



CIVIL SOCIETY & MEDIA IN ARMENIA

A Field Assessment for Learning, Evaluation and Research Activity II (LER II)

MAY 2019

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This Civil Society and Media Sub-Sector Assessment for Armenia was conducted by a team of international and local consultants fielded and managed by The Cloudburst Group, namely Dr. Sara Steinmetz (team lead), Hasmik Tamamyan (country expert), Kate Marple-Cantrell (management and logistics), and Astghik Mailyan (research support and translation). Cloudburst wishes to thank Dr. Graeme Robertson and Simon Hoellerbauer from the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill for their thoughtful review and contributions.

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ABBREVIATIONS

CEPA	Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement
CRRC	Caucasus Research Resource Center
CSM	Civil Society and Media
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CSO-LA	Civil Society Organisations/Local Authorities Programme
DOS	Denial of Service
DPO	Disabled Persons' Organization
EENA	Enabling Environment National Assessment
EPFA	Eurasia Partnership Foundation Armenia
EU	European Union
EIDHR	European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights
EVAC	Eliminating Violence Against Children
FOI	Freedom of Information
FOICA	Freedom of Information Center of Armenia
GONGO	Government Non-Governmental Organization
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IT	Information Technology
JFF	Journalists for the Future
LG	Local Government
LGBTI	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex
MIC	Media Initiatives Center
MP	Member of Parliament
NA	National Assembly
NED	National Endowment for Democracy

NSS	National Security Service
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OSF	Open Society Foundation
PM	Prime Minister
PSA	Public Service Announcement
RA	Republic of Armenia
SME	Small and Medium Enterprise
SPAP II	Social Protection Administration Project II
SRC	State Revenue Committee
TIAC	Transparency International Anticorruption Center
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
UATE	Union of Advanced Technology Enterprises

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

After almost seventy years of Soviet domination, and twenty-eight years of a governance system that may be characterized as “semi-authoritarian,” Armenia’s political landscape has markedly transformed in the past year. Armenia’s 2018 Velvet Revolution focused on the removal of the regime in power and the corruption that was endemic to it. The country is now led by a Prime Minister who is committed to reform and a largely inexperienced government that aspires to bring democracy to its citizens. Civil society is developing but still dominated by larger, urban organizations. Trust in civil society organizations is generally low. While multiple sources of print, radio, television, and online information exist, the overall media environment is constrained by limited funding resources.

PURPOSE AND QUESTIONS

This Civil Society and Media Assessment supports USAID/Armenia’s Development Objective 2 (DO 2), “more participatory, effective, and accountable governance.” Its purpose was to conduct a primarily qualitative analysis of civil society and media sector dynamics in a political transition setting, focused on a number of thematic areas including civil society and citizen engagement in advocating for and monitoring reform; civil society capacity and enabling environment; disinformation and other threats; and media reach and pluralism.

The following four core questions guided the assessment:

- **Political Environment:** What are the post-revolution political/social dynamics, constraints and opportunities that may impact the working environment, role, and direction of Armenia’s civil society and media sectors?
- **Civil Society:** What are the current challenges and opportunities for Armenian civil society to play a constructive role in advancing Armenia’s democratic transition and consolidation?
- **Media:** What post-revolution challenges and opportunities affect the expansion and strengthening of Armenia’s various media outlets as sources of objective information and civic education throughout the country?
- **Donors:** What is USAID’s comparative advantage as a donor in this sector? What are the priorities of other donors? What, if any, are the gaps in planned donor assistance? Where can USAID assistance make a difference?

METHODS AND LIMITATIONS

This assessment focused on the internal dynamics and needs of two sectors, civil society and media, as well as the relationship of these sectors to each other, to government, and to citizens. A social science rather than technology-focused approach was utilized.

The assessment consisted of two phases—desk research and field research. The academic evidence review (desk research) considered what the academic literature tells us about civil society and media development and assistance in political transition settings such as Armenia. The assessment team combined the findings and recommendations from the academic evidence review with traditional desk review of relevant primary and secondary sources, program documents, donor analyses, sector

assessments, and policy/academic think pieces to finalize the core research questions and sub-questions to explore during fieldwork. The field assessment research questions were also informed by the issues/questions that arose from desk review document sources and from the team's understanding of critical challenges that often affect civil society organizations worldwide.

In-country interviews were conducted from April 3-17, 2019, predominantly in Yerevan; interviews were also undertaken in Gyumri, and Poqr Vedi, a small community in the Ararat Valley. Field research consisted of in-depth interviews and targeted small group discussions, with key informants and stakeholders from the following main stakeholder groups: USAID and USAID partners; Armenia government officials (local and national); members of National Assembly (NA) and NA staff; "social movement" actors/leaders; relevant national and local civil society organizations (CSOs); CSO coalitions and networks; policy and academic analysts/think tanks; journalists and media representatives (including social media); and bilateral and multilateral donors, and donor-funded projects.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Armenia sits at a critical juncture. The Velvet Revolution and the smaller-scale civic initiatives that came before it have shown that the Armenian public desires change and is willing to become involved when necessary. Furthermore, the new government in Armenia is supportive of democracy and open to civil society participation. Possibilities of change and reform are strengthened by an Armenian Diaspora that has demonstrated a willingness to provide development and technical assistance and serves as another channel of support.

Nonetheless, democracy in Armenia is fragile and retreat appears to still be possible. An inconsistently connected and financially vulnerable civil society and a weak and divided media scene may make it difficult for the promises of the revolution to be fulfilled. Institutions, processes, and principles of democracy, therefore, need to be developed, formalized, institutionalized, and protected while the environment remains conducive to reform. Internally, a slow pace of change and reform implementation and the limited capacity of the new government have been raised as issues of concern. Citizens are expecting change and want to see it relatively soon, so movement on this front is important to ensure that the public does not lose confidence in the government. At a regional level, Armenia's geo-political position and affiliations with Russia require delicate maneuvering regarding both regional and national politics.

Three key cross-cutting priority areas for the civil society and media sectors emerge from this analysis:

Civic Education: Without wide public understanding of and support for democracy, it is possible for public opinion to be manipulated, or frustrations exploited, and for public support for Armenia's nascent democracy to be diminished or reversed.

Enabling Environment: In the context of the fragile political environment, it is critical that laws, regulations, and processes that provide protections to the civil society and media sectors, and that define relationships between government and sector actors, are developed and established.

Advocacy: Support for sector advocacy initiatives and for follow up monitoring of implementation constitutes a priority focus for donor efforts.

CIVIL SOCIETY

With respect to civic initiatives and civic culture, the new government is largely supported by citizens across the country. This support and optimism may be a useful entryway to building wider citizen understanding of what constitutes democracy and a democratic culture. However, Armenian society at large is affected by decades of non-democratic rule that have embedded perspectives that are sometimes antithetical to democratic norms. For example, while the exchange of views and debate is now more open, a lack of tolerance of different voices has transformed debate and criticism into confrontation and antagonism. Participation that is exercised through public criticism is often resisted and denounced, especially on social media. In addition, conservative perspectives and social dynamics that pervade, and in some cases seem to define, Armenian culture may sometimes appear to be at odds with donor agendas.

The CSO enabling environment in Armenia is relatively positive across a number of areas, and CSO operations are generally not unduly burdened. Still, at present, formal mechanisms for CSO-government dialogue are limited. While such channels are permitted across government, and while some ministries and NA committees have functioning advisory/stakeholder participation committees, the use of such mechanisms is not required or universal. Advocacy is conducted through informal and formal channels, and politics is viewed to be personal across the board, both at the local and national levels. Post-revolution Armenia has opened an opportunity for civil society actors to develop new, formal, and more effective channels and processes through which to engage with government institutions.

The government's interest in strengthening democracy also provides an opportunity for moving forward on legislative reforms that affect civil society and the media. CSO flexibility and activities are presently constrained by a number of laws and regulations, including the legal standing of CSOs on public interest issues and the absence of an endowment law that might ease CSO sustainability limitations. The reality of the CSO operating environment is that current funding for many CSOs is derived from donors. As a consequence, their credibility may be questioned, and CSOs may be criticized for pursuing agendas that may be more responsive to donor interests than to local or national needs or concerns.

Within the civil society sector, organizations generally appear to be willing to work together on issues of common interest, on an ad hoc basis, despite differences they may have on other issues. The willingness to collaborate underlines the capacity of sector actors to potentially work together on important issues and to play a positive role in strengthening the process of democratization as it moves forward. Previous successes of ad hoc coalitions serve as models for current and future initiatives, and the sector is proving to be dynamic, with new organizations emerging.

The civil society sector is still generally weak in a number of factors that are essential for effective advocacy including 1) representation of, and links with, wider constituencies, and 2) capacity in areas such as evidence-based research, clear and objective analysis, effective communication, and presentation and dissemination of clear and compelling materials. Further, linkages between national and local level organizations are limited. While national level policy in areas such as education, health, social services, and decentralization have direct implications for local communities, linkages between local and national level organizations are generally unequal and based on funding, i.e., national level organizations receive grants and use local organizations for implementation, rather than for critical two-way policy dialogue and collaboration.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the context of the fragile political environment in Armenia, it is critical that laws, regulations, and processes that provide protections to the civil society sector, and that define relationships between government and sector actors, are formalized and institutionalized. Recommendations thus focus on these core overarching issues, as well as on mechanisms through which to strengthen sector actor capacities. Please refer to Section 2.5—Summary and Prioritization of Civil Society Recommendations for the full numbered list of recommendations in this sector.

- **Civic initiatives:** Support CSO activities that assist civic initiatives, particularly in areas of legal representation and monitoring. Establish dialogue between civil society activists, grassroots civil activists, and civic initiative activists to ascertain what kind of outside support civic initiatives may be comfortable accepting.
- **Civic education:** Support country-wide civic education programs through training and education activities, and media programs. Focus areas would include principles and processes of democracy (the ideal and the real); democracy in the current Armenian context (expectations and constraints); and critical thinking and media literacy (including identifying information sources, assessing evidence, analyzing facts, evaluating information, and understanding responsible media).
- **Improved processes and awareness raising:** Support government-CSO dialogues to reform participation mechanisms. Raise awareness in the civil society sector regarding the relatively new CSO registration guidelines that now permit registration at regional offices.
- **Legislative and regulatory reform:** Support legal standing of CSOs on public interest issues, government oversight of CSOs by the tax authorities, an endowment law, and charitable contributions deduction legislation.
- **CSO capacity building:** Address capacity gaps within CSOs by providing formal training; grant sub-components for training of individual organizations; and sector and cross-sector hands-on internships, fellowships, exchanges, and learning opportunities. Provide capacity support to government bodies that are responsible for responding to advocacy initiatives that are being funded and supported.
- **Local capacity building:** Increase local level CSO capacity by providing training for local organizations and community-based groups on budget monitoring and social audits. Such activities would help build and strengthen civil society at the local level and contribute to the fight against corruption.
- **Government capacity building:** Establish quick grant mechanism to support reform efforts as issues and legislative initiatives arise. In this context, also provide capacity support to government bodies that are responsible for responding to advocacy initiatives that are being funded and supported. Develop the capacity of officials working in the State Register and State Revenue Committee Department of Non-Profits' Oversight. Support a “marketplace” website that makes available information regarding issues that experts, data collection experts, researchers and analysts are able fill the expertise gap across the CSO sector, on as-needed basis.
- **Fostering greater connectivity:** Establish policy research/resource center for CSOs, media, and NA staff. Build linkages between local and national organizations by supporting initiatives that focus on cross-community concerns. Issues would be presented to appropriate ministries and/or NA committees and a related advocacy campaign could be conducted. Focus issues would be those that

are regulated by national level policy but that have direct local implications (for example: education, health, or social services).

MEDIA

Multiple sources of information are available to the public, ranging from print and radio, to television and online media. Notably, Public Television is improving the format and content of its programs and seeks to foster a citizenry that embraces debate and difference. Public TV audience numbers have gone up, and the channel's ratings have moved to second place. Additionally, in a market populated by media outlets that may represent political actors or particular biases, a number of local media outlets have provided objective content and have undertaken serious investigative reporting. Although these independent outlets are generally grant-funded, they nonetheless serve as useful models for the development of a vibrant and professional media sector.

While television remains a mainstay for many citizens, internet and related online media sources have become preeminent channels of information exchange. Internet has generally remained outside the control of government, and online media have greater editorial freedom in comparison to print and television. Online channels, including Facebook, are now battlegrounds for ideas and political perspectives, and are able to reach 67% of Armenia's population. While the availability of a medium such as Facebook to reach a wide audience is useful in disseminating education and information, it is also a major challenge in the war against disinformation. Outside of social media, television, which has relatively significant viewership, is also an avenue through which biased information and reporting may be aired. In this context, Russian TV is often noted as a possible source of non-objective information.

The professional activities of Armenia's journalists are protected by law, and constraints such as censorship, pressure, and obstruction are prohibited. In addition, Armenia's Law on Freedom of Information (2003) is generally considered to be "enabling." As is the case with the CSO enabling environment, challenges to various freedoms occurred not necessarily because of gaps in the laws, but because of the lack of enforcement.

Legislative reform initiatives that are critical to a vibrant media are expected and/or needed. The lack of transparency in media ownership and financing is a core issue that affects media in Armenia. It makes it difficult for the public to determine what interests may be behind various media outlets, and what self-censorship is being imposed by editors and journalists. The problem of ownership and reporting bias persists because audience numbers and advertising possibilities in Armenia are relatively limited, forcing media outlets to accept funding from interests with agendas. Freedom of Information (FOI) also presents challenges to citizens and CSOs. FOI requests may not yield the information sought from government offices. Government agencies do not regularly update websites and are not proactively publishing the required information. In addition, in recent months, ministries have posted information directly on social media sites/Facebook, often neglecting to provide the information on their official websites. Media-focused CSOs will collaborate on at least some of these reform issues via ad hoc coalitions.

The quality of journalism is negatively affected by a number of issues, including: pressures for quick stories and for infotainment rather than fact checking; reluctance to cover sensitive issues such as human rights, to avoid losing an audience that is largely socially conservative; limited issue expertise; limited impact of media training; and financial constraints that lead to funding dependence, affect editorial

control and the types of stories chosen (i.e., shorter more popular content pieces may be favored instead of research and investigative reporting, which requires time and money), and limit the opportunities afforded staff journalists to take time for training.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations focus on enabling environment issues that improve transparency, fairness, and pluralism (of sources) that are important to the media and Armenia. This includes legislative reforms and organizational reform of Council of Public TV and Radio Broadcasting. Media and media organizations may advocate for all of the above. Support/training on digital security is also related to the issues of fairness, free speech, and pluralism, and is thus a high priority. Please refer to Section 3.4—Summary and Prioritization of Media Recommendations for the full numbered list of recommendations in this sector.

- **Legislative and regulatory reform:** Support media and media-focused organizations in developing and advocating for legislative initiatives that are of concern to the sector, including transparency in media ownership, endowment law, and labor rights. Support and/or provide resources to facilitate enforcement of existing media laws by the government. Support organizational reform for the Council of Public TV and Radio Broadcasting.
- **Access to quality media content:** Support Social Media Management skills development to attract readers away from biased sources. Improve media information and entertainment programs to increase civic awareness, counter disinformation, and attract viewers, particularly those who watch Russian language TV. Support development and maintenance of more fact checking sites to assess massive amount of information that is made available online.
- **Digital security and the protection of speech:** Support digital security training and the modernization of digital security systems for various media outlets. Support a cross-sector FOI campaign that addresses the various challenges related to implementation of the FOI law. Support organizations that consistently monitor and report on cases of media obstruction and violence that may occur against journalists.
- **Media capacity building:** Grow media capacity through initiatives for journalists including civic education; grants to learn about and research/write objective stories on particular issues; core journalist skills training, including fact checking and investigative reporting; and hands-on training and practice through training programs abroad.
- **Sustainability:** Build media sustainability through business and financial management skills training and support for media audience measurement and audience research. Support investment by the public broadcaster and independent media outlets to update their infrastructure and adapt to technological advances in the media sector.
- **Government capacity building:** Train ministers and ministry officials/staff on communications skills that will enable them to work the media effectively. Improve government websites to ensure that they are user-friendly, consistently updated, and have comparable formats.
- **Fostering greater connectivity:** Support a media sector umbrella association to coordinate and advocate for media interests.

I ASSESSMENT OVERVIEW

I.1 PURPOSE, QUESTIONS, AND STRUCTURE

The purpose of this Civil Society and Media (CSM) Field Assessment is to support USAID/Armenia's Development Objective 2 (DO 2), "more participatory, effective, and accountable governance," by conducting a primarily qualitative analysis of civil society and media sector dynamics in a political transition setting. This assessment includes thematic areas including civil society and citizen engagement in advocating for and monitoring reform; capacity and enabling environment; disinformation and other threats; and media reach and pluralism.

The following four core questions guided the assessment:

- **Political Environment:** What are the post-revolution political/social dynamics, constraints and opportunities that may impact the working environment, role, and direction of Armenia's civil society and media sectors?
- **Civil Society:** What are the current challenges and opportunities for Armenian civil society to play a constructive role in advancing Armenia's democratic transition and consolidation?
- **Media:** What post-revolution challenges and opportunities affect the expansion and strengthening of Armenia's various media outlets as sources of objective information and civic education throughout the country?
- **Donors:** What is USAID's comparative advantage as a donor in this sector? What are the priorities of other donors? What, if any, are the gaps in planned donor assistance? Where can USAID assistance make a difference?

These questions have been informed by the three academic evidence reviews under this tasking, particularly the Civil Society and Media Evidence Review. Following each of these core questions the team has developed a set of sub-questions, which are listed in Appendix 4, although this document does not answer the questions in the same order as listed in the appendix. The first core question on the Political Environment will be answered throughout the other sections, and particularly in the relevant overview sections, rather than in its own section.

More generally, the assessment's structure is to first briefly review the Armenian context in light of the Velvet Revolution then provide an overview, analysis, and set of recommendations for subtopics under civil society and under media. The major topics covered under civil society will be: civic initiatives, civic culture, and education; civil society organizations; advocacy; and government relations. The major topics covered under media will be: media context; media enabling environment; and media sector capacity. Finally, the report wraps up with a synthesis of donor priorities and gaps in both civil society and media spheres and a concluding discussion of broad strategy priorities in these sectors.



The team discusses the community's newsletter during an interview in Poqr Vedi.

1.2 METHODS AND LIMITATIONS

This assessment focused on the internal dynamics and needs of two sectors, civil society and media, as well as the relationship of these sectors to each other, to government, and to citizens. A social science rather than technology-focused approach was utilized. The methodology for this assessment consisted of two phases—desk research and field research.

The purpose of the desk phase of the assessment was to develop the assessment questions. The desk research phase began with an academic evidence review by an independent university team.¹ The academic evidence review considered what the academic literature tells us about civil society and media development and assistance in political transition settings such as Armenia. The evidence review summarized evidence from the Armenia context and prioritized research and evaluation findings from similar transition settings, especially the former Eastern Bloc and post-Soviet context, with an emphasis on analysis-based, actionable, and operational recommendations. The evidence review also incorporated analysis of governance indicators from the Varieties of Democracy dataset (V-Dem) in Armenia and similar countries over time.²

The evidence review served as the basis for fieldwork preparations. The assessment team combined the findings and recommendations from the academic evidence review with traditional desk review of relevant primary and secondary sources, program documents, donor analyses, sector assessments, and policy/academic think pieces to finalize the core research questions and sub-questions to explore during fieldwork. The field assessment research questions were also informed by the issues/questions that

¹ USAID. 2019. Civil Society and Media in Armenia: An Evidence Review for Learning, Evaluation, and Research Activity II (LER II). https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00TJVV.pdf

² This VDem indicator analysis was updated during the preparation of this report to include 2018 data, which became available in April 2019. Please see Appendix I for VDem indicator analysis that incorporates 2018 indicator values.

arose from desk review document sources and from the team's understanding of critical challenges that often affect civil society organizations worldwide.

Then, the assessment involved three weeks of qualitative fieldwork in Armenia, including visits outside the capital, to gain a broader perspective of civil society and media challenges and opportunities. The assessment team consisted of: Lead Expert, Dr. Sara Steinmetz; Local Expert, Hasmik Tamamyán; Management and Logistics Lead, Kate Marple-Cantrell; and Research Assistant, Astghik Mailyán. The Lead Expert and the Management and Logistics Lead traveled to Armenia to carry out this research. The assessment team conducted field research, consisting of in-depth interviews and targeted small group discussions, over a period of approximately three weeks, from April 3-17, 2019.

These in-depth interviews and consultations occurred with key informants and stakeholders from the following main stakeholder groups:

- USAID and USAID partners;
- Armenia government officials (local and national);
- Members of National Assembly (NA) and NA staff;
- “Social movement” actors/leaders;
- Relevant national and local Civil Society Organizations (CSOs);
- CSO umbrellas, coalitions and networks;
- Policy and academic analysts/think tanks;
- Journalists, and media representatives (including social media); and
- Bilateral and multilateral donors, and donor-funded projects.

Please refer to Appendix 3 for the full list of respondents in key informant interviews. Additionally, small group discussions were conducted to elicit views of communities/citizens, representative cohorts (e.g., reform activists), and sector-related representatives (e.g., media outlets, councilors of elders). Please refer to Appendix 3 for the full list of small group discussions. In total, the team met with just under one hundred respondents (N=97). One-on-one interviews and small group discussions were conducted in Armenian or English, according to the respondent preference. Where needed, an interpreter was used during conversations. A guide of themes these interviews covered is located in Appendix 4.

The geographic scope of the interviews and small group discussions included interviews held in 1) Yerevan, 2) Gyumri, and 3) Poqr Vedi, a small community in the Ararat Valley. While this selection of geographic regions allowed the assessment team to incorporate perspectives of members of communities of a variety of sizes, the assessment team unfortunately was not able to include travel to the south of Armenia due to time constraints. Time constraints on field work also limited the number of relevant stakeholders and actors that could be interviewed.

Following fieldwork activities, Dr. Sara Steinmetz, Hasmik Tamamyian, and Kate Marple-Cantrell drafted the field assessment report. During the review process, Cloudburst made a number of structural and editorial revisions to the draft to conform to its report format and style.

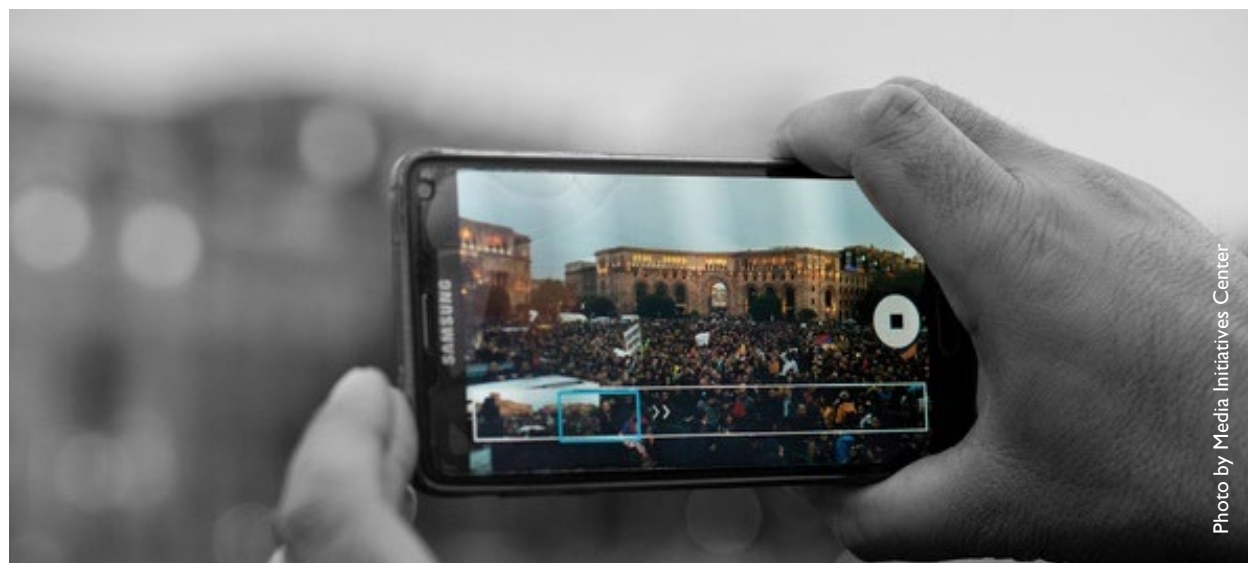


Photo by Media Initiatives Center

1.3 BACKGROUND

After almost seventy years of Soviet domination, and twenty-eight years of a governance system that may be characterized as “semi-authoritarian,” Armenia’s political landscape has markedly transformed in the past year. A state that was “firmly under the control of the ruling authorities” and run in the interests of the “ruling political and economic elite”³ has re-emerged as one with a Prime Minister who is committed to reform and is leading a government that aspires to bring democracy to its citizens.

Armenia’s 2018 Velvet Revolution focused on the removal of the regime in power and the corruption that was endemic to it; as such, it was a movement against, rather than a revolution for, a particular cause. The hopes that attached to this revolution were variously defined in terms of democratic reform and/or expectations that the individual lives of citizens would be improved. The mass protests led to the peaceful transition of government in 2018. The transition created a sense of optimism and hope among Armenia’s citizens, and placed the responsibilities of good governance on a new and largely inexperienced government.

Civil society and the media played an important role in the Velvet Revolution, but one characterized more by spontaneous grassroots protest and ad hoc individual involvement than by a sustained social movement or formal organizations. Unlike previous “Color Revolutions” in the former Soviet space, formal CSOs did not play a leading role, having been largely cowed by mass repression of protest in 2008. Instead, the revolution was characterized by mass protests organized from below via social media.

³ USAID. 2012. Democracy, Human Rights and Governance Assessment of Armenia: Final Copy, p.v.

These protests were spearheaded by charismatic appeals from prominent individuals, most notably the opposition politician Nikol Pashinyan, and often coordinated by CSOs, activists, and citizens.

Similarly, the media played a crucial role in drawing attention to the protests and sustaining interest in them (for example, via livestreaming by online media). However, this was often the work of prominent individual journalists who had worked for years outside of mainstream media to highlight corruption and abuses by the ruling party. In fact, the official media, dominated by the government and oligarchic interests, worked mostly against the protest movement. Given its grassroots nature, the revolution did not confer legitimacy on civil society organizations, which have since been reluctant to offer criticism of government actions and reforms. The implications of this represents a significant challenge for the sector's growth going forward.

Slow implementation: Despite the Prime Minister's apparent commitment to reform, progress has been slow. Specific goals and targets in the context of a government strategy have not yet been developed, and new staff, at all levels and across government institutions, are inexperienced. In addition, long-term, mid-level civil service employees may slow progress because they remain sympathetic to the previous government, or simply because they are slow in responding.⁴ In the National Assembly (NA), a notable gap in subject matter expertise exists both among Assembly members and staff. Across government bodies, the lack of communication skills is hampering the flow of information regarding what the government is doing for citizens, and what citizens can expect.⁵ The communications gap has also limited government-media exchanges through which government pronouncements may be clarified and media can pose questions that citizens are asking.⁶ Further, while multiple processes for formal civil society participation with ministries and the NA exist, utilization of these processes is varied, thus limiting the voice of citizens and the organizations that represent them within the corridors of government.

Criticism and opposition: Political attacks that criticize and attempt to undermine the current government are ongoing. Major sources of these attacks are officials of the previous government and its supporters, including economic/business oligarchs who control numerous media outlets. Facebook is politicized in Armenia, and the internet has become a political battleground. A lack of tolerance of different voices has transformed debate and criticism into confrontation and antagonism, particularly in social media. Broadly, the opposing voices represent supporters of the former government or previous government officials; supporters of the current government who attack its critics because criticism is viewed as an assault, and because such assaults may undermine the government's stability; external actors that oppose the reform government because it is amenable to political influences from the West;

⁴ A reduction in the number of ministries is expected, from 17 to 12, in accordance with amendments to the Law on the Structure of the Government. Attendant cuts in civil service personnel are expected; many may be from the mid-level civil service cadre. "Armenia cuts five ministries in government 'optimisation.'" 23 April 2019 by Armine Avetisyan. <https://oc-media.org/armenia-cuts-five-ministries-in-government-optimisation/>. See too: http://arka.am/en/news/politics/bright_armenia_faction_calls_for_firing_finance_minister/

⁵ On May 8, 2019, the Prime Minister delivered a speech, followed by a press conference, that covered 100 achievements primarily attributable to the new government. "100 Facts about New Armenia"—Introductory remarks by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, delivered at the press conference, 8 May 2019 at <http://www.primeminister.am/en/interviews-and-press-conferences/item/2019/05/08/Nikol-Pashinyan-Press-Conference/>

⁶ Prime Minister Pashinyan's extensive use of Facebook to communicate with the public is not generally criticized by CSOs and media; it is viewed as a way through which the Prime Minister can reach the public directly, without the filter of possibly biased media. Press conferences through which the media may follow up with questions (and which are currently limited) are, however, viewed as important mechanisms.

and internal conservative forces that oppose the reform government because it is amenable to social influences from the West.

Conservative forces within Armenia may exploit social issues that have the potential to aggravate sensitivities, sow tensions, and possibly spark social conflict. For example, the issue of “family values” in a country that in many ways is proud of its conservative social values is being co-opted to create a political wedge and put the new government on the defensive for being pro-West, and thus ostensibly amenable to destroying family values. While the “family values” agenda has been adopted by nationalists, more conservative factions in the Apostolic Church, and elements that are sympathetic to Russia, these issues are sensitive and important in their own right within Armenian society and need to be addressed with care and great sensitivity.

Citizen expectations. As noted above, in many cases, citizens are concerned about their own well-being and expect reforms to address their individual problems. These priorities primarily focus on economic changes that would improve their lives (e.g., higher wages, unemployment, and pensions), and social changes that would improve their environment (e.g., infrastructure/roads and the provision of reliable and affordable water). Anti-corruption remains a salient issue, particularly in the context of “punishment” of previous “corruption sins” committed by former government officials and oligarchs.

