stage involvement

As one participant described, “Sustainable Development Goals are nothing new, however the framework, indicators, development measurements are being revised.” Most of the interviewees and focus group discussion participants were informed of the SDGs Agenda before 2015 UN General Assembly Summit and could depict the transition from MDG agenda to the new 2030 agenda of SDG implementation. A representative of an international organization stated that their organization has been involved in the transition from millennial to sustainable development goals by helping to define sustainable goals via opinion collection activity.

Many CSOs have been involved in the nationalization process through open call. Although, this was not the only method, as some CSO representatives received invitations directly from the respective ministries. One representative reported that she was invited by the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs as an expert. Some did not remember how they became a part of working subgroups of the Inter-Agency Committee. This was a more frequent occurrence of those working in the Legal and Democratic Equality subgroup. A reason for this confusion could be the three month gap between closure of open call (April 7th, 2017), and the invitation to participate in subgroup meetings (the first meeting was held on July 18th, 2017).

CSO representatives who showed interest to contribute to the nationalization process of SDGs in Armenia have underlined three main motivations to be part of the working subgroups.

First motivation is to *share experience and expertise* gained through working in their fields (most of the CSOs participated in the study have more than 10 years of experience in their fields). Although CSOs are different with varying potential and professional capacity (something acknowledged by CSO representatives during FGD, and by the interviewed representatives from UN agencies), many are skilled and have adopted international standards earlier.

Second motivation is to *contribute to public policy formulation* regarding the 2030 Agenda of RA and *take part in the decision making process* by participating in the nationalisation process.

Third Motivation cited was *to be informed* about the overall process and Armenia’s status regarding SDGs implementation. This reason has been especially underlined by CSO representatives from Marzes.¹⁶ According to the representative from the Youth Initiative Center (YIC) in Gyumri, information regarding these types of working groups such as, platforms, usually arrive in Gyumri late. Additionally, few initiatives are being presented in Marzes. The YIC representative stated, “I continued my participation to avoid informational vacuum, because there were no wide coverage mechanisms utilized. I understood, that as an NGO representative

¹⁶ Marz is the major unit of territorial administrative division in Armenia; along with the capital city there are 10 marzes.

it would be very difficult to keep on track if I am not in one of those meeting rooms, if I am not in the mailing lists. I would miss the information that my organization, beneficiaries need to be aware of.”

When asked about the lack of online information on SDGs nationalization process, the Inter-Agency Committee and its subgroups’ work, the answers from the subgroups’ coordinators displayed that dissemination of operative information was not being prioritized. NCSO secretary also stated in the interview that there is ***lack of awareness about the agenda*** in general, which is primarily because of the limited media coverage.

According to the roadmap, ministries had an expectation of agreeing, formulating, as well as finalizing targets and indicators. It is important to note that nearly half of CSOs we contacted (total number 66) declined to participate in our study due to the lack of awareness regarding the process, and/or their withdrawal from the working subgroup.

Engagement in the nationalization process

Most of the CSO representatives who participated in this study attended the informational meeting held in May, 2017. The study participant CSO, as well as UN representatives, however, took part in the subgroup meetings upon availability and none of them participated in all meetings of subgroups. Many attributed the low attendance to too short of notice when invited, sometimes given less than 24 hours. This problem was more apparent for the remotely located marz CSO representatives.

A mismatch on the frequency of meetings in subgroups emerged when compared information provided by a subgroup coordinator (key informant interview) from a FG discussion. For example, all of the FG discussion participants from social subgroup stated that they did not receive invitations for seven meetings, nor the online follow-up of those meetings’ outcomes.

Based on the field work of this study, major gaps were discovered in communication, facilitation, circulation of the document(s), non-existence of activity timetable; and, a mechanism on making, approving and declining suggestions. The format of a subgroup with weak coordination, turned the format into something closer to the discussion platform; where opinions were voiced, but suggestions have not been addressed, or were not properly communicated. One interviewee stated that “suggestions have been made mostly by those who were louder and deadlock questions have been bypassed to move on, leaving it to the online discussion, which mostly was not sufficiently communicated.”

