

Social Accountability and Participatory Monitoring Approaches in Armenia

Experiences and Opportunities

A Reader



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List of Acronyms

BET	Budget Expenditure Tracking
CRC	Citizens Report Cards
CRD/TI Armenia	Center for Regional Development/Transparency International Armenia
CSC	Community Scorecards
CSPN	Civil Society Partnership Network
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
LSAB	Local self administration bodies
MES	Ministry of Education and Science
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
OXFAM GB	OXFAM Great Britain
PPEM	Public Participation in Expenditure Management
PM	Participatory Monitoring
PME	Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Program
WB	World Bank

List of participating civil society organizations, facilities, and communities

	Organization	Stakeholder group	Name of village/ community
1	Center for Regional Development/TI Armenia	NGO	Yerevan
2	OXFAM Great Britain	Donor	Yerevan
3	Fund Against Violation of Law	NGO	Yerevan
4	Communities Finance Officers Association	NGO	Yerevan
5	“Hazarashen”, Armenian Center for Ethnological Studies	NGO	Yerevan
6	Yerevan State University, Department of Sociology	Academia	Yerevan
7	Sisian Development Center	NGO	Sisian
8	Sisian Civic Center	NGO	Sisian
9	Sisian Community Center	NGO	Sisian
10	Sisian School # 4	Service provider	Sisian
11	Sisian Hospital	Service provider	Sisian
12	Verishen Secondary School	Service provider	v.Verishen
13	Verishen Ambulatory	Service provider	v.Verishen
14	Akner Secondary School	Service provider	v.Akner
15	Zangezour	Media	Goris
16	Kapan School # 1	Service provider	Kapan
17	Kapan Polyclinics	Service provider	Kapan
18	Syunik Secondary School	Service provider	v.Syunik
19	Kapan Center of National Statistical Service	Service provider	Kapan
20	Kapan School # 10	Service provider	Kapan
21	Meghri School # 1	Service provider	Meghri
22	Alvanq Secondary School	Service provider	v.Alvanq
23	Agarak Hospital	Service provider	Agarak
24	Employment Service Meghri Center	Service provider	Meghri
25	Meghri Center of National Statistical Service	Service provider	Meghri
26	Health and Welfare	NGO	Meghri
27	Mush-2 Community Center	NGO	Gyumri
28	Khoran Ard	NGO	Gyumri
29	Center for Community Initiatives and Advocacy		Gyumri
30	Sirarpeni	NGO	Gyumri
31	Yerkatgic Community Center	NGO	Gyumri
32	Krtutyayn Asparez	NGO	Gyumri
33	Shirak International Union	NGO	Gyumri
34	Civic Activity Auditorium	NGO	Gyumri
35	Ashotsk Community Center’	NGO	Ashotsk sub-region
36	Artik Community Center	NGO	Artik sub-region
37	Akhuryan Community Center	NGO	Akhuryan sub-region
38	Ani Patriotic Association	NGO	Ani sub-region
39	Amasia Community Center	NGO	Amasia sub-region

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This Reader forms part of the World Bank’s efforts to learn from field experiences which make an important contribution to the knowledge base of the World Bank in the area of social accountability and strengthening of the demand side of governance.

* Marz – Administrative regional unit

Table of Contents

Summary	6
1. Introduction	8
2. Piloting the Community Scorecard Methodology in the Public Secondary Schools and health institutions of Syunik Marz	10
3. Participatory Monitoring in the Public Secondary Education System of Shirak Marz	19
4. Monitoring and Evaluation of Irrigation and Health Situation in the Rural Areas	27
5. Public Hearings on Community Budgets.....	34
6. Conclusion: Lessons and Opportunities	38

Summary

Over the last years civil society organizations in Armenia embarked on implementing social accountability and participatory monitoring approaches, often in collaboration with the Government of Armenia and community groups around the country. Most of these initiatives aimed at strengthening transparency, accountability, responsiveness of service providers, local and, to a lesser degree, central government. Many of these initiatives focused on analyzing budgets, tracking public expenditures or monitoring the performance of public institutions. Often, these initiatives had pilot character, i.e. while building the capacity of relevant stakeholder and testing different methodologies, they tried to learn how to make use of participatory monitoring and social accountability for poverty reduction and economic development in Armenia.

Despite promising early experience, participatory monitoring and social accountability approaches have still some way to go in order to be institutionalized in Armenia. This Reader tries to document a small number of participatory monitoring and social accountability initiatives that were piloted by civil society organizations in Armenia. Its purpose is to capture the lessons learned and experiences, and contribute to the on-going debate in Armenia and beyond regarding the potential and the challenges of these approaches.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Armenia is in the midst of an important economic and political transition. In recent years, the Government of Armenia has taken up a number of progressive measures to improve development outcomes in the country. The Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper developed by Armenia places great emphasis on participation in the planning, implementation and monitoring processes by not only civil society organizations, but by a wide variety of actors including local governments, communities, the private sector and citizens.

Over the last years civil society organizations in Armenia embarked on an important initiative to pilot some of the strategies embodied in the PRSP, namely participatory monitoring and social accountability methodologies, in collaboration with the Government of Armenia and community groups around the country.

Social accountability is an approach towards building accountability that relies on civic engagement, i.e. in which it is ordinary citizens and/or civil society organizations who participate directly or indirectly in exacting accountability. Social accountability approaches have been tried in many parts of the world and have led to tangible improvements in the quality of service delivery, while also building capacities of citizens and government officials to build a more transparent and accountable system.

In general, participatory processes can be used for different functions and at different phases of the management cycle, such as planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, capacity building or institutional training, as well as in different sectors. For example, participatory monitoring and evaluation (PME) methodologies and approaches can be one of the key steps in addressing the lack of accountability and transparency of Armenia's public secondary education system. On the other hand, the Community Scorecard (CSC) methodology can be used to improve patient satisfaction in the health sector and Budget Expenditure Tracking (BET) can help communities understand their local budget and hence hold their government accountable for budget allocations and disbursements.

Participatory and social accountability approaches and mechanisms still are not institutionalized in Armenia. This results both from the difficulties of self-assertion and formation of civil society structures and absence of willingness of Armenian authorities to make transparent the governance of the country and decision-making processes. From this perspective, international organizations play a significant role in the development and strengthening of participatory approaches in Armenia.

This Reader summarizes some successful examples of participatory monitoring and evaluation (PME) implementation in Armenia. The cases presented are diverse both with regard to methodologies applied and to the areas of their application, which proves the necessity and desirability of PME application.

The reader consists of four case studies documenting the perspectives, advantages and limitations of the application of various PME methodologies. The first case study presents the application of the "Community Scorecard" (CSC) methodology in the secondary schools and health institutions of Syunik Marz of Armenia. The second case study analyzes the application of participatory public expenditure management

(PPEM), specifically the “budget expenditure tracking” (BET) methodology in the public secondary education system of Shirak[†] Marz of Armenia. Case study 3 documents the experience of OXFAM Great Britain in monitoring and evaluation of irrigation and health services in rural communities. In particular, the case study discusses the results of quantitative and qualitative monitoring evaluation, which reveal the problems in these areas. Finally, the fourth case study presents another participatory monitoring methodology – budget monitoring through public hearings. The study summarizes the experience of the Communities Finance Officers NGO’s experience. The concluding chapter summarizes the lessons learned from these experiences and also enumerates the opportunities that can be pursued in future.

[†] The project has been implemented by the Center for Regional Development/Transparency International Armenia.

Piloting the Community Scorecard Methodology in the Public Secondary Schools and Health institutions of Syunik Marz

Gohar Tadevosyan

Assistant Professor of the Department of Sociology
Yerevan State University and Consultant, World Bank

Participatory and social accountability approaches and mechanisms promoting transparency and efficiency of service delivery have not yet been institutionalized in Armenia. Hence international organizations play a significant role in promoting the development and strengthening of participatory approaches into the Armenian context.

The project on “Piloting and Capacity Building for Social Accountability and Participatory Approaches in Armenia,” aimed at strengthening participatory approaches and social accountability mechanisms in the Armenian society, has been implemented in 2003-2005 with the support from the World Bank and Norwegian and Finnish Trust Funds. The project was intended to promote participatory monitoring and social accountability methods in the community development projects and activities of the local self-administration bodies, and to develop the capacities of interested groups.

