



Civic Development and Partnership Foundation

**Aarhus Centers
Sustainability Plan
Development
PROJECT REPORT**

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BoT	Board of Trustees
CDPF	Civic Development and Partnership Foundation
GEF	Global Environment Facility
HR	Human resources
LSGB	Local Self-Government Body
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
MNP	Ministry of Nature Protection
MTA	Ministry of Territorial Administration
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
OD	Organizational Development
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PR	Public relations
SNPO	State Non-Profit Organization
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature

BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

Project Background

Since 2002 according to the Understanding Memorandum signed between RA Ministry of Nature Protection and OSCE office in Yerevan, Public Environmental Information (Aarhus) Centers started to act in the Republic of Armenia.

Up to now, 15 Aarhus Centers have been established in different regions of Armenia. Their activities include dissemination of information on environmental issues, promoting public participation in environmental decision making process, and promoting access to justice on environmental issues.

Though Centers are fully equipped and have strong experience in environmental area, one of the main and most important issues they face is lack of legal status and financial sustainability. Currently the support for Aarhus Centers is provided by the OSCE Yerevan covering the salary and activity costs and Marzpetarans/Municipalities that provide the office area for the Centers and cover their utility costs. Due to the absence of the formal legal status the Centers are unable to raise own funds and/or apply for grant funding as RA legislation doesn't allow to implement any financial activities to informal groups. This not only makes obstacles in everyday work of the Centers, but also prevents their development as independent organizations.

At the same time absence of diversification of the financial sources make the Centers very vulnerable on both sustainability and sovereignty sides. In case the OSCE will stop its support, it could happen that some of the Centers won't be able to support their activities and will have to close and other Centers may fully depend on the governmental/LSGB support that will influence their independence.

In order to avoid this situation and support further existence and development of the Centers, a project on evaluation of Centers' role in Armenia and development of their sustainability plans has been conducted to clarify different options of centers' further functioning though involving all the stakeholders into process of making decision upon Centers' status.

Project Objectives

The overall goal of the project is to help local Aarhus Centers (hereinafter: Centers) to strengthen their organizational development capacities particularly through development and implementation of long-term sustainability plan, including legal registration, set up of organizational structures and fundraising mechanisms.

The specific objectives of the evaluation are to:

- investigate the role of Aarhus Centers and the impact they have had on environmental developments on local level

- identify OD situation and needs of target centers with participation of Center staff, OSCE representatives, involvement of LSGB and other stakeholders
- provide recommendations on Centers legal status and further development mechanisms
- support planning of development activities accordingly to establish a long-term sustainability

The project has been conducted by Civic Development and Partnership Foundation (CDPF) staff, including researchers, OD and legal specialists.

Implemented Activities

During the preparation phase CDPF has hold several meetings with OSCE representatives to finalize goals and objectives of the project, as well as discuss project methodology.

As a result CDPF designed a sample for interviews out of the Armenian Aarhus Centers and their stakeholders, developed interviews questionnaire and a schedule of interviews.

During the main phase of the project interviews, basic legal analysis, document review, and brainstorming session were conducted.

Four out of 14 functioning Centers have been visited, coordinators and regional stakeholders (Marzpetarans/Municipalities and local NGOs) interviewed in:

- Hrazdan Aarhus Center
- Gyumri Aarhus Center
- Kapan Aarhus Center
- Yerevan Aarhus Center

Two more Centers coordinators – from Gavar and Alaverdi Aarhus Centers – have been interviewed in Tsaghkadzor, during annual Aarhus Center retreat.

Besides, representatives of the following national NGOs, governmental and international organizations have been interviewed:

- Ministry of Territorial Administration (Head of Local Self-Government Department)
- Ministry of Nature Protection (Deputy Minister, and Head of Environmental Department)
- “Khazer” NGO (President)
- “Ecolur” NGO (President)
- WWF Armenia (Director)
- UNDP GEF small grants program (National Coordinator)
- Transparency International Anti-Corruption Center (Chair)

During the December retreat of Aarhus Centers in Tsaghkadzor, a brainstorming discussion on sustainability models has been conducted on December 16, 2010.

In total four site visits, 24 interviews and one group discussion session has been conducted.

In parallel with the interviews Centers documentation (MoU, plans, reports, guidelines, etc) have been reviewed by CDPF researchers and legal analysis conducted by CDPF advisers to review the possible options of legal registration.

General Overview

The Role of the Centers in Armenia

All the respondents stated that Aarhus Centers play an indispensable role in the environmental life of Armenia. Respondents even noted that the Centers are important role-player in establishment of local democracy: “*some of them serve as islands of democracy in marzes*” (Inga Zarafyan, Ecolur NGO). The representative of Ministry of Territorial Administration named the center as an alternative environmental channel, raising important regional issues.

Among the most appreciated activities of the Centers providing information, raising awareness, making people voices heard, and mobilizing local NGOs and communities for change have been most often mentioned. Local self-government and territorial government representatives especially value Centers as a bridge with civil society organizations and as facilitator of government-civil society dialogue: “*The Center gave possibility to Marzpetaran to bring together state structures and the public. It could be stated that Aarhus Center linked the state, local government and civil society*” (S. Avetisyan, Syunik Marzpetaran).

Local non-governmental and international organizations stress the role of Centers being a platform for discussion, for meetings, and again, value their role as mediators between the decision-makers and local communities: “*We are very happy to have such centers in Armenia; if today we collaborate with Shirak and Syunik, tomorrow when we go to other marzes, we will certainly use their facilities. The Centers are a good platform for people to unite and receive or share information, have discussions on different topics*” (K. Manvelyan, WWF).

The regional disposition of the Centers is especially valued: “*Permanent work with people is needed in places while we can't go there again and again*” (A. Hambardzumyan, Khazer NGO); “*They are local people and know local language, sometimes even accent is important for persuading people*” (I. Zarafyan, Ecolur NGO).

Coordinators themselves point out the positive changes in places, mainly related to change in public perception and among state and LSGB representatives: “*the most important achievement is that we make the ecological parts of state and LSGB structures to work*” (Gyumri Center Coordinator); “*before we were created, there had been no words of human rights, environmental rights, environment, etc., when I remember those times, many things have changed. [OSCE] has dropped the seeds of civil society units*” (Kapan Center Coordinator).

The mission of the Aarhus Center

Generally, the mission of the Centers as formulated in the official documents is shared among all Center coordinators as well as most of the state and non-governmental sector representatives. According to the Memorandum of Understanding signed between OSCE, RA Ministry of Nature Protection, and Marzpetarans of each marz where the centers are located, the goal of the Centers is “*to assist in making environmental information more accessible for the public and promoting*

public participation in making decisions related to the environment” (MoU on establishment of public environmental information center in marz). Implementation of the three pillars of Aarhus convention: access to environmental information, right to public participation, and access to justice on issues related to the environment, is considered as key functions of the Centers.

