

Environmental Civil Society Assessment

Moldova

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Objectives and methodology



Objectives

The main aims of the Environmental Civil Society Assessment are to review the nature and status of environmental civil society organisations (CSOs) in Moldova; obtain a clear picture of their needs; analyse the challenges and opportunities they face; and identify the major problems that can be addressed by the SECTOR SEE CSO support project, which is being implemented in Belarus and Moldova by the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC) between 2011 and 2013 as part of the framework programme “Strengthening Local Environmental Planning and Environmental Civil Society in Belarus and Moldova during 2012–2014” (STREAM), implemented by the REC with funding from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). The assessment will provide specific information for use in designing the three main components of the project: (1) Organisational Viability; (2) Grant and Dialogue Platform Building; and (3) Networking and Capacity Building.

Methodology

The Environmental Civil Society Assessment is based primarily on 16 semi-structured face-to-face interviews conducted in Moldova with key civil society group representatives, CSO support organisations, legal experts, authorities and donors between March 5 and 9, 2012. Additional consultation took place through conference calls and e-mail exchanges. The CSOs selected for the interviews were proposed by REC counterparts in Moldova — Mr. Victor Cotruta, director of REC Moldova, and Mrs. Rodica Iordanova, director of EcoContact, the successor to Milieukontakt International in Moldova. The interviewed organisations represent the diversity of the environmental movement in Moldova: they include organisations from Chisinau and various rural areas; Transnistrian CSOs; longstanding as well as newly formed organisations; bigger networking and re-granting organisations (who were also representing their partner organisations during the interviews); as well as small grassroots groups typically working on a voluntary basis. However, it is important to bear in mind that the assessment is based on a small, representative sample of environmental civil society in Moldova and is not an exhaustive survey.

The research was organised around two main themes and four modules.

The two themes were:

- (1) the status, situation and state of development of environmental CSOs (internal environment); and
- (2) the legal, economic, social and environmental conditions affecting the organisations (external operating environment).

The four research modules were:

- 1. Legal Framework and Resources** — Legal and regulatory framework (interface between the state and civil society) and resource base (type and availability of finances).
- 2. Organisational Structure and Strategic Leadership** — Human and organisational capacities (skills and structures).
- 3. Knowledge, Information and CSO Cooperation** — Information and knowledge base (availability, including networking).
- 4. Public Accountability and Impact on Society** — Accountability (connectivity with the community, representation of the public, public trust, cooperative efforts, implementation of the Convention on Access to Environmental Information, Public Participation in Environmental Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters).

Each module incorporated consideration of the two main themes and as a result the interview questionnaires were comprehensive, including approximately 35 questions about the four main research modules. In addition to the interviews, background material from open sources was studied.

General overview of the environmental civil society sector in Moldova

Moldova has experienced turbulent changes in recent years, the most prominent of which was the transfer of political power in 2009 from the Communist Party to EU- and reform-oriented political parties. The slow progress of the poorest country in Europe towards democratisation and EU integration has been marked by the greater openness of society in general and of the media, and by the wide spread of Internet access.

Alongside these changes, the legal environment for CSOs and civil society in Moldova has improved considerably in the last year. The new government has proved to be more open and consistent in carrying out legal reforms, contributing to an enabling environment for CSOs. At the same time, the political and social events of 2008/9 strengthened the voice of CSOs, enabling them to be heard and acknowledged by the government and the Parliament.

In December 2008, the Parliament passed the Civil Society Development Strategy for 2008 to 2011. In addition, several laws affecting CSOs were adopted in 2010, such as the Law on Volunteering and the Law on Social Services. While further work is needed in order to ensure successful implementation, these initiatives are generally supportive of CSOs and contribute to creating a more favourable environment for non-governmental actions.

In 2010, the National Participation Council was established with the tasks of providing expert opinions on draft policies and contributing to monitoring the implementation of the Law on Transparency in Decision Making. The council includes 30 members representing CSOs and the private sector. A similar structure, the NGO Consultative Council, was created in June 2011 by the Ministry of Environment and its members currently include 11 representatives of environmental CSOs.

There are approximately 6,500 CSOs registered with the Ministry of Justice. Based on data from different sources, the actual number could be even higher, at around 8,000. The difference can be explained by the fact that information from the district level is not centralised at the Ministry of Justice. CSOs are active in a broad range of fields, although almost 50 percent are involved in the social and education sectors. The majority of active CSOs have a broad mission in order to attract donor funds. Public trust in CSOs remains quite low, in spite of a recent significant increase. This is due primarily to the low visibility of CSOs and their impact. In order to address this lack of trust, many Moldovan CSOs adopted a code of ethics in March 2008.

Besides their visibility problems, CSOs lack stable financing for their activities. There are no laws in place that would channel public funds to CSOs, and members of the public and businesses are reluctant to donate money. Under these circumstances foreign donors are the main source of funding for CSOs. Apart from fundraising problems, another drawback for CSOs is their low level of capacity and knowledge with respect to planning and implementing activities and keeping their accounts in order. Emigration,

mostly among young people, has also left the country without potential leaders in the civil sector. All these problems are more prominent at local level where the low level of decentralisation has resulted in weak regional and local authorities. On the positive side, however, there are larger CSOs that have overcome these difficulties and have been able to find leaders in the community.

Of the total number of CSOs in Moldova, over 500 are environmental/community CSOs, although, according to the results of the Annual Environmental NGO Forum, only between 50 and 70 CSOs are currently active.

Most of the active environmental CSOs have a long history in Moldova: many of them were registered in the 1990s or early 2000s. The oldest environmental organisation in Moldova is the Ecological Movement, which was formed in 1990 and played an important role in the political changes, as did other ecological movements from this period in various other Eastern European countries. At the time of its foundation, the Ecological Movement comprised 10 regional organisations and 70,000 members.

Many environmental CSOs were registered between 1999 and 2006. In this period, REC Moldova¹ was running a granting programme, during which over 180 projects were implemented with the financial support of the European Commission, the United States Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA), the Danish Cooperation for Environment in Eastern Europe (DANCEE), the United Nations Development Programme/Global Environment Facility (UNDP/GEF) etc. involving more than 160 CSOs from Moldova as well as from Romania and Ukraine.

In 2012, environmental organisations do not have such visibility and have a less powerful position within society. As one interviewee mentioned, due to internal competition environmental CSOs have lost their influence and there is an urgent need to help them develop into a strong actor in society. The position of CSOs needs to be generally promoted/upgraded, and within the sector new topics and ideas need to be developed and new generations with fresh approaches and innovative thinking need to be introduced and welcomed.

There is no doubt that environmental CSOs in general have made significant progress since the beginning of the transition. Many CSOs are closely cooperating with the government, industry and communities in order to identify solutions to environmental issues. They are providing public assistance and identifying ways to involve the community in environmental protection activities. Under the new conditions, CSOs have begun to understand the role they play in promoting environmental protection objectives.

¹ The Regional Environmental Center Moldova (REC Moldova) was established to assist in solving environmental problems in Moldova and neighbouring countries by promoting cooperation between CSOs, governmental bodies, local communities, the business sector and all other environmental stakeholders at both national and regional level. REC Moldova aims to increase public participation in environmental decision making.

Some Moldovan CSOs are already lobbying, providing information to legislators and the public, appearing in court cases and commenting on legislative proposals.

