

SCS Azerbaijan: Empowering Civil Society Organizations for Transparency (ECSOFT)

Overview

The Empowering Civil Society Organizations for Transparency (ECSOFT) project (2018 – 2022, \$2.5 million) is a USAID/Azerbaijan-funded initiative to support civil society organizations (CSOs) and Government of Azerbaijani (GoAz) agencies, enabling GoAz agencies to further improve their transparency and accountability by engaging with CSOs.

Azerbaijan Context

Azerbaijan is a member of the Open Government Partnership (OGP), a multilateral initiative promoting civic empowerment, strengthened governance, and anti-corruption measures, now encompassing 75 countries. Azerbaijan's status in OGP was downgraded in May 2016, due to its "unresolved constraints on the operating environment" for non-governmental organizations; but recently the OGP Steering Committee recognized that Azerbaijan has taken steps taken to resolve these constraints. In an effort to further improve its status with the OGP, the GoAz reached out to USAID to request assistance improving the fiscal transparency, accountability, and anti-corruption measures of its agencies.

Major Program Components

Increase partnerships with, and assistance to, selected GoAz agencies for improved transparency and openness through:

- Providing technical assistance to GoAz agencies on fiscal transparency, accountability, and anti-corruption measures

Increase civic advocacy to promote transparency and support efforts of state institutions to increase their accountability by:

- Building capacity of CSOs to implement advocacy interventions which address transparency and fight corruption
- Identifying areas of common interest for GoAz agencies and CSOs to cooperate on advocacy initiatives

- Promoting examples of successful cooperation between civil society and GoAz agencies to further build understanding and trust

Strengthen the sustainability and capacity of CSOs to engage as partners of GoAz to play a key role in promoting citizen interests through:

- Building capacity of CSOs to implement advocacy interventions which address transparency and fight corruption
- Identifying areas of common interest for GoAz agencies and CSOs to cooperate on advocacy initiatives

Achievements

- Conducted a needs assessment to identify government institutions' needs and to map civil society actors. During the needs-assessment process, ECSOFT engaged 91 CSOs and eight GoAz agencies.
- Worked with the Ministry of Justice to conduct three trainings for 65 CSOs on reporting obligations under anti-money laundering and counterterrorism financing legislation.
- Provided IT support to the NGO Support Council to help facilitate their online grant appeal process for CSOs outside of Baku.
- Co-organized an international conference with the OGP on how GoAz agencies and civil society organizations can improve consultations and citizen participation processes through public councils. The conference had 67 participants from over 14 government bodies, as well as members of public councils and CSOs.
- Hosted international workshop on requirements of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) for prevention of abuse of NGOs related to anti-money laundering and counterterrorism financing legislation. The USAID/Azerbaijan Mission Director and head of Financial Intelligence Service of Azerbaijan participated in the event, along with other GoAz representatives and CSOs.

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