



Technical Assistance for
Civil Society Organisations
Macedonian office



Проектот е финансиран од
Европската Унија



National Conference Report

QUALITY IN THE CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS' OPERATION

Ohrid, Hotel Metropol, 14-15 June 2011

The National conference ***Quality in the Civil Society Organisations' Operation*** has been organized by the TACSO project in partnership with 4 Civil Society Organizations which were participants at the regional TACSO conference on this topic, and they are: Citizens' Association MOST, Foundation for Local Development and Democracy – FOCUS - Veles, Local Community Development Foundation – Stip and Association for Democratic Initiatives- Gostivar.

The overall objective of this national conference was to transfer the experiences gained from the regional conference on the topic “*Quality Assurance Systems for Civil Society Organisations in IPA countries*”, to present the experiences of the implementation of quality assurance standards for Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in the region and in the country and to create a possibility for a discussion about the importance of the quality in the operation of CSOs and quality standardisation.

The participants of the event were 100 representatives of the Civil Society Organisations. There were invited guest speakers from the region (Croatia, Slovenia and Bosnia and Herzegovina), as well as journalists and representatives of the media.

The event consisted of four panel sessions and three parallel workshops.

The introductory session has represented a forum for all the participants during which the objectives and the programme of the conference, as well as the importance of the topics for discussion were presented. During the opening the Resident Advisor of the TACSO project in Macedonia, Suncica Sazdovska stressed the importance of this event, experiences from the regional conference in Zagreb on the same topic, which were the basis for defining the proposed conference programme, as well as the preparation activities, among which was also the preliminary analysis in relation with the topic through focus groups organized and carried out by the four partner organizations (Foundation Focus, MOST, Local Community Development Foundation Stip and ADI-Gostivar).

The findings from the focus groups were presented by Dime Velev from the Foundation Focus from Veles. He stressed that in the period before the conference there were organized six regional focus groups with the total number of 50 representatives from 45 Civil Society Organisations in Skopje, Veles, Gostivar and Stip. During the focus groups there have been discussed issues related with the quality assurance systems and the standards for operation of CSOs known to the CSOs from the country, as well as how the CSOs have assured the quality of their operation so far and which has been the benefit of implementation of quality assurance systems and the effects to the CSOs which would come as a result of it. Dime Velev stressed that the focus groups produced also specific questions and dilemmas of the Civil Society Organisations related with the quality of their operation and implementation of quality standards as well as the necessary support requested by the CSOs with respect to this topic. He presented the following conclusions of the focus groups:

- The organizations have very little knowledge of the quality assurance systems, but the interest and need for standardisation is great;

- In the local organizations, the procedures are not so precisely defined; namely, they have the basic documents and adjust themselves according to the requirements of the donors and realistically there is a need for updating the procedures;
- CSOs apply accounting policies for operation, as well as ethical code of conduct;
- CSOs have three-year plans to which they refer for the activities they need to take and annual working plans, code of conduct, as well as other rules and procedures;
- During the implementation of quality assurance systems, it is necessary to develop a scale which will cover the organizations different in size and capacity;
- It is necessary to respect also the organizations which for different reasons will not join the initiative for implementation of this kind of systems.

In regard to the implementation of **quality assurance systems in the Civil Society Organisations in the countries from the region**, the keynote speakers from Croatia, Slovenia and Bosnia and Herzegovina transferred their experiences in the second panel session.

In **Croatia** there is a locally adjusted quality assurance system – SOKNO (which comes from the system initially developed in Great Britain – PQASSO). The organization SMART works on its implementation in the CSOs in Croatia. Nikoleta Poljak from the Voluntary Center Osjek from Croatia, who is also a mentor for implementation of quality assurance system SOKNO, in her presentation, explained the history of development of the SOKNO system, implementation and benefits from it. She stressed that the system regulates 13 quality areas for which there are 3 levels of achievement. The main benefits of the implementation of SOKNO standard, according to the survey conducted by SMART in October 2010, are:

- Generally systematic thinking about organizational development
- Increased credibility in the donor community
- Improved communication and motivation among team members
- Supports establishment of user-centered approach and provision of better services
- Improved management system and organisational planning
- Clearly defined and harmonized purpose/mission of the organisation

The key lessons learned, from the implementation of SOKNO in Croatia so far, according to Ms Poljak are:

- Minimum requirements for implementation of SOKNO – operational budget (€7000 - €8000), one employee, space
- It takes at least one year to go through all 13 quality areas
- Should build on what the organization is already doing well
- Timing for implementation is crucial
- Investment in mentor showed crucial
- Limit the paperwork
- Implementing SOKNO is a continual process

Slovenia also has a practice of implementation of quality assurance systems for the Civil Society Organisations. The experiences and effects of its implementation were presented by Darja Sekula Krstik from the Centre for Information Services, Cooperation and Development of NGOs – CNVOS, Slovenia. According to her the key particularities of the system implemented in Slovenia are:

- Focus on transparency and financial accountability
- Internal and external communication, equal treatment of employees and volunteers (mentoring, motivation, trainings)
- Project management
- Networking and partnerships
- Indicators of success – impact on the society
- Certification or self-assessment

The process of getting a certificate lasts for three years, while the support and counselling during the implementation is provided by CNVOS and Slovenian Institute for Quality.

Bosnia and Herzegovina since recently has also been in the initial phase of the implementation of quality assurance systems for CSOs. The orientation there, similarly to the Slovenian model, has been towards the adjustment of the ISO management standard. About the implementation of this process and the challenges talked Aida Daguda from the Center for Promotion of the Civil Society -

CDCS from Bosnia and Herzegovina. The first steps taken in Bosnia and Herzegovina have been actually directed above all towards building of local basis of knowledge and establishing of institutional basis for implementation of this kind of system (certified auditors for quality assurance systems in NGOs, certified quality assurance managers in the NGOs, sharing of experiences and knowledge from Slovenia through study visit, introductory workshops, cooperation with the Institute for standardization in Bosnia and Herzegovina).

During the third session the keynote speakers from Macedonia – representatives of Civil Society Organisations, talked about the **local context and the legal framework related with the quality of CSOs' operation**.

Boris Sarkovski from the Local Community Development Foundation from Stip, presented the relation of the legal framework and the issue of quality of CSOs' operation and which effect can be expected on the quality of Civil Society Organisations' operation resulting from the implementation of the new **Law on Associations and Foundations**.

In regard to the **donors and how they treat the issue of quality assurance in the CSOs**, whether they take it into consideration while allocating finances and whether they support the increasing of quality standards in CSOs, more specifically about the institutional grants given by the Swiss Development Agency, whose programme Civica Mobilitas has been implemented by the Center for Institutional Development (CIRa), talked Svetlana Milenkovska who manages this programme and comes from the same organisation.

Filip Sekulovski from the Foundation for Sustainable Economic Development PREDA Plus, transferred his **experiences from the implementation of the standard ISO 9001:2008** as one of the rare experiences of CSOs in the country which has implemented this kind of working standard. He summed up that the key benefit from the implementation of this standard in his opinion is the provision of a comprehensive focus on the target groups, security and increase of the capacities of all employees and reduced operating expenses.

In continuation of the first day of the conference, the participants worked in 3 working groups. The workshops had the following topics:

1. **Quality and sustainability of CSOs**
2. **Benefits and challenges of the implementation of Quality Assurance Systems in CSOs**
3. **Required support for improving the quality in the CSOs operation**

The conclusions and discussion related with the conclusions of the working groups were presented during the second day of the conference when all the participants had an opportunity to ask questions and to discuss those three topics.

Working group 1: Quality and sustainability of CSOs

(Facilitator and reporter: Citizens' Association MOST – Darko Aleksov and Marijana Sokolovska)

The working group discussed the quality and sustainability of Civil Society Organisations through four key items for discussion: quality, results, image and sustainability. The participants overviewed the existing ways of functioning in CSOs and the current situation related with this issue.

In regard to the discussion of what the standards are the group suggested several definitions:

- prescribed rules, regulations and procedures of how one system will function;
- the standards contribute to the increase of quality;
- a standard is a consequence of many attempts, it is a result of a successful attempt;
- the establishment of standards happens during the functioning and acting of organisations; they develop to the level of the organization internally and develop continually;
- the sustainability in relation with the standards is inseparable, yet in order to reach standards, the organizations should turn to themselves and establish minimum standards internally in order to become stronger;

Benefits for CSOs from the implementation of standards which the group stressed are:

- the organizations should exchange experiences and good practices among themselves; the establishment of standards will contribute to the increase of exchange of experiences;
- the organizations must fight for achievement of sustainability of the processes and activities which they undertake, and not only for achievement of sustainability of the organisation;
- standards must exist, yet the organizations must change and adjust to the circumstances and change the procedures and rules which do not function, according to the legal regulations and ethical rules and norms. Also, the standards should be adjusted to the development level of the organization.
- the establishment of standards in the functioning of organizations makes them credible and influential in front of the decision-makers.