Citizen expectations may be significantly higher than government’s capacity to deliver. Indeed, at the local level, citizen expectations may be further frustrated by the lack of effective de-concentration of power and finances that would make it possible for local government to respond to local demands and needs. The Pashinyan government may continue to garner public support because whatever it does could be touted as a success. It may also, however, lose the confidence and support of citizens if issues are not addressed; as such, disappointment and discontent may replace optimism.⁷

Geo-political constraints. In addition to internal dynamics, Armenia’s geo-political position and affiliations with Russia require delicate maneuvering regarding both regional and national politics. The sensitivity of this relationship was demonstrated during recent government and NA discussions about Russian television networks. The debates noted that Russian channels, which are available through Armenia’s public broadcast services,⁸ were “anti-Armenian,” and that they often aired racist messages and calls for religious violence. Limits on the broadcast rights of the Russian networks were proposed. Despite these domestic concerns, the Prime Minister has resisted calls for such limitations,⁹ stating that there would

⁷ In his May 8, 2019, speech, the Prime Minister touted the many achievements of his government that touch on the lives of individuals: salary increases were given to military personnel, teachers, primary healthcare providers, and university staff; retiree-beneficiaries’ pensions were raised; funds to cover housing needs of military pensioners were increased; road construction moved forward; and, water supply, drainage systems, and water lines were reconstructed. “100 Facts about New Armenia”—Introductory remarks by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, delivered at the press conference, 8 May 2019 at <http://www.primeminister.am/en/interviews-and-press-conferences/item/2019/05/08/Nikol-Pashinyan-Press-Conference/>

⁸ The three Russian networks available through public broadcast channels are Channel One, RTR Planeta, and Rossiya K. An additional network, Mir Interstate, is operated by the Commonwealth of Independent States. <https://eurasianet.org/armenian-government-debates-taking-russian-tv-off-the-air>

⁹ Armenia remains heavily dependent on Russia regarding security aid and energy. The danger of antagonizing Russia was noted by Tigran Hakobyan, head of Armenia’s National Commission on Television and Radio, who explained, “Many countries, such as Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova, have realized that idea (of limiting Russia’s information channels), but they have paid a very high price and three of them have been deprived of their territories.” “Armenian government debates taking Russian TV off the air,” Ani Mejlumyan, April 26, 2019, <https://eurasianet.org/armenian-government-debates-taking-russian-tv-off-the-air>

be “absolutely no” censorship in Armenia, and that “no one is going to limit anyone’s right to express their opinion.”¹⁰

Moving forward. While euphoria regarding the revolution is subsiding, and changes are slow in coming, citizens and CSOs still seem to believe that the political will to make changes exists and have hope that reforms will be introduced and implemented in the next three to four years.

Numerous civil society and media actors have moved to government positions, and at least to date, remain sympathetic to the sectors they left. Thus, the overall environment for civil society and media has now improved. Criticism of the government is now possible, even if not universally appreciated. Because many civil society actors do not want to undermine the new administration, critical comments are now milder than the aggressive criticism meted out to the previous governments. The lack of stronger and more widespread criticism is problematic for some; the honeymoon, however, at least gives the novice government some time to find its feet. More generally, active civil society and media sectors, and ongoing dialogues, are fostering the kind of democratic culture Armenia needs to develop a strong democracy.

In addition to a generally supportive internal climate, donors are expressing interest in supporting democratic reform efforts in Armenia. The Armenian Diaspora has also demonstrated a willingness to provide development and technical assistance and serves as another channel of support.

¹⁰ See: “Armenian government debates taking Russian TV off the air,” Ani Mejlumyan April 26, 2019, <https://eurasianet.org/armenian-government-debates-taking-russian-tv-off-the-air>. “Armenia discussing threats of Russian TV channels,” <https://jam-news.net/armenia-discussing-threats-of-russian-tv-channels/>

2 CIVIL SOCIETY

The Civil Society section of this report will cover the following substantive topics: civic initiatives, civic culture, and education; civil society organizations; advocacy; and government relations. Each topic will include findings related to the current context and an interwoven analysis of that context leading to a list of related recommendations.

Key definitions for this section include:

In Armenia, ‘*civil society actors*’ range from individual civic activists to national level policy advocacy and monitoring organizations to service providers, charity and community-based organizations, cooperatives, and institutions focused on project implementation.

In the context of this analysis, the term ‘*civil society organizations*’ (CSO) refers to organizations that: 1) are engaged in national or local level advocacy focused on policy and public interests, legal reform, sector issues, and functional interests (e.g., business), and/or 2) are involved in monitoring of budgets, and policy and program implementation. Organizations at the national or local level that implement projects but are involved (or want to engage in) advocacy and/or oversight on behalf of a large or small community/constituency are also included.¹¹

Differentiating NGO and CSO: The term ‘*NGO*’ refers to non-governmental organizations. Although the term NGO is preferred locally in Armenia, the term CSO will be preferred throughout this document in accordance with standard USAID language.

Differentiating civic initiatives and social movements: ‘*Civic initiatives*’ may be geographically limited and generally address one issue; ‘*social movements*’ are national and have wider focus.

2.1 CIVIC INITIATIVES AND CIVIL SOCIETY

This subsection will cover the environment related to civic initiatives, the relationship between civic initiatives and civil society, and civic culture and education, including civic action in the current context. It concludes with recommendations for supporting civic initiatives and pursuing civic education.

2.1.1 OVERVIEW AND ANALYSIS

2.1.1.1 CIVIC INITIATIVES

In recent years civic initiatives in Armenia resulted from the failure of previous governments to address public discontent, and the “limited ability of the civil society sector to influence policy.”¹² Civic initiatives have often been spontaneous, reactive, and generally focused on narrowly defined issues. Yet they also represented broader concerns about issues of justice, corruption, and “a lack of democracy and the rise of oligarchic capitalism.”¹³ Notwithstanding these concerns, the possibility that an affiliation with “politics” would taint individuals and their movements has led many activists to insist that they are

¹¹ European Union, Armenia: Country Roadmap for Engagement with Civil Society, 2014-2017.

¹² Freedom House, *Nations in Transit 2018: Armenia Country Profile*. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2018/armenia>.

¹³ Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2018 Country Report: Armenia, p.10. https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/1427376/488336_en.pdf

“outside of politics.”¹⁴ CSOs may also resist the political reference, and instead describe their activities as “social” endeavors. Restart members, for example, participated in the revolution as individuals, and Restart played a “big role” in mobilizing students for demonstrations; nonetheless, the organization did not formally join the revolution as an NGO because its members knew it would be “political.” One activist noted that “the word political is not a good word in Armenia - it is associated with corruption and all evils.”¹⁵

Activists leading civic initiatives have generally been young and educated; coordination and information-sharing among them, and with potential participants, have generally been informal and primarily focused on the use of social media.¹⁶ Integrated within the dynamics of civic initiatives, however, are also the CSOs that support these actions, often behind the scenes.

Many of these initiatives were able to achieve “small, but symbolically significant victories,” including Kino Moskva, 2010; Save Trchkan Waterfall, 2011; Occupy Mashtots Park, 2012; 100 Dram Civic Initiative, 2013; Dem Em “I am Against” Civic Initiative, 2014; Electric Yerevan Movement, 2015; and various environmental campaigns.¹⁷

2.1.1.2 *CIVIC INITIATIVES AND THE CSO NEXUS*

In the view of various civil society actors (activists, analysts, CSOs), the links between CSOs and civic initiatives are natural and logical. While individuals who are associated with or are members of CSOs generally participate in civic initiatives, various CSOs have provided support for initiatives in the background. Organizations may utilize Facebook to organize people; they may provide legal advice and file lawsuits,¹⁸ as was the case during the Teghut environmental campaign; or, they may make premises available for press conferences, provide legal consultation, and monitor police activities, as occurred during the 2014 Maternity Leave campaign. In the case of the women’s campaign, CSOs did not openly join the initiative because they were aware of the public’s distrust of CSOs, and did not want to undermine the cause itself.¹⁹ The Helsinki Committee of Armenia has regularly monitored the right to free assembly and observed protests, and the Chamber of Advocates of Armenia established a hotline and provided volunteer advocates to address possible violations of citizen rights during the Spring 2018 protests.

The need and desire for CSOs and activists to cooperate is based on shared values, including principles of democracy, freedom of speech, and human rights. It is the role of CSOs to provide the research and analysis that educates the public about issues of concern, and it is the role of the activists to go out on the streets to protect those interests. Indeed, several CSOs have been established by activists because they are interested in advocating longer-term solutions. The Union of Informed Citizens, for example,

¹⁴ Yevgenya Jenny Paturyan, “Armenian Civil Society: It is Not All about NGOs,” in *Caucasus Analytical Digest*, No. 73; 26 May 2015, p.3.

¹⁵ Please note that only quotes from publications are cited; quotes that come from interviews are put in quotations but not cited.

¹⁶ BTI 2018 Country Report: Armenia, and Yevgenya Jenny Paturyan, “Armenian Civil Society: It is Not All about NGOs.”

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.16. Kino Moskva, 2010 (preservation of an old, open air cinema amphitheater); Occupy Mashtots Park, 2012 (halt the demolition of a public park); 100 Dram Civic Initiative, 2013 (prevention of Yerevan public transport fee rise); Dem Em “I am Against” Civic Initiative, 2014 (against the Mandatory Accumulative Pension System); and Electric Yerevan Movement 2015 (opposition to proposed electricity rate rises).

¹⁸ In another case, one activist noted that he had taken part in protests against rising prices for public transport and had been arrested numerous times. He was defended in court by an NGO attorney.

¹⁹ These CSOs were being labeled as “Western” and criticized for undermining values.

emerged from a 2013 social movement focused on informing the public about the negative impacts of joining the pro-Russia Eurasian Union. Restart was formed as a result of the 2017 #YesToDeferment Movement, and organizations such as Ecoera NGO were established to scale up efforts that had begun with environmental civic initiatives such as the Save Teghut Civic Initiative.²⁰

In addition to the direct line between civic initiatives and the development of some CSOs, Armenia has also witnessed the transformation of activists and civic initiatives into organized and registered political parties, representing various points on the political spectrum. The nationalist group, Sasna Tserer, for example, recently formed a political party that derived from its Pre-Parliament movement. Activists from various civic initiatives of the past six years have joined together to establish the Citizen's Decision Social-Democratic Party.

2.1.1.3 *CIVIC CULTURE AND CIVIC EDUCATION*

The Velvet Revolution has given Armenia the opportunity to expand and re-enforce democratic and participatory governance and deepen and strengthen the roots of democracy within its civic culture. Decades of non-democratic rule, however, have embedded perspectives that are sometimes antithetical to democratic norms. As previously noted, issues such as “family values,” which are co-opted and manipulated, may aggravate sensitivities and sow tensions that may potentially have serious political implications. Further, conservative perspectives and social dynamics that pervade, and in some cases seem to define Armenian culture, may sometimes appear to be at odds with donor agendas.

To strengthen the democratic foundations of the Velvet Revolution, Armenia's citizens need to understand and embrace the principles and priorities of democratic governance. To move forward on integrating values that are broadly encompassed by issues of social justice and rights, the desire for quick progress, at this nascent moment, may need to be weighed against the need for sensitivity to prevailing cultural norms and the utility of measured steps.²¹

In addition, one of the key issues to be addressed by civic education is the widespread distrust of CSOs and of politics in general. This leads to significant limits on the influence of CSOs and a civil society that is ad hoc and individualized. One way of attempting to strengthen the ties between individuals and organizations *and* increasing commitment to democracy is then via civic education initiatives that stress the importance of organized participation, constructive dialogue, and respect for political processes. Citizens need to see that the structures of politics exist to give them a voice. Of course, this also requires working with the government of Armenia to ensure that this is actually true.

Protest as participation: As participants in an emerging democracy, Armenia's citizens need to know, and to have confidence in, the processes and institutions through which they may make their views, complaints, and criticisms known. Citizen input and discontent at present, however, appear to rely on the tactics of the Velvet Revolution and civic initiatives that have had some success in the past; this includes confrontational protests, shutting down roads/highways, blocking government buildings, and other acts of civil disobedience. While issues addressed through these tactics may be legitimate, at the local level in particular, the inclination to use protests and shutdowns occasionally takes on personal

²⁰ Armine Ishkanian, *Civil Society, Development and Environmental Activism in Armenia*, (2013), p. 48. <https://ecolor.org/files/uploads/pdf/civilsocietyeng.pdf>.

²¹ The CRRC notes that studies it had conducted regarding values in Armenia indicate that family is considered an “absolute value.”

coloration. For example, citizens who do not like a mayor may attempt to oust the officeholder by occupying government buildings, rather than going through legitimate political processes. Public understanding of what is politically appropriate is important in heading off public showdowns to address personal grievances.

Idealization of democracy: In addition, the concepts of democracy also need to be clarified. Democracy is often explained and perceived in terms of ideals. As such, expectations regarding democracy can be very high and unrealistic. For example, the lack of legislation on issues such as hate speech and judicial discretion, which have not as yet even been developed in other democracies, is viewed by some as a weakness in Armenia's democracy. The clash between reality and often unrealistic expectations can lead to frustrations with a system that is just beginning to establish itself and an erosion of essential support. Citizens in a newly emerging democracy need to know that all democratic systems continue to work at improving their laws, and possibly their institutions, and that most struggle to create fairer, more participatory, representative, and inclusive systems. Other democracies are not necessarily free of the occasional clashes between freedoms and the need or wish for constraints; most or all struggle with fake news and vile posts and many have judicial disagreements.

Public expectations and citizen responsibilities: Some citizens have noted that both citizens and some activists feel that they helped to usher in the revolution and that now it is up to government to take care of the rest. In this post-Soviet environment, citizens may tend to continue to assume that it is the state that bears virtually all responsibility for the public's well-being. Indeed, given the multiplicity of demands on the current government, the expectations of the Armenian public need to be managed at a basic level. Citizens need to understand both the possibilities of the current political moment, and the institutional and financial constraints under which government works. Further, it is important that, at the local level, local government has the wherewithal to function and respond to the needs of citizens. If local government cannot make life easier for citizens and local needs are not met, ideals of participatory governance will not be very meaningful.²²

Citizens as agents of change: Whether democracy is viewed in idealized terms, or through the prism of the Soviet past, it may cause individuals to fail to consider their own roles as citizens and as agents of change. A clear understanding of how the mechanisms and institutions of democracy may be utilized by communities and individuals to effect change is necessary to address these challenges.

The right to criticize: Whereas public participation through protest and demonstrations appears to have been widely embraced, participation that is exercised through public criticism of the current government in particular is often resisted and denounced. Attacks on critics of the government are often generated by citizens who view criticism as confrontation, not as constructive endeavors, and as such, as deliberate attempts to undermine government. The public dialogue regarding government, in many cases, appears on Facebook. The content of Facebook posts following the Pashinyan victory has often been characterized as confrontational and rude.

²² Local government is legally obliged to involve citizens in decision-making processes. Funds for such functions are limited and mechanisms can be improved. Even if public participation in local governance processes is improved, however, government still requires the wherewithal to address the needs of their communities.

The right to rule of law: The gap in public understanding regarding the role of open dialogue and criticism in a democracy seems to be accompanied by similar lack of clarity regarding democratic governance processes and the rule of law. In an April 2019 government session, for example, Prime Minister Pashinyan ordered the head of the National Security Service (NSS) to crack down on “fake news.” Some civil society actors were quick to criticize the Prime Minister. Shushan Doydoyan, head of the Freedom of Information Center of Armenia, for example, publicly stated that the verbal instruction from the Prime Minister threatened freedom of speech, and that “Any regulation should be determined by law. Moreover, the NSS’s authority does not include control over the internet, much less punishments for distributing fake news.”²³ Apparently, the same outrage was not heard from the general public, which evidently welcomed the Prime Minister’s pronouncement.²⁴ Such a reaction from the public points to a serious gap in the understanding of citizens regarding of the role and utility of the rule of law in a democracy, the protections the rule of law provides, and the dangers of arbitrary one-man rule.

Media and citizens: Armenians also need to have access to accurate and objective information, as well as the tools through which to critically assess the information. Without such capacity, citizens remain vulnerable to manipulation, particularly in a media environment where so much information is available, and so much “fake” or biased news is provided.

Support to country-wide civic education programs will be important to address these issues. This includes focus areas such as core principles and processes of democracy (the ideal and the real); democracy in the current Armenian context (expectations and constraints); and critical thinking and media literacy (including identifying information sources, assessing evidence, analyzing facts, evaluating information, and understanding responsible media).

2.1.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1.2.1 CIVIL SOCIETY SECTOR – CIVIC INITIATIVES

1. Support CSO activities that assist civic initiatives, particularly in areas of legal representation and monitoring.
2. Establish dialogue between civil society activists, grassroots civil activists, and civic initiative activists (populations that may overlap but not one-to-one) in order to ascertain what kind of outside support civic initiatives may be comfortable accepting.

2.1.2.2 CIVIL SOCIETY SECTOR – CIVIC EDUCATION

3. Support community level civic education discussions/activities designed for the general public or particular audiences/constituencies. The goal should be to show citizens that they have a voice in politics and that they can work through organizations to make that voice stronger. To be more widely effective, training needs to include active participation, e.g., engagement in local level activities to resolve problems or monitor and report on project/policy implementation. This training should also be flexible and fit to local needs (developed through local ground-truthing and pilot work).

²³ “Pashinyan takes on “fake news,” Joshua Kucera, April 9, 2019, <https://eurasianet.org/pashinyan-takes-on-fake-news>.

²⁴ Public views regarding the Prime Minister’s fake news pronouncement is based on discussion with USAID.

4. Improve civic education in schools. In the education system, instruction and exercises in critical thinking and democratic civic culture are important to establish firm foundations for Armenia's democratic future. For example, high school activities may give students an opportunity to identify local problems, find solutions, and work with local government to resolve the identified issues. Such projects engage students in critical thinking, as well as processes of governance, participation, and democracy.
5. Establish social media management training to help civil society, media, and government actors/institutions produce more interesting and appealing Facebook content that provides objective information and analysis and attracts more readers. This could include working with activists involved with civic initiatives in Armenia to develop techniques that CSOs can use to reach their constituents.
6. Produce/broadcast news-related discussion programs that promote dialogue and respect for pluralism (rather than confrontation). Public TV currently airs three such programs: two on political issues and one about social issues. Public TV plans to develop and launch an online platform, which would reach a wider audience, including segments of the population that primarily rely on online information sources. For more information about Recommendations 6-7, see Section 3.1.1 Media Context—Overview and Analysis—Television. See also Section 3.1.2 Media Context—Recommendations, including recommendation 32 regarding Public TV.
7. Create entertainment media with civic education components. This can include support for:
 - a. The development of soap operas/TV series that embed/integrate civic education/social transformation issues into program plots. At present, the content of soap operas promotes anti-social behavior, gender stereotypes, and domestic violence.²⁵
 - b. The development of dialogue programs with comedy segments interspersed to keep listeners engaged and make criticism more palatable.²⁶
 - c. The development of programs that engage students and youth. This may include weekly debate or “college bowl” programs about political or policy issues, or topics that are particularly relevant to youth (e.g., Was it right to demolish cafes on the opera square? Is it a good idea to increase the tax on fizzy drinks?).²⁷
8. Grants to journalists to cover “social transformation” issues in informative, sensitive, humanizing, and relatable ways, to introduce awareness and discussion about social issues without instigating immediate opposition. For example, PINK has been invited by several public schools to discuss sexual health and HIV prevention. By highlighting the important and useful

²⁵ <http://asbarez.com/136125/armenian-soap-operas-promote-gender-stereotypes-and-violence-says-study/>

²⁶ NED has funded an activity that publishes monthly comics on relevant political and social issues that promote “debate on controversial topics through the use of political satire.” Comics appear in the newspaper Tsets, and a comic book containing the entire series is expected to be published. Project material will also be made available online and shared on social media. The project is undertaken by MediaLab and funded by NED through the Umbrella Journalists’ International Network NGO. European Union and GDSI Ltd., Eastern Partnership Civil Society Facility, Mapping Support to Activities and Gaps in Armenia Media Sector, March 2-11, 2018.

²⁷ Politicians and government officials could be present to comment at end if they found arguments convincing.

contribution PINK is making by conducting these discussions/trainings, media stories may begin to pave the way for a dialogue, if not immediate acceptance of the community.²⁸

2.1.2.3 **GOVERNMENT SECTOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

9. Promote communications training for government officials (see also Section 3.2.2.2 Media—Government Sector Recommendations).

2.2 **CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS AND OPERATING ENVIRONMENT**

This subsection will provide some background on perceptions of civil society organizations and a contextual analysis of the enabling environment for CSOs at the national level. It will then also cover issues faced at the local level by CSOs and gender gaps across CSOs. Recommendations target civil society, business, and government sectors.

2.2.1 **OVERVIEW AND ANALYSIS**

The landscape of CSOs in Armenia is comprised of many registered organizations, only a subset of which are active. Based on registration data collected by the Ministry of Justice, as of the end of 2018, Armenian civil society included 4,222 non-governmental organizations; 1,120 foundations, and 244 associations. The Delegation of the European Union to Armenia estimates that 15-20% of registered organizations are active.²⁹

While CSOs are present in Armenia, these CSOs are not necessarily trusted or known. As is the case in many democratizing countries, trust in Armenia's CSOs is generally low or non-existent. CSOs are often viewed as “grant eaters” that take money from funders, but that neither do much, nor have a real focus or cause.³⁰ Negative public opinion of Armenia's civil society actors has been re-enforced by previous government messaging that led the public to believe that the CSOs were destroying the country. However, there is some evidence that these public attitudes may be softening. A series of International Republican Institute (IRI) polls last year showed a nine percentage point increase in the proportion of respondents who view CSOs positively, from 37% in the July-August 2018 IRI poll³¹ to 46% of respondents who had a positive opinion of NGOs/CSOs in the October 2018 IRI poll.³²

²⁸ Less controversial, yet sensitive issues might be introduced first. Discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity continues to be a significant issue and one that appears to be particularly sensitive. Armenia's anti-discrimination laws do not extend protections to LGBTI persons on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity (United States Department of State, Armenia 2017 Human Rights Report). At present, on the Annual Review of the Human Rights Situation of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex People in Europe, published by EU-funded Rainbow Europe, Armenia ranks 48th of 49 countries. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/26/world/europe/armenia-transgender.html?action=click&module=Latest&pgtype=Homepage>; <https://rainbow-europe.org/country-ranking>

²⁹ European Union, EU Country Roadmap for Engagement with Civil Society in Armenia for the period 2018-2020. CSO registration is not required unless an organization expects to enter into financial transactions. USAID, ICNL and FHI360, 2017 Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index for Central and Eastern Europe, 21st Edition—September 2018.

³⁰ See also: DRG Assessment 2012; USAID CDCS FY 2013-2017; ECRG Promoting Transparency and Accountability through Advanced Civil Society Participation (Program Description).

³¹ IRI. Public Opinion Survey: Residents of Armenia July 23–August 15, 2018.

https://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/2018.10.9_armenia_poll_presentation.pdf, p. 41.

³² IRI. Public Opinion Survey: Residents of Armenia October 9–29, 2018.

https://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/2018.11.23_armenia_poll.pdf p. 28

2.2.1.1 **BACKGROUND**

This subsection will provide background about dynamics and challenges experienced currently by CSOs in Armenia.

Unlike the country itself, Armenia's civil society sector appears not to have undergone its own reform revolution. Organizational transparency in financial reporting, for example, is limited. Registered CSOs that obtain donor funds adhere to donor reporting requirements. Generally, however, organizations do not publicly report on how funds received from local or international donors have been used.³³ Transparency International would like to introduce transparency requirements for CSOs; many, however, are opposed to such an initiative.

Additionally, organizations must often contend with their dependence on donors and funders, and the consequences such dependence produces: issues and projects are responsive to donor interests, not necessarily local or national needs or concerns; the activities and credibility of these organizations are often undermined by the relatively short-term nature of grants; projects, campaigns, and initiatives last as long as the funding does and then disappear; and core support is not assured, requiring that organizations work with as many funding partners as they can.

In addition to issues of trust, organizations may be tainted by politics if limited income compels them to obtain funding from persons or institutions that represent particular political interests. Furthermore, many organizations are detached from what might be their base: the links they may claim to have with constituencies may be minimal, at best.

That said, there are some CSOs that are viewed positively, and examples of this are human rights defenders including Helsinki Committee of Armenia NGO, Helsinki Association for Human Rights NGO, Helsinki Citizens' Assembly Vanadzor, and The A.D. Sakharov Armenian Human Rights Centre. These CSOs are generally trusted and viewed as legitimate. A number of interviewees noted that that while many CSOs are not trusted, the human rights organizations are, and the organizations noted were mentioned by numerous interviewees as trusted organizations. For example, one CSO and one journalist specifically stated this, noting that "most honest NGOs before the revolution were human rights organizations or those that supported them." A journalist indicated that in the context of the CSO sector, the organizations that had some legitimacy were lawyers' groups and human rights defenders. A political party representative also noted that the party would be willing to work with human rights organizations (or organizations working on anti-corruption), but that they would not collaborate with organizations focused on environment, poverty, or sustainable development. CSO leaders who are known and recognized in their communities are also often trusted, although they may not be associated in the minds of the public with the CSOs with which they work.

The organizational landscape within the civil society sector is both burgeoning and dividing. A new generation of CSOs is emerging, including Political Dialogue, Restart, Civic Initiative for Education, and Alternative Projects.³⁴ In addition, several policy-focused organizations that are affiliated with the previous government remain and continue to form. These organizations include: the Armenian Lawyers'

³³ USAID, ICNL and FHI360, 2017 Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index for Central and Eastern Europe, 21st Edition—September 2018, Section 3.6-Organizational Capacity.

³⁴ Political Dialogue brings political parties and civil society together to discuss policy issues; Civic Initiative for Education supports the formation of teachers' unions.

Association, Civic Consciousness, and a new organization founded by former Minister of Justice Arpine Hovhannisyan.³⁵

Dividing lines among civil society organizations, at present, are often delineated in terms of organizations that are identified with the previous government (either GONGOs or “pocket” organizations)³⁶ and those groups that have not been associated with the former government.³⁷ In some cases, however, policy disagreements between the two camps may slow forward movement on policy reform issues. For example, the Armenian Lawyers’ Association is supporting a version of an anti-corruption law with which several other CSOs do not agree. As such, organizations are “fighting” with each other about the content of the anti-corruption strategy.

While these division lines may create policy challenges, they are not considered definitively negative. Despite their differences, organizations generally appear to be willing to work together on issues of common interest, on an ad hoc basis. The interest of organizations to collaborate on matters of mutual concern, despite opposing each other on most issues, is a particularly significant and an important aspect of the civil society sector in Armenia. It underlines the capacity of sector actors to potentially work together on important issues and to play a positive role in strengthening the process of democratization as it moves forward.

2.2.1.2 CSO ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

Given the above context in which CSOs operate, CSOs need a supportive enabling environment to productively participate in democratization. The CSO enabling environment in Armenia is relatively positive across a number of areas³⁸ and CSO operations are not generally unduly burdened. Freedoms upon which CSOs rely, including freedom of association, freedom of assembly, and access to information are established, and CSO registration was recently simplified to allow for registration at regional offices instead of at the National Registry in Yerevan.³⁹ Nonetheless, enforcement has at times been problematic and dynamics on the ground may create tensions. Harassment or violence against peaceful protestors has occurred in the past; intolerance and vehement criticism may at present be directed at critics of the new government, or representative/supporters of the LGBTI community; and responses to Freedom of Information requests remain discretionary in many cases. Concern regarding rights of assembly and free speech were generated by Prime Minister Pashinyan’s May 2018 call to stop “all actions of mass disobedience” to give government time to solve the country’s many problems.⁴⁰ In April 2019, he again raised questions about his commitment to free speech and rule of law when he ordered

³⁵ With respect to the Armenian Lawyers’ Association, questions have been raised regarding the Association’s approach to anti-corruption legislation. Civic Consciousness (established by Narek Samsonyan) is active in spreading fake news. The name of the organization founded by former Minister of Justice Hovhannisyan is yet to be made public.

³⁶ “GONGOs” are Government NGOs; these organizations may have received government money (through government channels or contracts), were directly influenced by government, had government-affiliated personnel on staff, or were previously established by government. “Pocket organizations” are those that have been created independently, but that work with government in their own interest. Such organizations may obtain funding or contract MOUs with government by choice.

³⁷ While the term GONGOs has been used to refer to organizations that have been affiliated with the previous government, Transparency International has noted the some may now consider TI to be a GONGO related to the current government.

³⁸ The regulatory framework for registered CSOs is encompassed in the Law on Public Organizations (2016), and the Law on Foundations (amended 2016).

³⁹ European Union, Armenia: Country Roadmap for Engagement with Civil Society, 2014-2017.

⁴⁰ “New Armenia PM: Carrying out civil disobedience actions now means carrying out sabotage actions,” <https://news.am/eng/news/452743.html>

the head of the National Security Service to crack down on “fake news.”⁴¹ Nonetheless, the expectation of many is that the enabling environment will continue to improve in post-Velvet Revolution Armenia.

Notwithstanding a generally positive environment, CSO flexibility and activities are constrained by several laws and regulations.

Legal standing of CSOs on public interest issues: Under the Law on Public Organizations, which was adopted in December 2016, public associations do not generally have legal standing on public interest issues. Organizations may only represent their own interests in court, or the interests of their members, beneficiaries, or volunteers. An exception to this rule is made for environmental CSOs, which are permitted to submit public interest cases⁴² in accordance with the Aarhus convention, to which Armenia is a signatory.⁴³ In reality, however, even environmental CSOs face obstacles in pursuing legal recourse on public interest issues. Environmental organizations that attempt to file lawsuits may be stymied, for example, by demands that they produce proof that they paid taxes for a number of years; they may need to show evidence that they previously submitted their complaints/views at public hearings and that nothing was done in response. Despite the difficulties raised by the issues related to the legal standing of CSOs, the CSO community is not currently focused on this issue as a matter of immediate concern.

Government oversight of registered CSOs: Until the new CSO legislative framework was passed in late 2016, the Ministry of Justice oversaw legal compliance of CSO activities and the State Revenue Committee (SRC) was responsible for tax-related issues. The framework, however, transfers complete oversight of CSOs to the SRC.⁴⁴ Discussions are currently ongoing among several organizations regarding which government entity or entities ought to be responsible for CSO oversight. (These organizations include: Anti-Corruption Coalition; The A.D. Sakharov Human Rights Centre, The NGO Center, and Transparency International Anti-Corruption Center⁴⁵). Reforms related to this issue are expected in the context of Administrative Proceeding Code⁴⁶; legislative revisions regarding this matter, however, are still required.