Specifically, this case study reports on the results of the pilot on the application of participatory monitoring (PM) and community scorecard (CSC) methodologies in the public secondary schools and health institutions of Syunik Marz.

1. Project Goals

The goals of monitoring the public secondary schools and health institutions are:

- > to introduce and test the expediency and efficiency of the application of CSC methodologies in the public secondary education and health sectors;
- > to make transparent the activities of the schools and hospitals/policlinics for all groups relating to them;
- > to encourage the schools and hospitals/policlinics to identify problems;
- > to encourage the stakeholder groups to implement changes addressing the problems identified.

2. Method and Procedure

2.1 Partners and Monitoring Institutions

In order to implement participatory monitoring, community-based working groups including civil society and government representatives, were established in four sub-regions of Syunik Marz. Each working group consisted of 4-5 main workers, as well as volunteers. All the groups attended workshops where they received training in CSC

methodology, as well as other PME methodologies such as budget expenditure tracking (BET), self-evaluation and citizens report cards (CRC).

The monitoring in the education sector has been implemented in 3 towns and 4 village schools in 4 sub-regions of Syunik Marz (Sisian, Goris, Kapan and Meghri). Monitoring in health sector has been implemented in 2 town hospitals (Sisian and Agarak), one town polyclinic (Kapan) and one village out-patients' clinic (Verishen village).

2.2 Monitoring Implementation Process

The monitoring has been implemented in two phases with 7-8 months interval between each phase, which made it possible to trace the progress of the reforms. The following are the steps taken to implement the CSC methodology:

1. Prior to CSC implementation each working group performed certain preparatory activities, including:

- > study of the legal regulations of the sector being piloted;
- > preliminary study of the situation in the selected institutions;
- > individual meetings with the representatives of communities, institutions and other stakeholders.

2. Formation of focus groups from the representatives of the stakeholders.

During the preparatory activities focus groups have been established consisting of both service recipients and service providers. In general, in the schools these groups consisted of representatives from 4 major stakeholder groups:

- > school boards/administration
- > teachers
- > parents
- > students (from senior grades)

The representatives chosen from the health sector came from the following stakeholder groups:

- > patients of the hospitals, polyclinics and out-patients' clinic;
- > nurses
- > doctors
- > members of the administration of these facilities.

In order to ensure the diversity of opinions and impartiality of information, in some cases (especially in the course of the selection of students and patients) the groups were divided based on the sex and age.

3. Development and evaluation of service scoring criteria

The focus groups, with the support of monitoring groups, discussed and proposed its own criteria for evaluation of the service provision. These criteria were then scored and justifications for these scores were presented. After developing the table of service provision scores each focus group also discussed potential measures to solve the problems they identified.

Analysis of the criteria included in the scorecards reveal that the major factors affecting the quality of the school service are the “*material-technical resources*” and “*conditions of school buildings*.” These criteria were scored low by almost all groups, as there has been no repair and renovation works or acquisition of new equipment during the last decade, especially in the remote and rural areas.

Another problem was with *pedagogical personnel*, specifically the lack of teachers with higher pedagogical education and high level of teaching quality. While discussing this problem, the group noted that a related problem was the limited opportunities for training.

The major problems identified in the health sector were “modern medical equipment” and “professional staff,” which received low grades because they were non-existent or lacking.

4. Interface Meeting

During this meeting all participants involved in the focus groups discussed the results of the scorecards and developed a plan for reforming the corresponding service. These reform plans include both macro-level problems, requiring the intervention of the government, and in particular, direct intervention of Armenian MES, and micro-level problems, which can be resolved with their own resources. For the most part, only reforms aimed at solving micro-level problems have been implemented, although certain steps toward the resolution of macro-level problems have also been taken. The resolution of such problems, however, requires taking much clearer, consistent and direct steps, which educational and health institutions do not undertake at this moment. On the one hand, they are not confident in their own capacities, and moreover, they do not trust in the promises of the government.

5. Actions undertaken by the working groups to push forward reforms

The working groups also tried to assist the selected institutions in the implementation of the reforms, though their main goal was to act as an intermediary between the service recipients and providers in the evaluation of the services and the development of reform plans. This is especially important at the preliminary stages of the methodology piloting, since people mainly expect changes from outside and are extremely passive in initiating such changes on their own.

The Meghri monitoring group initiated a conference for the representatives of the education sector of the sub-region, where the activities on piloting the methodology have been discussed and the grounds for cooperation among these representatives have been established. As the principals of schools who gave speeches at the conference noticed, “...*all that was mentioned could be applied to their schools, as all schools have similar problems, and apparently PM methodologies are innovative, interesting, and applicable, and it is possible to carry out certain reforms at the community level, without waiting for actions from higher levels of the government.*”

4. Results in Education and Health Sectors

4.1 Education

Overall, the application of the CSC methodology in the schools of Syunik Marz yielded significant results. It also aroused great interest among community members which could become a serious stimulus both for the democratization of the public secondary education system and the improvement of the quality of education. The results of the application of the CSC methodology can be grouped into the following assertions:

#1 The CSC methodology promoted the democratization of the school by encouraging the participation of the students and their parents in the discussions and decision-making on school issues.

Thanks to the CSC application, students and their parents felt they were full members of their schools. As a principal of one of the schools mentioned in his speech: *“We opened the curtain and created an opportunity for the clash of ideas. Administration of the school became more democratic, allowing the students and their parents to also become full participants in the administrative process.”*

#2 The initiatives of the school administration became more focused

Although most schools had feedback mechanisms in place, the principals noted that these mechanisms were virtually dysfunctional. The principal of the Meghri school, for example, stated that the “box of suggestions” they had made available had not been effective. Many principals appreciated the CSC methodology for its ability to yield more effective results. In fact one principal stated, *“How did it happen that we had not realized long ago that employing this methodology we could have revealed many problems and found adequate solutions?”*

At the first stage of monitoring, students of Meghri School # 1 raised the issues of redecoration of the recreation room, purchase of musical instruments, and enlargement of the buffet. By the second stage of monitoring the problems had been solved by joint efforts of the monitoring working group and the administration.

#3 Monitoring led to changes in the performance of service providers

In some schools the main principles of the methodology were applied in the overall administrative process. CSC methodology has become a working style in teachers’ and students’ councils and parents’ meetings of the Meghri and Sisian schools. They use the methodology to try to identify problems and find solutions.

Some changes are evident in the teaching style of teachers as well. Rigorous methods involving insults started to give way to milder methods. Teachers said: *“We now view our students in a new manner and notice that they have acute insights”*. Teachers became more attentive to students’ needs and more aware of the lessons. Finally, they became more interested in daily life of their students.

#4 Monitoring encouraged the pupils to become more active, responsible and attentive.

After monitoring was introduced, the general atmosphere changed in all the schools. Both the administration and teachers in the schools have noted a change in the students' behavior.

In many cases students became proactive, which is apparent in the activities of student councils. In almost all the schools student councils became more active and started to organize different types of events, both intellectual and athletic. Students also became more responsible. After monitoring began, students' attendance improved and became regular. Before that, due to different reasons there were many absences from classes and the school administration could not resolve the problem.

The administration of Sisian School # 4 mentions that after monitoring was introduced students used different measures to keep their behavior at an appropriate level. The student council of this school applies sanctions to those students who arrive late or disturb the lesson.

According to the principal, sanitary-hygienic conditions of classrooms have been significantly improved thanks to an initiative by a group of students. As teachers say: *“Incentives such as prizes, encouragement from other students, and awarding of transitional banner to the classroom considered to have “the cleanest schoolroom, created healthy competition among them.”*

#5 Monitoring permitted all students and parents to voice their views independently of the pass-rate of students and the living conditions of parents.

There is a widespread opinion among teachers that students with low pass-rate cannot have interesting ideas, so it's senseless to listen to them. The monitoring, however, created equal conditions for all the students and parents. It became clear, that teachers' and the principal's view of student's expectations was wrong. The principal of Meghri School # 1 said: *“At the second stage of monitoring one of the students with low pass-rate accused us of ignoring him and frequently not hearing his answers, while we thought that the student tried to avoid answering.”*

Students with low pass-rate and improper behavior highly appreciated the monitoring. Some teachers, however, found that the influence of monitoring on students was negative to some degree. They claimed that students became more demanding of teachers and less demanding of themselves. However, this opinion was not general and it was mostly expressed by those teachers who most often referred to the necessity of applying “severe” methods to students.

