

AFKAR III

Sharing Best practices and Learnings

Designed for **Aid Effectiveness Partners**
and **Development Practitioners**

Reflection notes developed by: **AFKAR III Technical Assistance Team**



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PREFACE

PREFACE

"Sharing Best Practices and Learnings from AFKAR III Program – Designed for Aid Effectiveness Partners and Development Practitioners" is part of a series of publications emerging from AFKAR III Program/ Technical Assistance tasks (2015-2018) to support civil society organizations' capacity building. It draws on the lessons learned from the special monitoring and evaluation process of CSOs' projects benefiting from AFKAR III Program.

This booklet is the essence of lessons learned and best practices of AFKAR Program. It has been developed throughout the life span of AFKAR III project. The idea of the booklet started when the team leader of the Technical Assistance to the project Mrs. Najwa Ksaifi did a review of literature about the fourteen years of AFKAR experience and the recent research related to the status of CSOs in Lebanon. This review resulted in "Background Notes". It was revealed that the experience of AFKAR program and its various CSOs' experiences in the implementation of their projects are not documented in order to build on their results to support further projects in the future. In addition, it was also found that there is a crucial need for lessons learned and best practices to be shared with the representatives of CSOs in order to better articulate their proposals for funding purposes and build on the ongoing experiences and learnings. The booklet is directed also to the Donors who are funding and supporting civil society organizations with the objective of enriching their selection criteria of projects for funding. The work was the result of inputs from several contributors. Thanks goes to AFKAR team members, AFKAR Program Manager Ms. Youmna Chacar Ghorayeb and her team members Ms. Jocelyne Assaf and Ms. Micheline Moubarak, for their field work follow up on the projects' activities of AFKAR III grantees together with the team of the procurement Department headed by Mr. Youssef Saad and his team members, namely Ms. Aline Saade, Ms. Rania Kiwan and Ms. Amal Al Jurdi. Also thanks goes to all the Technical Assistant team supported by TRANSTEC who provided technical assistance to AFKAR III Program. The "Background Notes" together with other research conducted by Ms. Hala Moughniyeh were developed into a position paper on the "situation of CSOs in Lebanon nowadays". Another team member Ms. Sawsan Mehdi, the first Monitoring and Evaluation expert to join the project, assessed the 13 AFKAR CSOs projects funded by the EU and conducted intensive Monitoring and Evaluation





field visits accompanying AFKAR Program team and team members from the procurement department. The field visits resulted in updating the Monitoring and Evaluation Form, conducting individual coaching to each of the AFKAR III CSOs and writing a detailed report to complement the assessment done. Another intensive round of M & E field visits were again conducted by the second M & E expert Mr. Rodolph Gabriel, who had further updated the M & E form and implemented learning workshops and conducted one to one coaching with every CSO of AFKAR III program.

The monitoring and evaluation process would not have been the same without the training component of AFKAR III project. A series of on-going capacity development workshops were conducted in the various areas of management, finance, legal, partnership and networking, etc. implemented by trainers experts Mr. Rami Allaw, Mr. Ali Murad and Ms. Nadine Haddad under the supervision of TA senior training experts Mr. Simon Bachawaty and Mr. Nizar Amine .

All of the above activities, resulted in best practices and lessons learned which led the team leader and the M & E expert to document the process in order for AFKAR team to share their learning experiences with the Donors as well as the Senior Directors of the various CSOs and the Coordinators of the Public Sector in the related Ministries who are in charge of communication with the CSOs.

A special thanks also goes to Ms. Hoda Hawa, Expert in Editing, who updated the literature review, restructured and edited the content of the booklet in the way it is now.

INTRODUCTION

AFKAR Program, which was initiated by the Office of the Minister of State for Administrative Reform (OMSAR) in January 2004, and with funding made available by the European Union, had provided, in coordination with the assistance of the procurement Department, administrative and financial support to projects by civil society organizations in Lebanon.

Over the years, AFKAR Program had developed the experience and impact to become a unique model of its own right – a bridge between civil society and public administration contributing to reinforcing communication between the public sector and non-governmental organizations and institutions.





In its three phases, AFKAR I (2004-2008) with one-million-euro fund and AFKAR II (2008-2011) and AFKAR III (2010-2020) with funds reaching three-million-euro and ten-million-euro respectively, provided support to projects working to promote the rule of law, respect of human rights and civil liberties, strengthen democracy, empower the marginalized, and more recently under AFKAR III, contribute to socio-economic development. In total, AFKAR gave support to 64 projects and over 200 civil society organizations and partners of organizations which were implementing the projects, which were selected according to the European Union criteria.

Moreover, AFKAR created a space for dialogue between active nongovernmental organizations and decision makers which had contributed to success stories, such as changing laws and empowering communities. To capitalize on this rich experience, AFKAR III Program incorporated from the beginning a technical assistance mission: Technical Assistance for the Provision of Capacity Building in the Framework of AFKAR III Program (ENPI/2015/370-806). The Technical Assistance envisaged three purposes:

- 1) to strengthen the overall capacities and accountability of the civil society organizations and increase their involvement in policy dialogue with the Lebanese government;
- 2) to assist the Office of the Minister of State for Administrative Reform in managing the implementation of civil society initiatives granted to civil society organizations under AFKAR III;
- 3) to raise awareness concerning the necessity of development and reform in the socio-economic field and the importance of networking between the multiple stakeholders through effective communication, visibility and outreach of AFKAR III projects and activities to the public.

