



“SUPPORT TO SOCIAL SECTOR REFORMS IN ARMENIA”

Program

Quarterly Progress Report January – March 2015



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<i>Total Program Cost:</i>	\$3,700,819.00
<i>Consortium Partners:</i>	1. Mission Armenia - Lead Partner 2. Counterpart International 3. Urban Foundation for Sustainable Development 4. Child Development Foundation

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i. List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

CDF	Child Development Foundation
CIG	Civic Initiative Groups
CPI	Counterpart International
CRRC	Caucasus Research Resource Center
CSO	Civil Society Organization
GoA	Government of Armenia
IR	Intermediary Result
ISS	Integrated Social Services
MA	Mission Armenia
MLSA	Ministry of Labor and Social Issues
PMEP	Performance Monitoring and Evaluation Plan
PRIP	Pension Reform Implementation Program
RoA	Republic of Armenia
RFA	Request for Application
SSSRA	Support to Social Sector Reforms in Armenia
UFSD	Urban Foundation for Sustainable Development

ii. Background

In December 2014, in response to the submitted proposal for *RFA No. 111-14-000003: Advanced Civil Society for Accountable Governance Project*, Mission Armenia was awarded USD 3,349,187.00 under the USAID Cooperative Agreement No.: AID-111-A-15-00003 for the implementation of the “**Support to Social Sector Reforms in Armenia**” program.

This is a five-year program and focuses on Social Sector Reforms under *Civil Society Consortium 2* of the mentioned RFA. The program directly supports the **Intermediate Result 2.1**: “*More participatory, effective and accountable governance*” and its sub-IRs under Development Objective 2 of the USAID Country Development Cooperation Strategy for 2013-2017.

The overarching **goal** of the program is to promote improved and sustained social protection system in Armenia that is effectively responsive to the needs and concerns of the citizens. The program seeks to achieve the following key **results**:

- Result Area 1: Civil Society’s ability to engage citizens and articulate their interests improved and sustained;
- Result Area 2: Monitoring of government institutions, officials and policy processes strengthened;
- Result Area 3: Citizen access to independent and reliable information increased;
- Result Area 4: Civil society enabling environment improved.

These Results are supported by a wide scope of activities focused on capacity building, creation of community platforms, sub-grants management, advocacy, monitoring, gap analysis, and visibility. The program is to intervene in 29 communities/districts of Yerevan and eight provinces of Armenia, including Ararat, Shirak, Gegharkunik, Lori, Kotayk, Syunik, Armavir, and Tavush.

A consortium of four local and international organizations implements the program, namely:

1. Mission Armenia - Armenia-based NGO, the lead organization;
2. Urban Foundation for Sustainable Development - Armenia-based NGO;
3. Child Development Foundation - Armenia-based NGO;
4. Counterpart International - US-based NGO.

Mission Armenia, Urban Foundation for Sustainable Development and Child Development Foundation serve as the primary implementers of the program, while Counterpart International provides capacity building and assistance in key technical and management areas. The major roles of the Consortium are to:

1. mobilize and empower citizens with relevant capacities to ensure citizens’ engagement in the monitoring of social sector reforms that Government of Armenia (GoA) has recently introduced in Armenia to the pension system, social services and child protection services;
2. strengthen the capacity of CSOs to monitor these reforms and provide quality services in line with the Integrated Social Services (ISS) principals;
3. engage in monitoring and advocacy for the realization of these social sector reforms;
4. develop evidence-based recommendations for further improvement of reforms and the better protection of social rights.

1. Political Context / Enabling Environment

Political Situation:

Meeting of the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly: On March 16, prior to its two-day fourth plenary session in Yerevan, Euronest Parliamentary Assembly had a meeting with civil society representatives of Eastern Partnership region. They discussed the challenges and achievements of Eastern Partnership. They also touched upon the new strategic situation in the region and the aspirations of some countries; the success and failures in reforms to promote democracy. Civil society representatives voiced their concerns and suggestions on European Neighborhood and EU regional policy.

Prime Ministers' Club: On the initiative of Prime Minister Hovik Abrahamyan the first meeting of the Prime Ministers' Club took place (26 March 2015) aimed at discussing the economic and political issues of the country. Hovik Abrahamyan, Vazgen Manukyan, Gagik Harutyunyan, Khosrov Harutyunyan and Hrant Bagratyan took part in the meeting and agreed on holding similar meetings on a regular basis.