#6 Monitoring convened everybody and channeled combined efforts towards improvement of schools.

Monitoring created an atmosphere of consolidation and cooperation. Consolidation should be considered at two levels: within the school community and between schools.

The link between parents and schools is especially weak in rural communities since the former is completely involved in farming and cattle-farming and do not pay adequate attention to the education of their children. These parents are usually convinced that their children will not have the opportunity to continue their studies and that education will not yield any benefits. As a result of monitoring, however, the number of parents attending parents' meetings grew significantly; hence the link between parents and schools become stronger. Furthermore, "open house day," a day during which parents can attend classes and listen to the lesson with permission of the administration, was introduced in some schools.

Parents and teachers also began to organize program events, and parents started to assist in repair and redecoration of the school.

A partnership has been established between the school of the village of Alvanq and school of the town of Meghri. As a result, the Meghri school renders material and methodological support to the Alvanq school. In the Meghri school during a full-day exchange of pedagogical experiences was organized for the teachers of Alvanq school. Meanwhile the pupils got the opportunity to participate in the lessons of corresponding classes.

Cooperation between Verishen and Akner schools proved to be possible as well. Students of Akner School utilize the computer center of Verishen School. Furthermore, with the support of the English Teaching Center students of the Verishen and Akner schools jointly study English.

4.2 Health

In contrast to the education sector, both the process of, the methodology implementation and, especially, the reforms were carried out more passively and on a much smaller scale in the health sector.

First of all, it was much more difficult to apply the methodology in the hospitals, polyclinics and out-patients' clinics, considering the specific function of these institutions. Engaging nurses and doctors in the monitoring for 1-2 hours would impede the functioning of the institution, especially if its staff is small. Getting patients to participate was also challenging. Although hospital patients may be available in one place at the hospital, they cannot always devote much time to the discussions because of their health conditions. At clinics the problem was that it was very difficult to gather the same group of patients for the second time for participation at interface meetings.

The biggest obstacle working groups faced in the health sector, was the skepticism of the medical staff towards the results of the methodology pilot. This skepticism stemmed from medical staff's hostility to application of the methodology in general. Unlike the education sector, the health sector has always been less transparent and, in some sense, more elitist. Hence doctors are very confident that they are completely

aware of the problems with both their institution and patients. They claim that the only source of all their problems is the lack of financial resources. According to them, if the implementation of the methodology does not directly provide financial assistance, then such methodology is not relevant.

Apparently, however, there is another opinion (especially among the nurses and administration), stating that participatory monitoring is absolutely crucial to the health sector and can bring forth substantial changes. Yet currently the attitudes of the representatives of this sector is more consumer-like. They argue that the reforms in this sector require substantial financial investment, which is very difficult to acquire from local sources.

The results of the first and second stages reveal that there are serious problems in this sector, such as the acquisition of new equipment, absence of specialists in specific areas, repair of buildings, etc. However, there are some problems which do not require huge financial resources and where the application of participatory monitoring methods can achieve substantial results. For example, the relationships between the doctor and patient, doctor and nurse, doctor and administration, may appear friendly, but are often full of tension, contradictions and conflicts and need to be reformed.

Nonetheless, during the period between the first and second stages of the monitoring significant changes took place in the institutions being monitored. Although it is difficult to link these changes directly with monitoring, working groups mention that the monitoring, to some extent, was the stimulus for these changes. Mainly the following reforms have been implemented in the institutions where the monitoring has been carried out:

- staff training
- supplying with new equipment
- small repair works
- extension of the assortment of medicine.

Given the results of the monitoring, the health sector is not yet ready for the application of the participatory monitoring. Instead, other forms of the participatory monitoring should be introduced in this sector, which will combine both monitoring itself and parallel implementation of projects targeting the problems identified by the monitoring results.

5. Advantages and limitations of the method

5.1 Advantages

The participants of the CSC methodology identified the positive features below on the basis of their experience:

- > The method is rather simple and is a useful novelty for Armenian reality;
- > The method helps explain the problems of a specific service from the perspective of people connected to that service in different ways (e.g. recipients vs. service provider);

- > The CSC methodology also has a cognitive significance and develops the self-evaluation capacity of those connected to the service;
- > The method promotes the formation of a culture of social dialogue, partnership and cooperation;
- > The method enhances social accountability of both the service providers and recipients, as well as undermines the traditional stereotype according to which only service providers can initiate change.

5.2 Limitations

Although every working group said that they did not face serious obstacles when implementing the methodology, there were certain factors that impeded their work. These factors are mainly associated with the absence of the culture of participatory and democratic governance. These factors are:

- > Limited resources of the communities and organizations under the community subordination, which impedes the process of real reforms;
- > Indifference and mistrust of the society, and its alienation from participatory process. Expectation that the changes will be implemented from the outside.
- > Unclear mechanisms of the democratic governance of institutions, which makes citizens dependent on decision-makers and obstructs the equal participation of people in decision-making processes and implementation.
- > Absence of a culture of cooperation among community structures, which also impedes the process of reforms.

6. Summary

Overall, the application of CSC methodology in the public schools of Syunik Marz was successful. It really became a stimulus to consolidate all stakeholder groups related to schools and jointly implement the reforms.

Other approaches should be applied in the health sector in order to pave the way for successful implementation of participatory monitoring methods. One such approach could be combining monitoring with the implementation of certain projects, which could render financial assistance to the health institution where monitoring has been implemented.

In order to institutionalize participatory monitoring methods, however, they must be carried out continuously and consistently. If participatory monitoring is not an enduring effort, the reforms will probably be one-time and short-lived undertakings.

Throughout the implementation of the project certain activities were directed towards the scaling-up and sustainability of the methodology. In particular, prior to the start of the second phase of monitoring, the Meghri working group conducted a training on CSC methodologies for the representatives (school administration, teachers, parents and pupils) of all 11 schools of the sub-region. However, these institutions are still not ready to conduct monitoring on their own and expect support from the monitoring working groups.

Furthermore, in order to ensure the sustainability of participatory monitoring, the working groups proposed an initiative to establish a Regional Resource Center for

Monitoring and Evaluation. This initiative has been supported by the institutions, which have been monitored in the framework of the Project. (See details at www.mrc.am)

Participatory Monitoring in the Public Secondary Education System of Shirak Marz

Varuzhan Hochtanyan
Public Policy Expert
Center for Regional Development/
Transparency International Armenia

1. General Description of the Project

The methodology of participation in public expenditure management (PPEM) received wide recognition among civil society organizations of different countries starting from 1980s, when it became clear that the governments of those countries were not able to resolve the problem of poverty elimination. These failures resulted from either insufficient funding of projects targeted at the elimination of poverty or ineffective implementation of such projects. Such a situation stimulated broader public participation in the management of public expenditures, which was aimed towards the increase of transparency and accountability of the governments' activities.

The idea of PPEM is based on the concept of public participation in all stages of the government's budget cycle. At the *budget formulation* stage the citizens participate in the allocation of public resources, and in some cases, in the formulation of the alternative budget. At the *budget analysis* stage they evaluate the extent to which the funds allocated from the state budget reflect the budget's adherence to the principles of social equity. Citizens' participation at the *budget expenditure tracking* stage allows them to observe how the funds allocated from the state budget are spent. Finally, at the *performance monitoring* stage citizens evaluate the performance of the government to find out how efficiently the budget funds have been spent.

Two PME methodologies, Community Score Cards (CSC) and Budget Expenditure Tracking (BET) have been piloted from October 2004 to March 2005 in the public secondary schools of Shirak Marz of Armenia within the framework of the project on "Piloting and Capacity Building for Social Accountability and Participatory Approaches in Armenia" supported by the World Bank and Norwegian and Finnish Trust Funds. The project has been implemented by the Center for Regional Development/Transparency International Armenia (CRD/TI Armenia).

2. Project Goals

The major goals of the Project are:

- > to introduce the mechanisms of participatory monitoring in the public secondary education system of Shirak Marz
- > to develop the capacities of local NGOs in PME and social accountability methodologies.

