Situational Analysis and Recommendations:

**CSO and State Interaction
in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and
Turkmenistan**

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List of Acronyms

ARGO	"Civil Society Development Association "ARGO"
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CISC	Civil Initiatives Support Center
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CWFA	The Committee for Women and Family Affairs
DRC	Development through Regional Cooperation
EITI	Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative
ICNL	International Center for Non-Commercial Law
NGO	Non-governmental organization
P4I	Partnership for Innovations
PC	Public Council
PIB	Public Initiative Bodies
PPP	Public Private Partnerships
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

I. Introduction

Civil society in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan has the opportunity to expand civic space through partnerships and interactions - between CSOs on the country, cross-border, or multi-country levels; or through CSO-government cooperation. This paper presents the findings and recommendations of a multi-country research initiative to identify the prospective common thematic areas, mechanisms of interaction and tools to develop civil society and cross-sectoral partnerships and networks between Azerbaijan and the Central Asian countries - Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. These findings may be used to guide the activities of the USAID funded, *Partnership for Innovations* (P4I) program being implemented by the Civil Society Development Association (ARGO), in cooperation with key in-country partners.

The investigation reveals that CSOs are actively engaging each other on both formal and informal platforms through: short and long-term networks, joint-events, and joint-projects. They recognize the increase effectiveness of collaboration and shared work, rather than acting in isolation. Respondents particularly noted that CSO interactions are a means to build CSO capacity, along with effectively address thematic areas using already existing regional knowledge and resources.

CSO-government interactions also seem to be expanding, particularly in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Examples of CSO-government relationships in these three countries demonstrates a slow transition from mutual opposition and mistrust, to mutual respect and colleagues. The establishment of cooperative CSO-government interactions in the target countries is a huge step towards securing a three-sectoral democratic government.

Highlight recommendations to increase CSO-interactions include:
1. Empower CSOs to engage constituents and governments - basic organizational capacity, information and communication technologies, and communications.
2. Expand and refresh the concept of civic space - including not only rebranding, but also expansion to virtual civil society, and attract fresh, open-minded talent into the sector.
3. Institutionalization of a regional partnership network - to develop strategies and coordinate civil society development initiatives within the target countries.

Highlight recommendations to increase CSO-government interactions include:
1. Change perceptions and relationships - establish mutual understanding and trust through reciprocal awareness raising of each sector.
2. Collaborate with governments to implement or improve interaction mechanisms - establishing a new level of cooperation, from management of daily activities to long-term strategic partnerships.
3. Strengthen support mechanisms - using innovation for CSO-government interaction and partnership development.

II. Background and Objectives

USAID's Partnership for Innovation (P4I) program, implemented by Civil Society Development Association - ARGO, aims to strengthen civil society in Central Asia and Azerbaijan in a manner that is both sustainable and inclusive within and across national boundaries that fosters progress and sustainability. This will be achieved through two objectives: (1) increase learning, professionalism, and connectivity among leading civil society organizations (CSOs) across the Central Asian countries - Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, and Azerbaijan, and (2) increase resiliency of the CSO community to adapt and recover from the shocks or stressors of a rapidly changing operating environment in Central Asia and Azerbaijan, specifically through the development the CSO Web-Academy, an innovative online capacity building platform.

P4I program introduces innovative civil society development approaches in the target countries. This is especially vital, as Central Asia and Azerbaijan continue to witness the shrinking of civic space through a combination of restrictions imposed within the legislative and economic arenas that undermine basic legal guarantees of freedom and CSOs sustainability. In addition to supporting the development of civil society and mitigating the shrinking civic space, the P4I program is also addressing a generational gap between the CSOs established during the first decade after the collapse of the Soviet Union and those that have been established in more recent years. Without a strong civil society, Central Asia and Azerbaijan, which continues to be influenced by the Russian political agenda, and expanding exposure to Islamic extremism, are increasingly becoming authoritarian states with ensuing poor human development conditions that breeds violent extremism, and thus threatening regional and global security. P4I is responding to this current reality by promoting civic participation in the democratization of state policies, building the capacity of CSO networks, and supporting an enabling environment for CSO development.

Purpose of this report: In order for the P4I program to respond to actual in-country and regional needs, and combat the shrinking of civic space, P4I needs to not only identify the in-country needs, but also understand the current capacity and practices of regional CSO and CSO-government interactions, in order to implement best practices, innovative tools, and recommendations. The purpose of this research is to support the P4I program impact by identifying the following within and between Azerbaijan and the Central Asian countries - Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. The results and findings of this research survey will be used to guide P4I program activities:
   a. Thematic areas that are common between the target countries;
   b. Communication mechanisms and tools to develop civil society and cross-sectoral cooperative partnerships and networks;
   c. Best and innovative practices and lessons learned regarding regional and cross-border interaction between CSOs and CSO-government;
   d. Elaborate recommendations on how P4I CSOs could improve coordination mechanisms through network cooperation, promoting and introducing innovations in civil society, and representing CSOs' interests on the national and regional levels.

Definitions: The multi-country context of this research generates multiple understandings and definitions of various topics. The most notable being the definitions of civil society organization (CSO), innovation, and interactions.

A. <u>Civil Society Organization (CSO):</u> The legal definition of a civil society organization or non-governmental nonprofit organizations (NGOs) is rather broad, differing in nearly every target country. Therefore, for the purpose of this research, the definition of CSO is based on the following UN[1] criteria:
1. Voluntary self-governed organization;
2. Independent from government authorities; and
3. Not pursuing a profit-making goal.

B. <u>Innovations:</u> The concept and definition of innovation for civil society within the region is under ongoing discussion, and is yet to be definitively established. It varies in accordance to country context, perception, and knowledge base. Within the five target countries, multiple definitions and concepts of innovation exist, from the very basic to advanced. For example, Turkmenistan perceives the opportunity to participate in regional conferences and the previous joint P4I - World Bank tele-conferences as innovative; and Azerbaijan perceives the use of CSO resource centers as innovative. In contrast, a country that has a relatively open government and been building civil society for over 20 years with the support and influence of western aid, Kazakhstan perceives the use of modern internet technologies and multi-sector initiatives to spur social movements as innovative.

Understanding this contrast in perception and ability regarding innovations in the target countries is vital not only for the purpose of P4I, but for all agencies working towards innovations within the sector. Successful implementation of innovative technologies is dependent on country context. Due to the varied concepts and definitions, this research uses a collaborative definition of innovation - "introduced novelties that ensure a qualitative growth of processes effectiveness."[2] as they are seen in interaction between CSOs and CSO-government relations.

C. <u>Interactions:</u> For the purpose of this research to investigate interactions between CSOs and CSO-governments, the term 'interaction' includes both partnerships and network interactions at the regional level, involving interactions within at least four of the five target countries; cross-border level, involving interaction between two countries; and multi-country level, interactions involving three or four target countries.

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[1] Handbook on Non-Profit Institutions in the System of National Accounts. UN, New-York 2006, https://unstats.un.org/unsd/publication/seriesf/seriesf_91e.pdf
[2] https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Инновация

III. Survey Methods

This project was carried out by a multi-country team of civil society affiliated researchers under the supervision of senior research manager. The in-country teams provided a summary overview of the current country situation through reviewing 59 recent reports and documentation by reviewing documents and report that have been published within the last five years (list of documents - Appendix A). This basic information serves as an update and an addition of Azerbaijan to the the 2015, USAID supported, *Social Partnership: Interaction between NGOs and the State in Central Asian Countries* report[3]. The in-country teams also collected data via individual interviews and focus groups within their respective countries regarding CSO and CSO-government interactions.

In total, 68 respondents (37 women and 31 men) participated in this survey research (Please see Appendix B for country specific details). This report is the analysis and aggregation of those country specific findings.

Data collection from the survey respondents consisted of 58 individual interviews and one focus group with 10 participants. The focus group was held using virtual communication technologies, consisted of representatives from the five target countries, and concentrated specifically on the practices of cross-border CSO communication and access to information. It needs to be noted that respondents working specifically with media or communications were generally unwilling to participating in the focus group due to the sensitive nature of the topic. One media representative was willing to participate.

The interview and focus group respondents included:
- **CSO leaders and key employees** - that have worked for at least 20 years at the national and international levels within different thematic areas of civil society; successfully implementing national and regional advocacy and dialogue initiatives that resulted in a documentable achievement - some respondents having achievements at the international level, such as consulting governments in ratifying international conventions; and having at least one established partners from another target country. This highly selective criteria limited the respondent pool.
- **Government representatives** - at both the local and national levels, including:
  - Kazakhstan - the Ministry of Religion and Civil Society Affairs; former Parliamentarian; and the Director of the Civil Initiatives Support Center.
  - Kyrgyzstan - State Agency for Youth Affairs, Physical Culture and Sport; and the Ministry of Social Development.
  - Tajikistan - Ministry of Justice in Tajikistan (as the responsible body for working with civil society); and the Committee for Women and Family Affairs.
- **International Organization representatives** - with representative offices in the target countries, including World Bank, UNDP, Soros Foundation, and International Center for Non-Commercial Law (ICNL); and

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[3] http://cso-central.asia/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Appendix-B_-Social-Partnership-Research.pdf

- **<u>Mass Media</u>** - MediaNet, Internews, Fact Checking Resource and social media representatives.

