

Meeting of Local Advisory Group Minutes

Date: 30.10.2017

Time: 11:00-12:30

Venue: TCC Grand Plaza, Skopje

Attendees:

LAG members: Nikica Kusinikova, Misha Popovikj, Fani Karanfilova-Panovska, Irena Ivanova, Ivana Petrovska, Dragan Sekulovski, Gordana Gopic-Dimitrovska, Sashko Jovanov, Eli Cakar, Vesna Tasevska

TACSO national office: Suncica Sazdovska, Valentina Atanasovska

Representatives from the TACSO resource centre by MCIC: Emina Nuredinoska, Jasmina Chaushoska

Guests: Nicola Bertolini – EU Delegation; Snezana Kolekeska – EU Delegation; Melita Cokrevska – USAID; Ana Drakic – USAID Civic Engagement Project; Suzana Nikodijevic Filipovska – General Secretariat of the Government; Orhideja Kaljosevska – Secretariat for European Affairs

Absentees:

LAG members: Zoran Ilieski, Ana Cholovic Leshoska, Toshe Panovski, Jasminka Popovska, Ana Janevska Deleva, Samet Skenderi

Agenda

Chairperson: Nikica Kusinikova

11:00 - 11:10	<i>Welcome coffee</i>
11:10 - 11:20	<i>Introduction</i>
11:20 - 12:00	<i>Presentation of results from the TACSO project</i> <i>Presentation-Suncica Sazdovska, Discussion</i>
12:00 - 12:15	<i>Information about regional conference Monitoring of the EU Guidelines for support to civil society 2014-2020</i> <i>Introduction – Suncica Sazdovska, Discussion</i>
12:15 - 12:30	<i>Other</i> <i>Discussion</i>
12:30 - 13:00	<i>Cocktail</i>

Discussion

At the very beginning the chairperson welcomed everyone to the last meeting of the Local Advisory Group under this phase of the TACSO project. The main objective of the meeting was to present the eight years of implementation of the TACSO project in Macedonia.

Presentation of results from the TACSO project

Ms. Suncica Sazdovska in her presentation gave overview of the project history, main project statistics, the TACSO guiding principles as well as the main activities, achievements and results per components. The regional dimension of the TACSO project was also covered in her presentation. Full presentation is attached to the minutes.

In the discussion, it was asked about the project budget for TACSO Macedonia as well as the mayor impact that the project has achieved.

Ms. Sazdovska informed that the total project budget for the last four years was 10.5 million Euros, however, the budget for implementing activities in Macedonia for the four-year period is around 450.000 EUR (without experts and project staff).

The project was focused on capacity building of CSOs, and although official impact assessment has not been done, still the evaluations of the participants and the outputs of the capacity building events point out significant impact on improving CSOs' capacities (strategic plans prepared, fundraising strategies prepared, increased interest in preparing project applications, etc.). However, the impact with respect to the enabling environment for CSOs seems to be limited as the council has not been established yet, the public funding system has not been reformed. Still the project activities provided good base to develop the debate further. In addition, the changes of the Government give some positive signals.

LAG members added that still the TACSO mandate was to bring stakeholders together, to raise awareness and to inform, not to advocate directly for changes. CSOs should advocate, since TACSO gave good basis for further advocacy actions of CSOs.

Additionally, it was stated that another TACSO outcome is the Local Advisory Group as the unique mixed body that was missing in Macedonia, and the establishment of LAG should be considered as one of the biggest impact of TACSO.

It was also stated that TACSO was a recognized brand among CSOs, especially with the help desk and the services that it provided, especially the monthly funding overview.

The EUD representative stated that the numbers presented are impressive. TACSO has incredible number of achievements, however, impact assessment is missing. In order to do impact assessment, specific methodology should be implemented that is costly. In his view, TACSO was very functional for EU guidelines and in addition the monitoring of EU Guidelines gives feed-back to TACSO impact as well. It was informed that there will be TACSO 3, however, there will be a gap.

Having in mind the importance of LAG as an open forum, it was proposed that LAG continues to function, even in the absence of TACSO. During this TACSO gap, EUD could take the responsibility for organising LAG meetings.

Another LAG member stated that the benefit of being LAG member is receiving information in advance, sharing experience among each other in LAG, but in general very impressive was the provision of expert's assistance within help-desk free of charge for CSOs.

A question was posed about the project visibility and which events organised by TACSO had the largest media coverage.

It was explained that TACSO's aim was to be visible among CSOs and this goal was reached having in mind that according to the last IPSOS survey, 80% of CSOs that responded to the survey are familiar with the TACSO services, which is the highest percentage of all TACSO offices. Concerning TACSO events, media coverage was the largest for those events that had ministers at the opening addressing.

With respect to the question about lessons learnt, it was informed that the project tried to cover all different demands and needs of CSOs, however that was done to the cost of losing the focus and continuity of certain issues. In addition, small number of international experts were used in the project, thus less international expertise was used and the project relied more on national expertise and the resource centre by MCIC.

Concerning the coverage of CSOs with TACSO services, it was explained that the database of TACSO beneficiaries overlaps to great extent with the database of active CSOs from Central Register of Macedonia because when the database was purchased in 2014 from Central Register an E-mail was sent to all with information about the TACSO project and question whether they would like to be added to the TACSO mailing list.

The Government representatives at the meeting expressed gratitude for being part of the TACSO LAG, gratitude to TACSO for assisting the institutions in their initiatives by sharing information but also by organising events in cooperation with the relevant government institutions.

Information about regional conference "Monitoring of the EU Guidelines for support to civil society 2014-2020"

Ms. Suncica Sazdovska informed about the regional conference on Monitoring EU Guidelines Year 3 (presentation attached).

During the discussion, it was informed that there were changes to the Law on personal income tax, and pursuant to those changes CSOs are not obliged to pay personal income tax for participants at events.

At the end of the meeting Ms. Nikica Kusinikova summarised the discussions and Ms. Suncica Sazdovska expressed gratitude to all LAG members for the great cooperation and for their commitment and contribution to TACSO project.