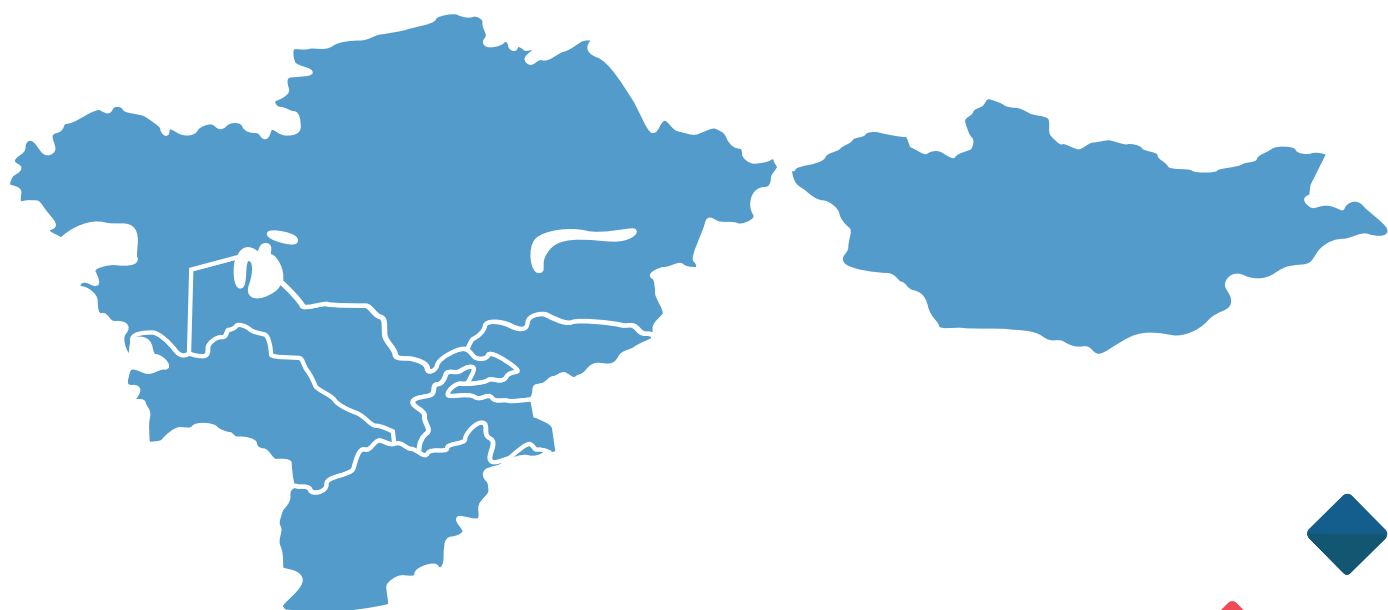


LOOKING INTO THE FUTURE

*Development of Central Asian
Civil Society - 2025*



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Development of Central Asian Civil Society - 2025



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УДК 061
ББК 66.7
В 40



Looking into the Future Development of Central Asian Civil Society – 2025 – Almaty, 2020

ISBN 978-601-7419-01-1

“Looking into the future Development of Central Asian Civil Society - 2025” is a vision that reflects the role, trends and prospects for the development of civil society in Central Asia for 5 years. The Vision represents an image of civil society (‘We are the ones who’) and defines strategic priorities for the development of civil society in Central Asia

This document is made possible by the support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The contents are the sole responsibility of the Civil Society Development Assosiation (ARGO) and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.

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Looking into the Future

Development of Central Asian Civil Society - 2025

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Preamble

“*Looking into the future Development of Central Asian Civil Society - 2025*” is a vision that reflects the role, trends and prospects for the development of civil society in Central Asia¹ for 5 years. The Vision represents an image of civil society (‘We are the ones who’) and offers ideas, ways of development and innovative solutions on the priorities as viewed by civil society itself.

The Vision is expected to have a longer term influence and impact for the Central Asian countries:

- Establish a regional identity and image of civil society as a positive factor of change;
- Advance the engagement of civil society as a whole - citizens and institutions in governance processes;
- Proactively position the transformation of civil society to reflect multigenerational, digital and environmental developments;
- Be the basis for advocacy and collaboration at all levels – civil society, at the multi-sectoral level, at the level of government and international organizations. Represent the voice of the Central Asian regional civil society;
- Contribute to the national civil society strategies set at the governmental level; and
- Be a genesis to coordinate the development of future projects and strengthen regional networks.