Please find the interview and focus group guides in Appendix C and D respectively, detailed participant description per country in Appendix B, and Term of Reference in Appendix E.

IV. Overview: CSO Operating Environment

The five target countries have both similarities and difference in regards to the status of civil society. The differences are particularly noticeable in countries, such as Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan where civil society has been given more liberties to develop versus more restrictive countries such as Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. This overview is both an update to the 2015, *Social Partnership: Interaction between NGOs and the State in Central Asian Countries* report[4], and a basis for consideration when examining the research survey results. This country overview primarily examines the in-country financial situation for CSOs and the operating environment. In general, throughout the five countries, there appears to be contradictory trend that both encourage and restrict CSO operations and influence.

While there is an overall trend of reduced or no foreign funding in all five countries, and greater controls over foreign funding, the individual in-country response of state financial support varies. Turkmenistan does not have state financial support, and it is extremely limited in Tajikistan. In Azerbaijan there is a significant state social support budget, though the distribution mechanism is heavily criticized. Kyrgyzstan is initiating steps to improve state financial support, and Kazakhstan is making the most progress by enacting a system of nationwide support.

At the same time, of increasing state social support and the narrowing of civic space, including tightening controls over CSOs, governments are also encouraging CSO operations. Turkmenistan has seen recent supportive legislation; and Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan - to an extent, have seen increasing CSO-government cooperation. This parallel and contradictory situation may lead towards either a loss of civil society independence with greater government influence, or improved governmental acceptance and possible trust of CSOs.

The below is a summary **update of the foreign funding, state financial support, and the CSO operating environment** as reported per country:

Azerbaijan: The in-country P4I partner and survey respondents reported that it is becoming increasingly difficult and more complicated for CSOs to operate within the country. Project registration procedures have become more complex, as well as procedures for obtaining foreign financing. Additionally, there has been an increase in governmental monitoring and control of CSO operations through fines and audits. In 2017, Azerbaijan was suspended from the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI)[5], which effectively eliminated donor support from the extractive industries.

Therefore, in practice, the only source of funding for CSOs is through the state. There are two major state donors, and both are under presidential administration - the CSO State Support Council and the Youth Fund. While these state funding bodies have considerable budgets to

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[4] http://cso-central.asia/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Appendix-B_-Social-Partnership-Research.pdf
[5] https://eiti.org/azerbaijan

support civil society initiatives, CSO are critical of the distribution mechanism and the amount of the financial awards. According to one of the respondents, the award amounts are insufficient for organizational sustainability and the implementation of larger projects.

A survey respondent explained the situation as follows:

> *Due to legislative amendments over the last 3 years, implementation of projects funded by international donors has become considerably more complicated. This mainly relates to the projects funded from abroad because any transaction (to a CSO's account) is considered a grant and shall be registered with the Ministry of Justice (an exception exists for service organizations for which a special tax treatment is applied). In reality, projects funded by international donors are not registered by the Ministry, and banks have no right to allow any financial transactions of CSOs.*

Kazakhstan: While the civic space is narrowing through an increase in governmental regulations of CSO activities, there is an observable diversification in state financial support and cooperation between the state and CSOs.

An example of the increased regulations is the registration requirements and public governmental database that includes not only information about the CSOs themselves, but also about the CSO projects, their activities, target groups, and the financial contributors. In addition, in October 2016, additional reporting requirements and regulations to monitor foreign financing of CSOs was enacted. It is unknown at this time if these regulations are affecting the amount of requested and received foreign aid. A survey respondent from Kazakhstan explained the situation:

> *The situation is aggravating abruptly – CSOs are yet not "foreign agents" but control enhancement is quite obvious. And risks will be growing. Independent press has been almost finished with both in our country, and in Tajikistan, and in Azerbaijan. And it was done long ago in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. For civil activists, service and politically insensitive, - it will be possible to live, however, if they are not able to solve problems, then they will be set requirements too.*

At the same time, there is an an increase in state financial support through CSO and CSO-government cooperation. The national budget for social contracting and state grants has been increasing in the local currency since 2014. In 2014, the budget was 5.5 billion tenge, this increased to 7.1 billion in 2015, and than to 9.2 billion in 2016[6]. This is an increase of nearly 60 percent in a three year period. (It is important to note though, that while the budget was increasing in tenge, the value of the tenge was decreasing in comparison to the US dollar. It can be assumed that this is a reflection of the strength of the tenge and the economic situation in Kazakhstan). Furthermore, the Kazakhstani state has expanded the sector and geographical scope that are eligible to receive state social contracting, grant funding, and financial awards

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[6] https://www.kursiv.kz/news/vlast1/ministerstvo-po-delam-religij-i-grazdanskogo-obsestva-usilit-kontrol-za-rashodovaniem-budzetnyh-sredstv-v-ramkah-gossoczakaza/

for excellence. To date, the Ministry of Religion and Civil Society has distributed 804,545 USD in financial awards[7] for excellence. Additional national level ministries now have social contracting funds included in their budgets. State social contracts are available in the budgets of every providence (oblast), whereas it was previously only available in Astana, Almaty, and larger urban centers. The state granting mechanism is being implemented by the Civil Initiatives Support Center (CISC), which began operations in 2016. As CISC is still relatively in the infancy phase, ARGO has been assisting them to increase their capacity of the granting process. To date, CISC has held three grant competitions, receiving 592 applications, and providing 66 grants totaling more than 780 million tenge (US$2.4 million).

The cooperation between CSOs and the state has also been observably increasing. This is seen particularly through the development of consultative and advisory boards, civic monitoring and control, and CSOs participation in law-making activities. ARGO has been increasingly interacting with the state regarding state financial mechanisms and strengthening the operating environment for civil society.

K. Assylov, chairman of the Committee for Languages Development and Socio-Political Work of the Ministry of Culture described the situation:

> *Now the work with CSOs is built not only on the level of regional centers and in cities, but also in districts and on the rural level. All local departments of the social sphere are implementing their projects jointly with CSOs: healthcare, social protection, educational departments, departments of sport, tourism and interaction with the youth. As far back as two years ago, this work was carried out mainly by the internal policy and education departments.''[8]*

Kyrgyzstan: It appears that civil society in Kyrgyzstan is struggling to maintain a firm foothold within the country. CSOs are struggling with both restrictive political rhetoric and financial stability. Similar to Kazakhstan, the government's perception and regulation of civil society is also contradictory to an extent. This is particularly seen within the legislative process. There have been seven legislative attempts to severely restrict or coin CSOs that receive foreign funding as 'foreign agents,' since 2010. However, due to advocacy from CSOs, these proposals never made it into law. While the political rhetoric exists to increase CSO regulations, it is not the popular rhetoric. CSOs were able to sway the opinion of law makers in support of a more independent civil society. However, as the legislative proposals were submitted seven times in as many years, and accepted for review, the restrictive rhetoric is strong enough to remain a threat. One survey respondent from Kyrgyzstan described the situation as:

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[7] https://diakom.gov.kz/ru/news/kak-prohodil-konkurs-npo-na-poluchenie-gosudarstvennoy-premii
[8] http://www.inform.kz/ru/plan-nacii-npo-vyhodyat-na-intensivnyy-uroven-vzaimodeystviya-s-gosudarstvom_a2925381

> *Our interaction with state bodies is, let us say, of a reactionary nature instead of active. We try to protect ourselves from discrimination initiatives and preserve that space that exists.*

At the same time, there appears to be an attempt by the Kyrgyz government to improve CSO-government cooperation. In May 2017, a law was enacted with measures to improve and increase the state financial support mechanisms. The P4I key partner has been actively working with the government to implement this law.

An increase and improvement in the state financial support is vital for CSOs in Kyrgyzstan. The amount of foreign funding available in the country has been steadily decreasing over the last few years, which can be explained to an extent by the government's policy change to work with new donors, such as China and less with western donors. At the same time, historically, the amount of state financial support for CSOs has been insubstantial, with the national budget being just several thousand US dollars. CSOs have been dependent on foreign funding. The decrease in available foreign funding is logically negatively impacting their ability to operate and respond to threats to further narrow the country's civic space.

Tajikistan: CSOs in Tajikistan are also facing growing legislative and financial barriers. Enacted legislation in recent years has greatly increased the regulations and monitoring of CSO activities. This includes amendments to the 2015 law on public associations, requiring registration of foreign funding.

It is unknown at this time if the foreign funding regulations have impacted the amount of requested or received foreign funds. However, the trend of decreasing foreign assistance in other countries in the area, is also true for Tajikistan. This is creating a significant strain for CSOs, as the majority of CSOs are dependent upon foreign funding.

