Practitioner's Guide:

**Strengthening Civil Society Organizations
in Good Governance Processes**

**Capacity Building of
Civil Society in Armenia**

Example:

Capacity Building of Civil Society in Armenia

Background:

The German Technical Cooperation (GTZ) supported from 2002 to 2006 a programme to Promote Food Security, Regional Cooperation and Stability in the South Caucasus (FRCS) with the aim to reduce poverty via improvement of service delivery and to support strengthening local self-governance through community participation and empowerment of rural citizens and their official representatives in a conflict sensitive manner.

Despite the economic decline and political instability that accompanied the collapse of the former Soviet Union, there is a growing recognition that sustainable peace requires an economic development strategy that involves a democratic decision-making.

By utilizing tools such as capacity building of civil society, local conflict analysis and peace and conflict impact assessment (PCIA) the FRCS/GTZ programme aimed to increase transparency into the community development and civic participation.

The GTZ/FRCS experiences with capacity building of civil society will be shown in the following application example.

Regional Conflict Setting

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, and the ensuing difficult transformation, led to drastic changes in the South Caucasus. The strain of transformation, coupled with social, economic and political backwardness, allowed internal and cross-border conflicts to erupt in the region.

The Republic of Armenia is officially still in a state of neither war nor peace with the Republic of Azerbaijan over the region of Nagorno Karabakh. Despite the since 1994 existing cease-fire, gunfire exchanges still sometimes occur along the border including the border-province Tavush where FRCS/GTZ is carrying out projects. The Tavush province is situated in the North-Western part of the Republic of Armenia, (consisting of the four districts Ijevan, Dilijan, Noemberyan, Berd) and borders Georgia to the North-West and Azerbaijan to the North and East.
Due to the described conflicts the ebb and flow of humans and goods over the borders waned, regional infrastructure and interaction collapsed. As many former Soviet republics, the Republic of Armenia battles not only deteriorated infrastructure, but a unresolved issues from privatization and a 'receptor' mentality , which means to perceive oneself exclusively on the receiving side and depend fully on external aid without self-reliance.
Conflict factors in the Tavush province in Armenia are low-level and deal with everyday problems such as the water supply, land distribution, etc.

At the same time, the neglect of local problems by the central government has diminished feelings of responsibility at the local government level. Social and economical relations are damaged and affected by mistrust and distance. Unless constructive means of dealing with the tensions and conflicts are developed and trust in oneself and in society is re-established, the region will remain unable to meet its development potential, reduce poverty and become food secure.

The reduction of poverty and food insecurity can be achieved through local leaders performing in an accountable, transparent and responsive way, which includes the participation of the civil society in decision-making processes. Through capacity building it is anticipated, that active people, groups, organizations who are lacking experiences and expertise can perform better as multipliers and information providers on local governance issues. The same shortage of expertise applies to the members of the local government who often don't know how to set up a development plan and thus rely on higher authorities for help.

An empowered civil society voices the interests of the citizens and gives input to government bodies. Their cooperation on horizontal level (with other groups or NGOs) and interaction on vertical level with local and national government institutions as well as with the private sector could mobilize human and possibly financial resources to provide again basic services to the people and by this assuring food security and in general human security.

In order to work within this sensitive setting the first step was to identify civil society representatives and to assess the needs of civil society in the region.

But before coming to the steps of capacity building a short definition of is given below:

Capacity building comprises:
▶ of a broad set of workshops, consultancies and training courses for representatives of (local self-) governance and civil society which are interlinked in the case of the South Caucasus with other capacity building tools of peace and conflict impact assessment (PCIA) and local conflict analysis.

With the aid of the trainings capacity building:
▶ develops competent, responsive and accountable (local self-) government institutions (village, community councils) and
▶ supports the evolution of civil society players and organisations to participate equally in local decision-making processes.
▶ Working on conflict, trust and peace-building.

Thus trained civil society representatives lobby and advocate in the interests of citizens, empower disadvantaged groups of society, as well as develop and apply the necessary checks and balances towards their elected representatives. It targets individuals, organizations, the interplay of organizations and the overall institutional framework.

