

MINUTES OF THE FIRST MEETING OF THE LOCAL ADVISORY GROUP (LAG)

«Civil Society Organisation Capacity Building in IPA Countries» (TACSO – Technical Assistance to Civil Society Organisations)

Date: 01. February 2010

Time: 10:00 – 13:00

Venue: Human Rights House Zagreb

Present were:

Civil Society Organizations Representatives

1. Milan Bijelić, Association MI, Split
2. Gordana Obradović-Dragišić, Association CESI - Center for Education, Counselling and Research, Zagreb
3. Sandra Pernar, Association GONG, Zagreb
4. Marlena Plavšić, Association Suncokret- Pula
5. Nikolina Svalina, Center for Peace, Non-violence and Human Rights Osijek
6. Jagoda Munić, Association Zelena akcija, Zagreb

Representatives of Government Institutions

7. Sanja Galeković, Central Finance and Contracting Agency (CFCA)
8. Cvjetana Plavša-Matić, National Foundation for Civil Society Development (NFCSD)
9. Igor Vidačak, Government Office for Cooperation with NGOs (GOFCNGOs)

EU Delegation Representatives

10. Erol Akdag, Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Croatia, Task Manager
11. Aida Njunjić, Interpreter

TACSO Team

12. Aida Bagić, SIPU International, TACSO Croatia Office. Resident Advisor
13. Irena Slunjski, SIPU International, TACSO Croatia Office, Project Officer
14. Tamara Brnetić, SIPU International, TACSO Croatia Office, Administrative and Finance Assistant

Chair person:

Aida Bagić, TACSO Resident Advisor

List of documents distributed at the meeting:

1. Agenda (in Croatian)
2. Power Point Presentation on TACSO Project - Technical Assistance to Civil Society Organisations) (in Croatian)
3. Needs Assessment Report (in English)
4. TACSO Croatia Office Work Plan from December 2009 – June 2010. (in Croatian)
5. Power Point Presentation on main duties of LAG – rules and procedures (in Croatian)

6. Rules and Principles of functioning of Local Advisory Group (in English)
7. TACSO Brochure (in English)

AGENDA:

10:00 – 11:30	Introduction of participants, Reviewing Agenda Presentation of the Project of Technical Assistance to the Civil Society Organisations (TACSO) (Draft Inception Report – e-mailed) Overview of the key findings of the Needs Assessment in Croatia (Croatia Needs Assessment Report – e-mailed) Overview of the planned activities on national and regional level discussion
11:30 – 11:45	Break
11:45 – 13:15	Establishment of the TACSO Project LAG Overview of the LAG rules and procedures (LAG rules and procedures – e-mailed) Involving LAG members in TACSO Project Activities Election of LAG President Agreement on future activities (communication between meetings, timing for following meeting)
13:15 – 14:00	Lunch

The purpose of the meeting was to establish the LAG for TACSO Croatia and to introduce the LAG members with the current status of the project. First part of the meeting concentrated on introducing LAG members to the findings of the Needs Assessment and gave a brief overview of the activities which will be undertaken at the regional and national level. Second part of the meeting concentrated on the establishment of the Local Advisory Group of TACSO Project, reviewing Rules and Procedures of Operations, discussing possibilities of including LAG members into Project activities, electing the President and reaching an agreement on future activities.

PART I:

Ms Aida Bagić, TACSO Resident Advisor opened the meeting by welcoming everybody and introducing TACSO Project in Croatia, thanking all participants for their acceptance of membership nominations and inviting them to introduce themselves. The meeting continued with a presentation of TACSO Project by listing key objectives and project activities and by introducing general project information.

Regarding project implementation it was mentioned that it was a part of the Civil Society Facility, funded through IPA, and that the project was implemented by consulting company SIPU International and its consortium partners. As well, participants were informed about the time frame, budget and organisational structure of the project. The presentation went on with an elaboration for each component of the project (namely Visibility, Technical Assistance, Capacity Building and Networking) listing activities planned until June 2010.

Regarding component 3, regional trainings Mr. Erol Akdag posed the question on the eligibility criteria for participants.

Ms Bagić explained that regional trainings are designed in accordance with the needs of participants from countries in the region, with previous training experience, representatives of the CSOs, who will be able to fit new knowledge in their daily work. For the pilot training there were 38 applications (half of them were not representatives of the CSOs, but individuals working in Public Administration and Education Institutions). Two applicants per country will be selected for each of the trainings.

When presenting component 4 i.e. proposed activities of the project Ms Bagić used the opportunity to invite everybody to attend kick off meetings which will be held during February in four cities (namely Rijeka, Zagreb, Split and Osijek) in order to cover all regions of Croatia. The events will be used as opportunity to promote TACS project and to present Implementation Guidelines for the Code of Practice on Consultation of the Interested Public in the Procedures of Adopting Laws, Other Regulations and Acts. The events are organised in cooperation with the Government Office for Cooperation with NGOs.