CONCLUSIONS which resulted from the work of the first working group are:

- Usually it happens to the organisations someone else to write and impose standards to them, which is a challenge for them since they do not have institutional mechanisms for their implementation; however the organizations do not have to accept standards which they already use and are functional for them, perhaps in slightly different manner;
- If minimum standards for the operation of Civil Society Organisations are established, it will contribute for them to be more credible, of better quality for the donors, decision-makers and target groups.
- The standards are positive for the organisations' operation and should be applied. However, it does not mean that the organizations will have to accept all from those standards. It is sufficient just that which means minimum, basic standard, as well as that which suits their terms.
- Also, the successful practices notices in some organizations, can be imposed as rules which function;
- The standards are needed to meet the needs of the target groups, but also to comply with the legal regulation;
- The certification can negatively influence the civil activism and sector in general;
- The civil sector should discuss the minimum standards and standards valid for all CSOs in the future, as well as the need for specific standards according to the area of action.

Working group 2: Benefits and challenges from the implementation of the Quality Assurance Systems in CSOs

(Facilitator and reporter: Association for Democratic Initiatives – Gostivar – Lulzim Haziri and Ivana Vlahovik)

The second working group discussed the benefit and challenges from the implementation of quality assurance systems in CSOs.

In regard to the benefits from the implementation of quality assurance systems, the group concluded they are related with:

- Stabilisation of the organisation (each employee knows his/her function),
- The rules and procedures provide for better quality implementation of projects,
- Greater efficiency and transparency
- Better reputation of the organization and trust by the others
- Accomplishment of the objectives and tasks
- Increased responsibility of the organisation
- The target groups receive better quality service and easier access to information

As obstacles in the process of implementation of quality assurance systems were mentioned:

- Time (for a consistent compliance with the rulebooks it is necessary that there is a person who will constantly take care of it)
- Frequent changing of the people employed in the organisations
- In some of the organizations many of the people spend the time out of the office (field activities)
- Non existence of standards

CONCLUSIONS from the second working group are:

- It is much easier to work when there are rulebooks, codes and the like.
- The implementation of these systems leads to better quality operation of the organisation
- Of great importance is the existence of a resource centre which will provide support during these processes
- The organizations should have a certain protocol in order to avoid jumping from one area to another
- Finding an adequate model of standards which does not require a lot of assets
- The existence of developed manuals, plans and codes it is easier to involve the new people in the organisations

Working group 3: Required support for improving the quality in the CSOs' operation

(Facilitator and reporter: Local Community Development Foundation Stip – Boris Sarkovski and Nevenka Longurova Girova)

The third working group which discussed the required support related with the improvement of the quality in the CSOs' operation first of all opened a general discussion about the need for quality assurance standards for CSOs, for overcoming the dilemmas during the discussion and concluding that they are truly needed. The third group made the following conclusions:

CONCLUSIONS from the third working group are:

- A need for more information about the process and use of standardisation of CSOs
- During the selection of a standardisation system it is necessary to check well which will be the most suitable for us
- To select a system adjusted to the size of organisation
- The process is also important, i.e. the way which will lead to the system
- There is a need for trainings about the standardization process
- More workshops in order to explain the whole process of standards implementation
- Mentoring for standards implementation, with a dispersed approach (local mentors)
- The state should co-finance the certification of CSOs

At the end of the final plenary session when the topics of the three working groups were discussed, Suncica Szadovska from the TACSO project summed up that the conference contributed to an improved understanding of the quality assurance systems in CSOs. The regional experiences presented at the conference showed **that the implementation of quality assurance systems is a rather serious and complex project/process** which requires investment of significant resources:

- Time (1-3 years of implementation and continuous process for maintenance of the system)
- People committed to the process

It has been concluded that the process requires above all willingness, patience and commitment by many actors:

- Civil Society Organisations
- Those organisations/institutions which will assume the task to lead the process and which should invest expertise and create infrastructure for support of the implementation process, but also the maintenance standards, as well as eventual certification.