Based on the above, AFKAR III/ TA laid a strategy that brought together all the elements of these three purposes under the title: Elements of the Strategy for AFKAR Program to Activate Public Policies and Cooperation between Official Institutions and Civil Society. The process included, among others, an overall capacity building, a sequence of workshops for consultations on a partnership platform between the CSOs which benefited from AFKAR I, II and III programs and coordinators designated by 13 ministries, along with proposals, as well as an advocacy and communication strategy. It is anticipated that what had been achieved in the TA process will constitute a stepping stone to bring organization and continuity, and reinforce the dialogue and cooperation on public policies





between civil society and public institutions, as well as complement the ongoing work of other ministries cooperating with civil society organizations.

Capacity building is one pillar of this strategy. In a way, capacity building is the learning material product of the TA process, which was reached through a participatory training approach encompassing representatives of CSOs and government institutions both as trainers and trainees. The product is made up of three publications, one of which is this booklet:

- Manual "Directional Steps to Reinforce Dialogue and Cooperation on Public Policies between Civil Society Organizations and the Public Sector";
- Handbook "Designing and Managing Projects for civil society Organizations";
- Booklet "Sharing Best Practices and Learning from AFKAR III Program – Designed for Aid Effectiveness Partners and Development Practitioners.

The comprehensive participatory approach to capacity building is an ever evolving process that offers lessons learned, thus making it possible for lessons to be shared for the public benefit.

~AFKAR III Program and Technical Assistance Team.~

I. Sharing Best Practices and Learnings from AFKAR III Program

CSOs grantees under AFKAR III were targeted as effective vectors of democratic and socio-economic development and reform. Along the long chain of actions and responsibilities needed for the successful implementation of such diversified projects, AFKAR team took up a specific role: to technically support CSOs for the best implementation of the programs. Strengthening the skills of partners' organizations, building their capacities, along with those of the government staff, through consultations, trainings and dialogue, constituted, and still constitute, main parts of this process in order to consolidate good governance concepts and practices.

Based on its experience in capacity building with more than 64 projects, AFKAR Program moved on





to an all-encompassing approach to capacity building of civil society organizations, one that integrates training workshops into a comprehensive plan of evaluation and project follow up, to reach eventually both civil society and the public sector.

It is a tailored approach, where every training session is set to identify the difficulties that confront the projects, in order to deal with these difficulties as needed and overcome the obstacles and draw lessons for the future. The objectives are:

- 1) to improve the system of work and its means and applications,
- 2) to clarify concepts and manage knowledge and exchange of information,
- 3) to enrich the experience, refine skills, raise competence and enhance performance.

Moreover, AFKAR Program has pushed the training experience further by targeting civil society organizations representatives who received support from the program and the 13 ministries (with whom its work intersected during the past decade and a half) to participate in dialogues, meetings and workshops in order to enhance cooperation between them and build partnerships. As such, AFKAR Program laid the ground for capacity building on public policy dialogue between civil society and the public sector in a unique pilot workshop prepared by representatives of both sectors. In this pilot workshop and most other workshops, capacity building relied on a participatory experimental methodology (including exercises, interactive activities and case studies).

In this booklet, lessons from AFKAR Program good practices in capacity building and empowerment of CSOs are drawn from these participatory training workshops and the field work of the Monitoring and Evaluation process of 13 CSOs beneficiaries of AFKAR III program.

However, the monitoring and evaluation results are addressed here within a broader context that seeks to identify general aspects of the situation of CSOs in Lebanon and underline the main challenges facing them based on surveys and field work undertaken by AFKAR team. These include: 1) a survey in 2017 of the 27 civil society organizations that benefited from AFKAR programs I, II and III and which are participating in the initiative to establish a partnership platform with coordinators from 13 ministries; 2) the monitoring and evaluation reports of AFKAR III for the years 2017 and 2018; 3) AFKAR III 2017 Needs Assessment Report; in addition to 4) other observations during the capacity building process in general.





The text in this booklet is divided into three parts. The first addresses the situation of CSOs in general in Lebanon. The second deals with the CSOs' challenges, based mainly on AFKAR/TA findings, but also includes other sources. The third part is the most extensive, and presents the findings and learnings from the monitoring and evaluation process of projects supported by AFKAR III. The text ends with recommendations based on the findings. The strengths and weaknesses of civil society organizations in Lebanon, the challenges and the lessons drawn from these findings, can offer aid partners and development practitioners some insight into ways to enhance the criteria and process of selection and, therefore, put more effort in helping lay the ground for sound projects in the future.

II. Situational Overview of CSOs in Lebanon

In contemporary usage, civil society is broadly defined as "an arena of un-coerced collective action around shared interests, purposes and values, with distinct institutional forms, at least in theory, from the state, family and the market". However, the definition is more complicated in practice as "the boundaries between state, civil society, family and market are often complex, blurred and negotiated".⁽¹⁾ As such, a wide variety of formal and informal organizations are considered within civil society. Examples are "non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community-based organizations (CBOs), academia, journalist associations, faith-based organizations, trade unions", etc. with varying capacities, expertise and scope ⁽²⁾.