Ms Bagić concluded her overview by welcoming everybody's proposals for future activities of the TACS project. She emphasized the importance of participants stating all relevant potentially problematic issues they noticed in the Inception or Needs Assessment Report, or during her presentation. She explained that the final version of the Needs Assessment Report is expected to be published soon and it will integrate some of the already provided comments of the persons consulted (including individual LAG members). She suggested only the most important issues from both reports to be discussed at the meeting.

Issues raised:

- Ms. Sanja Galeković raised the issue of the importance of the coordination of activities, precisely having in mind the monitoring obligation of GOfCNGOs and CFCA to visit each CSO at least once during the duration of the project. If TACS Team would engage in monitoring this would mean overlapping of activities. She also questioned the appropriateness of the TACS monitoring function. Ms. Galeković also pointed out that some tools are already developed and the possibility of their use instead of developing new ones, she also stressed the need for better description of the criteria for five projects which will be selected
- Mr. Igor Vidačak pointed out that it should be taken into account that Croatia is different on many aspects. Inception Report does not clearly show the possibilities for project's adjustments in each country. In order to avoid duplication of efforts and to achieve optimal deployment of resources available it would be useful to avoid monitoring field visits by the TACS Team as it is already done by GOfCNGOs and CFCA
- Ms. Galeković raised the issue regarding training modules as financial reporting from her experience appears to be the weakest link and asked for this to be taken into consideration when developing training modules on EU funded projects.
- Ms. Jagoda Munić pointed out the need to assist CSOs with solvency during the duration of projects. She pointed out to the fact there are no available bank loans for CSOs. (Zagrebačka Bank –

Zaba one of the major Croatian banks started loan line for companies involved with IPARD projects).

- Mr. Milan Bijelić whose organisation is included in the Programme of Regional Development and Strengthening Capacities of CSOs (further “Regional Support Networks”) stressed the importance of good coordination and interest of CSOs from Dalmatia for cooperation with the project

Ms. Irena Slunjski presented one of the project activities during March which foresee contacts with representatives of all the Regional Support Networks in order to agree on further cooperation.

Ms. Cvjetana Plavša-Matić commented that the NFCSD is going to host a meeting with Regional Support Networks, taking place in February, and proposed to merge mentioned two meetings in order to use resources available more efficiently. Ms. Bagić emphasizing the importance of the regional component of the project noted the possibility for the Regional Support Networks to contribute to the project’s overall regional (Western Balkans and Turkey) component.

- Ms. Galeković raised the importance of allowing public servants to be eligible to participate at a training on SOKNO (quality assurance system for CSOs, based on the British PQASSO) and asked that issue to be taken into consideration. explaining that one of the criteria CFCA staff are using when monitoring NGO projects is done by applying SOKNO system, so they would benefit from further education in that direction.

- Ms. Nikolina Svalina, expressed her opinion that TACSO project should precisely profile itself, by choosing specific targets from Inception Report and Needs Assessment Report. According to her it should be the networking among CSOs aiming to strengthen them in becoming serious partners in advocacy and lobbying. She also asked for a clarification of direct TA for the design and preparation of project proposals, and maintained that project should be focused on specific issue.

Ms. Bagić stressed that issue is still to be elaborated. She emphasized that four components are still from the general description of the project, but it is the intention of the project to ask LAG members for their opinion when choosing specific focus for TA. LAG members were briefly explained the procedure for allocation of Incidentals Budget financing. She added her personal hope that this project would contribute to the preparation of the new strategy on civil society development.

- Mr. Akdag stressed the importance of defining regional and specific targets for Croatia. His primary concern was to ensure avoiding a duplication in training but at the same time ensuring that small and rural NGOs were adequately trained and educated.

Ms. Bagić, explained that the project is not designed in a way that it can efficiently deal with each individual NGO; in Croatia it seems more appropriate to strengthen capacities of the existing support organisations which are better suited to deal with individual small and rural NGOs

- Mr. Bijelić explained they are, through five regional networks within the Programme for Regional Development and Strengthening of CSOs (funded by NFCSD) already providing support to small and rural NGO offering services such as training and individual consultations pointing out the importance of coordination to avoid overlaps.

- Ms. Sandra Pernar pointed out one area of possible engagement of the project would be the lack of knowledge on cooperation of local authorities with CSOs.

Mr. Akdag commented a raised issue that in his opinion that there are projects dealing with democratization, visibility, sustainability that should be involved with this issue.

Mr. Vidačak, commented the importance of networking with EU CSOs which is possible to be achieved through study visits available within the People to People programme.

- Speaking about the help desk service Ms Bagić, pointed out that in Croatia the aim of the help desk will be modified in order to fit the current needs, for the moment it is thought to be networking within IPA countries and between CSO in IPA countries and EU as for the moment it is insufficiently covered.