Relying on the presented regional and local experiences, as well as the discussions in the groups it has been concluded that **there are obvious benefits from the implementation of standards in the CSOs operation**, which among the other things, reflect in:

- Improved management and increased focus on organizational development
- Increased efficiency and improved services offered by CSOs
- Building institutional memory
- Improved image and credibility
- Improved management of the people in the organization and increased motivation

Considering the local context it has been mentioned that the **pressure for increased quality in the CSOs' operation constantly grows** as a result of:

- Law on Associations and Foundations which introduces requirements whose realization means realization of minimal (first) level of standards (according to the models presented by the regional keynote speakers)
- The requirements of the donors who increase the criteria and who in addition to good projects, more and more attention pay to the organizational capacities as well (strategic plans, procedures and systems, financial management capacities and so on.)
- The need to provide sustainability to CSOs, since without an adequate quality services, the organisations cannot expect to achieve good results, influence and good image in the public.

In regard to the **follow-up steps**, in accordance with the recommendations of the third group, a conclusion has been made about the need for further building of the awareness of CSOs for this issue and the need for provision of more and more detailed information about the existing standards, thus the debate can continue in relation with an eventual development of a quality assurance system adjusted to the local needs. The TACSO project has stressed that there is preparedness for allocation of resources for this purpose in the second phase of the project.

At the end, the participants made an **evaluation of the conference** through an evaluation questionnaire. The summarised data of the evaluation show that the participants have expressed very big satisfaction with the contents of the conference, the methodology which was used and the preparedness of the keynote speakers. They have especially stressed the sharing of the experiences from the region. They have considered the topics covered by the conference as very relevant. The organisational and logistic aspects of the conference have also been highly rated.

Annexes

Annex 1 Programme

Annex 2 List of participants

Annex 3 Presentations of keynote speakers

Annex 4 Presentations of the working groups result

Annex 1

NATIONAL CONFERENCE QUALITY IN THE CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS' OPERATION Ohrid, hotel Metropol, 14-15 June 2011

PROGRAMME

Objectives of the national conference:

The overall objective of this national conference is to transfer the experience gained from the regional conference organized by TACSO “*Quality Assurance Systems for Civil Society Organisations in IPA countries*”, to present the experiences from the implementation of the quality assurance standards for Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in the region and in the country and to create possibility for discussing the importance of the quality in their operation and quality standardisation.

The working sessions will be targeted at exchanging experiences, mapping the needs for quality improvement in the CSOs' operation and the obstacles that they are facing as well as identifying recommendations about steps to be taken for strengthening the quality in their operation. It is planned for the conclusions, the recommendations and the suggestions from the working groups, in addition to the conference discussions to be the starting point for further steps.

Thus, the national conference is organised by the TACSO project in partnership with 4 Civil Society Organisations whose representatives attended the regional conference on the same topic. These are the organisations: Citizens' Association MOST, Foundation for Local Development and Democracy – FOCUS, Local Community Development Foundation Stip and Association for Democratic Initiatives.

Key elements for the conference programme:

- **Experience from the region regarding the implementation of the quality assurance systems for CSOs**

In Croatia there is local adjusted quality assurance system – SOKNO (derived from the system initially developed in Great Britain – PQASSO). The organisation SMART is working on its implementation in Croatia. In Slovenia the quality assurance systems are also being implemented in CSOs. What are the experiences and the effects from their implementation in these countries?

- **Overview of the experience in the quality assurance in Macedonia and CSOs' views on the issue**

A few organisations in Macedonia succeeded in implementing standardized quality assurance systems. What motivated them to do so? What are the benefits from that? How many national CSOs are familiar with the quality assurance systems? What are the perceptions and attitudes of CSOs regarding this issue?

- **Local context and legal frame**

What are the current laws and other regulations on the issue? What effects can be expected on the quality in the CSOs' operation with the new Law on Associations and Foundations? How donors see the issue of quality assurance in CSOs? Do they take this into account when awarding funds? Do they support implementation of quality assurance standards in CSOs?

- **Core issues for discussion regarding the quality in CSOs' operation.** The participants in the working groups will discuss the following topics:

- **Quality and sustainability of CSOs**

- Why is it important to improve the quality in the CSOs' operation? How does quality impact the

CSOs' results? How does quality influence CSOs' image and the trust CSOs enjoy in public? Can quality contribute to the CSOs' sustainability and how?

