



# “SUPPORT TO SOCIAL SECTOR REFORMS IN ARMENIA”

## Program

### Quarterly Progress Report #4

October – December 2015



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1. Mission Armenia - Lead Partner
2. Counterpart International
3. Urban Foundation for Sustainable Development
4. Child Development Foundation

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### **Part II**

#### **APPENDICES:**

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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
LG	Local Government
GoA	Government of Armenia
ISS	Integrated Social Services
MA	Mission Armenia
MLSA	Ministry of Labor and Social Issues
NA	National Assembly
NGO	Non-governmental organization
RoA	Republic of Armenia
RFA	Request for Application
SSSRA	Support to Social Sector in Armenia
UFSD	Urban Foundation for Sustainable Development
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
US	United States
USA	United States of America
USAID	United States Agency for International 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 8 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 social services, child protection services, and pension system;
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:**

**Successful collaboration between the GoA and the USAID:** (November 20, 2015). “We attach great importance to GoA-USAID cooperation. USAID has implemented this and other similar projects aiming economic growth, democracy and governance, healthcare and social protection, which are very important to our nation’s sustainable development. The Government of the Republic of Armenia is ready to continue cooperation with the US Agency for International Development with view to implementing such programs and initiatives as stem from the best interest of our country and people”, Prime Minister Hovik Abrahamyan expressed confidence while taking part in the official launch of the “My Armenia: cultural tourism in Armenia program”. <http://www.gov.am/en/news/item/8192/>

**Concerns and opinions expressed by experts and representatives of NGOs on Social Partnership:** (October 22, 2015). During the meeting taken place at the RoA Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, representatives and experts of the ministry and NGOs raised concerns and expressed opinions on Social Partnership Agreement at the national level. Areg Savgulyan, Adviser to Minister of Labor and Social Affairs highly appreciated the involvement of NGOs and experts emphasizing that the Agreement differs from previous formats of cooperation. It aims to institutionalize relationships among various organizations and build effective mechanisms of cooperation maintaining principles of effective management of resources.

The Agreement is a civil document open for all organizations and individuals who are willing to cooperate within the framework of the agreement objectives. [http://www.mlsa.am/home/show\\_news.php?id=1114&sec=news&back](http://www.mlsa.am/home/show_news.php?id=1114&sec=news&back)

**Social Partnership Agreement Signed between Government of Armenia and Civil Cooperation Network for Strategic Programs:** (October 23, 2015). Attended by Prime Minister Hovik Abrahamyan, a social partnership agreement was signed between the GoA and the Civil Cooperation Network for Strategic Programs. Before the signing ceremony, Hovik Abrahamyan addressed the audience: “The Government of Armenia pays special attention to transparency and increased role of society in all spheres of activity. The purpose of this agreement is the establishment of the institute of social cooperation in the process of developing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating strategic programs in the Republic of Armenia. The Government will be consistent in its policies aimed at increasing public accountability and cooperation with civil society.” <http://www.gov.am/en/news/item/8151/>

**Armenian Prime Minister: 2016 state budget to remain socially oriented:** (November 2, 2015). Realistic provisions to ensure stability form the basis of Armenia’s draft state budget for 2016, Armenian Prime Minister Hovik Abrahamyan said at National Assembly of Armenia during debates of the 2016 draft state budget. According to the premier, next year, too, the state budget will be socially oriented, which is evident from the fact that almost half of the budget expenditures of 2016 are for education, social protection, and healthcare. He said an appropriate level of expenditures is planned for defense, public order maintenance, and national security. <http://www.panorama.am/en/news/2015/11/02/prime/1472623>

## **Social Protection/Social Sector Reforms:**

**The 4th Annual International Pension Conference took place in Yerevan, Armenia:** (November 9, 2015). USAID/Armenia Mission Director Dr. Karen Hilliard attended the conference. During the event, ongoing social security reforms, including the implementation of the country's new pension system (that goes into full effect in January 2017) and the introduction of ISS, were summarized.

Over 100 professionals from financial and government institutions of the country, and representatives from Ukraine, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Georgia and Russia attended the conference.

Dr. Hilliard spoke of USAID's long-standing collaboration with the Government of Armenia to make the country's social protection system more efficient, effective, transparent, and financially stable. Vulnerable populations, including people with disabilities, children with special needs and the elderly, have been an important focus of USAID assistance, she noted.

USAID/Armenia Mission Director also emphasized the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs' 114 hotline, which was created through USAID and the World Bank support. The hotline handles calls on all types of social issues, including disability allowances and family benefits, and also helps reveal instances of corruption. <http://prip.am/yerevan-hosts-the-4th-annual-international-pension-conference>

**Armenia's experience in the ISS sphere has become a matter of interest and is being studied among 6 other countries:** (October 30, 2015). UNICEF Headquarter Office, as well as the Regional Office for Central, Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States included Armenia among the 6 countries that implemented reforms in the social protection sphere and can be a sample model for other countries. [http://www.mlsa.am/home/show\\_news.php?id=1120&sec=news&back](http://www.mlsa.am/home/show_news.php?id=1120&sec=news&back)