- Mr. Vidačak explained about the involvement of GOfCNGOs in the project from the very beginning and the importance of the way of incorporation of project activities into the processes that have already started in Croatia. He stressed that some of the issues were dealt with by other projects and it is necessary to ensure that TACS0 brings an added value in the areas that are not adequately covered. The challenge, according to Mr Vidačak, will be to increase the visibility of the project and other TA services available to CSOs. He explained that GOfCNGOs is dealing on daily basis with at least 20 questions on basic issues what should be dealt with by existing Regional Support Networks. TACS0 Project should be focused on supporting the implementation of existing National strategy for creating an enabling environment for civil society development, as one of the specifics of Croatia. He also added it is very beneficial for the GOfCNGOs to have TACS0 in their premises as it is much easier to avoid overlapping, ensure complementarily and synergy of activities and also with activities of the NFCSD. He supported issues raised by Ms Galeković that some members of the Public Administration bodies should participate at SOKNO training. Finally, it is all about ensuring sustainable environment for civil society development, and that requires cross-sector collaboration.

- Ms. Pernar commented regarding the revision of the national strategy that the project should aim at ending with having a concrete proposal on the new national strategy and emphasized the problem of inconsistency of Croatian and EU CSOs as one of the problems Croatia CSOs are facing when dealing with EU CSOs.

Mr. Akdag proposed on that matter that when networking with EU NGOs, Croatian CSOs should consider involving umbrella organisations. Ms. Bagić added the project team was hoping to have as one of the activities to encourage some Croatian CSOs to join EU networks

Ms. Gordana Obradović-Dragišić stated her opinion that the problem she sees with networking is that in order to join a successful EU network you have to be a network yourself and the accession procedure is very complex and complicated, even for existing networks. In regard to communication with local authorities, according to her opinion, it is well observed that CSOs have insufficient capacities, however, she stressed there are CSOs with sufficient capacities which are faced with the hesitation of local authorities to consult CSOs.

- Mr. Bijelić expressed his opinion that TACS0 project should emphasize visibility as public still does not recognize and understand the role of CSOs

Conclusions:

- **Efforts have to be undertaken in order to avoid duplication of efforts and to achieve optimal use of available resources (everybody has to take special care to share information)**

- **When developing training modules on EU funded projects financial reporting has to be included as it appears to be the weakest link**
- **The possibility for public servants to attend SOKNO and some other training modules will be looked into**
- **Project will ensure that TA needs of small and rural NGOs are also answered**
- **Project will also engage into the area of cooperation of local authorities and CSOs**
- **Project will aim at encouraging Croatian CSO networks to join EU networks**
- **Project will concentrate help desk activities into regional networking as this is one of its strong points**
- **Project will work on informing the public about the roles of CSOs stressing their contribution in daily lives**
- **Project will encourage CSOs to cooperate on common initiatives**

PART II:

Establishment of the Local Advisory Group

Ms Bagić in her introduction invited everybody to define in more precise words further functioning of the LAG and after that board members briefly passed through the distributed rules and procedures.

Raised Issues:

- Mr. Vidačak asked to have Interim Report available and proposed to schedule LAG meetings according to the TACSO reporting schedule to the EU.
- Ms. Munić commented that the mandate of the project and of the LAG is not and cannot be the preparation of a new strategy for development of civil society but only commenting of the mentioned document. She added that other countries have no Council for Civil Society Development so that the situation is somehow different.
- Ms. Bagić presented the possibilities of TACSO project involvement is the new strategy development as primarily of facilitative nature
- It was proposed that representatives of Council for CS Development and children and minority rights to be included in the LAG. On the suggestion of Mr. Vidačak it was decided – for the sake of efficiency - not to expand the membership of LAG, but to leave the opportunity for inviting guest members to participate in the meetings.
- Mr. Vidačak also asked for the possibilities for alternation of rules and procedures and proposed to pass through rules and procedures of selection for regional trainings as well as to see the future obligations of regional trainings participants.
- Ms. Obradović Dragišić raised the issue of Conflict of Interests

Ms. Bagić explained there are some activities from which LAG members will be excluded. This issue is still being discussed at the regional level. One of the options, like in Serbia, is to exclude LAG members from direct decision making on issues concerning his/her organisation. However, Ms. Bagić stressed, this body is of the advisory character and its decisions are not binding for execution by TACSO Team.

Ms. Pernar agreed to be the next Chairperson of the meeting which will take place in Zadar on the occasion of the NGO days (May 13-15, 2010). TACSO Croatia Office will ensure necessary assistance in preparing for the meeting.

Upon request all participants will be mailed the PowerPoint Presentation on TACSO project and Monitoring Report.

Conclusions

- **Meeting every six weeks, as suggested in the Rules and Procedures, seems a bit optimistic and due to all duties and obligations of LAG representatives it is not realistic. The proposal by Mr. Igor Vidačak to meet in May during the Associations Days in Zadar was accepted. Ms Sandra Pernar passed her voluntary nomination for LAG President and accepted to chair the following meeting**
- **Ms. Sanja Galeković proposal to ensure LAG's influence on the first Interim Report may not be feasible due to the fact that the Report is being prepared by HQ in Stockholm and it is not clear whether there may be a time to consult LAGs in all of the countries. However LAG members will be given a possibility to comment Croatian Work Plan which should be completed on 8 Feb. LAG members will have two days for their comments and suggestions.**

The meeting finished sometime after 13:00 hrs.

Minutes taken by Ms. Tamara Brnetić, TACSO Croatia Office Administrative and Finance Assistant