CIVIL SOCIETY IN ACTION:
ADVANCING RIGHTS, TRANSFORMING LIVES
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UNDP partners with people at all levels of society to help build nations that can withstand crisis, and drive and sustain the kind of growth that improves the quality of life for everyone. On the ground in nearly 170 countries and territories, we offer global perspective and local insight to help empower lives and build resilient nations.

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### Frequently used acronyms

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<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>CEDAW</td>
<td>Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women</td>
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<tr>
<td>CESD</td>
<td>Centre for Economic and Social Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>CNA</td>
<td>Capacity Needs Assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPRD</td>
<td>Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities</td>
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<td>CRF</td>
<td>Constitution Research Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSP</td>
<td>Civil Society Platform</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSO</td>
<td>Civil society organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>DM</td>
<td>Democracy Monitor</td>
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<tr>
<td>EPF</td>
<td>Eurasia Partnership Foundation</td>
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<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>FCC</td>
<td>Family Care Centre</td>
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<tr>
<td>GFP</td>
<td>Gender Focal Point</td>
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<tr>
<td>HRCA</td>
<td>Human Rights Centre of Azerbaijan</td>
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<tr>
<td>HIV/AIDS</td>
<td>Human immunodeficiency virus and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>Information and Communication Technologies</td>
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<tr>
<td>ISD</td>
<td>Initiative for Sake of Development</td>
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<td>IDPs</td>
<td>Internally Displaced Persons</td>
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<tr>
<td>LDPA</td>
<td>Law and Development Public Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>LGA</td>
<td>Local Governance Association Public Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>MPA</td>
<td>Mingachevir Parent’s Association</td>
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<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-governmental organization</td>
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<td>NWM</td>
<td>National Women’s Machinery</td>
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<td>OGP</td>
<td>Open Government Platform</td>
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<td>PC</td>
<td>Public Committee</td>
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<td>PMGs</td>
<td>Prison Monitoring Groups</td>
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<td>SDGs</td>
<td>Sustainable Development Goals</td>
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<tr>
<td>SWOT</td>
<td>Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats</td>
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<tr>
<td>TSA</td>
<td>Targeted social assistance</td>
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<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
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<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations Children’s Fund</td>
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<td>WARD</td>
<td>Women Association for Rational Development</td>
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<td>WEI</td>
<td>Women Empowerment Index</td>
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Introduction

Civil society organisations (CSOs) play a key role in promoting the values of democratic governance and influencing the development agenda. CSOs give voice to citizens’ concerns, advocate for transparent and accountable institutions, and promote human rights and fundamental freedoms. CSO participation in policy processes is key to ensuring inclusive and effective policy.

Civil society actors at national and global levels have developed substantive capacity and influence in a range of development issues. Partnering with them can help contribute to the effectiveness of development interventions, especially with respect to marginalised and vulnerable groups.

The European Union supports the role of civil society in good governance and accountability. Civil society participation in policy processes is key to ensuring inclusive and effective policies in line with the real needs of citizens. Civil society contributes to building more accountable and legitimate states, leading to enhanced social cohesion and equitable sustainable development. It contributes to increased stability by supporting community-based development and boosting opportunities for, and resilience of, vulnerable groups.

EU funding to civil society in Azerbaijan over the years has touched a wide range of areas, as diverse as media freedom and pluralism, women empowerment, equality and non-discrimination, fight against domestic violence, access to justice for vulnerable groups, prevention of torture and ill-treatment, community empowerment, poverty reduction, social inclusion of vulnerable populations.

EU’s engagement with civil society in Azerbaijan is a core component of EU’s partnership with the country, and is based on the notion that an open society is the best guarantee for long-term stability and prosperity.

UNDP partners with civil society actors across multiple domains, including programme implementation, policy development and advocacy. Recognizing that civil society actors often serve both as a driving force in guiding development policies and as a watchdog to make sure policies get implemented, UNDP facilitates civil society participation in all facets of Agenda 2030 implementation.

“Civil society plays many important roles in support of the 2030 Agenda, from advocacy and planning to implementation, monitoring and accountability. UNDP will continue to partner with and advocate for the inclusion of civil society in country-led efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda, guided by the advice of the UNDP Civil Society Advisory Committee. Where requested, UNDP will also work with Governments to strengthen the capacities of civil society organisations and to help countries create space and opportunities for civil society to effectively engage in sustainable development” (UNDP Strategic Plan, 2018-2021).

About the Programme

In Azerbaijan, the EU and UNDP work together to strengthen civil society and increase citizens’ participation in promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms, in order to advance the democratic development of the country. This alliance is embodied in the programme Enabling civil society to play a greater role in promoting socio-economic rights of vulnerable populations implemented over 2016-2018. The project had a budget of EUR 2 million, funded by the EU, and benefitted from the organisational support of UNDP.

The overall aim of the programme was to support the development of a vibrant civil society advocating for and working on social inclusion, equality and human rights advancement of vulnerable groups. To achieve this, 12 local CSOs acted as Implementing Partners of the programme.

This publication showcases the 12 projects implemented by the local civil society organizations in the framework of the joint EU-UNDP programme. It documents the projects’ results and highlights the dynamic and versatile role that civil society organizations have played in ensuring the success of initiatives to protect and promote human rights, equality and non-discrimination.

The programme Enabling civil society to play a greater role in promoting socio-economic rights of vulnerable populations was structured around two components:

Component 1: Organisational Development and Networking of Partner CSOs

While CSOs have strong capacities to contribute to the country’s development agenda, they also face capacity challenges. The UNDP conducted a Capacity Needs Assessment (CNA) to define the organisational development needs of the partner CSOs. Based on the findings of the CNA and ad hoc demands of the partner CSOs, the programme organised a series of capacity building seminars, with a focus on six areas: i) public relations and communication; ii) gender and SDGs; iii) human rights-based approach; iv) monitoring and evaluation; v) organisational management; vi) innovation and social enterprise.

The programme also introduced regular meetings of all partner CSOs as a networking platform to facilitate knowledge exchange on experiences, challenges and lessons learnt from the programme implementation.

Component 2: Implementation of Civil Society Initiatives

Throughout the programme duration, the partner CSOs implemented twelve initiatives in various parts of Azerbaijan aiming to promote and protect the rights of vulnerable groups, including women, children and youth, persons with disabilities, imprisoned persons and other socially disadvantaged populations. These initiatives are described in the subsequent chapters of the publication.
Programme results: At a Glance

- Policy/analytical/research papers produced: 35
- Knowledge products (manuals, toolkits, training/monitoring resources) developed: 84
- Individuals trained: 2106
- Citizens who received free legal/psychological aid: 2261
- People with improved living conditions: 5668
- Individuals with improved livelihoods (includes also family members): 220
- Small grants allocated for community initiatives: 32
- People exposed to awareness raising campaigns: 411,227

Programme Map

- Center for Economic and Social Development
- Constitution Research Fund
- Democracy Monitor Public Union
- Eurasia Partnership Foundation
- Human Rights Centre Azerbaijan
- Internews Azerbaijan Public Association
- Initiative for Sake of Development
- Law and Development Public Association
- Local Governance Assistance Public Union
- Mingachevir Parents Association
- Uluchay Social-Economic Innovation Center
- Women Association for Rational Development
PROBLEM

In September 2015, 193 UN Member States, including Azerbaijan, endorsed the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development, with its 17 SDGs and 169 accompanying targets. The fundamental principle of the 2030 Agenda - "Leaving no one behind" - calls the governments to extend the benefits of sustainable development to socially excluded groups of the population. As one of the strategies to achieve the SDGs, the Government of Azerbaijan prioritized implementation of social protection policies. Pre-project analysis identified three problems that can impede progress towards the SDGs:

a) Absence of monitoring and advocacy mechanisms with participation of local civil society organizations hinders efficient implementation of the national social programmes;

b) Absence of a regular policy dialogue between civil society actors and state authorities results in missed opportunities for improvement of social policies and legislation;

c) Limited awareness of low-income population about social protection options prevents them from accessing benefits offered by the national social programmes.

