

## CSOs & Policy Dialogue

Project  
Evaluation

The Consortium Project “CSOs & Policy Dialogue” is a three years programme funded by the Austrian Development Agency (ADA). Phase II (Jan 1st 2017 - Dec 31st 2019) succeeded the pilot phase (Dec 1st 2014 - 30th Nov 2016) and is implemented under the lead of HORIZONT3000 by a Consortium of five Austrian NGOs (HORIZONT3000, CARE Austria, CARITAS Austria, SOS Children Villages, Austrian Red Cross) and their local partners in East Africa (Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda). Their project objective is to “Further strengthen capacities of East African CSOs regarding their policy dialogue engagement”.



## Main Findings

Overall, the findings of the external evaluation carried out in 2019 indicate that the project is on course towards achievement of its objectives and results. There is good progress and significant gains that can be consolidated.

# 01 Relevance

- The project corresponds to intern. development commitments, focusing on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 6 and 17. It exhibits Global North-South partnerships and collaborations, an approach that aims to facilitate skill transfer and capacity strengthening for the Southern CSOs.
- The involvement of the EA CSOs in the needs assessment and in developing the capacity-building plan ensured that the local priorities were integrated in the design. Sequencing of activities was ideal, starting with the development of a capacity building plan that was executed in a phased approach, allowing learning and adaptation. Capacity building focused on cross cutting capacity gaps manifest across partners. Experience sharing and cross learning visits were relevant in stimulating peer learning.
- The pilot phase tested the proposed intervention and provided a platform for continued engagement of EA CSOs in refining project approaches. PD is a superior approach to policy engagement as compared to competitive approaches traditionally used by many CSOs. SAF implementation was characterized by flexibility, allowing the implementers to shift and respond to changing priorities.



# 02 Effectiveness

- The facts that EA CSOs were at different levels of PD knowledge and experience and responded differently when addressing challenges, created a favorable gradient for experience sharing and for knowledge and skill transfer. This condition together with trainings led to improved capacity for PD engagement across the EA CSOs, as reflected in media engagement, use of research data to generate evidence for policy engagement, resource mobilization, and strategic planning for PD.
- SAF enabled EA CSOs to put into practice the acquired skills, and to expand space for public participation. Influence of EA CSOs on local and national development plans and other legal/ policy processes was observed across board. EA CSOs were better placed to engage more effectively in the four stages of PD, as depicted by the fast-paced accomplishment of some of the initiatives. All the EA CSOs had either established or strengthened their PD partnerships at the time of this evaluation. Additionally, EA CSOs were at different stages in developing their respective PD strategies- either draft in progress or completed.

# 03 Efficiency

- Financial resources were generally limited for the entire project, and as learnt during this evaluation, the project could not have achieved any better results with the same resources.
- Result optimisation with limited funds was possible through innovations that included: 1) Including other funding mechanisms to integrate project activities. 2) Identifying strategic opportunities to engage in the processes. 3) Circumventing the processes (e.g. engage with county committees instead of assemblies). 4) Keeping training costs low by relying mainly on local consultants, and institutional arrangements with KRCS. 5) Cross learnings and experience sharing appeared to have yielded great results with minimal resources.
- Effective coordination and management was a major factor in the efficiency and effectiveness of phase I and II. Available resources did not, however, allow adequate travels by Austrian partners, including the project coordinator, to East Africa to perform coordination as well as M&E roles. Other factors that may have hampered efficiency and therefore also effectiveness, is staff transitions that were manifest across the consortium.



# 04

## Impact

- Project impact is manifest in improved capacities of CSOs to play the vital role of influencing policies, strategies, laws and other plans in their domains of work. Improved capacity is evident in faster processes in the realization of PD objectives. These impacts are attributed to better relationships established with government partners; improved trust, increased collaborations and information sharing, and strengthened capacity of citizens to engage with governments. Use of evidence to guide agenda setting and policy engagement enabled CSOs to engage effectively in these processes.
- The effects of the project within the target beneficiaries has already started spilling over to other communities, as evident in the case of DRM policy in Marsabit County in Kenya, where neighboring counties sharing the same classification of arid and semi-arid lands (ASAL) have already begun pursuing DRM policies.



# 05

## Sustainability

- CSOs were effectively involved in the planning and implementation of the project and benefitted from capacity building initiatives, including resource mobilisation. They established partnerships that can be of continued benefit beyond the project, especially for cross learning and for joint-engagement in PD.
- Even through staff exits threaten sustainability, the trained pool will still be available locally. Once finalized, also the PD manual will be an important tool for capacity building and for technical guidance.
- The small action funds focused on policy and legislative frameworks, and on long term and medium term plans and strategies that will likely guarantee continued derivation of benefits by the target populations. Communities become knowledgeable of their rights to public participation and are likely to continue demanding space to participate in relevant processes.

## Selected Recommendations

- Fast track expenditure of the SAF on actions that contribute to project objectives, especially in pursuing completion of policy and legislative processes already in progress, and potentially increasing funding to human resource positions to enable partners engage effectively in PD processes initiated under the SAF.
- Focus on institutionalising and consolidating achievements of phase I and II and strengthen individualized support to partners, including coaching and mentorship on implementation of the acquired skills in the upcoming phase.
- Emphasis on implementation of finalized PD strategies and the PD manual, once finished and establish proper documentation for all learning materials for ease of reference.
- CSOs already appreciate importance of evidence use in PD, but should further delve into mapping potential data sources, developing partnerships and networks for information sharing, and establish databases for relevant information. Also support EA CSOs in developing appropriate indicators to measure progress and achievements in advocacy work.

