

## **Founding meeting of the Local Advisory Group (LAG) Minutes of the Meeting**

**Date:** 23 December 2009

**Time:** 10:30-12:30

**Venue:** Local project office

### **Present:**

*LAG members:* Ahmet Jasarovski, Zoran Ilieski, Zoran Milkov, Irena Ivanova, Lulzim, Haziri, Metodija Sazdov, Petre Mrkev, Fani Karanfilova Panovska

*Chair person:* Suncica Sazdovska

*Present members from the TACSO project office:* Mirjana Pehcevska Pop-Iliev and Valentina Atanasovska

*Guest:* Elizabeta Nedanoska Head of the Unit for Cooperation with NGO within the General Secretariat of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia

### **Absent:**

*LAG member:* Vladimir Misev

### **List of documents distributed at the meeting:**

1. Agenda for the founding meeting
2. Contact list for LAG members
3. Project presentation: Technical Assistance for Civil Society Organisations (main objectives and project activities)
4. Rules and procedures for LAG

## **Agenda and discussion**

1. Introduction and presentation of the LAG members
2. Project Technical Assistance for Civil Society Organisations (main objectives and project activities) *Presentation*
3. Selection of chairperson for the founding meeting of LAG
4. Presentation of the role and expectations from the LAG and rules and procedures for the LAG
5. Conclusions and next steps

1. Ms. Suncica Sazdovska welcomed all present at the meeting and briefly presented the agenda. Further on, she proposed for everyone to present themselves aiming to get to know each other and show the diversity of the group i.e. all the segments of the civil society included or covered by their networks and organisations. The LAG members presented themselves.

2. Ms. Sazdovska presented the project Technical Assistance for the Civil Society Organisations with its main objectives and project activities.

- Regarding project implementation it was mentioned that it was part of IPA (multi-beneficiary programme). Further on, the project composition and the main project implementing body – the consulting company – SIPU International as well as the partners from the consortium and their role were presented. Next, the time frame, the budget and the overall organisation of the project (regional office and all national offices) as well as the employees and their responsibilities and tasks in the local office were presented.

- In the presentation of the project's organisation, the role and composition of the Local Advisory Group was also explained.

- Further on, the project's main objective was presented, the expected results, as well as the core components with activities for their implementation.

- In the part where the main objectives were presented, Ms. Fani Karanfilova Panovska posed a question about measuring the achieved objectives, which quantitative indicators would measure that and which would be the data to show what had been achieved. Had the presented budget been really properly utilized and which indicators would measure the performance?

- Further on, in the presentation of the project' third component i.e. capacity building, it was asked about the procedure of selecting trainers having in mind the fact that they have to be experienced in civil society and to be familiar with the situation of the country's civil society organisations.

- It was stressed that the calls for proposals would be transparent and that all CSOs could take part with their representatives. The trainings to be organised at the regional level would be in English, whereas, the local or national trainings would be in the local languages i.e. the official language of the country.

- Ms. Sazdovska listed the generic trainings planned to be implemented by the project such as: fundraising, CSO management, advocacy and lobbying, inclusion of CSOs in policy creation, EU funding, project management.

- Regarding the part where the fourth component was presented, i.e. relationship between CSOs and external stakeholders it was stressed that several partnership events were planned which among other things would aim at strengthening the relationship among the government, the CSOs and the other stakeholders.

- The kick-off event of the project was also mentioned and it was planned for the event to take place in January/February 2010. Besides presenting the project, it was planned on that other event activities were to take place for informing and establishing partnerships via discussion and joint forums, thus, it would be good on the following LAG meeting to propose topics for discussion. The proposal for discussion on the Needs Assessment Report of the CSOs was given as an example. All LAG members were invited to provide their comments and remarks to the report via e-mail. Since very few members managed to send their remarks, it was proposed the remarks to be sent by 25 December at the latest.