Endowment law: Civil society and media sector actors complain about limited financial resources, over-dependence on donors and funders, and related sustainability constraints. Representatives from both sectors are supportive of endowments as a way of providing civil society organizations and media outlets with financial support that has longer time horizons and fewer strings attached. Although some CSOs

⁴¹ “Pashinyan takes on “fake news,” Joshua Kucera, April 9, 2019, <https://eurasianet.org/pashinyan-takes-on-fake-news;http://www.foi.am/en/media/item/1738/> (4/10/2019).

⁴² NGO Center, Enabling Environment National Assessment (EENA), National Report-Armenia, July 2018, p.6.

⁴³ Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters. <http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/pp/documents/cep43e.pdf>

⁴⁴ NGO Center, Enabling Environment National Assessment (EENA), National Report-Armenia, July 2018, p.15.

⁴⁵ The NGO Center has been actively involved in related discussions both before and after the Ministry of Justice published the Draft Amendments to the Law on Public Organizations that introduced changes to the reporting requirements of CSOs on 29 October 2018. The NGO Center was the lead organization to mobilize these discussion/negotiations among CSOs from all over Armenia, and later the TIAC and Armenian Lawyers’ Association took over the process mainly because they had lawyers in their staffs. The Statement on the Draft Amendments to the Law on Public Organizations proposed by the SRC includes the names of the CSOs that joined the Statement and expressed their disagreement with the Draft Law:

<https://transparency.am/en/statements/view/305>, and at this link is another Statement signed by 103 organizations: <https://ccd.armla.am/en/3650.html>.

⁴⁶ Public input related to reforms in the Administrative Proceedings Code were due by April 14, 2019.

have been involved in discussions regarding a law in the past (e.g., ICHD,⁴⁷ Eurasia Partnership Foundation,⁴⁸ Media Initiatives Center, and Transparency International Anti-Corruption Center), it does not appear to be on the immediate agenda of any organization.

More generally, as described in the Civil Society and Media Evidence Review under this tasking, donor improvements in the enabling environment – such as “attempt[ing] to help forge connections between groups and to boost their capacity to hold officials accountable”⁴⁹ – will help CSOs better function in their watchdog and strategic advocacy roles across the sectors, including in the drive to reduce corruption through greater government transparency.⁵⁰ Additionally, as described in the Integrity Systems and Rule of Law evidence review under this tasking, Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) associations, in particular, are important civil society actors in the fight against corruption because they “are a sector with financial incentives—and some resources—to undermine monopolies... [and] SME associations are useful for mobilizing collective action, including against corruption, through rewards and punishments (e.g., fines).”⁵¹

2.2.1.3 CIVIL SOCIETY AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

National-local level CSO linkages: Issues facing local level CSOs differ from those operating at a national level. While national level policy in areas such as education, health, social services, and decentralization has direct implications for local communities, linkages between local and national level organizations are generally unequal and based on funding, i.e., national level organizations receive grants and use local organizations for implementation, rather than for critical two-way policy dialogue and collaboration.⁵² The unequal relationship is exhibited, for example, in the EU-funded National Platform for NGOs. The platform supports thirteen working groups that focus on a variety of issues. It was hoped the platform would engage both national and local organizations in active policy dialogue; the EU, however, has noted that a few larger/lead organizations have “hijacked” many of the working groups and that the “internal democratic procedures” are “not exemplary.” The working groups remain Yerevan-centric and members are not reaching out to smaller regional CSOs.⁵³

Local CSOs and national government: At the Ministry level,⁵⁴ interest has been expressed in delegating the work of social service provision to local, community-based CSOs; this includes organizations that would serve as monitors of the services provided. When such services begin, training and support for

⁴⁷ ICHD initiated the discussion and advocated for an endowment law sometime between 2001-2013 and they took the draft law to the NA, but this was not adopted as a separate law. Some principles of the endowment law were nevertheless included into the Law on Foundations later on.

⁴⁸ For more information in EPF’s discussions/law drafting on this issue see:

https://epfarmeria.am/sites/default/files/Document/Draft_Endowment_Law_2009.pdf

⁴⁹ USAID. 2019. Civil Society and Media in Armenia: An Evidence Review for Learning, Evaluation, and Research Activity II (LER II), p. 11. https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00TJWV.pdf

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 26.

⁵¹ USAID. 2019. Integrity Systems and the Rule of Law in Armenia: An Evidence Review for Learning, Evaluation and Research Activity II (LER II). https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00TNMJ.pdf

⁵² Interviewees pointed to The A.D. Sakharov Armenian Human Rights Center as an example of a national level organization that had regional branches in Shirak, Gegharkunik, and Syunik regions.

⁵³ Exceptions to this description are the Education working group, which has arrived at common positions, and the Human Rights working group, which the EU feels should still look in regions for smaller organizations.

⁵⁴ Specifically, the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs.

local monitoring organizations would be required, and an effective system of reporting would need to be developed.

Local CSOs and local government: CSOs at the local level are generally not viewed as mechanisms through which to raise citizens' issues. Where they exist, they may more often take the form of community-based organizations, cooperatives, or ad hoc associations established to address practical activities. They rarely meet with Councils of Elders or mayors to discuss issues; in fact, local officials interviewed did not know of many such organizations. While, as noted above (Section 2.2.1.1 Civil Society—Organizations Background), members of the public may trust individuals who are, in fact, CSO staff, they often do not identify these individuals with a particular organization.

At present, local governments may have the opportunity to apply for government funding for various activities. This may be a useful opportunity for local organizations to link with local governments and demonstrate their utility and capacity. Providing smaller organizations with the opportunity to help local governments in this way may contribute to an increase in their engagement with local governments and with their communities.

Fostering local civil society dynamics: In many smaller communities where CSOs do not exist, efforts to introduce an element of civil society may be made, particularly by training young people. The NGO Center, for example, establishes youth groups as a basic building block for civil society where none exists. The Urban Foundation for Sustainable Development makes efforts to develop activist groups in areas where participation is low. Groups that may have formed as a result of these interventions may not be sustainable in the longer-term; the capacity of the individuals involved, however, remains. For example, the NGO Center and the Urban Foundation for Sustainable Development noted that among the young activists they had trained, a number of individuals moved on to political roles (e.g., mayor, deputy mayor, and Members of Parliament; members of Councils of Elders). The mobility of trained individuals, however, means that local organizations, too, may suffer from human resource drainage, in this case from the regions to the capital.

Citizen engagement in local government: Despite the relative absence of CSO-government interactions, individual citizen participation in local level governance, as reflected in citizen interactions with the Councils of Elders and Mayor's offices, appears to be robust. Citizens are attending Councils of Elders meetings to voice demands.⁵⁵ When issues are not resolved at the local level, citizens go directly to the regional or national government office responsible (individually, as a group, or with a mayor, when appropriate). Public engagement is further encouraged through live streaming of government meetings.⁵⁶

2.2.1.4 ADDRESSING THE GENDER GAP

Whether at the national or local level, women generally fill staff roles in most CSOs and the positions they hold are often not at the decision-making levels. Organizations that are led by women are those focused on social issues and women's rights.⁵⁷

Civil society organizations have often served as training grounds for individuals who move on to engage in politics; the limited space provided to women in decision-making positions, therefore, may not only

⁵⁵ Citizens Offices are also utilized to address municipal service issues.

⁵⁶ Live streaming is paid for by local governments; the NGO Center also supports such initiatives.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

impact the role women play in civil society now, and the roles they may undertake in the future. It also serves to potentially limit their opportunities of engaging in the political sphere. This limitation is particularly important in the context of the low levels of active political engagement of women in Armenia, which is reflected in the 2018 World Economic Forum Gender Gap Report that ranks Armenia 115 out of 149 countries in relation to women's political empowerment.^{58 59}

2.2.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.2.2.1 CIVIL SOCIETY SECTOR

10. CSO registration. Raise awareness, in the civil society sector, regarding the relatively new CSO registration guidelines that now permit registration at regional offices.

11. Legislative and regulatory reform. As noted above, a number of important legislative and policy issues that would ease the enabling environment for CSOs are pending. Sector organizations have commented on the need for some of these reforms, but do not appear to have an interest in pursuing all of them. Creating artificial demand with donor funding may prove only temporarily useful. When these initiatives emerge as sector priorities, donor support would be useful. A quick grant mechanism, discussed in Section 2.3.2.1 Civil Society Sector—Recommendations, could serve this purpose.

- a. Legal standing of CSOs on public interest issues. While limits placed on the ability of CSOs to pursue public interest issues in the courts is a clear problem, the CSO community is not currently focused on this issue.
- b. Government oversight of CSOs by the tax authorities. This issue is currently on the CSO sector's action agenda. (See also Section 2.3.2.1 Civil Society Sector—Recommendations 17-18, quick grant mechanisms).
- c. Endowment Law. At present, an endowment law does not exist. It does not appear to be on the immediate action agenda of any organization.

12. CSO capacity support at the local level.

- a. Support local monitoring and social audits through community-based groups⁶⁰ focused on project implementation and budget spending related to local or national funds. Such activities would help build and strengthen civil society at the local level and contribute to the fight against corruption.
- b. Local and national advocacy linkage-building. Issues that are regulated by national level policy, but that have direct local implications, may serve as useful starting points for local-national collaboration on reform needs. These issues, for example, may focus on

⁵⁸ World Economic Forum, Global Gender Gap Report 2018, <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2018/results-and-analysis/>.

⁵⁹ At a recent press conference, Prime Minister Pashinyan noted, "For the first time in the history of the Third Republic, a female mayor has been elected in our country." "100 Facts about New Armenia"—Introductory remarks by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, delivered at the press conference, May 8, 2019 at <http://www.primeminister.am/en/interviews-and-press-conferences/item/2019/05/08/Nikol-Pashinyan-Press-Conference/>.

⁶⁰ USAID. 2018. Governance in Armenia: An Evidence Review for Learning, Evaluation and Research Activity II (LER II), p. 1. https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00TNMG.pdf

education, health, or social services. National and local level organizations could hold community meetings across the country to identify salient and common challenges that affect all or most communities in relation to a particular issue (e.g., education). Together, the organizations could develop a common platform that would be presented to the appropriate ministry and/or NA committee and conduct a related advocacy campaign.

- c. Train local organizations in basic proposal development to support local government efforts in obtaining government funding for various activities.
- d. Train local organization regarding (1) substantive issues with which they deal, and (2) effective participation strategies, so that they are able to more competently represent their interest in regional and town public consultations.⁶¹

13. Addressing the gender gap

- a. Support capacity/leadership development training and activities for senior and non-senior female staff in a broad range of organizations to increase their skills in organizational management and expand the pool of actors who may enter the political sphere.
- b. Support mentors and mentorship activities that provide women an opportunity to engage with government officials and learn about leadership and the processes of governance.

2.2.2.2 **GOVERNANCE, CIVIL SOCIETY, AND THE BUSINESS SECTOR**

- 14. Promote anti-corruption and business advocacy. To foster a strong anti-corruption advocacy block, support new independent business associations representing legitimate businesses and professional associations. Businesses across sectors, ranging from construction and manufacturing to IT, require transparency, clean government, and enforcement to do business. Independent associations representing these interests could work alone or together to advocate for anti-corruption reforms that are effective and implemented when enacted.⁶²
- 15. Support charitable contributions deduction legislation. A law that allows for individual or business deductions for contributions would create incentives to support non-profits and would be helpful in improving the CSO/media sustainability problem.

2.2.2.3 **GOVERNMENT RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 16. Develop the capacity of officials working in the State Register and SRC Department of Non-Profits' Oversight to ensure appropriate and effective implementation of new oversight regulations for CSOs.

⁶¹ The NGO Center conducts trainings on participation; all local organizations need to understand these processes.

⁶² A number of business associations established under previous governments, e.g., SME Development National Center (which is no longer active), and The Union of Manufacturers and Businessmen in Armenia, are variously viewed as either government-established organizations, or as mediators for and with the previous government.

2.3 CIVIL SOCIETY ADVOCACY

This subsection focuses on the components of effective advocacy, advocacy practices, and prospects for collaboration between CSOs, which is vital to successful advocacy. It provides recommendations for the civil society and government sectors.

2.3.1 OVERVIEW AND ANALYSIS

2.3.1.1 COMPONENTS OF EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY

Effective advocacy generally requires a three-pronged approach: 1) Representation and constituencies; 2) Research, analysis, and presentation; and 3) Government relations. Firstly, initiatives need to be representative of a wider public, beyond the specific organization or group spearheading the effort. Second, clear definitions of the issues and problems being addressed need to be offered, responsive and realistic solutions need to be proposed, and persuasive and effective presentations of the issues and solutions need to be delivered. Finally, advocacy initiatives must ultimately reach decision-makers in government. As such, the process of advocacy requires an environment in which government is willing and able to collaborate with its citizens, and in which advocates have access to mechanisms through which to reach government and maintain ongoing and productive dialogues.

Armenia has generally been weak in regard to these core approaches, yet it has been able to achieve some successes. Successes and remaining gaps are described below with respect to each of the three necessary components of an approach:

Representation and Constituencies: Wide public support for an advocacy initiative may be formed by engaging a large constituency of individual citizens and/or by establishing a coalition of CSOs that legitimately represents a wider public.⁶³ Armenian activists have successfully engaged large constituencies of individuals through social media, as has been the case with many past civic initiatives. CSOs have successfully organized, generally in the form of ad hoc coalitions, to run public campaigns and jointly pursue policy and/or legal reforms.⁶⁴

Research, Analysis, and Presentation: Evidence-based research, clear and objective analysis, effective communication, and presentation and dissemination of clear and compelling materials is a notable gap in civil society at present.

Government Relations: Governments prior to the Velvet Revolution did not generally support robust CSO activism and did not mandate effective processes through which advocacy could be pursued. At present, the government headed by Prime Minister Pashinyan is willing to listen to civil society and CSOs and, in principle, to collaborate with them. Formal mechanisms through which collaboration may be pursued, however, generally remain weak or are non-existent, and the capacity of government to respond to public needs and demands has not as yet been developed.

⁶³ International pressure may at times also be used as an advocacy tool.

⁶⁴ For example, the Coalition to Stop Violence Against Women (active since 2010) has successfully advocated for the adoption of the first ever domestic violence preventive law (2017); Transparency International Anti-Corruption Center submitted Recommendations on the Law on Procurement and Procurement Legislation to the Ministry of Finance (March 2017) and an agreement was reached for TIAC and Anti-Corruption Coalition to submit new recommendations on sub-legislative acts. See: <https://transparency.am/en/news/view/1875>.

2.3.1.2 **ADVOCACY PRACTICES AND INITIATIVES**

Advocacy initiatives and practices are becoming a common component of CSO activity in Armenia. While some organizations understand the process of effective advocacy, CSOs generally did not previously expect to justify the issues they were pursuing and did not often know how to advocate for them. At present, not only is the environment more conducive to the professionalization of CSO advocacy, effective and evidence-based advocacy is required to justify criticism of a government that many would prefer to shield. Further, as legislation and programs are put in place, CSOs need the skills to monitor implementation to ensure the ultimate success of their advocacy efforts. The significance of CSO capacity on the outcomes of advocacy initiatives was underlined by a senior government official who noted that, though CSOs take part in the decision-making process by commenting on draft laws, their experts only raise questions, but do not suggest solutions. Clearly, civil society organizations in Armenia need to have the skills to develop and present solutions to the problems they expect the government to solve.

Advocacy skills gap: The range of advocacy strategies utilized by organizations to engage citizens and government have included: the use of Facebook; online television; social media; online PSA campaigns; regional television; distribution of booklets and fliers to citizens; personal meetings with government officials; submission of letters and research to the Prime Minister's office, ministries and NA standing committees; and participation in government-CSO collaboration mechanisms. At the core of advocacy, however, are research and presentation skills, and it is these skills that are generally noted to be missing in the sector itself.⁶⁵ More specifically, the advocacy skills required by the civil society sector include: subject matter expertise, evidence based research, policy analysis, legal analysis, production of effective advocacy materials and presentations, writing and dissemination of policy briefs, monitoring and evaluation, constituency building, and proactive government relations. One member of the National Assembly who had come from the civil society sector, for example, noted that CSOs ought not wait for the NA to invite their input. CSOs should reach out to Members of Parliament (MPs) and NA staff with research and publications, send their press releases to them, and generally be more proactive in keeping NA members and committee staff informed. This is a useful instruction for CSO relations with the ministries and other government agencies as well.

Communications gap: In addition to substantive advocacy skills, it is critical for civil society actors to engage and utilize the media and government in their efforts. In the context of media engagement, some options exist for such linkages. For example, the Open Society Foundation-Armenia, Article 3 Club (run by the For Equal Rights NGO) and the Media Center (managed by the Public Journalism Club) make space available for CSOs to organize events and discussions with media representatives. The events are also live streamed to reach a wider audience. A more concerted effort to share information and to engage media interest in issues and initiatives, however, is needed and missing. CSO skills are generally weak regarding communications with wider society (with whom they may not reach out), and the media (with whom they may not contact). Many organizations do not know how to write media-friendly press releases, use Facebook, talk with journalists in an effective manner, or refrain from saying things that can

⁶⁵ The fact that a number of senior and experienced CSO staff members have moved into government and NA positions, has led to a common refrain regarding civil society capacity gaps created by the migration. In addition to this most recent wave of personnel transfers, however, trained CSO staff may leave the sector to work in higher paying jobs with international development organizations. CSOs continue engage new staff and experts to fill positions. Nonetheless, expertise in the civil society sector itself is lacking.

be targeted or attacked by propaganda. Evidence of how such skills translate into media coverage was provided by a representative of the Union of Informed Citizens, which is media savvy, noting that the organization, or names of its members, was mentioned in the media 200 times in 2018.

2.3.1.3 **ADVOCACY: PROSPECTS FOR CIVIL SOCIETY COLLABORATION**

Advocacy requires a coherent set of demands or recommendations from a united voice that represents a set of organizations or a sector, and ideally, the support of grassroots constituencies. CSO networks and coalitions, permanent and temporary, represent such united voices. The government is generally less likely to heed the arguments of one organization that is individually representing an issue or policy recommendation. When confronted by a multitude of different demands regarding the same issue, decision makers may have difficulty assessing which demands are most legitimate, and consequently, may focus on none. In addition, the proliferation of demands on government institutions that are constrained in terms of capacity and resources serves to undermine public trust in the willingness of government to act. Collaboration is, consequently, crucial to advocacy.

Coalition successes and failures: A number of CSO coalitions have conducted effective advocacy campaigns in past years, including those focused on child protection, mobilized around the Eliminating Violence Against Children (EVAC) campaign;⁶⁶ domestic violence;⁶⁷ resistance to proposed draft amendments to the Law on Public Organizations;⁶⁸ and anti-corruption.⁶⁹

While examples of functioning and successful coalitions exist in Armenia, prospects for long-term coalitions success are limited. Coalitions that have lasted are those that share a narrow, common agenda, such as core human rights (e.g., The Coalition to Stop Violence Against Women), or are ad hoc and narrowly focused on one issue or problem (e.g., Amulsar mine initiative).⁷⁰ More artificial coalitions, i.e., those formed because of donor support, generally last as long as does the funding. As is the case in many other countries, CSOs may often concentrate on their narrow interests to the exclusion of other issues that may directly affect their areas of focus. They may find it difficult to narrow their common goals and develop a strategic vision that all members can embrace. Organization leaders may find it difficult to work together because they compete for funding or are unable to set egos aside. Leading CSOs may often dominate discussion in their particular field, allowing little room for input by others.

To achieve a level of success when working together, CSOs need to learn how to narrow their goals, identify a singular and important objective from within a plethora of issues, and find common ground and a common strategy. The Yerevan Press Club and its partners, including MIC and CPFE, for example, will follow a similar blueprint as they advocate for media-focused legislative reforms. The CSOs will conduct broad discussion with media sector actors/institutions, examine priorities and determine timelines, divide work among participating organizations and coordinate activities, and engage experts in legislative

⁶⁶ The campaign was conducted by the Child Protection Coalition.

⁶⁷ Coalition to Stop Violence Against Women.

⁶⁸ Civil Development and Partnership Foundation (2009).

⁶⁹ Led by Transparency International.

⁷⁰ An unofficial coalition of media organizations focuses on possible media-related violations (including those related to FOI) and includes: Yerevan Press Club, Media Initiative Center, Committee to Committee to Protect Freedom of Information, Goris Press Club, and Public Journalism Club. The group communicates via a Facebook chat group and publishes their group statements on the web page of each member organization. One such statement, criticizing the National Assembly for restricting journalists' access, was issued on February 4, 2019.

drafting. Some organizations are able to do this now, of course, but not all organizations have these skills. It would be useful for those other organizations to acquire them.

Civil society sector coordination: In terms of the sector’s own interest, an apex organization that could unify civil society organizations to further sector interests (e.g., CSO legal standing on public interest issues, endowment law, or revision of draft legislation comment period), is considered a non-starter because CSOs are reluctant to work together and do not believe they will be able to find agreement among themselves.

2.3.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.3.2.1 CIVIL SOCIETY SECTOR

17. Establish a quick grant mechanism to support reform efforts as issues and legislative initiatives arise. Quick grants would generally be utilized for ad hoc coalition efforts that relate to CSO and media sector enabling environments, as well as policy reform initiatives across sectors and issues. Advocacy/policy successes in any area will have spillover effects on other civil society initiatives: they will increase confidence in the reform process and create enthusiasm for further actions and initiatives. The tactics and strategies used to achieve success would be valuable as lessons learned for other efforts.
18. Quick grant mechanisms or issue/advocacy project grants might support grant sub-components including:
 - a. Public information funding sub-component to support CSOs in developing and producing presentation content for media distribution/broadcasts. This funding would help organizations publicize the issues on which they are focused, as well as the role of civil society organizations in working in the public interest.
 - b. Government relations funding sub-component. Grants may cover the training and/or cost of a government relations officer/advisor to ensure that CSOs are proactive in engaging and sharing information with government offices, ministries, and NA.
 - c. Organizational capacity development sub-component. Numerous organizational capacity trainings have been offered in Armenia and many organizations have undergone one or more organizational capacity training courses. Additional training may be needed as staff move to other institutions and as new organizations enter the sector. An organizational capacity development grant sub-component would allow CSOs to identify their specific capacity needs and use the grant to address their particular gaps.

Core skills generally required by CSOs include constituent engagement, project reporting, finance, and monitoring and evaluation. For organizations that have established some history of success and legitimacy in their communities, the provision of capacity support on organizational management issues beyond core skills are useful. This includes strategic planning, organizational structure and management systems, human resource and personnel management, and sustainability strategies.

The Eurasia Partnership Foundation maintains a website that offers a “marketplace” with information about training institutions and experts, and that provides information on free training opportunities and grants competitions. This website (or a similar one)

could be used by grantees to select capacity development trainers (or training courses) based on their particular needs.

19. Filling the expertise gap. Support a “marketplace” website that makes available information regarding issue experts, data collection experts, researchers, and analysts who are able to fill the expertise gap across the CSO sector on as-needed basis. Experts might also provide CSO staff with training in their areas of specialty. The website could serve as a portal through which studies, analyses, and reports produced by think tanks, academic institutions, research organizations, or CSOs could be accessed, and potentially serve as a research/analysis network for broader analytical initiatives.⁷¹
20. Advocacy skills and training. Training related to advocacy may be provided through traditional training programs, through the utilization of consultant/experts, or through hands-on experiences provided by internships/fellowship and exchanges. (Also see Recommendation 26, Joint CSO-NA staff training, and Recommendation 28, Policy Research/Resource Center for CSOs, media, and NA staff.)
 - a. Support training in core advocacy skills ranging from constituency-building, evidence-based research and policy analysis, to monitoring and evaluation, government relations, and communications. Communications skills require both CSO/government partnership building skills (e.g., communicating research findings and evidence-based recommendations effectively), and Social Media Management Training. As is noted throughout this assessment, the use of Facebook as a news, information, and discussion platform has become both widespread and politicized. As such, the effective utilization of Facebook is important in reaching the widest possible audience. Social Media Management Training provides Facebook users with strategies for developing more interesting and appealing Facebook content and attracting more readers.
 - b. Coalition building. The willingness to engage in long-term collaborative efforts is somewhat limited in Armenia. The core capacities for long-term coalition efforts are often missing. This includes identifying core advocacy interests and strategies; consensus building and dealing with challenges such as compromising on issues or tactics, or on position, prestige, and power; and information sharing and maintaining contacts regularly.
21. Internships, fellowships, and exchanges
 - a. Cross sector internships/exchanges to provide journalists and CSO staff an opportunity to learn about each other’s work and contribute to improving the effectiveness of both sectors. Such exchanges would give journalists interested in particular topics the chance to learn about them, in depth, in specialized CSOs. Journalists working in various organizations would contribute to their host CSO by developing necessary staff communications skills and capacities that are often missing. Further time spent in a CSO will raise media awareness about the role of CSOs and the contributions they could make to Armenia’s further development. Similarly, CSO interns working in the media sector would have a chance to share information with media colleagues about the issues on which they work. The experience would also give CSO interns a chance to learn

⁷¹ The Eurasia Partnership Foundation maintains a “marketplace” website that carries information regarding organizational training institutions/experts and opportunities.

communications skills that are necessary for CSO effectiveness. (Funding would be required for administrative/organizational support and stipends.) While such internships are valuable, it is often difficult or impossible for most staff journalists, in small, often cash-strapped media outlets, to take advantage of such opportunities. Freelance journalists, however, are more likely to be able to participate.

- b. Training internships for CSO staff and journalists not based in Yerevan. A limited number of well-trained CSOs and media organizations exist in Armenia; a full-fledged internship program for all interested CSO and media staff would be difficult. The most in need may be CSO staff and journalists from outside of Yerevan; as such, a rural-urban training internship may be the most feasible form of support. (Funding would be required for administrative/organizational support and stipends.) This program would ideally be set up sooner rather than later – if support becomes institutionalized in Yerevan and nowhere else in the country, these parts may feel disconnected from the center, and it will be harder to make the change later.
- c. International exchange opportunities for CSO staff and journalists are useful and welcome. The need is high, especially for journalist exchanges, but the costs may be high as well.

2.3.2.2 GOVERNMENT SECTOR

- 22. Provide capacity support to government bodies that are responsible for responding to advocacy initiatives that are being funded and supported. Without the ability to respond to demands and reforms that are supported by CSOs and citizens, advocacy may lead to rising frustrations, to a deterioration of confidence in government, and possibly to a weakening of support for democracy itself.

2.4 CIVIL SOCIETY—GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

This subsection will review the means by which civil society communicates with national government, whether through informal channels, public councils, online platforms, or the NA. It will then provide recommendations for civil society and government sectors.

2.4.1 OVERVIEW AND ANALYSIS

Armenia's governance system remains centralized; as such, the most efficacious channel for advocacy or participation in the policy-making process is viewed to be at the ministry level. Advocacy/advisory mechanisms are permitted across government, and some ministries and NA committees have functioning advisory/stakeholder participation committees. The use of such mechanisms, however, is not required or universal. Indeed, ministries appear to bypass formal mechanisms by unofficially asking individual CSOs for input. CSOs themselves seem to feel that a platform or official mechanism for requesting input is needed instead of sending individual emails.

2.4.1.1 *CIVIL SOCIETY AND GOVERNANCE INSTITUTIONS*

Informal channels: Advocacy is conducted through informal and formal channels. Politics across the board, however, is viewed to be personal both at the local and national levels. Both advice and criticism are shared with government through personal contacts.⁷² While personal relationships are often utilized because it is easier to go to the right person than navigate more complicated bureaucratic processes, ironically, for some organizations, personal level advocacy has become harder because new personnel have taken over and old contacts have been lost.⁷³

Formal mechanisms: Formal, institutional channels through which advocacy may be pursued include issue-based councils that have been set up under the Prime Minister's office, to which CSOs are invited (e.g., the council on the prevention of domestic violence, council on anti-corruption); Public Councils, and ministry and NA public hearings that are not required and held at the discretion of the institution.

Public Councils were set up in 2016 as broadly participatory advisory mechanisms that include CSOs and ministry representatives; most of these Councils are not considered to be efficient or effective. Committee agendas are generally developed without CSO input; invitations to meetings are sent on short notice, together with lengthy preparatory documents that are scheduled for discussion; and the views and suggestions made by CSO participants are often not integrated. Whether or not a Public Council meets is dependent on decisions of individuals; as such, not all Public Councils are functional.⁷⁴ Prior to the consolidation of ministries in April 2019, thirteen out of seventeen ministry-related Public Councils met on a regular basis. The Ministry of the Environment, for example, had a functioning Public Council; the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructures did not.⁷⁵

At present 250 CSOs participate in councils. Fourteen are local/regional organizations. Membership terms run for two years and organizations join through an application process. As such, participating organizations represent their own interests, not sector perspectives or concerns.

CSO Input and Legislative Drafting (E-Draft web portal): In addition to various councils, committees, and hearings, the public may access, review, and comment on draft legislation via an interactive government website: e-draft.am. This mechanism has been in effect since 2017 and has proven problematic for the civil society sector. CSOs complain that the two weeks provided by the Ministry of Justice website does not allow sufficient time for comment. Sector actors want a longer comment period and note that the process of drafting laws should be more transparent from the start.⁷⁶

2.4.1.2 *CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY*

Formal mechanisms: As is the case with national government agencies, formal mechanisms for CSO participation in policy development processes in the National Assembly are limited. Public hearings held

⁷² If criticism at the personal level does not work, organizations go public e.g., at hearings or through the media.

⁷³ The influx of new staff and the prevalent use of informal channels present challenges for CSOs who have found that new staff may often think they "know everything" and that their role is to decide whether to accept or reject input provided by civil society organizations.

⁷⁴ See, for example, USAID, ICNL and FHI360, 2017 Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index for Central and Eastern Europe, p.37.

⁷⁵ Following the Velvet Revolution, the members of the Public Council were invited to an introductory meeting at the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructures once; in late April 2019, an announcement to form a new council was published and the newly selected members were contacted later on to suggest an agenda for further policy development.

⁷⁶ The Law on Normative Legal Acts requires executive agencies to make draft laws public.

by parliamentary commissions to discuss draft laws were made optional by the NA in May 2017; they had previously been compulsory. Further, while Parliamentary committees can establish working groups to consider specific draft laws, such working groups, which include civil society, are rarely formed.