This Project was in some ways, a continuation of the previous project implemented by CRD/TI Armenia with the support of OXFAM GB. The main difference is that the project discussed here targets local NGOs of Shirak Marz rather than school structures, in particular, school boards, school parental and pedagogical councils as the first project did.

The need for the second project, to some extent, was dictated by the results of the first project. Those results were:

1. The school structures neither have capacity, nor willingness to carry out monitoring efforts on their own. The main reason is that these structures are still heavily dependent on those they are expected to monitor, such as school principals and relevant departments of Marzpetarans (Regional administrations).
2. Both the students and their parents, and teachers do not perceive themselves as the owners of the school, responsible for its fate. The mentality that the state should solve all problems of the school still dominates.
3. The same parents and teachers do not imagine that the government should be transparent and accountable to them. As a result they do not believe that monitoring could entail to any positive impact.
4. Very often the schools perceive NGOs, especially if they are from the capital city, as organizations providing material aid to schools or conducting trainings. If their expectations are not met, they do not feel any obligation to become involved into monitoring activities.

Given these lessons it was found more expedient to choose local NGOs as the targets of the new project. It was expected that local NGOs would have more incentives to implement reforms in the public secondary education system of the Marz. In addition, they know their local specificities better. Finally, development of their capacities will facilitate the formation of a strong civil society in the region.

To a certain degree this is a new approach in practicing PM methods, in the sense that the major role in conducting monitoring is reserved for civil society organizations rather than to groups providing services within a given sector, or to groups receiving services (i.e., school boards, parental and pedagogical councils).

3. Method and Implementation Procedure

3.1 Partner NGOs and Monitored Schools

After becoming acquainted with NGOs in Shirak Marz and seeking recommendations from different sources, such as the NGO Center of the Armenian Assembly of America, Yerevan office of World Learning, media and journalist organizations of Shirak Marz and others, the CRD/TI Project Team defined the following criteria to select NGOs responsible for carrying out the projects:

- 1) at least two-year experience in implementing education and community development projects;
- 2) transparency of the organization's activities (NGOs who wish to participate in the project had to submit to complete information about themselves); and

3) involvement of all sub-regions of the Marz (city of Gyumri, administrative center of Shirak Marz, Amasia, Ashotsk, Akhuryan, Artik and Ani sub-regions).

Based on these criteria 15 NGOs were selected, of which 10 represented Gyumri, and 5, the sub-regions of the Marz. Geographically the NGOs of Shirak Marz are distributed very asymmetrically. There are more than 170 active NGOs in Gyumri, whereas in each of the sub-regions of the Marz there are only 1-2 NGOs, which were founded during the last 2-3 years and do not have sufficient experience.

At the same time, the team selected the schools to be monitored and the NGOs who were trained in the methodology conducted experiential learning exercises in these schools. Two schools were selected from each region and city of Gyumri. The NGOs also met with the administration of the pre-selected schools to agree on the arrangements and organizational issues related to the conduct of experiential learning exercises.

The final selection of schools included 3 urban schools (Schools # 19 and # 21 of the city of Gyumri and School # 5 of the town of Artik) and 9 schools representing rural areas. Those were the schools of the villages of Amasia and Aregnadem from Amasia sub-region, Tavshut and Tsoghamarg from Ashotsk sub-region, Marmashen and Vahramaberd from Akhuryan sub-region, Horom from Artik and Anipemza and Dzorakap from Ani sub-regions.

3.2 Project implementation process

The training workshop for the selected NGOs was conducted in November 2004, during which 2-day theoretical and practical classes have been conducted with the participants on two PM methods (CSC and BET), after which a practical field exercise was conducted in the school of the Torosgyugh village. Based on the results of the training workshop, 13 NGOs were selected to implement the activities of the next stage of the project.

In this project, the local NGOs were not only trained and introduced to the CRD/TI Armenia's experience from its previous project and a pilot project implemented by WB teams in Syunik Marz, but also completed experiential learning exercises on the PM methods they learned. The main purpose of these exercises was to figure out how the NGOs selected learned the knowledge they received from the training, as well as the feasibility of the application of PM methods in the public secondary education sector of the Marz. The latter could be revealed from the relationships established between the implementing NGOs and school groups (students, teachers, parents, school administration) during the experiential learning exercises.

Considering that most of the NGOs were from Gyumri, it was decided to involve one sub-regional NGO and one NGO from Gyumri in the experiential learning exercises in each sub-region. This arrangement promoted cooperation between regional and Gyumri NGOs, and, moreover, the relatively less experienced and newly established sub-regional NGOs got the opportunity to learn from more experienced Gyumri NGOs.

The learning exercise phase started after the selected NGOs collected information on the estimates and execution of the selected schools' budgets from the Department of Finance and Social-Economic Development of Shirak Marzpetaran to carry out the MET component of the exercises. Thereafter this information was verified using different means and followed by the implementation of measures relating to CSC in the selected schools. Parallel to the interface meetings with stakeholder groups within the CSC framework, public hearings were held and attended by the representatives of the mentioned groups. At these hearings the NGOs presented the school budgets to them and initiated discussions on these budgets.

The last event organized within the framework of the project was the seminar held in February, 2005 in Gyumri aimed at summarizing the activities implemented. Participating NGOs exchanged experiences and discussed the perspective of the PM application in Shirak Marz. The seminar received coverage from two local TV stations and one local weekly.

4. Results

1. Currently there are 13 NGOs in Shirak Marz that know and are able to apply CSC and BET methods of PM

Considering the current socio-economic situation in Armenia, this becomes especially important, as possessing PM methods these NGOs will be able to protect more decisively the public or private interests they represent.

2. In the course of planning and implementing experiential learning exercises the participating NGOs did not face problems with school administrations or regional authorities

The participating NGOs managed to reach clear agreements with school administrations on the organization of relevant events and most of these events were held in time. The delays of some events were connected solely with weather conditions.

The relevant bodies of the regional government, and the Department of Finance and Social-Economic Development of Shirak Marzpetaran submitted necessary information on school budgets to participating NGOs, which the latter used to conduct BET.

3. The implementation of experiential learning exercises jointly by Gyumri and sub-regional NGOs facilitated the establishment of cooperation between the NGOs of Shirak Marz. That in turn will have positive impact on the consolidation of civil society structures of the Marz and in the future will substantially increase the efficiency of PM methods application.

Due to the fact that the participating NGOs and schools involved in the project represent all sub-regions of Shirak Marz, the future scaling up of the PM methods will become substantially easier. The participating NGOs and schools can in the future promote the application of these methods in their areas. Moreover, participation of

sub-regional NGOs in the project was an advantage, as they are more informed about the specifics of their sub-regions and participation was positively perceived by the communities. At the same time, participation of Gyumri NGOs in the experiential learning exercises in the regions enabled higher level of impartiality of monitoring and relieved local NGOs of possible pressures from their communities.

4. Extension of the spheres of application of PM methods

Many participating NGOs were community development centers, and thus can apply PM methods in other sectors as well. In particular, during implementation of the project one of the participating NGOs - Amasia Community Center – took the initiative to monitor the activities of the Office of the Amasia Village Head using CSC methodology.

5. Problems revealed as a result of PM application

Although due to time constraints the project did not aim to identify the problems of participating schools and their solutions during the experiential learning exercises, some results have been attained.

During the interface meetings 9 out of 12 schools participating in the project identified the conditions of the school as an important monitoring criteria. Only one of the school buildings (School # 19) received an excellent grade from participants (this is explained by the fact that the school has been largely reconstructed in 2004 within the framework of earthquake zone reconstruction program). These complaints ranged from the absence of gym (Dzorakap, Tsoghamarg), canteen (Dzorakap) or unrepaired roof (Tavshut) to the location of the schools in structures completely unfit for teaching (Aregnadem). In different schools, differing conditions of the building received the same grades. For example, the conditions of the building in both Aregnadem and Dzorakap schools were evaluated as unsatisfactory at the interface meetings, whereas the conditions of the Aregnadem school were much worse compared with those of the Dzorakap school. This issue should be taken into account in the future scaling up of this method.

The same pattern was repeated in the case of heating. Both Gyumri schools (where there were no problems of heating) did not identify heating as a monitoring factor. The schools of Dzorakap, Tsoghamarg and Vahramaberd villages gave heating a good or excellent score, while the remaining cases made serious complaints connected with insufficient/nonexistent heating (Anipemza), low quality of the heating oil, which is dangerous for the health of children and teachers (Artik, Marmashen) and deteriorated or low quality heating equipment (Aregnadem).