This document embodies the developments, experiences and ideas expressed by the participants of the *II Innovation Festival in Central Asia* and the X International Conference *Insights into Development*, organized by the Civil Society Development Association - ARGO, held in Almaty, Kazakhstan, June 2019. More than 300 people from 13 countries (Argentina, Afghanistan, Belarus, Germany, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Russia, USA, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Sweden),² jointly formulated The Vision based on a wide and inclusive understanding of the civil society ‘ecosystem.’ Social entrepreneurs, academia, civil society organizations and civil activists defined the vision through a prism of their own identity and role in the development of Central Asia³.

This Vision was formed to empower Central Asian civil society’s presence in the emerging common international civic space and join the community in addressing global problems. The world is changing, and globalization has fueled the emergence of a single space that transcends national boundaries, linking cultural, informational, rule of law and economic fields. Additionally, globalization and the information age has brought about the realization of interlinked problems that also transcend national and regional boundaries. Apart from

¹ This Vision was co-designed and represents civil society in Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Counties unite by the Innovation for Change in Central Asia – www.innovationforchange.net.

² <http://argonet.org/mezhdunarodnaya-konferenciya-istorii-razvitiya-vzglyad-iznutri-den-vtoroj/>

³ For methodology, please see annex 1.

governments, these issues are addressed by civil society organizations working at the regional and international levels. Central Asia occupies a vast territory,⁴ however its presence and role on the global level is not visible, nor is it identified as a single region. The countries' leaders have the political will to change to increase Central Asia's presence at the global level, with the leaders acting together in multiple realms - economic, political, cultural, etc. Accordingly, civil society institutions also recognize the necessity to formulate parameters of civil society regionality.

The Vision strives to capture an understanding and definition of Central Asian civil society's present day phase of development; Envisions the most optimal development scenario in the shorter term, i.e. five years; and Positions Central Asian civil society on a common strategic path for long-term development and sustainability. The Vision sets the cooperation priorities of Central Asian civil society institutions, guiding successful implementation of plans and strategic programs which determine the vectors of modern development for the region within the global community.

The Civil Society Development Association (ARGO) is the initiator and organizer of the Vision. Our special thanks to the civil society organizations, experts, consultants, editors and technical specialists whose contributions made the development of the Vision possible.

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Central_Asia

I. The concept and role of civil society in the modern world

The concept and definition of ‘civil society’ is ever evolving and changing. In 1998, the World Bank defined civil society as a wide range of nongovernmental and nonprofit organizations that are involved in social life, expressing the interests and values of their members or other persons, and are guided by ethical, cultural, political, scientific, religious or philanthropic implications⁵. This and other similar definitions have been widely used since the early 2000s by both academia and among international development specialists to identify the sphere beyond the family, state and market. This was the guiding concept within the initial period of development of CIS following independence.

However, as the world changes and evolves, it is becoming more apparent that this definition is severely limited, excluding the individuals and informal groups that shape and influence society. Klaus Schwab, the founder and executive Chairman of the World Economic Forum, believes: Nongovernmental organizations other civil society representatives play a diverse set of roles in social development. Over the last two decades, these roles have changed as the external environment for civil society changes⁶.

In an era of social media, big data and artificial intelligence the civil society sector is expanding, giving a new impetus to organizations and active citizens. People can easily connect, reach out to their governments and establish constructive dialogue on issues of interest, concern, and pressing matters. An inclusive civil society - both formal and informal is becoming more apparent and relevant as both are developing in response to advances in technological, communication, and more subtle changes in society⁷.

It is difficult to conclusively determine its size, influence and impact of this sector at the global level due to its complex nature. One study compared the third sector to that of nations, describing it as the “Volunteer Land,” where approximately 54 million people work full-time, and it comprises of more than 350 million people across the world⁸. Civil society as a sector transcends organizational and national borders.

Today the concept of civil society is not limited by nonprofit organizations, political parties, mass media or other citizens’ associations, but it is **an aggregate of individuals, groups, institutions and associations united by** caring attitude toward what is going on in their own yard, village, and town. These are the citizens who participate in decision-making and bear responsibility for such decisions⁹.

From this context of the concept, **the role of civil sector** is implemented in four main areas.