Expertise in the National Assembly—Members: The National Assembly suffers from a shortage of expertise, both within the body itself, and among staff. NA committees, often composed of newly elected MPs, may be short of members who understand the issues with which they are charged to deal. For example, from the twelve members of the NA Standing Committee for Territorial Administration, Local Self Government, Agriculture and Environment, only two have expertise in the Committee’s areas of focus. The other ten are not sufficiently familiar with the issues and cannot meaningfully participate in the development of related legislation.

Expertise in the National Assembly—Staff: Staff expertise is lacking as well. Staff salaries at the National Assembly are low; as a result, the institution cannot hire highly qualified experts. Staff indicates that they have not been offered training on research/analysis or sector issues. Any training they have received focused on general issues such labor codes or the roles and responsibilities of institutions.

This shortage of experts forces at least some NA committees to rely on CSOs to fill the gap on sector issues and legislative development. The system is uncertain and unreliable. CSOs involved often participate on the basis of good will; as such, NA staff and MPs do not know how long it is possible to depend on the expertise provided by these organizations. The NA Standing Committee for Territorial Administration, Local Self Government, Agriculture and Environment, for example, has seven working groups on environmental issues that are composed of CSOs and government officials. The Committee collaborates with two or three CSOs that have sufficient expertise and capacity to be helpful. The work of these CSO is partially funded by the government and partly undertaken on a voluntary basis. To fill the expertise gap and supplement the semi-voluntary participation of CSOs, the Committee chair also relies on voluntary funding from twenty business associations to pay for a small group of independent experts.⁷⁷

Civil service staff regulations: NA staff activities are further constrained by civil service regulations. Job descriptions for civil service staff do not include monitoring responsibilities outside of NA premises; as such, staff members are not required to undertake work assignments outside of the NA compound. To carry out fact checking and monitoring of programs, outside assistance must be engaged, and this outside help is often sought from members of civil society.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Business associations providing voluntary funding for short-term experts include the Union of Advanced Technology Enterprises (UATE) and SME Cooperation Association.

⁷⁸ For example, particular medical procedures are required to be provided for free. NA staff cannot go to the medical facilities to confirm that the operations are, indeed, provided at no cost.

2.4.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.4.2.1 CIVIL SOCIETY SECTOR

23. Government-CSO dialogues to reform participation mechanisms. Formal and effective mechanisms for participation are needed across government institutions. Support government-CSO discussions to determine how to best increase civil society participation in the policy-making process; what formal processes/mechanism would function most effectively; and what government may require from CSOs to make their input useful.

In this context, it would be important to discuss and establish processes through which CSO representation in formal participatory mechanisms may be sector-focused, rather than simply representative of individual organizations and interests, as is now the case.⁷⁹

Following the revolution, individuals from the civil society and media sectors moved to assignments in government institutions. Many still feel linked to, and concerned about, their sectors. As such, this early period of adjustment may be a good time for government-CSO dialogues to define and establish formal participatory mechanisms.

24. Establish a grant mechanism to fund the utilization of CSO expertise support to the NA. This grant mechanism would fund CSO support to committees for a given period of time (a long-term commitment).⁸⁰
25. Grants to conduct monitoring on behalf of the NA. The grant would cover costs of CSO monitoring related to the implementation of legislation that NA staff may be constrained from doing because of civil service regulations.
26. Joint CSO-NA staff training to fill expertise gap. Training areas include:
 - a. Sector issues;
 - b. Cross-sector issues (e.g., gender, human rights, anti-corruption);
 - c. Research/analysis skills;
 - d. Analysis skills regarding risks of draft laws and impact assessments; and,
 - e. Facebook / Social Media Management Training for Committee staff who oversee Committee Facebook pages.

Joint training on sector issues would help establish common ground between CSOs and counterpart NA staff on issues of mutual concern. They would also foster informal government-CSO links that are often necessary and a part of the advocacy process.

⁷⁹ Organizations that have participated in formal government advisory mechanisms will likely object to the idea that the sector, not individual CSOs, be represented. As a compromise, perhaps half the CSO participants in these mechanisms can be sector representatives, and the remaining half continue to be comprised of individual organizations.

⁸⁰ Grants to support the provision of CSO expertise would be useful until NA staff is able to provide expertise, or other mechanisms for providing expert advice are established.

Similarly, joint training for government staff and CSOs on relevant technical and cross-cutting issues could be conducted. Where logistics allow, joint CSO-NA staff and government staff trainings could be considered.

27. CSO training for government institutions. In addition to advocacy, CSOs are linked to government through the provision of training. For example, the Union of Informed Citizens will train approximately 30 government press secretaries and spokespersons from ministries and state agencies on communications skills; Freedom of Information Center Armenia conducts workshops for the heads of government information departments; and the NGO Center trains local government on participatory governance, participatory development planning, procurement, and leadership.

Opportunities for other or additional trainings may arise. In most cases, government may cover the costs. Where funds may be short, USAID may consider using the quick grant mechanism to cover CSO trainings for government staff/officials.

28. Policy research/resource center for CSOs, media, and NA staff. A shortage of experts in the NA, and capacity gaps in civil society and media sectors in areas related to research, analysis, and writing may be addressed, in part, through a policy/research center, preferably housed in a university.

Such a Center would make available computers/internet; a staff member who could provide research support and instruction; periodic short trainings on research/analysis/writing; examples of good research/policy analysis documents (in Armenian); and short (Armenian language) how-to videos. A possible link could be established with university staff who might offer issue-related lectures or occasional seminars. The Center could announce research needs/assignments on behalf of CSOs, media, and NA staff, and possibly provide oversight for graduate student internships that focus on research/analysis assistance requested by the sectors. (Internships would possibly provide academic credit and/or a small stipend.) In addition, research and analytical material produced by academic institutions, think tanks, research organizations, and CSOs may be housed in the Center for research purposes.

The Center would respond to immediate needs for research/analysis and would foster the development of future experts. The premises may also provide a shared working space for civil society staff, journalists, and NA officials/staff. Such an environment would encourage discussion and dialogue about relevant issues and events between the sectors. It is important to harness this opportunity now because if organizations, activists, and NA staff do not share access to such a resource center from the beginning, it may be difficult to institutionalize this later on, resulting in wasted resources.

29. NA internship program for young professionals. NA internships would give young professionals an opportunity to learn about particular sector issues, how government works, and how CSOs and media relate to government. Participants would be assigned to NA committees, or communications offices, and would contribute to the work of the NA by serving as research/analysis staff, for example. This program would be important as a learning experience for future government and CSO leaders, as well as for journalists who need to understand how government works. A similar internship program for young professionals could also be implemented in government ministries and within local government.

2.4.2.2 **GOVERNMENT SECTOR**

30. Provide issue training (and analytical skills, if needed) to new government officials and members of the NA to ensure that they are able to competently engage in policy development/reform and legislative development.⁸¹

- a. Establish formal and effective government-CSO collaboration mechanisms.
 - Ensure that Public Council meetings are mandatory, that their processes are transparent, accountable, and participatory, and that public/CSO input is integrated into the decision-making process.⁸²
 - Develop and institute selection criteria for civil society participants that are inclusive. At least a segment of civil society participants would preferably sit on the Councils as representatives of their sectors, rather than as representative of their particular organizations.
- b. Support ministries in organizing informal participatory mechanisms, including non-mandated hearings.
 - Provide technical support to the agencies that want to conduct public hearings and employ specialists to organize such events.
 - Provide similar support to agencies to organize formal dialogue processes and informal hearings in regions and local communities.
- c. e-Draft web platform.
 - Increase the period currently allowed for public comment on legal drafts.
 - Enhance transparency of public comments and recommendations and the mechanisms of their incorporation in draft laws.⁸³
 - Conduct in-person government-civil society follow-up consultations to ensure that comments have been considered and that the legislative revision process actually assessed all submissions.⁸⁴
- d. National Assembly.
 - Increase CSO participation by mandating collaborative bodies and processes.

⁸¹ Representatives of the Coalition to Stop Violence Against Women, for example, noted that officials in most government agencies are “quite progressive.” Government on issues of concern to various CSOs may be slow, however, because there are many issues to deal with and prioritization is a problem.

⁸² Although legislation requiring Public Councils exists, the convening of actual and relevant Council meetings has been optional. While government would need to make Council meetings mandatory, donor support to help ministries develop functional and useful processes may increase the likelihood that Public Councils would be utilized.

⁸³ Article 4 of the RA Law on Regulatory Legal Acts states that “Results of holding public discussions and the draft regulatory legal act elaborated based thereon shall be promulgated as well.”

⁸⁴ See, for example, USAID, ICNL and FHI360, 2017 Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index for Central and Eastern Europe, p.38.

- Establish a professional research service in the NA to fill the expertise gap and help with the legislative process.⁸⁵
- Revise civil service regulations to allow government personnel to conduct necessary monitoring of government premises.

2.5 SUMMARY AND PRIORITIZATION OF CIVIL SOCIETY RECOMMENDATIONS

In the context of the fragile political environment in Armenia, it is critical that laws, regulations, and processes that provide protections to the civil society sector, and that define relationships between government and sector actors, are formalized and institutionalized. Recommendations provided in this section focus on these core overarching issues, as well as on mechanisms through which to strengthen sector actor capacities.

Table I below presents the summary and prioritization of civil society sector recommendations. The prioritization of recommendations is based on: 1) how important an issue/problem is; 2) how difficult it may be to carry out a recommendation successfully; and 3) how wide the impact of the activity would be. The timeframe refers to which year of the five-year strategy USAID might try to implement activities/projects. Please refer to Appendix 5 for a combined table of assessment recommendations by priority level (Table 7) and a summary table of assessment findings and recommendations by sector (Table 8).

TABLE I: SUMMARY AND PRIORITIZATION OF CIVIL SOCIETY RECOMMENDATIONS

SECTOR RECOMMENDATION PRIORITIES	IMPLEMENTATION TIMEFRAME
CIVIC INITIATIVES	
1. Support CSO activities that assist civic initiatives, particularly in areas of legal representation and monitoring	1-2 years
2. Establish dialogue between civil society activists, grassroots civil activists, and civic initiative activists to ascertain what kind of outside support civic initiatives may be comfortable accepting	1-2 years
CIVIC EDUCATION	
5. Social media management training for civil society, media, and government	1 year
8. Grants to journalists to cover “social transformation” issues	1 year
9. Communications training for government officials	1 year

⁸⁵ While this is an ostensibly reasonable solution, it has drawbacks in the Armenian context. Experts are generally lacking both in the NA and the civil society sector. The NA has difficulty attracting qualified experts because salaries offered are relatively low, as compared to government/ministry and donor/international organization compensation. A research service institution would require capable expertise; this in turn would require a long-term source of funding for higher salaries. It is not clear from where funding for the salaries would come. Even if salaries were raised sufficiently to attract a cadre of experts, the relatively narrow pool of expertise means that these experts would be moving from the ministries, other government institutions, and/or donor/international organizations. As such, another gap will have opened, at the very least, in the government/ministries.

3. Community level civic education	1-2 years
6. Production/broadcast of news-related discussion programs that promote dialogue and respect for pluralism	2 years
CIVIL SOCIETY	
11.b. Government oversight of CSOs by the tax authorities	Current on CSO sector agenda
17. Establish quick grant mechanism to support CSO reform initiatives	1 year
19. "Marketplace" website to fill expertise gap	1 year
22. Capacity support to government bodies responsible for responding to advocacy initiatives	1 year
23. Government-CSO dialogues to reform participation mechanisms	1 year (start with ministries where political will/interest exists)
26. Joint CSO-NA staff training to fill expertise gap	1 year
30. Issue training (and analytical skills, if needed) for new government officials / members of the NA	1 year
30.c. Increase the period currently allowed for public comment on e-Draft web platform	1 year
14. Support new independent business associations	1-2 years
20. CSO advocacy skills and training	1-2 years
12.a. Local-level project and expenditure monitoring through community-based groups	2 years
18.a. Public information grant sub-component	2 years
30.a. Establish formal and effective mechanisms for government-CSO collaboration	2 years
11.a. Legal standing of CSOs on public interest issues	Support when political will exists
27. CSO training for government institutions	As required
CIVIC EDUCATION	
7.b. Develop/broadcast dialogue programs with comedy segments interspersed	2 years
7.c. Development/broadcast of television programs that engage students and youth	2 years
4. Civic education in schools	2-3 years
7.a. Develop/broadcast soap operas/TV series that integrate civic education/social transformation issues	2-3 years
CIVIL SOCIETY	
16. Develop the capacity of State Register and SRC Department of Non-Profits' Oversight staff	1-2 years

24. Grant mechanism to fund utilization of CSO expertise in the National Assembly	1-2 years
10. Raise awareness regarding new CSO registration guidelines	2 years
12.d. Local organization training on substantive issues and participation strategies	2-3 years
28. Policy research/resource center for CSOs, media, and NA staff	2-3 years
30.d. Establish a professional research service in the National Assembly	2-3 years
18.c. Organizational capacity development grant sub-component	2-5 years
13.a. Leadership development training/activities for female CSO officials/staff	3-4 years
12.b. Local and national level advocacy linkage-building	3-5 years
13.b. Mentorship activities for women to learn about leadership and the processes of governance	4-5 years
11.c. Endowment law	Support when political will exists
12.c. Proposal development training for local organizations	3-5 years
21.a. Civil society/media cross sector internships/exchanges	3-5 years
21.b. Training internships for CSO staff and journalists not based in Yerevan	3-5 years
18.b. Government relations grant sub-component	4-5 years
21.c. International exchange opportunities	4-5 years
30.b. Support ministries in organizing informal participatory mechanisms	4-5 years
25. Grants for CSOs to conduct monitoring on behalf of the NA	4-5 years
29. NA internship program for young professionals	4-5 years
30.d. Revise civil service regulations to allow government personnel to conduct necessary monitoring of government premises	4-5 years
15. Support charitable contributions deduction legislation	5 years
20.b. Coalition building capacity support	5 years

3 MEDIA

The Media section of this report will cover the following substantive topics: media context, enabling environment, and sector capacity. Recommendations will be provided for each of these topics.

3.1 MEDIA CONTEXT

This subsection will provide an overview of the current media context in Armenia and introduce key considerations within this domain, including the evolving role of online media, the factors surrounding reaching youth through media, and vulnerabilities to disinformation in the current environment. The subsection concludes with associated recommendations based on findings on the general media context in Armenia.

3.1.1 OVERVIEW AND ANALYSIS

Citizens in Armenia utilize multiple sources of information ranging from word-of-mouth (generally at the local level), print and radio, to television and online media. Newspapers are the least utilized sources of news: while approximately 36 newspapers exist in the country, average circulation is estimated at 1,000 to 3,000. There are 20 radio stations in the country, as well as 17 nationally available television stations, 19 television stations in the regions, and 200 internet news portals.⁸⁶

Television: Television continues to be a dominant medium despite the growing interest in online sources. Armenians are able to access cable and satellite television, Russian networks, private stations, and Public TV. The most popular television stations are Armenia TV (private), Shant TV (private), and A TV, HI (public).

Russian is the country's unofficial second language. Russian programs are popular, and Russian television remains a widely utilized source for news and entertainment.⁸⁷ Of particular concern for some are political biases expressed in Russian news programs that provide regional and international news, and that are viewed by citizens and utilized by Armenian media outlets. Further, as noted in Section 1.3—Background, recent government and National Assembly (NA) discussions have expressed concern about Russian programs that appear to be “anti-Armenian,” and that broadcast racist messages and calls for religious violence.⁸⁸

While it appears that future licenses for Russian television channels will not be rejected, possible alternatives, which may attract viewers across the spectrum, are emerging. Armenian Public TV, for example, is making inroads as a trusted news and information provider. It is generally believed that

⁸⁶ USAID/IRES, Europe and Eurasia: Media Sustainability Index 2019, p.126.

⁸⁷ A number of Russian language channels air on cable and three Russian TV channels are licensed to broadcast—Pervy Kanal, RTR Planeta, and Kultura. RTR Planeta and Pervy Kanal cover current affairs and reflect the Russian government's official line. Center for the Study of Democracy, Russian Influence in the Media Sectors of the Black Sea Countries-Tools, Narratives and Policy Options for Building Resilience, 2018.

⁸⁸ “Armenian government debates taking Russian TV off the air,” Ani Mejlumyan, April 26, 2019.

<https://eurasianet.org/armenian-government-debates-taking-russian-tv-off-the-air>. “Armenia discussing threats of Russian TV channels” <https://jam-news.net/armenia-discussing-threats-of-russian-tv-channels/>

government control that was previously exerted over Public TV has now diminished. Public TV audience numbers have gone up, and the channel's ratings have moved to second place.⁸⁹

Prospects that Public TV will continue to make inroads in viewership numbers appear positive. The president of the Public Broadcast Council has noted that Public TV is interested in making its viewers feel like citizens and believes that the channel can contribute to the social transformation that will make Armenia a thriving democracy. In this context, Public TV is willing and interested in producing and/or airing programs that will increase civic awareness and attract more and new viewers. This includes soap operas/television series that integrate civic education messages; dialogue/debate programs designed for students and youth (for more information, see Section 2.1.1.3 Civil Society—Civic Culture and Civic Education); and Public Service Announcements (PSAs) that provide information from the government about activities and reforms as well as from CSOs about governance and critical social issues (e.g., tolerance, civic engagement, and discrimination). In addition, Public TV is considering ways to develop and launch an online platform as a cost-effective and easy to use mechanism that would reach more viewers.

Research supports initiatives to use television media to impart pro-democracy messages. There were positive results via feature length films with anti-corruption messages in Nigeria,⁹⁰ soap operas with pro-census messages in the US,⁹¹ and radio soap operas with pro-family planning and pro-reconciliation messages in Tanzania⁹² and Rwanda,⁹³ respectively. Effects were not always very strong, however, and were not consistently lasting, indicating that long-term benefits might require more consistent support. Moreover, changing behaviors can require sustained effort and is harder to do than changing opinions or attitudes.⁹⁴ ⁹⁵ As such, soap operas and TV programs could be an effective investment, if backed up with additional support. One intriguing – and potentially more cost effective – option would be designing “reality” television shows around appropriate messages. Although there is not much research on this medium, reality television offerings could take advantage of the turn toward infotainment in Armenia.

However, public broadcasting in Armenia is disadvantaged by poor financial administration and inefficiency, which has diminished the ability of the organization to most effectively produce new and innovative programming.

⁸⁹ Based on interview discussion; also see European Union and GDSI Ltd., Eastern Partnership Civil Society Facility, Mapping Support to Activities and Gaps in Armenia Media Sector, March 2-11, 2018, p.2.

⁹⁰ Blair et al., “Motivating the adoption of new community-minded behaviors: An empirical test in Nigeria,” *Science Advances* 5, 2019, pp. 1-8.

⁹¹ Trujillo and Paluck, “The Devil Knows Best: Experimental Effects of a Televised Soap Opera on Latino Attitudes Toward Government and Support for the 2010 U.S. Census,” *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy*, 2011, pp. 1-20.

⁹² Rogers et al., “Effect of Entertainment-education Radio Soap Opera on Family Planning Behavior in Tanzania,” *Studies in Family Planning* 30(3), 1999, pp. 193-221.

⁹³ Paluck and Green, “Deference, Dissent, and Dispute Resolution: An Experimental Intervention Using Mass Media to Change Norms and Behavior in Rwanda,” *American Political Science Review* 103(4), pp. 622-644.

⁹⁴ Paluck et al., “Does Product Placement Change Television Viewers’ Social Behavior?”, *PLOS One*, 2015, pp. 1-18.

⁹⁵ However, it is also the case that sometimes programs can backfire: an experiment in the Democratic Republic of the Congo showed that when a soap opera that “promoted extended intergroup contact” was paired with a talk show program that attempted to encourage “discussion about intergroup conflict and cooperation,” it actually made listeners *less tolerant*. See: Paluck, “Is It Better Not to Talk? Group Polarization, Extended Contact, and Perspective Taking in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo,” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 36(9), 2015, p. 1170.

Role of online media: While television remains a mainstay for many citizens, internet and related online media sources have become pre-eminent channels of information exchange, and many outlets now even have drones and equipment for livestreaming.⁹⁶ Online channels, including Facebook, are now battlegrounds for ideas and political perspectives and are able to reach 67% of Armenia’s population.⁹⁷ Because the internet has generally remained outside the control of government, and online media have greater editorial freedom in comparison to print and television,⁹⁸ bloggers, civic activists, and individuals who are viewed as “opinion makers” are able to reach tens of thousands of users and mobilize hundreds for an action.⁹⁹ Indeed, the Velvet Revolution was fueled by social media platforms, communication apps, and live-streaming tools. During the course of the revolution, Pashinyan utilized Facebook livestreams to address and coordinate the public; RFE/RL Armenian service, azatutyun.am, civilnet.am, and lin.am generally organized livestreams from the demonstrations; and “eyes from everywhere” reports notified the public of “provocations and violence. Everyone was a walking media outlet; everyone was streaming live.”¹⁰⁰ Before and during the demonstrations, CSOs, activists, and the public used Telegram and other communications apps to exchange information and coordinate demonstrations.¹⁰¹ The increase in demand for internet traffic during the protests, as reported by Ucom, rose by 300%.¹⁰²

The predominance of Facebook in this context is far reaching in terms of users and utilization. In the wake of the revolution, Facebook garnered approximately 1.3 million active users.¹⁰³ The platform is utilized to exchange views and opinions, conduct “virtual protests,” access news,¹⁰⁴ and directly learn about national political events and issues from government pronouncements made by the Prime Minister and other government officials.

Worryingly, a lack of tolerance for alternate political and social views seems to have exploded. Criticism of government, essential to the democratic process, may be constrained because an intolerance of different voices has transformed public debate and criticism into confrontation and antagonism, particularly in social media. As such, journalists, bloggers, and active social media may self-censor to “avoid public pressure from social media users.”¹⁰⁵

The dynamism of the online environment means that citizens have equal access, both to misinformation and propaganda that is “aimed at stirring division and discord”¹⁰⁶ and to independent media outlets that serve as counterweights. Independent outlets are generally grant-funded and thus free of financial

⁹⁶ Ibid. p. 126.

⁹⁷ “Percentage of Individuals Using the Internet”, International Telecommunications Union, https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/statistics/2018/Individuals_Internet_2000-2016%20Jan2018.xls, in Freedom House, Nations in Transit 2018: Armenia Country Profile, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2018/armenia>.

⁹⁸ Eurasia Partnership Foundation, Velvet Revolution and Political Developments in Armenia-Briefing Book, September 2018, p.15.

⁹⁹ USAID. 2012. Democracy, Human Rights and Governance Assessment of Armenia: Final Copy (internal draft).

¹⁰⁰ USAID/IREX, Europe and Eurasia: Media Sustainability Index 2019, p. 3.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 121.

¹⁰² Freedom House, Freedom on the Net 2018, at <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/2018/armenia>.

¹⁰³ USAID. 2019. Civil Society and Media in Armenia: An Evidence Review for Learning, Evaluation, and Research Activity II (LER II), p.21. https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00TJWV.pdf

¹⁰⁴ Individuals may often eschew direct links to media sources and “get the stories within their Facebook accounts through feeds, and even more through their friends’ shares.” IREX, Media Sustainability Index 2018, Objective 3-Plurality of News.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. p. 125.

¹⁰⁶ “Facebook Identifies Russia-Linked Misinformation Campaign,” Adam Satariano, January 17, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/17/business/facebook-misinformation-russia.html>

dependencies that determine content and require self-censorship. Included in this cadre of independent media are Factor TV, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Hetq, EVN, and Civilnet.¹⁰⁷

Reaching Youth: Online media has clearly dominated the attention of Armenia's youth, as has generally been the case in much of the world. As noted in this report, Social Media Management enables outlets to produce more interesting and appealing content that provides objective information and analysis, and that attracts more readers. Such techniques may be utilized to attract younger consumers of information and news. Public television programs (whether on television or online, as is planned by Public TV), could also be made attractive to younger audiences. In addition to tailored soap operas/TV series that embed/integrate civic education/social transformation issues into program plots, or dialogue programs with comedy segments interspersed to keep listeners engaged, Public TV could produce weekly debate or "college bowl" programs about political or policy issues, or topics that are particularly relevant to youth (e.g., Was it right to demolish cafes on the opera square? Is it a good idea to increase the tax on fizzy drinks?). At present, Public TV broadcasts an EU-funded program for young journalists.

One editor of an online social media outlet noted that an audience study conducted by the outlet indicated that, unless a serious political event such as the 2018 revolution was occurring, the 17-35 age group was less engaged in reading the news. In her view, many media outlets had a problem reaching young people because most are not interested in politics, and the most likely way to reach young people, as well as all others, is through videos. For this outlet, one approach utilized to attract youth was to give young student journalists the opportunity to write pieces about anything in which their age group was interested.

Vulnerabilities to Disinformation in the Current Environment: All countries in the world these days appear to be vulnerable to disinformation campaigns by extremists, foreign countries, and even their own politicians.¹⁰⁸ This is true in even the richest and most sophisticated media markets. However, the challenge of disinformation is particularly acute in a small, relatively poor, strategically vulnerable country like Armenia.

Though "fake news," whether disseminated through online media or other channels, is a worldwide phenomenon, it does pose specific challenges in Armenia. The rise of infotainment over fact-based reporting in Armenia makes it particularly easy to package lies and untruths in ways that make them attractive to large audiences. Moreover, Armenia's strategic dependency on Russia and the relative size of the two countries' media markets make it easy for Russian state propaganda to enter Armenia, even without Russia explicitly attempting to undermine the Armenian government. In terms of domestic actors, the control that vested interests have over some of the media organizations in the country makes it easier for these vested interests to present their own spin on events within the country, while a lack of support for investigative journalists makes it hard to combat this propaganda. Finally, the apparent present distrust of the media by the Pashinyan government makes it hard for genuine critics to gain a foothold and hold the government accountable. As such, the current environment also makes it easier for the government to portray the media as enemies. Moreover, because it can be genuinely difficult to distinguish between well-intentioned critics and those attempting to undermine the

¹⁰⁷ Media outlets such as Radio Free Europe, Civilnet, and I in.am have played active roles in civic actions. Radio Liberty and Civilnet have live streamed from streets during all civic actions. During the Velvet Revolution, I in.am also provided non-stop coverage.

¹⁰⁸ See, for example, Polyakova, Alina and Daniel Fried, Defense Against Disinformation 2.0, The Atlantic Council, June 2019.

government and progress of the revolution, the government is tempted to overplay its hand to the detriment of the quality of debate. Finally, the centrality of social media in the information space and the fact that the government itself relies heavily on social media also contribute to a context in which misinformation is particularly hard to combat.

As noted in Section 2.1.1.3 Civil Society—Civic Culture and Civic Education, civic education that provides tools through which to critically assess information is needed. Without such capacity, citizens remain vulnerable to manipulation, particularly in a media environment where so much information is available, and so much “fake” or biased news is provided. In addition to traditional civic education activities, television programs (that may be developed and broadcast by Public TV) may be utilized to provide such media literacy information directly and indirectly, through entertainment programs (e.g., soap operas).

Fact apps and websites (such as fit.am, run by the Union of Informed Citizens) are an important means through which news/information consumers may identify whether news and information are legitimate. In addition to fit.am, more fact checking sites are needed to deal with the massive amount of information that is made available online. However, as even fact checking has become a fake news medium,¹⁰⁹ frequent and public notice of which fact apps are objective and reliable is needed.

Other perspectives on the issue of fake news in Armenia have been noted as well. Contributors to the 2019 IREX Media Sustainability Index noted that “today’s problem in Armenian media is less fake news and more reflective of a global problem of impartiality in the media. Journalists are either MP candidates, or in the government, or hired to work against the government; the whole field is off its axis, with few journalists left trying to maintain objectivity.”¹¹⁰ Another source for that report added, “We need new, quality professionals (in the media).”¹¹¹ Independent experts and analysts who are not associated with any of the political parties are needed as well. The possibility of addressing fake news through the courts was also raised by a discussant, who noted, “that civil libel cases could improve efforts to fight the spread of false information, which seems to be proliferating. ‘We can consider these processes positive, provided the courts function independently and come up with fair verdicts.’”¹¹²

3.1.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1.2.1 MEDIA SECTOR

31. Provide training in social media management to media and CSOs to enable them to produce useful and interesting Facebook content and attract more readers.
32. Improve media information and entertainment programs to increase civic awareness and attract viewers, particularly those who watch Russian language TV. Specifically, Public TV requires technical assistance to:

¹⁰⁹ See <https://medium.com/dfrlab/armenia-assailed-by-deceptive-fact-checking-groups-part-i-the-players-2ce03daf2d28> and <https://medium.com/dfrlab/armenia-assailed-by-deceptive-fact-checking-groups-part-2-the-coordination-2276bb6e3b2e>.

¹¹⁰ USAID/IREX, Europe and Eurasia: Media Sustainability Index 2019, p.7.

¹¹¹ Ibid, p.6.

¹¹² Ibid., p.124.

- a. Develop/produce soap operas/television series that are interesting and useful in the Armenian context. As noted in Section 2.1.2.2 Civil Society—Civic Education Recommendation 7.a, at present, the content of soap operas promotes anti-social behavior, gender stereotypes, and domestic violence. Within the context of entertainment, new programs could support gender parity by presenting the role of women in all fields in a positive light and portray gender violence as unacceptable. Programs could model non-discriminatory behavior (e.g., related to gender, religion) and pluralism as a positive aspects, even within a conservative culture.
 - b. Develop/produce student/youth focused dialogue/debate programs. As noted in Section 2.1.2.2 Civil Society—Civic Education Recommendation 7.c, this may include weekly debate or “college bowl” programs about political or policy issues, or topics that are particularly relevant to youth (e.g., Was it right to demolish cafes on the opera square? Is it a good idea to increase the tax on fizzy drinks?).
 - c. Develop a Public TV online platform that would reach a wider audience, including segments of the population that primarily rely on online information sources. This could incorporate the development programs that have an online interactive element to help draw Armenians into the work done by the public broadcaster. Develop outreach mechanisms for the public broadcaster to better reach constituents. This could be done via investment in an active social media presence by hiring individuals (or getting volunteers, given the budget constraints they will surely face) to use social media pages to reach out to Armenians. The goal of these activities would be to get viewers to be active, not passive, participants in programming. Audience participation could also help further legitimize the public broadcaster.¹¹³
33. Bolster Armenian Public TV and public broadcasting in order to make sure it is independent from the government.
- a. Invite independent journalists to advise the public broadcaster.
 - b. Integrate public feedback into the board of the public broadcaster to ensure that the public broadcaster serves (and is seen to serve) the public interest. In its most limited form this would involve having private individuals and representatives of civil society groups sit on the board of the public broadcaster and opening decisions of the board to some form of public comment procedure. More ambitiously, citizens could volunteer to serve on the board or public elections could be held, perhaps online. These could be rotated across the different regions of the country to ensure broader representation.
 - c. Support institutional development needs of Public TV, such as additional human resources to edit civic education content and, more broadly, the establishment a funding mechanism separate from the state budget that would help to insulate the public broadcaster from short-term political pressure.