<http://www.armradio.am/en/2015/03/26/prime-ministers-club-holds-first-meeting/>

Prosperous Armenia Party Announced the Party as an Opposition:

On March 23, before the start of National Assembly four-day session Naira Zohrabyan, the newly elected leader of Prosperous Armenia Party announced the Party as an opposition. The decision about this position shift was made during the extraordinary congress of the Party. During the same congress, Gagik Tsarukyan announced about leaving the politics and his position as the party leader. <http://armenianow.com/hy/node/61186>.

Local Referendums: On December 17, 2014 the National Assembly approved Amendments to the Law on Local Referendum of RA. Armenia has a Law on Local Referendum since 2002 but no referendum was conducted since then. First referendums will be conducted in May 17, 2015 in the context of community consolidation in 3 clusters of pilot communities to be consolidated. <http://www.gov.am/en/news/item/7800/>

Social-Economic Context

Within the reporting period, no improvements were observed in the social-economic situation in Armenia. Armenia had regress in the economic freedom ratings by the Heritage Foundation and continued losing its positions. Armenia's foreign and local currency ratings were reduced three times (Fitch Ratings agency). According to the Gallup International survey results conducted among the population in Yerevan and provinces on the most hazardous priorities for Armenia, 43% of the respondents mentioned in-war condition and unemployment; 41 % of the respondents considered migration; and 40% stated poverty.

The gap between real and nominal expenditures in Social Protection was growing: despite the fact that in 2014 those expenditures exceeded their 2008 level by 70%, however, poverty reduction continued remaining a priority for the sector. Expenditures on Family (poverty) benefits actually were below their 2008 level by 6%. Starting from 2014, the policy of paying unemployment benefits was cancelled, which too had a negative impact on deepening poverty. According to the Eurasian Economic Commission report, in January 2015, compared to January 2014, consumer prices in Armenia rose by 4.3% and prices for food stuffs - by 4.5%. Consumer prices index rose by 5.4% in February 2015 compared to February 2014, the National Statistical Service (NSS) reported.

According to the RoA State Employment Agency, only in January 2015, the number of job seekers totaled to 72, 600 persons. As compared to the previous year rate, it was increased by 12.2 per cent. In the range of major reasons for unemployment for most of them (83.8 %) was also their non-competitiveness in the labor market. Percent of unemployed women continued staying high: 71.8 %. This issue was stated in the Armenia-OHCHR Compilation Report-21 January 2015 too. Namely, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights was concerned about the disproportionately high level of unemployment among women and the significant gender pay gap. Another issue for concern was the limited availability of social housing, as well as no access to basic services and social protection for workers in the informal sector. The report stated also that due to insufficient financial resources, the list of health services funded by the State had been retrenched, so that only certain priorities and priority groups were incorporated.

Social Protection/Social Sector Reforms:

Law on Social Assistance: On December 17, 2014, the National Assembly of Armenia adopted the Law on Social Assistance. This law defines the concepts of social assistance, social services and integrated social services, the right to social support, the rights and responsibilities of recipients of social support, funding sources of social support, the system of social assistance management, etc. It provides for the establishment of social assistance network comprising also of civil society. During the program kick-off meeting with Consortium member organizations, First Deputy Minister Araik Petrosyan, in fact, admitted that they need assistance in creation, empowerment and mobilization of such networks as: “this is a new concept and there has been no previous experience”.

The law also introduces the concept of social contracting at local and national levels, in which civil society has an important role in co-management aiming at integrated, full and accessible service provision, as well as it attempts to regulate the interagency social partnership aimed at minimizing overlaps of functions and filling the existing gaps in the relevant sector. Another important field that is regulated is the implementation of social programs at a local level. It is expected that the law will help to facilitate implementation of social sector reforms.

Integrated Social Services:

For several years now, the Armenian government has been piloting integrated social services. The process of introducing integrated social services in Armenia has completed its pilot stage. http://www.armenianow.com/society/61529/armenia_social_services_department_of_ministry_and_labor

However, according to Armine Mkhitarian, Social Policy Analyst-Expert, there are certain issues that require improvement. Mainly, there is a shortage of service provider NGOs and social services in the country; case managers do not possess adequate information on relevant programs in their locations that are implemented either by NGOs or by Public sector; case managers' status is not legal enforced. Additionally, insufficient funds are allocated to social workers to cover transportation and communication costs while managing the case, etc.