On the contrary, the ministries responsible for the SDG 2030 nationalisation have been provided with a *limited timeframe* and *human resources*. Coordination of subgroups was not the main task of ministry employees’. In addition, time allocation issues came into play while performing coordination activities, leading to significant effort in managing this process. It is

likely that overloading ministry employees with additional tasks negatively influenced the organizational process, as well as, the motivation and dedication of employees to this activity.

While voicing their concerns and referring also to their previous experience with cooperation with public institutions, CSO representatives unanimously stated that most of the time they are left with the perception of those meetings being *formal*. Content-wise, most reported that subgroups did not expect major intellectual input from CSO representatives. The term “formal” has been utilized by the CSO representatives based on the following arguments. **First**, the complexity of the broad agenda concerning all aspects of development requires a rather slow and profound discussion, with a clear timetable and a visible outcome. Such quality work could not be performed in a 1-2 month period. **Second**, some participants had an impression that an existing document was already prepared by ministry representatives (based on UN targets and indicators), which should have been discussed rather than worked on. Many stopped attending meetings justifying that the time is being spent on “formality.” Another argument made was the **shortage of financial resources** for project implementation. The perception was that only the activities (to be initiated to reach nationalized targets under each SDG) provided with funding were to be implemented, was quite common. Moreover, the study participants based on their previous experience, stated that mostly the activities with external funding would be implemented (EU, USAID, etc.).

Another issue is the **agenda ownership**.¹⁷ It must be strictly defined. The problem of funds provision is one of the threats to ownership: implementation of projects with mainly foreign funds leads to minimal opportunity for the Government to take ownership of the agenda. Except for the financial aspect, the idea of ownership is comprised of dedication and capacity to realise adopted policies. In addition, ownership is important in the declaration of ‘Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.’ The declaration states, “As national ownership is key to achieving sustainable development, the outcome from national level processes will be the foundation for reviews at regional and global levels, given that the global review will be primarily based on national official data sources.”¹⁸ Of course, SDGs nationalisation and implementation is a government led process; however, administratively overloaded institutions like ministries need innovative solutions, provided from an expert community. As a result, the [National SDG Innovation Lab](#) has been created, which aims at accelerating the SDGs’ implementation. According to the director, it is an open platform for NGOs to present their suggestions. Although joint ownership of the process may improve

¹⁷ Ownership is the effective exercise of a government’s authority over development policies and activities, including those that rely – entirely or partially – on external resources. For governments, this means articulating the national development agenda and establishing authoritative policies and strategies. ”, Council for International Development, 2006 <http://www.cid.org.nz/assets/CID-Resources/Fact-Sheets/FS8.-2014-format.-Ownership.pdf> [Available on May 8, 2018]

¹⁸ See here: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld> [Available on May 8, 2018]

results, it will depend on the government's success in a roles distribution strategy, and types of institutionalized platforms created for SDG implementation.

The disappointment of CSOs with the process was, to some extent, predetermined by *low trust* towards the government. Low trust was generated by the previous experience of joint work with public institutions. Many participants had an ineffective collaborative experience with state bodies, while performing in different committees, working groups and presenting packages' of suggestions. One of the participants, referring to two different platforms participated previously, mentioned that "aspirations have to be connectable to reality," meaning that some real steps have to be taken to implement ideas generated, formulated, and put onto paper during meetings. According to FG participants, the primary reason for not accepting/implementing suggestions is a lack of the capacity and financial assistance. One of the FG participants described their frustrations, "Only activities with financial assistance from external donors are being accepted." This disappointment is mainly due to wasted time and effort. Some of the participants described positive experiences with ministries (including the department of police), explaining that they were targeted, and required less resources and capacity to organize.