Poor water-sewage system and sanitary conditions was also a widespread problem, and only the schools in Gyumri and Tsoghamarg did not complain. In Anipemza water is unavailable throughout the entire village.

Other problems mentioned frequently were old school property, insufficient amount of textbooks, and low quality of textbooks. There were no serious complaints on the quality of education (except in Anipemza). However, both students and their parents noted that these appraisals are mostly comparative in nature, considering that during

the currently stressing socio-economic situation, the level of quality of the teaching is already a big achievement.

The short-term nature of the project did not allow the project implementation team to find out how the reforms defined during the interface meetings have been implemented. Hence, the discussion on the kinds of reforms implemented will be limited. In many cases, in order to solve the problems faced by schools it was suggested to appeal to the government or to find sponsors. This approach was justified to some degree, as in some cases (Dzorakap, Tsoghamarg, Tavshut, Gyumri) such tactics gave positive results and many problems have been solved in this way.

The participants rarely tried to solve problems on their own. Obviously, some problems cannot be solved using only community resources, particularly, the problems of school buildings. However, a number of problems could potentially be resolved by the community. The proposed reforms indicate that the participants either had no great desire to solve problems by themselves, or they had no idea how they could solve them. The latter is supported by the fact that the solutions they proposed were not specific. Several reasons may explain the community's passive attitude including, the poverty of the population (which is especially striking in the villages and small towns), as well as the prevalence of the old mentality. According to the "old mentality" the state is solely responsible for the situation of the schools and the citizen does not see himself or herself as a part of the state. Hence it is the government's responsibility to resolve the school's problems. Furthermore, many citizens expressed that unless the macro-level problems are resolved, the solution of micro-level problems will have a "make-up" nature, and consequently, it is not worth spending time on them.

Budget expenditure tracking was also implemented during the experiential learning exercise phase. The tracking revealed how much resources the school actually has to solve the problems revealed by the community scorecard monitoring. The results of budget tracking overall reiterate those obtained by the previous project implemented by CRD/TI Armenia – the biggest share of the school budget has been spent on the teachers' salaries and payments to the Social Insurance Fund. Actually, the share has increased even more this time around (90-95 percent), leaving almost nothing for other expenses. The main reason for this is that that was that increase of teachers' salaries, which is one of the priorities of the Armenian Government, was greater than the increase of the allocation to education in the state budget. In this situation it becomes important acquiring and utilizing extra budgetary sources for funding. However, as the results of learning exercises revealed, such sources are very scarce, especially in the villages, and existing ones were not used in a transparent manner.

Another important finding was the attitudes of different stakeholder groups of the schools towards the applicability of PM methods. In general, teachers, pupils and parents had a positive reaction towards their application. However, there was an impression that they are unlikely to initiate monitoring on their own. Their role was limited only to identifying existing problems. It is difficult to say whether they will be consistent in implementing the solutions they proposed during the experiential learning exercises.

The attitudes of the school principals towards these methods was mixed. On one hand, they accepted that monitoring will help them better understand the actual situation of their schools and the perceptions of the community. On the other hand, during the monitoring, some principals did not tolerate critical remarks about their schools made during the interface meetings and public hearings on the results of budget expenditure tracking. Naturally, that impeded teachers, students and parents to express their opinions more openly. Moreover, there were cases (in Artik and Gyumri), where the principals tried to punish or silence some students who participated in the focus group discussions and made critical remarks. This harassment was halted only after the interference of participating NGOs. Clearly, this will be one of the most serious obstacles in the course of application of PM methods.

5. Advantages and Limitations of the Approach

5.1 Advantages

The approach implemented by the project had a number of *advantages*. **First**, the training has been conducted in an isolated training center, which was more conducive for the participants to concentrate and discuss the training materials during their leisure time.

Second, training of the participants was followed by an experiential learning exercise, which enabled the representatives of NGOs to solidify the knowledge and skills they received at the training. In addition, by monitoring the experiential learning exercises the project team managed to find out specifically which organizations will be capable of applying these methods in the future.

Third, the learning exercises in each school have been conducted not by one, but two NGOs. This approach will facilitate the strengthening of civil society in the Marz and increase the effectiveness of the monitoring undertakings in the future.

Fourth, the NGOs and schools selected come from over all the sub-regions of Shirak Marz. The information on the different methods introduced throughout the Marz, made it possible to assess the specificities of all regions with respect to both NGOs and schools.

Fifth, at the end of the project a seminar on the exchange of experiences was conducted. The seminar enabled the representatives of participating NGOs and schools to jointly discuss the applicability, advantages and limitations of PM methods, as well as possible future steps. At the same time, the seminar was also useful for the project implementation team to summarize the results of experiential learning exercises and envisage the perspectives of institutionalization and application of these methods.

Sixth, the NGOs were trained in two PM methods. Application of such a combination of methods enabled them to create a comprehensive picture on the real situation in the school.

5.2 Limitations

The method also has some *limitations*. In retrospect, the experiential learning exercises could have been more efficient if the representatives of the school groups (teachers, students and parents) had some preliminary information about the methodology to be applied in their schools. This would have allowed them to understand the importance of the proposed methods and enable them to have a clearer understanding of their roles. Furthermore, if the scarcity and weakness of sub-regional NGOs in the Marz (except Gyumri) is not improved it could lead to a situation where in some sub-regions the application of PM methods will be carried out either by Gyumri NGOs or will not be carried out at all.

Monitoring and Evaluation of Irrigation and Health Situation in the Rural Areas

Samvel Manukyan
Monitoring and Evaluation Expert
OXFAM GB Armenia Office

1. General Description of the Project

The Poverty Reduction Strategy Program adopted by the Armenian Government was developed in participation of the broad spectrum of civil society organizations and it is envisioned that its implementation will also be participatory. Among the most important components of PRSP are monitoring and evaluation, the main goals of which are the monitoring of the implementation of the measures foreseen by PRSP, assessment of the changes occurring in different aspects of poverty, as a result of which there could be developed methodological, strategic and procedural proposals, aimed at increasing PRSP efficiency.

In this framework in the period from August 2003 to August 2004 the “Civil Society Partnership Network” (CSPN) group of NGOs with the support of OXFAM GB Armenian office implemented a project of monitoring and evaluation of irrigation and health issues in the *rural communities* of Shirak, Tavush, Vayots Dzor and Syunik Marzes. As an object of monitoring and evaluation the health sector was chosen because it is one of the basic needs, and accessibility of irrigation is one of the factors of agriculture, which, to some degree, defines the prosperity of the rural households, and, hence, indirectly accessibility of social services.

Different subjects of civil society have been involved in the implementation of the project. Among them members and volunteers of member-organizations of CSPN and their Marz structures, community population, invited specialists-experts (economists, legal experts, sociologists, ethnologists, psychologists). Project management in Marzes was conducted by “Shirak NGO Union”, “Institute of Human Rights and Democracy” and “Fund Against the Violations of Law” NGOs. General supervision of the project was carried out by OXFAM GB Armenian office.

The results of the project are summarized in the publication in six volumes: Main Results, Methodology, Expert Assessments, Preliminary Qualitative Evaluation, Final Qualitative Evaluation, and, Mass Evaluation. The major part of the results presented in the volumes are available in CSPN web-site:

<http://www.cso-network.am/Monitoring/Monitoring/MONITOR!.htm> :

2. Goals of the Project

The goal of the Project was to evaluate **physical and financial components** of accessibility of health and irrigation. It is envisaged to carry out monitoring of

possible changes in coming years³. These goals had several contexts of objectives, which are presented below:

1. Define the criteria describing the physical and financial accessibility of the sectors selected for monitoring, including criteria describing participation⁴.
2. Test their adequacy.
3. Describe (evaluate) through them the levels of physical and financial accessibility of the observed sectors in the rural areas.
4. Evaluate (forecast) the impact of the possible actions to be implemented on the changes in the situation in the areas under monitoring.
5. Develop monitoring capacities of rural communities and NGOs working in the Marzes.