**Child rights protection annual program for 2016 is approved:** (October 1, 2015). MLSA minister Artem Asatryan presented to the Government the draft of "Child rights protection annual program and action plan for 2016". The aim of the annual program is to ensure state guarantees for social protection of children in difficult life circumstances, improvement of child-care and protection institutions, enlargement of alternative services, continuous development of education system, provision of quality and affordable healthcare services. RoA Government approved the annual program. <http://news.am/arm/news/288669.html>

**Discussion on "Reflection of Child Rights within RoA Constitution amendments":** (October 1, 2015). The meeting was organized by Save the Children Armenia country office to discuss Constitution Amendments in terms of child rights protection. The organizers highlighted the importance of including some child rights-oriented articles in the new draft constitution to ensure better protection for children, as Constitution has the highest enforcement power. In current Constitution, child rights are viewed in the framework of human rights without being specified. [http://www.mlsa.am/home/show\\_news.php?id=1095&sec=news&back](http://www.mlsa.am/home/show_news.php?id=1095&sec=news&back)

**In 2016 social protection spending to grow by 3.8% to 405.5 billion drams:** (November 4, 2015). Social protection spending in 2016 will grow by 3.8% to about 405.5 billion drams, according to Armenian Labor and Social Affairs minister Artem Asatryan.

The minister said the amount earmarked for labor pensions will reduce by 0.8% from 2015 to 223.8 billion drams 'because the total number of pensioners, according to the ministry's estimates, will drop from 458,500 to 457,000 people. The amount of the government's co-

financing of funded pensions will increase by 46.5% to 26.7 billion drams, due to the increasing number of public sector employees embraced by the system.

[http://arka.am/en/news/society/in\\_2016\\_social\\_protection\\_spending\\_to\\_grow\\_by\\_3\\_8\\_to\\_40\\_5\\_5\\_billion\\_drams/](http://arka.am/en/news/society/in_2016_social_protection_spending_to_grow_by_3_8_to_40_5_5_billion_drams/)

**Working meeting on alternative child-care services:** (November 12, 2015). A working meeting was held at MLSA with representatives from UNICEF, World Vision Country Offices, and USAID. The attendees discussed child-care alternative services and respective work in progress. Minister Artem Asatryan emphasized the deinstitutionalization process as a preventive mechanism.

During the meeting, the results of a comprehensive assessment on the situation in RoA child-care and protection institutions; the needs of children staying there, their parents; challenges met by social services and social protection responsible bodies were presented.

Artem Asatryan estimated the assessment conducted and stressed that it is important to not only work with children and on their issues, but look at the problem from different angles to better understand it. The support from the international organizations and programs to child rights reforms is going to be continuous.

[http://www.mlsa.am/home/show\\_news.php?id=1134&sec=news&back](http://www.mlsa.am/home/show_news.php?id=1134&sec=news&back)

**Meeting with Susan Jacobs, Special Advisor of Children's Issues, the US Department of States:** (December 4, 2015). Artem Asatryan met with Susan Jacobs to discuss reforms in child rights protection sphere. Artem Asatryan gave special importance to formation and development of alternative social services system, which will enforce social services and family care provision to children in the institutions. The minister stressed also importance of social worker institute in terms of case management, family need assessment and respective service provision. The progress is visible: transformation from bureaucracy to real social work is on the way to be established. Ambassador Susan Jacobs expressed willingness of the US Government to cooperate and support the reforms. The same day, the US Ambassador, Richard Mills, invited civil society representatives to a dinner with Susan Jacobs.

[http://www.mlsa.am/home/show\\_news.php?id=1151&sec=news&back](http://www.mlsa.am/home/show_news.php?id=1151&sec=news&back)

**Memorandum to develop child protection sphere:** (December 17, 2015). A memorandum was signed between MLSA and "Armenian Orphan Children Relief Society" foundation in view of the ongoing reforms in the sphere, and the priorities and needs defined by the Ministry.

The Memorandum aims to enforce systematic, comprehensive cooperation between the Ministry and the organization to promote children's protection in Armenia. [http://www.mlsa.am/home/show\\_news.php?id=1159&sec=news&back](http://www.mlsa.am/home/show_news.php?id=1159&sec=news&back)

**Regular session of National Committee for Child Protection:** (December 18, 2015). MLSA held a regular session to summarize the work done in 2015 and to present the results. According to Artem Asatryan, significant work was done to promote child's care in family, which is the priority for the state policy in child protection sphere. Representatives of relevant ministries, international and local organizations were present at the meeting.

<http://www.aravot.am/2015/12/18/640782/>

## 2. Summary of Conducted Activities

### **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:**

##### **Activity 1.1.2. Partner CSOs are identified**

As a result of the first phase, 12 CSOs applied for grants announced by Child Development Foundation within the project. On October 21, the Selection Committee held a meeting to select 4 partner CSOs. At the meeting the Committee decided to set a new deadline for new applications in order to have proper quality to choose. Such decision was made due to small numbers of applications for each lot. In order to ensure quality and competition, the committee decided to give opportunity to more CSOs to apply.