Benefit and challenges from the implementation for quality assurance systems in CSOs

Which specific benefits can be expected from the implementation of quality assurance systems in CSOs? What does the organisation gain from that? What does the target group gain?

Needed support for improving the quality in the CSOs' operation

Which preconditions are needed for improving the quality in the CSOs' operation? What kind of support, skills, knowledge, and information CSOs need to have for this purpose?

Other important elements for the conference programme:

Starting points for defining the proposed conference programme is the experience from the regional conference in Zagreb, the experience of the TACSO colleagues in other countries who implemented follow-up steps (Bosnia and Herzegovina) and the findings from the focus groups organised by the partnership organisations (Foundation Focus, MOST, Local Community Development Foundation and ADI).

Participants

- Invited guest speakers from the region
- Government representatives (Unit for Cooperation with NGOs, ministries)
- 80 CSOs
- Local Self-Government Units
- Journalists / media representatives

Reference materials for preparation:

- Reports from focus groups
- Report from the regional conference Zagreb
- Report from national conference Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Conference programme

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- **Overview of the experience in the quality assurance in Macedonia and CSOs' views on the issue**
A few organisations in Macedonia succeeded in implementing standardized quality assurance systems. What motivated them to do so? What are the benefits from that?
How many national CSOs are familiar with the quality assurance systems? What are the perceptions and attitudes of CSOs regarding this issue?
- **Local context and legal frame**
What are the current laws and other regulations on the issue? What effects can be expected on the quality in the CSOs' operation with the new Law on Associations and Foundations?
How donors see the issue of quality assurance in CSOs? Do they take this into account when awarding funds? Do they support implementation of quality assurance standards in CSOs?

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**NATIONAL CONFERENCE
QUALITY IN THE CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS' OPERATION**

**Ohrid, hotel Metropol, 14-15 June 2011
AGENDA**

Tuesday, 14 June 2011

10:30 - 11:00	Registration of the participants
11:00 -11:30	Opening of the conference / programme and objectives of the conference <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suncica Sazdovska, TACSO project • Dime Velev, Foundation for Local Development and Democracy FOCUS
11:30 – 12:30	Experience from the implementation of the Quality Assurance Systems for CSOs in IPA countries <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nikoleta Poljak, Association for Civil Society Development - SMART Croatia, • Darja Sekula Krstič, Centar for Informative Services, Cooperation and Development of NGOs - CNVOS, Slovenia • Aida Daguda, Center for Development of Civil Society - CDCS Bosnia and Herzegovina <p><i>Moderator: Suncica Sazdovska TACSO</i></p>
12:30-13:00	Coffee break
13:00-14:00	Local context and experience from quality assurance in CSOs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boris Sharkovski, Local Community Development Foundation Stip • Svetlana Milenkova, Center for Institutional Development • Filip Sekuloski, Foundation for Sustainable Economic Development PREDA Plus <p><i>Moderator: Lulzim Haziri, Association for Democratic Initiatives - Gostivar</i></p>
14:00-15:30	Lunch
15:30-16:30	Group work : <p>Working group 1 Quality and sustainability of CSOs (Facilitator and reporter: Citizens' Association MOST)</p> <p>Working group 2 Benefit from and Challenges in the implementation of Quality Assurance Systems in CSOs (Facilitator and reporter: Association for Democratic Initiatives - Gostivar)</p> <p>Working group 3 Required support for improving the quality in the CSOs' operation (Facilitator and reporter: Local Community Development Foundation Stip)</p>
16:30-17:00	Coffee break
17:00-18:00	Group work (continuation)
19:00 – 23:00	Joint dinner

Wednesday, 15 June 2011	
9:00 - 9:30	Morning coffee
09:30-11:00	<p>Reporting about the results from the working group discussions -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Working group 1. Quality and Sustainability of CSOs Reporter</i> <i>Questions and possibilities for discussion of all participants</i> • <i>Working group 2. Benefit from and challenges in the implementation of the Quality Assurance Systems in CSOs Reporter</i> <i>Questions and possibilities for discussion of all participants</i> • <i>Working group 3. Required support for improving the quality in the CSOs' operation Reporter</i> <i>Questions and possibilities for discussion of all participants</i> <p><i>Moderator: Suncica Sazdovska, TACSO</i></p>
11:00 -11:30	Summarizing the conclusions from the discussions and finalizing the national conference
11:30 – 12:00	Conference evaluation
13:00-14:30	Lunch