However, state support in Tajikistan is beginning to diversity, with funds distributed through Ministry of Health and Social Security, the Committee of Women and Family Affairs, and the Youth Affairs Committee. Unfortunately, the eligibility to receive funding is limited to CSO working with people with disabilities and the elderly; individual women entrepreneurs; and a 150 member network - the Union of Youth Public Organizations. In response to this restrictive eligibility, CSOs are currently lobbying the Committee for Women and Family Affairs to resume grant competition for CSOs.

Turkmenistan: The financial situation for CSOs in Turkmenistan is even more limited, with organizations being primarily dependent on membership fees. The government does not provide state financial assistance and access to foreign funding is extremely restricted. However, there has been a recent increase in legislative support for CSO-government interactions, particularly the laws on: Volunteerism (January 2016); Freedom of Religion and Religious Organizations (March 2016); and Organizing and Holding Assemblies, Meetings, Demonstrations and Other Mass Events (February 2015). In response to the law on volunteerism, there has been an increased in the legitimacy of the volunteer movement, as was seen with the development and use of volunteers in the 2017 Asian Olympic Games.

Turkmenistan has also seen an increase in open civil society activities, including a civil forum with round tables that discussed the role of public organizations in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Additionally, civil society has been able to openly and transparently cooperate with UNDP. Together, with a local CSO partner, UNDP developed the website, www.ngo-turkmenistan.org, where donors and CSOs can provide information about their organization, in both Russian and English. The administration of this website has been transferred to a local CSO. This is a significant change for Turkmenistan, which is historically quite restrictive.

V. Findings and Recommendations: Civil Society Interactions

A. Overview - Civil Society Interactions

CSOs within the target countries have experience of interacting and cooperating with each other, with international CSOs, and CSOs in Eastern Europe, Russia and Ukraine. The type and quality of the interaction has varied depending on the country context and available resources. Overall, the respondents reported that interaction and cooperation is nothing but beneficial for civil society and CSOs. They identified four thematic areas for cooperation: 1) economic development; 2) regional security; 3) social development; and 4) democracy and governance. According to the respondents, coordinated cooperation on these areas across the countries will raise the capacity and potential influential impact of CSOs and civil society to a greater extent than civil societies acting in isolation.

The survey results identified the following four main types of CSO interactions within and between the target countries:

1. <u>Long-term network:</u> A thematic focused network that is stable and relatively permanent. It may be formally or informally organized.

2. <u>Short-term network:</u> A network that is initiated and operated for the sole purpose of responding to a specific incident.

3. <u>Joint-events:</u> One-time events, such as a conference or workshop that brings together participants to cover a specific topic, but does not incorporate follow-up activities or project implementation.

4. <u>Joint-projects:</u> Project that are implemented in partnership between two or more organizations.

According to respondents, both types of networking are influential for the region. The long-term networking has been proven useful in working with systematic thematic issues, and preventing or responding to governmental movements. The short-term networking has been effective for responding to incident based needs, such as conflict and natural disasters. In regards to joint-events and joint-projects, the respondents identified that joint-projects were significantly more beneficial, having the greatest potential for long-term sustainable impact through: a) CSO capacity building of either basic organizational operations or skills and specialization development; and b) increased opportunities to attract government interest and CSO-government interaction.

The highlight recommendations resulting from this research includes: a) the consideration of country specifics - specifically in regards to capability of interaction and perception of innovation; b) CSO capacity building - through interactions and using already existing knowledge and resources; c) redefining and refreshing the concept of civic space - in terms of expanding the operating environment to the virtual space, and inclusivity of the third sector in its entirety; and d) institutionalizing regional networking - to organize regional strategy and

coordination, and support the formalization of partnerships and networks, identifying goals, objectives, and actions in specific thematic areas. Achieving these recommendations has the potential to strengthen P4I CSOs' cross-sectoral cooperative partnerships and networks, and thus strengthen civil society, expand civic space, and improve the lives of the region's citizens.

B. Common Thematic Areas for Civil Society Interaction

Based on the multi-country focus group, individual interviews and the country overviews, the following were identified as themes for cross-border and regional civil society interactions. These are areas of concern that are common for each country, and which may be jointly addressed. The survey respondents noted that cross-border or multi-country initiatives may strengthen civil society impact.

1. Economic Development:
   a. Job creation;
   b. Rural entrepreneurship;
   c. Social entrepreneurship;
   d. Cross-border trade; and
   e. Development of small and medium enterprises.

2. Regional Security:
   a. Climate change, environmental protection issues, and green technologies;
   b. Preventing violent extremism and radicalization; and
   c. Women and families that are affected by labor migration and ISIS.

3. Social Development:
   a. Local self-governance - inclusive planning and participative approach;
   b. Urban development;
   c. CSO capacity building; and
   d. Civic engagement of youth.

4. Democracy and Governance:
   a. Analyzing and advocating for the implementation of national commitments, such as the the UN Convention on the Rights for Persons with Disabilities; and
   b. Legislative initiatives that impact the operating civil society environment, and civil society proactive and reactive approaches to the legislation.

C. Mechanisms of Civil Society Interaction

Cross-border, multi-country and regional partnerships and networking are not novel to the target countries. Respondents provided examples of both long and short-term multi-country partnerships and networks. Based on the respondents feedback, it appears that Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have extensively more experience with cross-border and multi-country interactions, than do Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan. This can be explained by the

country context with Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan having more restrictions on civil society and cross-border interactions.

The identified long-term interactions are permanent and more stable networks that focus on specific thematic areas. These networks may exist for multiple years as both formal and informal networks. A respondent from Kyrgyzstan described the following long-term interaction:

> *Most networks and partner cooperation are <u>narrow-thematic</u>. For example, the "Central Asia in Movement" platform deals with labor migration, and some respondents mentioned it as an example of effective regional cooperation. This network includes 30 organizations from Central Asian countries and is aimed at protecting the rights of migrants and their families in in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Russia. The network's activity is structured and is coordinated by the committee (detailed information about the network is available at <u>http://camplatform.org</u>), and its specific feature is joint work of organizations both from countries-sources of labor migration and countries hosting migrants.*

Whereas the long-term interactions focus on a specific thematic issue, **short-term interactions and networks are generally a response to a particular incident.** A respondent from Tajikistan described an example of a short-term interaction:

> *As a good example of interaction with other CSOs can be mentioned the International Charity Action of Public Organizations, "The New Century Youth." The action was organized for the population of Kulyab in the south of Tajikistan, when more than 5,500 people were affected from a mudslide and avalanche. This was a fundraising initiative, with youth movements, organizations, civic activists from: Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Russia, Tajikistan citizens, and those who studied in the UK and US, responded to the call for help. Additionally, more than 10 international organizations responded to the action in Tajikistan, including embassies, and more than 40 commercial organizations, including mass media.*

D. Methods of Civil Society Interaction

Respondents identified that the primary method for interaction are joint-events, but the most fruitful method for interaction are joint-projects.

Joint-events are a one-time or regularly scheduled occurrence, and may or may not be associated with a network. They include conferences, trainings, study tours, and etc. Respondents identified that they primarily networked through the joint-events. It is interesting to note that joint-events were the only method of interaction identified by Turkmenistani respondents. This lends perspective to the Turkmenistani experience, perspective and country context, all of which must be considered in future joint initiatives.

In contrast to joint-events, respondents identified that joint-projects, which may or may not be associated with a network, have a longer-term and more sustainable impact. Joint-projects

require more resources and planning, including pre-assessments, actions that respond to identified needs, follow-up activities, and etc. However, the investment results in a greater positive impact, beyond the project goal. Joint-projects also foster organizational capacity building, as they create an action space for CSOs to learn and grow from each other. Respondents identified both the challenge and opportunity from implementing joint initiatives with other countries, is the difference in CSO capacity and country context. In order for the project to be implemented successfully, both partners need to have a relatively balanced level of organizational capacity and accessibility to implement the project's in-country activities. This requires the weaker organization to raise their capacity level, and is usually accomplished through the support of the stronger partnering organizations. The respondents identified that this is a more effective approach to CSO capacity building, than attending joint-events.

The respondents also noted that joint-projects tend to attract positive attention from governmental authorities, to a larger extent than single organization or in-country projects. They identified that this elicits a greater opportunity for the CSOs to improve relations with the government as joint-projects carry a level of prestige and legitimacy. The potential for joint-projects to improve CSO-government interactions and governmental activities is discussed further in chapter 6 - *Findings and Recommendations: Civil Society - Government Interactions*.