She also mentioned that as of today out of the projected 55 ISS centers, only 19 are operational. Even though it had been planned to have all the ISS centers operational by the end of 2016, however, according to the current pace of developments, a time-extension could be expected. “Activities are underway, - she continued, - to select relevant buildings for ISS centers, negotiate the cadaster cost and sign contracts accordingly”.

Astghik Minasyan, Head of Social Support Department of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, stated (March 18, 2015) that while no salary increase is expected for social workers, however, from this year on transportation fees for social workers are to be reimbursed, which would improve the quality of their visits”.

Child Protection: First Meeting of the National Committee for Child Protection of Armenia: On February 27, the first session of the National Committee for Child Protection of Armenia was convened. Artem Asatryan, Minister of Labor and Social Affairs of RoA chaired it. During the event, the Minister and UNICEF Representative in Armenia Henriette Ahrens signed a Memorandum of Understanding on “Social Inclusion of Vulnerable Children: Expanding Alternative Care, Family Support, and Inclusive Education Services”. The Memorandum declared the start of an important reform and clarified the roles and responsibilities of parties for the upcoming five years. In her welcome remark, the head of USAID Armenia, Dr. Karen Hilliard mentioned: "While we all understand the challenges of implementation of this reform, I am sure that everybody agrees with the belief that every child needs to live in a safe and caring family environment, get an education and be free from violence and exploitation," she said. <https://www.facebook.com/SavetheChildrenArmenia?sk=wall&filter=12>

Special Report on Children’s Rights by the Human Rights Defender of Armenia: On March 27, Armenian Ombudsman Karen Andreevyan issued a special report entitled ‘Children’s Rights in Child Care Centers and Special Educational Institutions: Systemic Analysis.’ In 2014, the representatives of the Torture and Violence Prevention Department of the Ombudsman’s Office had visited over 37 childcare centers and special educational institutions to study and monitor the situation of children’s rights there. The report presents the problems identified during the visits. <http://en.a1plus.am/1208555.html>

Sona Harutyunyan, Deputy Minister of Labor and Social Protection responded to the report noting that the Ministry was taking necessary measures to overcome the issues raised in the report.

2. Summary of Conducted Activities

Over the quarter, the following main set of activities were carried out, including:

Administrative Preparations

Sub-agreements: Following and based on the Cooperative Agreement signed between USAID / Armenia and Mission Armenia, Consortium lead partner, 3 sub-agreements were developed and signed between Mission Armenia and each of the other Consortium member organizations. Counterpart contributed to the development of the sub-agreements, based on its successful practices and lessons learned in sub-agreement management and administration. Multi-objective and multi-dimension nature and specifics of SSSRA, as well as Consortium partners' suggestions were carefully considered too in the sub-agreements development. The sub-agreements define the areas of authority and responsibility, monitoring and evaluation requirements, as well as outline reporting procedures, compliance and other applicable issues between the signatory partners, and provide detailed financial instructions for the funds usage. The sub-agreements also clearly specify all Mandatory Standard Provisions and Required as Applicable Standard Provisions for Non-US non-governmental organizations.

Staff recruitment: Mission Armenia and Counterpart initiated staff recruitment process through job announcements/competition. The procedural phases for competition included: (1) elaboration of Terms of References and job descriptions per project staff position; (2) posting of job announcements on several most popular job portals; (3) review/evaluation of applications in line with the set forth requirements; (4) selection and hiring of the qualified candidates. UFSD and CDF (entirely) and MA (partially) recruited the project staff involving some of their permanent staff members in accordance with relevant Load of Efforts for each position as specified in the approved project and completing the hiring procedures according to the internal Human Resources Policies.

Office Set-up: Two Consortium partner organizations, Counterpart and UFSD were involved also in office acquisition process. Counterpart started the bidding process for the office space and after the evaluation of the bidding offers received from several office owners, the current office was rented based on the best combination of price and convenience. UFSD made necessary arrangements for renting space for Project needs adjacent to the main office.