All interviewed Center coordinators recognize and share understanding of Center's main functions; however, both coordinators and other respondents put different emphasis on each of these components. Often access to information is mentioned as the primary function of the Centers: *“raising awareness I think is the most important issue and the primary one, while others come afterwards”* (Alaverdi Center Coordinator). At the same time, the description of Centers activities by other stakeholders and the statistics available in Center reports shows that in fact, the most extensive effort is done in the direction of awareness raising. This is naturally explained by lack of information and low level of “environmental” consciousness of population which brings more demand to informational activities: *“First of all, we have to reach the level where every citizen is informed enough to protect him/herself, to understand where her/his rights should be protected in what way... Then the same public participation, and access to justice, will be exercised by citizens themselves, in a conscious way”* (Gavar Center Coordinator).

The vision of Ministry of Nature Protection on Aarhus Center mission is more related to policy implementation: *“They should be ambassadors of MNP in places, raise awareness on ecological issues and implement our policies”* (S. Papyan, MNP Deputy Minister).

As an additional function, mediatory role indicated above is mentioned by both non-profit and state sector representatives: *“they can implement coordinating function in regions... Like ecological federation in Yerevan... As a resource center they can unify [NGOs]”* (S. Ayvazyan, Transparency International). *“The atmosphere of dialogue is the most important one, we shall bring state and public bodies to dialogue and thus solve the environmental issues”* (Yerevan Center Coordinator), *“the mission is to provide the linkage, to present public concerns regarding environment to the government and claim solution on behalf of the public”* (H. Gasparyan, Shirak Marzpetaran).

Though general understanding of the functions is shared among all stakeholders, there is some level of discrepancy in understanding regarding implementation of the third main principle of Aarhus Convention by the Centers. *“there is nothing written about the court¹. It is stated “access to justice” which is related to the public and not to the Center. That is, the role of Aarhus Center is to ensure public consciousness and access to juridical bodies, so that in case environmental rights are violated, the public is informed on mechanisms and possibilities of right protection, while judicial body is ready to accept the claim”* (Hrazdan Center coordinator). At the same time, several coordinators mention that their center is “weak” in providing access to justice, justifying this with lack of the legal status *“we cannot do much in the third area, as we do not and cannot apply to the court”* (Kapan Center Coordinator). Gavar Center coordinator explained the necessity to directly apply to the court with the lack of initiative on the side of local NGOs: *“when we point out the problem, we should be eligible [to apply] as all others are frightened. [...] They don't want to risk”*. (Gavar Center Coordinator). However, some state representatives expressed their concern whether court application is within the eligibility of the Centers (some examples are brought later in this report). To sum up, it is necessary to clarify the implementation mechanisms of “providing

¹ The respondent here refers to the document on guidelines for OSCE supported Aarhus Centres.

access to the justice” and clearly articulate this in Center related documentation and regulations in order to avoid misunderstanding in this field.

General Image

The Centers are mostly known by local population, especially in regions where large advocacy and media campaigns have been conducted: *“you know, marzpetaran also has hot line, but people call to Gevorg, believing that he is a defender”* (H. Gasparyan, Shirak Marzpetaran). However, recognition is often not enough when working with population as people are more concerned with social problems rather than environmental issues: *“in our region social problems are primary, they say my child is hungry, I am not interested whether Sevan shore is polluted or not”* (Gavar Center Coordinator). Raising the level of environmental consciousness among the population thus is one of the main challenges mentioned by several respondents.

Another finding related with the public image of the center as already discussed above is linkage of Aarhus Center with OSCE. Frequent visits of OSCE, extensive use of OSCE logo and name, as well as visits of international organizations and embassies give weight to the Centers and attach their image with international structures: *“they do not realize that this is a public structure, that we do not even have a status, they think about us as something linked with OSCE”* (Gyumri Center Coordinator).

Management provisions

Currently, Aarhus Centers in Armenia operate under the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between the government, represented by Ministry of Nature Protection and Ministry of Territorial Administration, and OSCE. As a rule, they are funded partially by OSCE covering staff salary, internet connection, transportation costs, and partially by regional and/or local government providing office area and covering facility costs. Financial administration is conducted by an NGO who collect financial reports and provides reporting to OSCE and tax bodies, and website is maintained by MNP funded by OSCE. The main decision-making body of the Centers is Board of Experts consisting of public and state representatives. The documentary basis of centers' activities, beside MoU, is Aarhus Center guidelines (A reference document to provide guidance for the strategic orientation, setup and activities of the OSCE supported Aarhus Centers created on November 2009), the roadmap for Aarhus Centers accepted in Riga in 2008, and the regional development program of the particular Marz.

This range of participating structures and guiding documents, differences in funding, managing, decision-making bodies makes the status of Centers rather ambiguous – whether this is state owned, public, or international structure, and after all, who the overseeing body is. On the other hand, this multi-stakeholder involvement ensures both impartiality (due to presence of non-profits and OSCE) and state commitment (due to presence of MNP and local/regional government). Later on, when discussing the desired future status of the Centers, it will be clear that generally respondents see it necessary to keep presence of multiple stakeholders to maintain effective functioning of the Centers. In this part, we will examine the administrative and decision-making mechanisms currently exercised in the centers.

The Board of Experts

The Board of Experts has been established in each Center in accordance with MoU provisions. The board consists half of state structure representatives (mainly marzpetaran and municipality, ministerial agencies and state non-profit organizations in places) and half of public organization representatives (local NGOs and media companies). The usual number of Board member is 10, though it varies from place to place (e.g. in Gavar the number is 20).

The main functions of the Board include development and approval of Center's annual plan, development of annual reports, support to Center activities, and general operational management. The frequency of Board meetings is set as monthly, according to MoU.

At the same time, the activity of the Board is different in different locations. E.g. Gyumri Center is exemplary in terms of successful functioning of Board: *“Board of Experts is the main power of Center functioning. [...] It is a structure that gives respectability to the Center as well as possibility to collaborate with various units”*. (Gyumri Center Coordinator). In Gyumri, the Center has also succeeded in terms of Board procedure implementation: *“We have all the meetings, meeting agenda is obligatory, sent to all members beforehand, everything is in a professional manner, preparation of transcripts is obligatory, minutes are sent to participants, Board members”* (S. Martirosyan, Sakharov Human Right Protection Center, Gyumri).

Some coordinators, though valuing the importance of the Board, mention that it is often difficult to organize meetings on monthly basis and to keep all Board members active. One of the reasons for that mentioned by Gavar Center coordinator is the distance which makes it difficult for experts to come to Gavar each month. There are also cases where the Board is non-functional at all: *“our society is not liberal enough to have governmental representative sitting together with public sector representative and talking as equals: non-governmental representatives are under pressure and the decisions are biased”* (Hrazdan Center Coordinator). As a result, in this Center there are no Board meetings as such, and the decisions here are made mostly in consultation with Deputy Marzpet, Board Chair. In Yerevan, the Board is also not functioning, though some changes have been made recently in Board composition to make it more active: *“There was time when we did not need it... Though they participated as experts, helped us [...], but in terms of gathering meeting, making decisions, no... [...] We have rehabilitated the Board this year; it was not functioning for two years”* (Yerevan Center Coordinator).