A respondent from Kyrgyzstan described an example of joint-projects that increases CSO partner capacity and gain governmental attention to the issue:

> *Some organizations create own networks, thus, attempting at not only sharing experiences but creating internal policies in the sphere of organization's core activity. For example, the Child's Rights Defenders League has implemented the project, "Combating discrimination against women and children, and promotion of their rights by changing the socio-economic policy in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan." As part of this project regional research was conducted and efforts were taken to coordinate the activities of CSOs. Additionally, sharing best practices on this project helped, "draw the attention of government bodies to the status of children and women living in a difficult life situation."*
>
> *From respondents' feedbacks in Kyrgyzstan*

D. Role Models

A prime example of the innovative impact potential for joint-projects is a CSO lead social enterprise to manufacture inexpensive, quality wheelchairs in Kazakhstan. This was made possible through a partnership between a CSOs in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan. The cross-border partnership raised the capacity of a local CSO, rendering economic, social and ecological services to one the most vulnerable groups of the population.

F. Challenges

The respondents identified a number of challenges for multi-country and regional interactions. These include both universal challenges that affect all CSOs in every country, and situational challenges that are more limited to country or organizational specifications.

Universal Challenges:

The primarily identified universal challenges include funding limitations, language barriers, and lacking leadership and management of networks and partnerships.

a. Limitations in funding is one of the primary obstacles for developing cross-border, multi-country, and regional cooperation. According to respondents, donors provide minimal to no financial support for joint activities, neither joint-events or joint-projects. Without donor funding, the formalization and sustainability of joint-initiatives are almost impossible to achieve. In addition, when donor funding exists, countries are further challenged by country specific legislation regulating foreign financing. All five target countries are subject to a degree of foreign financing regulation. Partners and international donors that work with countries that have more restrictive regulations require additional capacity building to understand how to work within the specific country context.

b. The next obstacle for regional cooperation the lack of a common language. The first generation of CSO leaders were influenced by the former soviet system, and thus Russian was a common language among the CIS countries. However, as this first generation ages and the next generation is stepping into civil society, Russian is no longer a common language. The next generation are primarily speaking their own local language, and English has yet to emerge as a unifying language. This lack of a common language is a significant limiting factor in joint cooperation and knowledge exchange, and civil society is in a desperate need to address and overcome this challenge in order to prevent further fragmentation and isolation of civil society within the region.

c. Respondents also noted that the lack of leadership and management limits the development, formalization, and sustainability of cooperative initiatives. They stated that there is a need for a regional leader to unite and organize the network and joint-project processes. Currently, ARGO as a local organization is working in this capacity as both the implementer of the multi-country P4I program, and the regional hub secretariat for the global Innovations for Change initiative.

Situational Challenges:

The vast majority of the identified situational challenges are dependent on country context. Respondents identified basic infrastructure considerations, CSO capacity, access to information, and the nature of the civil society operating environment as particular challenges for cross-border, multi-country, and regional cooperative initiatives.

a. The identified infrastructure challenges focused specifically on electricity and internet availability. Tajikistan respondents shared that in less populated areas electricity is not

constant or dependable. CSOs require battery-powered technology and non-electric dependent innovations and activities in order to operate within these areas. Additionally, internet accessibility is both specific to the country situation, and challenges within countries, with rural areas having more limited access to internet. Internet challenges include: cost, band-width, and reliability. It is quite expensive in Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan which is a limiting factor for CSOs' usage. Also, all five target countries experience challenges to a degree with band-width and reliability, either as a country or in the rural areas. This limits the types of web-services that are available for these areas. The respondents did note though that the internet situation is expected to change as cellular data and smartphones become more accessible.

b. Respondents identified a challenge of implementing joint-projects and cooperation is differences in CSO capacity levels because of country specifics. For example, the organizational capacity of Kazakhstani CSOs is generally much higher than that of Turkmenistani CSOs, and this is the result of development opportunities and operating environment differences. One respondent described the situation that, in spite of a number of years of third sector development, "*our experience in Tajikistan and the experience of a similar organization in Kazakhstan or Kyrgyzstan will differ. And the difference will be distinct.*" Accordingly, the difference in CSO capacity can be a limiting factor for implementing joint projects.

c. In addition to organizational capacity differences, respondents identified weak communication skills is also a challenge for networking and cooperation. The majority of CSOs in general require development within the area of communication, this includes internal policies, work with mass media, and using available internet technologies to inform, access public and civil society support, and exchange experiences and knowledge.

d. Access to information is also identified as a challenge for cooperation and joint-projects as it limits CSOs knowledge and perception of the common thematic issues. This is also an organizational capacity factor. The respondents identified that access to information is dependent upon country specific legislation that regulates the availability and type of information. The respondent identified that information is generally easy to access in Kyrgyzstan, while it is most challenging in Turkmenistan. It was also note that the topic of information is also regulated within countries, sensitive topics such as human rights is more difficult to access rather than topics surrounding social issues. A respondent reported that political based information is also regulated, with opposition channels available in Kyrgyzstan, but non-existent in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan. It can be assumed that similar limitations are in Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan.

e. As discussed in the overview of the CSO operating environment section of this paper, respondents identified country specific limitations as a significant challenge for cross-border, multi-country, and regional initiatives - particularly joint-events and joint-

projects. CSOs are required to work within organizational and legal constraints, such as: a) project and organization registration - especially challenging in Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan; b) foreign funding limitations - especially challenging in Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan, and c) actual limitations to implementing cooperative initiatives in-country - especially challenging for Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan.

G. Valuable Insights

The multi-sectoral individual interviews and focus group revealed a wealth of knowledge regarding cross-border, multi-country and regional cooperative initiatives, including three especially valuable insights. The respondents identified that cooperative initiatives strengthen civil society both through building the sustainable capacity of CSOs and enabling a platform for civil society to defend and expand civic space within the five target countries.

As discussed in the methods of interactions section above, joint-projects create a venue for weaker partner CSOs to strengthen their internal capacity, becoming peers with stronger established organizations. The respondents noted that this type of capacity building is more effective and sustainable than participation in joint-events. It is also a different approach to capacity building than the more typical cascade method, with a stronger organization implementing a specific capacity building project and assisting the development of a weaker organization - similar to what was seen in the USAID, Development through Regional Cooperation (DRC) program. It is possible that a joint-project, peer development approach may be more effective and sustainable as the less developed organization not only raises their capacity to become a peer, they also put this new capacity into practice to achieve a project goal that is presumably in-line with the organization's mission.

Respondents also identified common theme for cooperation as defending and expanding civic space. This is a relatively new concept to be included in the list of common thematic areas, which usually primarily focuses on social issues. The respondents suggested that the partnerships and networks not only exchange information about legislative amendments that affect the civil society environment from their respective countries, but also elaborate on preventative and proactive actions. It is possible that this concept can stand alone as its own network cooperative focus to improve legislation for CSOs, and/or be included in the activities of partnerships and networks that are focused on social thematic areas.

Along with involving initiatives addressing the legislative sphere that affects civic space, the respondents also revealed that civil society's operating space is expanding beyond the traditional physical form. The use of social media and other internet technologies enable a virtual civic space.

One of the respondent shared the experience of using Facebook to stage protests, rather than illegal protests on the streets. Another example of the influential use of the virtual civic space occured in 2016, in Kazakhstan. A proposed legislative amendment attempted to de-anonymize the internet by requiring commentators, bloggers and anyone expressing an opinion on the internet to have their names registered in a digital portal. Following negative

public reaction, and a social media campaign, the Kazakhstan Ministry of Information and Communications removed the amendment from parliamentary consideration[9, 10].

While this use of internet technologies, social media and virtual civic space to influence and instigate action is not a new concept outside of the region, it is a relatively innovative concept for the five target countries. Developing the capacity of the virtual civic space to influence change is still relatively in the infancy stages, with significant room to grow and expand.

H. Recommendations - Interactions between civil society organizations
The following recommendations for consideration of country specifics, CSO capacity building, redefining and refreshing the concept of civic space, and institutionalizing regional networking are based on the above respondent feedback. Concentration in these areas will improve P4I CSOs' cross-sectoral cooperative partnerships and networks, and thus strengthen civil society, expand civic space, and improve the lives of the region's citizens.

1. Consideration of country specifics:
   The varied levels of CSO capacity, experience with cross-border interactions and ability to engage in such interactions needs to be taken into consideration when planning and implementing these initiatives. This is a complex situation that requires accommodation and adaptability to be built into all network and partnerships, responding to in-country circumstances, strengthening weaker organizations, while also supporting stronger organizations and achieving the purpose of the network or partnership initiative. In order for civil society to be a balancing factor within the democratic process, multi-country initiatives should be obliged to work towards leveling the playing field, striving for all CSOs to have similar capacity levels as professional peers, regardless of country circumstance. These complexities can only be addressed by including all stakeholders as active contributors to the planning and implementation processes.