¹¹³ Enli, Gunn Sara. “Redefining Public Service Broadcasting: Multi-Platform Participation.” *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 14, no. 1 (February 2008): 105–20. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354856507084422>.

34. Support development and maintenance of more fact checking sites to assess massive amount of information that is made available online.

3.2 MEDIA ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

This subsection will provide a general background on the media enabling environment as well as a review of findings for a variety of relevant topics: legislative reform, labor rights for journalists, the Council of Public TV and Radio Broadcasting, and the Law on Freedom of Information (FOI). The subsection concludes with associated recommendations for the media and government sectors.

3.2.1 OVERVIEW AND ANALYSIS

3.2.1.1 BACKGROUND

As a result of the Velvet Revolution, the media enabling environment has improved¹¹⁴ and the atmosphere of caution is diminishing, yet the complexities of reinforcing democracy and democratic norms continue. Prime Minister Pashinyan's announcement shortly after his government took office,¹¹⁵ removing a stipulation requiring that government sessions be held behind closed doors, was welcomed. One year later, in April 2019, CSOs and media were disgruntled with the Prime Minister's statement ordering the head of the National Security Service to crack down on "fake news."¹¹⁶

The current legal environment is generally considered "enabling," and access to news and information is relatively unencumbered. The professional activities of Armenia's journalists are protected by law, and constraints such as censorship, pressure, and obstruction are prohibited.¹¹⁷ As is the case with the CSO enabling environment, challenges to various freedoms on which a free press depends have occurred, not necessarily because of gaps in the laws, but because of the lack of enforcement. Past complaints, for example, have centered on such issues as the lack of court independence in dealing with free speech issues, and crimes against journalists, including violations of journalists' rights by police.¹¹⁸

However, the overall media environment still functions under a number of constraints ranging from the impact of current civic culture (discussed in the preceding section) to economic limitations. The relatively weak economic environment continues to influence the way much of the media is funded, operated, and controlled. The multiplicity of media outlets and the relatively small audience market increase competition and a tendency to produce quick stories and infotainment rather than fact checked material.

Current law that does not require transparency regarding ownership of most media entities, a limited advertising market, and scarcity of funding sources, make it very difficult for Armenia's media sector to thrive independently. Various media outlets are owned by oligarchs and those who sympathize with the previous government. As such, the information landscape continues to be colored by social and political views of media funders, and audiences remain ignorant of the biases embedded in the information and

¹¹⁴ Reporters Without Borders notes that Armenia's ranking in the 2019 World Press Freedom Index improved; its position rose from #80 to #61, <https://rsf.org/en/armenia>.

¹¹⁵ U.S. Department of State, Human Rights Report-Armenia, 2018. <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/289345.pdf>

¹¹⁶ "Pashinyan takes on 'fake news,'" Joshua Kucera, April 9, 2019, <https://eurasianet.org/pashinyan-takes-on-fake-news>; <http://www.foi.am/en/media/item/1738/> (4/10/2019).

¹¹⁷ The legal framework that regulates the media includes the Law on Mass Media (2003) and the Law on TV and Radio (2000).

¹¹⁸ See NGO Center, Enabling Environment National Assessment (EENA): National Report, Revised as of July 30, 2018.

news being provided. Financial constraints may also cause media professionals to accept payments in exchange for certain types of coverage, mostly with the authorization and knowledge of the editors,¹¹⁹ and affect which are stories run in the media (i.e., shorter, more popular content pieces may be favored instead of research and investigative reporting, which requires time and money).

A significant problem is also Armenia's small population, which not only contributes to a small media market, but also reduces the pool of people with the expertise needed to run and organize a public broadcaster. Moreover, the experience of other small countries, like Slovenia, shows that most of the people who do possess the necessary expertise are usually interested parties when it comes to media regulation. This makes it extremely difficult to create an impartial regulatory framework.¹²⁰ As such, in Armenia, CSOs and donors should support both the development of a more robust, independent public broadcaster, while also committing to monitoring the relationship between the state and the public broadcaster.

3.2.1.2 **LEGISLATIVE REFORM**

Legislative reform initiatives that are critical to a vibrant media are expected and/or needed. Media-focused CSOs will collaborate on at least some of these reform issues via ad hoc coalitions. These include:

Law on TV and Radio—Multiplexer Operation: Armenia has moved from analogue to digital broadcasting. To accommodate this change, multiplex equipment is required to disseminate digital signals. The current law requires one multiplexer that covers the entire country and stipulates that the operator own the infrastructure.¹²¹

Under the previous system, small media outlets existed in regional cities. Working with these smaller outlets was affordable for CSOs. The switch from analogue to digital has led to a reduction of media outlets in the country. As a result, a number of larger regional media outlets, which are not close to local communities, are broadcasting.

Media organizations and owners of private regional television outlets believe that it is preferable to have a number of regional multiplex operators and allow them to connect to existing infrastructure. Allowing smaller private multiplexers would make operations less costly and would allow for more channels to be broadcast.¹²² In this context, however, government and media need to establish a mechanism for regulation of local outlets to ensure basic quality. The Yerevan Press Club is expecting to undertake an advocacy campaign to revise the legislation.

Law on TV and Radio—Licensing Transparency for Broadcast Media: Under the Law on TV and Radio, licensing is only required of the broadcast media. The licenses are awarded by the National Commission on Television and Radio.¹²³ A new competition for licenses will be conducted in 2021. Transparency in regard to the award process is a concern. At present, it is not possible to review and comment on

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Broughton Micova, *Small and Resistant: Europeanization in Media Governance in Slovenia and Macedonia*, Dissertation, The London School of Economics and Political Science, 2013.

¹²¹ The multiplex equipment currently used is owned by the government.

¹²² IREX, *Media Sustainability Index 2018*, Objective 5—Supporting Institutions.

¹²³ NGO Center, *Enabling Environment National Assessment (EENA)*, National Report-Armenia, July 2018, p. 18.

applications before awards are made, and it is not possible to review dockets after the process is completed. This closed process prompts questions regarding the role of political or economic biases in the award process.

Law on Mass Media—Transparency in media ownership and financial sources: A law requiring transparency in media ownership and funding would contribute significantly to the ability of the public to critically assess news and information. The law would make it possible to identify which political/social interests control which outlets. This information, in turn, would make it possible to determine if political/social biases are influencing the news and information being provided by outlets across the media spectrum.

CSOs and media outlets are expecting to develop a strategy for this initiative. They require legal support to draft/comment on related legislations and are interested in consultations with professionals from other countries who have experience with such legislation. At present, an ad hoc coalition composed of the Yerevan Press Club, Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression, FOICA, Public Journalism Club, and the Media Initiative Center is working on this issue.

3.2.1.3 *LABOR RIGHTS FOR JOURNALISTS*

Journalists work without contracts and without protections; as such, they often feel bound to conform to demands that may be contrary to the principles of objective journalism. A law that provides financial protections has been noted as an important media issue. This focus also appears to be timely, as the NA Standing Committee on Protection of Human Rights and Public Affairs currently has the issue of “rights of employees” on its agenda.

In the context of labor rights, the formation of new media-based unions may be considered. Under Armenia’s laws, media workers are free to form professional groups.

3.2.1.4 *COUNCIL OF PUBLIC TV AND RADIO BROADCASTING*

At present, the members of the Council of Public TV and Radio Broadcasting do not have assigned roles; the chairperson is the key decision-maker. The Council needs to be strengthened by clarifying the functions of the members and establishing clear roles and responsibilities. In addition, the five Council members are appointed by the president of Armenia for six-year terms; these members then elect the head and the deputy from among themselves. These political appointments undermine the Council’s ability to be apolitical and independent of the government.¹²⁴ ¹²⁵ ¹²⁶ Lastly, the functions and roles of the National Commission on TV and Radio also need to be redefined, as does the relationship between Commission and the Council of Public TV and Radio.

¹²⁴ NGO Center, Enabling Environment National Assessment (EENA), National Report-Armenia, July 2018, p.19.

¹²⁵ Interviews; see too NGO Center, Enabling Environment National Assessment (EENA), National Report-Armenia, July 2018, p.25.

¹²⁶ Per the IREX Armenia Media Sustainability Index 2018, “Article 26 of Armenia’s Law on Television and Radio protects the editorial independence of public media. However, the president of Armenia appoints the five member council exclusively for a period of six years; these members then elect the head and the deputy from among themselves. These political appointments undermine the public broadcasters’ ability to be truly public, apolitical, or independent of the government... Public television remains under the full control of the government and the alternative views currently available on it could be curbed immediately should the need arise,” (p.3, 7).

Under the new government, constructive collaboration between government-supervised and funded media and civil society is possible and needed.¹²⁷ As noted in Section 3.1 Media Context, the president of the Council is interested in transforming Public TV into a medium that fosters a citizenry that embraces debate and difference. The Council president's candidacy was backed by the CSO sector. He is willing to work with civil society actors and understands what they are able to contribute. As such, this is an opportune time to foster Council-CSO dialogues and partnership to further improve the quality of media content and the scope of issue coverage on Public TV.

3.2.1.5 *ACCESS TO INFORMATION / FREEDOM OF INFORMATION*

Citizens, CSOs, and government are all impacted by Freedom of Information limitations and possibilities. Armenia's Law on Freedom of Information (2003) is generally considered to be "enabling." The reality, however, may be somewhat more problematic. FOI use is limited; indeed, even media do not use it frequently. When FOI is utilized, responses are often dependent on several factors, including:

- The subject matter of a request may determine whether or not a satisfactory response will be received. FOI requests regarding human rights abuses, defense, or budget spending, for example, may be rejected on grounds that they are secret.
- Responses are often subject to the discretion of a particular individual or to the guidelines of a particular institution.¹²⁸ In one case, where requests were submitted for information regarding bonuses received by officials, one ministry provided names of all individuals and the amounts each received. Another ministry provided only a total number for both recipients and the bonus budget.
- The status/reputation of the person or organization making the request will likely affect the quality of information provided. State agencies are more likely to respond to requests from organizations that are known to publicize FOI-related misconduct or to publish the information that had been withheld. In addition, FOI requests may receive delayed responses or no response at all (particularly at the local level). Even when information is provided, it may be general, incomplete, or selective.¹²⁹

A lack of effective remedies to unsatisfactory FOI responses has led some complainants to organizations such as Asparez and Freedom of Information Center Armenia, which submit complaints on behalf of petitioners and brings related cases to court. The duration of these court cases may run from one to five years.¹³⁰ Public trust in the Pashinyan-led government led to an increase in FOI requests. As a result of its limited capacity, however, government responses have slowed even further. FOI advocacy/support organizations have allowed the new government time to adjust and have not, thus far, pursued FOI cases

¹²⁷ According to the USAID/IREX 2019 Media Sustainability Index, "Public TV 127 - Vardanyan warned that the progress should not be considered stable and institutionally ingrained; it depends largely upon the political will of the current government. Deheryan added, 'If there are doubts (that the service could weather a setback), it means that the public television is still not independent from the current authorities even today.'"

¹²⁸ Ibid. p.6.

¹²⁹ NGO Center, Enabling Environment National Assessment (EENA): National Report, Revised as of July 30, 2018, pp.26-27.

¹³⁰ A number of CSOs work in cooperation with the media sector to support freedom of speech and media independence. These include: Yerevan Press Club, Open Society Foundation (OSF), the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression, Committee to Committee to Protect Freedom of Information, Goris Press Club, Public Journalism Club, Eurasia Partnership Foundation Armenia (EPFA), Media Initiatives Center (MIC), and Journalists for the Future (JFF). See: IREX, Media Sustainability Index 2018, Objective 5—Supporting Institutions.

on behalf of petitioners. As of May 2019, however, they plan on reinstating legal actions to require documentation that had been requested.

Passive FOI: In addition to FOI requests, access to information requires that government make specific types of information public. Government agencies and offices, however, do not regularly update websites and are not proactively publishing the required information.¹³¹ In recent months, the issue has been further complicated as ministries post information directly on social media sites/Facebook,¹³² often neglecting to provide the information on their official websites.¹³³ Further, government websites are chaotically organized and not user-friendly; the quality of information provided by ministries also varies.

Representatives of the FOI community note that government offices need to be proactive in adhering to FOI regulations. Required information needs to be made available on government websites in a timely manner, whether or not it appears on Facebook and social networks. Ministers need to make themselves available to the media for questions, whether or not they have gone online to make a government announcement.¹³⁴ The lack of communications skills among new government officials makes it more likely that they will avoid press conferences. A number of communication trainings are currently being provided by civil society groups to increase the capacity and comfort level of ministries and government communications offices in dealing with media interviews and presentations.¹³⁵ The utility of developing communications skills is reflected by the fact that at present, only the Minister of Health appears to be utilizing the media well and is getting good press coverage.

3.2.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

3.2.2.1 MEDIA SECTOR

35. Support organizations that consistently monitor and report on cases of media obstruction and violence that may occur against journalists to keep attention focused on these critical issues and reduce the number of further incidents. Donors should also help these organizations engage the public in order to explain why such media obstruction is detrimental to good governance and why a strong media sector is necessary for fighting corruption.
36. Support media and media-focused organizations in developing and advocating for legislative initiatives that are of concern to the sector, including:

¹³¹ NGO Center, Enabling Environment National Assessment (EENA), p.30.

¹³² One observer noted that officials who use Facebook as a communications avenue may sometimes get drawn into time consuming responses to criticisms that appear, and that this neither appropriate nor a good use of official time.

¹³³ One journalist noted that he has, at times, had to copy and paste official government announcements from Facebook. One of his colleagues was referred to the “official” Facebook page of a municipality when he submitted a freedom of information request.

¹³⁴ At least in the case of the Prime Minister’s office, Prime Minister Pashinyan seems to believe that Facebook is an effective communications tools through which to reach citizens. In a May 2019 speech, he noted that “Every citizen has the opportunity to ask questions to the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, which can be done through Facebook-borne live question-and-answer sessions and meetings.” “100 Facts about New Armenia”—Introductory remarks by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, delivered at the press conference, 8 May 2019 at <http://www.primeminister.am/en/interviews-and-press-conferences/item/2019/05/08/Nikol-Pashinyan-Press-Conference/>.

¹³⁵ At present, the Union of Informed Citizens will train approximately 30 government press secretaries and spokespersons from ministries and state agencies on communications skills. Freedom of Information Center Armenia conducts workshops for the heads of government information departments.

- a. Law on TV and Radio—Multiplexer Operation;
 - b. Licensing Transparency for Broadcast Media; and,
 - c. Law on Mass Media—Law on Transparency in Media Ownership and Financial Sources.
- 37. Support investment by the public broadcaster and independent media outlets to update their infrastructure and adapt to technological advances in the media sector.
- 38. Support discussions and legislation focused on the protection of journalists and related labor rights.
- 39. Freedom of Information.
 - a. Consider support for a cross-sector FOI campaign to (1) inform the public, CSOs and the media about how FOI may be utilized and accessed; (2) advocate for more effective and responsive FOI processes; and (3) press for timely information updates on government websites.
 - b. Provide support to persons/organizations that assist FOI complainants through the resolution process, including court procedures.

3.2.2.2 **GOVERNMENT SECTOR**

- 40. Support and/or provide resources to facilitate enforcement of existing media laws by the government.
- 41. Council of Public TV and Radio Broadcasting. Support organizational reform focused on the clarification of the function and roles of executive body and Council members, code of conduct, control procedures, accountability/transparency mechanisms, and development of strategy.
- 42. Establish an effective and independent body to respond to and resolve FOI disputes (e.g., Commissioner of Freedom of Information/Information Commissioner). The FOI community has just begun to advocate for this idea.
- 43. Train government officials/staff responsible for FOI responses on legal expectations and response procedures. This could include revamping incentive structures for government staff so that complying with FOI requests can become a priority, not an afterthought.
- 44. Improve government websites to ensure that they are user-friendly, consistently updated, and have comparable formats.
- 45. Train ministers and ministry officials/staff on communications skills that will enable them to work with the media effectively.

3.3 MEDIA SECTOR CAPACITY

This subsection covers major media capacity gaps and related recommendations for the media sector.

3.3.1 OVERVIEW AND ANALYSIS

A number of media capacity gaps affect the sector, ranging from ethics and journalistic quality to financial constraints. Journalistic quality is eroded by pressures for quick stories in a market that is crowded with media outlets, and for infotainment rather than fact checking. Media has been reluctant to cover sensitive issues such as human rights¹³⁶ to avoid losing an audience that is largely socially conservative. The few media that are considered “open minded” report little about sensitive issues such as women’s and LGBTI rights. Issue expertise, which is necessary for informative, in depth, and objective journalism is rare; as such, reporting is often brief, basic, and not able to capture the interest of viewers/readers. Media training often does not yield results because journalists who have been trained do not transfer their knowledge to colleagues when they return to work. In addition, journalists trained on certain issues/sectors may be reassigned to cover other, wholly different subject areas.

One key need area for training is social media management and digital security. Online media has taken the place of traditional media by being much quicker and more flexible in providing news to larger audiences. To follow the trends, traditional media outlets are now sharing their content and reaching out to their readers/viewers through social networks. However, the online domain has its own rules of the game, and not all Armenian media professionals/journalists know how to play it safe. This is also true about civic activists/opinion makers/influencers, who have large numbers of followers on Facebook and other social networks. Those that may disagree with posts of journalists or activists shut down the offending accounts by overwhelming the sites, for example via denial of service (DoS) attacks.

Financial constraints are also a serious stumbling block to media sector capacity in Armenia. A small market, crowded media field, and limited advertising pool have limited the access to funds required by media outlets to operate independently. Those individuals capable of supporting journalism in Armenia have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo or altering policy in their favor; as such, there is little incentive for these individuals to invest in higher quality journalism. Therefore, financial constraints not only lead to funding dependence and related editorial control, they also impact media professionalism. For example, small operating budgets may force outlets to hire poorly paid and more inexperienced journalists; management may not be willing to allow staff journalists to take time off for training; and well-researched and investigative reporting, which requires time and money, may be cast aside in favor of stories that are shorter and that cover more popular content. Further, low salaries create an environment ripe for corruption. For example, journalists may accept pay for favorable coverage,¹³⁷ and at least prior to the revolution, some media personnel increased their salaries by accepting money from interests representing the previous government, for which no taxes were paid.¹³⁸

While oligarchs and those with political interests still have a hold on a variety of media, it appears that access to advertising has begun to open up for online media. Internet advertising is increasing and is estimated to range from \$2-5 million, “an annual increase of around 30–40 percent—indicating a rapid

¹³⁶ NGO Center, Enabling Environment National Assessment (EENA): National Report, Revised as of July 30, 2018, pp.22.

¹³⁷ IREX, Media Sustainability Index 2018, Objective 2-Professional Journalism.

¹³⁸ These have been labeled “gray salaries.”

reshaping of the ad market, especially considering that online viewing has increased tenfold post-revolution.”¹³⁹ On the other hand, advertising funding is decreasing for television.¹⁴⁰ Online income might further be increased through content monetization. Given the current economic circumstances of many of Armenia’s citizens, however, content monetization would likely not be very successful at present.

3.3.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

3.3.2.1 *MEDIA SECTOR*

46. Civic education for journalists. Train journalists on issues related to good governance and democracy so that they are able to explain and report on threats to democratic freedoms and principles that may undermine the interests of the public. These issues are pertinent to all journalists, including those who cover national and local government issues, sectoral, and cultural affairs.
47. Support partnerships between media outlets and journalism schools so that journalism students are able to get hands-on practice.
48. Capacity support for journalists. Provide grants for journalists¹⁴¹ to learn about and research/write objective stories on particular issues. Where training has not produced wide results, for example in relation to women’s issues and domestic violence, grants or internships/fellowships that give journalists an opportunity to learn about the reality of the problems by working in organizations focused on these issues may yield greater impact. Grants could be offered through Public Information Funding Sub-Components of CSO quick grants or Issue/Advocacy Project Grants. Internships/fellowships could be offered through Cross Sector Internships/Exchanges (for more information, see Recommendation 21.a-b. —Media/CSO exchanges; Rural-urban internships).
49. Continue to make available core journalist skills training, including fact checking and investigative reporting.¹⁴²
50. The development of online courses, which may be developed in partnerships between CSOs, media, and the IT sector. Such courses could provide training and education on a gamut of issues, from investigative research to civic education. Monetization of such courses might be considered when economic conditions make it likely that particular audiences would be willing and able to pay.
51. Provide journalists with hands on training and practice through training programs abroad. Such experience, for example, would allow journalists to see how newsrooms actually work and to

¹³⁹ USAID/IREX, Europe and Eurasia: Media Sustainability Index 2019, 129-130.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ There is some feeling among interviewees that training journalists to be objective writers is the most important form of training/support, as opposed to grants to media organizations. However, donors have to be careful that these journalists do not become ‘tainted’ by receiving such grants. Some of the negative attitudes toward civil society organizations in Armenia are heightened by connections these organizations have to donors. Tellingly, one interviewee mentioned that citizen journalists are actively refusing to work with donors and think that they do not need the support.

¹⁴² The Union of Informed Citizens provides such training online.

familiarize themselves with equipment. Training opportunities could be regional (e.g., in the past Armenian journalists went to Georgia).¹⁴³

52. Digital security and the protection of speech. The security of Facebook and other social network accounts of journalists, activists, CSOs, and some media are jeopardized, and accounts have been shut down when social network accounts are reported by large numbers of social network users. This practice has affected objective and independent media and individuals. To ensure that all views can be shared online, without the threat of being shut down by those who disagree, trainings related to digital security as well as modernization of digital security systems for various media outlets is needed.
53. Alumni newsletter for youth monitors and citizen journalists. Several projects have trained youth monitors and citizen journalists. In some case, monitors have established local NGOs (funded by NED, OSF, and the US Embassy). The impact of the trainings, however, may be limited. Monitors and journalists may not have opportunities to utilize their training beyond the training period. A platform that serves as a venue for monitors to report and journalists to write about various social/political/economic issues may prove useful and effective. Monitors/reporters may be offered a small stipend and/or awards may be given for the best stories each year.
54. Advance media audience measurement and audience research. Other than measures of audience reach and scope, media outlets do not have information regarding the demographic characteristics and preferences of their audiences. Even within a narrow advertising market, such basic knowledge is useful for attracting advertisers. Support to media outlets in utilizing appropriate research tools or supporting access to institutions that are able to conduct such research, therefore, is fundamental in contributing to their financial sustainability. The importance of such data is underlined by the extent of advertising that is placed on Facebook. “Facebook keeps tearing advertising dollars away from Armenia’s market, offering a more efficient, traceable, measurable advertising platform. During the parliamentary snap election of December 2018, candidates and political parties extensively advertised on Facebook.”¹⁴⁴

Beyond advertising, audience research could also guide media outlets in developing more attractive and interesting programs for their specific audiences, e.g., youth.
55. Support initiatives that focus on the development and passage of an endowment law to foster media sustainability. The media sector, like the CSO sector, believes that independent endowments would address issues of donor/funder dependence and sustainability. Such endowments are not possible without an endowment law.
56. Media sustainability training. Develop business and financial management skills in the media sector (e.g., utilizing strategies including subscriptions, sales, advertising, sponsorship, crowd funding, etc.). The economic environment is currently not conducive to successful sector-wide sustainability initiatives.
57. Support a media sector umbrella association to coordinate and advocate for media interests.

¹⁴³ Training on multimedia tools and skills training have repeatedly been noted as important areas of training.

¹⁴⁴ USAID/IREX, Europe and Eurasia: Media Sustainability Index 2019, p.130.

At present the Yerevan Press Club occasionally takes on the role of an umbrella organization. It is a membership organization that has a code of conduct to which its members are required to adhere and works with members in the pursuit of specific initiatives. The idea of a sector-wide media umbrella, however, is currently resisted.

As is the case in the context of resistance to long-term CSO coalitions and the development of an apex organization, CSOs may often concentrate on their narrow interests, to the exclusion of other issues that may directly affect their areas of focus. They may find it difficult to narrow their common goals and develop a strategic vision that all members can embrace. Organization leaders may find it difficult to work together because they compete for funding or are unable to set egos aside.¹⁴⁵ Nonetheless, Armenia’s civil society actors have demonstrated a capacity to unite to advocate for issues that are important to them, even if those coalitions are short-term. An umbrella organization is useful only insofar as it is utilized; fostering the development of an umbrella for which potential members see limited use, and/or which is likely to be marginalized, will yield limited results. Support for ad hoc initiatives would contribute to demonstrating the possibilities of success through joint efforts and would, thus, serve as a possible motivating factor for the development of a more permanent umbrella organization.¹⁴⁶

3.4 SUMMARY AND PRIORITIZATION OF MEDIA RECOMMENDATIONS

The major media sector focus is on enabling environment issues that improve transparency, fairness, and pluralism (of sources) that are important to the media and Armenia. This includes legislative reforms and organizational reform of Council of Public TV and Radio Broadcasting. Media and media organizations may advocate for all of the above. Support/training on digital security is also related to the issues of fairness, free speech, and pluralism, and is, thus, in the high priority list.

Table 2 below presents the summary and prioritization of media sector recommendations. The prioritization of recommendations is based on: 1) how important an issue/problem is; 2) how difficult it may be to carry out a recommendation successfully; and 3) how wide the impact of the activity would be. The timeframe refers to which year of the five-year strategy USAID might try to implement activities/projects. Please refer to Appendix 5 for a combined table of assessment recommendations by priority level (Table 7) and a summary table of assessment findings and recommendations by sector (Table 8).

TABLE 2: SUMMARY AND PRIORITIZATION OF MEDIA SECTOR RECOMMENDATIONS

SECTOR RECOMMENDATION PRIORITIES	IMPLEMENTATION TIMEFRAME
31. Social media management training for media	1 year
36.a. Legislative reform: Law on TV and Radio—Multiplexer Operation	1 year

¹⁴⁵ In the case of a media-focused umbrella, potential members may be reluctant to join because they may not wish to confer legitimacy on what they consider “fake news outlets,” by signing joint statements with them. (Source: Interview with a journalist.)

¹⁴⁶ Recommendations listed in section 3.2.2.1, for example, include current and potential initiatives for which support may be provided.

36.b. Legislative reform: Licensing Transparency for Broadcast Media	1 year
36.c. Legislative reform: Law on Transparency in Media Ownership and Financial Sources	1 year
41. Organizational reform: Council of Public TV and Radio Broadcasting	1 year
43. Train relevant government officials/staff on FOI procedures	1 year
45. Communications training for ministers and ministry officials/staff	1 year
46. Civic education for journalists	1 year
48. Capacity support for journalists, including grants to journalists to cover “social transformation” issues	1 year
52. Protecting speech: digital security	1 year
38. Legislative reform: Protection of journalists and related labor rights	2 year
42. Establish effective and independent body to respond to and resolve FOI disputes	2 years
32.c. Develop a Public TV online platform	2-3 years
37. Support investment by the public broadcaster and independent media outlets to update their infrastructure and adapt to technological advances in the media sector	2-3 years
35. Support organizations that consistently monitor and report on cases of media obstruction and violence	Continuous
49. Core journalist skills training	Continuous
32.b. Develop/produce student/youth focused dialogue/debate programs	2 years
39.a. Cross-sector FOI campaign	2 years
44. Improve government websites	2 years
32.a. Develop/produce soap operas/TV series that integrate civic/social education for the Armenian context	2-3 years
33. Bolster Armenian Public TV and public broadcasting in order to make sure it is independent from the government	2-3 years
34. Support development and maintenance of more fact checking sites to assess massive amount of information that is made available online	2-3 years
39.b. Support to persons/organizations that assist FOI complainants	2-3 years
47. Support partnerships between media outlets and journalism schools so that journalism students are able to get hands-on practice	3-5 years
55. Endowment law	Support when political will exists
40. Support and/or provide resources to facilitate enforcement of existing media laws by the government	Support when political will exists

51. Regional/international journalist training program	3-4 years
53. Alumni newsletter for youth monitors and citizen journalists	3-4 years
54. Media audience measurement and audience research	4-5 years
50. Development of online courses	5 years
56. Media sustainability business and financial management training	5 years
57. Media sector umbrella association	5 years

4 DONOR ACTIVITIES AND GAPS IN ASSISTANCE

This section begins by presenting key priorities and activities within the civil society and media programming of USAID and other donors. It then presents assessment findings on current gaps in assistance within these sectors.

4.1 OVERVIEW AND ANALYSIS

4.1.1 USAID

USAID partners with the Government of Armenia, civil society, and the media sector to promote more transparent and participatory governance that is responsive to citizens. USAID/Armenia's last program cycle included three major civil society projects and one major media project, all of which will close by mid-2020.¹⁴⁷ Since the end of this prior programming cycle coincides with the political transition in Armenia, this moment contains an opportunity to take stock of how needs in these sectors have changed and how USAID might respond in turn.

Recent USAID/Armenia civil society sector programming has focused on growing government and CSO trust and collaboration through linking support for government reforms with CSO input. Projects in this portfolio have focused on facilitating decentralization and territorial reform, building CSO professionalism, and nurturing local level capacity to monitor corruption and advocate for improvements within communities. Through the Civil Society Organizations Development Program (CSO DePo; 2014-2019), implemented by the Eurasia Partnership Foundation (EPF), USAID worked to expand the pool of professional and organizationally strong local partners in the country and develop the capacities of Armenian CSOs to become business-oriented, sustainable intermediary providers and capacity developers. Additionally, the Civic Engagement in Local Governance (CELoG) project (2014-2020), implemented by the Communities Finance Officers Association, supports local civil society organizations to increase civic engagement and oversight of local governance and decentralization reform at central and local levels. Finally, through the Engaged Citizenry for Responsible Governance program (implemented by Transparency International Anticorruption Center; 2014-2019), USAID supports a locally led civil society consortium to reduce the space for corruption by increasing civic engagement in and oversight of reforms. The goals of this program are to improve transparency and accountability of government actions and policies and ensure citizens' access to reliable information on corruption.