The program coordinator from the Women Support Center, which was represented in the legal and democratic subgroup, informed that the Coalition to Stop Violence Against Women¹⁹ did not participate in subgroup activities when the law against domestic violence²⁰ in Armenia was widely discussed. In addition, there were major concerns and disagreements voiced by the coalition that have not been addressed. Low trust threatens healthy and productive cooperation between the government and CSOs. One of the CSO representatives stated that they are eager to cooperate with the government in any way possible to have a direct impact on development in the country. The UNFPA-Armenia representative reinforced the idea of cooperation with the Government, as withdrawal from the processes is not effective in any way. The representative said, "To achieve a result there is a need to cooperate with state bodies; however we are being criticized for that by our colleagues."

At the same time, interviews with ministry representatives showed that they were satisfied with the process, stating that they tried "to take into account opinions of all participants" [quoting the Coordinator from the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Development]. This statement indicates that these meetings are aimed at receiving consultation, sharing ideas about targets and indicators under each goal. The finalization of targets and indicators, which were supposed to be one of the outcomes of working subgroup activity, were already

¹⁹ See here: <http://coalitionagainstviolence.org/en/home/> [Available on May 8, 2018]

²⁰ See here: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/anna-nikoghosyan/paradox-of-armenia-s-domestic-violence-law> [Available on May 8, 2018]

implemented out of the wider working group with the consultation of a limited number of experts. This was concluded based on the provided documents of draft targets and indicators from Ministries, which were in the working process.²¹ Communication issues continue to be prevalent such as, different perceptions and expectations about the process from organizers and participants side led to the dissatisfaction from the process.

In conclusion, side organizers and CSO representatives had limited expected success.

Outcome of the nationalization process

Participants unanimously stated that the outcome (the draft version of targets and indicators) of the working group has not been communicated to working subgroup participants. This means that those participating in discussions are not aware of the final document submitted to the Prime-Minister's staff.²²

According to the draft document of nationalised targets and indicators, the SDG 1 'No Poverty', 7 targets have been set and 19 indicators have been defined. As for the SDG 5 'Gender Equality', 6 targets have been set and 21 indicators have been defined.

According to the [Roadmap](#), "Armenia–Nationalizing the 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development" the stages of integration, localization, monitoring and reporting do not intend to engage CSO representatives.

The results of all these stages are being summarized in the form of [Voluntary National Report](#) for presentation at the High-level Political Forum (July, 2018), and it is being developed by the Prime-Minister's Staff. Simultaneously, the Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia has developed a set of all the indicators providing an assessment of current state of affairs with regard to the SDGs.²³

²¹ Draft version targets and indicators for SDG 1 were provided on March 26th, 2018. Draft version targets and indicators for SDG 5 were provided on March 28th, 2018.

²² Only one FGD participant received a document after requesting it from the subgroup coordinator.

²³ Armenia SDGs indicators. Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia; see <http://www.armstat.am/en/?nid=655> [Available on May 8, 2018]

CONCLUSIONS AND RECCOMENDATIONS

This study monitored and evaluated CSOs institutionalized involvement in the SDGs nationalization process. There has been a significant effort from the government and UN in Armenia in order to institutionalize the process. One institutionalized platform has been available for CSOs to contribute to the process, which the working subgroups of the Inter-Agency Committee created under the National Council on Sustainable Development.

CSOs were expecting to share experience and expertise for the agenda development, have an impact on public policy formulation, and to be well-informed about the RA Government vision on SDGs nationalization and implementation.

While representatives of the ministries assigned to coordinate the SDGs nationalization and implementation were rather satisfied with the process, CSO representatives described it as rather unproductive.

Monitoring revealed the following challenges in the working subgroups:

- A limited timeframe provided for the recruitment and involvement of CSOs in implementation of the roadmap;
- weak administration of the nationalization process, due to the coordination of subgroups has been assigned to ministerial staff, in addition to their overloaded ordinary schedule;
- formal aspect of subgroup activity has been prioritized over the content one;
- lowering interest and participation of CSOs in the SDGs nationalization process due to low trust towards the government;
- lack of the SDG 2030 agenda ownership (plan of action for people).