2. CSO Capacity Building:
   The respondents repeatedly reported about needs in three particular areas of CSO capacity, basic organizational capacity, information and communication technologies, and communications. Again, the extent of the need levels within these three areas appears to vary by the organization and country context.

   a. Basic organizational capacity building:
      Build the capacity of organizations to sustainably operate and function to a level that induces true social change. While there are various methods to build organizational capacity, the joint-project, development approach is a relatively

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[9] For more details see: https://tengrinews.kz/kazakhstan_news/abaev-mik-isklyuchilo-normyi-deanonimizatsii-kommentatorov-310420/

[10] Please note that at the time of the focus group, the amendments were cancelled. However, on November 23, 2017, the Majilis included and approved the amendment to the legislation on information and communications. For more details see: https://tengrinews.kz/kazakhstan_news/anonimnyie-kommentarii-internete-zapretyat-majilis-odobril-331676/

innovative concept for the region. This can be a cost effective and sustainable approach, as it the sharing of already existing knowledge and experience, and practical implementation within the organizations. The peer-development approach includes partnering a stronger and more established organization, with a weaker organizations in another country. The partnership requires the weaker organization to raise their internal capacity with guidance from the stronger organization, so as they are able to operate as a peers and implement a project specific to their field of focus. This in turn creates an opportunity for cascading development, with the newly strengthened organization then partnering with a CSO within their own country, and raising the capacity of that CSO. This approach can pass along development knowledge and capacity building from the regional to the local level.

b. Thematic CSO capacity building:
    The peer-development capacity building concept as described above can also be used to build the capacity and increase the effectiveness of CSOs within their thematic areas. This is a joint-project approach by partnering organizations with differing mission and knowledge strengths. For example, a Tajikistani CSO that specializes in agricultural production, partners with a Kazakhstani CSO that specializes in community mobilization. The two partners implement a joint, specialized project that could not be implemented by either organization singularly, as it is a combination of their respective strengths. The results in not only a more effective project outcome, but also the partners learn from each other, strengthening their own capacity.

c. Communications:
    All CSOs, partnerships, and networks must have a written policy guiding both internal and external communications. Such a mechanism will both clarify communication roles and channels, raise the level of professionalism within the organization, improve external relations, and increase external perceptions of the organization. This need can be supported by P4I both by providing training and information of communication principles, techniques, and protocols; and by developing a "CSO and Network Innovative Communications Guide" in local languages. The guide can be available electronically and provide traditional and innovative communication ideas; information about available social media and communication technologies, including their merits, weaknesses, and accessibility in the target countries. It can also include an open policy template that can be customized, adapted, and adopted by CSOs and networks. Such a guide can simplify developing communication procedures for not only CSOs and networks as a whole, but also for project and program implementation with the consideration of country specifics.

d. Information and Communication Technologies:
    Respondents identified that CSOs are in need of training regarding the use of social media and internet technologies. This can be carried out in partnership with

media or technology experts through the traditional training approach, or through a basic e-course on the CSO web-Academy[11]. It is suggested that this course be refreshed annually, to cover updated and new technologies.

3. <u>Expand and refresh the concept of civic space:</u>
   The current culture of civil society within the target countries is limiting itself by operating within a framework that was established by international development agencies during the 1990's. The respondents identified this as an obstacle to civil society advancement in the region. There is an assumption that legitimate civil society activities and movements are restricted to traditional CSOs, implementing grant-based projects. This original framework was effective for developing post-soviet civil society in the target countries, however evolution is necessary in all systems to not merely survive but to thrive. It is recommended that civil society and CSOs within the target countries expand and refresh the concept of civic space.

   a. <u>Civil Society and CSO Rebranding:</u>
      As a means to overcome the aging of civil society, attract fresh talent, change negative social and governmental perceptions, and establish stronger multi-sectoral relations, respondents suggested rebranding CSOs and the concept of civil society as a whole. This includes not only the usage of new terminology and but also essence of civil society itself. Currently, the concept of civil society in the target countries is generally exclusive to CSOs, rather than the third sector in its entirety. This exclusivity limits the reach, scope and capacity of civil society. The blurring of sectoral lines also needs to be taken into consideration with the concept of civil society, for example social entrepreneurship and socially responsible businesses can be in both civil society and the business sector.

      This innovative idea can be supported by establishing and spreading a framework for a civil society 'reboot'; and championing for a refreshed civil society in all communications at the regional and national levels. Networks and CSOs are in need of guidance to change their own perception of civil society through information and counseling.

   b. <u>Expand civil society to include the virtual civic space:</u>
      Along with refreshing the concept of civil society, the boundaries of civil society also need to be expanded to the virtual space. This includes hosting conferences, workshops and webinars, and public meetings and forums via communication technologies. This media can be a communication platform, not only between CSOs, and CSO and governments, but more importantly between CSOs and their beneficiaries. This is a tool for citizens to have their voices heard. Expanding to the civic space requires CSOs to be trained in internet and social media technologies. It is also necessary to consider country specifics and adapt

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[11] A P4I initiative, the CSO web-Academy is an internet-based education platform providing Russian language CSO management education for the target countries.

technology to the needs of the region. Investigating best practices in other countries regarding innovative communications in areas with limited infrastructure, could prove beneficial for the target countries.

4. <u>Institutionalization of Regional Partnership Network:</u>
   Many respondents noted that an organization or group within the target country is necessary to undertake development of strategies and coordination of civil society development initiatives within the target countries. Currently, the Central Asia Innovation Hub (ARGO is the current secretariat) and the Regional Cooperative Council (organized by ARGO) are providing these services. However, as these organizations do not seem to be reaching the respondents. This type of coordinated leadership should be expanded to possibly include national hub organizations within the thematic areas, that communicate with the regional coordination bodies.

   Respondents also noted the need to formalize partnerships and networks in order for them to be successful and effective. Overall goals, objectives, and actions in specific thematic areas must be clearly defined within each partnership and network. P4I could support this through developing a e-guide and template to serve as a formalization guide for partnerships and networks.

VI. Findings and Recommendations: Civil Society - Government Interactions

A. Overview: Recognizing the Need for Cooperation

In general, CSOs and governments have historically maintained a mutual attitude of rejection and opposition within the target countries. This effectively eliminated any possibility for fruitful interaction and cooperation. CSOs perceived government bodies as bureaucrats and bribetakers; and state bodies perceived CSOs as "opposition screamers" and "lazy grant eaters." This situation appears to be changing for both parties in the the target countries, with Turkmenistan experiencing positive legislative movements, and Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan - to an extent, experiencing an increase in productive CSO-government cooperation. However, respondents did report that negative attitude and perception, along with deficiencies in the mechanics of interaction, continues to challenge partnerships.

This research survey includes feedback from both civil society and government leaders. The respondents identified the following five areas for CSO-government interaction in the target countries: 1. economic development; 2. regional security; 3. social development; 4. urban development; and 5. democracy and governance. Establishing interactions and partnerships on these platforms gives civil society the the possibility to create new civic space. The establishment of mutual trust and respect may be a more effective route to respond the the shrinking of civic space, rather than directly confronting governments.

> **Areas for CSO-government interaction:**
> 1. economic development;
> 2. regional security;
> 3. social development;
> 4. urban development; and
> 5. democracy and governance.

B. Common Thematic Areas for CSO-Government Interaction

Based on the multi-country focus group, individual interviews and the country overviews, the following were identified as areas for CSO-government cooperation within each of the target countries. These are areas were identified based on the respondents feedback in the interviews and focus group.

1. Economic development
   a. Youth and women social entrepreneurship; and
   b. Agricultural sector development.

2. Regional Security
   a. Addressing environmental degradation issues, climate change, and the population's adaptation to environmental changes and consequences.
   b. Women and families that are affected by labor migration and ISIS.
   c. Prevention and rehabilitation of violent extremism.

3. Social Development
   a. Issues concerning people with disabilities, including the gender perspective, inclusiveness, and etc;
   b. Gender related issues, including empowerment, equity, domestic violence, and women's rights;
   c. Legal and social protection of children's rights; and
   d. Education and public healthcare.

4. Infrastructure Development
   a. Urban and community development.

5. Democracy and Governance
   a. Strengthening the capacity of local governments; and
   b. Expanding the use and availability of government communication and cooperation through information technologies.

C. Methods of Interaction

In 2015, ARGO published the *Social Partnership: Interaction between NGOs and the State in Central Asian Countries* report.[12] This report identified four forms of interaction between CSOs and the state:
   1. Mediation between the community and local authorities through consultative and advisory bodies, hearings, etc.;
   2. Service provision, particularly, through social contracting;
   3. Monitoring and civil control of state authorities; and
   4. Participation in policy development and legislative processes.

The following serves as a brief overview of the Azerbaijani experience and an update to the target Central Asian countries. Respondents reported on the most common and observable forms CSO-government interactions. Based on the survey results, these four forms of interaction continue to be relevant to date by differing degrees.

Azerbaijan:
Respondents identified service provision and mediation as the two most observable forms of interaction. Service provision is arranged through government granting and social contracting mechanisms - which are the only form of funding available for CSOs. Additionally, the use of mediation has been developing over the past three years, with some ministries administering public councils within the country.