PROJECT OBJECTIVE

The overall objective of the project was to strengthen the role of the CSOs in promoting the principles of accountability and transparency in the implementation of social services in Azerbaijan. The specific objective of the activity was to improve implementation of social services in Azerbaijan by empowering civil society organizations to engage in advocacy, monitoring and multi-level policy dialogue.

PROJECT ACTIVITIES

The project mobilized 11 civil society organizations in Ganja that are active in the social sphere, provided training, including on such topics as social legislation, targeted social assistance, employment, and Sustainable Development Goals. The Centre for Economic and Social Development (CESD) also developed a training manual for the CSOs interested in acting as watchdogs and advocates for social programmes.

The CESD experts raised awareness among the low-income population about the existing social protection programmes and their potential benefits, as well as legally and technically supporting them to prepare applications for these programmes.

The project produced seven analytical papers and a set of policy recommendations to improve provision of social protection for low-income families in rural Azerbaijan. Policy recommendations were presented at the final high-level conference, which included the participation of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population, parliamentarians, international organizations and socially vulnerable groups. CESD is preparing additional policy papers that will investigate ways to improve the effectiveness of the self-employment and insurance systems.

PROJECT RESULTS

The 11 CSOs in Ganja and Samukh have improved capabilities and capacity, and are organized in a network to perform their watchdog function of monitoring implementation of social protection policies, undertaking advocacy and participating in policy dialogues. The CSO representatives became active in monitoring the activities of regional institutions responsible for the management of the Targeted Social Assistance (TSA) programme. Thanks to their efforts, more vulnerable families are now entitled to receive TSA.

A regular multi-level policy dialogue platform was established between civil society actors and authorities to enable better coordination of strategies and improvement of the quality and accessibility of social services. The CSOs and local government authorities will continue to meet bi-annually after the project completion, pointing to the lasting effect of the relationship and networks built through the project.

High-level advocacy efforts by the CESD around the policy recommendations from the project helped escalate these issues to the attention of the Minister of Labour and Social Protection of Population, who recently announced several changes to the legislation regarding Pensions.

“The training and the manual were very helpful. Our organization works with People with Disabilities (PwDs) and they turn to us for help with social services. We are now equipped with knowledge, arguments and skills to better serve them. When in dialogue with service providers we build our case on the solid information provided during the training. Right now, we are advocating for the installation of special equipment on public transport to make it accessible for PwDs. Thanks to the manual, we can spread the knowledge throughout our organization”.

Ms. Elmira Ismayilova
Head of the Ganja branch of Disabled Women’s Society.

“The training was extremely useful. The PwDs are a segment of the population in need of special care and tailor-made services. Especially when it comes to finding a job: many employers simply refuse to hire them. At the training we learnt about quotas for the PwDs in the workplace, and now they are applying for jobs with certain requirements. We also better understand the responsibilities of various institutions and can refer PwDs’ applications to the appropriate agency”.

Mr. Mirzamed Orujov
Head of Samukh branch of the Garabagh War Veterans and Families.

“We believe the project implemented by the CESD is a substantial contribution to the effective management of social policies in Azerbaijan. Our Ministry is interested in cooperation with the CSOs, and we will continue to work together after the project completion, and build on the achieved results”.

Natig Mammadov
Deputy Minister of Labour and Social Protection of the Population
**Constitution Research Fund**

**PROBLEM**

People with disabilities represent one of the biggest vulnerable groups in Azerbaijan. This group amounts to around 613,000 people, or 6.2% of the total population of the country. Azerbaijan has joined the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), and its Optional Protocol, and has developed a National Action Programme on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. However, a number of studies point to certain barriers preventing people and children with disabilities from fully enjoying their rights:

- There is a low level of awareness among public and private actors, including government officials, court personnel, lawyers, and people with disabilities, on the issues of discrimination and rehabilitation remedies;
- There is a lack of communication channels to regularly inform people with disabilities about social protection measures and benefits available to them, including legal aid, care assistance and training, especially in accessible language formats;
- There are no efficient mechanisms and referral systems for the provision of legal and social aid to persons with disabilities.

**PROJECT OBJECTIVE**

The overall objective of the project was to increase the role of civil society in advancing the socio-economic rights of vulnerable populations. The specific objectives of the project were to:

1. Support civil society organisations to apply human-rights based approaches in promoting the rights of people and children with disabilities;
2. Support community-based organisations to promote social inclusion and the socio-economic rights of people and children with disabilities at the local level; and
3. Support non-governmental organisations to promote the issues of non-discrimination and equality for people and children with disabilities.

**PROJECT ACTIVITIES**

The project created a regional civil society organisations’ (CSOs) network and trained its members in legal aspects related to the status of persons with disabilities, national legislation, the CRPD, and the role of CSOs in providing social services to people with disabilities. The project also supported the CSOs network to facilitate several discussions with people with disabilities that helped to identify barriers to full inclusion in all aspects of their life.

In addition, the project experts educated social workers, lawyers, school teachers, health workers and duty-bearers on social and legal services delivery, disability entitlements, key provisions of the CRPD, state obligations, and the National Action Programme 2013-2018 on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The Constitution Research Fund also produced a Skills Guide and held a national conference on the “Organisation of Social Work in Azerbaijan: Current Situation and Expectations”.

300 persons with disabilities and their family members were educated on the rights of persons with disabilities, the CRPD, national legislation, and available services and resources. Social workers visited 306 families including persons with disabilities, assessed their needs, and helped to enhance their wellbeing.

**PROJECT RESULTS**

Over 300 civil activists, social workers, service providers and duty-bearers have stronger capabilities and greater capacity to provide social, legal and other types of services to people and children with disabilities in six regions of Azerbaijan. The level of professionalism of social workers from the State Social Protection Fund was increased in areas such as the ethics of social work, core skills, and social work theories.

As a result of the project, 306 people with disabilities and their family members benefited from the services of social workers trained by the project. 115 persons with disabilities have improved well-being and 34 received free legal aid. These people remain on the radar of the local NGOs and social workers for provision of additional support.

The country-wide awareness raising campaign has reached out to 400,000 people.

“We believe the project was beneficial to both the social workers and people with disabilities. Social workers in the local branches of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population became familiar with modern requirements for the organisation of social work. These training sessions helped them to better understand their mission as a social worker and approach their work with greater responsibility and responsiveness to the needs of persons with disabilities.”