During discussion at the Tsaghkadzor retreat, coordinators mostly accepted the importance of keeping Board of Experts; thus, probably the issue here is to revise the mechanisms and procedures so that it will not be just a formal body but effective for the Centers' functioning.

The Factor of Coordinator

It is apparent that the factor of coordinator's personality is vital for Centers' functioning, effectiveness, and image. The personalities of coordinators as willing, devoted and competent persons are often mentioned. *“Surely, the personality of coordinator is important, if the coordinator is active, has the information, she/he can initiate a good campaign”* (I. Zarafyan, Ecolur NGO). Often even the profile of Center's activities is in some extent related with Coordinators skills and approaches. There are centers more involved in advocacy activities and others focused on awareness-raising and ecological education. Certainly, the specific of the region is also important in this case; however, interviews show that coordinator's personality is decisive. The case of Gyumri center openly entering into confrontation with marzpetaran's actions is exemplary: *“The whole city knows the center, the center is debating (քյալլա է տալիս) with everyone, and this is for the sake of people. One knows that if he [Gevorg] has set up his mind, he will raise a clamor, and reach his goal”* (A. Khachatryan, Gyumri Municipality). Another citation from international organization representative: *“The Aarhus Center coordinators are very different, one is hyperactive, another - active in average, some are little active”* (H. Ghazaryan, UNDP GEF Program). At the same time, it is hard to maintain effective functioning of the Center if the Coordinator is not active: *“It is difficult there for a non-active person, if one is not active, he/she will leave soon, because the Center is constantly pulled and pushed on all sides”* (I. Zarafyan, Ecolur NGO); *“one person is dealing with a giant system and the system wouldn't change! [...] They are all conscious, devoted persons”* (G. Ghazinyan, OSCE). The adherence to the principles and devotion to the idea becomes of a key importance for effective activities.

Organizational Development Aspects

Planning and Decision Making

Centers develop their annual plans approved by the Board of Experts. As a rule, this plan is based on the primary issues outlined in social-economic development program of the region, as well as on results of Centers' own research in the field. All the Centers include celebration of international ecological days and implementation of seminars on ecology in their plans. However, most of the coordinators note that it is often difficult to fully implement the annual plans since unexpected issues may come up throughout the year and the planned actions are replaced with more urgent ones: *"we can't follow the annual plan since the challenges are often changing unexpectedly"* (Hrazdan Center Coordinator).

Necessity of more long-term strategic plan is realized by coordinators: *"Unfortunately, planning is one of the painful issues. Each organization should define a target to reach in five years. If we do not have a vision, correspondent strategy, we can't plan what to do this year. Thus, it appears that we planned something and in fact did what we could"* (Gyumri Center coordinator).

Some coordinators use Aarhus roadmap as a guide for Center's long-term planning and take the latter into account during annual planning. At the same time, national level planning is needed for guiding Aarhus Centers in their strategic plans: *"Armenia had to approve plan of actions as it is usually done in case of other conventions but we have not done it for Aarhus Convention implementation"* (S. Ayvazyan, Transparency International). *"If there was a national action plan, it would become a handbook for the Centers"* (Gyumri Center Coordinator).

Human and Material Resources and Needs

The Centers in fact function in full scope with limited resources. They are equipped with necessary furniture, technical devices, and provided with Internet connection. There are some differences in the enhancement level of Centers' equipment; e.g. some of them have projectors and portable computers and others do not. Among the visited locations, Kapan Center was the least equipped one, lacking not only projector and notebook, but also photo camera and even fixed phone connection (the coordinator had to make phone calls through his personal mobile phone). Ideally, Centers Coordinators expressed a wish to have also some environmental monitoring tools.

Organizations collaborating with Kapan Center expressed their concern on lack of transportation for the Center as well as enough financial means for local trips: *"there is petrol issue: they need to go to communities, explore there, I don't know, maybe they do, but it would be good if they had needed resources"* (K. Manvelyan, WWF).

One or two persons are involved as Center coordinators, and practically all centers use volunteer work. In centers involved in interviews, there are up to 12 volunteers, and usually there is even no need to advertise volunteering opportunity: *"We never told anyone to come"* (Alaverdi Center Coordinator); *"They come and say "we are interested in ecology, we want to work"* (Kapan Center Coordinator). Some of Centers have long-term volunteers from US Peace Corps. At the same time, there are no formal procedures of volunteer registration, division of labor, management and

evaluation. Volunteers work on as needed basis, and coordinators follow that they do not interfere with each other and assign tasks in accordance with their skills.

In any case, many coordinators mention necessity of more staff to manage implementation of all the work in full scope and also not to close the Center during the day when they have to leave for visits or business trips. As to the competencies of the coordinator, several needs have been highlighted such as necessity of English language fluency, more expertise on ecological legislation and normative, more information on existing ecological movements and national programs.

Fundraising Activities

As indicated above, the centers are mainly funded by OSCE paying for salary and some operational expenses and by local government bodies through in-kind contribution. Some of the centers initiate project activities jointly with other organizations and receive some limited funding for specific project purposes (e.g. monitoring water quality, producing a film, tree planting, etc.). Because they lack legal status, Centers do not apply directly to international organizations for grant funding, though several coordinators have experience and expertise in project writing.

There have been attempts for getting funds from corporations and small businesses. E.g. Hrazdan Center has negotiated with Mika Cement factory on providing funds for environmental purposes which is their obligation. As a result, they came to the agreement to prepare upcoming year's plan for spending this budget jointly so that the special funds are spent in a more efficient way. Alaverdi and Kapan Centers are negotiating with mining companies which provide some funds for environmental actions. None of the interviewed Centers has an experience of fundraising for Center's operational expenses. In any case, experience shows that the image and scope of activities of the Center allows raising funds from local companies in case the requests are duly presented and the expected funding serves to concrete purpose.

PR and Media Relations

The Centers involved in interviews indicate good relationships with local media and sufficient experience in development and dissemination of news, representing materials, etc. All the centers have comprehensive databases of local organizations and media agencies, and use a variety of professional and personal contacts for publicizing their work and cases: *"All our announcements, films, they [media] do everything for free, while they charge others"* (Gavar Center Coordinator); *"I would not achieve anything if not the media"* (Gyumri Center Coordinator).

Some PR materials are also available, like booklets and newsletters; Center's activities are presented in OSCE annual reports. An important PR tool for the centers is the website www.aarhus.am, which is constantly updated in three languages. The website administration is conducted by MNP and funded by OSCE. It is used not only for posting news and announcements, but also as a general information resource on center activities, environmental legislation, and contact lists of all state agencies involved in environmental field.

The Centers make use of mailing lists for disseminating announcements; not everywhere electronic communication possibilities allow this active communication and the phone is widely used as well:

“I know all phone numbers by heart... In Kapan, phone is the major [communication tool]”
(Kapan Center Coordinator).

Finally, Facebook social network is widely used by coordinators for networking and information dissemination.