The most successful organisations are those that have found a unique role and tasks not undertaken by other organisations — either related to law drafting or in the fields of nature protection, involvement in international conventions or re-granting. Although CSOs believe that their mission is influenced primarily by environmental needs, the implementation of their activities is clearly dependent on their donors, and on their donors' programmes, thus only those CSOs with capacity and experience in project management have managed to survive while the rest have ceased to exist.

Since 2010 EcoContact, the successor to Milieukontakt International in Moldova, has been organising annual CSO forums in order to improve cooperation between environmental CSOs and to support existing networks. The forums serve as an arena in which CSOs can exchange their experiences, information and knowledge; participate in discussions on the decision-making process; and plan activities taking into consideration national and global movements in the field of environmental protection.

Despite all these activities, some of the CSO leaders with whom the assessment team talked do not consider their work to be very successful, claiming that they have not managed to change citizens' attitudes as a result of their work. In addition, due to a lack of capacity and knowledge the performance of the state and state authorities is insufficient in terms of solving environmental problems, thus environmental conditions in the country have worsened in recent years. The interviewed organisations mentioned the following issues as being the most urgent: waste management, the extension of green areas, water purification, the introduction of protection corridors for agricultural land, biodiversity protection, energy, soil protection and air pollution as a result of transportation. Citizens have only recently begun to ask about their environmental rights as a result of a growing awareness of their surroundings and the living environment.

One encouraging fact is that a number of environmental civil society movements have recently emerged, mostly involving enthusiastic young people who are working on an entirely voluntary basis to try to mobilise citizens to get involved in various types of environmental actions. (They managed, for example, to get over 100,000 people into the streets to help clean up their country.)

The territory of Transnistria

Civil society in Transnistria is clearly less active than in other districts of Moldova. The local administration is indifferent towards CSOs acting at the social level, but is against any political interference from civil society on the frozen conflict between Moldova and the territory of Transnistria, democracy or other issues. The main fields of activity are therefore limited to education, social and environmental protection, the young, sports and tourism. For the most part, CSOs in Transnistria remain weak and play a limited role. Moreover, the disputed status of Transnistria has increased their international isolation.

The problem of depopulation, and the accompanying problems of CSO leadership turnover and the closure of many CSOs, are extremely serious in Transnistria, too. In the early 1990s, there were 730,000 people living in this region. According to the Moldovan statistical authorities, there are now just 410,000.

Of the 500 CSOs registered in Transnistria, only 40 are active, 15 of which are environmental CSOs. They speak only Russian, and with their poor knowledge of Romanian and English they have limited access to European funds and little cooperation with European organisations.

Module I — Legal framework and resources

Main findings

Legal framework

- CSOs in Moldova are generally able to carry out their activities and operate within the current legal framework. The existing CSO registration law and taxation system do not create huge obstacles to CSOs that wish to register. However, they do not bring any particular benefits either. Although CSOs are handled similarly to commercial companies, on the basis of the Fiscal Code CSOs are eligible for income tax exemption based on legal stipulations and official requests to the Fiscal Services by December 31 of the fiscal year.
- The registration procedure in Transnistria is more complicated and bureaucratic. CSOs need legal assistance and are obliged to hire a company to assist them. Together with the registration fee, these costs may create financial problems for smaller CSOs that lack funding.
- Most environmental CSOs in Transnistria choose to be registered in Transnistria only and avoid double registration in Moldova due to fear of political conflicts. However, they cooperate closely with Moldovan CSOs and can access bank accounts in Moldova. Grassroots groups in Transnistria, so-called initiative groups that are not registered anywhere and operate on the basis of small local resources or voluntary work, receive funds directly through some of the bigger CSOs in Moldova such as EcoContact and Eco-TIRAS.
- The recently created status of public utility has not yet resulted in a breakthrough in terms of real, tangible benefits for CSOs, although it might provide an opportunity to facilitate the activities of the CSO sector and further its transparency. CSOs also find the application procedure long and complicated.
- Only a few environmental CSOs are involved in discussions and lobbying for improvements to the legal and regulatory framework for CSOs. So far no success has been achieved regarding a proposal to introduce the opportunity to donate 1 percent of income tax to civil society groups, as can be done in Hungary, and to give tax incentives to companies donating funds to CSOs.

Resources

- The most important donors are foreign. Domestic funding (through the National Environmental Fund administered by the Ministry of Environment) is available for local authorities, CSOs and scientific institutions, although there is a lack of transparency in its administration.
- It has become more difficult to apply for foreign funding due to the complicated application process and reporting requirements.
- Environmental CSOs do not usually have a concrete fundraising strategy. They direct their fundraising efforts according to their topic-related programme area and/or donor availability.
- Some bigger environmental CSOs have created networks and have been involved in capacity building and re-granting on a smaller scale.
- Strong rural organisations and organisations based in central Chisinau have no complaints about their annual budget, although some of them lack qualified staff to implement their projects.
- As a result of not accepting operational costs, many smaller organisations have been left without office space.
- Strong rural organisations and organisations based in central Chisinau are well equipped with computers and have adequate office space.
- Membership fees do not usually bring in sufficient funds.
- Self-financing strategies have not been explored by environmental CSOs.
- There are only limited attempts on the part of businesses to support environmental CSOs.
- Local philanthropy and social corporate responsibility are not yet developed.

Legal framework

Registration

No particular problems have been detected by CSOs regarding registration within the current legal framework in force. Initiative groups can register with the Ministry of Justice

and may operate at national level, or can register at local level (with the local public authorities) and operate at local level.

Since 2010, when the Law on Public Associations of May 17, 1996 was modified, it has been possible to register a CSO as a public utility (PU) organisation. The PU certificate is issued by the Certification Commission, the members of which are delegated by the Parliament, the government and the president of Moldova. The certificate is valid for a period of three years, after which it must be renewed. The Ministry of Justice must make a decision on whether to grant the status within one month. Originally, the status was introduced in order to support CSOs and provide grounds for benefits for them (e.g. partial or full tax exemption, special conditions for renting offices in public buildings, government support for implementing their activities etc.). However, this status has not so far resulted in any special benefits or tax exemptions, and the process of obtaining the certificate is far from easy. Organisations need to make additional investments and fulfil extra requirements (e.g. they must develop and publish annual reports, including financial reports, disseminate these reports, establish a supervision council/steering committee, have been in existence for at least two years, and have overheads that do not exceed 20 percent of their overall budget). To date, only a few environmental CSOs have applied for and received a certificate. The procedure takes up to one year and CSOs regard it as overcomplicated and bureaucratic and are not currently interested in trying it. However, if the proper benefits were given, this status could help promote CSO activities and lead to greater transparency regarding the operation of the sector.

CSOs from Transnistria have complained that the registration process is quite difficult for those who undertake it themselves. Bearing in mind the difficulties encountered in the registration process, CSOs need to hire a company to help them, in which case the total cost, including the registration fee, could amount to as much as USD 250. In the case of CSOs working on a low budget, this is more than they can afford. In Moldova the registration fee is quite low, at around EUR 30.

Taxation

There are currently no tax exemptions for non-profit CSOs, which are treated in the same way as commercial organisations.

There was a change in the legislation in 2012. Prior to this, reinvested profits were not taxed. However, since 2012 the tax on profit is 12 percent. This applies to all entities in Moldova, including CSOs that manage to make some savings from projects or that do not use all project funds by the end of the budget year and thus, according to the financial reports, finish the year in profit. However, CSOs are normally non-profit-making organisations and this change in legislation should not affect them.

It is advisable that grant agreements clearly state the amount of funds and the period of funding, and that funds are spent accordingly, otherwise tax will have to be paid.