Vugar Behbudov
Head of the Department of Social Services and Programmes State Social Protection Fund, Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Population.

“Over a few years we could not correct the documents for the house we are living in. I have difficulties due to my disability, and I do not know much about legal stuff. Thanks to the social workers, they visited our family, and learned about our problems. They did not fix the documents themselves, but they sent us a lawyer. He gave us advice, helped to write an application to the notary, and explained the rules of the procedure. Now we are collecting some missing documents and hope to receive the correct house documents soon.”

Zaki Husenaliyev
Resident of Sheki and project beneficiary

“We have been doing social work in the region for a while. The opportunities for knowledge and skills development here are limited. The training sessions organised by the project helped us to change the way we are doing our work. We started to see ourselves as social workers, not as social servants. We as social workers learned how to organise provision of social services to people and families in difficult cases, and how to work with individuals.”

Shalala Hajiyeva
Social worker, Oguz region

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**PROJECT**

**Project title:** Enhancing the social and legal environment for protection of people with disabilities and children with disabilities in Azerbaijan

**Start date:** October 2016

**Completion date:** May 2018

**Budget:** Euro 122,986

**Location:** Oguz, Gabala, Sheki, Gakh, Balakan and Zakatala

**Target groups:** Civil society organisations, service providers, people and children with disabilities

**Final beneficiaries:** People and children with disabilities

**Project partner:** CSO Network, Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population, local executive authorities

**Focal point:** Mr. Alimammad Nuriyev, email: kafondu@yandex.ru
Project title: Enhanced Civil Society Support for Promoting Gender Equality through the Legal Framework and Women’s Socio-Economic Empowerment in Remote Regions of Azerbaijan

Start date: May 2017

Completion date: May 2018

Budget: Euro 122,849

Location: Baku, Lankaran, Mingachevir

Target groups: Civil society organisations, media, young people, women

Final beneficiaries: Women in remote areas

Focal point: Mr. Fuad Hasanov, email: dhrmm.az@gmail.com

Project objective

The overall objective of the project was to promote social and economic empowerment of women in the remote regions of Azerbaijan. The specific objectives of the project were:

i) to strengthen the civil society organisations’ (CSOs’) capacity to advance the principles of equality and non-discrimination in the institutional and policy frameworks for socio-economic empowerment of women; and

ii) to strengthen women’s leadership skills to enable them claim their socio-economic rights and to actively participate in the community life.

Project activities

The project supported several baseline studies looking into the socio-economic aspects of women’s empowerment, including the employability of women and access to financial resources and financial services.

11 training sessions were conducted in Baku, Mingachevir and Lankaran bringing together over 110 active women, civil society activists, women entrepreneurs, educators and health workers, members of the municipalities, media and students from the project’s target regions. The training sessions covered a broad range of topics, such as women’s entrepreneurship, networking, communication and the effective use of ICT technologies, women’s participation in decision-making, advocacy, non-discrimination and equality law.

A workshop on the role of the media in promoting women’s empowerment was organised by the journalists involved in the project. Four journalists conducted research into the topic by investigating individual cases of inequality and discrimination against women.

The project experts developed a national Women’s Empowerment Index (WEI). The index measures degrees of women’s empowerment in five areas: economic contribution, education, governance, health and media. It presents a comprehensive picture of women’s rights protection, financial independence and influence on decision-making. The project also supported the establishment of the Women’s Empowerment Network in Mingachevir.

The findings and results of the project were presented at the national conference in Baku, which brought together state entities, parliament, civil society, media and the private sector.

Project results

CSOs in three regions are better positioned to influence policy, legal and institutional frameworks affecting the socio-economic situation of women exposed to discrimination in the remote parts of Azerbaijan. Women in remote areas became aware of their rights, and gained better leadership, social and business development skills. Through the mobilization of the media, the project advanced the gender equality agenda, and made women’s discrimination cases more visible.

Thanks to the project, decision-makers can use the Women’s Empowerment Index as a tool to monitor the effectiveness of their women’s empowerment policies.

23 women joined the Women’s Empowerment Network, which will continue to function after the completion of the project. Through this network, women gained access to knowledge resources, have a stronger voice in public discussion and a higher chance of influencing the decision-making process.

The State Committee for Family, Women and Children’s Affairs, the Parliamentary Commission on Human Rights, and the Office of the Ombudsman are prepared to consider the recommendations of the baseline studies in shaping their policies.

“Before the training I thought ‘gender equality’ was about numbers of men and women. Now I realise that my understanding was wrong. The meaning of ‘gender equality’ is much wider, it is about social roles and responsibilities, about equal rights and opportunities for men and women, boys and girls. I will share this knowledge with my community members in Yevlakh”.

Sonia Ridvanova
Resident of Yevlakh and training participant.

“Believe education should be the main action area of the network, and the network should reach out to remote settlements. I personally got more knowledge from the training and stakeholders meetings organised at the Mingachevir Media Club and learned a lot about women’s economic empowerment and the legal aspects of women’s entrepreneurship. Many networks were created in the country, but few remain active. Our priority task should be to turn our network into a sustainable working mechanism. We should also involve persons with authority to make decisions”.

Yegana Nabiyeva
Executive Director of the Mingachevir Parents Association
In Azerbaijan, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are often unable to significantly influence policies and budgets, or to define their own development strategies and plans, in a way that ensures their responsiveness to the population’s priorities and effective implementation of their plans. The pre-project situation analysis carried out by the Eurasia Partnership Foundation (EPF) points to a number of factors at the core of the problem including:

a) Recent years have been marked by a restrictive legal and political environment that constrained operation of the civil society organisations (CSOs) in Azerbaijan and limited their ability to advance a reform agenda;

b) CSOs have weak constituent bases, lack powerful advocacy and outreach strategies, have poor communication skills in crafting effective messages and, as a result, fail to rally broad-based support and maintain momentum around a cause;

c) The decision-making process in Azerbaijan is highly centralized, and regional authorities play a tokenistic role in shaping public policy despite their statutory right to participate in the development of local strategies. Municipalities, NGOs and citizens have even fewer opportunities to put forward a vision, propose new ideas and initiatives and meaningfully participate in the policy-making process.

The project aimed to increase the role of civil society in advancing the socio-economic rights of vulnerable populations, and promoting social inclusion, equality and non-discrimination. Specific objectives of the project were i) to increase the influence of the local CSOs on the formulation and implementation of socio-economic policies; ii) to support the CSOs in advocating for the rights of the vulnerable population in the target regions; and iii) to sustain the long-lasting impact of the project by developing civic participation skills among the CSOs.

The project targeted its activities at NGOs located outside of Baku. The project experts assessed the institutional capacity gaps of local NGOs and three NGO Resource Centres and provided training and technical support to address these gaps. EPF conducted a field study identifying key barriers to the operation of the NGOs at the local level. It facilitated three regional thematic workshops and organised three thematic coordination meetings to discuss regional strategy development and coordination. EPF also developed an NGO Guidebook on civic participation skills, which sources of research to refer to in order to come up with substantive ideas and suggestions.