In Lebanon, civil society is diverse and active and has a long history dating back to the mid -19th century and still operating under the 1909 Ottoman law. With the liberty and ease in legalizing associations, civil society organizations had proliferated to reach more than 10,000 registered organizations. Given the wide diversity of CSOs and the impact of the political system's confessional

⁽¹⁾ Centre for Civil Society State at London School of Economics.
http://www.centroedelstein.org.br/PDF/Report/ccs_london.htm

⁽²⁾ UNDP. "UNDP and Civil Society Organizations: A Toolkit for Strengthening Partnerships", 2006.
<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?page-view&type=400&nr=2141&menu=1515>





power structure, the complexity of identifying civil society boundaries in Lebanon is pronounced, as the links are very strong between the religious, family, civil and political arenas. Nevertheless, the most adopted model in Lebanon is the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) model, though cooperatives and charitable associations are well entrenched. Also, the most recent approaches to civil society still rely mainly on the NGOs model as an entry point to analyze civil society, while other types of associations can also fall under the definition of civil society, such as syndicates or unions and religious institutions. This makes it difficult to comprehend the diversity and the complexity of CSOs in Lebanon as well as their multi-layered interactions, including relation with public institutions.

A History of Service Provision and Beyond

Seen according to function and roles, civil society organizations are performing the following: 1) service providers, 2) agents for development and 3) agents for policy change. Most Lebanese CSOs fall under the first two categories– namely service providers and agents for development – at the expense of work on policy. CSOs' roles, nevertheless are diverse, and concentrated mainly where government presence is weak, such as in health, education and care services, economic development and rights' awareness, or in training and empowering local developments. Lebanese civil society's focus on services has been exacerbated due to political developments over the years. Prior to the 1975-1990 war, the civil society constituted mostly of political parties and trade unions as well as long established religious charitable welfare institutions. The war later paved the way for the proliferation of different kind of organizations, mostly NGOs with focus on the provision of basic services in order to fill the gap in the absence of central services. Because of the historical context in which it emerged, Lebanese civil society became largely made up of service-providing associations. After the 2006 war and, most recently, following the war in Syria, service provision was further expanded within civil society including non-sectarian and non-partisan NGOs. In a survey done by Beyond Reform and Development (BRD) study⁽³⁾, 28% of the NGOs surveyed focus on service provision, 37% on capacity building and 46% on awareness raising campaigns. The study cites the "inade-

⁽³⁾ Mapping Civil Society Organizations in Lebanon, Beyond Reform and Development, 2015.
https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/delegations/lebanon/documents/news/20150416_2_en.pdf



quacy or insufficiency of government services" as the main reason driving CSOs into service delivery, a trend that was further exacerbated by the influx of refugees post-2011.

Development projects, including support for income-generating activities and infrastructure, are also widespread in civil society, though to a much lesser extent than direct services and humanitarian aid. CSOs see themselves as filling the existing gap between services provided by public institutions and existing needs on the ground.

Parallel to the vast majority of Lebanese CSOs that are working on services and development, comparatively few have taken up advocacy and policy work. This was a post-war phenomenon beginning in the 1990s. The concerned CSOs presented themselves as agents for "the promotion of democracy, human rights, rule of law and social justice", as well as sustainable human development. Such organizations exist today mostly in the form of secular non-partisan NGOs.

However, only 8.5% of those surveyed by the BRD study were able to "contribute to the policy-making process and voice their constituencies' concerns directly to policy makers, at the local and national levels", while 31% declared that they managed to "formulate policy solutions and recommend reforms at the level of practices, laws or policies at the local and national levels". Even though some success stories can be mentioned as certain CSOs succeeded, to some extent, in having a limited impact on policies on the national level (affecting few laws related to environment, election, women against violence and special needs), the fact is that it is difficult to evaluate the tangible effect of CSOs efforts on policies in Lebanon.

CSOs Relationship with Government

The government has welcomed the role of CSOs in service provision and, in some instances, has even institutionalized it. The Ministry of Public Health, for example, relies heavily on a network of Primary Health Care Centres (PHCCs) across all regions of Lebanon that are run, for the most part, by NGOs. Similarly, the Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA) has a network of Social Development Centres (SDCs), some of which are operated by NGOs. Both of these networks are regulated by the ministries and integrated in their national service delivery plans, although the decree on the criteria for associations contracted by the ministry has not been put into practice yet. Though these NGOs





maintain a non-governmental status, they act as the primary vehicles for basic service delivery and are essential to the concerned ministries but do not intervene on the policy level.

The refugee crisis has also accentuated the dependency of government institutions on their non-governmental counterparts. A joint government/UN plan, the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP), has activated a nation-scale coordination scheme between government (at the national and local levels), UN and NGOs, for the effective and efficient provision of services in all sectors, including food security, health, education, water and sanitation. Ministries and municipalities have been actively involved in these efforts through national inter-sectoral and inter-agency planning committees, sectoral steering committees and sectoral working groups.

While few advisory bodies do exist, one can fairly say that there are currently no government mechanisms in place to ensure systematic consultation with civil society for policy making. As some policy makers do consult with civil society, these initiatives tend to be sporadic and highly dependent on the policy makers as individuals.