3. Method and Procedure

Monitoring and evaluation have been carried out in three directions:

1. Structural, legal and economical evaluation and monitoring of the management of the selected areas the goals of which are:
 - > Define those structural-functional and legal contexts, in which the accessibility of the sector to be monitored is evaluated. Observe its adequacy to the PRSP goals.
 - > Develop *expert suggestions* on the structural-functional and legal regulatory mechanisms of the sectors under monitoring;
 - > Increase the level of knowledge and awareness of the monitoring implementation team and community population on the sectors under monitoring, and by that enhance the adequacy of the situation perception and activities (including monitoring activities as well) of the sectors under monitoring⁵;
 - > Develop a universal evaluation tool for the sectors (questionnaire for mass studies/surveys)
2. Qualitative evaluation and monitoring of the selected sectors in 12 village communities of Shirak, Vayots Dzor and Syunik Marzes (4 communities in each Marz). Its goals were:
 - Obtain deep and diverse context descriptions of the sectors under monitoring in the *specific* communities, also in the context of other problems of the villages. This will resolve a number of issues, including:
 - > formation of content perception on the sectors under monitoring among the monitoring implementing NGOs and volunteers;
 - > Develop monitoring capacities of NGOs;

³ This means that the series of evaluations performed every year is transformed into a monitoring process.

⁴ “Participatory” are those criteria, which reflect the grounds for evaluation of the situation in the selected areas made by rural population.

⁵ It is difficult to assume that the monitoring or evaluation, as well as the interpretation of obtained data could be of high quality without having high quality (expert) information on the sectors under monitoring.

- > Establish positive relationships between the monitoring implementation teams and population and local self-administration staff of the communities under monitoring;
 - > Support the communities under monitoring in developing and further implementation of high quality assistance projects aimed at the improvement of the situation in the given sectors;
 - > Revealing *participatory criteria* for the evaluation of the selected sectors.
 - > Enhancing the adequacy of the tool (mass studies/survey questionnaire) developed for the generalized evaluation of the sectors.
3. Quantitative evaluation (survey) of the sectors in 21 village communities of Shirak, Tavush, Vayots Dzor and Syunik Marzes, the goals of which were:
- > Evaluate the physical and financial accessibility of the healthcare and irrigation water on a marz level;
 - > Observe these assessments in the context of other problems of the villages and agriculture.
 - > Assess possible impact of different types of activities on the situation in the sectors under monitoring.

4. Results

The table below describes the situation of irrigation generated as a result of the project implementation.

Table 1. Major Criteria Describing the Situation with Irrigation in 2003

<i>Criteria</i>		<i>Tavush</i>	<i>Shirak</i>	<i>Vayots Dzor</i>	<i>Syunik</i>	<i>Sign</i> ⁶
Indicators of the financial accessibility of irrigation water						
1. Share of the fees for irrigation in the structure of agricultural expenses		1.4%	3.8%	8.5%	1.1%	↑↓
2. Average amount of payments for irrigation, in Armenian Drams (AMD)		984	5063	8963	2087	↑↓
Criteria of physical accessibility of irrigation water						
3. "Do you receive sufficient amount of irrigation water?" Relative number of households is given.	3.1. yes	7.3%	14.9%	34.8%	44.5%	↑
	3.2. partially	11.9%	31.0%	42.6%	31.6%	↑↓
Technical criteria describing the situation with irrigation water						
4. Spread of different types of irrigation. Share of the land lots of households by the type of irrigation	4.1. irrigation by gravity flow	76.5%	28.9%	70.8%	47.0%	↑
	4.2. pumping	11.0%	6.5%	37.2%	8.3%	↑↓
	4.3. drinking water	10.7%	36.3%	4.2%	4.8%	0%
	4.4. other types	7.7%	1.8%	2.7%	3.9%	↓
	4.5. non-irrigated land lots	89.6%	89.0%	55.4%	69.9%	↓
5. Types of measures of the volume of irrigation water. Relative number of households is given.	5.1. According to contract the volume of consumed irrigation water should be measured by water-gauge	0.0%	6.7%	27.7%	2.9%	↑

⁶ In the "Sign" column the optimal values of the indicators or the directions of their favorable change are given.

0% or 100% means that the value of the indicator is defined by law.

↑ - the maximum value of indicator is favorable.

↓ - the minimum value of indicator is favorable.

↑↓ - the favorability of the value of indicator is defined in the context of other indicators.

	5.2. Water-gauge is actually used	0.9%	1.2%	7.3%	0.3%	↑
	5.3. Consumed water is not measured	76.4%	38.1%	19.4%	70.0%	0%
Criteria describing the institutional situation with irrigation water						
	6. Households receiving water from the Water Consumers Association or Water Users Union	7.1%	4.9%	32.4%	12.8%	100%
	7. Households do not having water suppliers	61.6%	70.2%	14.9%	42.9%	0%
	8. Households receiving water without contract	86.9%	90.3%	46.4%	75.9%	0%
	9. Households receiving water without contract or supplier	20.5%	20.4%	34.8%	35.7%	0%
	10. Presence of receipts for payments	63.5%	67.2%	93.8%	81.6%	100%
Subjective estimates of the situation with irrigation water						
	11. Average score for the general situation with irrigation water ⁷	2.82	2.61	2.98	3.01	↑
	12. Average score for the change in the situation with irrigation water compared with the previous year ⁸	2.82	2.61	2.98	3.01	↑
	13. Change of the score compared with the previous year, %	-6.0%	-13.0%	-0.6%	0.3%	↑

The values of criteria 1 and 2 in Table 1 show that in the overall context of agricultural expenses the *financial accessibility* of the irrigation water is not a matter of concern. On the other hand, legal-organizational regulation of the problems of the irrigation water (which has the highest level in the Vayots Dzor Marz, see indicators 5.1-5.3 and 6-10) entails an increase in the share of expenses on the irrigation water in the structure of overall agricultural expenses. Thus, this issue should be taken into consideration in the course of strategic planning for the sector.

Criteria 3.1 and 3.2 reveal that the *physical accessibility* of the irrigation water is an important problem. The situation is relatively good in Syunik and Vayots Dzor Marzes, bad – in Shirak Marz, and desperate – in Tavush Marz.

Criteria 4.1-4.5 render plenty of materials for the strategic planning in the irrigation water and agriculture sectors. Here we will mention only one problem directly related to poverty. Irrigation using drinking water is widespread in Shirak Marz and is relatively well-spread in Tavush Marz. This should definitely be reduced. However, the reduction should be *preceded* by the regulation of the problems connected with irrigation water supply, which is unsatisfactory in these Marzes. Drinking water is used by poor households who can cultivate only their personal plots. Thus, regulation by collection of fees for drinking water (a task separate from irrigation water issues and dealt by different *commercial* entities) will make the poor even poorer. Hence an alternative regulatory scheme is necessary.

According to the values of Criterion 12 of Table 1 the subjective estimates of the situation with irrigation water became worse with statistical significance in Shirak and

⁷ A 5-grade evaluation scale has been applied, where 1 means that the overall situation with irrigation water in the community is very bad, and 5 means the overall situation with irrigation water in the community is very good. 3 means that the overall situation with irrigation water in the community is satisfactory.

⁸ A 5-grade evaluation scale has been applied, where 1 means that the overall situation with irrigation water in the community became worse compared with the previous year, and 5 means the overall situation with irrigation water in the community improved compared with the previous year. 3 means that the overall situation with irrigation water in the community substantially did not change compared with the previous year.

Tavush Marzes. On the other hand, the data obtained do not change significantly in Syunik and Tavush Marzes.

The next Table displays the criteria whose variations have a significant influence on the subjective estimates of the irrigation water situation.

Table 2. Dependence of the farmers' estimates of the overall situation of irrigation water on different factors

<i>Factors characterizing the situation with irrigation water</i>	<i>Dependency level</i>
1. Sufficient level of irrigation water supply	42.6
2. Farmer's previously formed estimate on the situation with the situation with irrigation water	23.5
3. Differences in the type of irrigation ⁹	21.3
4. Type of the water supplier ¹⁰	15.5
5. Factual method of measuring the volume of the consumed irrigation water ¹¹	10.6
6. Presence of a contract on irrigation water ¹²	8.2
7. Projection of the existing socio-economic situation ¹³	3.9
8. Projection of the dynamics of the change in the family's well-being	2.7
9. Projection of the former socio-economic situation	1.9

Tables 3 and 4 present the criteria describing the physical and financial situation in the health sector in the villages, and Table 5 presents the criteria determining the general subjective.