The project helped local NGOs to self-organise into a Civil Society Platform for Strategic Cooperation and Coordination in Development and Governance (CSP), uniting 35 organisations, and to develop a coalition with the local Open Government Platform. The Platform holds quarterly meetings between the authorities and NGOs, and allows the

Project title: Strategic Cooperation and Coordination in Development and Governance

Start date: October 2016

Completion date: May 2018

Budget: Euro 123,080

Location: Guba, Khachmaz, Mingachevir, Shirvan

Target groups: CSOs, NGO Resource Centres, national and local authorities, municipalities

Final beneficiaries: General public

Project partner: NGO Resource Centres in Guba, Mingachevir and Shirvan

Focal point: Ms. Naila Hashimova

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Focal point: Ms. Naila Hashimova

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In 2015, the prisons in Azerbaijan were holding around 24,000 inmates including defendants and convicts. The penitentiary system, subordinate to the Ministry of Justice of Azerbaijan, is largely based on the old-fashioned prison institutions concentrated mainly in Baku and the surrounding regions of the Absheron peninsula. However, over the past years, the government has built new prisons in the area, including one in Sheki.

In 2006, the Public Committee (PC) was established under the Minister of Justice to monitor the prison conditions and to assist in the implementation of corrective actions. The PC has up to 11 members recruited among the activists of NGOs. Working on a voluntary basis, the PC members and the HRCA activists are only able to visit the nearest prisons in Baku and Salyan. However, other prisons located in the cities of Ganja and Sheki are far from Baku and remain outside of public control since the PC visits irregularly. Although, by law, provincial NGOs can participate in the prison monitoring under the supervision of the PC, there is little interaction between authorities and civil activists, and the latter are de facto excluded from participation in the public control process.

The overall objective of the project was to advance socio-economic rights of inmates held in prisons in the western and north-western regions of Azerbaijan. The specific objectives of the project were:

I) to improve public monitoring over prisons in Ganja and Sheki cities;

II) to establish cooperation between the local NGOs and prison authorities.

The HRCA identified and trained 60 CSO activists in Baku, Sheki and Ganja, on international standards for prison monitoring, domestic law, monitoring techniques and reporting. The project also supplied computer equipment to improve the technical basis of the CSOs. The civic activists formed the core of the Prison Monitoring Groups (PMGs) and paid a total of 36 visits to 14 prisons of Azerbaijan. PMGs provided legal aid to over 1,100 prisoners and held meetings with 450 prisoners to improve their legal literacy.

The project experts worked closely with the CSOs – members of the PC of the Ministry of Justice, and discussed ways to improve prison monitoring system and detention conditions at the Committee’s meetings. In Ganja and Sheki, the project helped initiate a dialogue between the local NGOs and the executive authorities, the Ministry of Justice and Ombudsman.

The project supported the production of the Prison Monitoring Manual, made a compilation of the prison-related laws and regulations as well as translated ‘Rules of Internal Discipline’ for Russian-speaking prisoners. ‘Prison library’ online portal prisonlib.wordpress.com was launched as a resource hub that provides easy access to prison-related legislation, penitentiary reform updates, legal counseling and other useful information.

HRCA held seven press-conferences in Baku, Sheki and Ganja, and issued over 60 press-releases, interviews and news articles, to focus greater public attention on problems faced by the prisoners in Azerbaijan, such as reintegration of former prisoners, HIV/AIDS in prisons, overcrowding, etc.

The project contributed to tighter public control over the various prison management aspects by establishing six new prison monitoring groups (PMGs) representing civil society and initiated a much-needed dialogue between the Ministry of Justice and the PMGs.

Regular public monitoring of the prisons in Baku, Salyan, Ganja and Sheki and advocacy campaigns contributed to the improvements in the detention conditions. In particular, the campaign against prison overcrowding garnered widespread support and pushed for certain policy changes. The President decreed further humanisation of the penitentiary system. In addition, the use of arrest as a preventive measure has decreased by 25%; a probation service was established; and drug addicts (within certain categories) are treated as patients and are no longer incarcerated.

The project also improved legal education of prisoners and advocated for a continued reform of the penitentiary system, including application of the European standards in prison living conditions. The Prison Monitoring Manual was also approved for use as a textbook for the Law Department of the Baku State University.

“The Project was met with high interest and response from the NGO community in Ganja. As the news about the project spread through local media, more people wanted to join our NGO. Participation at the seminars created a feeling of partnership and solidarity between various NGOs and the media. Such events are very important for the people living far from the capital”.

Nushaba Mammadova
Chairperson of Tomris NGO from Ganja.

“I had an opportunity to visit the Sheki prison as a monitor and to meet with the prison officers and inmates. It is a valuable experience, and I shared my impressions with the participants of the seminar. For many of us, the notebooks provided by the project were our first personal computers. With the notebooks we do our work more efficiently. The project was both moral and material support to the local civil society.”

Elkhan Feyzullaev
CSOs activist from Sheki.

“I want to thank the project for giving me legal advice. I am still a convict in an open-type penal settlement, but I have greater freedom of movement. Now I can spend all day outside the settlement, enjoying being with my family. Your consultation eliminated one third of my prison sentence.”

Larisa K.
69 years, Baku
Problem

A number of reports by reputable international sources indicate that the CSOs sector in Azerbaijan is often seen as fragmented, poorly organised and mistrusted by the general public. As well as being unable to effectively reach out to their target groups and advocate for change. Although some CSOs report being a part of a part of a coalition, in practice many of them, especially those based in regions, often work in silos.

Helping CSOs build broad-based coalitions can facilitate enhanced efficiency and sustainability through the pooling of resources. This leads to a more impactful influence on public opinion and a stronger impact on public policy formulation and implementation. This project sought to address gaps in CSOs capacities by providing training and resources which equips CSOs with enhanced abilities to better represent constituencies, increase public trust, and promote networking and cooperation among CSOs and local authorities.

Project Objective

The overall objective of the project was to empower CSOs in Azerbaijan and promote their role in social development. The specific objectives of the project were:

i) to build the capacity of the Azerbaijani CSOs and support focused results-oriented advocacy efforts;

ii) to enhance networking between the CSOs and local authorities in the Western part of Azerbaijan in order to strengthen effective relationships and cooperation.

Project Activities

91 CSOs representatives and social activists were trained in topic areas such as legal education, advocacy strategies, and coalition building, as well as public relations, social media, and tools for communication. Following the trainings, Internews Azerbaijan organised two prototyping events. Participants developed a working prototype of advocacy campaigns and tested it in two separate initiatives. The first initiative organised a flash mob to attract attention to the issues individuals with hearing and speech disorders face. For the second initiative, participants mobilized young volunteers to educate rural youth about information and communication technologies (ICTs) and social media.

The small grants for the project implementation were awarded to seven training participants who generated the best ideas for advocacy projects. The small projects highlighted a multitude of issues. Some of the issues highlighted included violence against women, the social inclusion of children and youth with disabilities, civil society empowerment, and challenges faced by vulnerable groups.

The project promoted online and off-line networking. The online media platform www.svp.az was established to facilitate interaction among the CSOs working on similar issues, as well as strengthening outreach to the communities. Online webinars were organised to encourage virtual exchanges among the CSOs. Regular tea meet-ups and roundtables were organised, bringing together 160 individuals, 46 CSOs representatives, and representatives of the media, ministries and local governments. These meet-ups and round-tables facilitated the discussion of ways to collaborate over such issues as volunteerism, women rights, orphans and children with disabilities, and data journalism, among many more.