The new call was closed on November 16. 11 more CSOs applied with the below breakdown of Lots by geographical coverage and number of applications:

Lot	Administrative Division	Communities	# of Applications Submitted
1	Yerevan	Nubarashen, Erebuni and Ajapnyak;	3
2	Tavush and Gegharkunik	Noyemberyan; Vardenis	2
3	Armavir and Ararat	Armavir, Baghramyan; Vedi, Ararat	2
4	Shirak	Ashotsk, Maralik	4

The overall number of applications as a result of prolonged call was 23, which is distributed in the following way:

Lot	Administrative Division	Communities	# of Applications Submitted
1	Yerevan	Nubarashen, Erebuni and Ajapnyak;	4
2	Tavush and Gegharkunik	Noyemberyan; Vardenis	8
3	Armavir and Ararat	Armavir, Baghramyan; Vedi, Ararat	5
4	Shirak	Ashotsk, Maralik	6

The selection committee members had two weeks to read the whole package of applications and assess them. The assessments provided by all 5 members of the committee were generated and 4 applications scored the highest (1 in each lot) were put on the table to be further discussed by the committee. On December 1 the selection committee held a meeting to discuss the selected applications. They agreed with the selection results and elaborated more on questions to refer to the shortlisted CSOs to make the applications complete.

4 qualified CSOs shortlisted had extensive experience in civic activism and child's rights protection. 4 best applications were selected proving cost effective approach; that is maximization of the project outcomes with minimal financing.

The following CSOs were selected in respective lots:

Lot 1 – Human Dignity and Peace Foundation  
Lot 2 – “Partnership and Teaching” NGO  
Lot 3 - “CIVITAS” Armenia Center for Democratic Education  
Lot4 – Armenian Relief Society

Besides the correspondence with shortlisted CSOs, CDF held informal meetings in order to discuss all concerns regarding the project proposals and make suggestions how to improve.

On December 22, the finalized application packages were received, after which an introductory meeting was organized with the selected CSOs to introduce them the whole project and work in progress. The grant agreements are prepared and the partner CSOs wait for final decision to sign them.

### **Activity 1.1.3 Build the Capacity of the CIGs and 4 CSO’s**

During the reporting period, Consortium members organized different trainings for developing CIG members’ capacity.

#### **Training on the Structure and Functioning of State Social Protection System in RoA**

- On October 2, the SSSRA Mission Armenia Social Policy analyst-expert conducted training for Charentsavan CIG members on Social Protection System in Armenia. During the training, the functions of Territorial or Regional Agency of Social Support; Employment State Programs; of Social-medical Examination Agency; structure and functions of ISS centers were presented to the participants. After a 4-hour training, the participants had an opportunity to visit Charentsavan ISS center to get acquainted with its functional features.
- On October 7, a similar training was organized for Artashat CIG members. The training was conducted at the Artashat ISS center meeting hall so that the CIG members had a chance to see in practice the operation of an ISS center too. Overall, 38 participants attended both trainings, among them were active community members, representatives of NGOs, public social services, local governmental institutions, etc.

#### **Training on ISS Reform**

On October 20, the SSSRA Mission Armenia Social Policy analyst-expert of conducted introductory workshops for CIG members in Tshambarak community on the Integrated Social Services reform, its vision, implementation mechanisms and specific focus. The CIG members were informed about social sector reforms in general, with a detailed focus on ISS reform and ISS Centers operations, as well as other programs implemented by Armenian Government in this field.

At the workshops, the CIG members referred to a variety of social issues, including issues regarding Poverty Family benefits and pensions.

#### **Advocacy Trainings**

On October 6-7, Counterpart together with Mission Armenia continued to build the capacity of CIGs through different trainings. Particularly, two-day trainings were organized on Advocacy for the CIG members from Shirak and Lori Marzes. The trainings were organized with overnight stay in Tsakhkadzor, which was a very good opportunity for the CIG members

to get to know each other, discuss common issues and share their experience as well as establish networking ties for further cooperation.

The trainers put special emphasis on importance of detailed analysis of problems, as only disaggregation of problems and clarification of their causes would lead to a successful design and implementation of advocacy campaigns. It was important to increase knowledge, skills and confidence and build the capacity of Project Team and CIG members on advocacy, community mobilization and referral networking.

Through a combination of theory and practical activities, CIG members will have an enhanced understanding on the key topics of social sphere having been discussed at the trainings. Facilitators encouraged the participants to have interactive discussion on:

- a) to what extent the obtained information would be helpful in their own work, and
- b) probable problems participants might face when applying or adapting what they have learned.

### **Training on Tools and Resources for Media Campaign**

A 3- day “Online Tools for Media Campaigns on Advocacy of Human Rights” training took place on 18-20 November. It was an evidence of successful cooperation between two Consortia of the USAID-funded programs - Media for Informed Civic Engagement and SSSRA. 18 participants, representing the CIGs of Gegharkunik Marz (Sevan, Gavar), got acquainted with the online media tools. They will use the skills acquired in the forthcoming years of the program implementation including arranging online media campaigns for their chosen topics on social problems of their communities.

### **Seminars on Pension Reform**

During the reporting period, a series of seminars were conducted for CIG members on pension reform. The seminars took place in Sevan, Vanadzor, Yerevan and Kapan to which representatives from all the 17 CIGs participated. The plan and the handouts of the pension seminar had been developed in close cooperation with the Pension Reform Information Center specialists based on cooperation arrangements that had been achieved earlier.