Furthermore, the vast majority of these initiatives are initiated by CSOs, and not by state authorities. The AFKAR program, however, is an exception as a Lebanese public institution within OMSAR, has been committed since 2004, to support CSOs involved in human and civil rights through the AFKAR program. This allowed the nascent CSOs to emerge, consolidate their knowledge and launch debates around fundamental issues, such as women's rights, drug addicts' rights to heal, democracy and elections, and ecological concerns.

In parallel, CSOs – especially rights based CSOs – learned to convey their messages and pressure the government into taking specific actions, mainly through lobbying followed by projects funding. Generally speaking, CSOs often have to resort to pressure methods (lobbying, communication campaigns, etc.) to claim a space at the decision making table (in ministries, parliamentary committees, etc.). This seems to make the most tangible impact on public opinion, as it has been the case for early marriage, women's participation in politics or understanding and healing drug addiction.





III. Challenges to CSOs: General Perspective

Challenges that confront CSOs in Lebanon do not only stem from the political environment or state disposition, but also from internal conditions affecting the state of civil society organizations, taken individually or collectively.

A. The profile of CSOs: Internal challenges

One of the main paradoxes of civil society organizations revolves around human resources, and the efficiency of internal structures and governance. While CSOs' achievement goals in Lebanon are related to their specialization, which must be managed by adequate human resources and expertise, many of the CSOs are lacking the adequate infrastructural resources.

The CSOs landscape differs greatly in terms of size, resources, capacity and experience, considering that 80% of CSOs in Lebanon are small organizations and have less than 10 staff members (according to BRD study). The weaknesses cited cover internal managerial governance structures. Most CSOs admit the need of support in terms of internal management and thematic expertise. The AFKAR III Program, observed the following whilst monitoring the 13 CSOs beneficiaries involved in socio-economic projects:

- Difficulties with managing the project, particularly in applying the EU procedures in terms of financial and procurement rules;
- Difficulties in monitoring and evaluation and reporting, as well as a poor knowledge of the project documents.
- Lack of strategic approach versus projects and initiatives.
- Absence of cumulative work and capitalization is considered one of the reasons behind the high staff turnover.
- Work based on interventions instead of sustainable development policies.
- Lack of documentation and the archiving of the institutional memories of the institutions





The other problem is related to sustainability, given the NGOs' high reliance on funds from international organizations. As a result, these organizations shift away from their original missions to satisfy the requirements of the availability funding calls, and focus on similar target groups (refugees, women, children, etc.). At the same time, project-based partnerships developed on an "official" level (through MOUs or other kind of agreements) are not transformed into a long-term partnerships that would tackle policies (on the local or national level).

B. The Profile of CSOs: Cooperation Challenges

The CSOs as a body may have acquired a presence and a more assertive demeanor, but is still lacking in systemic cooperation and the breadth of citizens' and volunteer participation. Cooperation among CSOs has been described as uneven. Although cooperation was common in the form of alliances or joint campaigns, it was issue oriented in most cases.

In the questionnaire which was completed by 27 AFKAR grantees, all CSOs reported that they coordinate with other CSOs based on specific thematic areas and/or geographies and/or special relationships. None of them reported a complete absence of coordination with other CSOs. Almost half of the respondents reported being part of a coalition and/or network of CSOs. The cited coalitions/networks corresponded systematically to the thematic area of the CSO. This would let us assume that partnerships among CSOs are frequent and common and that inter-CSO sectoral strategies exist. However, this is not consistent with the AFKAR M&E reports that show that there is not enough coordination between CSOs and no common strategies. This may be explained by several factors:

- ◆ Coordination culture at CSO level is limited to "sharing information" and discussion meetings.
- ◆ CSOs working in the same sector often differ in their understanding of a problem and/or diverge in their approaches to a solution.
- ◆ CSOs working on the same thematic area compete over the limited financial resources made available by donors.





C. Difficult Access to Policy Makers

Many of the problems of dealing with public institutions are related to the public institutions' limited expertise and human resources, and lack of coordination, combined with a near-absent culture of policy making as well as a lack of trust among policy makers to undertake policy changes. Political instability continues to prioritize broad political questions, which in turn undermines any attempt to set national priorities and a future vision.

According to a Needs Assessment Report conducted by AFKAR in November 2017, the challenges of dealing with public entities are multi-layered:

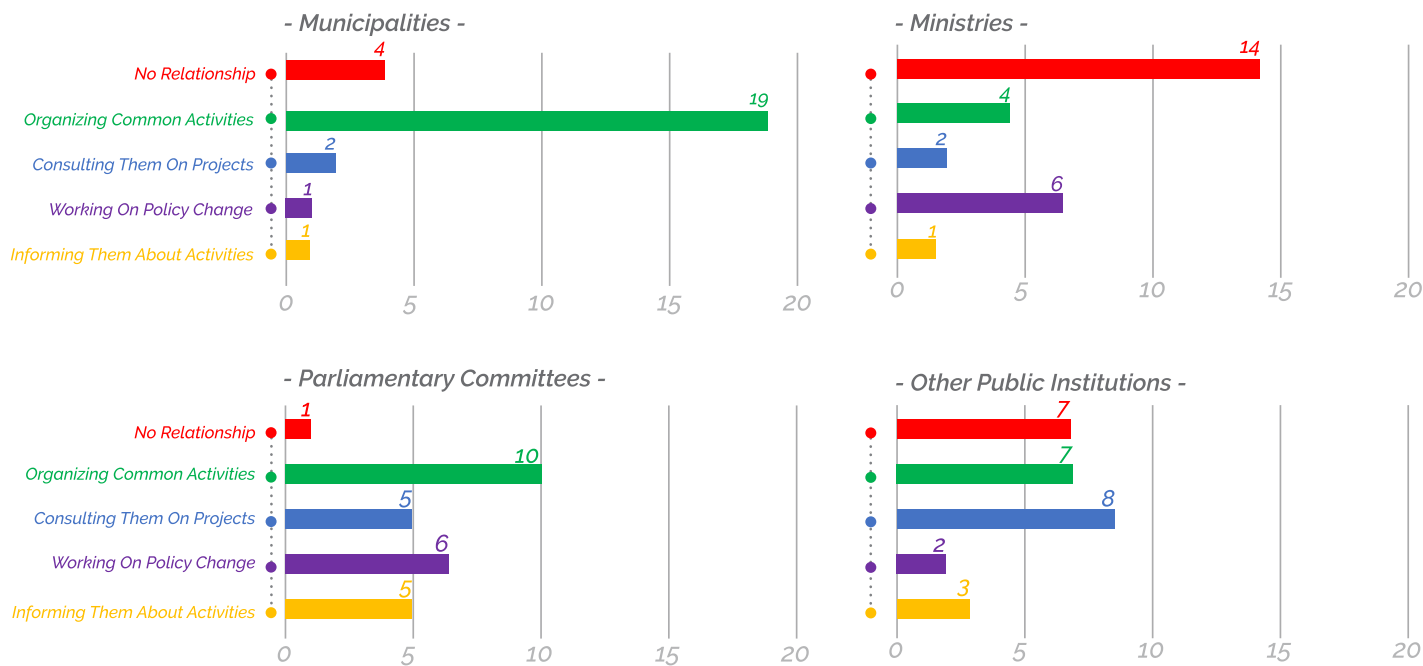
- Limited and punctual?? Coordination based on needs or specific request for permits.
- Limited available data when it comes to rules and regulations that are continuously under development.
- Difficult access to available data.
- Stressful and limited communication process.
- Lack of mutual trust between the CSOs and the governmental entities.

Another survey covering the 27 AFKAR beneficiaries showed that the aim of CSO coordination with public institutions seems to be the facilitation of the CSOs' planned activities rather than initiating a policy dialogue. In fact, the majority of CSOs reported that they coordinate with municipalities and ministries to organize common activities, while only 6 out of 27 engage with ministries and parliamentary committees on a policy level, and only 1 CSO engages with municipalities on a policy level.



CHALLENGES TO CSOS: GENERAL PERSPECTIVE

The CSO's engagement with public institutions





IV. Capitalization and Learnings from AFKAR Program

Through the years, many lessons were learned, via the process of capacity strengthening of more than 64 AFKAR CSOs and many other NGOs that were part of the grantees of AFKAR Projects, on how to accompany AFKAR partners in quality management. This section will focus on the main conclusions and deductions pertaining to the CSOs capacities and capabilities to manage grants in general and EU grants in particular.

The Technical Assistance given to AFKAR III program in order to enhance the implementation's quality of the 13 CSOs grantees' under AFKAR III permitted a rigorous M&E process supported by OMSAR procurement team in charge of the grant management part.

Monitoring and Evaluation has been at the center of attention in the field of development assistance, and therefore has been constantly evolving in its definition and methods of implementation. The most widely used definition, and perhaps the most reliable one, notably for the purpose of this report, is that of the European Union. The most used definition is in providing an understanding of monitoring as "the routine collection and analysis of information to track progress against set plans and check compliance to established standards. It helps identify trends and patterns, adapt strategies and inform decisions for project and program management."

i- Monitoring and Evaluation: The Task

The process of Monitoring and Evaluation was multifaceted, ranging from the review of work plans and budgets of grantees, to field visits to each of them, in order to outline key project staff, their division of labor, and working environment, and to spot unclear or problematic areas in their proposals, as well as to hear their own views on what needs to be included in their projects.

The objective was to build the grantees' institutional capacities to implement their projects, and to offer on-the-job coaching as an adopted approach for Monitoring and Evaluation. The process





demanded a continuous monitoring of the evolution of capacities and project administration of the CSOs, based on the initial capacity development framework, as well as delivering tailored capacity building and coaching to those CSOs that are most in need of it. This included advising the CSOs on how to better (1) read and follow the EU reporting guidelines; (2) interpret and measure indicators; (3) describe impact, outcomes and results; (4) narrate the activities, including opportunities and challenges met during the first year of the project; (5) highlight the relationships between the partners themselves; (6) correlate the partnerships developed with national and local stakeholders, including private sector and local authorities; and 8) address the challenges related to communication and visibility. Furthermore, this backing has helped the grantees to better reflect the profile of their beneficiaries.

