



## Analysis of the Five-year Community Development Plan and Annual Work Plan Performance, and Development and Use of Participatory Evaluation Methodology

### Executive Summary

#### Introduction

Research carried out by various institutions shows that the majority of the population are not aware of what a five-year community development plan (hereinafter referred to as “FYCDP”) and an annual work plan (hereinafter referred to as “AWP”) are, and are not actively involved in the development, implementation, oversight and evaluation processes of these documents. Thus, according to the surveys conducted by Caucasus Research Resource Centers (CRRC Armenia) within the framework of the “Civic Engagement in Local Governance” Project (CELoG), 2.1% of respondents participated in public discussions on community policies, programs and plans, and only 1.3% attended the in public hearings/discussions on the community budget<sup>1</sup>. The said survey also proves that public awareness and participation in the sphere of oversight over the activities performed by the local self-governments is low. In particular, 93.7% of the population were not familiar with any law or procedure regulating public participation in local self-government, 96.4% had never overseen the implementation of any regulation adopted by their LSGs, and 97.2% were not aware of any tool for evaluating the activities of LSGs by the government.

This is evidenced by the results of the monitoring by “Compass” NGO, according to which Gyumri community has low participation of the residents in the sittings of the Council of Elders, almost absence in public hearings, as well as there is a lack of suggestions from both citizens and civil society representatives.

Based on the above, the “Compass” NGO team conducted a research aiming to assess the quality and effectiveness of the activities performed by LSGBs, as well as to involve the community residents in community life and promote the formation of a better informed and demanding public.

#### The Approaches and Principles for Monitoring and Evaluation of a FYCDP and an AWP

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<sup>1</sup> See [here](#) for the findings of the survey “Civic Engagement in Local Governance” (CELoG).

Monitoring and evaluation of delivery of community services, implementation of projects and activities specified by the work plan and the development plan, as well as other community work is the most important part of the process of monitoring the implementation of a FYCDP or the AWP. In general, monitoring is an objective and systemic process, the main purpose being data collection and analysis and its full use to achieve the goals set before the LSGBs. A well-developed evaluation system helps to put the activities of LSGBs on the right path and take active steps to improve the situation; it provides feedback to LSGBs without which it is impossible to ensure continuous improvement of the services and works. Regular monitoring of FYCDPs and AWP enables LSGBs to gain a number of advantages, particularly in budgeting, community service delivery and planning and implementation of other activities.

**Monitoring and evaluation of an AWP.** The AWP structure includes a Monitoring and Evaluation Plan (MEP), which provides that the Advisory Body (AB) for the FYCDP/ Budget Management under the community leader and the community staff should monitor the course of implementation of the sectoral projects included in the AWP once every six months. This process is carried out by collecting data on the intermediate performance indicators already defined in the program structures (passports), calculating their actual values, comparing them with the baseline and target values, and presenting the description of the monitoring results to the community leader.

**The research of the legal regulations for the implementation of the FYCDP and the AWP in the Republic of Armenia shows that they underwent considerable changes in recent years, including rather effective mechanisms for improving the sector.** Thus, the methodological guidelines for FYCDP and AWP development and monitoring do not in any way include methods, steps and tools for the CSOs, the media and the public to be able to be guided in order to conduct a participatory evaluation of a FYCDP and AWP. **Thus, it should be noted that there is a need to recommend additional methods and mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation of the FYCDP and AWP implementation and increasing the participation rate in the process.**

### **Targets for Improving Monitoring and Evaluation of Gyumri's FYCDP and AWP**

**Issues related to the development of the FYCDP.** The primary issue of developing the FYCDP and AWP is the non-specific content of these tools, because, as the sectoral experts point out, communities “copy” the content of the FYCDP and AWP from one another, without localizing these to their communities. In many communities, some sections of the of the FYCDP replicate similar documents of other communities, which, according to the experts, is due to the fact that these documents are not developed as a result of due stakeholder engagement and discussion. According to the experts, in order to make the process of development of the five year development plans and the AWP more effective, proper public hearings are needed which would enable to identify the community issues and priorities.

The lack of interest of the population in the FYCDP and AWP processes is another underlying issue. In general, there is skepticism and lack of trust among the population in the participatory processes, which is manifested both at national and local levels. On the other hand, not only the residents but also the members of the Council of Elders may not be interested in this process. During in-depth interviews, for

example, some members of the Council of Elders stated that they were not thoroughly informed about the CDPs and AWP or were not fully involved in their development.