Project Results

Through trainings and prototyping the project strengthened the design and implementation of public outreach and advocacy skills for 131 CSOs. Small-scale initiatives reaching out to local communities helped CSOs gain practical skills and advance their own outreach and advocacy goals and CSOs have been able to successfully apply these skills after project completion. For example, the Social Support to People with Disabilities Public Association, organised an exhibition to promote the artwork and talents of youth with speech and hearing disorders, providing them with livelihoods opportunities. This project also helped CSOs conduct outreach and sensitize businesses to the needs of vulnerable youth. As a result of these efforts, five girls from a boarding school were able to find employment, and other students were helped to create a Curriculum Vitae (CV) and apply for vacant jobs in various companies.

Other online and offline platforms and tools developed to facilitate networking between the CSOs participating in the project brought tangible results. E.g. a group of journalists and CSOs representatives signed a joint declaration and established a Media and CSOs network.

Partnerships between the CSOs and government authorities were enhanced through roundtable discussions. Representatives for the State Committee for Family, Women and Children Affairs and the Office of Ombudsman were actively engaged in the meetings and agreed to support the efforts of social activists beyond the project completion.

“I am grateful to the training organisers. I learned a lot of things about communications, public relations and data journalism. The training was interactive. Information was presented in an easy-to-digest form. The training programme was the right balance of team work and presentations. Trainers had [an] individual approach to each participant. The training raised a lot of questions and I wish there were more time to answer all of them”.

Sara Rajabli
Training participant

“The project was like a magic stick in the life of people with disabilities. The youth with disabilities were so excited to be part of the ‘Be the voice of silence’ flash mob and the art exhibition. These events raised the public awareness over the problems of vulnerable youth”.

Jamila Abdulova
CSO activist working with vulnerable people
PROBLEM

According to the United Nations Guidelines for the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency, the successful prevention of juvenile delinquency requires efforts in part, from the entire society to ensure the harmonious development of adolescents, with respect for and promotion of their personality from early childhood. Emphasis should be placed on "preventive policies facilitating the successful socialization and integration of all children and young persons, in particular through the family, community, schools, vocational training and the world of work, as well as through voluntary organisations."1

Azerbaijan has a low rate of offences committed by juveniles. However, the prevention services offered by the country’s criminal and juvenile justice system are often limited to meetings between police and children and youth at risk and their families. Such an approach does not allow for early detection of risk factors such as poverty or hereditary properties. Nor does it allow for interventions, which is critical for effective prevention of juvenile delinquency. In partnership with various stakeholders, this project sought to complement the existing services with the development of community-based social services to provide assistance to families in crisis and children at risk of offending.

PROJECT

Project title: Addressing Juvenile Justice Reform through Piloting Innovative Services for Promotion of Children’s Mental Health in Azerbaijan

Start date: November 2016
Completion date: May 2018
Budget: Euro 123,000
Location: Baku
Target groups: Professionals in mental health, general practitioners, family nurses, teachers, juvenile inspectors, police officers, social workers, policymakers
Final beneficiaries: Children and juveniles with sign of delinquency and their families
Project partner: NGO Resource Centres in Guba, Mingachevir and Shirvan
Focal point: Mr. Polad Azizov
e-mail: mhaids@initiative.az

PROJECT OBJECTIVE

The overall objective of the project was to contribute to the implementation of human-rights-based juvenile justice reform of Azerbaijan by promoting the socialisation of children with emotional, behavioural, and autistic spectrum disorders. The specific objectives of the project were:

i) to provide services for children with behavioural, conduct, and autistic spectrum disorders, which will serve as a secondary preventive measure for the juvenile delinquency in the country;
ii) to facilitate cooperation between the governmental and non-governmental bodies to serve as a lobbying body toward the desired and human rights-based change in the juvenile justice system of Azerbaijan;
iii) demonstrate effects of the newly established service on the rates and statistics of juvenile delinquency in one district of Baku, via pre- and post-research.

PROJECT ACTIVITIES

The project established a prevention-oriented multi-disciplinary Family Care Centre (FCC) in the Narimanov district of Baku. The staff was trained in early detection and early interventions for children, adolescents, and their parents and caregivers. The FCC initiated development of a referral network with schools, child health facilities, juvenile justice services, and CSOs. The project experts designed training materials and trained health professionals, juvenile justice specialists, caregivers, government and community organisations in referral pathways and procedures.

The FCC produced promotional materials and organised information campaigns to increase public awareness on child and adolescent mental health and juvenile justice. The project also developed six guidelines for diagnosing and treatment of common mental health problems in children and adolescents based on the international practices. A website with resources on the topic www.mhjj.az was created.

PROJECT RESULTS

An early detection and intervention model for vulnerable children was set up and offers an effective service for at-risk children and families in the Narimanov District of Baku, through its multidisciplinary team of specialists, application of the best international methods, and a proper referral system to available services.

As of 1 April 2018, the FCC provided free-of-charge client-oriented services to 153 children and their family members. The comparative advantage of the FCC is that it approaches problems by considering the complex interaction of biological, psychological, and social factors. This approach is known as “bio-psycho-social” and was applied in Azerbaijan for the first time, by the FCC.

The project also rallied support to advocate for a preventive approach toward juvenile delinquency, and collected evidence that will be used to advocate for juvenile justice reform in Azerbaijan.

"For the first time we have got high-quality services for free. I have never thought that someone can help my child to overcome his problems”

(Anonymous)

"Thanks to the FCC specialists, I understood better the origin of my son’s problems. My husband was imprisoned and I was worried that my son would inherit his criminal behavior, but now I know that his problems were the result of the stressful situation in our family”.

(Anonymous)

“I felt embarrassed about having a daughter with mental disorder, but psychoeducation and participation in the group activities with other parents who shared the same problem helped me to overcome shame.”

(Anonymous)

“We appreciate very much the activities of the Family Care Center and would like to sign a joint memorandum on cooperation”.

Yelena Isralova
United Aid for Azerbaijan.

“We were impressed by the work done in the framework of the project. It seems to be a great example of cooperation between governmental, non-governmental and international organisations”.

Tohfa Jamilova
UNICEF

About a third of the Azerbaijani population are exposed to various types and levels of vulnerability. People with disabilities, the elderly, refugees, internally displaced populations (IDPs), and low-income families are considered vulnerable populations. As they have specific needs and face problems related to accessing healthcare and social assistance programmes, social services, and housing, Azerbaijan’s vulnerable populations also face challenges related to social inclusion, education, mobility, employment, and access to public places and facilities.

One of the key obstacles preventing them to fully realizing their social rights is a low level of legal literacy and limited access to legal advice and support. More often than not, vulnerable populations cannot afford paid legal services, and there are only few CSOs that provide free legal consultancy. In many cases, due to the absence of legal support vulnerable individuals are unable to properly use available legal protection mechanisms and procedures for filing claims, justifying appeals, or filing complaints. They are also often unable to address their request to the relevant government agencies. Thus, vulnerable people are unable to claim and restore their rights and are often deprived of their legitimate right to benefit from the governmental subsidies, allowances, and medical rehabilitation services.

