**Final Evaluation**

**Joint EU-UNDP Civil Society Support Programme**

**Phase II:**

**1 July 2020 – 30 June 2023**

**Executive Summary**

This report presents the main findings of the final evaluation of the second phase of the project “*Joint EU-UNDP Civil Society Support Programme*” (hereafter referred to as the *CSSP II project*), financed by the EU and implemented by UNDP. The evaluation assessed the project’s achievements in terms of its relevance, effectiveness and impact, efficiency, sustainability, and other cross-cutting issues, and provides recommendations for the design of the upcoming phase of the project and similar interventions in this area. The evaluation methodology was based on mixed methods and involved the use of commonly applied evaluation tools such as documentary review, interviews, information triangulation, analysis and synthesis. Field work was conducted in the period 2-11 March 2023 and included meetings with beneficiary CSOs, UNDP, EU and other partners. The evaluation generated a wealth of findings and several recommendations which are synthesized in the rest of this section.

Relevance

The CSSP II project has exhibited a range of key features that have been instrumental in its relevance within the civil society landscape.

Areas for Potential Improvement:

* Offering more innovative and engaging training topics to CSOs to address their need for innovative and relevant content.

Effectiveness and Impact

Overall, the CSSP II project achieved most of its objectives, providing continuous capacity building support to diverse CSOs and contributing to civil society development.

Recommendations for the project's third phase include more systematic self-assessment methods for training programmes and expanded M&E efforts to capture the broader impact of grant initiatives on targeted communities.

Coherence

The CSSP II project has been coherent and complementary to other UNDP initiatives and projects of various development partners. These synergies have amplified the impact of efforts in capacity building, civil society development, and community improvement.

Potential areas for further improvement in coherence include:

* Integrating and consolidating training content across various projects to create a essential package for civil society organizations.
* Coordinating monitoring and evaluation efforts for a better understanding of the collective impact of projects on civil society capacity development and community-level improvements.
* Capitalizing on respective strengths of projects, such as leveraging CSSP II's capacity building focus to strengthen CSOs participating in EU4Dialogue activities.
* Developing a joint communications strategy to raise awareness and showcase the collective impact of these projects more effectively.

Efficiency

UNDP was responsible for the project’s management under the Direct Implementation Modality. The project team was lean and efficient. Despite challenges from political pressures, COVID-19, and the Ukrainian conflict, the project exhibited flexibility and adaptability in meeting its goals by actively monitoring local conditions and working closely with civil society actors. The project team effectively monitored and assessed the capacity of target CSOs using various methods, such as reports, questionnaires, and independent audits. Close engagement with CSOs was crucial for effective monitoring. Digital technologies played a significant role in bolstering civil society resilience, facilitating collaboration, and mitigating the exclusion of vulnerable groups. The project supported digital technology usage, even after the resumption of face-to-face communication. The project had an overall 94% execution rate at the time of evaluation. This indicates efficient planning and implementation. The project successfully gained visibility by engaging with numerous CSOs and communities. Key achievements include enhancing the positive image of EU and UNDP assistance, raising public and stakeholder awareness, strengthening online outreach, and communicating project results and sharing knowledge.

Sustainability

The CSSP II project has promoted sustainability through local ownership of project results, capacity building for civil society, extensive CSO engagement, enhanced connectivity and cooperation, collaboration with other projects, increased access to social services, and improved quality of life for vulnerable groups. Despite its success, the project faces challenges such as financial sustainability, maintaining the independent functioning of the Civic Resource Center (CRC), and ensuring the long-term impact of capacity building efforts. In the upcoming phase, there is a need to focus on CSOs’ financial sustainability through innovative funding models, strengthening the CRC, hubs, and umbrella organizations, and improving the sustainability of capacity-building efforts through an integrated training offer, the creation of an online training platform, capitalizing on existing resources, and emphasizing training of trainers.

Human Rights Based Approach, Gender & Youth Mainstreaming and Disability Inclusion

The CSSP II project has focused on diversity, inclusivity, and improving the situation of vulnerable local populations, including disadvantaged and disabled individuals. With a strong emphasis on gender equality, women and youth empowerment, and support for women and girls, the project has made significant strides in these areas. It has provided capacity building activities, grants, and training to women-led organizations and female participants. Furthermore, the project has supported youth initiatives and made efforts to promote disability inclusion. Overall, the CSSP II project has demonstrated a strong commitment to social impact and support for all members of society, helping improve the lives of marginalized groups in the community.

The evaluation identified the following set of recommendations for the attention of project stakeholders. These recommendations will be useful to UNDP and the EU in the process of designing the upcoming phase of the CSSP project.