Cooperation/Coordination of Operations

Project Steering Management and Evaluation Committee: To promote work effectiveness and ensure proper implementation and coordination of activities among the Consortium members, a Project Steering Management and Evaluation Committee was established comprised of representatives from each Consortium member. This format proved to be very fruitful to ensure consistency of performance and effective coordination in all areas related to the program implementation.

Over the reporting period, Consortium held weekly regular meetings on a variety of organizational, programmatic, financial, administrative and grants-related issues. The parties involved agreed on a joint coordination and collaboration scheme. They shared information, exchanged updates on implementation progress.

The Committee members also discussed and finalized the Project Summary, One Pager (in Armenian), and a SSSRA power point presentation (in Armenian and English). Please refer to Appendices E, F, H. The Committee members discussed also other issues related to the upcoming activities, such as preparation and organization of kick-off meetings, development of the required package of documents for those meetings, etc.

Networking with Other Projects: Mission Armenia and Counterpart closely collaborated with Caucasus Research Resource Center-Armenia (CRRC) and they preliminarily agreed on CRRC conducting a baseline countrywide survey on public awareness of social sector reforms. Mission Armenia and Counterpart jointly elaborated the scope of questions they would like to see in the survey questionnaires; the focus, orientation and design of the survey, as well as the framework of the holistic picture of findings that Consortium expects to gain from the survey to use them in the implementation of the SSSRA activities.

In view of the fact that one of the UFSD's roles as a Consortium member is to assist in creating civil society's awareness and capacity for monitoring pension reform related issues, UFSD established contacts with Pension Reform Implementation Program, Pension System Awareness Center. The representatives were briefly presented the objectives and result areas of SSSRA, agreed on future cooperation, information sharing and establishing synergies between the projects.

In line with the responsibilities of CDF within the framework of SSSRA to monitor Government reforms in the area of Child Protection and Care, CDF initiated meetings with the ISS representatives, as well as made on-site visits to several ISS locations. The aim was to understand the ongoing changes, consider the dynamics and actual pace of implementation of the reform, with the main focus on management of children's cases and protection issues.

Capacity Building Initiatives

Finance and Grant Management Workshop: Mission Armenia and Counterpart organized a Finance and Grant Management workshop for the Consortium representatives at Counterpart Armenia office. The workshop aimed at enhancing institutional and technical capacities of the Consortium members in sub-award management in compliance with USAID rules and regulations to ensure successful management of the assigned responsibilities within the framework of the signed sub-agreements.

The topics included but were not limited to:

- Budget and financial management overview;
- Sub-agreement: Major Provisions and Requirements;
- Installments and Financial Reporting Requirements;
- Financial Reporting Forms and Templates;
- Cost Share requirements.

In addition to the presentations on the above-mentioned topics, the workshop format provided ample opportunities for discussions, exchange of experiences, as well as questions and answers sessions. Given the importance of this activity, it was agreed upon to continue this initiative throughout the forthcoming months too. The topics identified for further Workshops include but are not limited to Procurement, Grants management and administration, Human resource management, financial management, etc.

Seminar on Integrated Social Services: Mission Armenia’s social policy expert conducted a one-day seminar on Integrated Social Services at Counterpart Armenia office. The seminar materials had been developed in advance and were shared with the participants at the event.

Representatives from all member organizations of Consortium took part in the seminar. The topics presented and discussed covered the following issues: scale and significance of ISS reform as a shift away from cash-transfer and benefits programs to addressable and needs-based programs; wide range of beneficiary coverage of differing ages, gender and vulnerability types; challenges that the rollout of the ISS has been facing in Armenia; how the state is administering, overseeing and holding social service providers accountable; and how relevant and effective the ISS is given the country’s current social policy needs.

Information Sharing on Social Context: In addition to the ISS Workshop, Mission Armenia also shared its experience and knowledge with the Consortium members on current context of social protection in Armenia. Having over 20-year experience and specialization in community-based services delivery for different vulnerable groups, Mission Armenia referred to key issues in this area. Mission Armenia presented also the actual context of social concerns and needs that high-risk groups are facing in the SSSRA target locations.

Institutional Strengthening: Throughout the quarter, Counterpart Armenia Finance, Grants and Administration Teams worked with the Consortium members to enhance their technical capacities in the areas of finance, administration, grants, procurement and human resource management. The Counterpart key staff worked separately with the Consortium members in reviewing and evaluating their procurement and Human Resources policies, manuals and deepening their capacities in the mentioned fields.