It has been stated that CSOs have various professional potential, but many are lacking the adequate institutional and professional capacity. The organisations willing and capable to contribute to this process could not realize their full potential because of the above mentioned challenges. Overall, the 2030 agenda of the RA Government and SDGs implementation process needs more media coverage.

It is important to note the little interest from CSO representatives (mainly due to the disappointment of the process described in this study) to take part in this study. While rejecting their participation in FGD, many stated that they could not be enough involved in the process and that they possess little information about the agenda.

After the nationalisation process, the country will be engulfed in the main stage of SDGs implementation and measurement of success.

Based on the completed study, conclusions and recommendations for the next steps are as follows:

- Creation of theme based targeted platforms with transparent selection mechanisms may be more suitable in terms of efficiency and complexity of administration of SDG 2030 nationalisation and implementation;
- Recruitment of trained (capacitated in SDGs) staff which will serve only, or at least mostly, for the administration of such platform(s) to properly organize the work;
- Introduction of online platforms for a more manageable and effective collaborative work process;
- Securing wider media coverage of the SDG agenda;
- Sharing work in progress with CSOs and general public regularly;
- Creation of joint-ownership by engaging civil society in the monitoring and reporting stages. This may lead to the introduction of an effective checks and balances mechanism for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals.

ANNEX 1: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview Guide

My name is [name and surname] and I represent Caucasus Research Resource Center (CRRC)-Armenia. CRRC-Armenia has undertaken implementation of “CSO engagement modality in the implementation of SDGs in Armenia: ‘No Poverty’ and ‘Gender Equality’ in focus” activity launched by the CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness. General objective of this study is to assess the effectiveness of the CSO engagement in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda by the Government of Armenia, in particular toward the 2018 High Level Political Forum for which Armenia has volunteered to assess the SDGs implementation and present the progress made in the country.

PART 1. Knowledge of SDGs and it’s reflection in internal strategic documents.

Let’s talk about 2030 Agenda of RA and the engagement of your organisation in it.

- 1. Please, share your knowledge/any information on SDGs and from which stage (if applicable) was your organization engaged in the implementation process of the latter and how did this happen?*
- 2. Does your organization prioritize the implementation of SDGs? And which goals are under focus of your organization?*
- 3. How are these goals reflected in strategic documents of your organization and if they are, how obligatory it is to take into account SDGs while starting a new project?*
- 4. Are there any platforms (maybe within UN or even out) except for the Inter-Agency working (sub)groups that SDGs’ contributing organizations’ meet up for discussions and exchange of their experience.*

PART 2. About projects implemented by [mention the organization]

Let’s talk about the projects your organisation implements and CSOs’ involvement in it

- 5. Could you please tell about several projects implemented by your organization which have contributed to the implementation of the goals?*
- 6. Who are the main partners in the implementation process of mentioned goals for your organizations?*
- 7. Do you think there are parties that have to be more/less involved in the process of implementation? Why?*
- 8. Do the project implementation methods utilized by your organization presuppose involvement of other CSOs in the implementation process?*
- 9. Have you worked with other CSOs for the SDG implementation purposes (please, provide instances), if yes then has your organization developed certain framework for cooperation with CSOs? If yes, could you please, tell more about it?*
- 10. Which criteria do you use to identify civil society organizations for collaboration on the implementation of SDGs?*
- 11. We know that National Statistical Service of Armenia has undertaken the evaluation of overall SDGs implementation. Did you attempt to assess the impact of your organization in this process?*
- 12. Could you please tell a little about plans of your organization on how you see the cooperation between your organisation and other CSOs in the future?*

PART 3. About work at Interagency Working group and CSOs role and future in the SDGs implementation process.