⁵ The Bank’s Relations with NGOs: Issues and Directions (World Bank 1998 b)

⁶ The Future Role of Civil Society. -WEF - Report, 2013. - 64 p.

⁷ <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/04/what-is-civil-society>

⁸ Routledge Handbook of Entrepreneurship in Developing Economies. - Edited by Colin C. Williams, Anjula Gurtoo, 2016. – P.199.

⁹ <http://cso-central.asia/mezhdunarodnaya-konferenciya-istorii-razvitiya-vzglyad-iznutri-den-pervyj/>

First – Partnership through development programs civil society institutions implement many projects at different levels, such as:

- Local – budget performance and community involvement in the territorial development strategy.
- National – state social contracting (implementation and results evaluation), through supporting a fair and competitive tender process for services.
- Regional – partner projects in Central and Southern Asian countries.
- Global – monitoring the execution of international conventions which have been ratified by Central Asian countries, and implementation of projects and programs with foreign partners to adapt worldwide social innovative technologies and best practices.

Second – Advisory Role

- Public councils.
- Professional experts' pool from civil society.
- Dialogue platforms, for example including the Civic Forum.
- Program evaluation by independent consultants from civil sector as a transparency and accountability tool of state programs, resulting in determination of quality of state programs implementation and proper use of citizens' taxes.
- Development and introduction of innovations in civil society. Innovative technologies exist not only in industrial and economic spheres, but in social sphere, too (when old technologies do not work). For example, crowdfunding, makeathones, social project innovative labs and other. Through these technologies social tasks can be addressed in a more effective manner.
- Road maps.

Third – Informational Role

By using innovations and digital technologies, civil society institutions disseminate knowledge and provide training for the community. For example, one of the key challenges of civil society is to promote and implement the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals to bring understanding of the Goals to every family and every citizen in our countries.

Fourth – Regional Cooperation of Central Asian Countries and Best International Practices

It implies that when governments of the region's countries strive for regional integration, in our opinion, civil society cannot be isolated from global challenges and deal with developing civil society in one country only. An example would be the work locally with communities and in rural areas, good governance issues, access to decision-making at the local level and so on. For example, inclusive planning with community involvement, inclusion of vulnerable groups and civil activists at the local level.

II. International development trends of civil society institutions and the adaptation of experiences in Central Asia

Based on international trends in the civil society development have been institutionalized a number of mechanisms that can be adapted to support the Central Asian experience.

1. International standards, principles and criteria of civil society development indexes.

There exist a number of civil society associations in the world that use civil society development evaluation tools. The introduction of these mechanisms in Central Asia will allow building an effective model of civil society.

A premier international body in the civil society sector is the **World Association of Non-Governmental Organizations (WANGO)**. The Code of Ethics and Conduct for NGOs¹⁰ represents an aggregate of fundamental principles and standards to guide civil society organizations. An objective of civil society institutions in Central Asia is commitment to the principles of this Code of Ethics and Conduct for NGOs.

The **CIVICUS Monitor**¹¹ is an example of a practical civil society evaluation mechanism that promotes and monitors the health and status of civil society. This research tool provides real-time data on the status of civil society and civil freedoms in 196 countries. Currently, the CIVICUS Monitor assesses the status of civil society in the Central Asian countries as “closed.” To build the principles of Central Asian civil society according to international trends, it is necessary to improve the CIVICUS Monitor’s assessed position of the sector.

Additionally, the accession of the **Open Government Partnership (OGP)**¹² is essential for civil society institutions to implement international experiences of civil society development. To be a member of the OGP, governments commit to defend the principles of an open and transparent government by adopting the Open Government Declaration, meet specific eligibility criteria and undergo an OGP value test.

The Human Freedom Index by The Cato Institute¹³ represents the status of human freedom based on dimensions that cover individual, civil and economic freedom. The Index criteria are as follows: the Rule of Law; Safety and Security; Movement; Religion; Association, Assembly and Civil Society; Expression and Information; Personality and Relationships; Size of Government; Legal Framework and Ownership; Access to Funds; International Trade Freedom; and Credit, Labor and Business Management.

¹⁰ <https://www.wango.org/codeofethics/ComplianceManual.pdf>

¹¹ <https://www.civicus.org/index.php/what-we-do/innovate/civicus-monitor>

¹² <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/process/joining-ogp/>

¹³ <https://www.cato.org/human-freedom-index-new>

The Democracy Index measures the level of democracy within a country. Compiled by the Economist Intelligence Unit¹⁴ the Index is based on 60 indicators grouped together into five different categories measuring pluralism, civil freedoms and political culture. In addition to numerical estimate and ranking, the Index classifies each country by one of the four types of regimes: pure democracy, imperfect democracy, hybrid regime, and authoritarian regime (For example, in 2018 Kazakhstan ranked 144th out of 167).