Kazakhstan:
The 2015 report identified that all four forms of CSO-government interactions are employed within the country. Respondents noted that the four forms of interaction continue to be implemented, with a growing use of consultative and advisory bodies, and service provision through state social contracting. Kazakhstan is quite advanced for the region in regards to the

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[12] http://cso-central.asia/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Appendix-B_-Social-Partnership-Research.pdf

forms of CSO-government interactions, monitoring and civil control of state authorities; and participation in decision-making and legislative processes. The government has employed internet-based technologies, including an e-government and open-government system that enables communication and civic participation within governmental processes. Citizens can watch parliamentary procedures in real-time; comment on the Prime Minister's or other Minister's blogs - who are then obliged to respond; and evaluate the efficiency of government services through a rating system. While these are only a few examples of the e-participatory methods, Kazakhstan has not yet developed the system in full.

The interactive method of service provision through state social contracting is also under development within the country. The Civil Initiatives Support Center (CISC) was established on December 31, 2015, and is a relatively young agency. To date, CISC has issued four granting cycles, with the first cycle eliciting intense criticisms from CSOs. Currently, CISC is working to improve this state granting mechanism, and has been actively consulting with P4I/ARGO for capacity development support. They have also contracted with ARGO to develop a computerized granting monitoring and evaluation system. ARGO and CISC's partnership is an extremely positive example of a CSO-government cooperation that holds the potential to impact CSOs and CSO-government interactions throughout Kazakhstan.

Kyrgyzstan:
The four forms of interaction were also identified to be active in Kyrgyzstan in the 2015 report. This appears to continue to hold true into 2017, with the government engaging in increasing interactions through service provision. The State Agency for Youth Affairs, Physical Culture and Sport (from here forward referred to as, The Agency) is one of two governmental bodies distributing state social funds. The Agency's budget of approximately 31,000 USD[13] is quite insignificant. However, it is supplemented through a CSO co-financing requirement of 20 - 40 percent, resulting in several positive outcomes. It ensures a sense of project ownership, influencing successful implementation and impact. It spurs multi-sectoral partnership development with businesses and local governments supporting the co-financing requirement. The co-financing requirement also supports CSO sustainability, by encouraging the diversification of funding sources, rather than sole reliance on grant support.

Tajikistan:
The 2015 report identified that the CSO-government forms of interaction in Tajikistan included participation in the decision-making and legislative process, mediation, and service provision. Based on the research findings these three forms of interaction continue to be in practice, with no interactions through government monitoring and civic control mechanisms.

Throughout 2017, the government of Tajikistan in cooperation with civil society, has been working to strengthen mechanisms of CSO-government interaction through an increased access of local communities to decision making process. For example, the First National Forum on Sustainable Development of Local Communities was organized in cooperation with the newly established the Local Development Committee under the President of

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[13] http://www.sport.gov.kg/news/view/idnews/2779

Tajikistan to promote the legal and regulatory environment for Public Initiative Bodies (PIB) and local communities. This is expected to be an annual forum as sustainable mechanism of public participation in decision making process.

In addition to the identified forms of interaction, respondents described an emerging, new form of interaction - Public Private Partnerships (PPP). According to the World Bank Group, PPPs are contract agreements between a private party and a governmental entity[14]. While PPPs are not an innovative approach within the greater context, this is an innovative form of CSO-government interaction for the target countries. Tajikistan has an established legal framework for PPPs, and there is a growing trust between the public and private sectors to actually form a partnership.

Respondents report that the interactive mechanism through service provision is quite limited in Tajikistan. The Committee for Women and Family Affairs (CWFA) is one of three state support distribution agencies. CWFA distributes 80 grants annually throughout the country, with an average amount of 3,000 USD/grant.[15] The purpose of funding is to support and develop women's entrepreneurship and the economic development. Funding is currently only available to individual women or women's initiative groups. CSOs are not eligible to receive funding. Additionally, respondents identified that the granting mechanism is in significant need of capacity development, with concerns regarding distribution, transparency, communication and project monitoring and evaluation.

Turkmenistan:
Two forms of interaction, mediation and service provision were identified in the 2015 report. While the provision of service is an identified form of CSO-government interaction, this mechanisms remains within the early stages of development. In actuality, service provision is a very limited to non-existent form of interaction. However, mediation has been put into practice through consultative and advisory bodies. For example, the "Intragovernmental Commission to ensure fulfillment of international obligations of Turkmenistan in human rights and international humanitarian law" is such a mechanism.

D. Role Models

An excellent example of a fruitful CSO-government interaction is the long-term, strategic partnership between the Republic of Tajikistan Ministry of Justice and a leading CSO. The partnership is dedicated to supporting the development of CSOs in Tajikistan, and has paved the way for collaborative relationships with the Public Council, and executive authorities at the oblast and district levels. These CSO-government partnerships have produced a simplified CSO e-reporting procedure, and established a process of regular meetings between the regions and municipalities with CSOs.

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[14] http://ppp.worldbank.org/public-private-partnership/overview/what-are-public-private-partnerships
[15] https://kumitaizanon.tj/index.php/ru/ob-yavleniya/75-konkurs-na-poluchenie-grantov-prezidenta-respubliki-tadzhikistan-po-podderzhke-i-razvitiyu-predprinimatelskoj-deyatelnosti-zhenshchin-na-2016-god

E. Challenges

The primary challenges identified by the respondents for CSO-government cooperation is the lack of capacity for cooperation. This includes everything from negative perceptions, lack of knowledge, and weak mechanisms for cooperation. These challenges are surmountable through awareness raising and training for both parties.

1. Perception and Attitude:
   Respondents identified that a major challenge with CSO-government cooperation is the government's negative attitude and perception of CSOs. However, this negative perception may be mutual thus severely hindering the possibility of cooperation. Respondents noted that governments, especially local level governments do not see CSOs or citizens as capable of being truly involved within the decision making process. This attitude is occasionally masked by the formal nature of cooperation. CSOs are invited to participate in government initiatives, mediation and consultative bodies, however their contribution is not actually taken into consideration.

   The negative perception and attitude is the product of a lack of knowledge about each party. Respondents noted that CSOs are generally not aware of governmental procedures and governments do not know about CSO capabilities. This lack of awareness definately inhibits mutual cooperation.

2. Mechanisms:
   The absence or imperfection of CSO-government interaction mechanisms, such as state social support, and consultative and advisory bodies inhibit productive cooperation. While these mechanisms are not the only means for CSO-government interaction, they are the primary and formalized standard methods. It is difficult for CSOs to initiate cooperation with the government, without engaging a government established mechanism. Respondents discussed the use of memorandums as a mechanism for successful interaction with governments. Within the country context, memorandums are significant as they ensure longer-term cooperation that survives changes in personnel, and etc.

F. Valuable Insights

Progress towards effective CSO-government partnerships holds the potential to create new civic space in the target region, rather than deepening the mistrust between CSOs and governments through directly confronting the shrinking of civic space. As CSOs and governments are slowly developing mutually beneficial working partnerships within the target countries, and governments are making some movements towards enabling CSO activities this opportunity to create a new civic space is emerging.

> *Central Asian NGOs should focus on building partnership relationships with those in the state with whom they share common goals, on their expert potential, and on becoming carriers of innovative practices that are of interest for all. In this way, civil society can find space, albeit limited, where the state accepts the role of NGOs in society. Instead of confronting the state with its failures, advocacy needs to seek out those counterparts in the state that have similar problems to solve, use innovation as a tool to build trust, and work with them as partners towards common goals. The key success factors are a constructive approach and a willingness to learn, by all involved parties.[16] - Philipp Reichmuth*

G. Recommendations

The following recommendations to raise the awareness of government and CSOs about the other, and work with governments to implement or improve existing mechanisms of interaction are based on the feedback and recommendations from the respondents. Addressing these areas have the potential to strengthen not only CSO-government interaction and cooperation, but also the actual relationship between the two parties. Improving this relationship is a necessary factor in both combating the shrinking of civic space, and expanding civic space. Government perception of CSOs as a partner and a peer, rather than a threat prevents restrictive legislation and works to balance the tri-sectoral power - a necessary element for a truly democratic society.

1. Awareness Raising:
   The foundation for any type of cooperation begins with mutual understanding and trust.
   Based on the poor attitude and perception of each other, it is apparent that both governments and CSOs have limited knowledge of their other party and do not know each other's values and capacity. This can only be overcome through communication, advocacy, and awareness raising. Civil society needs to continually engage and educate their governments in order to change the perception. If CSOs want the environment to change, than they have the responsibility to learn about their government and governmental procedures. CSOs leaders can also change the system from the 'inside,' by becoming elected public officials and/or repeatedly engaging their politicians and the parliamentary process.