Relations with Stakeholders

Collaboration with state structures

Ministry of Nature Protection (MNP) and Ministry of Territorial Administration (MTA) through regional government and local self-government bodies are parties in MoU on Centers' establishment. According to the MoU, MNP supports the Centers through providing environmental information, serving as mediator between the Centers and other state structures, and providing access to literature, legislation and other documentation. Marzpetarans (in some cases – municipalities) are responsible basically for provision of office space and facilities. Further, we will review the role of both regional and local government and national state structures particularly represented by MNP.

Relations with regional and local government

Interviews showed that Centers extensively collaborate with marzpetarans and municipalities in terms of information exchange. A critical factor for this collaboration is the presence of regional and local government in the Board of Experts: *“Out Board of Experts... is our tool, that is, we discuss issues around the table in distinctive format and request to discuss this particular question in particular structure. We bring the issue to the state. Often we stay beside the state structure if they work right, if the problem is public unawareness”* (Hrazdan Center Coordinator).

The location of the center is also contributing to more intensive collaboration: *“We collaborate efficiently. [...] Even if municipality organizes an event, they do it through us, saying that it is easier to do through our connections. [...] We interact with all departments, probably being in the same building contributes to that”* (Alaverdi Center Coordinator).

Municipalities and regional government often use the Centers as information dissemination tool, and sometimes consult them for environmental information: *“When I have an issue to let people know, I raise it in the Center”* (H. Gevorgyan, Shirak Marzpetaran). *“There are things that I learnt through the Center”* (K. Tumoyan, Kotayk Marzpetaran). In a way, Centers provide educational role for local government. *“We don't have that level yet when community leaders or avagani or servants understand their obligations in the environmental field or know how to do those things... Based on my interactions I can state that where Centers are present the community leaders, LSGB, are more informed, ready to solve this issue, compared to the communities where there are no Centers”*. (A. Giloyan, Ministry of Territorial Government). Regional government also makes use of collaboration to fulfill their responsibilities regarding collaboration with civil society representatives.

Having representation at the Board of Experts, regional government bodies are part of Center management: *“When the Center prepares their plans, we participate and make suggestions. We participate both in planning and in evaluation, marzpetaran also has an opinion”* (S. Avetisyan, Syunik Marzpetaran). This factor contributes to the closer collaboration between the marzpetaran/municipality and the Center, and helps to have “adherents” in the governance bodies. *“The Board of Experts gives public reputation and also possibility to collaborate with different structures. E.g. the head of department is a member of the Board, if the agency does not reply to our letter, next time he will be ashamed, either will not come [to the meeting] or will come and we say we have sent a letter what do you think on that. Or we discuss something*

and he says, write a letter, we will take care of that. When the Board meets, the public-state collaboration is realized in a small scale” (Gyumri Center Coordinator).

At the same time, local government’s involvement in the management of the Center, according to some of respondents, can become a hindering factor for Center's autonomy in some cases. *“To some extent, the Center is under the Marzpetaran's control. [...] It was positive and needed at the establishment stage, to have the collaboration between the state and the public. But today they have passed this becoming stage” (A. Ghazaryan, Environmental Security and Democracy NGO). “Marzpetaran usually consider the Center as an additional resource to use... Now it considers the Center as a headache, trouble, additional responsibility... Though there are some Centers that avoid trouble, saying let’s keep away from this since this structure keeps us and can close us whenever wants” (S. Martirosyan, Sakharov Human Rights Center, Gyumri).*

The autonomy of the Centers and independence from governmental control becomes urgent in cases where the Center has to oppose marzpetaran's decision or claim rights. In Gyumri, Center Coordinator has applied to the court (on behalf of an NGO) because marzpetaran has been cutting trees without having proper documentation, and in some days, marzpetaran representatives closed the office of the Center: *“Marzpet said, well, they are under my subordination, I will take the key from Gevorg, and we will have a new selection” (H. Gasparyan, Shirak Marzpetaran)². Even the Centers that do not have any confrontation with the regional government recognize that there is a confrontation potential in their activities. Centers have to apply to various structures to solve issues, including those related to local and regional government, and this often is considered as confrontation “we turn to higher level structures, and then the middle level is offended” (Hrazdan Center Coordinator).*

Overall, the relationships of Centers with regional government are rather ambiguous: on one side, marzpetarans are part of MoU and thus serve as donors for Aarhus Center functioning, on the second side, their representatives are represented in Board of Expert and thus are the part of the Center; thirdly, marzpetarans are collaborating with Centers as other governmental and non-governmental organizations in organization of meetings and in information exchange, and finally, they are also on the opposite side in cases where Centers have to implement advocacy campaign against marzpetaran's decisions. This complexity of factors brings to the range of opinions and solutions for Center status, location, and Board composition that will be discussed later, and can be solved in case all these roles: donorship, leadership, partnership and opposition come to harmony through better regulations and clarification of each of this role.

Relations with Ministry of Nature Protection

Yerevan Aarhus Center has different status and is fully funded by MNP. Thus, the center coordinator is officially ministry’s employee and reports to the head of Information-Analytical Center of the MNP. Though, as mentioned by the coordinator, she had not felt any pressure on the side of ministry, she thinks that an independent status would give more possibilities to the Center, e.g. sometimes she signs petitions not on the behalf of the Center but as a person to escape conflict of interest. At the same time, being located in the Ministry gives some

² Officially, this was justified by the completion of the first year of MoU after which marzpetaran should took on the funding, but since it did not have resources for that it initiated closure of the center. However, the fact of closing the office happened far after this first year was over.

advantages in this case as well: *“we address the Ministry for different questions, write letters, invite experts to our discussions, and we have not received any rejection up to now”* (Yerevan Center Coordinator).

However, many Centers do not have that close collaboration with the Ministry, notwithstanding the obligations taken by MNP in MoU: *“We are not satisfied at all with the work of MNP, none of the Centers will tell you that the Ministry supported them in any issue”* (Hrazdan Center Coordinator); *“We have bad relations with the MNP... we sent the water analysis [...], and they would not give any official reply. [...] The Ministry became a much closed structure, does not want to interact”* (Kapan Center Coordinator). Lack of implementation of Aarhus Convention's provisions is mentioned as a serious obstacle for Centers' functioning in general.

On the other side, Ministry is not satisfied with some of the actions that the Centers take: *“they took some actions without Ministry's consent. E.g. they wrote a letter to the President, which is not their business at all. It is neither their authority, nor the issue that they have to solve”* (S. Papyan, Deputy Minister, MNP). The Head of the legal department of the ministry expressed his dissatisfaction with the Kapan Center who participated in preparing application to court against the Ministry for lack of action in one of the ecological issues in Kapan.