At present, VAT is not payable in Transnistria, although there are plans to introduce it in 2013. Until the current government came to power, all goods introduced into Transnistria from Moldova were subject to a 100 percent customs tax. However, the new government abolished this tax.

At the initiative of civil society, discussion has been initiated in Moldova on introducing the opportunity to donate 1 percent of income tax to civil society groups, as in Hungary. Also, during discussions on the new CSO Strategy, CSOs suggested creating tax incentives for companies donating funds to CSOs. Both these proposals have been the subject of discussion for several years now, even in the Parliament, but so far without results.

Relatively few CSOs are involved with the major civil society groups and networks in the high-level discussions on improving the legal and regulatory framework for CSOs. Those involved are the more active CSOs, usually based in the capital, which also participate in the national-level consultative structures alongside the government/ Parliament. More environmental CSOs participate in the dialogue through the Environmental CSO Council, but such general regulatory issues are not discussed in this body.

Resources

CSOs in Moldova find it difficult to attract sufficient private and public funds, leaving international support as the main source of funding. In general, the government is in favour of enabling the financing of civil society. Recent legislative developments, such as a draft law that would allow donations to CSOs to be deducted as a small percentage of due income tax, could improve the situation. The political situation and the slow pace of work in the Parliament do not allow for rapid legislative changes. Although in principle there is a positive attitude on the part of the government to the use of public funds to finance CSO projects in the social sector, this is still not straightforward in practice. Businesses do not have sufficient fiscal incentives to support civil society, and when they do provide support it is often in an informal manner and off the record. Nevertheless, there are examples of financial support from businesses, in particular from larger companies. Partnerships have also been established between local administrations and CSOs.

Composition of resource base

Local financial support and private donor money for CSOs is very limited and the majority of CSOs depend on external support. Funds are provided by international donors (e.g. the European Union, the World Bank, the Soros Foundation and UNDP). For various reasons (language barrier, complicated application procedures and reporting requirements etc.) funding is mostly concentrated on between 10 and 20 large, strong

CSOs that are members of international processes, while rural CSOs receive little support.

Mechanisms currently available to CSOs are described below.

Funding from the EC is provided under various mechanisms (Joint Operational Programme Romania-Ukraine-Republic of Moldova, Joint Operational Programme Black Sea Basin, Eastern Partnership Initiative and others) for activities related to sustainable development, good governance and environmental protection priorities. Funds are provided for CSO development through the national Civil Society Forum and the Civil Society Facility, addressing CSOs at national and regional level. The Civil Society Facility, under its call for technical assistance, provides training and capacity building for CSOs at regional level. It provides grants of a minimum of EUR 150,000 and a maximum of EUR 300,000. Total financing of EUR 12 million will be provided to Transnistria for confidence-building activities. The Swedish Embassy in Moldova is part of the programme board, and UNDP will disburse the funds.

In addition, an EUR 1.1 million call for proposals for non-state actors and local authorities was launched by the EC in March 2012 and grants were awarded in July 2012 to address sustainable development, good governance and environmental issues. The single grants will be up to EUR 300,000. Another call in June 2012 supported the decentralisation process in general but also addressed sustainable development and environmental protection issues. However, many CSOs are not capable of applying for EC grants due to the complicated application process, their lack of a good financial history, and the reporting and monitoring procedures.

Sida offers support to CSOs in Moldova through the East Europe Foundation, the Soros Foundation and the Civil Rights Defenders, which serve as re-granting organisations that provide funding for CSOs through calls for proposals on capacity building in grants management and administration. These only indirectly include environmental topics. The main focus for Sida's work in Moldova is on energy efficiency, renewables and sustainable infrastructure. These issues need to be addressed urgently in the residential sector through work with condominiums and via links between CSOs and the business sector.

The GEF Small Grants Programme, to be launched in summer 2012, will support activities related to climate change, biodiversity, land and water management and ecosystem services. It will cover policy development, knowledge transfer and the sharing of good practices at local and community level through grants of up to USD 50,000. The required 50 percent co-financing and GEF's strict application criteria covering global environmental topics that are not so applicable to Moldovan CSOs are a major barrier.

In terms of domestic resources, although environmental CSOs have access to the National Environmental Fund managed by the Ministry of Environment, only a very few organisations have succeeded in obtaining a contribution from the fund. The fund has no special CSO support programme, and the application process and selection criteria are not fully transparent. Less than 5 percent of the fund is available for CSO grants, an

annual average of MDL 10 million. Nevertheless, some rural CSOs have been more successful in getting regular support for their activities through the fund. Interviewees described how, even if direct funding is not available, occasional in-kind contributions have been made from the fund. It also seems that nature protection organisations that provide a wide range of services to the government in terms of nature protection and the establishment of protected areas, for example, have more regular access to the fund.

Re-granting organisations, such as EcoContact and Eco-TIRAS, distribute small amounts of funding (between USD 600 and 2,500) to between five and 15 CSOs per year. EcoContact has recently issued a call for proposals to support environmental campaigning on water quality, public participation, waste management and the development of local environmental action plans (LEAPs). Grants of between USD 2,000 and 10,000 are provided, along with capacity building, for CSOs participating in the programme. Nevertheless, these funds are rather limited for the northern part of Moldova, where organisations are often working on a voluntary basis. There is a need to enhance their capacities, build on their previous and existing initiatives and involve them as partners in implementation, if possible, especially in Transnistria.

EcoContact also has significant experience in working with CSOs in Transnistria and could be a good resource for the SECTOR project.

Grants worth USD 10,000 were provided by UNDP to CSOs in Transnistria for capacity building and in order to enhance their cooperation with CSOs in Moldova, including cross-river partnerships avoiding direct political or human rights topics. The same approach is being followed in Gagauzia.

The interviewed Transnistrian CSOs prefer funds to be transferred to their bank account in the region. The Central Bank has to approve the disbursement of funds, and if the CSO proves that the funds were received as humanitarian assistance, no tax is payable on the grants. Only personal taxes, income tax and 27 percent social insurance have to be paid on employees' salaries. There is no VAT in Transnistria, although exchange rate losses can be considerable.

According to EcoContact, in order to undertake activities in Transnistria contact must be established with the local or central authorities. The process for the approval of transfers in Transnistria is very slow. Donations are not taxed in Transnistria, although a declaration of assets is required. Some Transnistrian CSOs have partners that are registered in Moldova, while others are registered as CSOs in Moldova but work as initiative groups in Transnistria. EcoContact works through CSOs that are registered in Transnistria using their local bank accounts to receive funds.

The overall technical and absorption capacities of CSOs in Moldova are limited, and CSO proposal writing, project management and budgeting skills are not widely developed. According to UNDP, the maximum size of projects that can be managed by the majority of CSOs is between EUR 20,000 and 30,000, although there are CSOs implementing grants amounting to over EUR 100,000.

Fundraising and financial management

Very few of the interviewed organisations have a concrete, written financial strategy. Fundraising decisions are usually made on the basis of previous experience and overall programming. In most cases there are no members of staff dedicated to fundraising activities. The entire team usually works together to design, write and implement projects. In the event of bigger projects, additional experts are hired.

There are capacity-building projects in Moldova aimed at teaching CSOs how to attract financing for their activities (e.g. for women's empowerment, grants of USD 1,000 are available as a means and incentive for learning how to plan, formulate projects and results, and follow up). Nevertheless, in many instances there is no follow-up funding and support for these CSOs.