I Preconditions for Capacity Building

1) **Identification of civil society representatives (CSR)** by carrying out **civil society survey** (15 volunteers did interviews in 62 communities, 58 villages, 4 towns) and out of these were

2) **Selection of target groups**

3) **Conducting a needs assessment**: analysis needs of target groups, used method: focus-group discussions with 30 focus-groups (consisting of 6-16 participants). The results of questionnaires and of deepened interviews that have been carried out with 3-5 people of each focus-group were used for later training of target groups. From 427 organisations were 321 groups/organisations targeted for trainings.

II Conducting Capacity Building

4) **Training of Trainers (ToT)**: establish and capacitate a team of professional facilitators, totaling 6 trainers: 3 senior trainers and 3 local trainers.

5) **Training of CSR**: Of 321 targeted groups, actually 273 groups of participated representing 62 communities with 1775 people participating. The groups were firstly divided into 3 blocs: (I) student, parental and pedagogical councils, women's unions, trade unions, civil active groups, focus-groups consisted of ca. 1600 participants which were split up into smaller regional groups; (II) 69 community unions were made up of ca. 150 participants; and (III) 9 mass media groups of 25 participants. The training for mixed groups of the first bloc consisted of 15 days on 15 topics, split up into three 4 days training for separate groups on one specific topic. For the second bloc one 4 days training was conducted and for the media representatives one 3 days training was realized. The training program is listed below.

6) **Practical part: CSR carried out activities** in their communities. With their newly gained knowledge they tried to implement and lobby with representatives of the local administration. During that time the midterm evaluation took place.

7) **Conducting midterm evaluation:** at the final meeting following expectations were compiled: increase in application of knowledge, of self-confidence, of community participation, increasing the amount of project proposals, increased cooperation of CSR and different institutions, CSR will liaise between population and authorities. Recommendations were collected (see below).

8) **Selection of 85 active participants** during the midterm evaluation. These people who represented 27 communities were asked to fill out a questionnaire about the activities they conducted in their communities. Additionally representatives of civil society and mayors from their communities were interviewed on the participants' activities. Based on the results of the questionnaires and interviews, finally **70 most active participants of Civil Society training courses were selected** in order to link them with local administration and with other local, regional and international organizations. This measure aimed to involve them in further activities and interventions. One of those interventions was the follow-up project of training in and conducting of PCIA (Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment took place in 2005)

9) **Report and Evaluation**

III Embedded in follow-up activity:

Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment (PCIA)

PCIA (for a more detailed description see other application example)

▶ Results of recommendations / of trainings were used for engaging in further activities
▶ General meeting: the above mentioned most active 70-85 persons contributed their lessons learnt (from the precedent training of CSR) and other active (new) 50 participants formulated their wishes, and with the help of a questionnaire detected their (further) training needs.
▶ PCIA-project proposal: Local trainers wrote on those results the training proposal, designed training modules and consulted opinions of the representative of community unions
▶ PCIA project was adjusted, approved and the invited interested civil society to the project

40 days later:
▶ Training for CSR on PCIA: 131 active, interested participants in 6 groups based on geographic measures went through the following training (see for a more detailed explanation see Application Example on PCIA):
  1) 2 theoretic training days,
  2) 2 practical exercise days / per month (6x in 3 months) field work in their communities or neighboring villages,
  3) consultations individually with trainer and within group,
  4) refining,
  5) presentation of results to members of CU
  6) discussing bad PCIA results with heads of communities, bad results (people were not informed) will not enable communities to get funds for the project implementation
  7) PCIA results improved
  8) +additional recommendation: sharing of experiences with PCIA monitors from different regions

As a result of PCIA implementation many conflicts in several sectors were identified and taken into consideration by the local self-government and others for the future design, planning and implementation of community development projects.
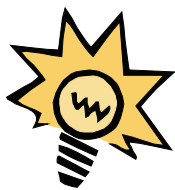
Obstacles

State and structures

▶ limited informational channels, not existing or expensive internet access hinders access to information, i.e. on grants.
A participant from Aigedzor describes the situation:

> *"Absence of information puts us in a very unfavourable position. A simple example, today a resident of Yerevan has a possibility to use Internet. Thus a child in Yerevan, in comparison to my child has serious advantages already; s/he has information and is five years ahead of my child. Even if I would be able to buy a computer for my child, the Internet is still an expensive pleasure."*