Being guided by the conviction that the natural resources of a country are owned by its citizens, the **Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI)¹⁵** is an established global standard to encourage transparent and accountable petroleum, gas and mineral resources management. This is an effective corporate social responsibility strategy for the transnational companies.

2. Civil society involvement in alternative monitoring.

Central Asian countries participate in more than 200 international conventions and multilateral agreements. To evaluate the state's performance of meeting the obligations assumed under international agreements, an alternative mechanism of monitoring is required so as nongovernmental partners can express opinions and ensure transparency of the actualization obligations process itself. Civil society's involvement is valuable and renders support to the state for effective nationwide implementation of international conventions. It is most effective when the role of civil society is defined and the rights and obligations, such as participation in developing plans and the process of state programs, presenting monitoring mechanisms of introduction of goals, access to funding and other resources, as well as participation in the reporting process is formalized.

3. International and global cooperation

The last decades have seen a steady trend in civil society institutions crossing borders and crossing the globe to elaborate effective mechanisms of responding to the challenges of our time in different spheres: - i.e. security, the protection of human rights, economic and social development, poverty reduction, environmental protection, education, science, culture, emergency humanitarian and technical response, and peacemaking.

¹⁴ <https://www.eiu.com/topic/democracy-index>

¹⁵ <https://eiti.org/who-we-are>

III. Insights into the portrait of civil society in Central Asia

As part of the *10th International Conference Insights into Development* interactive dialogue platforms were attended by representatives of different organizations from Central Asia and CIS countries, Europe, USA, Latin America, and South-East Asia. The participants discussed values, identity and commonality elements, and the differences within previous and current social and political climates. The innovative conference and communication technologies used at the conference, for example, Open Space, World Café, and etc. offered the participants a totally new experience of self-reflection; implementing democratic principles in practice; having an opportunity for management and modeling; and demonstrating and delivering inclusion and involvement methods.

Inspiration, creativity, and an atmosphere of freedom and openness allowed the participants to look at themselves from the inside, creating the common portrait of Central Asian civil society, as defined by guiding principles and values, uniting citizens into a single sector, and distinguishing it from the civil societies of other regions.

The principal distinguishing factors of Central Asian civil society is:

- ✓ Social cohesion
- ✓ Intercultural respect
- ✓ Tolerance, mutual respect, and sensitivity;
- ✓ Patience and gratitude;
- ✓ Commitment to values (land, family, cultures);
- ✓ Entrepreneurship and innovations;
- ✓ Cultural identity, brilliancy and diversity; and
- ✓ Gathering as communities, collective collaboration, and common consciousness.

These distinctive qualities are indicated in the principles of the activities of civic activists and civil society organizations of Central Asia, as well as in all the factors uniting the civil society of the countries in the region.

Principles governing the activities of civil society organizations and civic actors in Central Asia

1. **Mission compliance principle.** CSOs and civic actors engage in activity that contributes to developing the civil sector.
2. **Principle of value promotion by own example and practices.** CSOs and civic actors translate corporate culture into practice and implement all the principles that underlay their activities.
3. **Principle of being proactive.** CSOs and civic actors analyze and predict developing situations in and surrounding the civil sector, determining the probability of occurrence of new needs and contributing to their formation. CSOs and civic actors are proactive while remaining open to everything new.

4. **Partnership principle.** CSOs and civic actors are focused on joint mutually beneficial activities with different people and organizations. To implement the mission, CSOs and civic actors streamline, support and continuously expand a partner network.
5. **Professionalism and expertise principle.** People with experience, special knowledge, skills and abilities to address the challenges of civil society.
6. **Target groups' need-oriented principle.** CSOs and civic actors strive to understand their target groups in the best possible manner (their interests, problems, needs) and approach their activity based on such understanding. CSOs and civic actors have a common focus with the target audience.
7. **Systemic principle.** The mission of CSOs and civic actors is implemented through addressing an aggregate of various interrelated tasks based on an integrated and cascade approach.
8. **Availability and transparency principle.** CSOs and civic actors provide informational, financial and physical availability of their services for their target groups. Information about civil society organizations' activities, including program and financial components, are available for all stakeholders.