The Monitoring and Evaluation process was supported by capacity building workshops for the CSOs. AFKAR III / Technical Assistance organized workshops on Financial and Legal Regulations and Report Writing, Sub-granting Rules and Procedures, Partnership and Networking (with attendance by government staff also), Qualitative Data Collection Technique, Project Cycle Management (PCM), Proposal Writing and Reporting (PPW) and Monitoring and Evaluation (MER), as well as "Capacity Building of Media Production and Outreach".

One of the main tasks undertaken by AFKAR III program was to create a space for learning, cooperating and exchanging experiences, hosting both the CSOs representatives as well as the coordinators designated by ministries in a sequence of workshops to establish a partnership platform, an effort culminating in the Pilot capacity building workshop on dialogue on public policies between civil society and official institutions.

ii- Monitoring and Evaluation: Findings and Learning

Monitoring and Evaluation findings are diverse due to the great differences among the CSOs in terms of size, experience, date of establishment, and staff structure. The main problems are associated with the absence of sound project management. The gaps in this respect could be traced to: 1) the writing of the proposal was in several cases externally assisted from outside the concerned CSOs; 2) the unbalanced project team among less capable CSOs; 3) the lack in the feasibility of the projects approach at the onset of the projects implementation; 4) the lack of prior experience in





project management by the teams contracted by the CSOs; 5) the scale of activities of the projects requiring more time than the assigned; 6) other challenges facing the CSOs in measuring their indicators. The technical assistance team avoided the mainstream "one size fits all" approach, and worked closely with AFKAR program team, to adapt and validate existing tools of M&E to the nature and specifications of the grantees, and the purpose of the program as a whole.

The following are the main findings of the Monitoring and Evaluation process:

A. In Relation to Project Design

#1 Project design development

It is not enough that a good project is designed on paper, and at times by experts other than the CSOs themselves. The M&E team observed that some CSOs, when writing their project design, depended on outside sources and lacked pre-design interaction with other stakeholders and beneficiaries.

#2 Monitoring and Evaluation and project design

Less consideration is given to Monitoring and Evaluation by CSOs. The CSOs do not have a clear M&E approach and lack well-designed monitoring tools.

The Monitoring and Evaluation approach could be a tailored approach designed on the basis of CSO's management capacities and available tools. AFKAR/ TA exercised such an approach, and once the M&E process was clarified the CSOs reconsidered their position on the matter.

#3 Project design and implementation

Some project proposals are ambitious and impossible to complete within the expected time frame. In this respect, these projects would have required a preparatory phase prior to activities' initiation, a factor that should be taken into account during project conception phase.





B. In Relation to Implementation and Management

Since AFKAR team intervention is focused on the implementation level, most of the learning is related with this phase.

#4 Consistency between project proposal and action plan

In varying ways, the CSOs refer to different documents for the description of activities, be it the narrative document, the logical framework or the budget, to understand what activities are to be implemented. Understanding the relevance of each document is important for adequate management and implementation.

AFKAR/TA arrived during the process at some adjustments, by applying a side document to the logframe to comply with the project proposal. Such adjustment was made in a manner that does not affect the purpose of the project neither the budget. Coaching the CSOs was also necessary on how to elaborate and use the side document of the Logframe.

#5 Variations in CSOs' capabilities: a balanced team

Capabilities vary significantly among CSOs. A fact mostly evident in the wide variation among project's team. Arriving at a balanced project team is the optimal condition, but this was attained by few. Several CSOs assign one person for administrative, technical and financial and contractual aspects related to the project execution.

As a consequence of an unbalanced team, little time is left to identify lessons learned, success stories and/or more important to master sustainability factors of the project objectives. It is to be considered that the fulfillment of these mentioned aspects has to be accounted for in assigning the project's team.

#6 Variations in CSOs' capabilities: management performance & reporting

There are varying levels of good project management performance among the CSOs. Yet, in gen-



eral, limited capacities were observed on how to report on the deliverables and how to document the positive results (particularly the changes that CSOs are making in the lives of their rightholders). CSOs tend to deliver less comprehensive reporting. They usually refer the budget to understand further narrative. Some are not aware that the logframe is an integral part of the M&E.

Adequate reporting to which M&E can contribute could be done earlier in the project timeline, to bring about better results, with an eye on coaching through the process.

The one-to-one review of interim reports has tremendously contributed to understanding the EU template and to improve the reports contents. Moreover, the MER consecutive learning effectively enhanced the capacities in Monitoring and Reporting, and most of the CSO improved their plans to cope with the requirements

Another important challenge related to M&E is that CSOs' teams are in many projects made up of central and regional/ local teams. Consequently, the staffs collecting data for monitoring purposes are different from those managing the different activities in office (including writing the report).

#7 Indicators: Measuring and Interpreting

Problems in measuring indicators were related to the way that some issues are registered. Some issues are either not measurable (means of verification are inadequate), or irrelevant to the project context, or impossible to measure within the project timeline. Indicators were formulated without prior identification of a baseline or a target value to reach.

Difficulties were also reported in interpreting the indicators mentioned in the respective logframes. Reasons are related to language wording (i.e. the indicator as presented in the logframe has a different meaning from what the CSO intended to explain upon writing) or the means of verification used to measure the indicators that are neither appropriate nor applicable or feasible to be used.

Such problems require a one-to-one review of interim reports, and an elaboration of the indicator tracking sheet. Moreover, the previously mentioned side document to the logframe helped introduce the grantees on how to articulate a logframe properly, including further specifications attributed to the indicator, along with the baseline and target values and appropriate means of verification.