- With respect to the national action plan it was agreed to put it for a review at the next LAG meeting. Regarding the plan, Ms. Karanfilovsa Panovska asked whether the plan had already been finalized or there was room for its improvement and changes. Further on, Mr. Zoran Ilievski inquired about the deadlines for giving their opinion on the plan so that it could be thematically broadened or to add the needed or subtract the not needed matters.

- Ms. Sazdovska pointed out that some parts of the activities were planned at the regional level i.e. they needed to be harmonized in all 8 project beneficiary states. The proposals for the plan derived from the conclusions from the consultative meetings which had taken place at the regional level in Sarajevo. However, regarding the national activities it was stressed

that that was a project implemented by a service contact and a larger portion of the activities had already been foreseen before the project commenced, thus, the LAG role should be towards creativity and not overall changing of activities.

- Regarding the partnership events, it was explained that they should be one-day events for instance for promoting the new law on CSOs aiming at communicating the new law and the other changes to the law to the CSOs.

Ms. Elizabeta Nedanovska stated that the Unit for cooperation with the civil society organisations within the Government of the Republic of Macedonia had already planned 5 events for debates and discussion on that law covering the whole territory of the country.

- In any case, it was stressed that the comments were welcomed, but they needed to be sent as soon as possible so that the action plan could be adjusted before it was finally adopted.

- Ms. Karanfilova Panovska stated that she had general remarks on the Needs Assessment Report for the CSOs which to a larger extent gave picture of the CSOs, however, some parts did not correspond with the current situation having in mind the fact that the literature used was from 2003. She considered that not as relevant and important as the recommendations and comments for surpassing the problems which were not fully in line with the EU report. The CSOs' capacities were not sufficiently explained as well as CSOs' involvement in law creation. It was explained that the remarks to that report require more comprehensive analysis.

- The project team emphasised the methodology for drafting the report (interviews with relevant CSOs' representatives as well as the two focus groups from Gostivar and Tetovo) and the many possibilities given to the CSOs to present their opinions about the CSOs' needs. Further on, it was mentioned that on 7<sup>th</sup> October the Project Team had presented to 25 CSOs the report at the Consultative meeting, which had taken place at the EU Info Centre. Those CSOs together with representatives from the Government had had the opportunity to give remarks and comments and these comments had been included in the report.

- Regarding the comments and the questions about the regional trainings Ms. Sazdovska explained that the regional methodology had already been harmonized and the topics of the regional trainings would be the same for all countries, whereas, regarding the national trainings the LAG members were more than welcome to provide their proposals.

- Mr. Zoran Ilievski commented that they should use the possibilities and resources on the regional level as well as the needs for CSO networking to higher regional level, their mutual communication which would have greater effects. The same was stressed by Ms. Karanfilova Panovska who agreed with the possibility for utilizing the regional resources and good practices from other countries as well as to improve communication with CSOs from other countries.

- Ms. Sazdovska emphasized that all those issues had been discussed at the regional consultative meetings and due to those reasons it had been asked to harmonize the regional events so that all countries would be involved and in addition to that to evaluate the possibilities for the national events also to gain regional dimension (for instance: by inviting guests from neighbouring countries).

- Mr. Zoran Ilievski stated that there were insufficient regional joint activities of CSOs, their representation as well as their possibility for networking and sharing experiences from different countries. For instance, if a meeting was organized for think-tank organisations from various countries they could share experience, practices and possibilities for cooperation could be created. Within the project, for instance, even though it had been planned for members from other national offices to participate at LAG meetings, still, he considered that not only members from the project teams but also CSO representatives from other countries should also be invited.