The review revealed some provisions, which need to be revised, amended and a number of suggestions were made to make them in conformity with the US Government procurement policies for cooperative agreements. The proposed adjustments have been underway with expected results anticipating for the next quarter.

Additionally, since only Mission Armenia among the local partners had announced competition for hiring some of the project staff, Counterpart provided technical assistance, particularly to Mission Armenia NGO, in the process of posting announcements and hiring new employees

Financial Reporting Forms: Over the quarter, Counterpart Armenia Finance and Grants teams assisted in developing Sub-agreements Financial Reporting Forms to ensure SSSRA Consortium members’ accurate and timely financial reporting. These Reporting Forms are to ensure the compliance with USAID rules and regulation, to provide detailed information on sub-agreement funds received and the expenditures made, as well as to compare actual expenditures to the approved project budget. Additionally, the Reporting Forms require availability of copies of all invoices, payment orders and other supporting financial documentations required by RoA legislation. In addition to the information on funds received, the Sub-agreements Reporting Forms also provide detailed information on the planned and actual cost-share amounts as well as on all cost share supporting documentation.

Other Activities:

Counterpart updated and shared with the Consortium members the detailed Guidelines for Consortium partners regarding Compliance with Mandatory Standard Provision for non US NGOs M14 Preventing Terrorist Financing and M12 Debarment and Suspension. The Guidelines provide detailed information on the Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons List maintained by the U.S. Treasury, United Nations Security Designation List and

System for Award Management. The Guidelines also specify in detail how to conduct and maintain the results of background searches of individuals and organizations using these three sources.

The program start-up phase was used also to initiate drafting of SSSRA Grant Manual. The Manual will include all grants-related procedures, instruments and forms and is being developed considering Consortium partners' suggestions, Counterpart Armenia successful practices and lessons learned in this area, as well as the multi-objective nature and specifics of SSSRA. This instrumental tool is an important support to the local partners of Consortium for effective administration and management of grants to be issued within the SSSRA framework given their limited experience in administering and overseeing grants in accordance with USAID rules and regulations.

Counterpart also provided consultancy on branding and marking to Consortium members as well as has started working on the development of Outreach Strategy of the Program. The aim of the paper is to promote the public awareness and visibility of the Program, its goals and objectives, support to effective implementation of the Program and widely dissemination of the results as well as ensure effective communication among consortium members and other partners.

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Counterpart developed an additional module of Training for Trainers to equip the mentors and lawyers with necessary trainer's skills, which they will use during their future training sessions (Appendix G). The module includes a comprehensive Manual (and attachments) with description of necessary tools for beginner trainers.

Counterpart also reviewed the web site of Mission Armenia (www.mission.am) and developed a set of necessary recommendations with the aim of improving the website appearance and the functionality to ensure effective information and message delivery to stakeholders about the SSSRA program. Currently the web site of Mission Armenia is under construction. The recommendations provided include improvement of the web-site interface, content of the information, existence of necessary sections as well as the application of new generation media tools enabling to provide the information in a more accessible, flexible and user-friendly manner.

Mission Armenia: During the reporting quarter, MA developed the ISS training module. This module was shared also with the Consortium members. The module includes completed information about ISS activities; the services types it delivers, the problems encountered. Etc.

The module is designed for an Introductory workshop on the Integrated Social Service reform, as well as for building the capacity of the CIGs and partner CSOs covering such aspects as are ISS vision, implementation mechanisms and its specific focus. Trainings will be conducted for and by CIG mentors and the CIG members. These sessions will impart them skills to have relevant capacities for citizens' engagement in the monitoring of social sector reforms that GoA has recently introduced in Armenia.

Mission Armenia also elaborated the SSSRA Program Brief, it was discussed and shared with the Consortium members. After the feedback and finalization, the Program Brief was submitted to USAID for approval.

Urban Foundation for Social Development: UFSD started elaboration of training modules on Citizen Participation. The trainings will take place during the forthcoming months. As a consortium member, UFSD's role is: a/ to support the Project in promoting citizen engagement; and b/ to assist in creating civil society's awareness and capacity for monitoring pension reform related issues. Promotion of citizen engagement is perceived by the Program as a two-sided process: UFSD will organize trainings for CSOs and community active groups in public participation, on creating awareness of the right of citizens to participate in local decisions and affairs, methods and tools communicating that can be applied depending on the level of participation. On the other hand, training for local authorities will be organized later on how to engage and mobilize citizens for decision-making process.