The plan of the seminar consisted of two major parts:

- Employment pension included legal aspects, eligibility criteria, formulas of calculations
- Fully funded mandatory pension – included an overview of the history of legal regulation, popular perceptions about the reform, recent amendments in light of the rulings of the Constitutional court. Information was given about insurance funds and managers, etc. It is planned that the following seminars will be mainly dedicated to how monitor personal accounts and promoting the sense of responsibility in overseeing cash flow on the accounts.

### **Activity 1.2.1. Mapping of the value chain for civil society’s involvement in the reform areas**

The draft Methodology and Guide-Tool of Mapping the social services provider organizations were developed by Mission Armenia. Mapping considers to be a database of the existing services and state/non-state actors engaged in the social service provision processes presented by map format also having finding functions. The mapping process is to be implemented by the CIG members in the targeted 29 communities, Mentors, MA social

workers and partner CSOs.

It gives an overall and real snapshot of activities of social services provider organizations in the Program targeted communities having an opportunity to be updated in a certain period of time.

This is one of the priority issues for MLSA and it will contribute to the formation of supporting networks and practical activities making the basis for the fulfillment of ISS district centers.

The Map of the social services provider organizations can be useful also for community members, NGOs, other Ministries, governmental/non-governmental parties interested in the sphere.

### **Activity 1.2.2. Citizens' concerns about social services across Armenia are systematically collected and analyzed**

MA monitoring specialists developed and tested the Guidebook for Mentors and Social Workers and tools for citizens' concerns collecting process. The Guidebook was presented in detail to mentors and social workers with important instructions of use.

Besides using the existing tools, citizens' concerns were also collected during town-hall meetings of target communities.

To support CIGs with their upcoming activity, i.e. organization of town-hall meetings, Counterpart started the preparatory activities and worked on the methodology to be applied when organizing the town-hall meetings. The town-halls are aimed at identifying citizens' concerns about social services available in their community as well as discussing the key problems related to the implementation of the social sector reforms.

In order to ensure the large-scale participation of community members in Town-Hall meetings, it is important to have a clear plan on how they have to be reached. After discussing and summarizing the social issues, CIGs will try to urge local authorities to involve those issues in local budgets and allocate certain financial means for the solution of the latter. All CIGs partake in public hearings of Community/Local Budgets and make necessary recommendations regarding social issues.

Unfortunately, RoA Constitutional Referendum (December 6. 2015) brought delays in town-hall meeting schedules because of intense engagement of community leaders and main stakeholders in the Referendum preparation process. Therefore, the CIGs are to start holding the focus group discussions and town-hall meetings in target communities in the next reporting period.

## **12 informative meetings for CIGs and CSOs**

### **Community meetings in Vardenis, Ararat and Noyemberyan**

Community meetings were organized in Vardenis (08.10.2015), Ararat (29.10.2015) and Noyemberyan (13.11.2015) to raise public awareness about the progress of the Program and discuss child protection issues with the community members. Representatives of local governments, state institutions, local CSOs, social services and other institutions working with children were targeted. The Consortium members presented the Program activities to the invitees focusing on the specific group of activities planned for those particular communities. CDF referred to child rights reforms and challenges faced so far. Then, the floor was given to those present to discuss the issues the communities face, in particular, in terms of child rights protection. CDF took notes on the raised issues to voice them in the upcoming discussion

with the central and local authorities.

Some of the issues are the following:

1. inaccessibility of expert medical and social examination for people with disabilities in terms of geographical location, therefore lack of social assistance for children with disabilities;
2. inaccessibility of ISS centers for population of far located communities without proper transportation communication with the center;
3. lack of financial support to ISS case management;
4. lack of flexibility in application submission at ISS centers for people living in far located communities or having troubles to reach ISS center;
5. lack of community based service providers.

The Consortium members visited the local ISS centers and learnt about their work and challenges they face regarding the ongoing reforms.

CDF and other members of the Consortium agreed on further cooperation with the ISS Centers and local governments.

### **Study Visits to Erebuni and Nubarashen ISS centers**

On December 23, CDF representatives visited ISS centers located in two administrative districts in Yerevan; Nubarashen and Erebuni. While meeting ISS representatives and observing their work in the communities, CDF intended to learn more on local implementation of social sector reforms, as well as challenges they face in practice. A particular emphasis was done on child's rights protection. These study visits revealed issues to be addressed further, during an upcoming round-table with the main stakeholders.

## **Result Area 2: Monitoring of government institutions, officials and policy processes strengthened.**

### **Result 2.1: CSOs use systematic and evidence-based approaches to monitor, and assess impact of and report on selected government reforms and reform processes**

#### **Activity 2.1.1: Civil Society Monitoring tools of the ISS reform implementation is developed.**

##### *ISS monitoring methodology*

During the reporting quarter, the methodology for monitoring the Integrated Social Services was finalized by Mission Armenia and presented to the Deputy Minister of Labor and Social Affairs. The methodology included also the action plan for 2016, with the main activities being the development of assessment measures and tools, piloting and finalizing questionnaires and guides, sampling design, interviewee training, data collection, entry and analysis. The monitoring action plan for 2016 has already been agreed with Sona Harutyunyan. The assessment will compare data of communities where Integrated Social Services operate with communities where it is not introduced yet. The process will consist of a public opinion survey on social reforms and bi-annual monitoring of reform implementation for diverse population groups that the ISS are covering in selected communities.