USAID's media programming was designed to build journalism skills within a controlled media environment. Through the Media for Informed Civic Engagement (MICE) project (2014-2019), implemented by the Media Initiatives Center, USAID promoted efforts to increase public media literacy, demand for information, and access to independent and reliable news sources about government policies. The project also sought to help targeted media outlets to improve their professional capacity to produce fact-based, quality content as well as act as effective media watchdogs through: 1) improving the quality of journalism and alternative content for both local and national media on reforms-related issues; 2) engaging a dynamic team of journalists and active citizens to produce appealing multimedia content

¹⁴⁷ More information about USAID/Armenia's Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance portfolio, including civil society and media sector programming, is available at: <https://www.usaid.gov/armenia/democracy-and-governance>.

that stimulates a vibrant discussion in society about reforms; and3) equipping media with skills to conduct in-depth investigative and reliable fact-based reporting and digital storytelling.

Both the CSO DePo and the MICE projects regularly worked through ‘Info Houses,’ known in Armenia as ‘*InfoTuns*,’ to promote community advocacy and training outside of Yerevan. InfoTuns are almost always ‘hosted’ by a local CSO that provides the physical space for work and events, and project funding supports those training events and the salaries of at least one InfoTun manager to carry out activities. InfoTun managers also received periodic opportunities to travel to Yerevan for additional training at EPF. This work undertaken through InfoTuns in the regions focused on growing community capacity to monitor, expose, and advocate for the resolution of local issues and increasing citizen media literacy.

While it is beyond the scope of this assessment to evaluate USAID/Armenia’s current programs, key observed programming gaps and new challenges relate to:

- Public attitudes and citizen expectations (e.g. great expectations, and simultaneously, the attitude that all is in the hands of government to do). The assessment team is not aware of basic civic education in prior USAID programs. This is addressed by the civic education recommendations.
- Limited government capacity. This issue has been heightened by the widespread movement of professionals in other sectors into government service following the political transition. Where relevant, this is addressed in the government recommendations sections.
- CSO dependence on donor funding. While CSO DePo may have addressed this in training, this is still a problem and will likely remain one as long as the population remains poor. The Endowment Law and civil society capacity recommendations address this issue to the extent that is currently feasible.
- Hostile discourse in social media. This has not been previously addressed by USAID because it may not have existed. We provide recommendations for civic education and media programming (Public TV debate and soap opera programs) that promote pluralism and tolerance.
- Lack of advertising and thus independence for most media outlets. Based on the assessment team’s understanding, this was not a major focus of previous USAID programming. However, it is a problem because of Armenia’s relatively small audience and weak economy – conditions that are not promising in the context of media economic viability. This is addressed in the media recommendations via business and financial management skills training and support for media audience measurement and audience research.
- Freedom of Information. We are not aware of USAID programming in the past program cycle that addressed FOI. This is an issue that reaches across all actors: CSOs, government, and citizens. As noted in the media recommendations, the FOI environment requires support.

4.1.2 EU

Besides USAID, the other main donor working in the civil society and media sectors in Armenia is the European Union (EU). In fact, the EU touts itself as “the largest donor to civil society in Armenia.”¹⁴⁸ ¹⁴⁹

The current EU civil society programming (diaspora technical assistance via subgranting and capacity building of civil society for policy dialogue) evidences the organization’s movement towards customized capacity building. Rather than a one size fits all offering, the EU is increasingly asking organizations to identify their needs or gaps and then supports targeted training on these issues. The EU plans to renew focus on capacity building in the medium-term (approximately 2 years), as a new civil society capacity building project is in early development.

The planned upcoming EU civil society programming in the near-term showcases several other strategic and thematic priorities. Firstly, the EU intends to expand its support to civil society to include mission-driven private companies. This change will allow for grants to for-profit companies with nonprofit objectives. The EU will also support continued expansion of social enterprise activities within traditional nonprofits as a tool of income generation and locally led development. The organization has planned for several sources to fund this priority, including one lot of the Civil Society Organisations/Local Authorities (CSO-LA) 2019 program,¹⁵⁰ ad hoc financial support through the EU Rapid Response Mechanism, and the Creative Europe Programme in Armenia.¹⁵¹ This will include 2 million euros to support social enterprise in 2020 and an additional 2 million euro impact investment fund for social service delivery open to social enterprises, startups with a social mission, and CSOs.

Second, the EU also plans to continue a strategic focus on building monitoring capacity within civil society. This includes monitoring the implementation of the legal framework for “enabling environment and interpret[ing] new legislation in line with international and European standards”¹⁵² and “monitoring of the implementation of the EU-Armenia Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) and establishment of a bilateral EU-Armenia CSO platform,”¹⁵³ in addition to playing a general watchdog role over the government.

A third key priority within the EU’s upcoming work with civil society is human rights and those people left behind in the revolution, such as “women and youth from poor rural areas, national and sexual minorities, [and] people with disabilities and their own organizations (DPOs).”¹⁵⁴ In this work the EU will draw from several approaches—such as supporting the government’s openness to expand reforms to benefit vulnerable and marginalized groups, coalition building, a new rural community empowerment program—and funding sources, including an EU European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDR) 2018-2020 allocation of 3 million euros, a CSO-LA 2019 allocation (described in further detail

¹⁴⁸ EU Roadmap for Engagement with Civil Society in Armenia 2018-2020, p.6.

¹⁴⁹ In terms of relevant programming by other donors, GiZ also funds local governance programming. The World Bank will continue largescale and local governance-based investments in irrigation. Finally, the World Bank supports a program to provide services to the elderly and extreme poor, which is discussed in the following subsection.

¹⁵⁰ Biannual CSO-LA, EIDR. First will be on local authorities, then on human rights.

¹⁵¹ EU Roadmap for Engagement with Civil Society in Armenia 2018-2020, p.15.

¹⁵² Ibid., p.10.

¹⁵³ Ibid., p.12.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 9.

below), and the Media Facility project (also described in further detail below). The EU hopes to release the calls for proposals in these mechanisms in Q2 or Q3 of 2019.

This third priority area on vulnerable groups also includes a sub-focus on addressing extreme poverty, as much economic need persists in Armenia. The EU would like CSOs to address poverty more generally, since the CSOs that currently work in this space only deal with one aspect of poverty, like malnutrition, energy, etc. The EU expects to use a portion of the CSO-LA 2019 allocation to “expand CSO work on extreme poverty and its reduction, addressing the situation of the most vulnerable poor communities” beginning with a call for proposals in Q2 or Q3 of 2019.

In the media subsector, USAID has historically served as the predominant donor, but the EU is jumping in to assist in this subsector with its upcoming Media Facility project. Triggered by the recent changes in government, the Media Facility project will create a toolkit to combat hate speech and disinformation and promote access to information, investigative journalism, ethical standards (media ethics code), organizational frameworks (licensing, labor rights), and mentoring of media organizations. This project will also include an element of conflict sensitization to prepare the population for a peace deal on Nagorno-Karabakh. According to the EU Annual Action Programme 2018,¹⁵⁵ the 2-3 million euro allocated for CSOs through this project “will provide both core financial support and activity-driven financial support to third parties” and the EU will “complement this with expert advice and mentoring.” This project may also include research activities or capacity building, such as “a large survey on media consumption and preferences” or support to outlets for “big data collection and management.” Finally, the project may also contain legal support to journalists and support for the creation of a network of production centers to “help small local independent media outlets overcome lack of professional expertise and equipment.” The foreseen launch date of the Call for Proposals in this project is Q2 of 2019.

4.1.3 UNDP

The assessment team also met with representatives from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which runs several civil society programs funded by the EU. The main UNDP civil society program is the Kolba Innovations Lab. Begun 2014, this initiative employs a user-driven approach to incubating innovations and transforming interactions with citizens through crowdsourcing, social innovation camps, and labs to talk to institutions about validation and insights. This project has evolved over time and is currently focusing on the development of future users, such as needed skills and professions in Armenia 10-15 years in the future. The project is currently supported by the EU and Russia. It will continue for at least the next 3 years, though fundraising to expand the project beyond that timeline continues.

Upcoming UNDP-led initiatives¹⁵⁶ include the Women in Politics Project, an accountability grant pool, and an initiative to foster youth engagement at the subnational level. It appears that the Women in

¹⁵⁵ While this document is not publicly available, the excerpt of it describing this project was made available to the assessment team.

¹⁵⁶ UNDP also previously held talent management competitions in government (with Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Education, Prime Minister's office) before the revolution, but this is not active now due to lack of funding. UNDP would like to offer this program to government again should resources become available. UNDP is also talking about continuing programming surrounding community budgeting and gender sensitive budgeting but has no firm plans right now.

Politics project—totaling \$1.4 million over 2 years—will focus on local politics, anti-corruption, and resource centers on local empowerment, in partnership with Oxygen. It is also slated to include political party capacity building—especially of women and youth—through a training of trainer’s model.

Starting in May, the grant pool will support CSOs to keep government accountable via funding innovative ideas and new accountability methods. This is an effort to encourage the civil society sector (defined broadly) to keep innovating. The grant competition prioritizes problem identification, ideas, and insights, rather than traditional grant reporting requirements. The new project to promote youth engagement at the subnational level will occur over the next three years and fund interaction and feedback mechanisms, youth camps, and youth resource centers that host activities and salons. Pre-existing physical bases that this work will build on are InfoTuns and UN tourism resource centers in regional government buildings. (These have expanded in scope now to include community development.) Through both initiatives, the UNDP seeks to bestow opportunities on a new generation of CSOs, characterized by networked youth and the creation of new organizational structures. This will support the transformation of old CSOs, who they would like to support to talk to citizens more and expand into social enterprise activities.¹⁵⁷

4.2 GAPS IN ASSISTANCE

Despite the thoughtful approaches in the civil society and media sectors enumerated by the EU, UNDP, and other donors, interviewees did identify gaps in assistance that USAID could help fill.

4.2.1 CIVIL SOCIETY

Institution building: Institution building is currently an area of critical need in the civil society sector. In the words of one interviewee, building on the current reform momentum could allow “transparency [to] become the way of doing business, so no matter who is in power it is institutionalized.” Another interviewee highlighted the importance of “engag[ing] National Assembly [MPs] on research, workshops, and trainings in conjunction with civil society. The goal should be to make this the norm.” Yet another interviewee pointed out that while “civil society is ready to be part of the policy dialogue,” and while the government is willing to listen, cooperation is yet to be institutionalized and the frameworks that could help do this do not exist yet.

Supporting Armenia’s citizens to parlay this political moment to build lasting democratic institutions could be an important legacy of donor activity in Armenia. Key avenues for engaging in this development are through support to the enabling environment reform initiatives that would strengthen CSOs. Additionally, in the present climate of high political will, donors feel that civil society needs to institutionalize consultation and dialogue with the government to fend off potential future rollbacks. Directing resources toward the recommended development of formal mechanisms for CSO-NA dialogue, as well as supporting civil society FOI campaigns to press for FOI improvements, are two examples of options to maximize the current opportunity to institutionalize best practices.

¹⁵⁷ Information for this section was gathered through stakeholder interviews with representatives from the EU, UNDP, World Bank, and NED, the implementer of the ongoing political capacity building program, Strengthening Elections and Political Processes in Armenia (SEPPA).

Public Policy Research: Other donors also see public policy research as an area ripe for major contributions by donors, CSOs, and the government. Donors and CSOs could produce quality subsector wide research outputs—such as analyses on the current state of the civil society sector in Armenia, especially in the regions, legislation reviews, and easily digestible products such as visualizations of existing data – for example, of data collected by the Caucasus Research Resource Center (CRRC). One possible vehicle for this would be fellowships for follow-on research or products, similar to previous fellowships that CRRC had for qualitative follow up research on data it had collected. Universities can also play a symbiotic role in addressing this need for research, since student participation would improve the real-world relevance of educational offerings to students of international development. Lastly, the government could become a formal producer/supporter of research through the creation of a new institutional structure—a Chatham House-like strategic research unit—which would build capacity for publicly-funded policy research, a function that is currently only performed by political parties. One interviewee stated that at present government seems to be more innovative than civil society, and such an institution could help push civil society to be more productive.

Emerging Technology: Supporting CSOs to engage with emerging technology is also an area requiring special attention. One interviewee suggested introducing chat bots to help CSOs interact with larger numbers of citizens. Yet, donors worry that the civil society sector is not ready for technology changes, and CSOs need support to move towards and manage emerging technologies rather than resisting them. Additional work with CSOs to better understand how and when organizations adapt to technology changes would be useful for confirming or challenging this assumption and targeting support.

Guiding the adoption of open data in Armenia will be an ongoing related effort. Open data is still in its infancy in Armenia, since if it exists at all it is difficult to access or interact with. This is an opportunity for CSOs (or potentially the government) to mediate information from databases to citizens through hackathons, data visualization, etc. that make microdata legible to the larger population. While this work is currently linked to the digital agenda¹⁵⁸—UNDP is lobbying to connect health, education, social services, and judicial council data—the government will likely be ready for large-scale open data initiatives in 3-4 years.

Capacity building: Next, donors report that capacity building remains a need within civil society, particularly due to the recent movement of several civil society leaders over to the government and the associated capacity building needs for the resulting new government personnel. Additionally, one interviewee also mentioned that best practices are seemingly not trickling down to CSOs in Armenia, even those that are affiliates of international CSOs. Both of these factors point to ongoing need for targeted capacity building support.

¹⁵⁸ The RA government currently has a Digital Transformation Agenda. Based on the RA Decision N 926 (August 2017), the Digital Armenia Foundation was established and its Charter was approved to increase the effectiveness of public administration and local self-government systems in Armenia to ensure transparency and enable business environment and provide for a platform for the centralized coordination and supervision of digital infrastructure. Its goal was to establish a common digitized environment in all spheres of state governance. However, Yerevan City Court of General Jurisdiction has made a decision in January 2019 on the dissolution of the Digital Armenia Foundation (Case no. ԵՂ/20049/02/18). Recent developments on this matter are unclear. There were discussions that the functions of the Foundation may be delegated to one of the ministries after the general government restructuring.

More information on the UN/RA Government cooperation in the framework of the Digital Agenda can be found here: <https://egov.unu.edu/news/news/digital-transformation-agenda-unu-egov-armenia-2017.html>.

Some donors feel that upcoming capacity building work should either be very short-term and responsive to current needs or very future-oriented (like the new UNDP program described above). Short-term reactive assistance could help with modernization and adaptation to the changing technological environment (including social media and understanding how to work with those algorithms), aid increased engagement with citizens, and support policy building work. On the government side, there are comparatively few Armenian state-run programs, and there is an opportunity for a donor to address need and build government capacity via a joint program with the state.

Poverty: Finally, despite some focus on poverty and regional development by the EU and World Bank, donors consider this area a gap in assistance. The World Bank supports one initiative in this space in partnership with an implementing CSO—Social Protection Administration Project II (SPAP II)—but the organization does not otherwise work with CSOs on poverty. The EU has folded extreme poverty reduction as a goal under its priority to promote the rights of vulnerable groups (rather than a standalone priority). However, according to the Asian Development Bank, Armenia has the third highest proportion of the population below the national poverty line of countries in the region,¹⁵⁹ and this persistent issue merits more focused attention.

One option for addressing this gap in the context of civil society is through the strategy that the World Bank currently employs of supporting service delivery CSOs. Additionally, the proposed monitoring activities with civil society actors at the local level (and communities) could be pursued within a poverty reduction framework. These entities can be trained and organized to participate in budget and project development discussions within an economic development project, and monitor and report on project budgets and implementation. To be most effective, the monitoring reports would be linked to national level organization(s), which could publicize corruption, inappropriate governance, etc.

Poverty is a topic that would lend itself well to donor collaboration, and there are historical examples of this type of cooperation, such as past World Bank and USAID work on enabling growth sectors and tourism capacity.¹⁶⁰ Donor representatives also expressed interest in teaming up to address this challenge. Tourism specifically may represent a good area for follow-on coordination because the World Bank's recently released Country Partnership Framework noted, "Average per-visitor earnings have declined over the past decade, suggesting that available tourism offerings are somewhat static and that marketing efforts are failing to capture higher-spending visitors."¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ At 26% of the population as of 2017, Armenia ranks behind only Afghanistan (55%) and Tajikistan (30%). <https://www.adb.org/countries/armenia/poverty>

¹⁶⁰ Specifically, the WB and USAID explicitly cooperated within the South Corridor Tourism Development Strategy. Since 2011, analysis has been conducted for this Corridor by the USAID Enterprise Development and Market Competitiveness (EDMC) and Competitive Armenian Private Sector projects. In 2013, the USAID EDMC project conducted a visitor survey for all of Armenia. For more please follow this link: <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/528101467988937597/pdf/103149WPPI46596-Box394855B-PUBLIC-Armenia-Tourism-Corridors-Development-Strategy-March-2015.pdf>

¹⁶¹ World Bank. 2019. Armenia—Country Partnership Framework for the Period FY19-FY23 (English). Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group, p.9. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/523501552357219076/Armenia-Country-Partnership-Framework-for-the-Period-FY19-FY23>

4.2.2 MEDIA

Interviewees also offered several observations about gaps in assistance in the media sector and opportunities for additional support.

Institution building: There is also need for support to strengthening institutions in the media sector. Many recommended activities to support media enabling environment reform efforts (see Section 3.2—Media Enabling Environment for more information) would begin to address this gap. In particular, the recommended support for improvements in the operations of the Council of Public TV and Radio Broadcasting and in FOI processing in government represent promising avenues to work towards this goal.

Neutral discussion platforms: Some interviewees felt that the biggest gap or need in the media landscape is the absence of credibly neutral platforms for political discussion. While past assistance has provided valuable capacity building, the fact remains that once people have sharp reporting skills, they may not have a venue to use them. Other donors report that at least some members of the government are also interested in nurturing well regarded discussion platforms as another means for demonstrating transparency and openness to engage in debate. These factors appear to combine to produce an environment ripe for experiments in new formats and platforms for trustworthy political conversations.

Public TV is working to provide neutral platforms, as they have at least one news and social issues discussion program that tries to be more objective and inclusive of all (or most) views and is accessible around the country. To expand the reach of these forums, USAID could support the suggested discussion programs by Public TV with comedy segments interspersed. Additionally, one interviewee suggested another way to engage the people would be by expanding the use of town halls and live streaming political events and meetings, especially through initiatives like regional town halls, which would have the added benefit of expanding access to these conversations and avenues for feedback. However, donors will need to deliberately experiment through a number of ideas and see what works.

Regional Media Access: Next, there remains a persistent gap in regional media access with diminishing local TV coverage. High quality political coverage at the regional level (for example, through traveling televised regional town halls) could hopefully engage people outside Yerevan and harness the extra attention that people tend to pay to public affairs during transformative change.

Capacity Building: Media outlets and professionals could also use short-term reactive/responsive capacity building and research support. For capacity building, donor representatives identified additional need for targeted assistance with blogging, strategies for addressing fake news, public awareness about journalism codes of ethics and what is permissible to publish, and working within social media algorithms. In terms of community-wide capacity building, a soft intervention in critical thinking at the high school level was identified as an area where additional inroads in combatting fake news could be made by USAID. In terms of research needs in this sector, other donors feel that they and those working in this sector would benefit from additional audience research analytics/information to understand media user patterns in a more systematic way (who watches Public TV, etc.) and to understand the emerging role of other social networks like Instagram, especially for youth.

Depending on the exact scope of the EU's Media Facility Project, there may also be remaining need for support to the government in developing/updating media regulations—either through an amendment to

the current 2003 law or another means—to incorporate digital developments, fake news, and labor protections for journalists (hiring, firing, contracts, etc.). Despite the EU’s intention to fold this into the same project, there is likely also room for additional regional media programming (exchange, peacebuilding, etc.) in the South Caucasus to plan for a changing environment in case there are developments in Armenia’s relationship with Turkey and/or Azerbaijan.

5 STRATEGY FOR USAID CIVIL SOCIETY AND MEDIA ASSISTANCE

This section summarizes findings about the general reform landscape at this time in Armenia, recommending cross-cutting priority areas for USAID assistance. It then presents key issues and strategy recommendations within the civil society and media sectors.

5.1 OVERVIEW AND ANALYSIS

Armenia sits at a critical juncture. The Velvet Revolution and the smaller-scale civic initiatives that came before it have shown that the Armenian public desires change and is willing to become involved when necessary. Furthermore, the new government in Armenia is supportive of democracy and open to civil society participation. Possibilities of change and reform are strengthened by an Armenian Diaspora that has demonstrated a willingness to provide development and technical assistance and serves as another channel of support.

Nonetheless, democracy in Armenia is fragile and retreat appears to still be possible. An inconsistently connected and financially vulnerable civil society and a weak and divided media scene may make it difficult for the promises of the revolution to be fulfilled. Institutions, processes, and principles of democracy, therefore, need to be developed, formalized, institutionalized, and protected while the environment remains conducive to reform. Internally, a slow pace of change and reform implementation and the limited capacity of the new government have been raised as concerns. Citizens are expecting change and want to see it relatively soon, so movement on this front is important to ensure that the public does not lose confidence in the government. At a regional level, Armenia's geo-political position and affiliations with Russia require delicate maneuvering regarding both regional and national politics.

Three key cross-cutting priority areas for the civil society and media sectors emerge from this analysis:

Civic Education: Without wide public understanding of and support for democracy, it is possible for public opinion to be manipulated, or frustrations exploited, and for public support for Armenia's nascent democracy to be diminished or reversed. It is imperative, therefore, that Armenia's citizens understand the context and practices of democratic governance and pluralism; that they are cognizant of government's responsibilities to citizens, as well as the institutional and economic constraints under which the current government operates; and that they are aware of the role and responsibilities of citizens as advocates for issues, monitors of implementation and enforcement, and protectors of democratic norms, institutions, and processes. In this context, civic education is necessary for the general public and for the media, which acts as a primary conduit of information and analysis.

Enabling Environment: In the context of the fragile political environment, it is critical that laws, regulations, and processes that provide protections to the civil society and media sectors, and that define relationships between government and sector actors, are developed and established. In particular, this includes: (1) Legislation on the legal standing of CSOs on public interest issues; (2) Law on Mass Media - Transparency in media ownership and financial sources; (3) Law on TV and Radio - Licensing Transparency for Broadcast Media; (4) Law on TV and Radio - Multiplexer Operation; (5) Labor rights for journalists; (6) Organizational reform of Council of Public TV and Radio Broadcasting; and (7) Government-CSO Dialogues focused on reforming and institutionalizing participation mechanisms through which sector representatives may formally and more effectively participate in legislative and policy processes. While an endowment law is viewed by representatives of both sectors as a useful

mechanism through which to solve prevalent problems related to financial constraints, including the impact of financial dependency on the independence of sector actors, no active ongoing discussions about an endowment law appear to be occurring in either civil society or the media sector.¹⁶²

Advocacy: Support for sector advocacy initiatives and for follow up monitoring of implementation constitutes a priority focus for donor efforts. This includes support for initiative-focused activities and sector capacity to conduct advocacy campaigns and monitoring. Parallel to advocacy initiatives, donor activities must be accompanied by capacity support to the government bodies responsible for responding to reform and advocacy agendas that are being funded and supported by the donors.

However, it is important to note that this assessment was conducted during a formative and dynamic period for Armenia's government and democracy. As the revolution is institutionalized, and as civil society clarifies its roles and relationships within the current context, different issues, approaches, and dynamics may emerge over time. Similarly, as media laws and media-related government institutions evolve, as enforcement is (or is not) improved, and as the economic environment changes, some concerns may diminish and other possibilities for strengthening media may develop.

5.2 CIVIL SOCIETY

In general, donors have to help CSOs institutionalize their involvement in the political system while building closer connections to grassroots organizers and participants. Although donor support for Armenian CSOs has been relatively strong in the past, the relationship between Armenians and formal CSOs is stretched. In addition, citizen participation in government has also not been institutionalized due to the authoritarian nature of the previous regime. As such, donors should push for increased organized public involvement with civil society and state institutions via civic education programs.

It is vital that donors help strengthen the connections between CSOs and Armenians, with a particular focus on using social media in the same manner as civic initiatives. This should involve rehabilitating the image of civil society and political participation in the eye of the Armenian public. On the side of CSOs, donors need to provide resources to CSOs so that they can continue to pressure the government and maintain reform momentum. On the side of the government, donors need to help professionalize government and the National Assembly and set up institutions to make interactions between CSOs easier and more regular. Finally, donors need to look beyond typical development actors and engage with social movements and grassroots organizations and expand the focus beyond the capital by working with organizations based in diverse parts of the country, so that they do not feel left behind by political developments. This also includes providing support to women politicians and CSO members and leaders.

¹⁶² Beyond drafting and legislating an endowment law, the issue of endowment funding remains a challenge. If donors are willing, one potential way to address this issue could be a donor-funded endowment, wherein donors would contribute substantial sums to a CSO and/or Media endowment, but key questions remain surrounding that potential approach. Specifically, if they are willing, would donors demand decision-making authority over issues/organizations selected (and thus perpetuate the issue of donor domination of sector agendas)? Would the government contribute funds to such endowments? And if it would, how would government influence on issue/grantee selection be restricted?

5.3 MEDIA

Multiple sources of information are available to the public, ranging from print and radio to television and online media. The professional activities of Armenia's journalists are protected by law, and constraints such as censorship, pressure, and obstruction are prohibited. As such, the media environment is generally considered to be "enabling." However, there are key priority areas in which the donor community can make a constructive contribution.

One ongoing opportunity lies in the fact that non-traditional media played a key role in the Velvet Revolution and continues to play an outsized role in Armenian politics. Donors should use the rise of Facebook and the importance of social media in Armenia to their advantage by working with the government and CSOs to engage with their constituencies via these platforms.

The key challenges in the media sector in Armenia lie in the small size of the sector and its vulnerability to domination by oligarchic or foreign interests. Traditional media is relatively weak in Armenia, and donors need to invest in strategies to strengthen it. They need to work with the Armenian government, CSOs, and independent journalists and media activists to establish a stably robust public broadcasting system that is independent from the government. This will include helping Armenia's media sector modernize. In addition, it is important to build the capacity of Armenian journalists by providing training and financial support to both independent media organizations and individual journalists. A final focus should be on fortifying the legal environment for journalists in Armenia, as legislative reform initiatives that are critical to a vibrant media are expected and/or needed, and this may contribute to improving the quality of journalism.

APPENDIX I. VARIETIES OF DEMOCRACY PROJECT INDICATORS¹⁶³

The Varieties of Democracy Project¹⁶⁴ has two indices that measure civil society. The first, the *civil society participation index*, measures both how active citizens are in civil society and how active organizations are within the policy making process. The second, the *core civil society index*, aims “to provide a measure of a robust civil society, understood as one that enjoys autonomy from the state and in which citizens freely and actively pursue their political and civic goals, however conceived” (Coppedge et al., 2018, 237). Both indices are measured from 0 to 1.

Figure 1, below, shows that for most of Armenia’s post-independence history, neither index has changed much, with the civil society participation index hovering around 0.5 and the core civil society index hovering around 0.75. The core civil societies index spikes noticeably in 2011. This most likely reflects the 2011 protests, which evolved from a protest by street vendors in Yerevan against a ban on street trading into a broader contentious movement that managed to wring some concessions out of Sargsyan and the Republican Party of Armenia. Puzzlingly, the civil society participation index does not capture this 2011 protest episode, nor does it reflect the uptick in protest in Armenia in the years immediately following. The civil society participation index does begin to rise dramatically in 2016, culminating in the highest value in Armenia’s history in 2018, which captures the lead up to the Velvet Revolution and the protests themselves. In general, however, although both indices have fluctuated in last decade, the V-Dem indices do not seem to reflect what Armenian analysts described as a clear change in civil society and increase in grassroots activism after 2008. Paturyan and Bagiyani (2017) analyze three successful and one unsuccessful civic initiatives in 2013 and 2014, and Ishkanian (2015) lists 31 civic initiatives that came into being between February 2009 and May 2015, yet the V-Dem civil societies indices generally put civil society participation and robustness in these years at the same level or lower than the same measures in the 1990s.

V-Dem coders have rated civil society participation in Armenia as consistently and significantly lower than the robustness of civil society, which does seem to reflect the scholarly consensus delineated above that civil society has been institutionalized, but that citizens do not participate at high levels in formal civil society organizations. Unfortunately, the V-Dem indicators – displayed in Figure 2 (below) – do not allow us to clearly differentiate between formal and informal civil society. At the same time, it is telling that while several of the indicators increase noticeably in 2018, reflecting the role of civil society in the Velvet Revolution, the CSO Participatory Environment indicator, which assesses participation in organizations, remains steady. This, together with the issues regarding the lack of responsiveness of the measures to civic initiatives, implies that the core civil society index may overstate the strength of civil society in an organizational sense, yet also understate the increase in civil society activity after 2008.

¹⁶³ This analysis was prepared by Graeme Robertson and Simon Hoellerbauer (Department of Political Science, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill). For more information please see: USAID. 2019. Civil Society and Media in Armenia: An Evidence Review for Learning, Evaluation, and Research Activity II (LER II). https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00TJWV.pdf

¹⁶⁴ The website of the Varieties of Democracy Project; <https://www.v-dem.net/en/>.