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| ***Recommendation 1: Enhance the Training Offer*** | |
| To address the need of CSOs for more innovative and engaging training topics, the evaluation recommends the following actions for UNDP and the EU in light of the development of the new phase of the CSSP project:   * Conduct a needs assessment: Consult the CSOs to identify their most pressing needs, interests, and knowledge gaps, as well as their preferred training formats (e.g., online, in-person, workshops, or seminars). * Curate innovative training topics: Based on the needs assessment, select the most relevant and innovative training topics from Box X or other sources. Consider topics like the following:   + Social Entrepreneurship and Innovation   + Digital Marketing and Social Media Strategy   + Evidence-Driven Decision Making   + Design Thinking for Social Impact   + Impact Measurement and Evaluation   + Community Organizing and Mobilization   + Storytelling for Impact * Monitor and evaluate the impact: Regularly assess the effectiveness of the new training modules by soliciting feedback from participants at the end of each training session and assessing their impact on the CSOs' work. Use this information to refine and improve the training content over time. | |
| ***Recommendation 2: Improve the Measurement and Tracking of Results*** |
| To further enhance the effectiveness of CSSP project, the evaluation recommends the following actions for UNDP and the EU in light of the development of the new phase of the CSSP project:   * Develop and implement a solid self-assessment methodology for all CSOs participating in capacity development trainings. This will facilitate more systematic monitoring and reporting of training results, allowing the project team to identify strengths and areas requiring improvement. * Communicate the impact and value of strengthening civil society by sharing project results and success stories at the community level with relevant stakeholders. |
| ***Recommendation 3: Enhance CSSP’s Coherence with Other Interventions*** |
| To further strengthen the coherence of the CSSP project with other ongoing initiatives by development partners, the evaluation recommends the following actions for UNDP and the EU in light of the development of the new phase of the CSSP project:   * Develop an integrated training offer:   + Consider and assess the feasibility of the idea of consolidating training materials from EU-funded and UNDP-implemented projects.   + Assess the extent to which CSSP’s learning objectives are aligned with other ongoing initiatives by development partners.   + Create a unified training package to address diverse CSO needs.   + Explore options for placing the integrated training content under the management of the Civil Resource Center (CRC) and ensuring the maintenance, updating, and dissemination of training materials by the CRC.   + Utilize the CRC to facilitate workshops, training sessions, and peer-to-peer learning opportunities. * Implement integrated monitoring:   + Explore the feasibility of joint monitoring activities for EU-funded and UNDP-implemented projects.   + Explore the feasibility of conducting joint assessments of the collective impact of projects on civil society capacity development and community-level improvements. * Capitalize on the respective strengths of other projects to the benefit of CSSP:   + Explore opportunities for joint activities and initiatives that leverage the unique strengths of CSSP II and other EU-funded initiatives, such as EU4Dialogue.   + Facilitate more systematically skill and knowledge transfer between projects and participating CSOs. * Develop a joint communications strategy:   + Explore the idea of a unified communications approach for various projects, including joint press releases, social media campaigns, and public outreach activities.   + Take a more systematic approach to showcasing the collective impact of the EU/UNDP initiatives. |
| ***Recommendation 4: Explore Measures to Enhance the Efficiency of the Project*** |
| To further enhance the efficiency of CSSP project, the evaluation recommends the following actions for UNDP and the EU in light of the development of the new phase of the CSSP project:   * Streamline the CSO selection process by leveraging local knowledge and previous project experience, thereby reducing the time spent on screening and focusing more on implementation support. To this end, consider adopting a two-pronged approach for the selection process: less focus on established CSOs with previous assessments, and more attention to newly established CSOs. * Enhance project support for CSO initiatives during the implementation phase by providing closer engagement, guidance, and handholding to grant recipients. * Consider extending the grant initiatives' duration, allowing for more flexibility. |
| ***Recommendation 5: Further Strengthen the Sustainability of Project Results*** |
| To further strengthen the sustainability of CSSP results, the evaluation recommends the following actions for UNDP and the EU in light of the development of the new phase of the CSSP project:   * Enhance financial sustainability training for CSOs:   + Update the training content to include examples of financing models and approaches for CSOs that are relevant and drawn from successful real-world case studies.   + Help CSOs identify various funding models to diversify their revenue streams and increase financial sustainability.   + Help CSOs evaluate various funding models to determine alignment with their needs and goals. * Strengthen the sustainability of the Civic Resource Center (CRC), hubs, and umbrella organizations:   + Facilitate the conduct of a solid assessment of the modus operandi of the CRC, hubs and umbrella organizations, including the development of the respective business plans.   + Support the efforts of the managing CSO in diversifying CRC’s funding sources, exploring the potential of developing income-generating activities, and building strategic partnerships.   + Continue targeted capacity-building support for the staff of CRC, hubs and umbrella organizations in order to enhance their ability to manage the organization effectively, create strategic plans, and identify new funding opportunities.   + Support the respective CSOs in raising awareness about the role and work of CRC hubs and umbrella organizations through marketing and communication activities, with the aim of attracting donors, partners, and beneficiaries. * Improve the sustainability of capacity-building (training):   + Consider the creation of an integrated training offer by consolidating essential content across various EU-funded and UNDP-implemented (see Recommendation 2 above).   + Establish a training platform, managed by the CRC, to host, update, and disseminate training content.   + Capitalize on existing training resources by creating a /list of available relevant resources in English and Russian and providing assistance to CSOs in navigating it.   + Focus resources and effort on creating context-specific training material.   + Place greater focus on the creation of local training capabilities by providing more ToT opportunities. |