Factors unifying civil society in Central Asia

Civic responsibility - Responsibility to society for the development of their civic position, a system of socio-political guidelines, a set of attitudes in the field of their activities.

Human rights and freedoms - Support of universal understanding of human rights and freedoms as an aggregate of natural rights and freedoms, such as the right to life, freedom and personal integrity that a human being possesses by virtue of birth and that do not depend on state affiliation, as well as a possibility to perform certain actions to satisfy self needs and interests.

Synergy - Understanding the value of cooperation, contribution, assistance, and participation through joint action to achieve a greater common good.

Regional identity beyond political and geographic boundaries - Establishing the significance of socio-spatial identification in a regional aspect when an environment becomes not just a condition of collective living, but a subject matter of social designing and using the overall capacity of a region to improve living standards and life quality.

Social justice - Shared social justice requirements as applicable to social existence conditions by all civil society members when social justice sets boundaries within which distributive justice is applied.

Equality and inclusion - Organizing a social environment in the form that ensures equal rights in public administration and provides equal access to the distribution of benefits to all members of society. Inclusion can be provided in education, at the workplace, in a cultural aspect, and in the family.

Progress – A movement forward, improvement.



Figure 1. Approaches to the work of civil society in Central Asia

Figure 1 presents conceptual approaches in the civil society institutions activity in Central Asia. From the perspective of these approaches the Central Asian priority areas were formulated.

From a historical perspective, Central Asia’s current status of civil society is characterized as being:

Well-established - The sector has grown significantly due to the influence of professional organizations, organizations with high throughput capacity and CSOs guiding the sector, as well-established and developed legal frameworks within the region.

Legitimate – Public opinion leaders influence both legislation and donor agendas. Equal participation at the international level. They operate proactively rather than reactively.

Developing – Transfer from process-oriented to result-oriented; Response to reduction of donor funding; Blurred industry lines with a focus on businesses – social entrepreneurship; and consolidation.

Experiencing difficulties – Less donor funding; Less CSOs focused on advocacy rather than on services; Restrictive environment and narrowing civil space; “Old negative relations” – i.e. CSOs are grant eaters, a negative perception from some government agencies.

What is the portrait of civil society in Central Asia?

Thus, civil society in Central Asia - consists of active national and regional citizens with progressive thinking, those who determine the vector of development and are the first to initiate a movement. They are patriots influencing politics, without being political decision makers, and leaders who influence public opinion, determining a balance between power and society. They are the initiators of change, who promote new knowledge, progress and innovations. They are the researchers and analysts who have knowledge and skills in the area of civil society development, who are ready to share them with all stakeholders through trainings, mentoring and volunteering. They are the creators of good deeds who more frequently advocate promotion of the interests of society and vulnerable groups.

IV. Strategic priorities of civil society development in Central Asia

This section provides conceptual priorities for the development of civil society in Central Asia.

How does Central Asian civil society envision itself by 2025?

Civil society in Central Asia is distinguished by high civic responsibility; it is first a bearer of values associated with improving the world, respect for human rights and democracy; and a history maker influencing important decisions at the state level and in significant processes occurring in the country and region.