Figure 1. V-Dem Civil Society Indices for Armenia, 1990-2018

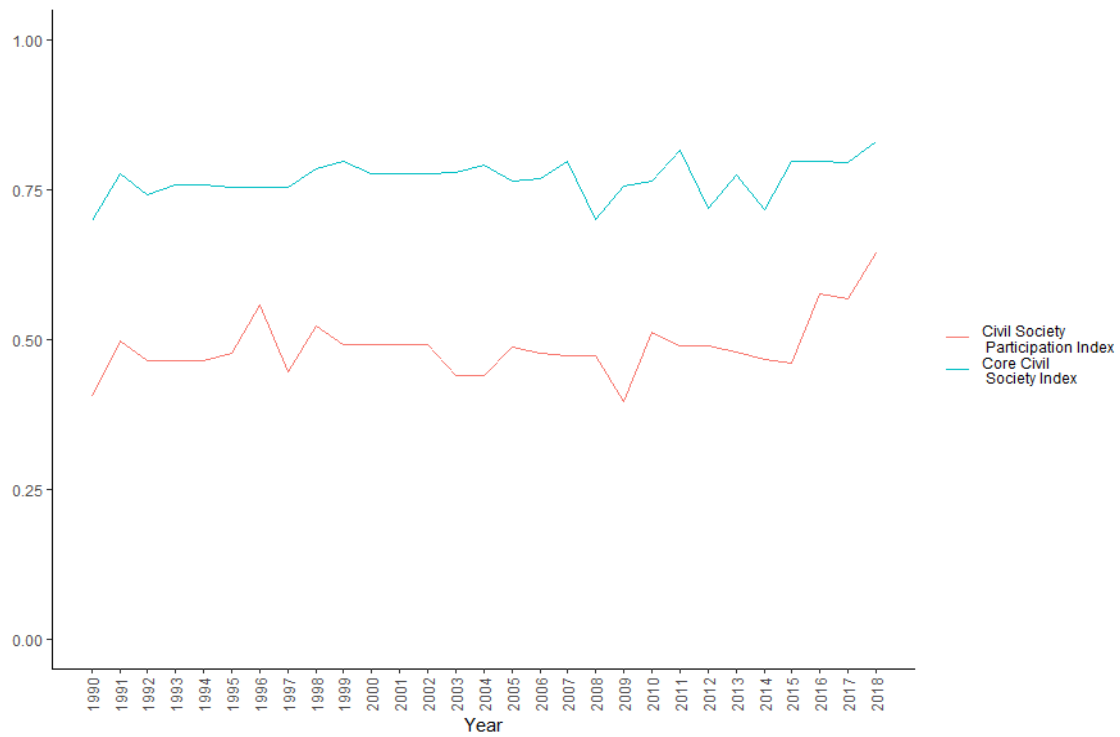
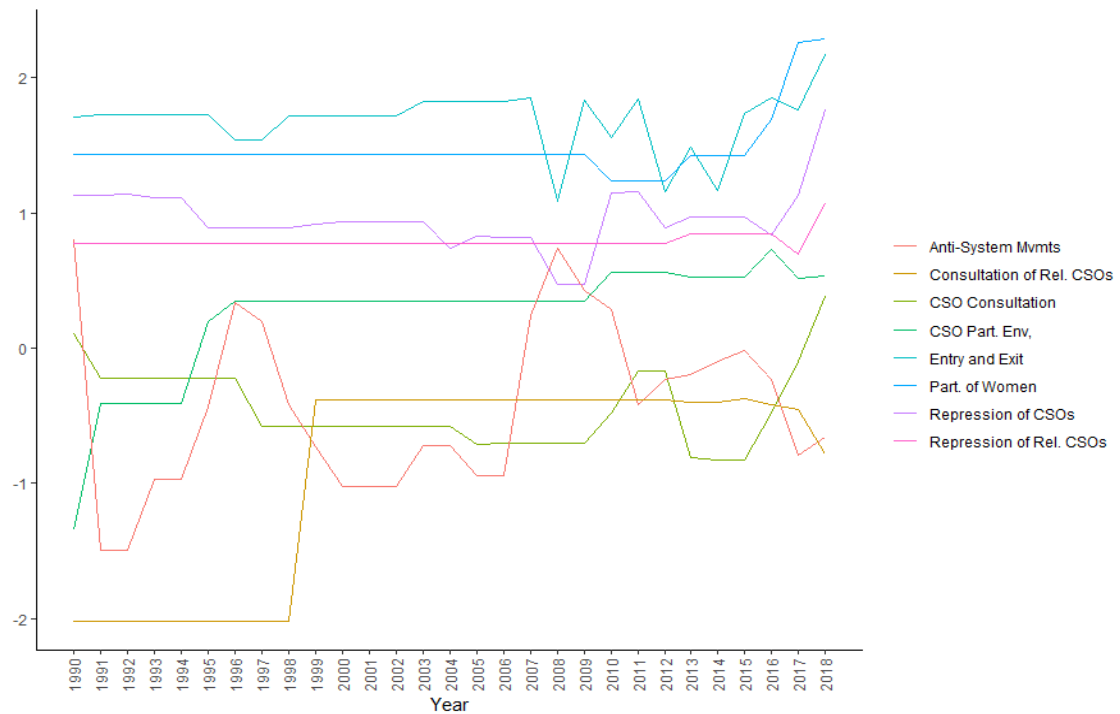


Figure 2. V-Dem Civil Society Indicators for Armenia, 1990-2018



Comparatively, Figures 3 and 4 (below) show that the robustness of Armenia’s civil society is only a little lower than that of Georgia, but participation is considerably higher in Georgia. Prior to the Rose Revolution in Georgia in 2003 and 2004, the indices were nearly the same for both countries. Ishiyama, Mezvrishvili, and Zhgenti (2018) show, using survey data, that social and institutional trust are much higher in Georgia than in the other Caucasus states, which they attribute to the existence of a better-developed civil society in Georgia. Azerbaijan lags far behind Armenia and Georgia on both measures, which is understandable given the consolidated nature of Azerbaijan’s authoritarian regime.

Figure 3. Civil Society in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, 1990-2018

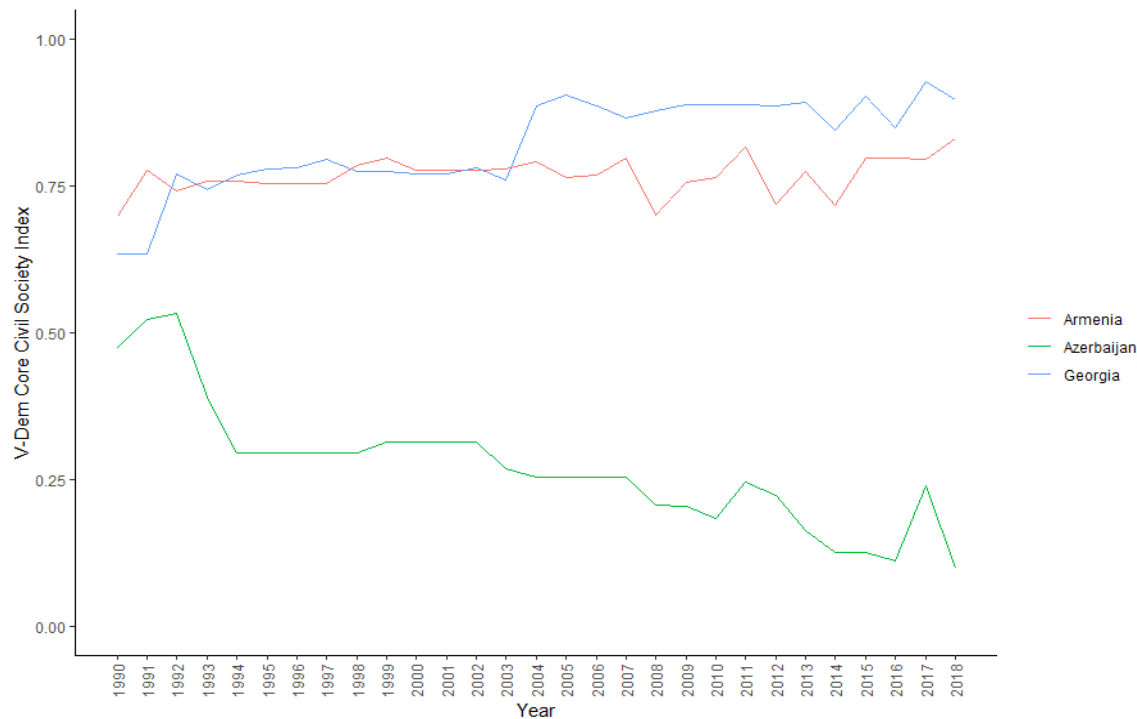
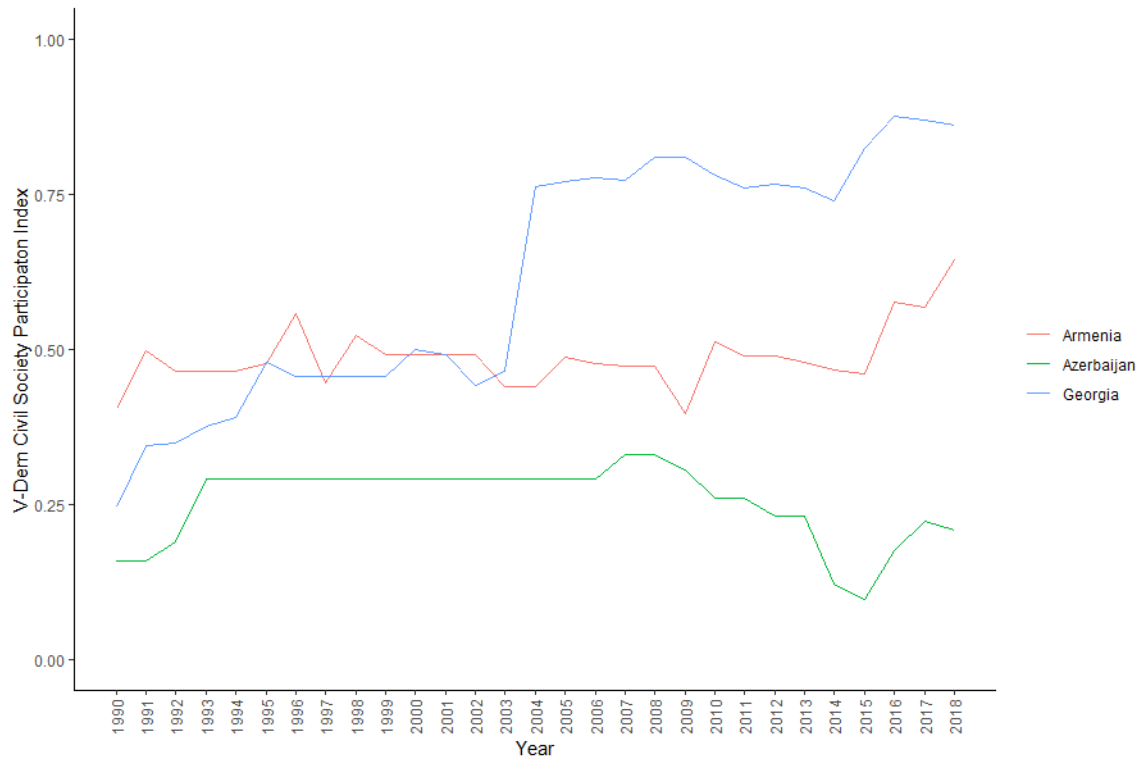


Figure 4. Civil Society Participation in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, 1990-2018



APPENDIX 2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

Core Question: What are the post-revolution political/social dynamics, constraints, and opportunities that may impact the working environment, role, and direction of Armenia’s civil society and media sectors?

This core question area has two sub-areas: Governance Dynamics and Citizens and the Reform Agenda. Table 3, below, lists Political Environment sub-questions and data sources within each of these sub-areas.

TABLE 3: POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT SUB-QUESTIONS AND DATA SOURCES

SUB-QUESTIONS	SOURCE (MAJOR INTERVIEW CATEGORIES) ¹⁶⁵
GOVERNANCE DYNAMICS	
I.1) Do Armenia’s core actors have the commitment and capacity to move forward on reforms (e.g., members/institutions under new government; new political actors/MPs; social movement leaders/groups; CSO sector)?	Interviews/group interviews with representatives of Government agencies, National Assembly (NA), Local government (LG) bodies, CSOs, and social movement and political party leaders
I.2) What does government consider to be its primary and secondary reform priorities?	Interviews/group interviews with representatives of Government agencies and NA
I.3) What does government consider to be its primary and secondary sources of information to inform reform (both in terms of content and prioritization)?	Interviews/group interviews with representatives of Government agencies and NA
I.4) What measures has the current government taken, and what measures is it planning, to open avenues for public input and participation in the development of policy and legislation?	Interviews/group interviews with representatives of Government agencies, NA, LG bodies, CSOs, Think Tanks
I.5) How does the government react to public criticism/protest?	Interviews/group interviews with representatives of Government agencies, NA, LG bodies, CSOs, and social movement and political party leaders as well as group discussions with citizens
I.6) What processes/avenues are most likely to succeed in influencing the progress/implementation of reform efforts (e.g., CSO advocacy strategies; CSO watchdog and policy input strategies; government-citizen formal/informal for a; street protests; media initiatives; other)?	Interviews/group interviews with representatives of Government agencies and NA, CSOs, Think Tanks
I.7) What reforms (if any) are opposition parties prepared to support?	Interview/group interview with political party leaders, including those not represented in the government
I.8) What kinds of relationships/linkages exist between and among media, government and civil society organizations (national and local levels)?	Interviews/group interviews with representatives of Government agencies, NA, LG bodies, CSOs, media and social movement leaders

¹⁶⁵ While we note main source interviewees for a particular issue, this does not mean that we did not ask unlisted interviewees about the same issue.

CITIZENS AND THE REFORM AGENDA

<p>I.9) What reforms are most critical/most immediately needed to maintain civil society and public support for government?</p> <p>Which citizen expectations/goals are realistic (or not realistic)?</p>	<p>Interviews/group interviews with representatives of CSOs and social movement leaders; group discussions with citizens</p>
<p>I.10) What is government willing to do; what is it able to do (short- and medium-term)?</p>	<p>Interviews/group interviews with representatives of Government agencies, NA, and LG bodies</p>
<p>I.11) How much time is the public willing to give government to initiate/implement reforms?</p>	<p>Interviews/group interviews with representatives of CSOs and social movement leaders; group discussions with citizens</p>
<p>I.12) To avoid crises of rising discontent/rising expectations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there a need for public information/civic education focused on what government is able to do in the context of its financial wherewithal (or other constraints)? • Is there a need for public information/civic education focused on what government is able to do in terms of process (e.g., process/time needed to revise laws; process/time for implementing effective enforcement mechanisms)? • Do CSOs/citizens/movements think that the government adequately communicates priorities and sets expectations? 	<p>Interviews/group interviews with representatives of CSOs and social movement leaders; group discussions with citizens</p>
<p>I.13) Does support for the current government and reforms differ among various groups/sectors (e.g., between rural and urban; youth and older citizens; other)?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through which institutions/organizations are these groups represented? 	<p>Interviews/group interviews with representatives of CSOs and social movement leaders; group discussions with citizens</p>
<p>I.14) How do citizens view criticism of the current government? (i.e. is criticism viewed as constructive, or as an attack on/rejection of the government's efforts?)</p>	<p>Interviews/group interviews with representatives of CSOs and social movement leaders; group discussions with citizens</p>

CIVIL SOCIETY

Core Question: What are the current challenges and opportunities for Armenian civil society to play a constructive role in advancing Armenia's democratic transition and consolidation?

Table 4, below, lists Civil Society sub-questions and data sources.

TABLE 4: CIVIL SOCIETY SUB-QUESTIONS AND DATA SOURCES

SUB-QUESTIONS	SOURCE (MAJOR INTERVIEW CATEGORIES) ¹⁶⁶
<p>2.1) What is the capacity of civil society to support reform initiatives and hold government accountable?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What does “advocacy” mean to civil society actors, to government (national and local), and to citizens? What formal and/or informal advocacy mechanisms/avenues are available (e.g., national/local government processes/structures; public education and/or media linkages to increase support for initiatives)? What capacities do CSOs think are most important for enabling advocacy/monitoring, evidence-based policy input, and constituency linkage-building? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What capacities/skills does the civil society sector possess to carry out advocacy efforts? What capacities/skills do CSOs/NGOs possess to support policy agenda setting? What capacities/skills do CSOs/NGOs possess to monitor and report on implementation of legislation and programs? Are issue-focused CSOs able to utilize media in their advocacy efforts? If yes, how? If no, what are the constraints to working with the media? 	Interviews/group interviews with representatives of Government agencies, NA, LG bodies, CSOs, media, and social movement leaders as well as group discussions with citizens
<p>2.2) How do CSOs view their relationship with government (e.g., independent and separate partners, opponents, subsidiary support actors, other)?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How do civil society actors view criticism of the current government? (i.e., is criticism viewed as constructive, or as an attack on/rejection of government’s efforts?) 	Interviews/group interviews with representatives CSOs
<p>2.3) What potential exists for coordinated civil society action in support of reform?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are there particular issues around which CSOs can converge/collaborate (e.g., human rights, freedom of information, specific anti-corruption initiatives, core environmental issues)? How do local and national organizations, working on same or similar issues engage with each other? (i.e., do they have formal/informal mechanisms for information sharing; policy dialogues to align policy recommendations and advocacy initiatives; agenda setting; coordinated advocacy strategies?) 	Interviews/group interviews with representatives CSOs (particularly umbrella organizations and coalitions) and social movement leaders

¹⁶⁶ While we note main source interviewees for a particular issue, this does not mean that we did not ask unlisted interviewees about the same issue.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which NGOs/CSOs participated in past successful social movements and coalitions? What lessons can be learned from these coordinated efforts? • To what extent is civil society fractured, and what is the current state of conservative or illiberal civil society? 	
<p>2.4) What role is the private sector willing and able to play in support of the reform government and reform agenda?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the private sector feel that it is adequately consulted or involved in dialogue with regards to reforms? Does it/can it collaborate with CS/media on dialogue/advocacy around common issues? Why/why not? • How can CSOs and/or the media collaborate with the private sector supporting democratization and reform efforts? 	<p>Interviews/group interviews with representatives of Business/Private Sector associations, CSOs, media as well as relevant Government agencies</p>
<p>2.5) A May (2017), Ministry of Territorial Administration and Development report (quoted in Freedom House, 2018) noted success in the use of citizen offices and online information management.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are local NGOs involved in information dissemination/citizen support regarding the use of citizen offices and online information management? • To what extent are municipal web sites useful as a source of information/accountability tool for CSOs and as a management tool for LGs? 	<p>Interviews/group interviews with representatives of LG bodies, CSOs, as well as group discussions with citizens</p>
<p>2.6) What further impact, if any, might be expected from the social movement that spearheaded the Velvet Revolution?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the social movement currently still exist in any form? • If the movement does exist in some form, does it expect to continue revolution/reform efforts? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – If yes, what issues are considered to be of greatest importance? – Are these expectations realistic? – How much time will the new government be given to implement changes? – What strategies would be utilized to press for reform and implementation? • How do the social movement actors stay connected and share information – internally, and with other groups that supported and joined the “revolution” (e.g., CSO or business leaders, government entities/representatives, media, youth/students’ groups)? 	<p>Interviews/group interviews with representatives of social movements¹⁶⁷, CSOs, think tanks, and group discussion(s) with activists.</p>
<p>2.7) Do “social movements” supporting anti-democratic influences exist?</p>	<p>Interviews/group interviews with representatives of Social movements, CSOs, Government agencies, NA, LG bodies, political party leaders, donor organizations</p>
<p>2.8) The CSO/Social Movement Divide</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why are NGOs “generally weakly involved with civic initiatives” (USAID 2019a, 2)? 	<p>Interviews/group interviews with representatives of Social movements, CSOs and think tanks</p>

¹⁶⁷ This includes social movement actors who have joined the government.

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- Why is there little effective cooperation between the “informal and formal parts of Armenian civil society” (USAID, 2019a, 2)?
 - How do social movements/civic initiatives engage with citizens, as opposed to CSOs/NGOs?
 - Is it possible to institutionalize the social movement that brought the Velvet Revolution (i.e., through an umbrella organization or coordinating network)? Have any efforts been made toward this end?
-

MEDIA

Core Question: What post-revolution challenges and opportunities affect the expansion and strengthening of Armenia’s various media outlets as sources of objective information and civic education throughout the country?

Table 5, below, lists proposed Media sub-questions and data sources.

TABLE 5: MEDIA SUB-QUESTIONS AND DATA SOURCES

SUB-QUESTIONS	SOURCE (MAJOR INTERVIEW CATEGORIES) ¹⁶⁸
<p>3.1) How might Armenia's media outlets balance/counter disinformation and provide objective reporting to the various population groups within the country?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How are more conservative influences exerted (or disinformation propagated) nationally and locally among various population groups? [e.g., via media; CSOs/NGOs; community/social/religious groups; business sector; other community opinion leaders; political players (political parties, “old guard” politicians/actors); other] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What alternative avenues might be utilized to provide neutral content and balance/counter such influence? How might donor assistance support the expansion of independent media outlets (print and online) to foster professional reporting? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What form might media assistance take to better reach youth given news consumption trends? 	<p>Interviews/group interviews with representatives of Media, Media CSOs, Social movements, CSOs, relevant Government agencies, political party leaders, donor organizations, Think Tanks as well as group discussions with citizens</p>
<p>3.2) What enabling environment issues support the expansion of a free and objective media? What constraints is media facing? What remedies may be pursued, if any?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are media sector laws, regulations and implementation adequate to constrain intimidation against media outlets and journalists? Has the current government addressed issues of intimidation against journalists? What constraints to media outlets face to developing as a business (financial sustainability)? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do these constraints differ for national/Yerevan outlets, as compared to regional/local media outlets? What form might media development assistance take to remedy constraints? 	<p>Interviews/group interviews with representatives of Media, Media CSOs, CSOs, relevant Government agencies, NA, Think Tanks, political party leaders, and donor organizations</p>
<p>3.3) Given the political transition, what are the prospects for the public broadcasters to genuinely assume the calling of public media?</p>	<p>Interviews/group interviews with representatives of Media, Media CSOs, CSOs, relevant Government agencies, NA, Think Tanks, and donor organizations</p>

¹⁶⁸ While we note main source interviewees for a particular issue, this does not mean that we did not ask unlisted interviewees about the same issue.

CSM SECTOR DONORS

Core Question: What is USAID's comparative advantage as a donor in this sector? What are the priorities of other donors? What, if any, are the gaps in planned donor assistance? Where can USAID assistance make a difference?

Table 6, below, lists the proposed Donor sub-question and data sources.

TABLE 6: CSM SECTOR DONORS SUB-QUESTIONS AND DATA SOURCES

SUB-QUESTION	SOURCE (MAJOR INTERVIEW CATEGORIES) ¹⁶⁹
4.1) What is USAID's comparative advantage as a donor in this sector? What are the priorities of other donors? What, if any, are the gaps in planned donor assistance? Where can USAID assistance make a difference?	Interviews/group interviews with Donor organizations, representatives of CSOs, Media, Social movements, Government agencies, NA, LG bodies, Think Tanks, Business/Private sector Associations, and political party leaders

¹⁶⁹ While we note main source interviewees for a particular issue, this does not mean that we did not ask unlisted interviewees about the same issue.

APPENDIX 3. LIST OF RESPONDENTS OF KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS AND SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS

TYPE OF ORGANIZATION	#	CATEGORY	ORGANIZATION	NAME / POSITION	N OF INTERVIEWEES	DATE INTERVIEWED
Executive Government and Public Agencies	1	A	Ministry of Justice	Vigen Kocharyan/Deputy Minister of Justice	1	May 6, 2019
	2	C	Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs	Gemafin Gasparyan/First Deputy Minister of LSA	1	May 7, 2019
	3	A	National Commission on Television and Radio	Tigran Hakobyan / Chair of Commission	4	April 16, 2019
	4	A	Public Broadcast Council	Ara Shirinyan / President	1	April 17, 2019
National Assembly	5	A	National Assembly	Committee Staff /Experts	4	April 12, 2019
	6	A	National Assembly	Varazdat Karapetyan / MP, "My Step" Faction	1	April 12, 2019
	7	A	National Assembly	Heriknaz Tigranyan / MP, "My Step" Faction	1	April 15, 2019
	8	B	National Assembly	Naira Zohrabyan / MP, "Prosperous Armenia" Faction	1	April 15, 2019
Local and Regional Government	9	C	Poqr Vedi Community	Members of the Council of Elders	3	April 10, 2019

	10	C	Poqr Vedi Community	Norik Martirosyan / Mayor Nelli / Staff	2	April 10, 2019
	11	C	Poqr Vedi Community / Meeting with Farmers' Association	Virab Manukyan / farmer, water user	1	April 10, 2019
	12	B	Interview with CAA member mayor	Ara Mkrtchyan / Mayor of Qasagh community	1	April 15, 2019
	13	C	Gyumri Municipality	Members of the Council of Elders	3	April 11, 2019
Political Parties not represented in the Government	14	A	Sasna Tsrer Pan-Armenian Party	Varuzhan Avetisyan Garegin Chugaszyan	2	April 16, 2019
	15	B	Citizens' Decision Social-Democratic Party	Suren Sahakyan Mikayel Nahapetyan	2	April 8, 2019
Civil society organizations, civic activists, unions, NGOs, umbrella organizations	16	A	Activists	Davit Petrosyan Tehmine Yenokyan Garik Miskaryan Hayk Grigoryan	4	April 9, 2019
	17	A	Coalition to Stop Violence Against Women	Zaruhi Hovhannisyan/ Coordinator Stella Chandiryan / Lawyer	2	April 8, 2019
	18	A	Community Finance Officers Association	Abraham Artashesyan / Deputy President	1	April 3, 2019
	19	A	Eurasia Partnership Foundation	Gevorg Ter-Gabrielyan / CEO Gayane Mkrtchyan/CSO DePo Expert Isablla Sargsyan/CSO DePo Expert	3	April 8, 2019

20	A	Freedom of Information Center Armenia	Shushan Doydoyan / Founcer	1	April 4, 2019
21	NA	Sakharov Armenian Human Rights Centre / Infotun	Seyran Martirosyan / Head Luiza Petrosyan-Zakeyan / InfoTun Coordinator	2	April 11, 2019
22	A	Helsinki Committee of Armenia	Avetik Ishkhanyan / President	1	April 5, 2019
23	A	NGO Center	Arpine Hakobyan / President	1	April 4, 2019
24	A	PINK NGO	Mamikon Hovsepyan/ Executive director	1	April 9, 2019
25	A	Shirak Center in Gyumri	Vahan Tumasyan / President	1	April 11, 2019
26	A	Transparency International Anti-Corruption Center	Sona Ayyazyan / Executive Director	1	April 9, 2019
27	A	Urban Foundation for Sustainable Development	Armen Varosyan / CoP Hayastan Stepanyan Armine Tukhikyan	3	April 3, 2019
28	B	Communities Association of Armenia	Emin Yeritsyan / President	1	April 15, 2019
29	B	Union of Informed Citizens	Daniel Ionissyan / President	1	April 3, 2019
30	A	Caucasus Research Resource Center (CRRC) Armenia	Heghine Manasyan / CEO	1	April 3, 2019
31	A	Turpanjian Center for Policy Analysis, AUA	Yevgenia Paturyan / Director	1	April 4, 2019

	32	NA	InfoTun Coordinators	Group interview with InfoTun Coordinators	8	April 9, 2019
	33	NA	Fund of the "Center of Legislation Development and Legal Researches" Ministry of Justice of RA	Nune Pepanyan/Civil Society Expert	1	May 6, 2019
Business/Private Sector Associations	34	C	SME Cooperation Association	Hakob Avagyan	1	April 17, 2019
	35	NA	Union of Advanced Technology Enterprises	Karen Vardanyan / President	1	April 17, 2019
Media, media-focused organizations, and journalists	36	A	Asparez Journalists' Club in Gyumri	Levon Barseghyan / President	1	April 5, 2019
	37	A	Association of Investigative Journalists	Edik Baghdasaryan/ President Christine Barseghyan / Manager of anti-corruption projects at Hetq	2	April 9, 2019
	38	A	Media Initiatives Center	Nouneh Sarkissian / Executive Director	1	April 5, 2019
	39	A	Radio Liberty	Hrayr Tamrazyan	1	April 17, 2019
	40	A	Tsasyg TV, Gyumri	Margarita Minasyan /Director	1	April 11, 2019
	41	B	EVN Report	Maria Titizian	1	April 2, 2019
	42	B	USAID financed MICE project Targeted Media	Anna Israelyan (Aravot Daily) Yuri Manvelyan (Epress)	2	April 5, 2019
	43	B	Yerevan Press Club	Boris Navasardyan / President	1	April 2, 2019

Donor Organizations, Embassies, International NGOs	44	A	EU Delegation to Armenia	Gregory Tsouris /Deputy Head of Cooperation	1	April 16, 2019
	45	A	Open Society Foundations	Larisa Minasyan / Executive Director Gayane Mamikonyan/Anti- Corruption Project Coordinator	2	April 8, 2019
	46	A	UNDP	Marina Malkhasyan / Youth Project Manager Marina Mkhitarian/ Kolba Innovations Lab Lead	2	April 14, 2019
	47	A	World Bank	Vigen Sargsyan/Senior Communications Officer	1	April 17, 2019
	48	B	UK Embassy	Steve Dodds/Head of Political and Press Section.	1	April 30, 2019
	49	C	NDI	Laura Nichols/Senior Resident Director Laura Simonyan/Program Officer	2	April 17, 2019
Citizen's meetings	50	C	Poqr Vedi Community	Meeting with the citizens	7	April 10, 2019
	51	C	Gyumri Municipality	Meeting with Citizens	7	April 11, 2019

APPENDIX 4. KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

INTERVIEWS (SEMI-STRUCTURED)

This guide is presented as a sample or illustrative interview protocol. Please note that, as interviews were semi-structured, these questions were not necessarily asked verbatim or in this order. Instead, the guide acted as a memory aide or a checklist for the interviewers, to ensure that relevant topics were covered to the extent possible. Additionally, successful semi-structured interviewing requires interviewer flexibility to pursue useful themes outside of those listed or to focus on a subset of themes where a source is particularly informative. As such, this guide served as a 'living' document during fieldwork, and questions may have been dropped, added, or revised during fieldwork.

INTRODUCTION

Thank you very much for taking the time to meet with us. Before we start, I'd like to give you a bit more context for the research. I'm an independent consultant engaged by the Cloudburst Group and an expert in governance assessments. Ms. Hasmik Tamamyan is a Monitoring and Evaluation professional here in Yerevan. Our Research Assistant, Ms. Astghik Mailyan, is also here to serve as a language interpreter.

We're assessing the civil society and media environment after the Velvet Revolution for USAID. We want to learn more about civil society and citizen engagement in advocating for and monitoring reform, policy priorities and capacity, and media reach and pluralism.

Your contribution is very important to us and we appreciate your time and input. Results of this interview may be used in assessment reporting, and this report will be made publicly available online. However, we will ask for your permission if we are considering a direct quote.

REFORM (ALL)

Now I would like to ask you about the current political environment.

1. What is your view of the current political environment?
2. What is your view of prospects for genuine reform?
3. What reforms/changes (if any) do you hope to see?