▶ arbitrariness of civil judicial system (one of the frequently asked questions were:

> *"How can various active groups influence on the processes of establishment of civil society, under the conditions of arbitrariness and wilfulness established in the state?"*

Society

▶ indifference within society towards decision-making processes and engagement which also resulted in difficulties to recruit participants in the initial stage

> *"Under the conditions of general poverty and indifference it is rather complicated to talk with people about cleanness of community or other problems which are of community importance. There are lot of people who barely earn for daily bread; it is natural that they are not really interested in community concerns, especially when in the result of solving a community problem doesn't lessen their concerns."*

▶ passive local mass media
▶ low level of civil activity and awareness:

> *"the activity of a person or even a group can change nothing"*

combined with negative attitude toward community leadership.
▶ insufficient knowledge of own rights and obligations: right to participate in sittings of elders, proposal making
▶ corruption

Target group

▶ inactivity or low level of willingness, i.e. religious organizations and political parties
▶ absence of group interest for serving community needs
▶ insufficient information on the mission of (own) NGO, objectives, tasks, since the NGOs got used to get funds, equipment for their offices, etc.
▶ some participants did not see direct benefit from activity directed to the establishment of civil society
▶ lack of information on management of activities, such as developing, evaluating, monitoring of programs
▶ absence of experience of cooperation between groups
▶ underestimation of own role and importance
▶ distrust regarding changes in community life
▶ lack of strategies for activities
▶ insufficient information on legislation regulating activities of mass media
▶ some civil action groups which have been set up by international organizations did not see any possibility to continue independently without the financial international assistance

Citing a representative from a village council:

> *"… people are too passive, they wait for assistance from somewhere. By participation of people the program will be more successful; they must think as one village, problems must be well-founded, think out business programs, find donors."*

Training modules

Training modules...
- ► were developed out of the results of questionnaires carried out during the needs assessment (STEP 3)
- ► different modules were developed according to the specific needs and objectives of each group

Training topics included:
1. Levels of personal dependence, independence, interdependence
2. Skills of communication (balanced decision-making)
3. Interpersonal conflicts
4. Team work and leadership
5. Theory of motivations
6. Value processes and monitoring in the Republic of Armenia
7. National policy of the Republic of Armenia in the direction of stimulation of civil society and carrying out SPOP (the strategic program for overcoming poverty)
8. Importance of civil participation and its levels
9. The system of local self-administration bodies in Armenia
10. Actors for realization of civil society (serve as intermediary, moderator, gradual involvement of civil society group/organisations into the process of solving various tasks of community importance)
11. The law on local self-administration bodies, drawing up of programs for development of communities
12. Social cooperation (constructive interaction within and between organizations)
13. Participatory evaluation of needs
14. Participatory drawing up of programs and budget (management, administration, making own activities transparent, information, financing, evaluation)
15. Monitoring and evaluation of programs (watch-dog training)
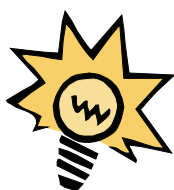
Eye openers What was unexpected or unintended?

- ► Fast advancement: participants presented already during the training complete programs and proposals,
- ► Lack of information: even members of elder' councils were not informed of community budget,
- ► After the trainings: expectations of continuance of trainings in order to establish environment for cooperative activities,
- ► Although some civil society groups mentioned in the beginning of the project that they do not expect compensation for the job they do. In fact they waited for a motivation; they expected to be paid to do the work,
- ► NGOs are not free of (informational) hierarchies.

Civil Society (CS) survey

▶ Decide whether to apply the same/similar/different approach to the CS groups or whether to focus on special needs of certain communities.

▶ Provide strong supervision during the needs assessment for the field interviewers in order to get correct and feasible results.