Equipment and staffing

Small, rural CSOs often lack their own office space, modern computers and other technical equipment, stable Internet connection and the logistics necessary for successful project implementation. There are more CSOs without an office than with, since donors usually refuse to cover office costs. One interviewed CSO from Transnistria, for example, is working from home following the change in government when office space that was previously provided free of charge was taken away. However, some UNDP projects, for example, do not support organisations working from home. The re-granting CSO EcoContact does not object to grantees working from home.

Transnistrian CSOs apparently face the most unfavourable conditions in this respect. The computers they are using are more than 10 years old, which makes the exchange of information with partner organisations, networks and resource centres very complicated. It is also a barrier to providing citizens with immediate, up-to-date environmental information and to establishing better connections with others working in the environmental sector.

Grants

The future grants programme should support capacity building for environmental CSOs as the main target group. Environmental CSOs should cooperate, network and join in platforms with other CSOs in order to achieve a broader impact. Connections between environmental CSOs, trade unions, consumer protection groups and CSOs working among different religious as well as community groups, especially at local level, should be encouraged.

The grants programme needs to take into account, and establish cooperation with, ongoing programmes under the GEF Small Grants Programme, the European

Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument and UNDP in order to coordinate content and avoid overlaps.

The niche for a new grants programme

As indicated above, several environmental topics are covered by existing grants programmes, but none of these donors offers support exclusively to environmental CSOs. No major donor focuses on strengthening the role of CSOs in decision making on sustainable development and environmental protection, or on enabling them to play their role in society. This should be the main niche for the new grants programme, in order to complement existing programmes.

As the most important CSOs are situated in Chisinau, and since many CSOs from the central area of Moldova have been able to profit from the available international and domestic funds, there is an urgent need to enhance the capacities of rural as well as Transnistrian CSOs.

Based on the above, topics for grants should be offered at three levels:

At the *local level*, grants should:

- help to address environmental and sustainable development issues at community level, promoting sustainable lifestyles through public awareness raising, education, information dissemination, campaigning and pilot projects;
- support the implementation of strategies and policies on environment and sustainable development at local level and promote involvement in decision making at local and regional level (including LEAPs);
- support networking, cooperation and platform building with other CSOs and local actors in order to be able to influence decision making more effectively, and cooperate with businesses and other actors, including consumer protection and religious groups, trade unions, farmers, youth and women's groups;
- help to develop eco-tourism, eco-agriculture, bio-food production and marketing, local branding, and cooperation with farmers and local businesses;
- help to ensure waste management and water management at local level, tackle water scarcity and promote sustainable water use; and
- help to improve energy efficiency in the buildings of local public institutions, schools, kindergartens and homes by changing old heating systems and using renewable energy sources (e.g. by demonstrating energy efficiency and energy saving, solar collectors, solar power and wind energy from local resources, biomass use etc.).

Grant support at *national level* should enable CSOs to:

- promote CSO and public participation in decision making on sustainable development and environmental protection at national level, including the formulation of policies, programmes, plans and projects (environmental impact

- assessment [EIA], strategic environmental assessment [SEA], permitting, licensing) as well as the drafting of laws and regulations;
- provide advice and free legal assistance on public access to information, public participation and access to justice, including an option to set up a public advocacy centre;
 - play the role of watchdog, lobby for improvements, and monitor the authorities and make them accountable for their commitments;
 - strengthen cooperation and networking among CSOs and build up their platforms in order to be able to develop their position in dialogue with the authorities responsible for environmental and sustainable development decision making at national level; and
 - build joint actions and cooperate with businesses and other actors, including consumer protection and religious groups, trade unions, and youth and women's organisations.

Regional grants should cover:

- transboundary or cross-border cooperation on river basin management, nature protection, the implementation of international conventions, and the provision of a common implementation framework for neighbouring or cooperating countries with CSO involvement; and
- the transfer and exchange of experience and good practice on river basin management, water quality improvement, water use, water and health issues, climate change, nature conservation and biodiversity, energy efficiency and renewable energies, eco-tourism, eco-agriculture, bio-food production and marketing and local branding, involving cooperation and networking among CSOs and authorities and businesses from neighbouring and EU countries.

The topics should not be too narrowly defined and should allow CSOs to come up with their own proposals. It is also important to have the possibility of including in the grants demonstration or pilot projects, work on practical issues, as well as capacity-building, training, education and/or awareness-raising elements.

Recommendations

Legal framework

- There is need to improve the legal framework for taxation, which would facilitate and promote the operations of CSOs and offer tax exemptions.
- Special attention should be given to improving the registration process in Transnistria in order to make it easier for CSOs to register. The process should be simplified so that CSOs can register themselves without needing to involve a lawyer or a company to assist them, thus reducing the costs involved.

- The implementation of the Law on Public Organisation, which introduces the status of public utility, should be enhanced, allowing CSOs to take advantage of tax and other benefits to create more favourable conditions for their activities. The application procedure should be simplified in order to encourage CSOs to apply for public utility status, provided they can obtain clear benefits as a result.
- Environmental CSOs, in cooperation with other CSOs, should continue to raise the above issues, lobby for positive changes and achieve improvements in the legal and tax framework for CSOs.

Equipment and staffing

- In order to undertake activities in Transnistria, it is necessary to establish good contacts with the central and local authorities. The approval of the Central Bank of Transnistria is needed in order to convert received funds into local currency. The process for the approval of transfers in Transnistria takes up to 10 days. Donations and grants are not taxed in Transnistria. Income and social tax are payable for people employed under the project. There is no VAT in Transnistria, although exchange rate losses could be up to 5 percent. Many Transnistrian CSOs have partners registered in Moldova, or are registered as CSOs in Moldova but work as initiative groups in Transnistria.
- Dialogue should be established with the East Europe Foundation, the Soros Foundation and the Civil Rights Defenders in order to learn about their re-granting activities and share experiences.
- Dialogue should be established with the Swedish companies dealing with tertiary energy efficiency in Moldova in order to explore ways to cooperate on possible CSO grants.
- Contacts should be established with UNDP/GEF and synergies built in order to avoid overlaps in terms of the grants provided by the SECTOR project.
- It is important to draw CSO attention to available resources other than funds (the local expertise of retired people and students, volunteers, local community services, the creativity and enthusiasm of children, the general resourcefulness of the poor etc.).

Grants

- The future grants programmes should support capacity building for environmental CSOs and CSOs dealing with issues related to sustainable development.

- The new grants programme should strengthen the role of CSOs in decision making on sustainable development and environmental protection and enable them to play their role in society more effectively.
- Capacity building and cooperation with CSOs in Transnistria should avoid direct political or human rights topics, while all environmental topics, including waste and water management, will be acceptable.
- Environmental CSOs need to cooperate and network as well as to join platforms with other CSOs in order to achieve a broader impact. Connections between environmental CSOs and CSOs working in other fields, including consumer protection and religious groups, trade unions, farmers, and youth and women's groups, especially at local level, should be encouraged.
- Specific programmes should be crafted to target rural and Transnistrian CSOs. Local-level grants should address environmental and sustainable development issues at community level, promoting sustainable lifestyles through public awareness raising, education, information dissemination, campaigning and pilot projects achieving tangible results. These could include the promotion of eco-tourism, eco-agriculture, bio-food production and marketing, local branding, cooperation with farmers and local businesses, waste management and water management at local level, sustainable water use, as well as energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy resources.
- Other programme components should support CSOs working at national and regional level to strengthen their involvement in decision making on environmental and sustainable development issues, to play their role of watchdog more efficiently and to develop/improve networking and cooperation at national and regional levels, as well as with neighbouring and EU countries.
- Topics should not be narrowly defined but CSOs should be able to come up with their own proposals. Demonstration or pilot projects, work on practical issues as well as capacity-building, training, education and awareness-raising elements could be included in the projects.

