14th session of CEPA: Contribution to the "Call for Inputs"

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Subject: Assessing opportunities of high education entities for building CSO's capacities and using their resources

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RESEARCH REPORT
on "Assessing opportunities of high education entities for building CSO's capacities and using their resources"

1.   Introduction and justification

After gaining independence, CSOs started its development in Azerbaijan, and began to provide its contribution to the formation of civil society. Special provisions serving for development of this sector, have been included in the newly adopted different policy documents, various legislative and normative statements have been adopted. For instance, "Law on Public Participation", "Law on Social Service", "Law on Social Orders" etc. and basic policy document of Azerbaijan "AZERBAIJAN – 2020: THE VISION OF THE FUTURE". Moreover, CSOs have been planned to be included in the adverse-centralization policy, which has been adopted as the basic policy of state governance since 1990th years of the previous century, as well as in various state programs, in the policy documents on youth's development and local governance (Municipalities). Assuming these law and normative statements as a basis, currently CSO is entrusted with executing various functions on the sphere of serving people by the government. In recent years, Ministry of Labor and Social Protection (MOLSP), Ministry of Education (MoE), Ministry of Youth and Sports, Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources, State Committee on Deals of Refugees and IDPs and other government bodies entrust NGO with the organization of some services by holding a competition among NGOs. The held competitions on improving teachers skills upon the application of new curriculums by TN that's already being implemented for few years, on organizing services in communities for physically and mentally defective children by MOLSP can be cited as an example of it. But there exist enough gaps in NGOs' roles in development processes and in improvement of the society's attitude towards NGO sector. One and even main of such kind of gaps is limited relations between NGO sector and "high education entities and scientific-research community".
This document reflects the outcomes of the research conducted in this direction.
Research work reflects worldwide experience in this field, CSO in Azerbaijan, its participation in education process, and especially current status of its relations with High Education Entities, as well as recommendations on extension of these relations.

2.   Policy on NGO management and NGOs' capacity building in Azerbaijan

As it was mentioned above, after gaining independency, the civil society development was accepted as one of the priorities of the Azerbaijan Government, and various events fostering civil society development started to be realized. It is not accidental that one of the major challenges in "View to Future-2020" document, defining future strategy of Azerbaijan, is civil society development. As it was reflected in this document, state policy in a direction of development of civil society and extension of relations between state agencies and civil society institutions will be continued throughout the realization of the conception. For this

purpose, "National Activity Program for Civil Society Development" will be prepared by the Council on State Support to NGOs under the the Auspices of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan and implemented. The program will include preparation and acceptance of new legislative statements stimulating civil society development and strengthening support of the state and prvate sector to the civil society, increasing financial support to the NGOs' projects and programs, formation of "CSO Resurs and education Center". etc.

Working Group on "National Activity Program for Civil Society Development", which has been formed with the participation of experts (12 persons) of active local and international NGOs and of international organizations (USAID, EU) by the Council on State Support to NGOs under the Auspices of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan (I was a member of this group), includes a special division (prepared by sub-working group on education) called "Scientific-research work, education and awareness-raising about CSOs and NGOs", and this division includes the following provisions:

•   Preparation of textbooks and methodical means on various sectors of civil society development and NGOs' Management;
•   Including non-commercial and Community Development subjects in education programs of high education entities, preparation of teaching curriculum for both subjects;
•   Including various topics on non-commercial management into course and diploma works;
•   Organization of periodic scientific seminars and conferences on NGOs' role in society's development, preparation of dissertation works, thesises, scientific works and articles.

3.   Summary of research outcomes

According to the leassons learned, CSO-education/training institutions cooperation is very useful for both sectors in achieving their goals, and this cooperation is very important.

For the first, CSO had enough influence over change of "participatory attitudes" and "habits of approach" in the education system. Such kind of changed and new attitudes resulted in increase of the local communities' interests to mobilize their resources for development of education entities and in extension of their capacities. Majority of the CSOs are sure that "participatory mechanisms" are the best for changing the local attitudes;

For the second, CSOs have helped build organizational capacity at the local level. Alongside with providing trainings on various topics in the schools (preparation and realization of new curriculum, interactive training methods etc.), the CSOs facilitated organizational capacity building of the school personnel and communities. Formation of Teacher-Parent Associations (TPA) and increase of the communities' support to the education process are the best example for this. TPAs were formed in some communities by the CSOs, and later on the Ministry of Education was involved in the process.

For the third, cooperation level between high education entities and CSOs is very limited excluding some universities. This cooperation is realized in some universities through forming coalitions with CSOs and implementing various projects. For instance, TEMPUS, ERASMUS programs. Besides, various international and local organizations performing work in a direction of education (for instance, IREX, Germany Association of the Adults' Education etc.) work only with a cooperation principle of the "project-from project". Cooperation does not bear stable character in these programs. Both parties do not benefit from these programs enough in such conditions, but this cooperation does not bear stable character, and these programs do not aim at building CSOs' capacity and creating resources for CSOs in universities.

4.   Suggestions on strengthening cooperation between the education entities and CSOs

According to analysis of the research otcomes, development of the cooperation between the education entities and CSO, more effective usage of the resources of both sectors shows existence of a potential for the formation of "CSO resources" in universities. Effective usage of this potential and taking the following measures will strengthen the University-CSO relations. Through taking these measures, "Resource Centers" can be formed in the universities for CSOs' capacity building, and CSOs can achieve resources for application of the students' and teachers' theoretical knowledge.

i)   Currently, the organizations are inclined to cooperation in a direction of "mutual needs and expectations". From this point of view, both the universities and CSOs in Azerbaijan are in a relevant development level, and thus there is enough knowledge that they should learn from one-another. So, there are enough spaces for their cooperation. In order to extend this cooperation, various round tables, discussions, seminars and conferences should be organized. We can launch this issue by the round table on the theme "The Role of Education in the Civil Social Development" with the Council on State Support to NGOs under the Auspices of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan in some universities.

ii)   Events should be arranged for involving the students in voluntarily work in the local and international organizations, and events related to CSO should be organized in the universities for raising the students' knowledge on CSO;

iii)   Cooperation should be extended through inviting professors and teachers of the universities, as well as researchers in the events organized by the local and international CSOs, involving them in various research-character events, and involving the students in short-term events like conducting surveys;

iv)   During my discussions, a number of people suggest the current curriculum is in need of a major shake-up so that trans-disciplinary understanding is increased, leadership and mobilization skills are enhanced, and practice and theory more closely interwoven. In this sense, universities need activists and practitioners in the classroom too, providing practical insights and 'live' case studies. Relations with CSOs are good resources for this. CSO personnel with these capacities should be identified, and their resources should be used in the relevant universities;

v)   Literature about the CSOs' management and marketing should be translated, and new materials and literature should be written. Alongside with CSOs' representatives, the universities' personnel should be involved in this process, and thus, both the cooperation and resources on both sectors should be extended in this way;

vi)   Competitions and scientific conferences on CSOs should be organized among the students and teachers. For instance, we can improve students knowledge on both studying CSO and protecting environment by organizing article competitions among students on the theme - "The Role of CSO on Environmental Protection".