EXECUTIVE GOVERNMENT, PUBLIC AGENCIES, AND NATIONAL ASSEMBLY MPS

4. What are the government's current policy/legislation priorities?
5. What challenges does government expect in developing/implementing reforms?
6. During reform, where will constraints/challenges/pushback come from?
7. What is government's reform policy/implementation timeline?
8. What is your view of the CSO/NGOs (civil society sector)?
9. How could the **civil society** sector be useful/work with the government?
 - a. Participate/support the development of policy, legislation and related programs
 - b. Participate in policy/project monitoring
10. What is your view of the media?
11. How could the **media** sector be useful/work with government?

- a. Inform the public about government reform activities and progress
- b. Participate/support development of policy
- c. Support policy/project monitoring

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY STAFF

- 12. Is research focused on policy development and/or legislation conducted at the National Assembly?
- 13. If yes, what kind of research is conducted?
 - a. How do staff find information?
 - b. How prepared do you feel to conduct analyses?
- 14. What support might Assembly staff need or want to help you do your work professionally? [PROBE: possible avenues for advocacy and role/linkages of civil society in supporting research/analysis].

LOCAL AND REGIONAL GOVERNMENT

- 15. During reform, where will constraints/challenges/pushback come from?
- 16. What is your view of the CSO/NGOs (civil society sector)?
- 17. What is your view of the media?
- 18. What mechanisms exist for citizen/CSO participation in local governance?
 - a. How well do they work?
- 19. How could the **civil society** sector be useful/work with local government in support of citizen interests and more effective, participatory and transparent government?
- 20. How could the **media** sector be useful/work with local government in support of citizen interests and more effective, participatory and transparent government?

POLITICAL PARTIES NOT REPRESENTED IN THE GOVERNMENT

- 21. Do you think the “revolution” is long-term/permanent or do you expect to get back into power?
- 22. Based on lessons learned from the Velvet Revolution, would a returning conservative government do anything differently?
 - a. Governance priorities
 - b. Participation
- 23. What are the current policy/legislation priorities of the opposition parties/representatives?
- 24. What reforms proposed by/expected from the new government (if any) are opposition parties prepared to support?
- 25. During reform, where will constraints/challenges/pushback come from?
- 26. What is your view of the CSO/NGOs (civil society sector)?
- 27. What is your view of the media?

NATIONAL CSOS, THINK TANKS AND POLICY ANALYSTS

- 28. What are the policy/legislation priorities of the CSOs and of their constituencies?
- 29. What timeline do you think is feasible for policy reform and implementation?
- 30. During reform, where will constraints/challenges/pushback come from?
- 31. How could **civil society** sector be useful/work with government on policy reform and implementation?
 - a. Formal/informal dialogue mechanisms

- b. Advocacy initiatives
 - c. Legal process
 - d. Information sharing (about issues, government progress, citizen views)
 - e. Participate/support development of policy reform policy input
 - f. Supporting policy/project monitoring
32. How could the **media** sector be useful/work with civil society and government on policy reform and implementation?
33. How can CSOs increase their legitimacy with the public?
34. What capacities do you think are most important for CSOs to **serve as advocates/monitors**?
35. What capacities do you think are most important for CSOs to **link with constituencies**?
36. Has CSO worked with other organizations in a network or coalition? Are more/stronger coalitions needed to advocate on particular issues? Why or why not.

LOCAL CSOS

37. What are the policy/legislation priorities of your CSO and of your constituency?
- a. Local level priorities
 - b. National level priorities
38. What timeline do you think is feasible for policy reform and implementation (national level reform)?
39. During reform, where will constraints/challenges/pushback come from?
40. How could the civil society sector be useful/work with local government in developing local projects/addressing local issues?
41. How could the civil society sector be useful/work with local government in expanding citizen oversight/monitoring?
42. How could the **media** sector be useful/work with local government in **developing local projects/addressing local issues**?
43. How could the media sector be useful/work with local government in **expanding citizen oversight/monitoring**?
44. What local level mechanisms are available for civil society-media interactions?
- a. How well do they work?
45. How can CSOs increase their legitimacy with citizens?
46. What capacities do you think are most important for CSOs to **serve as advocates/monitors**?
47. What capacities do you think are most important for CSOs to **link with constituencies**?
48. How can local CSOs bring significant local concerns to the attention of relevant national government institutions?

BUSINESS/PRIVATE SECTOR ASSOCIATIONS

49. Is the private sector supportive of reform?
50. What are the policy/legislation priorities of the private sector organizations and their members?
51. If the private sector is interested in reform:
- a. What timeline do you think is feasible for policy reform and implementation?
 - b. During reform, where will constraints/challenges/pushback come from?
52. Does private sector undertake advocacy? If Yes:
- a. On what issues?
 - b. How do you advocate?
 - c. How successful have you been?
53. How does the private sector view the civil society sector and the media?

54. Does the private sector share interests with citizens/civil society sector on which they can join forces? *[Issues might include: improving education; freedom of information]*
55. If shared interests /or issues of concern exist, how can civil society and business work together to effect change?

MEDIA, MEDIA-FOCUSED ORGANIZATIONS, AND JOURNALISTS

56. What reform priorities do media outlets and media organizations consider most important?
57. What timeline do you think is feasible for policy reform and implementation?
58. During reform, where will constraints/challenges/pushback come from?
59. What is your view of the CSO sector as:
 - a. Advocates?
 - b. Information conduits?
 - c. Watchdogs?
 - d. Representatives of particular constituencies?
60. How can media and the civil society sector work together to support reform efforts?
61. What are the most effective media mediums?
 - a. How does this vary by cohort (e.g. rural/urban; youth/older citizens), if at all?
62. What are the most effective program formats?
 - a. How does this vary by cohort (e.g. rural/urban; youth/older citizens), if at all?
63. How can media expand its reach?
64. How can media improve its communications with audiences?
65. What enabling environment issues support the expansion of a free and objective media?
66. What constraints is media facing?
 - a. What remedies may be pursued, if any?

DONOR ORGANIZATIONS, EMBASSIES, INTERNATIONAL NGOS

67. What is your view of the CSO/NGOs (civil society sector)?
68. What is your view of the media?
69. What are the policy priorities of other donors?
70. What do you view as gaps in support that may need to be filled?

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

71. What are your policy/legislation priorities?
72. What timeline do you think is feasible for policy reform and implementation?
73. During reform, where will constraints/challenges/pushback come from?
74. How do you view the work and role of **CSO/NGOs** (civil society sector)?
75. How could **CSOs** develop stronger synergies with social movements?
76. How do you view the work and role of the **media**?
77. How could the **media** develop stronger synergies with social movements?

COMMUNITY

78. What are your policy/legislation priorities?
 - a. Local level
 - b. National level
79. What timeline do you think is feasible for policy reform and implementation (national level reform)?

80. What is your view of CSO/NGOs (civil society sector)?
81. What is your view of the media?
82. How do you get your information?
83. How can **civil society** help citizens better understand reform processes?
84. How can the **media** help citizens better understand reform processes?
85. How can CSOs/NGOs more effectively link to citizens to government?
 - c. Local government
 - d. National government
86. How can CSOs/NGOs can increase their legitimacy with the public?

CONCLUSION (ALL)

87. Do you have any final comments that you wish to share?
88. Are there any questions that you would like to ask me?

APPENDIX 5. TABLES OF ASSESSMENT FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

TABLE 7: RECOMMENDATIONS BY PRIORITY LEVEL

SECTOR RECOMMENDATION PRIORITIES	IMPLEMENTATION TIMEFRAME
HIGH	
CIVIC INITIATIVES	
1. Support CSO activities that assist civic initiatives, particularly in areas of legal representation and monitoring	1-2 years
2. Establish dialogue between civil society activists, grassroots civil activists, and civic initiative activists in order to ascertain what kind of outside support civic initiatives may be comfortable accepting	1-2 years
CIVIC EDUCATION	
3. Community level civic education	1-2 years
5. Social media management training for civil society, media and government	1 year
6. Production/broadcast of news-related discussion programs that promote dialogue and respect for pluralism	2 years
8. Grants to journalists to cover “social transformation” issues	1 year
9. Communications training for government officials	1 year
CIVIL SOCIETY	
11.a. Legal standing of CSOs on public interest issues	Support when political will exists
11.b. Government oversight of CSOs by the tax authorities	Current on CSO sector agenda
12.a. Local-level project and expenditure monitoring through community-based groups	2 years
14. Support new independent business associations	1-2 years
17. Establish quick grant mechanism to support CSO reform initiatives	1 year
18.a. Public information grant sub-component	2 years
19. “Marketplace” website to fill expertise gap	1 year
20. CSO advocacy skills training	1-2 years
22. Capacity support to government bodies responsible for responding to advocacy initiatives	1 year
23. Government-CSO dialogues to reform participation mechanisms	1 year (start with ministries where political will/interest exists)
26. Joint CSO-NA staff training to fill expertise gap	1 year

27. CSO training for government institutions	As required
30. Issue-training (and analytical skills, if needed), for new government officials / members of the National Assembly	1 year
30.a. Establish formal and effective mechanisms for government-CSO collaboration	2 years
30.c. Increase the period currently allowed for public comment on e-Draft web platform	1 year
MEDIA	
31. Social media management training for media	1 year
32.c. Develop a Public TV online platform	2-3 years
36.a. Legislative reform: Law on TV and Radio—Multiplexer Operation	1 year
36.b. Legislative reform: Licensing Transparency for Broadcast Media	1 year
36.c. Legislative reform: Law on Transparency in Media Ownership and Financial Sources	1 year
37. Support investment by the public broadcaster and independent media outlets to update their infrastructure and adapt to technological advances in the media sector	2-3 years
38. Legislative reform: Protection of journalists and related labor rights	1 year
41. Organizational reform: Council of Public TV and Radio Broadcasting	1 year
42. Establish effective and independent body to respond to and resolve FOI disputes	2 years
43. Train relevant government officials/staff on FOI procedures	1 year
45. Communications training for ministers and ministry officials/staff	1 year
46. Civic education for journalists	1 year
48. Capacity support for journalists and grants to journalists to cover “social transformation” issues	1 year
52. Protecting speech: digital security	1 year
MEDIUM	
CIVIC EDUCATION	
4. Civic education in schools	2-3 years
7.a. Develop/broadcast soap operas/TV series that integrate civic education/social transformation issues	2-3 years
7.b. Develop/broadcast dialogue programs with comedy segments interspersed	2 years
7.c. Development/broadcast of television programs that engage students and youth	2 years

CIVIL SOCIETY	
10. Raise awareness regarding new CSO registration guidelines	2 years
11.c. Endowment law	Support when political will exists
12.b. Local—national level advocacy linkage-building	3-5 years
12.d. Local organization training on substantive issues and participation strategies	2-3 years
13.a. Leadership development training/activities for female CSO officials/staff	3-4 years
13.b. Mentorship activities for women to learn about leadership and the processes of governance	4-5 years
16. Develop the capacity of State Register and SRC Department of Non-Profits' Oversight staff	1-2 years
18.c. Organizational capacity development grant sub-component	2-5 years
24. Grant mechanism to fund utilization of CSO expertise in the NA	1-2 years
28. Policy research/resource center for CSOs, media, and NA staff	2-3 years
30.d. Establish a professional research service in the NA	2-3 years
MEDIA	
32.a. Develop/produce soap operas/TV series that integrate civic/social education for the Armenian context	2-3 years
32.b. Develop/produce student/youth focused dialogue/debate programs	2 years
33. Bolster Armenian Public TV and public broadcasting in order to make sure it is independent from the government	2-3 years
34. Support development and maintenance of more fact checking sites to assess massive amount of information that is made available online	2-3 years
35. Support organizations that consistently monitor and report on cases of media obstruction and violence	Continuous
39.a. Cross-sector FOI campaign	2 years
39.b. Support to persons/organizations that assist FOI complainants	2-3 years
40. Support and/or provide resources to facilitate enforcement of existing media laws by the government	Support when political will exists
44. Improve government websites	2 years
47. Support partnerships between media outlets and journalism schools so that journalism students are able to get hands-on practice	3-5 years
49. Core journalist skills training	Continuous
55. Endowment law	Support when political will exists

LOW	
CIVIL SOCIETY	
12.c. Proposal development training for local organizations	3-5 years
15. Support charitable contributions deduction legislation	4 years
18.b. Government relations grant sub-component	4-5 years
20.b. Coalition building capacity support	5 years
21.a. Civil society/media cross sector internships/exchanges	3-5 years
21.b. Training internships for CSO staff and journalists not based in Yerevan	3-5 years
21.c. International exchange opportunities	4-5 years
30.b. Support ministries in organizing informal participatory mechanisms	4-5 years
25. Grants for CSOs to conduct monitoring on behalf of the NA	4-5 years
29. NA internship program for young professionals	4-5 years
30.d. Revise civil service regulations to allow government personnel to conduct necessary monitoring of government premises	4-5 years
MEDIA	
50. Development of online courses	5 years
51. Regional/international journalist training program	3-4 years
53. Alumni newsletter for youth monitors and citizen journalists	3-4 years
54. Media audience measurement and audience research	4-5 years
56. Media sustainability business and financial management training	5 years
57. Media sector umbrella association	5 years

TABLE 8: FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS BY SECTOR

FINDINGS	ASSESSMENT	RECOMMENDATIONS
CIVIC INITIATIVES AND CIVIL SOCIETY		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gaps in civic education exists across the country; dialogue around issues including basics of democratic governance, pluralism, criticism, and participation would be useful. • Criticism of the government (e.g., pace of change/reform) is now possible; on the most part, it is milder than the aggressive criticism meted out to the previous government. • Civil society does not want to undermine the new reform-focused government. • Government itself is generally not complaining about criticism it is receiving from civil society and media. • More vociferous criticisms of reform government come from government officials and oligarchs associated with the previous government. • Attacks on the critics come from the public (e.g., citizens who come from a culture that sees criticism as confrontation, not as constructive; from people that say that the critics are sympathetic to the previous regime). Public needs to understand and embrace values of democracy to make the revolution sustainable. • People still practice previous civic initiatives and revolution-learned tactics ranging from demonstration and protest, civil disobedience, shutting down highways and municipal buildings. In some cases, demonstrations/actions are based on personal issues, e.g., to get rid of mayor, and not adhere to democratic processes. 	<p>Opportunities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government and National Assembly are sympathetic to civil society sector and media. • Support for current government has continued. • Donor interest in supporting reform efforts exists. • Armenia diaspora is willing to provide help. <p>Constraints:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government has been slow to implement reforms. • Government dominated by new, inexperienced staff. • Mid-level of Government/NA bureaucracy is obstacle: may be sympathetic to previous government or simply slow in responding to needs. • Lack of expertise in NA. • Lack of communication skills in government/NA. • Multiple processes for formal civil society participation (in ministry and NA) exist; utilization of these processes is varied. • Citizen expectations may be significantly higher than government capacity to deliver. • Citizen expectations at the local level may be frustrated by lack of real de-concentration of power and finances. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Support CSO activities that assist civic initiatives, particularly in areas of legal representation and monitoring. 2. Establish dialogue between civil society activists, grassroots civil activists, and civic initiative activists (populations that may overlap but not one-to-one) in order to ascertain what kind of outside support civic initiatives may be comfortable accepting. 3. Community level civic education discussions/activities designed for the general public. 4. Civic education in schools. 5. Social media management training. 6. Produce/broadcast news-related discussion programs that promote dialogue and respect for pluralism. 7. Create entertainment media with civic education components. This can include support for: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. The development of soap operas/TV series that embed/integrate civic education/social transformation issues into program plots. b. The development of dialogue programs with comedy segments interspersed to keep listeners engaged and make criticism more palatable. c. The development of programs that engage students and youth. 8. Grants to journalists to cover “social transformation” issues in informative, sensitive, humanizing and relatable ways. 9. Communications training for government.

- Civic understanding needs to improve (ranging from understanding democratic process and pluralism, constructive engagement and criticism).
- Education needs to be improved to include areas such as critical thinking.
- “Family values” debate may sow tension.
- Role/position of women still needs to be strengthened.
- Economic need continues to dominate individual interests.
- Armenia’s geo-political position and affiliations with Russia require attention and delicate maneuvering.

CSOS, ENABLING ENVIRONMENT/CAPACITY, AND CSO/GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

- CSOs are not necessarily trusted or known. Distrust of CSOs is rooted in money and politics: CSO dependence on donors and funders means that issues pursued, or projects implemented, are responsive to donor interests, not necessarily local or national needs or concerns. Activities and CSO credibility are also undermined by the relatively short-term nature of grants: projects, campaigns, initiatives last as long as the funding does and then disappear. Core support is not assured, so organizations need to dance with as many partners as they can.
- Negative public opinion of civil society actors has also been re-enforced by the biases of the previous government messaging, which led the public to believe that CSOs were destroying Armenia. While organizations may not be known or trusted, particular persons who are leaders of CSOs, however, are often recognized and trusted.
- At present the civil society sector appears not to have undergone its own revolution. Nonetheless the civil society sector is both burgeoning and dividing. A new generation of CSOs is emerging.
- Dividing lines are often defined in the context of organizational camps that are identified as government NGOs (GONGOs) and “pocket” organizations, and

Opportunities:

- Some CSO staff has moved to Govt/NA and are sympathetic to the sector.
- CSOs are willing to work together in civic actions and ad hoc coalitions – even when they disagree on other issues.
- Citizens are more active in local governance.

Challenges:

- Division between CSOs connected to previous government and those supporting current govt.
- CSOs not willing to work together formally (e.g., longer-term coalitions; apex organizations).
- Capacity gaps, particularly in the realm of advocacy (research, analysis, communication).

10. CSO registration.

11. Legislative and regulatory reform.

- a. Legal standing of CSOs on public interest issues.
- b. Government oversight of CSOs by the tax authorities.
- c. Endowment law.

12. CSO capacity support at the local level.

- a. Support local monitoring and social audits.
- b. Local and national advocacy linkage-building.
- c. Train local organizations in basic proposal development.
- d. Train local organizations regarding 1) substantive issue with which they deal, and 2) effective participation strategies.

13. Addressing the gender gap.

<p>organizations that are not identified with the former government. These division lines between organizations that are identified with the previous government and those that are not, may create policy challenges, but are not considered definitely negative. Some, however, may slow forward movement of policy reform. In general, organizations appear willing to work together on issues of common interest, on an ad hoc basis, even if partners are considered to be affiliated with the previous government.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Bottom up civil society linkages continue to need strengthening. ● Lessons learned from previous civic initiatives and the Velvet Revolution may lead to occasional over-reliance on civil disobedience actions (e.g., closing highways; shutting down municipal offices). ● Donor dependence poses legitimacy and agenda constraints. ● CS organizations generally distrusted. ● Some CSO staff has moved to Government/NA. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Support capacity/leadership development training and activities. b. Support mentors and mentorship activities. <p>14. Anti-corruption and business advocacy.</p> <p>15. Support charitable contributions deduction legislation.</p> <p>16. Develop the capacity of officials working in the State Register and SRC Department of Non-Profits' Oversight.</p> <p>17. Establish quick grant mechanism to support reform efforts as issue and legislative initiatives arise.</p> <p>18. Quick grant mechanisms or issue/advocacy project grants might support grant sub-components including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Public information funding sub-component. b. Government relations funding sub-component. c. Organizational capacity development sub-component. <p>19. Support a “marketplace” website that makes available information regarding issue experts, data collection experts, researchers and analysts that are able fill the expertise gap across the CSO sector, on as-needed basis.</p> <p>20. Advocacy skills and training.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Support training in core advocacy skills. b. Coalition building. <p>21. Internships, fellowships and exchanges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Cross sector internships/exchanges. b. Training internships for CSO staff and journalists not based in Yerevan. c. International exchange opportunities for CSO staff and journalists are useful and welcome. <p>22. Provide capacity support to government bodies that are responsible for responding to advocacy initiatives that are being funded and supported.</p>
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23. Government-CSO dialogues to reform participation mechanisms.
24. Establish grant mechanism to fund the utilization of CSO expertise support to the NA.
25. Grants to conduct monitoring on behalf of the NA.
26. Joint CSO-NA staff training to fill expertise gap: Training areas include:
 - a. Sector issues;
 - b. Cross-sector issues (e.g., gender, human rights, anti-corruption);
 - c. Research/analysis skills;
 - d. Analysis skills regarding risks of draft laws and impact assessments; and
 - e. Facebook / Social Media Management Training for Committee for staff who oversee Committee Facebook pages.
27. CSO training for government institutions.
28. Policy research/resource center for CSOs, media, and NA staff.
29. NA internship program for young professionals.
30. Provide issue training (and analytical skills, if needed), to new government officials and members of the National Assembly.
 - a. Establish formal and effective government-CSO collaboration mechanisms.
 - b. Support ministries in organizing informal participatory mechanisms, including non-mandated hearings.
 - c. e-Draft web platform.
 - d. National Assembly.

MEDIA

- Preferences in information sources: youth prefers social networks/social media to traditional media, older population watches TV. At local level, word of mouth is also a mechanism for information-sharing.

Opportunities:

- Varied use of media outlets.
- Media-engaged population.

31. Provide training in social media management to media and CSOs to enable them to produce useful and interesting Facebook content and attract more readers.

- There is a sense that public TV is less controlled than it has been in the past. But the only truly independent media are grantees: Factor TV (OSF); Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Hetq, EVN Report, etc. Since this is a small market for media, and media outlets need funding, oligarchs and politician often fund outlets, which are then constrained in their reporting (or at least say they will not report negatively about the person). Without a media law that makes media ownership/resource base transparent, the public does not know who is behind media outlets and what self-censorship is being imposed.
- Like the CSO sector, media outlets have lost talent, e.g., about 20 representatives of media are now MPs.
- Legislative reform initiatives that are critical to a vibrant media are coming up soon. Media-focused CSOs will collaborate on reform issues via ad-hoc coalitions.

Challenges:

- Public TV readiness to play a role in social transformation.
- Oligarchs, previous government-affiliated officials continue to exert great influence on the media (through various platforms).
- Many media outlets exist; few are wholly independent.
- Journalists constrained by self-censorship where media is financed by oligarchs.
- Lack of capacity: fact checking, investigative reporting.
- Questions about financial sustainability.
- Hate speech on Facebook and other media platforms.
- Current use of Facebook by government in lieu of, not together with, use of government/ministry website.
- FOI exists, but responses to those people/organizations that are not know/important are limited.
- Need for Armenian language international news sources to expand viewer perspectives (many watch/ use Russian media for news outside of Armenia).
- Need for reform: multiplex license; transparency of tv/radio license application/selection.

32. Improve media information and entertainment programs to increase civic awareness and attract viewers, particularly those who watch Russian language TV.
33. Bolster Armenian Public TV and public broadcasting in order to make sure it is independent from the government.
34. Support development and maintenance of more fact checking sites to assess massive amount of information that is made available online.
35. Support organizations that consistently monitor and report on cases of media obstruction and violence that may occur against journalists.
36. Support media and media-focused organizations in developing and advocating for legislative initiatives that are of concern to the sector.
37. Support investment by the public broadcaster and independent media outlets into update their infrastructure and adapt to technological advances in the media sector.
38. Support discussions and legislation focused on the protection of journalists and related labor rights.
39. Consider support for a cross-sector FOI campaign and provide support to persons/organizations that assist FOI complainants.
40. Support and/or provide resources to facilitate enforcement of existing media laws by the government.
41. Support organizational reform for the Council of Public TV and Radio Broadcasting.
42. Establish an effective and independent body to respond to and resolve FOI disputes.
43. Train government officials/staff responsible for FOI responses on legal expectations and response procedures.
44. Improve government websites to ensure that they are user-friendly, consistently updated, and have comparable formats.
45. Train ministers and ministry officials/staff on communications skills that will enable them to work the media effectively.
46. Civic education for journalists.

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47. Support partnerships between media outlets and journalism schools so that journalism students are able to get hands-on practice.
 48. Capacity support for journalists.
 49. Continue to make available core journalist skills training, including fact checking and investigative reporting.
 50. The development of online courses, which may be developed in partnerships between CSOs, media and the IT sector.
 51. Provide journalists with hands on training and practice through training programs abroad.
 52. Digital security and the protection of speech.
 53. Alumni newsletter for youth monitors and citizen journalists.
 54. Media audience measurement and audience research.
 55. Support initiatives that focus on the development and passage of an endowment law.
 56. Media sustainability training.
 57. Support a media sector umbrella association to coordinate and advocate for media interests.
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APPENDIX 6. OUTBRIEFING POWERPOINT PRESENTATION



OUTLINE

- 1) PURPOSE
- 2) RESEARCH QUESTIONS
- 3) METHODOLOGY
- 4) INITIAL FINDINGS
- 5) NEXT STEPS



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ASSESSMENT PURPOSE

- Understand changing context after the 2018 Armenian Velvet Revolution
- Support USAID/Armenia's Development Objective 2, more participatory, effective, and accountable governance



CORE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. **Political Environment:** What are the post-revolution political/social dynamics, constraints and opportunities for the civil society and media sectors?
2. **Civil Society:** What are the current challenges and opportunities for advancing Armenia's democratic transition and consolidation?
3. **Media:** What post-revolution challenges and opportunities affect media outlets and their objectivity?
4. **Donors:** What is USAID's comparative advantage? What are the gaps in planned donor assistance?

METHODOLOGY

- Informed by three academic Evidence Reviews, particularly Civil Society and Media Evidence Review
- Desk research (prior to fieldwork)
- Field research from April 3-17
- Qualitative semi-structured interviews (individual and group; 81 interviewees) with interpreter
- Interviews in 1) Yerevan, 2) Gyumri, and 3) Poqr Vedi

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INTERVIEWS & SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Armenia government officials

Members and staff of National Assembly

“Social movement” leaders

National and local CSOs, including coalitions/networks

Policy and academic analysts/think tanks

Journalists and media

Bi- and multi-lateral donors

Communities/citizens, reform activists, and representatives of sectors (e.g., media outlets, mayors)

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FINDINGS: ACADEMIC EVIDENCE REVIEW

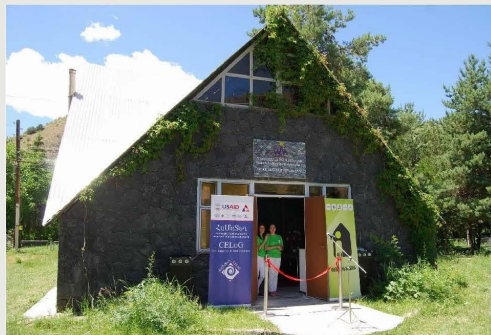
- Protest-based civil society may mean there is no umbrella group to direct reform; reformers may fragment
- Key media challenges are developing alternative sources of information and establishing independent public service broadcasting
- Donors face difficulties since outside support makes civil society organization's unpopular
- Euphoria around Pashinyan – overreliance on one person

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FINDINGS: INFOTUNS

- Group interview with InfoTun coordinators and site visit to Gyumri
- USAID helped increase capacity in monitoring, advocacy, internet/media literacy
- Need: consistent rural engagement (internet literacy); more community inclusion in selecting monitoring issues



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FINDINGS: OTHER DONORS

- European Union
 - Civil society: Capacity building of civil society for policy dialogue, Diaspora technical assistance, Social enterprise, Impact Investment fund, Local authorities
 - Media: New Media Facility
- UNDP
 - Women in politics, Citizen (youth) engagement, CSO grant pool for accountability work
- World Bank
 - Irrigation / local water governance, strengthening livelihoods with CS follow on

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INITIAL FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

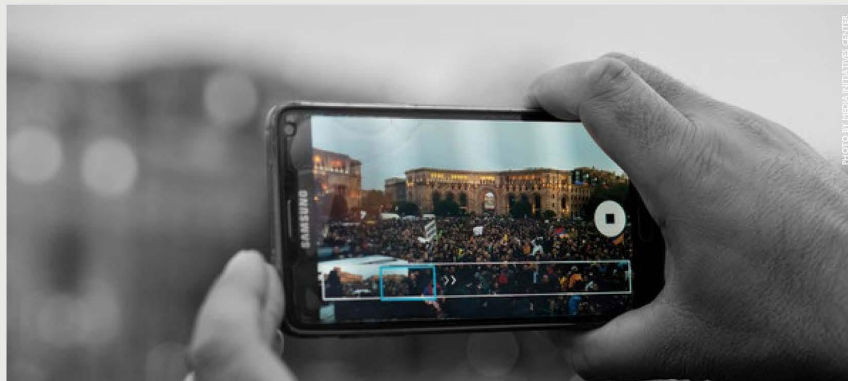
- Civil Society
 - Civil society and government
 - CSO enabling environment
 - Civil society capacity
 - Advocacy – Prospects for CS Collaboration
 - Organizational capacity
 - Governance, civil society and business sector
- Civic Education
- Media
 - Enabling environment
 - Capacity development

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NEXT STEPS

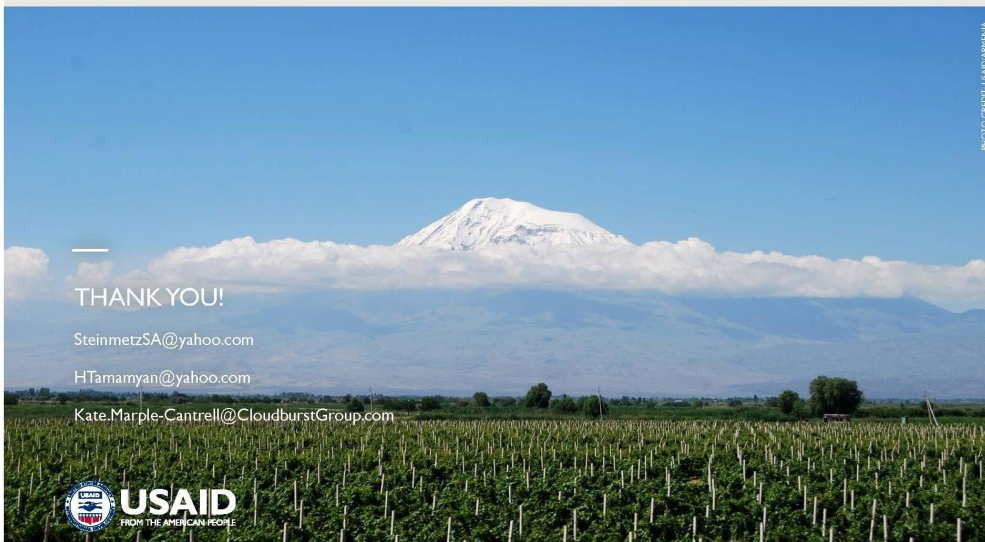
- Final assessment report (Summer 2019)
- Expand discussion of opportunities, challenges, recommendations
- Update VDem indicator analysis



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THANK YOU!

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