Module II – Human and organisational capacities

Main findings

- Moldovan environmental CSOs are aware of the importance of strategic leadership and of process management and its tools, but not many organisations have put these things into practice. Although they feel the need to have them available, either they lack sufficient skills, or they work under external conditions that are too unstable, to allow them to create a strategy for their organisation. The environmental CSO community has expressed its interest in participating in the internal assessment process and, based on its outcomes, they are keen to develop long-term strategic plans for their individual organisations.
- Most of the CSOs are still reactive rather than proactive: instead of planning organisational change/activity they react to external circumstances. As such, the flexibility and adaptability of CSOs has become an important aspect of survival and a key success factor.
- At present, there is no organisational development programme targeting environmental CSOs, although such programmes have been developed for organisations dealing with gender issues. It would be advisable to cooperate with the domestic developers of such methodologies/programmes.
- Environmental CSOs clearly perceive the need to achieve better communication with the general public and other stakeholders, and to build a better public image. In particular, the need for better cooperation and communication with the government has been pointed out as urgent, as is the need to mobilise greater interest and involvement on the part of the public in environmental issues.
- Governance bodies tend to be weak: some of their activities are outsourced to CSOs as they lack capacity to undertake them themselves.
- Representatives of donors, government and support organisations feel that environmental CSOs have low project implementation capacities, especially poor skills in grant application writing and reporting.

Strategic leadership and organisational development issues

Strategic leadership in organisations is formalised through tools such as strategic planning, fundraising strategies, business planning, public relations (PR) and communications strategies or human resources (HR) strategies.

Environmental CSOs in Moldova are aware of strategic leadership and of process management and its tools, but not many of the interviewed organisations have put them into practice. Very few organisations have long-term strategic planning as the basis of their activities. Even the most successful organisations plan their activities only three months in advance. This lack of strategy is due largely to the unstable external conditions (as stated by Transnistrian CSOs), or to insufficient knowledge or skills to create a long-term strategy and the related documents for the organisation. As one CSO claimed: "Dependence on grants is hindering the strategic process a great deal." Some of the organisations do not even consider strategic planning as an essential element of their organisational operations and sustainability. There are also some very new organisations, the membership of which comprises mostly students and other young people, which have been busy with various civil campaigns (e.g. the worldwide clean-up campaign "Let's Do It") and have therefore not yet had time to set up a proper organisation or create a long-term development plan.

Of the various strategic tools, the lack of a PR and communications strategy was mentioned most often: such strategies are rarely developed, leading to miscommunication and misunderstanding among environmental CSOs and other stakeholders as regards the capabilities and role of the CSOs.

The majority of the organisations are limited to their annual plan, on-going project timelines or concrete topic-related programmes. The Stefan Voda branch of the Ecological Movement in Moldova (EMM), for example, as the main author of the local environmental action plan in Stefan Voda, uses the same document as its strategic plan for dealing with the environmental needs of the community.

Nevertheless, the majority of the organisations interviewed were interested to learn more about the organisational assessment and planning process and would be interested in taking up the opportunities offered by the Organisational Viability component. The interviewees also expressed their view that any tool that creates opportunities to become less donor driven and more sustainable and independent in their actions is worth learning and adopting into their organisational habits and activities.

There is an existing Code of Ethics for Moldovan CSOs (a sponsor-driven initiative by the US Embassy), in which recommended internal accountability principles are fairly well reflected. This is something to which environmental CSOs could adhere.

Organisational structure

The Law on Non-governmental Organisations (1996) states that “NGOs registered in Moldova are free to set up their internal organisational structures.” The legal norms related to organisational set-up were excluded from the legal framework and CSOs face no legal impediments to setting up democratic governing bodies and refining internal accountability.

Most of the environmental CSOs in Moldova do not set up structures or assign specific tasks to staff members as they operate with a small number of active members (the interviewed organisations generally have between three and five full- or half-time paid members of staff), either volunteers or staff. Many of the active members carry out multiple tasks mostly related to project implementation and they do not necessarily have specialised functions (with the exception of accountants or finance personnel).

The majority of the organisations have governance structures (board, assembly, executive director or president) and a few operational structures (e.g. a fundraising team). In most of the CSOs the executive bodies are far stronger than the governing bodies, and often there are no de facto governing bodies. Often the same person handles governing and executive functions. There are many “grey zones” and overlaps within CSOs, which mean that the internal mechanisms of check and balance are suffering.

Overall, the CSOs are satisfied with their flexible structure and arrangements, which help them to adapt to the constantly changing external environment and survive through times when funding is scarce. As one CSO stated: “Flexibility has helped us not to close the office even when we don’t have funds available.”

There have not been many structural changes in recent years that would have helped to reflect the mission and vision of the organisation. Nevertheless, the organisations are trying to optimise their tasks and obligations through routine management and regularly organised staff meetings. As one CSO from Transnistria said: “Organisational changes come along with new people who bring in new ideas, experiences and directions, not along with structural changes.”

Organisational strengths

When asked about the strengths of their organisations, rural CSOs mentioned good relations with local authorities and the media, the transparency of their work within the community, the trust of local people and their own openness towards them. One rural CSO mentioned that every new project they have received has been presented to local people, thus gaining the trust and support of the community. In the best cases, communities also use local CSOs to influence the decisions of the local government and to represent the interests of the community before it.

Bigger, centrally based CSOs mentioned that their organisations are strong due to well-educated teams and strong human capacities, networking connections, the regular sharing of experiences, and their ability to find their own niche (e.g. providing capacity-building training for the authorities or other stakeholders, playing an active part in the implementation of various conventions at state level, or contributing to the drafting of environmental legislation and policy).

Organisational weaknesses

Obstacles to the work of CSOs may be either internal or external. In Moldova, external obstacles seem to prevail. They include: lack of cooperation with the government and isolation from the rest of the world (a problem specific to Transnistria); lack of technical equipment, professional software and the skills to operate them (specific to Transnistria); weak environmental administration (Moldova in general); poor cooperation with local environmental authorities (specific to Chisinau, not to the district areas); apathy on the part of citizens towards environmental problems (due to the more pressing economic and social issues); and insufficient cooperation with European organisations and inadequate access to international funds due to limited knowledge of English (specific to Transnistrian CSOs).

The internal obstacles identified include complicated and sometimes reduced access to funds; limited staff due to funding problems; lack of real contact with citizens (specific to CSOs in Chisinau); the language barrier (mentioned by CSOs in Transnistria); and, for both city-based and rural CSOs, lack of project writing skills, the absence of a proper communication and PR strategy and inadequate knowledge/skills to maintain relationships with partners. One organisation mentioned that they have plenty of projects but not enough people to implement them.

Both Moldovan and Transnistrian CSOs mentioned as a major problem the fact that investments are made in young people (either staff members or volunteers), who then leave the organisation. This situation is more critical in Transnistria.

Although Moldovan CSOs did not mention a lack of topic-related expertise within their organisations, the Ministry of Environment has criticised environmental CSOs for their low level of scientific knowledge, and donors have criticised their low implementation capacities, especially their poor skills in grant application writing and reporting. Deputy Minister Radu Bajureanu has also mentioned the urgent need to evaluate and enhance the capacities of rural CSOs.