To achieve this vision there is a need for restarting its development priorities

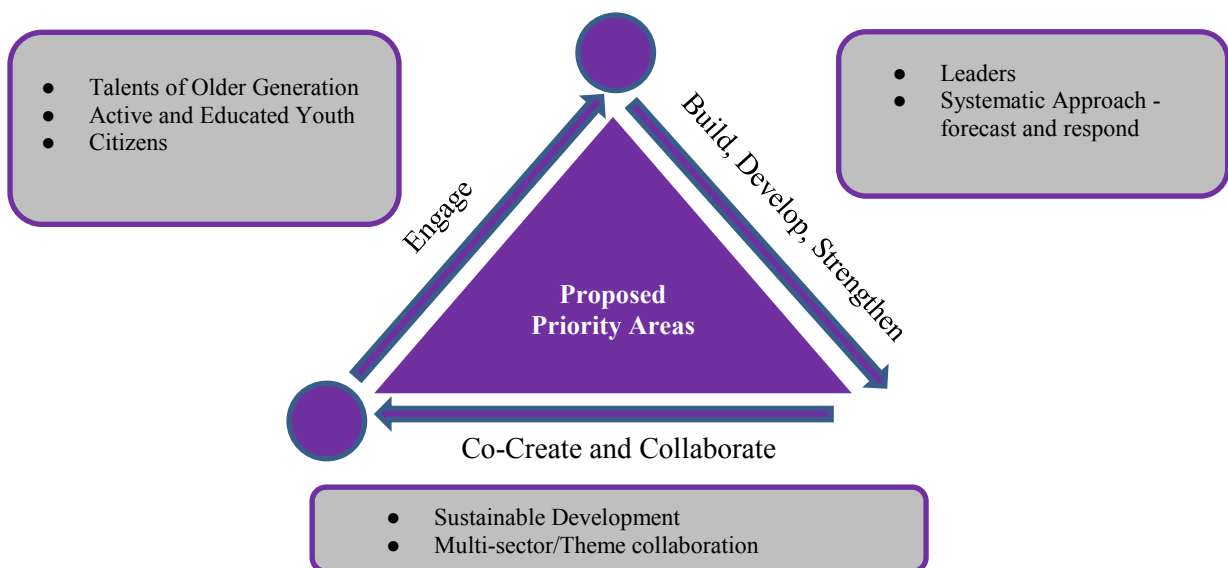


Figure 2. The logical chain of civil society actions on the implementation of priority areas

While striving for the world that maintains diversity, strengthens social cohesion, multicultural dialogue and understanding, tolerance, mutual respect, gender equality, innovations, entrepreneurship, as well as identity, security and dignity of all people, Central Asian civil society sets the following **strategic priorities for the coming 5 years**.

Priority 1. Regional development of Central Asia

Goal – sustainable development of the Central Asian region to adequately respond to new global challenges

Objectives:

- ✓ **Support expansion, deepening and activation of the complex of relationships between Central Asian countries in its entirety.** Develop a long-term program for further political dialogue, implementing large-scale social projects and joint regional development programs, addressing pressing issues including: countering the threats of violent extremism and terrorism, migration, transboundary waters, and promoting cultural and scientific exchange.
- ✓ **Elaborate and implement a single integration regional socio-economic policy** to prevent intensive economic intrusion of China, and counteract its political and economic dominance in the region.
- ✓ **Strengthen the role of public diplomacy and expand direct relations between the region's countries.**

Priority 2. Sustainable and inclusive development

Goal – social integration, inclusive effective governance in civil society to address pressing problems, combat poverty, and achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

Objectives:

- ✓ **Involvement and constructive participation of all stakeholders**, including businesses, civil society, public movements and government authorities in addressing the tasks of sustainable community development and achievement of the SDGs at the national level.
- ✓ **Develop, create and monitor multilevel Roadmaps** on the adaptation and implementation of the SDGs, including the localization of the SDGs targets and indicators subject to the countries' national priorities and 'leave no one behind' principle.
- ✓ **Initiate and implement programs with greater involvement of the SDG's context** that will: a) contribute to the fair distribution of wealth, reducing poverty and making communities sustainable; and b) enhance a social effect of local development programs through cooperation with international organizations and local governments to implement innovative projects for sustainable community mobilization and development, inclusive planning with a territorial approach to local development (TALD), and local self-governance.
- ✓ **Improve the effectiveness of local and regional institutional mechanisms that promote and assist in implementing the SDGs**, including advocacy to contribute to the visibility of the SDGs and public monitoring of SDGs implementation.
- ✓ **Evaluate National Voluntary Reviews on SDGs**, within the context of the Central Asian SDG implementation agenda.
- ✓ **Support effective regional interaction** between Central Asian countries and other international partners, a) focusing on specific characteristics of each individual country;

and b) implementing networking, capacity building, monitoring, and awareness raising in SDG processes at the global, regional, national and local levels.

Priority 3. Equal rights – equal opportunities

Goal – create an inclusive environment of human rights and freedoms, and ensuring good quality of life for all members of society.

Objectives:

- ✓ **Empower and promote the social, economic, and political inclusion** of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion, economic, or other status through targeted civil society interventions, multi-sectoral dialogue and collaboration - including the adoption and implementation of rights-based international conventions.
- ✓ **Enable full and active participation of every member of society** in all aspects of life, including civic, social, economic, and political activities, as well as participation in decision-making processes.
- ✓ **Promote an enabling civil society.**
- ✓ **Targeted inclusive initiatives** strengthening the position and improving the lives of vulnerable groups, including children with disabilities, women, and the elderly populations to exercise their citizen and human rights.