The data will be collected using the following quantitative and qualitative methods: desk review, focus group discussions with the beneficiaries, in-depth expert interviews, population survey, while during the bi-annual monitoring process the following tools will be employed: observation and evaluation forms.

In order to avoid similar problems in the future, Consortium was to receive an agreement with the Ministry on:

- Monitoring methodology and activity plan;
- Monitoring measures;
- Monitoring tools (survey questionnaire, expert interview questionnaire, focus group guidelines).

By the end of the next reporting period the Monitoring and Evaluation package can already serve as a basis of ISS Monitoring and Evaluation system for the MLSA.

### ***Analysis of 2015 budget expenditures and of 2017 planned budget on social security and social insurance:***

In the reporting period, the TOR for conducting an analysis of 2015 budget expenditures and ***of 2017 planned budget*** on social security and social insurance was finalized. The selection of the qualified applicant is projected for January 2016. The selected consultant will be responsible for:

- Developing the methodology of analyzing the state budget on social area;
- Conducting the analysis of 2015 state budget on social security;
- Preparing the final analytical report of 2015 state budget on social security for the public at large; and
- Organizing trainings on the methodology of analyzing the state budget on social area among civic initiative groups (CIGs).

The Guidelines of analysis and monitoring of the RoA state budget social sector expenditures was finalized too, in compliance of which relevant analysis reports will be produced. The results of ISS system monitoring and RoA state social sector budget analysis will serve as a tool to strengthen the effectiveness of advocacy efforts at local and national levels.

### ***Legislative framework on social assistance in Armenia***

During the reporting period, the legislative framework on social assistance has been analyzed. The analysis also includes review of relevant Articles of the draft Constitutional amendments and other interrelated legislation.

The legislative analysis is an ongoing process and will be conducted throughout the life of the project.

### ***Observation and evaluation monitoring forms***

The observation and evaluation forms were finalized in the reporting quarter, as well as focus group discussion tool was updated and is ready to be tested. These forms will be used by the Civic initiative Groups (CIGs) as bi-annual monitoring tools.

**Activity 2.1.2. Citizens' concerns about the Integrated Social Services across Armenia are systematically collected and analyzed.**

Mission Armenia team elaborated the Citizen Concern Collection Form. This template is designed for CIG members that were to record citizen complaints. Such important factors as are gender breakdown, geographic distribution, categorization of issues under major groups, etc. are strongly considered on this template, therewith mapping common issues for local, regional and national levels.

The template enabled the CIG members to compile all complaints, observations, and identified gaps, classify them into sub-categories and analyze. Accordingly, citizens complaints and applications were compiled and analyzed and shared with local ISSs, LGs, Marz Administration and the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs.

Being much involved in child rights field and working at grassroots level, CDF got and updated information on child rights violations and other issues from the society and partner organizations.

Additionally, citizens concerns were received via CDF hotline.

Social workers within the organization observe citizens' concerns on a daily basis.

Most of the issues highlighted are addressed by the organizations by themselves or are directed to local or national governments if necessary. Due to established cooperation with ISS centers in the communities, many cases are referred to them. These cases are used for advocacy purpose as well.

**Activity 2.3.1. Collaboration with local and national Government is established to ensure access and support for CSOs to lead the monitoring of the selected reforms' operation and effectiveness.**

During the reporting period, a number of meetings were held with the representatives of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs to ensure close collaboration and discuss potential partnership opportunities, as well as the collaboration format with MLSA within the frame of the SSSRA program. In particular, meetings were held with:

- Sona Harutyunyan, Deputy Minister
- Geghanush Gyunashyan, Head of the Department on Family, Women and Children Issues
- Astghik Minasyan, Head of the Social Assistance Department
- Arman Sargsyan, Coordinator of the Capacity Building Resource Center

During those meetings, the parties discussed the reform implementation processes, stated the needs and possible ways forward. All state representatives signified the public outreach and monitoring components of the Program and mentioned specific issues that the Ministry would like for Consortium to target within the framework of Program's mandate.

The following observations and suggestions were of particular importance:

1. Establishment of a Coordination Board and specific working groups for each area the SSSRA program covers (ISS, pension system and child protection system).
2. Synchronization and possible review of activity timelines considering the reform implementation processes and timelines with view of avoiding duplication of efforts.
3. Mapping of the strategic directions of reforms implemented by the Ministry and synchronization of the SSSRA monitoring activities with the reform processes. The Deputy Minister specified the following monitoring needs faced by the Ministry:

- Assessment of the quality of services provided by the ISS centers and their comparison with those provided in communities that do not have such centers yet. The Ministry has envisaged this activity for 2016 and there is an initial agreement with the World Bank to conduct such an assessment, therefore, steps should be taken to avoid duplication of efforts.
  - Monitoring of reforms in the field of employment: the respective tools are already developed by the Ministry and there is a need for data collection in the field.
  - Monitoring of the child protection reforms.
4. Mapping of human and technical resources of both the Ministry and the Consortium partner organizations in quest of their mutually supportive and effective use.
  5. Involvement of Pension Reform Implementation Program in outreach and monitoring activities of the Consortium as well as in exploitation of the social portal, an information management tool recently developed by the capacity building resource center called “ISS Frontline” (ԻՍՏ առաջիժ).
  6. Inclusion of the Consortium members, partner organizations and CIG representatives in the to-be-established social assistance networks.
  7. Development of a cooperation model to ensure the link between the ISS centers, social support networks and beneficiaries. The effective cooperation between ISS centers will support to sustaining social sector reforms.
  8. Promote the establishment and institutionalization of the case management institute in the country by enhancing case managers' skills and capacities through special trainings.
  9. Public outreach activities for both citizens and public officials to enhance their knowledge with respect to reforms implemented in the pension system and impart them practical skills on how to read and grasp their account statements, differentiate between and select asset managers, assess their profitability, check their accounts through identification cards, demand accountability from asset managers and the like.

On October 9, the Consortium members, Lusine Simonyan and Hayastan Stepanyan, met with the head of MLSA Family, Women and Children’s Issues Department, Geghanush Gyunashyan, to discuss further partnership on child rights protection. The Consortium members presented the SSSRA program, which was followed by a discussion on support the Consortium can contribute with to social reforms in the framework of the Program. Agreements were reached on possible cooperation areas.

### **Activity 2.3.3: Proactive facilitation of National Policy Agenda Development**

On November 26, the members of CIGs, together with representatives of consortium organizations, visited the National Assembly of Armenia and had a meeting with the Head of Standing Committee on Social Affairs Hakob Hakobyan. CIG members raised the social issues that they had collected during their community meetings. Mr. Hakobyan thanked the meeting participants and encouraged the SSSRA program representatives to closely work with the Standing Committee and bring social issues to their agenda. Counterpart International’s Advocacy and Transparency Technical Adviser presented to the Committee head the project activity on organizing National Policy Agenda Development Day and received agreement from Mr. Hakobyan to cooperate in that format and take issues from expected discussions to their policy agenda. Consortium will organize meetings in January-February, 2016 with CIGs and citizens to continue discussing their concerns regarding social

issues, as well as formulate amendments to respective legal acts. After all meetings held, participants will come together on National Policy Agenda Development day in the National Assembly to talk on the revealed issues with the Committee on Social Affairs.

The NA Head of Information and Public Relations department Marusya Asatryan continued the meeting and made a presentation on the legislative process. She talked about how the draft becomes a law and emphasized the possibilities that Civil Society is to influence the decision making.

The basis for joint elaboration of social sector policy agenda is laid with the Standing Committee on Social Affairs of the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia. All these will enable the CIGs and CSOs to strengthen the knowledge they already gained and proceed independently and carry out ISS monitoring in 29 communities of 9 provinces of Armenia according to the monitoring methodology that the Consortium developed, as well as raise the awareness of citizens on provision of integrated social services, in the fields of child rights protection and pension reforms.

## **Result Area 4: Civil society enabling environment improved**

### **Result 4.1: CSOs identify and advocate on specific improvements to CSO legal framework**

#### **Activity 4.2.2. The concept of Social Contracting is promoted**

##### **Social contracting round table discussion**

Throughout October, the Mission Armenia and Counterpart International Armenia representatives together had individual meetings with World Vision Armenia, Children of Armenia Fund, Oxfam GB, Save the Children and Armenian Red Cross organizations aimed at identifying common priorities and concerns as well as mobilizing efforts to work in a more coordinated manner in the field.

On November 5, the representative of Mission Armenia and Counterpart International Armenia together organized a round table discussion entitled “Current Practice and Challenges in Social Contracting between the Government and NGOs”. The organizers invited various CSOs, which have experience in either social contracting or service provision for central / local authorities. The roundtable discussion featured the following issues:

- Clarification of social contracting,
- Current status of legal framework,
- Necessity for legislative amendments,
- Degree of awareness and preparedness of NGOs to participate in tender processes and undertake contracted social services.

Hripsime Kirakosyan, Head of Mission Armenia, presented Mission Armenia’s experience of service provision with state funding. Artashes Torozyan from Partnership and Teaching NGO (Goris) talked about the capacity building interventions they made by the demand of state agencies. Armen Bezhanyan, Children of Armenia Fund, shared his ideas on the need for ensuring effectiveness and sustainability of social contracting. Tigran Petrosyan from

Caritas presented the vision of Armenian Caritas on social service provision and contracting. Following the presentations, Hayastan Stepanyan from Counterpart opened the floor for discussion (*Please find Appendix A attached*).

Main conclusions from the round-table discussion were the following:

- It is necessary to formulate a clear policy, create the appropriate legal framework, and establish effective mechanisms, which, in their turn, will ensure that the processes become transparent, mutually beneficial, and manageable.
- Local authorities should have comprehensive description and standards of the services provision it intends to purchase and organize an open tender, in which all interested and eligible organizations, including businesses, can freely and equally participate.
- Another crucial component that needs to be developed and applied is the monitoring system by CSO`s or local authorities, which will help to understand whether the services are provided properly and the state funds used efficiently.
- The CSOs` sustainability will be fostered by Social contracting as due to regular outsourcing of funds by the authorities they will be able to adequately serve their constituencies, in difference to their current funding base that is primarily comprised of availability of spontaneous donor grant-funding.