These issues show the different interpretation of the Center's role and framework that exists on both sides, as well as highlight the conflict of interests that Centers have to deal with when taking decisions on their actions. As illustrated by one of the respondents words: *“Who shall give the authority to the Centers? The Ministry or the Center itself? The present scenario does not work, it does not work properly, as some parties are not satisfied. [...] There should be a political will in order this format be a functioning one. The Center should not apply to the court, it should be the mediator, and the case should be solved by the officials. However all the cases take a turn for the worse today, and thus the Center should take its place: either to shut up or to oppose. Otherwise it is a dead structure. [...] Today, when there is no political will, the Center shall decide either be on this or on that side»* (S. Ayvazyan, Transparency International)

Thus, like in relationships with regional government, relations of Centers with the national government are complicated: the Centers are created with participation of state for implementation of Aarhus convention, they serve as linkage between the state and civil society, and they are devoted to their mission of environmental protection. Accordingly, they have to represent the state, serve as a mediator, and sometimes oppose. This multiple role of the Centers shall be recognized by all the parties, if the Centers are to continue their activities as before, or shall be limited clearly in case the founders of the Centers decide that the limitation is a better option.

Collaboration with NGOs and international organizations

The Centers do not apply to grant projects as they do not have legal status; however, they implement projects with support of OSCE as well as in coalition with other NGOs. Often the scheme of joint projects is the following: the Center initiates discussion of a project idea with an NGO and assists it in project writing process. Aarhus Center participation is presented in the

project as a contribution, as well as the expertise of the Coordinator. The project is implemented in joint efforts, and the reporting is carried out by NGO contracted by donor.

UNDP GEF project has collaborated with the Centers in organizing project presentation events and for on-going consultation of local NGOs in applying to and implementation of the project. Other international organizations collaborate with centers on case-by-case basis: when a meeting is planned or project implemented in a region related to environmental issues, Centers often serve as a mediator, inviting NGOs, media, etc., providing organizational support, meeting space, and local media broadcasting when needed. *“We are very satisfied with our collaboration, we just told them that we need this event, and they organize it...”* (K. Manvelyan, WWF).

Local environmental non-governmental organizations also use the collaboration opportunities, particularly the members of EcoFederation. On one hand, they use Centers resources for their activities, on the other hand, provide their expertise and information to Centers on current trends and news in ecological field. In terms of information exchange, Centers collaborate closely with Ecolur NGO. Besides Ecolur, Transparency International Anti-corruption Center, Khazer NGO and other organizations' experts provide free seminars and presentations in Centers upon request. At the same time, these organizations' support is compared to Environmental Law Center, which rarely provides information and consultation needed.

As to regional NGOs, collaboration here is not only with environmental organizations, but others as well, especially taking into consideration that there are few environmental organizations in some of the marzes. NGOs approach the Centers for resources, for guidance and consulting, for joint activities and advocacy campaigns. It is clear that Centers serve as a linking structure for NGOs in the region: *“we have created a coalition of local NGOs last year; and keep constant link with each other”* (Alaverdi Center Coordinator); *“Aarhus Center is not a competitor for NGOs, that's why they are able to bring NGOs in the field together”* (G. Ghazinyan, OSCE). Sometimes this factor even helps NGOs to start dialogue: *“Often some organization would not meet with us but we could organize a meeting in the Center... And during this meeting we could tell each other what is needed”* (A. Ghazaryan, Environmental Security and Democracy NGO, Kapan)

In their turn, mature local NGOs provide their expertise to the Centers: *“NGOs help us a lot. We are four year old only, while there are organizations that are present in the field for 10 years: in Sevan, Martuni; Sakharov Center supports a lot in legal framework”* (Gavar Center Coordinator).

The Role of OSCE

Being the founder of Aarhus Center and currently the major donor for Centers activities, OSCE is perceived more as a mentor in the view of Centers rather than just a donor. In many cases, coordinators contact OSCE to consult on a specific issue or to decide on taking action. However, they are given autonomy in making decisions and managing day-to-day operations of the Center. *“OSCE has a great role [in Center activities], [...] OSCE does not force but shows that there are different opportunities and solutions, [...] so you can decide what is appropriate”* (Gavar Center Coordinator). *“OSCE leaves us free and wants this structure to develop in an evolutionary way. OSCE never put a pressure on me, even when I had a controversial opinion”* (Gyumri Center Coordinator).

In any case, Centers provide event report and periodical (quarterly, semiannual and annual) reports to OSCE, because of the rules settled by the OSCE Agreement. At the same time, these reports are more perceived as information exchange and dissemination since they are posted at www.aarhus.am website and made available to other centers, stakeholders and wide public.

One of the major roles of OSCE in Centers' activities is serving as a powerful advocacy tool: *“OSCE has visible and invisible roles. OSCE can make a call when I do not succeed, [...] just one call to the Marzpet and the issue is solved. On the other hand, the fact that we supported by OSCE is sometimes making decisions faster, even without a call”* (Hrazdan Center Coordinator). OSCE representative also mentioned cases where OSCE's intervention was crucial in solving issues, starting from information provision by the state structures up to the continuation of the Center activities (in case of Gyumri Center, the intervention of Ambassador helped to settle the issue of re-opening the center). The invisible role – linkage of the Centers image with OSCE – mentioned above by Hrazdan Center Coordinator, is also widely recognized both by Center coordinators and the stakeholder organizations: *“the [OSCE] image allows them to be psychologically free”* (A. Ghazaryan, Environmental Security and Democracy NGO, Kapan); *“OSCE is a weighty organization in everyone's eyes [...] All this increase the image of Aarhus Center [...] the impact would not be the same if we gathered anywhere else, but here where we talk and make decisions under OSCE flag”* (V. Martirosyan, Khustup NGO, Kapan)

Further Development

Vision on Center's Future

In their vision of Center's future, respondents indicated the following characteristics: strong, sustainable network having a large impact in the field, with competent and sufficient human resources, all the necessary equipment, unifying organizations working in environmental area, enjoying public trust and respect: *“so that people know: if they turn to the Center, the issue will be certainly solved”* (Yerevan Center Coordinator).

As to the scope of work, there were several suggestions expressed by respondents regarding clarification and enhancement of the current activities of the Center. In particular, monitoring and subsequent advocacy work has been stressed as necessary by WWF representative; MNP representative mentioned that each marz will now have ecological programs and Aarhus Centers can help regional governments in development of this program and then monitor the implementation process.

Some respondents were concerned with practical solutions: *“even if you discuss a problem 10 years at an ideal platform, there is no result. [...] But if the organization is a mature one, if it is a separate, more actions will be done”* (A. Ghazaryan, Ecological Security and Democracy NGO, Kapan). Similarly, Hrazdan Center Coordinator indicates finding the source of the problem and giving institutional solution as the main mission of the Center.

Consolidation of NGOs and serving as a mentor for them is often mentioned as necessary work scope for the Centers: *“it would be preferable that Center coordinators work in places to consult NGOs what projects are available, what co-funding sources are in place, how to negotiate with donors... or since LSGB has some funding available, to inform NGOs that there is such a possibility”* (H. Ghazaryan, UNDP GEF).

Necessity of a comprehensive and clear strategy on the Aarhus Center work scope is mentioned by Coordinators as a necessary basis for their further activities. In the previous chapter on management provisions, it was already mentioned that the scope and activities of the center considerably depend on the Coordinators personality. *“Our mandate is not clear, the MoU is very vaguely defined [...]. Here the personality of coordinator takes a key role, but it shouldn't be like that. We shall clearly understand the scope of our activities”* (Gyumri Center Coordinator). *“Well, we developed a working procedure, how to work, but I would like to have a clear mechanism, workplan for everyone [...]. We should have a concrete principle, what we are basing on, which is approved, so that no one can say why you are doing that. So that I do what is approved by the documents and signed by some thousand persons”* (Gavar Center Coordinator).