Priority 4. Civil society interaction with government

Goal – improve mechanisms of interaction with government authorities to promote effective, transparent, accountable governance, and to increase the expert capacity of civil society organizations on program monitoring and evaluation, public policy, civic participation, advocacy in various thematic areas.

Objectives:

- ✓ **Position the role of civil society as a facilitator** of cross-border, cross sectoral, intergovernmental, and interdisciplinary cooperation.
- ✓ **Partnership and a constructive dialogue with government bodies**, including a) assistance in implementing international conventions and the SDGs; b) improving access for vulnerable groups to good-quality social services; c) improve regulatory mechanisms of public advisory councils and forms of public control; d) civil society organization state support mechanisms, including social contracting; and e) the introduction of innovations.
- ✓ **Introduce legal norms and mechanisms** that ensure wide community involvement in government and socially significant decision-making process.
- ✓ **Develop local self-governance** in terms of a) stimulating community involvement and interest in addressing local issues, b) citizens' participation in the evaluation of the effectiveness of local governmental activities, c) monitoring the use of budgetary

resources, and d) strengthening independence and accountability to the community of lower level managers in tackling pressing regional issues.

Priority 5. Multisectoral/Thematic collaboration

Goal – identify collaboration opportunities to use the superpower of civil society to build a better future

Objectives:

- ✓ **Create a favorable civil society operating environment** within the conditions of narrowing civic space in the modern world due to a changing political environment.
- ✓ **Initiate and implement strategies and programs aimed at developing a peaceful, just and inclusive society** that will provide equal access to justice, and will be based on respect for human rights recognized by states, including the right to develop, rule of law and freedom of association.
- ✓ **Introduction and wide dissemination of civil society innovations** through regional cooperation and increasing the information and technical capacity within the region.
- ✓ **Strengthen the expert capacity in civil society**, expand a platform to develop networking interaction and multiply opportunities for public initiatives in order to achieve their own goals at the local, regional and global levels.

Priority 6. Civil society multigenerational paradigm

Goal – active involvement of youth and senior generation to foster a renewed movement of civil society.

Objectives:

- ✓ **Strengthen a multigenerational civil society** through highlights and learnings from the first generation, facilitating virtual and face-to-face dialogue, shared knowledge exchange and multigenerational collaboration between the first, second and third generations of Central Asian civil society.
- ✓ **Targeted implementation of multigenerational initiatives** addressing common challenges within society.
- ✓ **Generate a civil society of shared and multigenerational leadership**, empowering all generations to actively engage in their local, national, regional, and global communities.

Priority 7. Youth leadership development

Goal – prepare proactive and educated young people that are relevant to the changes and challenges in the 21st century with new professions and competencies.

Objectives:

- ✓ **Prioritize and strengthen education and academic youth-focused civil society** through a researched based capacity building approach, resource implementation, mentoring and growth through networking.
- ✓ **Engage multisectoral collaboration**, linking education, youth focused civil society and the labor sector to streamline and adapt the education system to meet regional economic and market needs.
- ✓ **Transition leadership to the next generation(s) of civil society leaders.**

Priority 8. Social entrepreneurship

Goal – develop a social entrepreneurship ecosystem in Central Asia

Objectives:

- ✓ **Create an enabling operating environment for social entrepreneurship** by addressing all levels of the ecosystem - government support, enabling organizations, funders, beneficiaries, customers, and local, national, and regional networks of peer social entrepreneurs.
- ✓ **Strengthen the institutional capacity of social entrepreneurship** including targeted learning opportunities, mentorship, and the development and implementation of a social enterprise impact assessment at the social and economic levels.
- ✓ **Create a Central Asian social entrepreneurship dialogue platform and a Central Asian social enterprises rating system**, bringing together all stakeholders – representatives of different ministries, businesses, public organizations and civil society to strengthen the financial and regulatory environment supporting new entrepreneurship.

Priority 9. Initiative on climate change adaptation and mitigation

Goal – improve the quality of people’s lives in the current climate change conditions and protect and preserve local, national, regional and global natural ecosystem.