Table 3. Major physical and financial accessibility criteria of health service

<i>Criteria</i>	<i>Total</i>
1. In the case of sickness considered necessary to get medical aid and asked for such aid ¹⁴	86.3%
2. Ratio of the financial and physical inaccessibility of the health service¹⁵	
2.1. Lack of money	64.9%
2.2. Medical facility or doctor were far from their residence	7.7%
2.3. The habit to get treatment at home	19.5%
2.4. Other	7.9%
3. Physical and financial inaccessibility of medicine	
3.1. Did not use medicine when being sick	7.3%
3.2. Used, including	92.7%
3.2.1. Did not purchase	14.9%
3.2.2. Purchased, including	77.8%
3.2.2.1. Purchased only part of the medicine	14.6%
3.2.2.2. Purchased all needed medicine	63.1%

⁹ The level of satisfaction from the situation with irrigation water is higher in the case of irrigation by gravity flow, than in the case of irrigation by pumping (with other conditions being equal).

¹⁰ The considered water suppliers are the Union of Water Consumers, community, head of the village community, "Irrigation" CJSC and absence of water suppliers. The least favorable supplier was the Union of Water Consumers.

¹¹ The most favorable methods of measuring the volume of the consumed irrigation water are the following (in the order of diminution)

1. measuring the irrigation water consumed volume with water gauge, 2. by the operating portions for soil and plants, 3. approximately, by the decision of the water supplier, 4. by the time schedule of the water pump: The last method of measurement caused the most complaints.

¹² Presence of the contract increases the general level of satisfaction.

¹³ Criteria 7, 8 and 9 reveal that, as a rule, the farmers do not confuse the estimate of their or their villages' socio-economic situation with the estimate of the situation of the irrigation water. That is, the farmers, as a rule, estimate impartially the general situation of the irrigation water, and, consequently, the participatory criteria are adequate.

¹⁴ Presented the weighted average by Marzes

¹⁵ Estimated through the question "Which is the *main* reason for not turning to medical facility in the case of particular sickness?" (could be given only one answer)

4. Reasons for not using or partially using the medicine	
4.1. Lack of money	35.8%
4.2. There was no medicine in the drug-store	16.5%
4.3. The drug-store was far	2.4%
4.4. There was no need for medicine	12.0%
4.5. Received for free in the framework of state program	12.0%
4.6. Received as aid from NGOs	8.1%
4.7. Already had at home	6.3%
4.8. Other	6.7%

The percentage of people turning to a medical facility in the case of sickness is high because the only types of illnesses taken into account are those for which the family considered that there is a *necessity for turning to medical aid*. Illnesses for which it is objectively difficult to determine whether there was really a necessity to turn to medical aid or not, constitutes a “grey zone.” This “zone” can be reduced through the formation of a culture of a more responsible approach to health among the population. On the other hand there is a need to assess the impact of the family’s well-being on the formation of such culture. Thus, the content of the criteria of turning to medical aid is not meaningless and *requires contextual interpretation*.

It is also important to assess the accessibility of medicine, as it is described not only by criteria expressing need (criteria 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3), but also by criteria regarding compensation (criteria 4.5 and 4.6), as well as background criteria (4.4 and 4.7). The primary criterion for the accessibility of medicine should be considered, “Purchased all necessary medicine in the case of illness” criterion (3.2.2.2). Its value is derived from “*Purchased not all medicine or did not purchase medicine in the case of illness*” responses should be interpreted in the context of outstanding criteria from Table 3¹⁶

Table 4 presents Marz averages of the community estimates for health care, which are derived and interpreted similarly to those of Table 2.

Table 4. Evaluations given by the rural population on the general situation of healthcare in their communities and their changes compared to the previous year

Score	Shirak	Tavush	Syunik	Vayots Dzor
Very bad or bad	20.60%	18.50%	29.50%	25.00%
Satisfactory	44.90%	56.30%	37.80%	44.90%
Good or very good	32.10%	19.40%	31.50%	28.90%
Average Score	3.14	2.98	2.96	2.99
Change in the Score				
Worsened or slightly worsened	13.70%	6.30%	14.60%	8.40%
Almost unchanged	58.90%	63.40%	57.40%	61.30%
Improved or slightly improved	23.00%	20.30%	27.40%	26.20%
Average Score	3.1	3.14	3.17	3.19
Change of the score compared with the previous year %	3.30%	4.60%	5.60%	6.30%

According to Table 4, the Marz average score for community healthcare in Shirak Marz is statistically higher than a “Satisfactory” score, whereas in the remaining Marzes it does not differ from “Satisfactory” score within 0.05 statistical significance level. At the same time, according to the subjective opinion of the farmers, on average

¹⁶ As well as other criteria, not presented in this article. See “Monitoring and Evaluation of the Situation with Irrigation Water and Healthcare in Shirak, Vayots Dzor and Syunik Marzes,” volume VI, Survey, Yerevan, OXFAM, 2004.

the healthcare situation in the villages of the observed Marzes improved, which is statistically certain within 0.05 statistical significance level.

Table 5 presents the criteria which have the most influence on the farmers' subjective evaluation of the healthcare situation. Among them Criteria 1-4 could be used to improve the subjective evaluation of the healthcare situation in the rural communities.

Table 5. Correlation of the Village population Evaluations of the Situation in Healthcare in their Communities with other factors

<i>Factor</i>	<i>Impact Value</i>
1. Villagers' previously determined evaluation on the healthcare situation	31.8
2. Physical inaccessibility of the medical facility or healthcare provider	8.1
3. Presence of community medical facility ¹⁷ and its type (aid station/out-patients' clinic)	5.1
4. Experience from the last visit to medical facility ¹⁸	4.0
5. Trend in the change of the well-being of the family	2.5

Using elements of the CSC methodology the project led to the development of 64 new criteria for villagers to evaluate the healthcare situation, and 50 criteria to evaluate irrigation water.

5. Summary

Implementation of this project illustrated that a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation project (with qualitative and quantitative methods applied and comprising different sectors) can be conducted by a team consisting of different civil society organizations. However, it is important to clearly define functions and adequately delegate tasks based on the types of professional skills required.

The expediency of this project is substantially enhanced by legal, economic, structural and functional expert evaluations of the sectors under monitoring.¹⁹

¹⁷ The absence of medical facility in the settlement is the least favorable factor. Such situation exists in the multi-settlement communities, where the medical facility is located only in one these settlements, and the others do not have them. For example, Syunik community of Syunik Marz consists of 6 settlements, and there is an aid station only in one these settlements. The evaluation of the general situation in the settlements with out-patients' clinic is better, than in the ones with aid stations.

¹⁸ Level of satisfaction from the last visit to the medical facility.

¹⁹ The majority of the PRSP measures are adoptions of legal acts or making changes and amendments to such acts. These legal acts determine the structure and functions of the system.

Public Hearings on Community Budgets

Vahan Movsisyan
Chairman of the Association
of Communities Finance Officers

1. General Description of the Project

The current local self-administration system of Armenia has existed for only 8 years. During that period legal, financial and organizational foundations of the local self-administration have been created, and the institutes of local self-governance have been established. However, the process of democratization at the local level is slow. The participation of civil society in the process of decision making at local level remains weak. Among the reasons are the lack of awareness, absence of relevant culture and mechanisms, mistrust towards the government, etc.

Public hearings of community budgets play an important role in the establishment of democracy at the local level. The hearings enable the community to get a notion of the program of community development, financial means of the community, the problems and their possible solutions. NGOs working in the field of local self-administration focus their efforts on catalyzing change through public hearings on community budgets. The Association of Communities Finance Officers (CFOA), for example, has been periodically involved in organizing public hearings and discussions on local budgets since 2001. Such hearings have been conducted in more than 10 communities, in most of which they became traditions.

2. Method and Procedure

Public hearings of community budgets are among the most important methods in organizing feedback between local self-administration bodies (LSAB) and the community, providing information, involving the community in decision making processes, and conducting transparent and public policies. In the absence of an active civil society it is very important to introduce such mechanisms and methods, which will make it possible to enhance the attention and interest of the community population towards the activities of LSAB, and, at the same time, will develop capacities and skills to cooperate with personnel within LSAB.