Thus, given that there are general guidelines for Aarhus Centers, there is a need for specific strategy for Armenian Centers that would clearly indicate the framework of Centers' activities and guiding principles.

Legal status

One of the purposes of this evaluation is to find out views of Aarhus Center coordinators and stakeholders on the further status of the Centers. Almost all the respondents understand that

Centers need to be legally registered to fully use their potential and strengthen organizational and particularly financial bases.

Most of the respondents use the notion of *independence* as a key concept when speaking about the future status of the Centers; however, they understand this notion differently: from state-owned organization autonomous in its activities to a non-profit organization where state bodies do not have any participation in decision-making.

The option of state non-profit organization (SNPO) was suggested by MNP Deputy Minister: *“the advantage of SNPO is that maintenance expenses will be covered by the state budget, the reports will be provided to the state and the funding will be provided. Though on the other side Foundation would have a Board of Trustees and provide some independence. But we can’t justify establishment of a Foundation, so in that case we cannot take the decision to the government as funding issues will arise. It should be SNPO, otherwise we cannot [justify and request funding]”* (S. Papyan, MNP). The major contra-argument for state-owned organization is threatening the mediator's role of the Centers: *“if this is just another state structure, why should people turn to us, they would rather go directly to the Major”* (Alaverdi Center Coordinator). Local government representatives see the risk in case of becoming state-owned organization: *“if any state structure owns the Centers, I don't think they will be as impartial as now”* (S. Babakhanyan, Hrazdan Municipality); *“Aarhus Center is such a structure that should be independent... Otherwise it would not be able to provide unbiased discussions and approaches”* (S. Avetisyan, Syunik Marzpetaran). *“It would be good for Center to be a Foundation, to be independent. If the Center be coordinated by the Ministry, it will become the performer of the ministry’s will”* (H. Gasparyan, Shirak Marzpetaran).

At the same time, the importance of state presence in the governance of the Center is recognized by most of the respondents: *“the Centers have been originally established and based on the idea of collaborative co-ownership”* (S. Ayvazyan, Transparency International).

Overwhelming majority of respondents suggested the option of Foundation with balanced management, where state, local, and international organizations have equal proportions in decision making body. *“The Aarhus Center should be a bridge between state and public structures, thus the management should be conducted equally by the state and public structures”* (Gyumri Center Coordinator).

The status of Foundation with representation in regions is recognized as the best option that will ensure Centers’ independence, continuation of mediator’s role, collaborative solution to problems and basis for sustainability. This option was discussed at Tsaghkadzor retreat and get unanimous support of the Centers’ coordinators.

Board of Trustees

As mentioned above, equal representation of different structures is the most popular choice among the respondents and also agreed during the retreat as the best option. *“We suggested four sectors: international, government, NGO, and community. But OSCE and other international organizations in the field should be necessarily there and take on major roles [...] so that the work style is different due to the presence of internationals”* (Hrazdan Center Coordinator). *“Balance should be*

kept: state bodies, scientists, public should be presented there. Also the ministries dealing with these issues: territorial administration, nature protection” (S. Papyan, MNP).

Some respondents believe that it is not needed to involve state representatives in the governance of the Centers: *“When they tell about involving ministry to the Board of Trustees, I think it would not work out. [...] They would lead to other direction. The Centers are in fact an opposition, hardly the Ministry representative will be interested... or would rather say, no, don't do that... I want to say that the autonomy, independence is disappearing” (A. Hambardzumyan, Khazer NGO); “I don't think the state should be involved. The more independent they are, the more effective their work is, and then there is more freedom in their activities” (K. Manvelyan, WWF).* However, the majority of respondents is for state structures' involvement, given that the state representatives are not a majority in the Board and represent variety of state agencies: *“The Board of Trustees should be comprised 1/3 of state bodies, 1/3 of internationals, and 1/3 of non-governmental sector. In this case we will fully exclude the possibility of state structure domination” (Gyumri Center Coordinator).* There are also suggestions on involving independent experts and business sector representatives.

The discussion in Tsaghkadzor brought to the following formula of BoT membership:

- One OSCE representative
- One MNP representative
- One MTA representative
- Ecological NGO representative
- An expert from the Academy of Sciences
- A representative of an international organization
- Business company representative

Thus, seven members can be involved in BoT, two of which representing international organization, two representing government, one local NGO, one scientist and one businessman. This scenario mostly meet the opinions expressed during the interviews as it ensures participation of the main actors and provides Centers with independence. The size of such a composition (7 members) is also optimal from the group dynamics viewpoint.

The founders of the foundation have not been specifically discussed by the respondents; however, during the brainstorming session a composition similar to BoT option was suggested, including the state, OSCE, local government (in case the centers are registered locally), as well as national and international organizations. The option of present Aarhus Center coordinators as funders was also discussed as an alternative in case OSCE cannot serve as founder because of its status and also to avoid full state ownership and bureaucracy.

Coordinators also agreed that the institute of Board of Experts shall be continued, though mechanisms of management would change and they will have consultative role. In this case, it would be necessary to revise the composition and procedures of the Board so that it becomes active and effective in all locations.

The Structure

For effective functioning, a unified structure is mostly mentioned by respondents in their vision of Centers future: *“There should be one Aarhus Center and all the regional centers will serve as units, then it will be one foundation”* (A. Gabrielyan, MNP).

Option of separately registered organizations spread in the regions with one umbrella unit serving as funding and consultative support was also considered, but the risk of weakening Centers, bringing competition among them, and adding administrative work was expressed for this option: *“It could be an option to have 14 legal bodies, but if we become an NGO or other body so much accountancy, reporting, etc. It will distract us from the work”* (Kapan Center Coordinator).

Financial sources

The issue of further funding of Centers was a concern not only for Center representatives, but also other stakeholders. Many respondents stated that Centers in any case would need some core support, whether from OSCE, state or other bodies, so that they could cover basic operational expenses and raise funds for programmatic activities. At the same time, most of interviewees recognize that the funding body can become the main decision maker and that is why decision on funding sources should be taken carefully: *“who pays he orders the music”* (A. Hambardzumyan, Khazer NGO). Mostly the risk of dependency was correlated with state funding option: *“I would prefer no funding from state, as the funding in any case will not be much, but then the control will be in place instead”* (A. Gabrielyan, MNP). Even regional government representatives express opinion that state funding can threaten independent activities of the Centers: *“If marzpetaran gave the funding, the meaning of this office will diminish, as this Center is a linking body between the state and the public”* (H. Gasparyan, Shirak Marzpetaran).