In the end of the round table discussion, a working group was formed which will work on developing the quality standards for the provision of social services.

The round table discussion and other meetings with the CSOs played an important role in promoting the establishment of close cooperation between NGOs involved in social sector activities. It was a good opportunity to bringing them together to discuss and raise the existing issues in the target field and seek ways to jointly address them. The working meetings revealed that the majority of NGOs face common issues and an agreement was achieved to actively cooperate in future trying to meet better results. This consolidated effort of NGOs that work under state funding will further promote contracted social services provision at a community level.

## **Other Activities:**

### **Finance, Grants and Administration**

*Work with Sub-grantees:* This quarter, MA Finance Team has received the sub-grantees` Advance Request forms on a monthly basis, verified them and submitted to USAID in such a manner to ensure the timely provision of the sub-recipients with funds needed for smooth and steady implementation of programmatic activities. Particular attention had been drawn to the presentation of the quarterly financial reports of sub-recipients, keeping the requirements, rules, methods and principles of the Financial Reporting documentation and their transmission to Mission Armenia, sustaining sufficient and appropriate controls in place. MA Finance team got the reports from partners, checked and approved them. Detailed information on sub-agreement funds was obtained, actual expenditures were compared to the approved project budget, to verify those expenditures, their nature, eligibility and compliance with the project objectives, USAID rules and regulations and local legislation. The scanned copies of all relevant supporting documents were required on contract bases, as well. While reviewing this period`s Financial reporting, as one preceding the annual report, the state of budgetary performance and budget effectuation extent were measured and analyzed.

Monitoring and consultancy visits were arranged to the offices of Consortium partners UFSD and CDF to ensure that they are compliant with all the regulations, subject financial operations and documentation were being adequately followed, data was being captured in a timely and reliable manner. No significant deviations from the planned operations were discovered, all important documentation was being generated and stored properly. The matters discussed and considered during the visits included but were not limited to such as some budget management related and cash-box operations issues . Ways had been suggested to manage it more properly and minimize cash transactions. Also were discussed the amendments to the contracts with implementing partners for 2016, the evaluation and selection of sub-grantees' projects, provision of the upcoming sub-grants portfolio, including contracts, financial reporting documents, etc.

Throughout the quarter guidance on various points was given, a constant information exchange, regular discussions on challenges and feedback were provided to the consortium members by means of meetings, phone calls and via e-mail.

*Sub-agreements Quarterly Financial Reports:* To enhance the Consortium Partners institutional and professional capacities in sub-award management and in ensuring compliance with USAID rules and regulations, Counterpart Finance and Grants Teams provided ongoing consultancy to Partners in developing Sub-Agreement Quarterly Financial Reports. The reports presented the detailed information on sub-agreement funds received and the expenditures made, the information on the planned and actual cost-share amounts, as well as provided copies of all invoices, payment orders and other supporting financial documentation required by the RoA legislation. Counterpart also assisted in careful review of the submitted during the quarter financial reporting forms and documents, as well as provided comments and suggestions that were incorporated in the final version of the documents.

*Grants Management Training:* During the quarter, Counterpart organized Grants Management Training for the Child Development Foundation (CDF) representatives to ensure the effective administration and management of Child Protection Monitoring Grants issued by CDF in September. The topics included but were not limited to:

- Developing Request for Application (RFA);
- RFA dissemination;
- Conducting RFA Information Session;
- Forming the Grants Evaluation Committee;
- Grants evaluation criteria;
- Grants approval process;
- Grants agreement;
- Conducting consultations with Grantees on the reporting process;
- Conducting monitoring visits and grants final evaluations.

In addition to the presentations on the above topics, the Training format provided ample opportunities for the discussions, exchange of experiences as well as questions and answers sessions. This activity was regarded as an important step in Consortium Partners capacity development and it is planned to continue the organization of this training for the Consortium other Partners in the upcoming quarters.

*Child Protection Monitoring Grants:* During the reporting period, Counterpart provided ongoing consultancy to CDF to finalize and issue the Request for Applications for Child Protection Monitoring Grants. The goal of the grant is to monitor the Child Protection component of the social protection reform in twelve target areas. The RFA was designed to help developing good quality applications with the detailed information on problem statement, proposed methods/solutions, goals and objectives, intended beneficiaries, project

implementation locations, the main activities that need to be implemented, expected results, project staffing and management. The RFA also provided instructions and format for the development of grant project work plan, budget and budget narrative. The RFA was widely announced through Counterpart website and Facebook page, CDF mailing list, and other public organizations' websites and social media pages. Additionally, with the assistance of Counterpart, the Question/Answer Session for the potential grantees was organized at CDF office to clarify all application requirements.