- Ms. Karanfilova Panovska agreed that exactly that was confirmed in Brussels by the event “People for people” aiming at acquainting people with each other; still she remarked why these events always took place in Brussels.
- Ms. Ivanova elaborated that the event always took place in Brussels since among other things the aim was for CSOs to become familiar with the EU organisational structure as well as due to the fact that the event always had only one head office which was in Brussels.
- With respect to the Web site Ms. Ivanova proposed that it would be more useful for the national database to be set in such a way that every CSO could update their data by user name and password according to the on-line registration model PADOR imposed by EU.
- Regarding the Needs Assessment Report for CSOs Ms. Ivanova agreed that LAG should contribute. Further on, she explained about the project’s budget that the budget had not been decreased but the budget was the tender’s offer of SIPU International who won the tender whereas the remaining amount of 1,3 million Euros were allocated for grants.
- Ms. Ivanova stressed that LAG was an advisory group, not project steering committee. They should give their comments and remarks but also to contribute with their proposals. Next, she added that it was very important that things were being done but the period when these things were done was also important because late reactions would be unproductive, thus, with respect to the consultative process for the report or the action plan that was the moment for contributing and not once these reports were adopted and became official. Yet, something very important was to familiarize with the actual needs of CSOs. Regarding the trainings, she added that a working group could be organised for designing the trainings as well as other consultations for law changes or other proposals. In her eyes, the LAG should feel the pulse of the CSO and should exist as semi-formal group which would contribute for speeding up the work. Whenever was needed it would be good to invite people with particular expertise so as to answer adequately to the relevant questions regarding the CSO. LAG should be vanguard but at the same time should stand behind the activities and possibilities of the civil society. As far as regional networking was concerned, a big problem was the insufficient money but that was a good chance for sharing experiences and good practices.
- Mr. Zoran Ilieski added that the LAG should be an interaction for collecting information and sharing of experiences from diverse CSOs in the region.
- Mr. Lulzim Haziri stated that the database should be very carefully created and that the database should be well structured and developed, but also the databases from the other countries should be used as contacts for the CSOs in the region for building regional partnerships.

## **Conclusions**

- For the next meeting, the project’s Logical Framework with indicators should be prepared and reviewed for better informing the LAG members;
- The project should pay more attention and focus on regional aspect and to include more regional activities;
- The deadline for submitting remarks and comments to the Needs Assessment Report should be prolonged to Friday 25<sup>th</sup> December.

3. The third point from the Agenda was selection of chairperson and all members agreed that that could be done for next meetings having in mind that for the current meeting the members were not prepared and the meeting was approaching its end. It was proposed for Ms. Fani Karanfilova Panovska to chair the following LAG meeting. It was agreed for the next meeting’s Agenda first to be sent to the chairperson and in case there were no comments that

Agenda could be distributed to the other members together with the other materials for the next meetings at least 4 days before the meeting. At the next meeting, the new Agenda would be first adopted by the LAG members and then the meeting would proceed according to that Agenda.

### **Conclusions**

- For the next LAG meetings, LAG members coming from the CSOs would be chairpersons on rotational principle, whereas, the chairperson for the following meetings would be appointed at the end of that LAG meeting.
- Chairperson of the second LAG meetings would be Ms. Fani Karanfilova Panovska.

4. Ms. Sazdovska presented the Rules and Procedures for the LAG and emphasised the key pieces of information.

- Mr. Zoran Ilievski raised the issued about the transportation costs to be covered by the project in the amount of return bus fare. In his view, that amount was very low and due to the fact that the group in on voluntary basis at least the actual transportation costs should be covered, having in mind that the LAG members were travelling by car. It was proposed to pay per kilometre in line with the approach used for the project team.

- It was also stressed that it would be good to put in the Rules and Procedures for LAG that LAG was not a steering committee of the project but consultative and advisory group.

### **Conclusions**

- It should be checked with the project's management team about the possibilities for the transportation costs for LAG members to be covered according to the approach used for the project's team.
- The next LAG meeting was scheduled for 13 January (Wednesday) 2010.
- The list of documents for the next LAG meeting with all documents to be distributed to all LAG members via e-mail.
- Documents to be reviewed at the next LAG meeting:
  1. Project's logical framework and indicators
  2. Needs Assessment Report of CSOs
  3. Project's kick-off event
  4. National Action Plan for the following period

Minutes taken by  
Mirjana Pehcevska Pop-Iliev