   Civil society can support this change of attitude and perception through multi-sectoral, regional events that create a space for CSO-government dialogue and the opportunity for governments to learn from their regional peers. This can be further strengthened by expanding the geographical focus to learn from other CIS countries. Respondents identified that the governments in the target countries have a tendency to replicate each other's initiatives and movements. Therefore spreading messages of

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[16] https://www.opendemocracy.net/democraciaabierta/philipp-reichmuth/finding-new-civic-space-in-central-asia/feed

progressive CSO-government cooperation has the potential to encourage governments to follow-suit.

For example, the Kazakh experience of state support mechanisms demonstrates a positive step towards effective CSO-government interaction, with practices that can be replicated and practices that can be strengthened. The practice of the government consulting and implementing the advice and services from a leading CSO can serve as a role model for both governments and CSOs, demonstrating that both sectors can work collaboratively, as peers to achieve a common objective. Details of this partnership needs to be shared with the CSOs and governments of the target countries. Similar agreements can be employed not only to establish the granting cycle and monitoring and evaluation systems, but also to complete a needs assessment and survey identifying what services the government can outsource and the capacity of CSOs to fulfill those services.

2. Work with governments to implement or improve interaction mechanisms:
   a. **Public Councils (PCs):** Public councils are a governmental decision-making process, equivalent to city councils in the United States with elected members and mechanisms for citizen engagement in decision making. They are growing in popularity and use among the majority of the target countries. However, the effectiveness of PCs are limited and there is a need for training and capacity development of PCs at both the national and local levels.

   b. **Government Advisors:** A governmental advisor is representative from a specific target group that is tasked to work with the akim or mayor of a community. The advisor provides information and suggestions regarding community administration that affects his/her target group. The government advisor mechanism is active in Kazakhstan, with representative from disability focused CSOs advising local akim on issues that are specifically related to disability, such as city development, infrastructure, and etc. This mechanism is working with relative effectiveness in Kazakhstan, and can be replicated in the target countries within multiple thematic areas. However, as observed by a respondent, the effectiveness of government advisors depends fully on the "*personality of the adviser and the personality of the minister or akim.*"

   c. **Public-private partnerships:** Many respondents also suggested that the public-private partnership (PPP) model would be an effective cooperative mechanism in Kazakhstan. According to the World Bank, PPP is "a long-term contract between a private party and a government entity, for providing a public asset or service, in which the private party bears significant risk and management responsibility and remuneration is linked to performance[17]. While private parties are generally considered to be members of the business sector, the implementation of social

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[17] https://pppknowledgelab.org/guide/sections/1-introduction

entrepreneurship within civil society may blur this distinction, and thus PPPs become another form of CSO-government interactions.

3. <u>Strengthen State Support Mechanisms:</u>
   The three agencies are providing either state support contracts or granting mechanisms.
   Respondents identified that the granting mechanism is more flexible, and allows CSOs to develop institutionally as an organization. Additionally, grants are awarded based on the quality and reputation of the organization, rather than a price factor. This increases the likelihood of quality project implementation. It may be advantageous to raise the awareness of CSOs and governments, encouraging the use of the state granting mechanism rather the state social contracts.

   Additionally, respondents noted that state social contracting and grants in all countries that employ this mechanism, is in need of improvements. This related both to increasing a capacity of CSOs themselves, their professionalism, and training government officials to effectively implement such mechanisms. In this respect sharing best practices between the CSOs and governments in target countries and beyond would be beneficial. Intergovernmental interaction is especially vital, since governments within the target countries have a greater tendency to trust and replicate the practices of the neighboring governments, rather than initiating novel initiatives or trusting and accepting civil society led change.

Appendices

Appendix A - Documents and Reports Reviewed for Desk Research of Country Situation

Azerbaijan

APA News. *Over 5100 mass media registered in Azerbaijan*. (January 31, 2017). http://ru.apa.az/novosti-azerbaydjana/sotsium/v-azerbajdzhane-zaregistrirovano-bolee-5100-smi.html

AZERTAC. *Azerbaijan endorses strategic road maps for development of national economy and main economic sectors.* (December 6, 2016). http://azertag.az/en/xeber/Azerbaijan_endorses_strategic_road_maps_for_development_of_national_economy_and_main_economic_sectors-1016958

Business Association of Women Entrepreneurs - ASIA, official page. http://awe-asia.com/

Caucasus Network for Children, official page. http://caucasuschildren.net/

Council on State Support to NGOs under the Auspices of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, official page. http://www.cssn.gov.az/index.php?lang=en

Disabled Peoples' International, official page. http://www.dpi.org/

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Appendix B - Participant Description Per Country

In total, 68 (37 women and 31 men) were involved in the research

Country	Data Collection Method	# of Participants (male/female)	Description of Participants
Azerbaijan	in-depth interviews	10 (5/5)	CSOs leaders
	focus group	1 (1/0)	CSOs leader
Kazakhstan	in-depth interviews	15 (5/10)	1. CSOs leaders - 8 2. State structures representatives - 3. Ministry of Religion and Civil Society Affairs (head of the department), Majilis of the Parliament (former member), Civil Initiatives Support Center - CISC (director) 3. International organizations representatives - 4 World Bank (Office in Kazakhstan), UNDP, Soros-Kazakhstan Foundation, International Center for Non-Commercial Law (ICNL)
	focus group	4 (3/1)	Experts in the area of innovative communications. Internews, Medianet, Fact-checking resource
Kyrgyzstan	in-depth interviews	14 (5/9)	1. State structures representatives - 2 2. International organizations representatives - 2 3. CSOs leaders - 10
	focus group	2 (1/1)	CSOs leaders
Tajikistan	in-depth interviews	14 (6/8)	1. CSOs leaders - 11 2. State structures representatives - 2 3. Independent expert on public organizations legal support - 1
	focus group	1 (1/0)	CSOs leader
Turkmenistan	in-depth interviews	5 (3/2)	CSOs leaders
	focus group	2 (1/1)	CSOs leaders

Appendix C - Interview Guide

In-depth interview scenario

Hello! My name is _____. I represent _____.
We are partners of the Association for the Development of the Civil Society of Kazakhstan (ARGO) in the implementation of the Partnership for Innovation (P4I) project. Within the framework of the project, we carry out interviews with CSO development experts in 5 countries in order to identify promising areas for the development of partnerships and networking between CSOs of CA countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan) and Azerbaijan, innovative practices and communication mechanisms, interaction with the state, constraints and lessons learned. The consolidated report will be presented at the ARGO Conference at the end of June 2017 in Almaty.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the study and have allocated time for our conversation. It is very important for us to know your opinion. For any type of research, it is important to fix information, and our research is not an exception. To avoid distortion of information, your words will be recorded (on paper / on a dictaphone). I hope you do not mind. This will allow us to maintain the reliability of your words and simplify the further processing of data. This interview can be anonymous, if you want it.

For the facilitator: Prior to answering the main questions, fill in a questionnaire:
- Name (if you wish to indicate), country of residence
- Name of your organization, position
- Experience in the sector / in these thematic areas: ecology, public health, human rights, gender equality, LSG, public participation of youth, etc. (underline the necessary or add 'Other')
- Experience with government agencies in your country
- Experience of participation in international programs

 (if the respondent insists on anonymity, these data are recorded only for internal reporting.) If not, it is possible to quote the respondent in the Report).

(NB! During the interview, it is better not to offer answers at first, only if the respondent finds it difficult to answer the question, ask a suggestive question. The answer options can be read in order to clarify whether you understood the answer correctly, and to facilitate the processing of information.

Block 1- Interaction with CSOs

1. Describe your experience of partnership with CSOs of other countries in the region over the past 5 years (CSOs of which countries / areas / areas of cooperation (ecology, public health, human rights, gender equality, LSG, youth participation and Other)

1. What mechanisms of interaction have been applied - share specific examples (mechanisms: participation in joint projects, networking, exchange of information, etc.), which mechanism worked best and why
2. How communication was carried out in the framework of interaction (conferences, mailing lists, website, Google groups, social networks (FB, ???), etc.), what mechanisms were the most effective?
3. Describe what, in your opinion, are constraints and risks for interaction with (a) CSOs within the country and (b) CSOs in the region (from the point of view of legislation, financial support mechanisms, development of common strategies and approaches, coordination, etc.). If possible, give specific examples.
4. What, in your opinion, lessons learned and conclusions for the future (the next 5 years) can be drawn from your experience
5. In your opinion, what spheres / directions of cooperation between CSOs of Central Asia and Azerbaijan are most promising in the next 5 years? Give examples of possible joint projects / recommended actions
6. Your general conclusions / recommendations for the future

Block 2 - Interaction with government agencies.