### PROBLEM

The overall objective of the project was to improve legal awareness, promote and protect social rights as an integral part of fundamental human rights in Azerbaijan. The specific objectives of the project were:

1. to increase awareness of vulnerable populations about social rights through civic education and capacity building;
2. to provide legal advice and protection to vulnerable groups;
3. to strengthen technical capacity and competencies of local non-governmental organisations (NGO) and practitioners.

### PROJECT OBJECTIVE

The project objectives were also extended to a cover a larger group of military servicemen. The project produced a booklet that explains social rights in easy-to-understand language, and the ‘Restoration of Your Social Rights’ handbook is a step-by-step guide to claiming social rights, addressing social rights violations, and filing an appeal to courts and government agencies. An online training programme explaining social rights and protection mechanisms in the format of the Frequently Asked Questions, was created. The project organised a training of trainers and a series of seminars for legal practitioners, CSOs, and local governments. The Law and Development Public Association (LDPA) also created a Facebook page titled ‘Know and Protect Your Rights’ as well as an e-library on social rights and legal protection.

A Legal Support and Defence Centre was established in Baku to provide free legal advice to vulnerable populations. Support includes interpretation of legal documents, guidance to apply for restoration of rights, preparation of applications, and legal defence in court.

### PROJECT RESULTS

About 140 people in Baku and six regions of Azerbaijan have increased awareness on their social rights and protection mechanisms, by accessing offline and online resources on social rights.

As of 1 April 2018, 178 people have benefitted from free legal support, including court representation, through the Legal Support and Defence Centre established in Baku.

Capacity building events supported by the project have strengthened technical competencies of 20 lawyers and 15 CSOs to better understand international and national legislation related to social rights, its practical use and procedures. This enables them to identify problems associated with the protection and restoration of human rights for vulnerable populations, and provide legal consultancy.

Recommendations of the legal gap analysis received the attention of decision-makers and resulted in a number of legal changes. The amount of social benefits increased by 10 percent. The draft law on the Rights of PwDs was passed to the Parliament and is expected to be fully endorsed in the spring session of 2018. Death insurance entitlements were also extended to a cover a larger group of military servicemen.

“I had a disability of the 2nd degree. My health condition deteriorated and I wanted to get the first degree. I appealed to several lawyers but could not afford their services as the fees were too high. Then my daughter came across an advertisement for free legal aid on the internet, and I applied for it. Thanks to the legal assistance provided there, I have received the first degree. I believe that such projects are important for a lot of people like me who are in need of free legal assistance”.

Gahraman Mirzayev
Beneficiary of the Legal Support and Defence Centre

“Free legal aid services offered by such projects not only help persons with disabilities but anyone who needs legal assistance. Employers often refuse to hire these people, even though there is a certain quota for employing them. By taking advantage of free legal aid provided by the project, we will dispute specific cases in courts. We believe that judicial practice in this area will significantly contribute to the solution of the problem”.

Davud Rahimov
Head of the Union of PwDs Organisations

“For years I have appealed to various government agencies for compensation of my health damage from military operations but they took no action. In this training I learned that the case of violation of my rights on the part of authorities and individuals should be brought to the court. I believe that the publications distributed at the training will also help us to educate others. I think everyone needs to have access to such trainings and publications”.

Famil Guliyev
Training participant
Local Governance Assistance Public Union

PROBLEM

The Government of Azerbaijan supports community-level programmes that provide social services to vulnerable children and their families. Special emphasis is placed on the social integration of children with disabilities, prevention of child marriages, enhance childcare and support for children in poor living conditions. The Government of Azerbaijan decided to outsource the social services from national level CSOs, and awarded contracts to fifteen local level CSOs that delivered social services to over 1,500 children. Currently, the Azerbaijani Government is developing advanced standards for assessing the quality, effectiveness, and efficiency of targeted social services.

At the same time, qualitative evidence collected through interviews and discussions with various stakeholders at the local level suggests that many CSOs have limited capacities to effectively engage in state-supported social programmes. This project seeks to enhance the capacities of the CSOs and local authorities to provide social services to vulnerable social groups, specifically children and youth living with disability or some kind of impediment. This project also expected to contribute to the decentralization and improved quality standards for service delivery, ultimately facilitating better access of social services for vulnerable populations.

PROJECT

Project title: Support and Training in Azerbaijan for Rethinking and Tuning Social Inclusion (START)

Start date: October 2016
Completion date: May 2018
Budget: Euro 123,000

Location: Ganja, Shirvan

Target groups: Local NGOs, municipalities, local executive authorities, children and youth from vulnerable backgrounds and their families

Final beneficiaries: Children and youth form a less fortunate background and their families

Focal point: Mr. Vusal Mirzayev

Composition

Local Governance Assistance Public Union (LGA) created a pool of eight master trainers from the CSOs community in strategic planning, project management, and delivery of social services and advocacy for the rights of children and youth. These master trainers supported four municipalities in the development of innovative and inclusive social services for disadvantaged children and youth and their families.

The cross-sectoral initiative groups representing the State Social Protection Fund, local Executive authority, Municipality, Red Crescent Society, and Community were established in four municipalities. They were trained by the master trainers on the topics of social work, roles and responsibilities of social workers, the provision of social services, and conflict management in social service provision. With LGA’s facilitation the cross-sectoral groups developed local mid-term strategies for the delivery of inclusive social services.

LGA also supported implementation of eight small-scale pilot projects that targeted disadvantaged children and youth, and families. In addition, the project procured equipment for the Children’s Mental Health Department of Shirvan city, built staff capacity for department administration and service delivery, and established a department library.

PROJECT OBJECTIVE

The project aimed to support the effective and sustainable provisions of innovative and inclusive social services for the disadvantaged children and youth and their families.

PROJECT ACTIVITIES

Local Governance Assistance Public Union (LGA) created a pool of eight master trainers from the CSOs community in strategic planning, project management, and delivery of social services and advocacy for the rights of children and youth. These master trainers supported four municipalities in the development of innovative and inclusive social services for disadvantaged children and youth and their families.

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PROJECT RESULTS

A pool of master trainers was created to support cross-sectoral initiative groups that plan, design and implement inclusive social services for disadvantaged children and youth and their families. After the project completion, the master trainers engaged in local capacity building events organised by the Shirvan’s Youth and Sport Department. The trainers also succeeded in mobilising resources that provide legal services to vulnerable communities.

Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) were signed between four CSOs and four municipalities to secure continuous collaboration beyond the project’s lifetime. The pilot social projects were implemented in line with the mid-term strategy in Goychay and Shirvan.

Over 3,700 children and youth from less favourable economic and social background and their families benefited from these small-scale pilot projects. These projects provided clothing, school supplies and food to children living with a disability, children with a single parent, and children with unemployed parents. A tent was purchased for use by low-income families for community gatherings. In one case, a family of an individual who had a disability, was able to receive support with medical treatment and rehabilitation services.

“My son, Huseyn Salmanov, was born with a disease known as the ‘plexus disorder’. We could not afford going to the doctors, we had no money to pay for the visit. I learnt about the project at the event held in Goychay to mark the International Children’s Day. We applied to the project and received help. My son got treatment in Baku and went through a rehabilitation programme. Then the project bought two devices that my son is wearing day and night to continue recovery. For the first time, we felt there are people who care about us”.