### 3. Analysis of Program Progress

Today, thanks to the consistent and targeted work by the four member organizations, the SSSRA Program is already well known in the provinces and in the capital city of Armenia, as well as among local and international CSOs, governmental bodies and social service providers. Concurrently, while progressing, the Program was providing opportunity to the Consortium members promote, along with the goal and activities of SSSRA, establishing and strengthening communication and partnership with other USAID-funded consortia. As a result, there is a smooth information flow established between the partner consortia and CSOs, therewith, important contribution and involvement in the communication and partnership process between CSOs is ensured.

These supportive networking ties and fruitful collaboration have been acquired thanks to several important outcomes the Program has attained so far. Namely, in the course of the reporting period, the Consortium staff finalized a very important component: the standards and tools were elaborated that will be used for evaluation and monitoring activities of the ISS system. Further to which, following several meetings, the monitoring schedule was agreed on with the Deputy Minister, Mrs. Sona Harutyunyan,.

Consortium developed and finalized the methodology of mapping of social services provider organizations. This will enable to achieve the very necessary results that are considered as one of the priority issues for the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs. These mapping results will promote both formation of supporting networks of stakeholders involved in the relevant field and contribute to due operations of ISS district centers achieving practical effective work in place.

Another programmatic procedure that was completed during the quarter was the selection of the projected 4 partner CSOs that are to carry out the monitoring of ISS system, particularly from the child protection aspect, in 12 communities of RoA that have established and operational ISS district centers. The CSOs were qualified on a competitive basis and the contracts are ready to be signed at the beginning of January 2016.

#### **Achievements:**

- A very important programmatic achievement was the successful activities initiated by a strong civic platform: Civic Initiative Groups (CIGs) that were formed and trained in all the targeted provinces under the SSSRA Program. As a reliable resource for different programmatic activities with their core members in place that represent civil society organizations, citizens, local authorities and mass media, the CIG members have been demonstrating consistent and persistent effort and commitment to get

engaged in the projected activities assigned to them. More importantly, they have the same enthusiasm and high motivation as they had at the start-up.

- The program team has successfully involved groups of active, inspired and dedicated citizens in Marzes who are willing to contribute their efforts to support the reform process. Significant is the fact that once enrolled, the core members have not left the CI Groups and/or are not replaced frequently, and the availability of trained and empowered CIG members is one of the major factors for effectiveness of the Program performance, as they are to assume a new role that of important counterparts in in monitoring/advocacy-related activities for social sector reforms, including the ISS system, pension system, and child protection,.
- As a result of numerous meetings and discussions with ISS Centers' case managers, an effective cooperation was established among the Consortium and the case managers. The case managers we met at the community meetings and the study visits, were open to discuss with the SSSRA team about their work, the challenges they face regarding incomplete the reforms and ISS system establishment realizing the assistance the Consortium could provide. Monitoring and cumulating information on challenges faced during the reform process is one of the priorities of this project.
- Due to cooperation with USAID-sponsored other consortia, the possibilities to contribute to each other's programs have become more obvious and mechanisms for cooperation are being set up. In the framework of such cooperation, CDF was offered to contribute to "Social Inclusion of Vulnerable Children in Armenia" program led by UNICEF in cooperation with MLSA, which supports the child rights reforms in Armenia. CDF will work on one of the components within the reforms, concentrating on awareness raising about foster care system development in Armenia.

### **Challenges:**

Despite the fact that Consortium achieved the establishment of collaborative relationship with many Departments of MLSA and ISS Monitoring Action-plan was agreed on, unfortunately, MLSA Minister made his own decision to apply to USAID for termination of the SSSRA Program.

However, in order to move forward, the Consortium needed to obtain the Ministry's agreement, which appeared to be not an easy task. Now, when looking back we can presume that the Ministry was not very much interested in identifying the gaps in the reforms and problems related to the operations of implementing organizations, which explains the reason why it was constantly stopping the start of the assessment. As a result, the local organizations, members of the Consortium, were not allowed to implement one of the key tasks they were mandated to do which was monitoring of the government policy. Moreover, although the capacity of the CIGs, representing active citizens and local civil society representatives, were strengthened, they were not provided with an opportunity to become real mentors in monitoring of social sector reforms. Our experience of 2015 year affirms that the MLSA was not interested in the awareness building and monitoring of ISS reforms and did not show political will to involve civil society in the Process of Social Sector Reforms.

## **5. 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.

## 6. Programming Priorities for Next Quarter

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

- Conduct trainings for mentors and social workers on mapping the social services provider organizations therewith enabling them to independently conduct mapping after Project completion.
- Conduct Roundtable on “Local Level Policy Advocacy” to discuss, collect and summarize issues and concerns identified at local level to be later finalized and included in PAAD agenda.
- Conduct 29 community meetings (clustered meetings covering 17 communities) with CIGs to talk about the program close-out and to discuss the possible actions CIGs can take over to identify and raise citizens’ concerns to be addressed in the frames of the Reforms taking place in Social Sector.
- Conduct a 2-day workshop on “Local Government and Custody and Guardianship Bodies: Legal Framework, Challenges and Opportunities”.
- Finalize and print Citizen Engagement Manual.
- Conduct Project closeout trainings to ensure compliance with USAID rules and regulations.

## Part II: Appendices

The report has Appendices attached. These are:

**Appendix A: Presentations and Summary of Results of Round-table Discussion on Social contracting**

**Appendix B: Work plan Monitoring Report IV Quarter**