The method used in organization of community budget hearings is as simple as possible. It is realized through direct contact and interaction, which makes the role of each participant substantially valuable. While organizing the hearings, it is very important to ensure the sequence of certain mandatory actions and steps.

Steps

The organization of public hearings on community budgets includes implementation of certain preliminary trainings and organizational activities, which conditionally could be categorized into the following types:

1. Preparation of training materials and conduct of training seminars for the civil society organizations - the training materials should clarify the powers and duties of LSAB, especially in the financial-budgetary and service provision areas and should be as clear and understandable as possible. While working with the representatives of civil society one should avoid using professional terms and complex definitions, and along with introducing each new idea or concept one must discuss a concrete case from practice. In order to organize public hearings on community budgets, CFOA prepared a methodological guide, which is available on the organization's web-site: www.cfoa.am

2. Sharing skills and experience on the organization of budget discussions with the head of the community and his/her staff – this approach supposes possession of such skills, which would enable the head to autonomously carry out budget discussions, using the existing resources of the community. This would solve the following problems:

- > how to organize budget discussions;
- > which issues special attention should be paid;
- > which is especially important;
- > what technical means could be used;
- > what kind of materials should be prepared;
- > who should be invited, etc.

3. Preparation, copying and dissemination of the community budget draft and budget reports versions, which will be presented at the public hearings - while implementing these activities it should be taken into account that the prepared materials should be presented to people with no professional knowledge on these issues and thus, they should consist of frequently used comparative diagrams, percentage expressions, comparisons of planned and factual data, growth or decline time trends, maps, figures, etc. The prepared materials should be disseminated at least one week before the date of the hearings, using the resources of LSAB, NGOs functioning in the community and media, as well as actively involving the community.

4. Preparation of the hall and technical means for hearings – the hall for hearings should be shaped in a manner allowing each participant in the hearings individual or group to realize the role assigned to him/her. In most parts of urban communities of Armenia the community information-analytical centers of LSAB possess sufficient technical means to prepare the community budget draft and reports to be presented at the hearings. CFOA, for example, has installed and maintains a community budgeting software package that can provide full technical support to public hearings on community budgets.

3. Results

NGOs functioning in the area of local self-administration, among them CFOA and “Councils of Elders of Armenia,” have made a great contribution in the establishment and development of participatory democracy. These events were attended by representatives of the staff of the heads of communities, members of the councils of elders, political parties, NGOs and media, as well as inhabitants of the specific communities. Such hearings and discussions have been organized in a number of urban communities, including Alaverdi, Idjevan, Sevan, Yeghegnadzor, Djermuk, Sisian, Kapan, Gyumri, Vedi and others towns.

Prior to the discussions training seminars have been conducted with the members of the community head's staff (especially with the head of the financial department), and required materials for the discussions have been prepared and published. Special attention was paid to the preparation of the coming year budget draft. All these materials have been prepared with the support of the community information-analytical centers, which provided the technical side of the discussions.

During the discussions the representatives of civil society organizations had the opportunity to ask questions. Some community discussions have been broadcast on local TV stations and, thus, became available for the population in general.

In many of the above-mentioned communities the public hearings on community budgets became tradition and are repeated periodically every year. First discussions in the communities have been initiated and organized by NGOs functioning in the area of local self-administration, funded by donor organizations. In the years following, the communities conducted such discussions by themselves on their own initiative.

4. Advantages and Limitations of the Method

4.1 Advantages

Public hearings on community budgets play a significant role in the formation of civil society. Being informed and participating in the determination of budget priorities, tracking the budget and implementation process, instills trust among the community. As a result of this trust and increased awareness, the population more readily performs its duties towards the community budget by paying the full volume of taxes, duties and fees for services. In turn, the steady tax flow enables additional resources in the revenues part of the budget, which is the main prerequisite for achieving a stable community and high quality of service provision.

Once a community member understands the strategy of the community's long-term development, the volumes of financing, and the targets of specific projects he/she can oversee the implementation of the planned activities and evaluate the effectiveness and goal-orientedness of the work of LSAB from the perspective of his/her expectations. This awareness is one of the major guarantees for ensuring that the LSAB remains efficient and accountable to the community.

The budget discussions also sought out members of the community who possess budgeting skills and are one of the foundations of the formation of an active civil society.

4.2 Limitations

The community budget is a very specialized document and is not easy to make it understandable for the majority of the population. Without a certain preliminary level of knowledge or experience, it is quite difficult for a community member to understand, assess the budget and then present suggestions on the community budget draft and oversee its implementation. Hence, a major part of the population does not have the opportunity to have an impact on the community budgetary process. Representation of the community is reserved for the Council of Elders of the community by law, whose members are elected through direct elections from the community and thus frequently do not differ much from the other members of the community in their knowledge of finance and budget. In addition,

in some LSAB the staff of the head of the community does not manifest interest to involve the community and members of the councils of elders in the budgetary process. Thus, it becomes clear that without outside intervention public hearings on community budgets may not be organized. Currently, the initiators of public hearings are the NGOs functioning in the local self-administration area, and the expenses connected with these hearings are incurred mainly by international donor organizations.

Conclusion: Lessons and Opportunities

The reader summarizes a number of cases on participatory monitoring and evaluation carried out in Armenia mainly by civil society organizations. The cases presented differ both in the monitoring methodologies applied as well as the areas of application. All of the case studies, however, serve one purpose, namely, to enhance the transparency and effectiveness of service delivery and to ensure the accountability of service providers.

The material presented reveals that participatory monitoring and evaluation methodologies received positive responses from both service providers and recipients, as it:

- (a) helped to understand the existing problems from the perspective of people related to the service being monitored in different ways;
- (b) facilitated the planning of future activities; and
- (c) led to substantial results. Moreover, the monitoring contributed to the strengthening of the culture of social dialogue, consensus and cooperation.

However, there are certain obstacles which will continue to hinder the process of PME implementation in coming years. One of the most prominent challenges is the indifference of the authorities towards the participatory projects, and in general civic initiatives, which weakens the role of this institute as an important catalyst for change. Another serious obstacle is the indifference of the society, its alienation and mistrust towards the participatory processes. Yet another important factor is the absence of clear mechanisms of democratic governance, which creates dependence on the sole decision-maker and impedes equal participation of citizens in the decision making and implementation processes.

One of the significant benefits of these pilot initiatives has been the documenting of the lessons learned. It is clear that in order to ensure the viability of participatory monitoring and evaluation, it is necessary to utilize local means and potential, which after some period and without external intervention could be reproduced and enable the institutionalization and scaling up of this process. The results of the application of community scorecard methodology in the secondary schools of Shirak and Syunik Marzes reveal that though the representatives of these institutions, to a large extent, perceive the usefulness of the application of these methodologies and wish to receive training on them, at the present moment they are not ready to implement these methods themselves. The same could be said about the authorities. They also are not indifferent to the results of the application of these methods. However, they do not prioritize this process among various issues they face, and, apparently, are not ready to independently organize participatory monitoring. In this aspect, the most reliable actor continues to be the NGOs, who mainly need only capacity development and some technical assistance, especially at the start of the process, after which they can independently proceed. The best examples are the Communities Finance Officers NGO and the Civil Society Partnership Network established by OXFAM Great Britain, which already have sufficient capacity to carry out monitoring by themselves.

However, considering the fact that the civil society sector in the Marzes is not well developed, the introduction and institutionalization of these methodologies requires assistance from the international community. The donor assistance to this process could be both in the consultative, by introducing and exchanging international experience, and technical forms. Technical assistance is needed mostly during the initial stage, which will enable local civil society organizations to establish monitoring structures. Also, the donors

can act as intermediaries between the government and such monitoring groups, thereby enhancing the institutionalization of PME.

In order to institutionalize the participatory monitoring and evaluation approaches it is necessary to present and discuss successful cases at different levels among interested parties, as well as to organize joint trainings for the representatives of the government/service providers and public/service recipients. In addition, in order to facilitate participatory processes, including monitoring, it is desirable to combine them with the implementation of development projects, which will make the results of monitoring more useful and tangible. This approach, presumably, would create a more conducive environment both for the implementation of monitoring and achievement of results stemming from that implementation, and the cooperation between the government/service providers and public/service recipients.