Human resources

CSO operations are carried out using a variety of human resources bases. Most have a small permanent staff (between three and five people), which undertakes everyday operations and fundraising activities. They are assisted by temporary or voluntary

members of staff, who participate in project work. In many smaller organisations, much of the work (between projects) is done on a voluntary basis. As one CSO in Transnistria explained: “Due to the small projects implemented they cannot afford longer-term paid staff.” The leaders of the organisation are generally very pleased with their team members, whom they consider to be good, mission-driven specialists and with whom they try to establish a long-term working relationship. It is very common in the countryside for a person to work in the same organisation for many years, right from its establishment.

The hiring process in CSOs follows the legal norms, although in most cases it is informal (i.e. not competition based). Many CSOs make insufficient use of human resources management tools such as personnel handbooks, job descriptions, personal development plans, human resources performance assessment tools etc.

In the course of the interviews it became clear that in many cases there is a need to appoint an experienced accountant. Organisations are also looking for an opportunity to buy the up-to-date accounting software required to ease communication on fiscal matters with the state.

Many organisations have realised that in order to perform efficiently they need to invest resources into building voluntary bases. Many of the interviewed organisations have a good volunteer network (up to as many as 800 people in the case of one interviewed organisation) and provide their volunteers with training and capacity-building options, as far as their funding allows. The problem is, as mentioned above, that young people who serve as volunteers will leave the organisation as soon as something better comes up.

Another staffing-related problem is the language barrier. Especially in Transnistria people do not speak English, and, even if they do take language courses, they do not have opportunities to practise. As a result, communication with the potential partner organisations is limited.

In terms of gender, the numbers of men and women involved in environmental CSOs in Moldova is apparently fairly even, according to the interviews.

When asked their reasons for joining a CSO, people usually mentioned wanting to bring about changes either at local or national level, or wanting to find ways to realise their own ideas. When asked their reasons for leaving the civil society sector, the answers were: lack of funds for environmental activities; falling levels of motivation due to the slow pace of change; the fact that organisations are not taken seriously by the authorities, which ultimately prevents changes from taking place; and false expectations about what can be achieved via a CSO.

Programme and service management

There is not always a programme management cycle in place: only a few CSOs, for example, carry out project evaluation. Nevertheless, environmental organisations in

Moldova perform a variety of activities and consider themselves successful in what they are doing. A few success stories deserve highlighting:

- The recent more active exercising of Aarhus rights (two court cases have been won against the state in relation to access to information).
- Activities related to the Dniester River, including the prevention of World Bank-funded activities on the hydropower plant in Ukraine.
- The establishment of environmental CSOs in Transnistria, with the implementation of several successful projects.
- The provision of grants and capacity-building trainings for other CSOs.
- The establishment of several ad hoc coalitions to fight against decisions made by the authorities (e.g. to reduce green areas in Chisinau).
- The drafting of a new EIA law and participation in various law- and policy-drafting processes.
- The creation of eco-tourism trails through local wetlands.
- The establishment of a visitors centre next to a nature protection area.
- Participation in drafting, or main authorship of, LEAPs or Agenda 21.
- The maintenance of a communication platform between environmental CSOs.
- The establishment of an ecological network (outsourced by the Ministry of Environment due to its low capacities for ecology and nature protection).

Activities that CSOs regard as not being performed to an acceptable level are: environmental advocacy, public participation and public consultations, lobbying and watchdogging. On the one hand, as stated by EcoContact, which has a long history of providing trainings for the CSO community: "Even the CSOs don't understand why it's important to exercise the rights of being an active citizen as there is no belief in real changes happening or trust in any change in general." On the other hand, failures are also related to the fact that there is no long-term partnership strategy between the Ministry of Environment and the environmental CSO community, thus it is hard to participate, follow up and contribute meaningfully, and, if necessary, to oppose activities planned and implemented by the Ministry of Environment.

When asked which type of project is most desirable in terms of funding requests, CSOs mostly mentioned the kind of projects for which they have competence and in which they have already been successful to date. The topics can be clustered as follows:

Environmental awareness and education

- Activities related to environmental education and awareness raising, not only among young people and citizens but also aimed at the business sector.
- Practical "How to save the planet" type courses in order to change people's environmental awareness and behaviour.
- Improvements to information centres in rural areas.
- New methods and best practices in relation to solving local environmental problems.
- The maintenance of the local nature museum (e.g. installation of a sound system).

Public participation

- Involvement in the decision-making process (law, policy-making decisions).
- Public participation in EIA.
- Ensuring access to environmental information.

Organic agriculture and eco-tourism

- The promotion of organic agriculture and education of local farmers.
- Awareness raising on the potential of eco-tourism: provision of guidelines and models, and assistance in setting up eco-tourism trails and activities.

Nature protection

- The creation of the first national park in Moldova (an idea supported by the Ministry of Environment, although the process has been postponed for various reasons).
- The rehabilitation of the ecological status of wetlands.

Waste management

- Involvement in the drafting of legislation.
- Awareness-raising campaigns against littering etc.

Water management

- Activities around the Dniester (possibly joint activities with Transnistrian CSOs).
- River basin management activities on different rivers.
- Drinking-water quality.

Energy saving and renewable energy

- Energy-saving "model" buildings.
- Trainings.

Specific to Transnistria

- The establishment of a Transnistrian environmental CSO forum.

It can be argued, based on previous experience, that in Transnistria grant activities related to education and tourism and other concrete actions (e.g. related to the Dniester River) would be accepted, while topics related to access to information, public participation or any other environmental rights might not be approved by the central government.

According to the CSOs, topics for the *regional grants* could be linked to the exchange of experience between Belarus and Moldova on river basin management, water quality improvement, wetland management and health issues. Funding could be used to organise an international conference on transboundary river basin management. In addition, Moldovan CSOs would be interested in cooperation with CSOs in EU member states.

Training

Training is a key element in capacity development and performance improvement. It was therefore important to assess environmental CSOs in terms of their approach to training, their training experiences and the quality of training available.

Some of the organisations train their staff members on a regular basis, whenever there is a need for it, using both in-house and external resources. For example, in one of the interviewed CSOs two trainings per year are provided for staff members on various issues on which the organisation is working (the last training was dedicated to wetland management). If needed, experts and partners from different countries are invited to conduct this type of training.

Many of the interviewed organisations underlined the constant need to organise trainings on:

- project writing skills, including the creation of a logical framework, for big international donors;
- successful project management (including reporting and accounting);
- the use and sharing of local knowledge;
- public participation in environmental decision making;
- awareness-raising techniques;
- PR and media relations;
- IT and computer literacy (including the design of small leaflets and flyers for organisational use, the use of Internet-based free software etc.);
- website design;
- cooperation with international organisations;
- English language skills; and
- environmental advocacy issues.

In addition to the above, so-called master class topics (public participation, advocacy, watchdogging, lobbying, information dissemination and communication) are highly appreciated. It was also stressed that the country has many experts who could deliver the trainings.

Rural CSOs expressed their interest in organising trainings not in Chisinau but rather at the regional level, involving the local authorities in the trainings as their capacities are equally low.