Other respondents, however, claimed that the state is one of the shareholders of Aarhus Centers and should provide budget for their functioning, which will also have a symbolic meaning of co-ownership: *“The state, having ratified the Aarhus Convention, has some obligation, and to fulfill these obligation, some X percentage of Center funding shall be covered by the state”* (Gyumri Center Coordinator); *“state funding will provided sustainable, each year a budget amount will be provided. While OSCE and other organizations can cover project costs”* (Yerevan Center Coordinator).

Most of the respondents expressed their hope that OSCE will continue basic funding of the Centers together with other international organizations. It can be stated that international sources are considered as most realistic and reliable for Centers' funding since they are comparatively sustainable and independent sources. At the same time, targeted funding is preferred rather than participation to grant tenders: *“there should be a special project... to provide continuous funding [...]. The Center should not become NGO competitor, because it will cause many problems. These grants should be directly for Aarhus Centers [...], the Center should not compete for some ten to twenty thousands, otherwise it will be engaged with this business only”* (I. Zarafyan, Ecolur NGO).

As to other sources, one NGO representative asserted that NGOs will be ready to contribute their funds for the Centers, optionally as symbolic membership fees. Public fundraising was not regarded as meaningful source for the centers' funding: *“no, they work hardly for each 10 drams”* (Gavar Center Coordinator).

The coordinators themselves consider an option of fee-for services as financial income opportunity, and they see printing, copying, Internet and hall rent as possible options for paid services. One of the respondents from international organizations suggested establishing a business linked with tourism that can become a good fee-for service for the Centers.

Role of Stakeholders

It was already mentioned that respondents expressed hope that OSCE will continue funding support to the Centers. Apart from funding, the role of OSCE in the future development of the Centers was rated highly in terms of general support of Centers' activities. Center coordinators especially mention that they cannot imagine the Centers without OSCE support: *"I cannot imagine that structure when the Center is out of OSCE"* (Hrazdan Center Coordinator) *"Both OSCE image and funding are critical for the Centers"* (S. Babakhanyan, Hrazdan Municipality); *"the support of OSCE is needed so that the Centers do not collapse"* (A. Ghazaryan, Ecological Security and Democracy NGO, Kapan). Beyond doubt, taking into account the role that OSCE plays in the life of the Centers, and the image of the centers attached to the OSCE as international organization, it is important to keep the support of OSCE in terms of mentoring, intervening, and donorship, as for upcoming several years it is a key condition for making Centers mature and sustainable organizations.

As to the collaboration with state structures, MNP and MTA are mentioned as state bodies having an important place in Centers' activities. On one side, Centers can and should monitor implementation of Aarhus convention by the state, on the other, the government shall be interested in Centers' active functioning and provide all the necessary information: *"they should be obliged to periodically provide information on environmental issues [...]. Information is also an in-kind contribution"* (S. Ayvazyan, Transparency International); *"The Center is the speaker of the state"* (H. Gasparyan, Shirak Marzpetaran).

The formal participation of the government in the establishment of the Centers as legal bodies is in any case considered as necessary, at least as a part of MoU on the Center establishment. As to location, there are different opinions on whether the Centers shall continue to be located in regional or local government building or they should move to a separate place. The interviewed coordinators were generally rather for separate spacing, however, two of them told that they do not see problem with staying in the state-owned building, while two were insisting that this location threatens Centers' independence. An NGO representative suggested viewing the issue from another vision: *"this building is not the property of the state administration, but of the public; thus non-governmental structures have also a right to use this property"* (I. Zarafyan, Ecolur NGO). GEF representative suggests finding a long-term solution to the location issue, through purchase of a space rather than renting.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Following the findings and their analysis, CDPF would recommend the following steps as priorities for the further development of the Centers.

Legal Status and Board Composition

- ✓ Registration of the Centers as a Foundation is the most preferred solution on the further status of the Centers. As a first step it is recommended to create a joint working group including MNP, OSCE and Aarhus Centers' representatives in order to avoid possible misunderstanding and misinterpretations. The working group will draft the statute of the Foundation (including structure, BoT composition, goals and objectives, main working areas and responsibilities of the founders and BoT, etc.) and other necessary documentation (guiding policies and procedures, etc.) for registration. It is critical to ensure and make all involved parties understand that the process of documentation development and approval should be collaborative and build on the consensus.

CDPF will suggest having a general meeting of Centers with participation of ministry, local and international organizations to discuss and finalize the developed documentation.

- ✓ As according to the local legislation there should be at least three founders we would recommend to include Government of Armenia, OSCE (if possible) and one more well known environmental organization as founders in order to ensure representation of the main stakeholders. UN, WWF, ecological network representatives could be considered. In case if OSCE won't be available for inclusion as a founder it is strongly recommended to include UN as a founder.
- ✓ A special attention should be paid to the Board of the organization and its regulation mechanisms. A Board representing Government of Armenia, OSCE, local NGOs and international organizations is the most preferable; involvement of scientific and business field can also be considered. The number of 7 Board members is the most optimal one, and allows involving all the interested parties. As an option we would recommend to have the following members on the Board:
 - One OSCE representative
 - One MNP representative
 - One MTA representative
 - One Ecological NGO representative
 - An expert from the Academy of Sciences
 - A representative of an international organization (e.g. WWF)
 - Human Rights protection organization representative (e.g. Sakharov Human Right Protection Center NGO)

While developing the Boards policies and procedures it should be ensured that BoT members cannot be selected for more than two terms (the optimal time-frame for one term is three years) and Chairperson is rotating each three years. This will allow keeping the balance of power and escape domination risks.

It is also recommended to fix that all vital decisions should be made by the Board unanimously and other strategic decisions with 2/3 of the voices.

- ✓ The structure of the Aarhus Center Foundation shall be a unified one, with representations in regions as at the moment it will be a most powerful option for the organization that have to secure its own funding, independence, and influence in the country.. We would recommend having a separate administrative body (probably in Yerevan where main stakeholders and partners are located) to conduct financial management, general administration, HR and PR functions, while the Centers themselves will directly implement programmatic activities and provide services. At the same time the administrative body could play a consulting and technical support role.

Planning and Management

- ✓ A single strategy, vision and mission should be developed that will direct new organization and make the centers less dependent on the coordinator's personality and experience. The most convenient option will be development of a three year strategic plan for the Centers including clearly written mission, vision, strategic goals, and fundraising necessities and options.
- ✓ National plan on Aarhus convention implementation can be an important precondition for directing Aarhus centers' activities; development, lobbying and supporting plan implementation should be included in the strategic plan as one of the goals of Centers.
- ✓ The strategy for the center will help to clarify the role and scope of work of the center, as there are several issues viewed differently by the stakeholders and the centers themselves, particularly interpretation of exercising "access to justice" function, and generally the balance between practical interventions for issue solution vs. pure awareness raising and serving as a platform for discussions.
- ✓ A development plan should be prepared for newly established organization and each Center (branch) to ensure smooth transition to the new structure and environment. The plans should include general development activities for all Centers but also address specific needs of each region. It is strongly recommended that first year plans concentrate on the development of the organization and Centers internal capacities and regulations, as well as development/re-establishment of the networks.