▶ "If the survey had more technical/quantitative structure, the selection of target groups and needs assessment would have been more qualitative by their nature"

▶ Use additional sources from other organizations. (i.e. other surveys, such as the Sussex University matrix)

▶ Decide what groups should be included. I.e. religious sects and political parties were first as potential groups targeted ("whoever wants can participate"), but those groups were not interested

The important lesson to learn is: We wanted to change the behavior, attitude, but it is not possible to do that during one year or in one project. The mayors and civil society groups should cooperate, and this cooperation would take place if they continue with the gained knowledge and experience to work with each other. For the moment it is not going on, project ended and the idea also. Some mayors suggested having the training courses constantly and even more, the mayors would wish to take part together with civil society groups in courses in order later to follow it up. Who should organize that? Again, mayors suggest to CUs' staff to do that.

For the trainings

▶ additional materials: for information and illustration of NGO activities, success stories in other regions, countries, i.e. newsletters, magazines, films, professional literature about civil society, business consultancy, etc.

▶ separate trainings for youth representatives

▶ **exchange of information** on local self-administration

▶ training in monitoring of local-self administrative bodies/ educational skills

▶ **engagement in local TV:** because of limited informational channels trainings of local TV channels (were the weakest group) should be carried out, in form of informational programs, general discussion programs

▶ Trainings of mayors and CS together, so that linkage is done right from the very beginning and enable mayors and specially CU's to take over once the FRCS project has finished. This way a follow-up can be ensured.

After the trainings

▶ Organize a uniting, consolidating meeting for the most active participants -> in order to increase effectiveness of participatory activities.

▶ Create flexible groups of most active participants, so that assistance and control can be achieved over programs realized by regional community unions.

▶ Carry out more frequent and substantial trainings in order to engage bigger audiences.

Cooperation

▶ It was emphasized that cooperation and unification of border villages is important.

Cooperation with local self-administration and state administration

▶ CSR should be ready to submit recommendations based on clear priorities and plans for development of the community

▶ Representatives of communities should use tools of monitoring and evaluation.

▶ CSR should be ready to engage in solving small scale problems, (i.e. gathering money to repair the village museum).

▶ CSR should cooperate constructively with local self-administrative body.

▶ Overcome oppositions inside groups and between groups.

Cooperation with community unions

▶ cooperation with community unions were rather passive: CSR were in some cases during trainings complaining that programs submitted to CU were directed mainly to rehabilitation of substructures. Because: mayors do prioritize by themselves, they don't ask other groups, such as CSR — at the same time the capacities of the CSR remain weak: Even after many trainings their capacities do not allow them to open up discussions with the mayors; CSR are not seen as useful support for the mayors. The reason might be that the citizens are not ready or willing to engage in community life.

▶ That's where CSR need to get involved: they would be pushing and would make the community's population to propose to the mayor the community needs which again need to be brought on the agenda of the community unions where decisions are taken
-> that's where not only the mayors should decide but CSR should get involved: to evaluate and monitor programs implemented in communities

Outcomes

Active as well as passive participation was recorded during the trainings. The latter leading to no progress, while the active participants experienced and achieved:

▶ Planting the "seeds" of civil activity (out of 1775 participants of first trainings – less than 100 active people were detected for further activities)
▶ forming of embryos of awareness
▶ seeing the necessity of forming common/group interest
▶ presentation of specific recommendations for their communities, to the mayors and CUs (CUs being a product of external support, not own initiative)
▶ revising partially view of own role, own possibilities and own importance
▶ receiving knowledge for implementation of specific programs, arrangements, changes in communities
▶ clarification of activities and possibilities
▶ training as successful experience of cooperation between groups, i.e. : proposals were presented aiming at uniting university and non-university students, carrying out educational, cultural activities
▶ necessity of establishing of cooperation between groups/ NGOs
▶ increase of information concerning mass media legislation

However to a certain extent councils make decisions and the mayor is more likely to follow and not vice versa like it was before.

The overview and collected database on Civil Society Organizations their representatives and activities has been useful during the trainings and is free available to the regional administration, inter/national organizations and everyone interested in order to link them with each other.

Now in 2006 the process of increasing involvement and participation is on the first stage, we just touched the ground. As one of the participants put it: "until we understood during these four months what do you want and what can we do, the trainings already were finished". The process of engaging the CSR with the local governments should continue. It is up to them to do follow up.

References and Sources Used

GTZ/FRCS (2005): **Trainings of capacity building took place in 2004, followed by Trainings and implementation of PCIA for CSR in 2005** GTZ/FRCS documentation, Armenia, 2002-2005