Recommendations

- In the absence of an organisational development programme targeting environmental CSOs in Moldova, it is advisable to cooperate with the authors of existing programmes that have been developed for organisations dealing with gender issues.
- Since over half the population in Moldova is rural, special emphasis should be given to the development of civil society in the countryside. There is a need to develop a democratic culture, taking into account poverty, the lack of democratic traditions and inherited inertia.
- Big CSOs need opportunities to strengthen their involvement in decision making on environmental and sustainable development issues and to improve their networking and cooperation at national and regional levels.
- The SECTOR CEE project should cover capacity building, improvements to project cycle management (grants applications and reporting), organisational development and the financial sustainability of CSOs.
- CSOs need to improve in the following areas: awareness raising, visibility, participation in decision making, environmental enforcement, lobbying, information dissemination, environmental advocacy, access to justice, viability support and watchdogging. They also need to improve their foreign language skills.
- So-called master class trainings should also be provided for local authorities, especially in the municipalities selected for the LEAP project.
- In addition to the various training programmes provided by SECTOR, a follow-up programme is recommended, which will allow for the monitoring of the post-training phase, the identification of barriers to implementation and the provision of further tailored assistance.
- Environmental CSOs can be conventionally divided into two groups: CSOs that act mainly at the grassroots level; and CSOs that focus mainly at policy level. The Organisational Development component should take this into account. Some CSOs serve as an umbrella organisation, and this should also be reflected in the development programme.
- The Central European University (CEU) has been implementing a young leaders' programme in Moldova and it will be beneficial to consult them when setting up the training programme within the SECTOR project.

- There is a need to train consultants in general CSO development so that consultancy is available in the country when needed by CSOs.
- Topics for local grants might include helping to address environmental and sustainable development issues at community level, including networking and cooperation with other CSOs, and implementing environmental strategies and policies. The regional component should address the transfer and exchange of experience and good practice and should provide a common implementation framework for Belarus and Moldova. In addition, several Moldovan CSOs showed an interest in cooperation with CSOs in Belarus and with EU member states.

Module III — Knowledge, information and CSO cooperation

Main findings

Information landscape

- Information on the state of the environment is generally available and accessible, but specific information on environment and sustainable development is either unavailable or difficult to find and access.
- Although agencies dealing with environmental protection at different levels collect and publish environmental information, it is not stored in a properly structured and publicly accessible integrated environmental information system, but is rather scattered among the institutions.
- CSOs are significant sources of information not only for the general public and the CSO community but also for government agencies. All of them gather, produce and share some kind of environmental or sustainable development-related information with the community in which they operate. Much of the available information is the result of CSO project activities.
- CSOs are aware of the need to improve the presentation of the information and knowledge they have gained in order to be able to share it with target groups or their community in order to have a greater impact in society.
- The bigger CSOs each have their own website and also make use of advanced electronic information tools such as social media. Conversely, the smaller, rural CSOs and CSOs in Transnistria lack computers and software and little experience in using modern information technology.
- Many CSOs realise the need to learn more about emerging environmental topics and to learn how to use media relations and modern information tools in a more efficient and effective manner in order to collect information for the public and to communicate environmental and sustainable development challenges in an attractive and easily understandable way.

Enabling CSOs to take action

- The bigger CSOs focus on environmental policy in various sectors as well as legal issues. Many cover sustainable development in general, but only a few have

strong expertise in specific fields. Activities include expert assistance, assessments and research, project-related capacity building and trainings, information dissemination, education and awareness raising among the population (via campaigns and the publication of studies, newsletters and bulletins), and the organisation of concrete local direct actions such as camps, summer schools and clean-up activities. Only a few CSOs implement pilot projects and campaigns that mobilise a bigger target group.

- A few CSOs offer assistance and services to other civil society groups, provide re-granting, assist in dialogue with authorities at central level, and assist in CSO platform building and communication. Only a few bigger groups are involved in public participation in environmental decision making.

CSO cooperation and networking

- The cooperation and networking among CSOs that started in the framework of the NGO Forum in 2011, with some results, is still in the initial stage. So far, CSO cooperation is happening largely on an ad hoc basis without a detailed and concrete cooperation strategy and programme.
- There has been a considerable improvement in terms of electronic communication among CSOs thanks to EcoContact's efforts to help maintain CSO networking and cooperation, facilitate the NGO Forum and electronic platform, and maintain databases and websites for other CSOs. EcoContact has so far been successful in finding funds for these activities, but the longer-term programme and the financial sustainability of these efforts need to be secured.
- Some smaller networks organised by a few of the bigger CSOs also cooperate on the basis of different projects. There is potential in these networks for more strategic cooperation with one another.
- Many bigger CSOs are involved in international cooperation with CSO networks engaged in environmental protection and sustainable development, and in transboundary or cross-border cooperation with neighbouring or EU countries. CSOs also participate in cooperation regarding European and other international agreements and environmental policy processes to support their national implementation. They currently see greater benefits in these international networks and cooperation opportunities than in the national ones.
- Only a few CSOs cooperate with other CSOs from the non-environmental sector in order to improve the CSO sector's situation and operating conditions.

Cooperation with the government

- Good examples of cooperation between CSOs and the authorities exist at regional and local level in some regions and municipalities in which CSOs are active and implementing projects. The expertise of CSOs is often used in environmental decision-making processes by these authorities, and in some cases CSOs can also become strategic partners for the local or district authority or are invited onto local advisory councils.
- The number of CSOs that are active and implementing projects at regional level is limited, and many smaller CSOs act only at the local level and have difficulty accessing project funds.
- In Transnistria, CSOs report having good relations but less-intensive cooperation with the regional and local authorities. Moldovan CSOs cooperating with Transnistrian CSOs find it easier to work with the local authorities than with the central authorities, especially if a project or activity is directed at solving a concrete environmental problem.
- There are still many unexplored and unexploited opportunities for cooperation and contact with the regional and local authorities.

Cooperation with businesses

- There is little experience of cooperation between CSOs and businesses. There are good examples at the regional or local level of businesses offering in-kind support, but no joint cooperation efforts exist.
- Local CSOs often implement projects or activities with local farmers or farmers' associations in order to educate or train them about organic agriculture, good agricultural practices or eco-tourism, contributing to the development of local small businesses.

Information landscape

According to the interviewed CSOs, information on the state of the environment is generally available and accessible. However, they pointed out that specific environmental information or information on sustainable development is either unavailable or difficult to find and access.

According to a national regulation, only information regarding the activities of the ministry itself can be posted on the website of the Ministry of Environment. There is no recognised website on which comprehensive relevant environmental information can be found. At present, information is scattered on the websites of various agencies.

Some institutions, including the decentralised structures of the Environmental Inspectorate at district level, claim to provide information. However, despite the fact that agencies dealing with environmental inspection at various levels do collect and publish some information, this information is not stored in a properly structured and publicly accessible integrated environmental information system. As a result, it is not easy for CSOs, or for the general public, to find out where the information is stored and how it can be accessed.

Most information exists and is published in the form of written reports and documents. There are big gaps in certain fields, especially in terms of up-to-date information. With the exception of meteorological information, no environmental information is available daily online. There is no monitoring information and very little information on the quality of the environment, environmental pollution and the use of natural resources. At local level, environmental information from government sources is even less available due to lack of human resources and the limited accessibility of electronic information.

The quality of environmental information provided to the general public by the relevant ministries and agencies is rather low. Improvements are needed in terms of proactive distribution, help in understanding the nature of environmental information, and making the most important and relevant environmental information broadly available to the public (mainly in electronic form, but also in printed format) in a user-friendly and easily understandable way.

Few CSOs seek information in accordance with official procedures, since such requests are usually answered only in a general manner. At regional and local levels, CSOs tend to use personal contacts and meetings with the relevant officials to obtain requested information. However, these channels are not open to the general public.