**Methodological issues.** Organizing discussions and meetings with community residents and other stakeholders for the evaluation of the FYCDP depends on the community leader. In some communities this is done properly, while in others it is not; in the latter communities participation is “ensured” only by publishing the CDP and collecting feedback. In this respect ensuring participation is left to the discretion of the community leader although it is a mandatory component for developing the CDP.

On the other hand, after the publication of the FYCDP reports, no report or minutes are presented on the opinions and suggestions submitted by the population and the response of the municipality to them: this makes the process non-transparent. It is recommended to formalize this process and develop a summary/minutes of the opinions and suggestions received on the FYCDP performance evaluation and their responses, making it publicly available.

**Use of guidelines.** The methodological guidelines provided by the Ra Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure are used by the specialists. The relevant specialist of Gyumri Municipality, for example, presented that the FYCDP and AWP were being developed in accordance with the methodological guidelines. The employee of the municipality also mentioned that they use the methodological guidelines when developing the FYCDPs, specifically when setting the monitoring indicators. The methodological guidelines were assessed by the users to be mainly useful.

**Advisory body.** The tools used in the FYCDP and AWP development, implementation and performance evaluation tool include the board created by the community leader, which may include members of the Council of Elders, experts, and active community residents. As a way to increase the efficiency of the FYCDP performance evaluation process, **it is recommended to strengthen the mechanisms for the formation and operation of the boards.** Currently, the boards do not involve sectoral specialists, experts and independent researchers.

There is an Advisory body under the community of Gyumri, which deals with the development of the annual budget and the development plan.

**FYCDP and AWP development and performance evaluation by a multi-stakeholder group.** According to the sectoral experts, members of the Council of Elders and the representatives of the municipality and Regional Administration (*Marzpetaran*), the FYCDPs and AWP should be developed by a multi-stakeholder group. All parties involved in in-depth interviews attached importance to ensuring public involvement in the process of the CDP performance evaluation, including CSOs. The participation of any body was not ruled out by the experts because, according to them, the involvement of a wider circle would allow more meaningful discussions and an ambitious end result. On the other hand, as a self-governing body, ensuring the independence of the process from the regional administration and the government was deemed important in the process of performance evaluation of the FYCDPs and AWP. Importance was attached to the participation of non-governmental organizations, community non-commercial organizations (CNCOs) and the active groups of the population, such as young people, representatives of the non-governmental, educational and business sectors, as well as engagement of research organizations and sectoral experts in the needs assessment phase. A special mention was also made of the involvement

of the representatives of the development programs departments of the regional administrations (*Marzpetarans*) and the representatives of the relevant subdivisions of the RA Ministry of Economy and their methodological assistance in the process of evaluating the performance of the CDPs and AWP.

**FYCDP and AWP alternative tools.** The experts consider the FYCDPs and AWP to be effective & sufficient tools for addressing community issues, provided that these tools are properly developed and implemented, with proper oversight and monitoring of the implementation.

As **alternative/complementary tools**, it is recommended to use the following:

- A Priority Assessment Matrix developed through an inclusive community meeting;
- Preparation of quarterly and semi-annual plans for the implementation of the AWP; monitoring of such plans, performance evaluation and identification of relevant risks;
- Organizing quarterly discussions to discuss and evaluate performance and decide on further actions;
- Presentation of sectoral policies through the Annexes to the CDPs;
- Development of specific sectoral development tools; and
- Development of the practice of drafting mid-term expenditure plans at the community level, which implies compiling and evaluating a comprehensive document on the activities and projects to be completed over up to three years.

**Issues with the AWP.** AWP are monitored in the first and second semesters, and the monitoring results are published on the community website along with the annual budget performance report. In the first quarter of each following year, the AWP performance is approved by the Council of Elders and published on the community website.

In case the AWP should be derived from the FYCDPs, according to the experts in some cases the content of the AWP does not match the FYCDPs; they are developed based on the program capabilities. Thus, one of the issues to be monitored and evaluated is the extent to which an AWP is consistent with and is derived from the FYCDP. According to the experts, the monitoring and evaluation of AWP is carried out very superficially.

The experts who participated in the interviews positively assessed Gyumri's FYCDP, noting that it has a solid logical framework and contains sufficient information for monitoring.

**Monitoring indicators.** According to in-depth interview participants, setting the monitoring target indicators correctly is important: it depends on the availability of research data at the local level, as well as on the knowledge and capacities of the evaluating specialists. Surveys conducted at the local level can serve as a guide for setting monitoring indicators and selecting certain program areas.