We have learnt that you are/are not a member of Social/Legal and Democratic Equality Subgroup

13. *Could you tell how did you learn about the opportunity to become a member of this subgroup? What was the application process?*
14. *Have you participated in the meetings of working subgroups?*
15. *How frequent are those meetings and how often do you participate in these?*
16. *Could you tell more about these meetings, how they take place, how many members take part in it, how effective are discussions and if there is any decision making process, how is it processed?*
17. *To what extent your initial expectations meet Subgroups' activities in reality?*
18. *According to you, how considerable is the engagement of CSOs in the Subgroups' activity? How proactive/passive do you think CSOs are as members of Social/Legal and Democratic Equality Subgroup? (If CSOs are not active, what do you think is the reason for it and how it can be better promoted?)*
19. *How would you, in general, evaluate overall involvement of CSOs in the implementation of SDGs (specifically Goal#1 and Goal#5) in Armenia (so far and also in the future)?*

THANK YOU

ANNEX 2: LIST OF KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWEES

All the interviewees (except for phone interviews) have been asked their consent to share their names, institutions. Otherwise, interviewees had an option to share information anonymously. As for the Focus group and expert group discussions, these were conducted completely anonymously.

<i>Name Surname</i>	<i>Institution</i>	<i>Interview type</i>
Ms. Anoush Avanesyan	UN RC office at UN in Armenia	Interview via phone
Ms. Lilia Afrikyan	RA Prime Minister's office	Interview via phone and e-mail communication
Ms. Karine Danielyan	National Council on Sustainable Development, 'For Sustainable Human Development' NGO	Face-to-face recorded interview
Mr. Tevan Poghosyan	International Center for Human Development	Face-to-face recorded interview
Employee	UNICEF in Armenia	Face-to-face recorded interview
Ms. Hasmik Gevorgyan	Women's Support Center	Face-to-face recorded interview
Mr. Ashot Avetisyan	Administration of Legal and Democratic Equality Subgroup	Face-to-face recorded interview
Mr. Erik Gyulazyan	Armenian National SDG Innovation Lab	Face-to-face recorded interview
Mr. Alen Mkrtchyan	Administration of Legal and Democratic Equality Subgroup	E-mail request has been sent, written answer have been received
Ms. Tsovinar Harutyunyan	UNFPA in Armenia	Face-to-face interview
Ms. Anna Yeghoyan	Youth Initiative Center	Skype interview
Employee	Khariskh NGO	Skype interview
Employee	Mission Armenia	Skype interview
Anonymous	Anonymous	Face-to-face recorded interview

ANNEX 3: FOCUS GROUP GUIDE

Focus Group Guide

Introduction:

1. Welcome

[Moderator] Introduce yourself and the note taker/assistant, and point to the written consent form with a few questions (organization, position) around to the group while you are introducing introduction information.

Review the following:

- Who we are and what we're trying to do
- What will be done with this information
- Why we asked the teachers to participate

2. Explanation of the process

[Moderator] Ask the group if anyone has participated in a focus group before. Explain that focus groups are being used in social sciences as important sources for qualitative information.

About focus groups

- We learn from you (positive and negative)
- Not trying to achieve consensus, we're gathering information
- No virtue in long lists: we're looking for priorities
- In this project, we can get more in-depth information from a smaller group of people in focus groups. This allows us to understand the context behind the answers and helps us explore topics in more depth.

Logistics

- Focus group will last about one hour (60-90 minutes)
- Feel free to move around, help yourself to refreshments, change seat, drink coffee, and enjoy sweets.

3. Ground Rules

Ask the group to suggest some ground rules. After they brainstorm some, make sure the following are on the list.

- Everyone should participate.
- Information provided in the focus group must be kept confidential
- Stay with the group and please don't have side conversations
- Turn off cell phones if possible (warn important people)
- Have fun

4. Turn on Tape Recorder

5. Ask the group if there are any questions before we get started, and address those questions.

6. Introductions

- Go around table:

[Moderator] Discussion begins, make sure to give people time to think before answering the questions and don't move too quickly. Use the probes to make sure that all issues are addressed, but move on when you feel you are starting to hear repetitive information.