Child Development Foundation: As projected, CDF is to monitor social reform in the area of Child Protection with selected partner CSOs through networking activities in the target provinces. For selection of best four CSOs among the local organizations, CDF elaborated CSOs selection criteria taking into consideration such important factors as were experience in the child protection sphere; competencies in policy analyses, monitoring and evaluation; institutional capacities, as well as willingness to fulfill the SSSRA activities. In order to finalize the selection process, CDF is expecting to have the findings and results of the surveys that are underway by CRRC and the Eurasia Foundation.

Meeting with Ministry of Labor and Social Affaires

To introduce the "Support to Social Sector Reforms in Armenia" program, a working meeting was organized at the RoA Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (MLSA). The meeting was hosted by the Minister of Labor and Social Affairs Artem Asatryan, First Deputy Minister Arayik Petrosyan, Deputy Minister Sona Harutyunyan, Advisor to the Minister Areg Savgulyan, Head of the Department of International Cooperation and Development Programs Anahit Martirosyan, Head of the Department of Public Relations Anush Danielyan, Head of the Social Security State Service Armen Abrahamyan and Head of the "Norq" Information-Analytical Centre Koryun Sargsyan.

During the meeting, the representatives of USAID and Consortium member organizations outlined the overall goal, objectives and the scope of activities of the five-year program designed to support the implementation of social reforms. The parties discussed the current challenges and priorities for the RoA Government in the social sector, the country's reform agenda, and the key areas for intervention, as well as referred to issues related to Integrated Social Services, Child Protection, and the pension system, among others. Participants also deliberated upon various tools and solutions to render the implementation of the reforms truly effective inputs, without duplicating the efforts of the parties involved. Lastly, MLSA representatives presented the framework of their needs and expectations from SSSRA.

Among upcoming steps, it was agreed upon to submit to the Ministry the detailed SSSRA Work Plan. Based on the presented data, the Ministry will nominate MLSA representatives for the membership of the to-be-established SSSRA board that will, among other issues, define the scope and framework of the social sector monitoring process, as well as will allow for more significant "buy-in" of the proposed outputs and recommendations by the Ministry.

After the meeting, Consortium members held a meeting to discuss and sum-up the results of the meeting with the MLSA. They made necessary decision for upcoming events, namely: to be more presentable; to come up with more coordinated activities/roles of each partner during the events; to have in-advance specific requirements to the person who is to present the Program.

Kick-off Meetings for CIG Establishment:

Formation of CIGs (Civic Initiative Group) falls under **Result Area 1: *Civil Society's Ability to engage citizens and articulate their interests improved and sustained.*** **Result 1.1:** Citizens more involved in CSO activities. **Activity1.1.1. Form (CIGs)**

As projected, at the project inception, Civic Initiatives Groups are to be formed in the 17 districts/communities of Yerevan and six provinces in Armenia (Kotayk, Ararat, Gegharkunik, Lori, Syunik, and Shirak). The CIGs are envisaged to have a core group of members representing active citizens and local civil society, different public and educational infrastructures, as well as mentors in monitoring of social sector reforms and advocacy. In addition, lawyers-experts are to provide relevant guidance for all 17 CIGs. CIG members will be later involved in the monitoring process of social reforms taking place in the country. Each of the CIGs will organize annual town hall meetings to identify citizen's concerns about the social services available in their community. The community meetings are to bring together providers of the social services, representatives of local authorities and beneficiaries of those services as well as other civil society representatives to discuss the key problems related to the implementation of the social sector reforms. A concerted effort will be made to ensure strong representation of women, youth, people with disabilities, the elderly and other vulnerable groups.

As a first step in CIG formation, Mission Armenia jointly with Consortium Partners worked on planning and implementation of kick-off meetings to be held in the projected 17 target communities.

Having technical assistance by Counterpart, the Consortium members jointly developed the required package of documents for kick-off meetings. The package included: Guide on organization of kick-off meetings, templates of Agenda, Participant Registration List, Letter of Invitation, List of invitees, Event Form/Protocol on Event, etc.