Objectives:

- ✓ **Implement the Paris Agreement** that defines a global action plan to curb global warming as a contribution to climate change adaptation, which is a direct and far-reaching threat to people and communities across the world, and leads to irreversible consequences.
- ✓ **Develop cooperation and networking cooperation** to implement projects and programs aimed at improving the practical knowledge and skills of local communities to protect natural ecosystems, recover and preserve biological and genetic resources, and conserve water and energy resources, as well as implement adaptation measures, mechanisms and green technologies, mitigating climate change consequences. An example is CCRI – the Community Conservation Resiliency Initiative – an initiative that is being successfully developed in a number of countries across the world.

- ✓ **Initiate and implement strategies and programs focused on a concern for people**, with a special emphasis on developing healthy and sustainable communities, women and children, people in poverty and the population residing in high-risk areas. They are particularly vulnerable from the perspective of a climate change impact and, as a rule, have more limited adaptability.
- ✓ **Implement projects aimed at improving the quality of life** in cities; creating sustainable cities with a comfortable living environment, clean air, infrastructure, and access to energy, water and safe products.

Conclusion

Central Asian civil society is as diverse as the countries themselves, encompassing the entire spectrum within the countries, from emerging democracies with shrinking or threatened civic space, to essentially a closed civic space. Traditionally, civil society support for the region has targeted CSOs, which has resulted in a disconnected civic space that is highly sensitive to the same threats that are witnessed globally. This shrinking of civic space in Central Asia negatively impacts fundamental human rights, including the freedom of association and speech. Aspects of this problem includes a lack of dialogue between all parties and a multigenerational gap with the younger generation having limited engagement in civil society. The traditional response of CSOs all over the world has been to try and combat the shrinking itself. However, this approach is unnecessarily confrontational and deepens the mistrust between CSOs and governments. Instead, the response to the shrinking of civic space is to counteract it, open new civic spaces, engaging civil society in its entirety and build multi-sectoral trust between civil society, government, and the private sector.

In actuality, civil society in Central Asia is not limited to nonprofit organizations, political parties, mass media or other citizens' associations, but is an aggregate of individuals, groups, institutions and associations united by care and concern for their own yards, villages, and towns. It is a society of citizens concerned about the social, economic, political, cultural and moral situation. These citizens actively participate in decision-making and bear responsibility for such decisions.

This document, *Looking into the future Development of Central Asian Civil Society - 2025* identifies for the first time ever, civil society in Central Asia as such, shaping its portrait, identifying its difference from other regions, and capturing an understanding of the role it plays in the development of the region and society as a whole. It is the product of civil society as a collective. It is the collective voice of Central Asia's grassroots, unifying and re-defining civil society in both action and as a stronger and more powerful actor to shape government and donor community policy. This new identity lends confidence, direction and purpose of Central Asian civil society.

Implementation of priority areas and the achievement of *The Vision* will reboot Central Asian civil society, making it an active and flexible society with a regional identity and individual country-specific approaches. It will have a new generation of capable and professional leaders who will be balanced between service orientation and advocacy. It will be focused on cooperation and integration of thematic areas to achieve common goals, and will demonstrate a commitment to ideas and principles of freedom and democracy. It will be a society reflecting the culturally rich, diverse and multigenerational reality of Central Asia.

Annex 1: Methodology

The vision is the product of the collective input and feedback generated from more than 300 participants, speakers, and expert consultants of the *II Innovation Festival in Central Asia* and X International Annual *Insights into Development* Conference, held in Almaty, Kazakhstan, June 2019. This is a unique dialogue platform for the region, enabling bringing civil society together to exchange experiences, expertise, innovations and connect to address common problems. The participants represented civil society from 13 countries, including Central Asian countries, Afghanistan, Mongolia and others. Information for The Vision was generated both through discussion formats within the conference itself, but also through data gleaned from the registration forms, expert working groups.

An editorial team of international and local experts structured The Vision, through real-time analysis of the information and feedback provided during the conference blocks: “The Past,” “The Present” and “The Future.”

Based on the goals and objectives, theoretical aspects in this document are built upon the provisions of Central Asian countries’ Constitutions, legislative acts regulating the civil sector activity, and general theoretical and applied research, as well as relevant domestic and foreign research.

The methodological tools are underlain by principles and methods of general sociology, political science, data of specific social studies, content analysis, research in the area of public and political relations, principles of historical and cultural analysis, comparative analysis, etc.

The materials of the Civil Society Development Association (ARGO) formed the factual basis of the Report.



Civil Society Development Association (ARGO)

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