1. Describe your experience of interaction with government agencies of your country for the past 5 years (areas of cooperation, specific examples)
2. What mechanisms of interaction have been applied - give specific examples (mechanisms: participation in joint activities / implementation of the state social contracting / implementation of the state grants / provision of services / information exchange / participation in the work of public councils, etc.), what mechanism worked best and why
3. What innovative practices of interaction could you offer (based on your experience, perhaps the experience of international partners)?
4. Describe what, in your opinion, are constraints and risks for interaction with (a) CSOs within the country and (b) CSOs in the region (from the point of view of legislation, financial support mechanisms, development of common strategies and approaches, coordination, etc.). If possible, give specific examples.
5. What, in your opinion, lessons learned and conclusions for the future (the next 5 years) can be drawn from your experience
6. In your opinion, what spheres / directions of cooperation between CSOs and the state in your country are most promising in the next 5 years? Give examples of possible joint projects / recommended actions
7. What tools of public participation and advocacy and recommended actions in the dialogue with the state can be most effective for achieving measurable results in the next 5 years?
8. Your general conclusions / recommendations for the future

Block 3 - Mechanism for implementation of SSC

1. In which thematic areas the mechanism of the state social contracting is the most applicable?
2. Please, consider in detail, as an example, the issues of state social financing (which mechanism is used? Specific examples of successful projects? What did not work and why? How was done monitoring and evaluation and by whom? Risks and recommendations for the next 5 years) in:
   • Kyrgyzstan - on the example of the State Agency for Physical Culture and Sports of Youth of the Kyrgyz Republic;
   • Tajikistan - on the example of the Committee on Women and Family Affairs under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan;
   • Kazakhstan - on the example of the Center for Civil Initiatives.

If the respondent has already fully answered some of the questions earlier, they can be omitted.

If you are interested and want to receive more detailed information, then you can leave us your e-mail, and we will send all the information you are interested in.

Many thanks for your answers! You helped us a lot!

Meeting of communications experts
Topics for discussion

Date: 3 May 2017, 15:00
Venue: ARGO office (36, Zhandossov Street, Almaty)
Participants:

	Name	*Organization*	*Country / City*
1	Adil Jalilov	Fact checking	Almaty
2	Igor Brattsev	Media Net	Almaty
3	Nazym Toganbayeva	Internews	Almaty
4	Nikita Kovalyov	ARGO	Almaty
5	Maya Meiretkulova	Researcher	Ashgabat
6	Berkeli Atayev	Partner	Ashgabat
7	Fuad Dargyahly	Partner	Baku
8	Valentina Galich	Internews KP	Bishkek
9	Artur Sarkizov	CSO	Bishkek
10	Timur Nurlobekov	Partner	Dushanbe

Introduction: within the framework of the project, we are carrying out interviews with CSO development experts in 5 countries in order to identify promising areas for the development of partnerships and networking between CSOs of CA countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan) and Azerbaijan, innovative practices and communication mechanisms, interaction with state, obstacles and lessons learned, recommendations for the future. The consolidated report will be presented at the ARGO Conference at the end of June 2017 in Almaty.

List of questions for discussion:
Since the study deals with regional interaction, it is important to discuss with the communications experts field the following topics:
- Existing and potential communication mechanisms from the point of view of communications,
- Opportunities and constraints for communications taking into account the specifics of countries and modern technologies.

In particular, the following questions on these aspects:
- Access to information;
- Communication Objectives;
- Communication channels;
- Technical capabilities.

TERMS OF REFERENCE
for Expert Research and Preparation of

Analytical Report on Regional and Cross-Border Thematic Areas of CSOs Cooperation in Azerbaijan and Central Asian Countries.

Countries: Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan

PROGRAM: PARTNERSHIP FOR INNOVATIONS

Functional Name:	**Expert for preparation of the Report on regional and cross-border cooperation of CSOs in Azerbaijan and Central Asian Countries.**
Duration:	60 working days planned, including country visits.
Payment Terms:	One-time payment following satisfactory completion and approval by ARGO of all documents, including the final Report.
Travel Costs:	All costs for Expert's travels to other countries (transportation costs, per diem, expenses covering future travels for research) to be included into a total amount and specified in the financial proposal. ARGO accepts for payment economy air tickets only. Cost of higher class air tickets will be borne by the Expert her-/himself.

INTRODUCTION

The "Partnership for Innovations" Program (P4I), ARGO is inviting an Expert for conducting a research and preparation of **Analytical Report on regional and cross-border thematic areas of CSOs cooperation in Azerbaijan and Central Asian (CA) Countries.** The program is funded by USAID and will be implemented in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Azerbaijan till 2020. The research data will be based on the findings of previous research projects conducted by ARGO.

The Research and Report are designed to identify perspective areas, mechanisms and communication tools for the development of partnership and network interaction between CSOs of Azerbaijan and CA countries in specific thematic areas based on the current conditions for the civil society development, and to ensure sustainability of the Program results.

The Research and Report shall assess topical thematic regional dialogues with participation of CSOs, and effective mechanisms of CSO-state interaction for Azerbaijan and CA countries.

The Research and Report shall identify and document best and innovative practices, and lessons learned from regional and cross-border CSOs cooperation, and make recommendations on how the Program participants and CSOs could improve mechanisms of coordination through thematic network cooperation, promote and introduce innovations in the civil societies, and how best they can represent CSOs' interests on the national and regional levels.

EXPERT RESEARCH GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goal: Identify perspective areas for the development of partnership and network interaction between CSOs of Azerbaijan and CA countries in specific thematic areas (environment, public health care, human rights, gender equality, rights of people with disabilities, education, regional migration, youth civic participation, etc.).

Objectives:
- Determine approaches, mechanisms and communication tools for the development of partnership and network interaction in specific thematic areas:
  - between CSOs of Azerbaijan and CA countries,
  - between CSOs and the state in the CA region and Azerbaijan.
- Identify and describe best and innovative practices, and lessons learned from regional and cross-border cooperation between CSOs, and the CSO-state interaction.
- Elaborate recommendations on how the Program participants and CSOs could improve mechanisms of coordination through network interaction, promote and introduce innovations in their civil societies, and represent CSOs' interests on the national and regional levels.
- Identify priority areas for international programs based on the needs of the CA countries and Azerbaijan.
- Identify the most effective mechanisms of practical implementation of international programs for the purpose of ensuring the region's sustainable development goals.

Based on the results of the Expert Research to develop recommendations with regard to the following questions:

1. What perspective areas, opportunities and conditions exist for CSOs of Azerbaijan and CA countries to develop effective partnership and network interaction in specific thematic areas?
2. What innovative approaches to communication and network interaction of CSOs will be most effective and applicable to the development of partnership and thematic networks between CSOs of Azerbaijan and Central Asia?

3. What public participation and advocacy instruments, as well as recommended actions in the dialogue with the state will be most effective for achieving measurable results within the next 4-5 years?
4. In which thematic areas is the state social contracting mechanism most relevant? For instance, please examine in detail the issues of state social financing in:
    - Kyrgyzstan - under the State Agency for Youth Physical Culture and Sports of the Kyrgyz Republic;
    - Tajikistan - under the Committee for Women and Family Affairs under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan;
    - Kazakhstan - under the Civil Support Initiatives Center.
5. What are the limitations and risks for the sustainability of regional and cross-border partnership and network initiatives of Azerbaijani and Central Asian CSOs?
6. What thematic areas are the most perspective in terms of implementation of international programs? Describe the current context, lessons learned and develop recommendations for future.
7. What mechanisms of practical implementation of international programs are most effective? Describe the existing experience, draw lessons learned and develop recommendations for future.

The Analytical Report should take into account the current political, economic and social environment while considering opportunities and risks for further development of CSOs regional initiatives.

EXPECTED EXPERT RESEARCH FINDINGS

Expected findings of this Expert Research will comprise a comprehensive analytical Report in Russian and English that should, as a minimum, contain the following:

1. **Explanatory Note**
    - Brief description of the Research
    - Context and goal of the Research
    - Key conclusions, recommendations and lessons learned

2. **Introduction**
    - Goal of the Research
    - Key issues under consideration
    - Methodology
    - Research structure

3. **Regional and cross-border thematic areas of cooperation of CSOs of Azerbaijan and CA countries**:
    - Full description of the Research.

4. **Findings, conclusions and recommendations**

5. **Attachments to the Expert Research Report**
   - Scope of work
   - List of persons interviewed
   - Conclusion after country visits
   - List of documents reviewed
   - Questions asked and conclusions based on the results

The Report shall not exceed 40 pages (excluding attachments).

MECHANISM OF IMPLEMENTATION

Primary responsibility for the Research management rests with ARGO/P4I Office in Almaty, Kazakhstan.

ARGO will conclude a contract with the Research Expert. ARGO and Chief of Party will be responsible for maintaining contact with the Research Expert in order to provide documentation on the Program, and help arrange interviews with local partners and experts in the countries.

The Research will be conducted during **March - May 2017**.

Presentation of the Research findings will be held in May 2017 with participation of experts.
The Report (draft and final version) should be submitted to ARGO Office in Kazakhstan.
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Aliya Ilikpayeva, e-mail: i.aliya@argonet.org