The preparation phase encompassed a set of activities. Mainly, Consortium members made up the kick-off meetings schedules, acquired preliminary agreements with target community leaders, Mayors, Province Governors, elaborated Official Letters, developed the meeting agenda and communicated with the local participants.

The aim of these meetings was to widely introduce the Program to the community people and all interested parties as well as support formation of CIGs.

As of the end of the reporting period, several kick-off meetings were held in different target communities with active participation and constructive discussions. Many participants of those meetings introduced their willingness and readiness to become Civic Initiative Group's member and to have his/her own input in the monitoring processes of social reforms. Task forces were formed in those communities. They will be involved in the process of the organization of upcoming Town-Hall Meetings. As planned, the rest of the meetings are to be held in April-May.

3. Analysis of Program Progress

This was the first quarterly report of the **Support to Social Sector Reforms in Armenia (SSSRA)** program, and therefore, it primarily covered the program start-up period:

- administrative preparations;
- coordination of operations and partnership among the Consortium member organizations;
- capacity building initiatives for the Consortium member organizations
- elaboration of training modules and programmatic materials;
- kick-off meetings

Implementation mechanisms were realistic and feasible, thanks to which a normal pace of performance was ensured for the reporting quarter. The implementation had a timely and smooth performance throughout the reporting quarter. No major deviations were observed from the projected work-plan that could hamper the performance.

Along with the implementation of the above-mentioned components, of which we detailed in the previous chapter of this report, the efforts of Consortium members were also directed to team-building activities pursuing an overall goal to establish a harmonized and well-coordinated setting among the four partners involved. Success of implementation much depends on a well-collaborated partnership among the Consortium members. This issue was particularly of utmost importance, since there were four organizations that were to get involved in a wide range of activities at different levels and dimensions. It should be stated, that Consortium did fulfill this important task and a sound team spirit was developed and created. The program had a good start with that regard.

Partners shared their best practices on organization of community meetings to bring together state and local authorities, CSOs, active citizens and beneficiaries, business and media representatives, as well as other stakeholders with relevant knowledge and experience in the sphere that resulted in to a set of proactive and participatory discussions with noteworthy and constructive suggestions and recommendations.

Another progress achieved during the quarter, was capacity building imitative among the Consortium members to have comprehensive knowledge on all aspects that SSSRA is to intervene in and share common understanding to all matters under the program.

Another important issue that was responded during the quarter, referred to collaboration with local authorities in the SSSRA target locations. Consortium gained the full support of the Mayors/community leaders to support with the SSSRA implementation-related issues over the Program lifetime.

4. Monitoring and Evaluation

ISS Monitoring Indicators and Tools: In the course of the reporting period, Mission Armenia developed and finalized the indicators and tools for ISS monitoring and it will be shared with Consortium members shortly after its finalization. All the peculiarities of ISS reform have strongly been considered in the elaboration of the indicators, including the specifics of wide coverage of its components and beneficiary groups; as well as the areas the ISS reform covers. Among them are provision of social services to the unemployed and other beneficiary groups; assistance to families living under the poverty line, people with disabilities, elderly singles/couples without permanent shelter, children in difficult situation, etc..

Project M&E Tools Elaborated and Finalized: During the reporting period, the key M&E tools – the Work plan, Work plan Narrative and PMEP were further elaborated and finalized by Mission Armenia and Counterpart. Please refer to Appendices A, B, C). Towards this end, a number of meetings were organized with Consortium representatives both separately and with the participation of all parties involved to fine-tune the initial documents produced and turn them into user-friendly, effective and applicable tools.

Research Plan for the Baseline Assessment Developed: Throughout the reporting period, a detailed research plan was developed by Counterpart that will guide the baseline assessment. The research plan details the scope and main objectives of the assessment, research questions, quantitative and qualitative tools and methodology to be applied as well as timeframe of the planned activities.

As proposed by the research plan, the baseline will measure public awareness, satisfaction with and inclusion/participation in social security policies and programs as related to a) System of Integrated Social Services, b) Issues of Family, Women and Children, c) Issues of the Disabled and the Elderly as well as d) Pension Security System.