Nigar Salmanova
Resident of Goychay municipality

“Implementing a pilot project to improve social services of vulnerable people living in the Hajigahramanly municipality is our first success. We have families living in difficult conditions and facing various sorts of problems. The project purchased a tent for our community where these people can have weddings, celebrate holidays, mourn their dead and have other kinds of community gatherings. It also turned into an income-generating opportunity for the municipality”.

Samira Abishova
Chairman of the Hajigahramanly municipality

“Our Children Mental Health Department has been providing psychological services to children and youth from Shirvan and 8 surrounding regions since 2016. But we do not have enough equipment and our conditions are not up to the standards. We believe that this project will change the situation. With new equipment, and trained personnel our Centre will offer more professional services”.

Dilavar Gurbanov
Psychotherapist in the Children Mental Health Department of Shirvan city
PROJECT

PROJECT ACTIVITIES

The project organized a series of data visualisation trainings and data journalism workshops targeting media, data enthusiasts, CSOs activists and government representatives, reaching 223 persons. The most active participants also attended international trainings in the Czech Republic and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

An online course, “What is Data Journalism”, was developed and the book Data Journalism was translated into Azerbaijani and made available at the www.data.org.az portal. Special effort was made to reach out to the regions - MPA organised a data journalism training for journalists working in regional newspapers, freelancers and bloggers, covering 15 regions including Nakchivan. The book was also presented and discussed at the Mingachevir State University and Mingachevir Tourism College.

Six consultations were held with the government representatives in five regions of the country bringing together 122 people, to discuss how data can be used to improve service delivery.

PROJECT OBJECTIVE

The objective of the project was to develop an inclusive open data community in Azerbaijan and to strengthen its capacity to promote governance, accountability and public access to information and services.

PROJECT RESULTS

The geographical names on the territory of Azerbaijan on www.openstreetmap.org were translated from English into Azerbaijani, enabling local people to make use of this global map.

“Today people are inundated with information, and it is becoming more and more difficult to navigate through countless lines of numbers and statistics. Infographics are gaining popularity as a powerful tool to allow people to easily digest information through the use of visual data, charts, and statistics. Bringing data journalism to Azerbaijan can also improve the skills of the statisticians”.

Etibar Kerimov
Head of the Mingachevir branch of the National Statistics Office

“I learned a lot during both the local training in Mingachevir and a one-month international course in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Later on, I became a trainer in a four-day training session for regional journalists. Through that experience, I realised that I feel more fulfilled when I share the knowledge with others”.

Farid Hasanov
Independent journalist and participant of local and international trainings on data journalism
**“Uluchay” Social-Economic Innovation Center**

**PROJECT**

**Project title:** Provision of legal aid, rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners in Azerbaijan

**Start date:** October 2016

**Completion date:** May 2018

**Budget:** Euro 123,482

**Location:** Sheki

**Target groups:** Prisoners and staff of the Sheki prison, CSOs, local authorities

**Final beneficiaries:** Prisoners

**Project partner:** Sheki regional office of the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Centre for Economic and Social Development

**Focal point:** Mr. Ilyas Safarli
e-mail: ilyas@uluchay.org

**PROBLEM**

In Azerbaijan, prisoners face many hardships as they re-enter society after their release. Because of the systemic legal and societal barriers, it is more difficult for released ex-offenders to find employment, secure housing, re-connect with family and community and generally function in society, than it is for the general populace. The ex-prisoners do not have access to legal and psychological support, lack education and work experience and are regarded with suspicion by potential employers. This challenging environment deters ex-offenders from becoming productive members of the society, and sets them up to fail. In these circumstances, ex-prisoners tend to resort to criminal behaviour.

According to the official statistics of the Ministry of Justice of Azerbaijan, the rate of repeated offenses tends to rise every year (13.5% in 2012, 13.8% in 2013 and 15.7% in 2014). This project sought to reduce the likelihood of repeated criminal behaviour by providing support services and addressing shortage of vocational skills among the prisoners of the Sheki prison.

**PROJECT OBJECTIVE**

The overall objective of the project was to protect and promote economic and social rights of prisoners for their rehabilitation and reintegration into society.

**PROJECT ACTIVITIES**

The Uluchay project experts trained the staff of the Ministry of Justice, Penitentiary Service, other CSOs and local authorities in prison management, prisoners’ rights and international conventions, including the European Convention for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and International Human Rights Standards Protecting Prisoners. The training participants also learned international best practices regarding how the government and civil society can work together to ensure success of the prisoners’ rehabilitation and social reintegration programmes. Members of the Uluchay provided legal aid, mentoring, vocational training, and business education to the inmates of the Sheki prison. Given the high demand for these kinds of services, Uluchay extended legal, psychological and business support to cover more prisoners than originally planned.

In addition, the project organised awareness raising campaigns among the general public on the needs and rights of offenders and sensitised entrepreneurs and potential employers to the problems faced by ex-prisoners in finding employment.

**PROJECT RESULTS**

During the project, over 400 prisoners received legal aid and over 350 benefitted from psychological support. A woodcutting workshop was established on the premises of the Sheki prison where the prisoners are producing wood flooring, furniture and souvenirs for sale and earning livelihoods to support themselves and their families.

Over a hundred prisoners learned the essentials of business start-up and development that will help them to re-integrate into society after their release. Nine business ideas generated by prisoners received financial support from the project, including a sewing workshop, a carwash, three workshops for woodwork handicrafts, a woodcutting workshop for vegetable containers, two woodcutting workshops for furniture and a bee-keeping business.

“The support received from the project has totally changed my life. It helped me and my wife start a family business – home sewing. By opening a sewing workshop, I have realised my wife’s biggest dream and that makes me happy. Now this business is the main source of income for our family.”

Natig Huseynov
Former prisoner and beneficiary of the business training and start-up grant

“The project gave me a unique opportunity to start my own business inside the Sheki Prison – I make wooden handicrafts. Thanks to this business, I can earn money to support my family and fulfil my duty as the breadwinner and the father. I helped organise my son’s wedding. I am waiting for my release date to re-unite with the family. I will take the equipment with me and continue to work in woodcutting, and will return to a normal life.”

Vasif Ismayilov
Prisoner at the Sheki Penitentiary Service, beneficiary of the business training and start-up grant

“As the project’s results have shown, both the project idea and the partnership strategy were appropriately designed. The close partnership developed between the Sheki regional office of Ministry of Justice and ‘Uluchay’ was critical to the success of the project. The project produced great benefits to our target group, and is an excellent example of how a government structure and an NGO can work together and complement each other’s efforts.”

Rahman Mammadov
Chairman of the Sheki regional office of the Ministry of Justice
Azerbaijan ratified the UN Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and adopted a sound legal framework for gender equality. However, the gender disparities persist in education, employment, political participation and decision-making, access to information and communication technologies. Weak institutionalization of gender equality in the national systems and structures is a key barrier to effective gender mainstreaming in all policies and programmes within the state machinery that play a pivotal role in the process of women’s advancement. The lack of sound gender analysis results in gender-blind policy-making and planning. In addition, CSOs have limited knowledge of gender equality mechanisms and tools, and cannot adequately participate in implementation, monitoring, reporting and advocacy of women’s rights related instruments, namely the CEDAW.