Introductory questions:

- Introduce yourself, your organization, and your sphere of activity.

PART 1: Knowledge of SDGs and its' reflection in internal strategic documents.

Let's talk about 2030 Agenda of RA and the engagement of your organisation in it.

1. Please, share your knowledge/any information on SDGs and from which stage (if applicable) was your organization engaged in the implementation process of the latter and how did this happen?
2. In which goal nationalization are you engaged in and why?
3. Whether the implementation of that goal is a priority for your organization and if yes, how are these goals reflected in strategic documents of your organization.

PART 2: About work at Interagency Working group and CSOs role and future in the SDGs implementation process.

4. Could you tell how did you learn about the opportunity to become a member of this subgroup?
What are your expectations?
5. What was the application process?
6. How often do you participate in the meetings of working subgroups?
7. Could you tell more about these meetings, how they take place, how many members take part in it, how effective are discussions
8. How was the decision making process in the group? How was the nationalization document implemented?
9. To what extent your initial expectations meet Subgroups' activities in reality?
10. Are you sharing, discussing the job done in the subgroup in your organization?
11. According to you, how proactive/passive do you think CSOs in the Subgroup? What do you think is the reason (active/passive).
12. Do you know at what stage is the SDGs implementation process, what we reached? Are you delivered about the next stages of the process?
13. Are there actors, according to you, who are less involved in the process of implementation of SDGs but there is a need to be more involved and vice versa.
14. According to you, how considerable is the engagement of CSOs in the Subgroups' activity?
15. Returning to the nationalization process, what would you do in another way for making it more effective?

PART 3: Cooperation with other organizations/government

Let's talk about the cooperation experience of your organizations with other organizations/ government.

16. Within the framework of your programs how was the cooperation with other CSOs, government?

17. What are the difficulties and privileges of cooperation with different organizations?

PART 4: Future in the SDGs implementation process in RA

18. Please share with us your opinion about the future of SDGs implementation process.

19. Except the implementation of your programs, are you going to engage in the government's possible initiatives in the implementation process of SDGs?

THANK YOU

ANNEX 4: CONCENT FORM of INTERVIEWEES

Consent Process

The written consent form (information and sign-in sheets incorporated) for the research participants are completed in advance by all those seeking to participate. Below is a summary of the information to be provided to the interviewees within the information sheet. The interviewers/researchers should use this information to make sure that the participants have the necessary information and give their written consent accordingly.

Thank you for agreeing to participate at the interview. We are very interested to hear your valuable opinion on how the SDGs are implemented in Armenia. In particular, we are eager to hear on 'No Poverty' and 'Gender Equality' Goals. General objective of the study that we are conducting is to assess the effectiveness of the CSO engagement in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda by the Government of Armenia.

- *We would like to audio record the interview so that we can make sure to capture the thoughts, opinions, and ideas we hear from the participant. The access to the recordings will be restricted as soon as they are transcribed.*
- *You may refuse to answer any question or withdraw from the study at any time, although this is very undesirable. It is better not to start the interview.*
- *If you have any questions now or after the interview, you can always contact the CRRC-Armenia study team members, whose names and phone numbers will be provided.*
- *Please, check the box and sign to show you agree to participate in this interview and assure that we can get in touch with you if needed.*
- *Confidentiality of the information provided will be regulated according to the participation type to be marked below (The interview will be completely confidential with no names attached if you choose the first option)*

I agree to participate at the interview

(Please, check the box and mark one of the answers)

- 1. As Anonymous**
- 2. As representative from X organization**

3. As NAME SURNAME from X organization

Signature _____

Please, take the contacts of CRRC-Armenia research staff member [handle the business card] to contact us anytime in the future in regards to any questions you may have in reference to this interview, it's topic or the project that we are implementing.