As a part of the Research Plan, Population survey is to be conducted as a quantitative tool for the baseline assessment. Two methods have been proposed for conducting the survey. According to the first method proposed, the sampling will be designed with the goal to have data representative at the country level. The sampling for the survey will be carried out using the database of Armenian household electricity users provided by Armenian Electricity Network Company and used by CRRC-Armenia for different surveys. Alternatively, an *experimental design* will be applied with 29 project communities serving as a sampling frame for group of participants. 10 target communities and 10 control communities will be selected for purposes of the survey.

Focus group discussions and face-to-face expert interviews will serve as qualitative counterpart to the assessment. It is envisaged to conduct 3 regional focus group discussions and at least 12 in-depth interviews with relevant actors and experts of the social sector of the country.

Additionally, organizational survey will be conducted to fill data gaps regarding to CSO capacity and methods of citizen engagement, experience and capacity in policy monitoring, cooperation between CSOs and Government in relation to social policy monitoring, etc. The organizational survey shall target at least 30 respondents based on the following criteria: regional coverage, diversity and thematic area of functioning.

Monitoring and Reporting Templates Developed and Fine-Tuned: During the reporting period Counterpart Armenia's monitoring and reporting templates have been adjusted and

finalized to be introduced to Consortium members and ensure the effective monitoring and evaluation of the project.

5. Best Practices and Challenges

- At the project inception, the four Consortium member organizations were to start working in a new format: to initiate activities as a consortium. Each of them had its own experience and style of work, however, as a member of Consortium a new inner routine of working relations were to be developed. This was successfully overcome during the quarter lifetime and harmonized and cooperative team-building atmosphere and relationship were achieved and established among all partner organizations of Consortium.
- The project has envisaged constant communication flow and synergies among and joint advocacy lobbying actions with other Consortia. With this regard, even though this is to be coordinated through regular quarterly coordination meetings, however, Consortium partners consider that more pro-active and extensive collaboration is needed and therefore, additional events rather than coordination meetings would be appreciated to have to ensure proper communication and effective implementation of all programs run by all consortia.

6. Expenditures

For this quarter, all the expenditures were made according to the pre-approved budget. There were no major cost overruns or high unit costs. Besides, all the expenditures were based on the best combination of price and quality. All the financial data are detailed in the Financial report submitted by Consortium to USAID/Armenia.

7. Programming Priorities for Next Quarter

The following activities are to be carried out in the course of the next reporting period:

- Develop comprehensive monitoring and reporting system for Consortium partners.
- Develop Civil Society Monitoring tools of the ISS reform implementation
- Conduct TOTs for project mentors and lawyers.
- Conduct trainings for CIGs on social sector reforms
- Conduct training on advocacy for the CIGs, partner CSOs and members of the Consortium.
- Continue the provision of capacity building for the organization of kick-off meetings and for the formation of Civic Initiative Groups in targeted communities.
- Provide consultancy and share best practices for the preparation of conducting annual town hall meetings in targeted communities.

- Support and facilitate the CIGs to develop informational materials/leaflets highlighting the key information on ISS, Pension and CP sphere.
- Organize the quarterly monitoring meeting with community active members.
- Produce and publish a brochure and a poster on ISS.
- Prepare and organize of the Forum with CSOs to discuss the progress on improving the CSO legal framework.
- Provide consultancy on restructuring the Mission Armenia NGO's website to ensure more effective outreach in social sectors reforms area.
- Provide ongoing consultancy and guidance to Consortium member organizations in Quarterly Financial Reports preparation and review.
- Develop SSSRA Grant Manual.
- Elaborate and finalize the development of grants-related forms and templates.
- Finalize the process of updating and reviewing the consortium members' procurement and human resources management policies.
- Provide ongoing consultancy to the partners in their procurement related, staff recruitment and other financial/administrative issues.
- Start the process of reviewing and updating the consortium members' other internal policies.
- Conduct one-day informative session on child protection system and child protection reforms.
- Conduct citizen engagement training with CIGs and CSOs.

Part II: Appendices

The report has eight Appendices that are attached to this report separately. These are:

- Appendix A: SSSRA Workplan
- Appendix B: SSSRA Workplan Narrative
- Appendix C: SSSRA PMEP
- Appendix D: Program Research Plan
- Appendix E: Program Brief
- Appendix F: Program One-Pager
- Appendix G: TOT Training Manual
- Appendix H: SSSRA Power Point Presentation