To address the problem, it is critical to build a strong Gender Focal Point (GFP) machinery capable of supporting gender mainstreaming and influencing decision-makers to pursue gender-sensitive policies and programmes, thereby, forming a robust National Women’s Machinery (NWM). The need to strengthen the operation of the GFP machinery was also emphasized as an issue of concern by the UN CEDAW Committee.

The overall objective of the project was to support civil society contributions to the quality and effectiveness of CEDAW implementation in Azerbaijan through NWM, and CEDAW-related monitoring, reporting and advocacy. The specific objective of the project was to address 16 recommendations of the CEDAW review in the three areas of concern — National Machinery for Women’s Advancement; CEDAW Visibility, Awareness and Implementation; and Follow-up and Reporting.

Azerbaijan ratified the UN Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and adopted a sound legal framework for gender equality. However, the gender disparities persist in education, employment, political participation and decision-making, access to information and communication technologies. Weak institutionalization of gender equality in the national systems and structures is a key barrier to effective gender mainstreaming in all policies and programmes within the state machinery that play a pivotal role in the process of women’s advancement. The lack of sound gender analysis results in gender-blind policy-making and planning. In addition, CSOs have limited knowledge of gender equality mechanisms and tools, and cannot adequately participate in implementation, monitoring, reporting and advocacy of women’s rights related instruments, namely the CEDAW.

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A comprehensive information database and publications were produced to support effective operation of the NWM and participation of the civil society in the implementation, monitoring, reporting and advocacy of the CEDAW. The project completed two out of five steps necessary to strengthen the NWM in Azerbaijan.

Gender School, a unique capacity-building infrastructure with a gender-oriented profiled team, was established, capacitated and serves as a source of expertise in gender mainstreaming.

The project established a Gender School as a technical facility with a good mix of expertise to support the operation of the NWM. The WARD staff held seven orientation and planning meetings with the experts of the Gender School in order to strengthen the GFP machinery, assess the capacity needs of the gender experts, and develop a strategy and action plan for the Gender School. Based on the results of the capacity assessment, the project organised a four-day international training for the Gender School experts in Guba, covering the concepts of gender architecture, NWM and gender mainstreaming.

The project organised a Forum for GFPs from 17 ministries, state agencies and academia that helped to identify needs and perspectives for improvement of the operation of the GFP and NWM. The Forum, attended by the members of the Gender School, allowed them to better understand the GFP’s capacity needs and, specifically, requirements in terms of knowledge resources.

The project produced a Resource Pack of eight publications to guide the GFPs, experts, human resource managers and supervisors in their work. The Resource Pack covers a multitude of topics — working with CEDAW and other human rights mechanisms; gender equality; leadership; recruitment, retention and promotion; and gender terminology. The project launched and presented the Resource Pack to the GFPs, ministries and other state agencies, and advocate for its integration into the work of state agencies.

“The managers and heads of departments do not understand the benefits that a GFP can bring to their organisation and do not know how to make use of the information provided by the GFP. I expect the Resource Pack to provide guidance in this respect”.

— Saadat Ibrahimov

Senior advisor to Human Resources Department, Ministry of Justice

“Introduction of a GFP function in the state institutions in 2000 was a big step forward in the implementation of the gender policy in Azerbaijan. But, it is expected that a person assigned with this responsibility is educated in gender issues. Hopefully, the Gender School will be able to fulfill this role”.

— Nurlana Qurbanova

Head of Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

“ ‘We have the GFPs in the ministries and state committees, but they do not fully understand the scope of this function. They are usually focused on performing their main duties, while the GFP function is not clear and is often considered marginal. We hope the Resource Pack will help the GFPs better understand their responsibilities and support them in their work’”.

— Rena Ibrahimimbova

Head of Department on Gender and Applied Psychology, Baku State University, expert of the Gender School

“It is crucial for GFPs to have access to an entire pack of information and tools to fulfill their GFP function. They will be able to mainstream gender into their agencies’ work only if they fully understand the gender concept, gender policy, and the mission of their agencies as well as their role in this system. I am confident that the Resource Pack, prepared by the project, will play an instrumental role in this regard”.

— Zumrud Jalilova

Lecturer of Gender Studies at the Baku State University, expert of the Gender School
Centre for Economic and Social Development (CESD) is a leading independent economic think tank in Azerbaijan. Its mission is to promote research and analysis of socio-economic issues in order to positively influence the public policy decision-making process.

Constitution Research Fund (CRF) is a non-governmental organization functioning in Azerbaijan since 2004. Its mission is to assist development of democratic institutions, promote democratic values and rule of law, and enhance civic participation.

Democracy Monitor Public Union (DeMo) is a non-governmental organization specialized in monitoring, advocacy, legal aid, humanitarian research and educational work on civil and political rights, non-discrimination and equality law, women empowerment as well as promotion of democratic institutions and confidence-building in the communities and among the societies involved in the conflicts in the South Caucasus.

Eurasia Partnership Foundation (EPF) is a non-profit organization with local foundations in the South Caucasus countries. EPF’s mission is to empower people to effect change for social justice and economic prosperity through hands-on programmes, helping them to improve their communities and their own lives.

Human Rights Centre of Azerbaijan (HRCA) is a non-profit organization operating in Azerbaijan since 1993. HRCA’s mission is to promote international human rights standards in Azerbaijan through monitoring, education, advocacy and international litigation.

Internews Azerbaijan is a non-profit independent organization that supports development and operation of professional and independent media in Azerbaijan, including broadcast, print and radio communication media outlets.

Initiative for the Sake of Development (ISD) is a non-profit organization focused on assisting children, young people and families in crisis situations and other vulnerable populations. The mission of the organization is to promote and protect rights of children and young people including right to education, health and mental health, and comprehensive development through support to civil initiatives.

Law and Development Public Association (LDPA) is a non-profit organization functioning in Azerbaijan since 2005. Through its activities, the Association supports development of civil society and democratic institutions, increases legal awareness of citizens and assists in the implementation of legal reforms in Azerbaijan.
Local Governance Assistance (LGA) is a non-profit organization established in 2005. Its mission is to support development of the local governance system by contributing to the solution of social and economic problems at the local level. The activities of the LGA are focused on public services delivery, regional and rural development, social-economic development and employment.

Mingachevir Parents’ Association (MPA) is a non-governmental organization established in 2004 in Mingachevir, by a group of journalists. Its objectives are to promote sense of patriotism among students and young people, educate journalists, promote open data, raise environmental awareness among children and youth.

Uluchay Social-Economic Innovation Center is a non-governmental organization established in 1995 and based in Sheki, Azerbaijan. Its mission is to support the socio-economic development of Azerbaijan’s regions. Uluchay is working on civil society development, justice issues, public sector reform, youth empowerment, EU Integration, gender and social problems.

Women’s Association for Rational Development (WARD) is a non-governmental organization established in 2002. Its mission is to contribute to the development of Azerbaijan through women’s empowerment and equal participation. WARD’s programmes are focused on gender-based discriminatory practices; women’s reproductive health and rights; female entrepreneurship; women’s role in conflict transformation and peace-building.