#8 Subcontracting

Subcontracting is new to many CSOs, but it is a reinforcing factor in their management capacities. As is usually the case, the subcontractors are selected on the basis of their expertise (engineers, psychologists, etc.) and not much attention is given to their previous experience in project management. Involving subcontractors in the learning/ training process related to management issues could address this gap.

C. In Relation to Cooperation, Building Partnerships and Alliances

#9 Managing relations between partners

Managing relations between partners is more complex than what it appears to be. Some CSOs witnessed difficult relations with the partners. One important observation is that many CSOs are not aware of the importance of the MOUs drafted to regulate roles and responsibilities among multiple partners.

#10 Building relations between AFKAR III CSOs

Building relations between the CSOs beneficiaries of the AFKAR III program was another crucial matter, to underline the potential linkages/ synergies that could be established among them, and what lessons they can learn from each other. The perception about collaboration is not very clear and many CSOs do not see the added value in collaboration.

In this respect, it is important to mention that the work undertaken by AFKAR on catalyzing the existence of a platform composed of AFKAR CSOs grantees and relevant local and national level ministries and government bodies had boosted the linkages between the CSOs.

#11 Relationships with local authorities/ ministries

The CSOs working in community development are not inclined to involve the municipalities and other local government agency in the stage of project design. Some of the action plans do not take



into consideration development plans done by municipalities, a matter which leads to replication of activities. Other CSOs look for sustainability in the last stage of implementation and sometimes just ask the municipality to take over and continue what has started, without taking into consideration the factor of ownership.

Moreover, the involvement and participation of rightholders is out of focus in most of the projects, and final beneficiaries are treated as recipients.

A major step has been taken in this regard by AFKAR in involving local authorities cooperating with CSOs in capacity building programs, especially those related to dialogue on public policies between civil society and public institutions, and in keeping up the work through field visits.

Although at the beginning, the perception of civil society organizations and government organizations about collaboration was not very clear, this has changed with the boosting given to interaction among these organizations, through adopting the initiative to establish a partnership platform between AFKAR grantees organizations and government representatives.

D. In Relation to the Capacity Strengthening of CSOs and Related Government Entities.

#12 Capacity building of CSOs and related government organizations

Managing development projects and programs by the concerned parties is observed to be weak. Some of these projects may be donor driven, or focusing only on the implementation process, and not taking into consideration any local development strategies or cooperation with local authorities. AFKAR program offered a combination of learning events to strengthen capacities of CSOs grantees and related government institutions. The main learning from the capacity strengthening workshops, on RBM, PCM, PPW and MER in addition to Networking and Communication, is boosting ownership through participatory approaches to designing and executing capacity-strengthening programs. This serves as a model for replication when these organizations do real work, and have the chance to test their theoretical knowledge.





One major success is when CSOs and Government Organizations jointly mapped a scheme identifying who does what in their region and what is the best strategy for coordination.

E. In Relation to Capturing Impact, Successes and Challenges

#13 The Impact aspect

As the CSOs focus on implementing activities from an output/ quantitative perspective, these organizations face limitations in regard to assessing the impact/ qualitative side. Capturing impact is one of the most common difficulties faced by the CSOs grantees who are more oriented towards activity execution rather than seeking a certain impact. They often attribute this shortage to short project duration.

Impact could be seen in relation to broader sustainability factors. Hence, the projects' impact could be addressed at the beginning of the project by working on a baseline and ensuring that indicators on specific objectives are impact indicators measuring the change in behavior or/ and the change desired.

#14 Success Stories

CSOs are aware that success stories need to be identified. In addition to the communication technical assistance provided by AFKAR project to identify and spread their success stories, project teams and mainly front liners should be equipped with tools to capture success stories and change.

#15 Documenting Challenges

There is reluctance among several CSOs related to documenting challenges faced either with a partner, or the local authorities or the beneficiaries. Their concern were shared vocally with the M&E team without writing them down.

M&E team has encouraged the CSOs to address and document all the challenges they are facing in order to address these challenges later on during the project as part of their learning processes.



#16 Communication and raising awareness

Despite the wide difference in size and capabilities among CSOs, they are in need to address the issue of communication. Depending on their capacities, some have a communication officer while others designate communication to be dealt with by someone who is undertaking other tasks. However, they are all eager to have their news covered by the media.

Training was a major support in this regard, as the workshop on capacity building on communication and the follow up was blended with AFKAR III communication strategy to give visibility and presence to the CSOs.

V. Recommendations from Visits and Observations

Recommendations in this section will be linked to the EU Project and Program Cycle Management. These recommendations are based on findings from the previous monitoring visits, on reports provided throughout AFKAR III program, as well as participatory training and learning events, provided for partners and stakeholders.

After synthesizing the findings, the conclusions in relation to these principles governing the program/ project cycle are translated into recommendations, as shown below.

A. In relation to assessment and identification of partners

When preselecting a list of partners, it is recommended that the assessment committee undertake another round of in-field organizational assessment, for the grantees and partners. Before signing any agreement, the contract management team needs to assess any critical elements for effective organizational management, and identify areas that need strengthening or further development.