According to the members of the Gyumri community Council of Elders, review of the dynamics of the monitoring indicators allows to draw a conclusion about the direction and rate of the community's development. Additional work is being done on the underperforming indicators during the following years.

The data are openly available on the website of the municipality. On the other hand, these indicators depend on the overall socio-economic situation of the country and do not always reflect the result of the work and efforts of the municipality.

**Issues with indicators.** The methodological guidelines define three sustainable development indicators:

- Reducing the number of families below the poverty line;
- Population growth; and
- Own income growth.

According to a municipality expert, while the growth of own revenues can be ensured through administration, the other two indicators are issues to be solved at the non-community level, depending on the overall socio-economic situation of the country, and do not always reflect the result of the work of the municipality.

The next issue with the indicators is that the target indicators are not based on data or analysis, in other words, they are not data-driven.

**Performance of the indicators.** The implementation of the indicators set in the CDPs varies between communities and depends on the efficiency of the municipality's activities and the resources of the community budget.

According to in-depth interview participants, the indicators are mainly performed or underperformed. Subvention programs implemented in the communities in recent years, as well as assistance provided to the consolidated communities within the framework of international donor-funded and loan projects, have contributed to the rise in the performance of the indicators. On the other hand, the members of the Council of Elders state that in a the rapidly changing socio-economic and political situation it is difficult to make forecasts of indicators; external factors have a big influence on the defined indicators.

The next question concerns the issue of responsibility or consequences in case of underperformance of indicators. The under-performance of the indicators as revealed by the monitoring does not cause consequences for the municipality. According to a representative of the municipality, "By creating the plan, the community authorities do not take responsibility for implementing it". In this respect, it appears that the setting of indicators is a guideline requirement and has no essential practical significance for the implementing parties.

**Conflict of interests.** Where the municipality carries out monitoring and evaluation, an issue of a conflict of interests arises, because in this case the same body develops, implements and monitors the FYCDP and the AWP. When outsourcing the monitoring component to independent research organizations, the experts predict a qualitative increase in the reports and more reliable evaluation results. On the other hand, the qualitative growth and capacity development of the local specialists is also deemed important.

**Delegating monitoring and evaluation.** The members of the Gyumri Municipality and Council of Elders state that they regularly cooperate with CSOs as part of various programs, but have not delegated monitoring and evaluation work as such to other organizations. Outsourcing of monitoring to CSOs is considered by the in-depth interview participants as a realistic and effective solution.

## Ways/Steps to Improve the Participatory Monitoring And Evaluation System for the Implementation of Community Development Plans

- When presenting the results of monitoring and evaluation, it is necessary to provide documentary substantiation for quantitative indicators.
- Trainings and capacity building for specialists involved in the setting, monitoring and evaluation process, including enhancing the effectiveness of the training courses and ensuring the practicability of the knowledge gained during the training.
- Outsourcing: engaging an independent monitoring organization in the process.
- Engaging stakeholders, CSOs and active public groups in the CDP and AWP monitoring process.
- Capacity building of CSOs, mass media, different active groups of the population in the oversight toolkit; and development of monitoring tools for these groups.
- Alternative participatory evaluation by the civil society on a regular basis, not just after project completion.
- Engage the residents in the development process; conduct quantitative representative surveys and discussions in the community; and develop the CDPs taking into account the priorities presented by the residents.
- Engage external consulting organizations in the process of development, monitoring and evaluation of FYCDPs and AWP. Specify a relevant line in the budget for this purpose.
- Engage sectoral experts in the development of the FYCDPs and AWP.
- Develop quarterly and semi-annual plans, evaluate their performance during the quarterly and semi-annual periods.
- Training of professionals involved in FYCDPs performance evaluation, including training courses on strategic planning, needs assessment, setting of monitoring indicators, and evaluation.
- Develop strategic thinking among the employees of the municipality.
- It is necessary to strengthen the mindsets of the community residents and municipality staff that the FYCDPs are developed in the logic of “from the bottom up”, and the priorities are based on the needs of the community residents.
- Development of online and offline evaluation tools, which will enable quick evaluations among residents.
- Comprehensible presentation of the content and monitoring results of FYCDPs and AWP to the public through infographics and visualizations.
- Involvement of an independent evaluation body in the process.
- Strengthen the role of the Union of Communities in the preparation, setting of monitoring indicators and monitoring of FYCDPs.
- Preparation of development programs by joint efforts of various levels of government and community authorities, engaging professional organizations.