Human and Material Resources

- ✓ All coordinators have to be trained for the specifics of the new organization, including financial, organizational and staff management, leadership, reporting, basic legal requirements, PR and communication. Also, specific trainings in environmental field should be provided to each Center based on their needs and requests, mostly related to specific regional issues.
- ✓ Performance evaluation should be set up with clearly written indicators and goals for Center coordinators and other staff performance. Though the current Coordinators are

active and responsible persons, this would help to set up institutional mechanism for their performance as well as provide basis for measuring centers' performance outputs.

- ✓ Volunteer management procedures, including set up of volunteer recruitment, day-to-day management, motivation, and evaluation mechanisms will help using volunteer work more effectively and rely on volunteers as part of human resource of organizations, thus helping to somehow solve the issue of limited staff.
- ✓ Board of Experts shall be kept on the local level as an effective way of involving local stakeholder and consultative assistance. However, the mechanisms of Board management shall be revised and more realistic compositions and meeting timeframes set, so that it becomes a really active and effective body. At the same time, in case a unified Foundation is established, it should be clearly articulated to the current Boards of Experts that their role is consultative in the decision-making process. Motivational mechanisms for the Board of Experts should be developed and practiced.
- ✓ It is recommended to improve Centers technical base including portable computers, projectors, photo camera, printer; at least to bring them to an equal level of equipment. Possibility of transportation means purchase should be considered for the Centers dealing with various parts of the region (e.g. Gavar, Kapan). A possible solution is to apply to large corporations and/or international development agencies for in-kind contribution of vehicles.

Funding Sources and Fundraising

- ✓ Secured core funding is necessary for the first period of Centers' autonomous functioning as they still lack capacity and experience in fundraising. One of the most effective ways could be obtaining of the endowment fund that will allow covering main staffing and administrative costs.
- ✓ International organizations' grants and state support are seen as the main sources of funding; at the same time establishment of one general funding pool for Centers' operational expenses will help to make the funding not linked with concrete Centers' activities thus providing more autonomy and independence in making decisions. On the other hand, each Center can be funded based on its activities and outputs as evaluated by the headquarters of the Center.
- ✓ Local business funding shall be considered as a good option for fund diversification, local funding development, and promoting corporate social responsibility and more conscious approach of businesses toward environmental issues. Since many businesses commit to contributing to the environmental issues as set by legal provisions, this possibility should be taken up by Centers both for channeling funds in most optimal direction and as a funding opportunity for their actions. Corresponding training in this area is needed.

Relationships with Stakeholders

- ✓ The Centers have established collaboration with local and national NGOs; it is recommended to continue building relations and networking with NGOs and other state

and scientific organizations working in the field and use these networks for centers' PR, fundraising and service provision.

- ✓ Establishment of partnership relations with local government is critical for keeping autonomy on one side and providing participation of the local decision-makers, on the other; thus Centers shall clearly define the framework of collaboration with local and regional government (neither oversight, nor submission, but partnership) to avoid misunderstandings in their relationships. A clear-cut MoU would help to provide an institutional basis for this relationship.
- ✓ As to relations with the MNP, the establishment of Foundation with involvement of various parties and set up of strategic plan with defined goals and objectives for upcoming year will help to prevent difference in visions on Aarhus status (state-owned vs. multiple stakeholder organization) and framework of activities. The Ministry shall continue its consulting and information providing role, and involvement in decision making body of the Centers.
- ✓ OSCE support is vital for Center's further functioning, not only as a funder, but even more as a consulting and supporting body. Though Centers have earned reputation in local communities, keeping Aarhus Centers' reputation linked with OSCE image and the support of OSCE in advocating international norms and standards will enhance the effectiveness of the Centers' work and their standing among local and international community.

Scope of Work

Though the mission and goals of the Aarhus centers are set through international documents, there are also additional functions that Armenian Aarhus Centers can play and already exercise in a spontaneous way.

- ✓ It is apparent that Centers not only serve as environmental right agents in places, but, given the weak role of NGOs in some regions and low level of awareness and right protection, they play as right protection actors and educators for local people. In a way, they represent model of civil society and can become catalysts of civic development on regional and community level.
- ✓ The centers carry out organizing of various events for local and national organizations and serve as a resource center not only for environmental organizations, but for others as well. Thus, they could use their experience and capacity in event organization and as information agents for international, local and governmental organizations. This will help them to get additional funding for administrative expenses, and earn more recognition locally and nationally.
- ✓ Monitoring of state and regional environmental programs is another area that Centers can play an important role. Besides, in the regions where large corporations like mining companies are present, the Centers can monitor spending of their special funding aimed at environmental purposes.
- ✓ Taking into account the role, image and potential of the Centers, the opportunities to support small-scale activities beyond the environmental issues could be considered for the Centers. This could be information dissemination and collection, representation of the

Yerevan based relevant organizations as focal points (e.g. Ombudsman office) or other similar activities.

Based on the funding and recommendations, further action plan on Centers development will be drafted and discussed with OSCE and other stakeholders, so that the necessary steps are taken toward autonomous and effective functioning of the Centers.

ATTACHMENT

List of Respondents

Respondent	Organization	Position
1. Anush Evoyan	Alaverdi Aarhus Center	Coordinator
2. Arthur Ghazaryan	Ecological security and democracy NGO (Kapan)	Legal Advisor
3. Inga Zarafyan	Ecolur NGO	President
4. Liana Asoyan	Gavar Aarhus Center	Coordinator
5. Gevorg Petrosyan	Gyumri Aarhus Center	Coordinator
6. Azat Khachatryan	Gyumri Municipality, Public service and Environmental Department	Chief Expert
7. Edgar Yengibaryan	Hrazdan Aarhus Center	Coordinator
8. Ray Reeder	Hrazdan Aarhus Center	Volunteer, ex-PCV
9. Susanna Babakhanyan	Hrazdan municipality, Agriculture and environment department	Leading expert
10. Ashot Avagyan	Kapan Aarhus Center	Coordinator
11. Amalia Hambardzumyan	Khazer NGO	President
12. Vladik Martirosyan	Khustup NGO (Kapan)	President
13. Kamo Tumoyan	Kotayk marzpetaran	Environmental Department Head
14. Simon Papyan	Ministry of Nature Protection	Deputy Minister
15. Aram Gabrielyan	Ministry of Nature Protection	Head of Environmental Department
16. Ashot Giloyan	Ministry of Territorial Administration	LSGB Department Head
17. Gohar Ghazinyan	OSCE	National Environmental Program Officer
18. Seyran Martirosyan	Sakharov Human Rights Protection Center NGO Shirak Branch	Head of Shirak branch
19. Hamlet Gasparyan	Shirak Marzpetaran, Agriculture and Environment Department	Chief expert on ecology
20. Seyran Avetisyan	Syunik marzpetaran, Territorial Administration Department	Deputy Head
21. Sona Ayvazyan	Transparency International	Chair/ Project Director
22. Hovhannes Ghazaryan	UN GEF Small Grants Programme	National Coordinator
23. Karen Manvelyan	WWF Armenia	Director
24. Silva Ayvazyan	Yerevan Aarhus Center	Coordinator