This phase is very important in the life of the project and has minimum requirements for hosting/ implementing an EU funded project.

Moreover, this can send a message to the implementing partner to strengthen the organization and





in subsequent years, enable it to see improvements, and help him to pinpoint where progress is still needed, and that being granted is an opportunity to enhance the organization capacity.

Sound Project Management

In similar projects managed by ministries and targeting CSOs, the following topics/ domains could be endorsed to measure the technical capacity of CSOs, and identify what needs to be strengthened from the beginning of the project.

- 1. Governance:** including Vision, Mission, and Values, Legal Compliance, Governing or Advisory Board, Leadership and Succession Plan
- 2. Administration:** Organizational Structure and Operational Policies, Procedures, Systems and Information Systems
- 3. Human Resources:** with focus on Staffing (levels, hiring, and retention), Job Description and Staff Supervision, and Personnel Policies and Compensation. Moreover, if the project involves volunteers and interns, ensure that the CSO can cater for hosting non-staff and have an adequate code of conduct.
- 4. Financial Management:** comprising Financial Policies and Procedures, Internal Controls, Financial Documentation and Reporting as well Financial Planning, and the ability of the organization to manage the amount of the grant in an effective way.
- 5. Organizational Management:** with a special attention on; Strategic and Operational Planning, Resource Mobilization, Communication Strategy; Documentation and Reporting, as well Internal Communication and Decision-Making capabilities.
- 6. Effective Partnership and Coordination:** CSOs and partners have to show experience or at least strong willingness, to work together and adapt their visions and missions so as to better respond



to the needs of rightholders targeted in the project. This has to be coupled with a set of work ethics and values which are essential for maximizing transparency in sharing data; including financial data.

7. Community/ Rightholders Involvement and Ownership: the recipe for managing a successful community-based intervention is having CSOs with proven abilities to engage rightholders.

B. In relation to design (the logframe, the Budget and the activities)

While taking the decision to grant a CSO, it is recommended for the granting committee to have a detailed assessment of the logframe proposed including the indicators. A technical assistance assessment regarding program quality is suggested to look into the synchronization of the logframe, the budget and the activities stated in the action. It is also important to recognize that the logframe is a living document. The matrix should provide a summary of the project design, and a picture of the change proposed. Logframes are not merely technical documents filled by experts, and detached from the reality of the action.

C. In relation to implementation including monitoring

This recommendation is suggested in the early phases of project implementation, to exert time and effort to build a strong participatory M&E Framework. The indicators-tracking table used in the project may present this framework. Furthermore, the administration of a baseline coupled with an end-line is highly recommended in order to facilitate completing the final report according to the EU format.

The main purpose of having the M&E framework is to describe the indicators used to measure whether the program is a success or not. In addition, this framework will be the basis of the monitoring system and the leverage of all the monitoring tools and





visits conducted during the technical assistance for CSO.

In order to measure the project success, it is recommended also to accompany CSOs in technical assistance, and be in contact with the rightholders / final beneficiaries on a regular basis to make sure they are satisfied with the implementation; satisfaction surveys on quarterly basis are highly recommended.

Besides, the M&E framework can also cater for the establishment of a data and information management system available from day 1 of the project to capture progress and learning.

In order to test the validity and efficiency of the M&E framework, at least a midterm review and a final evaluation of the action need to be administrated, this also enhance the accountability chain for rightholders and back donors.

D. In relation to right holders

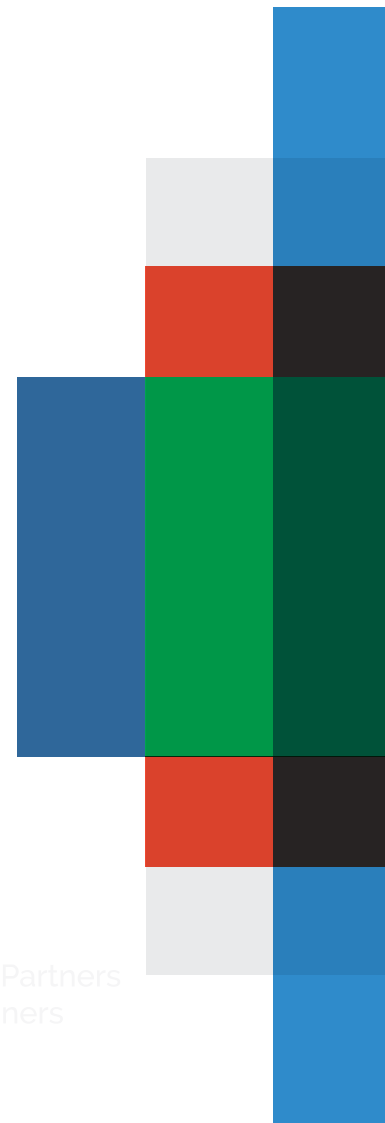
Our last recommendation will be in relation to rightholders, men, women, boys and girls, the main actors in the development process, they have to be consulted to a greater extent, and their ownership of the project enhanced. A human centered approach should to be adopted, and a development action involving the rightholders in all the steps must help in finding solutions to problems. Rightholders' involvement typically takes place in observing the problem within the context, brainstorming, conceptualizing, developing, and implementing the solution/ action.





AFKAR III

Sharing Best practices and Learnings



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