While it is important to improve the situation by, for example, a review of the legislation, progress is mainly needed in the practical field. The legislation that regulates public access to information and the obligations of the authorities to collect information and disseminate it actively dates back to the beginning of the 1990s. CSOs have proposed including a new chapter in the Law on Environmental Protection, and this process is under way. The draft Law on Access to Environmental Information is also under consultation with the authorities.

Despite the fact that the existing legislation generally stipulates the right to access to information and the provision of information, the public authorities are mostly unaware of their obligations and do not implement these laws properly. There is still ambiguity, for example, surrounding the type of environmental information that should be collected and provided actively or upon request by the authorities at different levels, apart from the Ministry of Environment and its agencies; what information should be considered to be of public interest and what should be kept confidential, and on what grounds; and what charges can be imposed for the provision of information.

In addition, members of the general public are not aware of their rights and do not usually require the authorities to fulfil their obligations.

CSO use of information

CSOs use and provide information related to the environment and sustainable development at different levels and for different purposes. They are important sources of information not only for the general public and the CSO community, but also for government agencies. All of them gather, produce and share information with the community in which they operate by means of newsletters, articles in newspapers and journals, videos etc. Much of this information is aimed at awareness raising on particular issues, sharing the CSO's experiences, or promoting the CSO's activities. Some CSOs carry out research or assist in monitoring under various projects. Some of the bigger CSOs have developed particular, even outstanding, expertise in certain fields and can supplement missing governmental capacity by offering expertise in the form of reports, project documents, scientific research and books.

Only a few CSOs cooperate with the authorities in information dissemination, and this is usually related to the dissemination of project results, environmental awareness raising and education for the young. Many use traditional information tools, especially in rural areas and Transnistria.

Nevertheless, many CSOs mentioned the need to develop their skills and knowledge further, especially in emerging fields such as climate change, renewable energy, eco-tourism and ecological agriculture, drought management, soil protection, nutrient reduction and best agricultural practices, or in specific fields new to their organisation.

Much of the available information was obtained as a result of various projects, and even the bigger CSOs are aware of the need to improve the efficiency of their information presentation in order to be able to share information with target groups and the community and to make a bigger impact in society. In general, the broader the availability and accessibility of project information, the greater the outcomes and activities of the CSOs.

The bigger CSOs each have their own website and make use of advanced electronic information tools such as social media. Some of the biggest CSOs have developed electronic libraries for their networks and for the environmental CSO community in order to disseminate science-based information (e.g. Eco-TIRAS). In addition, they assist smaller CSOs to develop and maintain their own websites. EcoContact, for example, in addition to offering such services, also hosts the electronic platform of environmental CSOs, mailing lists and discussion platforms. On the other hand, the smaller, rural CSOs and CSOs in Transnistria experience problems with the availability of computers and software or with the use of modern information technology and need assistance in this regard. Both Eco-TIRAS and EcoContact assist CSOs in Transnistria in their communication efforts. Mechanisms such as resource and information centres in rural areas and in Transnistria significantly help communities and civil society to access information and knowledge on issues relevant to the environment and sustainable development.

Some of the bigger CSOs, mainly located in Chisinau, turn more often to the media (radio and television), and organise press conferences or information sessions with journalists. Their representatives are often invited as experts to appear on different programmes. Nevertheless, only a few CSOs use the media purposefully to support focused campaigns or for public advocacy on particular burning environmental issues, such as the elimination of hotspots. Successful examples include the campaign “Clean Moldova”, and Eco-TIRAS activities.

Many CSOs understand the need to learn more about how to use media relations and modern information tools to inform the public and communicate environmental and sustainable development challenges in an attractive, interesting and easily understandable way. Stronger environmental journalism should be developed in order to broaden its impact not only in CSO newsletters, brochures and journals, but in society in general.

Enabling CSOs to take action

Most CSOs work on a project basis using the funds they are able to generate. The smaller, rural CSOs and CSOs in Transnistria are mostly focused at grassroots level and struggle to mobilise more resources by combining their efforts and, even when they lack funds, by involving volunteers and obtaining contributions from members of the community, local or regional authorities and businesses.

The bigger CSOs located in Chisinau, and those countryside groups that are managing bigger and medium-sized projects, focus on activities in a few specific fields. These include environmental policy and legal issues, various sectoral policies such as water protection, the implementation of the Water Framework Directive, waste management, chemicals (POPs), EIA, environmental risks, biodiversity, natural resources use, the protection and monitoring of species, and the protection and extension of green spaces.

Many CSOs deal with sustainable development in general, and only a few have strong expertise in specific topics such as sustainable transport or sustainable agriculture. Only a few address changes in lifestyle or work on sustainable consumption and production, sustainable agriculture and tourism, sustainable energy, including renewables, or sustainable transport.

Environmental education and awareness raising are covered by many groups, using different means and at different levels. While the bigger and medium-sized CSOs implement more focused, specialised programmes in their field of expertise, CSOs working in rural areas and in Transnistria carry out more general activities. These usually target the local population, especially schools and young people, but at the same time the activities are linked with the preservation and presentation of local natural monuments and nature reserves. One good example is the Ecological Movement of Moldova (EMM) Educational Centre, which for many years has run a successful

educational programme for schools based on the nature protection Green Museum in Stefan Voda. Only a few CSOs focus on education for farmers and local communities on organic agriculture, bio-food production and eco-tourism.

Examples of CSO activities in Moldova

Eco-TIRAS, an association of CSOs in the Dniester River basin, deals mainly with the promotion of river basin planning, devoting attention to public participation and the implementation of international agreements. Among the rural CSOs, Ormax also works on water issues, its main focus being the protection of the Cubolta River basin, where it cooperates closely with 16 municipalities and mayoralties. Activities range from the implementation of the Water Framework Directive to very practical activities for improving sanitation in schools and the community by installing ecological toilets.

In addition to working in the environmental legal and policy field, ***EcoContact*** focuses on establishing dialogue between environmental CSOs and the government and is also involved in practical cases through pilot projects. It also promotes communication and discussion among CSOs by operating an electronic platform for communication and by maintaining several web pages and databases for CSOs.

EcoContact and Eco-TIRAS also offer assistance and services to other civil society groups, provide re-granting for projects and develop and implement trainings and capacity building for other CSOs. Capacity building and training are also offered to local and central authorities. They also support the operation of resource and information and consultation centres in Transnistria (see the networking section).

The ***Ecological Movement of Moldova*** (EMM) is one of the oldest environmental CSOs. It works mainly on improving the environment in Chisinau, and in Stefan Voda is involved in the promotion of sustainable development, waste management, air quality protection, water management, sustainable transport, the protection and extension of green spaces, environmental education and awareness raising. It also has branches in the countryside. One of its branches, EMM Stefan Voda, is involved in environment and nature protection, education and awareness-raising activities in schools, and the development of the LEAP for the district. It initiated the establishment of the first national park in Moldova and has implemented various activities related to waste management, eco-tourism, eco-agriculture, energy efficiency and water protection. It also runs an information and consultation centre, provides assistance to the public and cooperates with other CSOs in Moldova. It has contacts with Ukrainian, Romanian and Polish CSOs.

Biotica promotes and maintains ecological networking (Moldova has no national park to date). Its experts provide a wide range of services to the government, especially to the Ministry of Environment in relation to nature protection.

The Eco-Counselling Centre Cahul (ECCC) focuses primarily on ecology, nature protection and awareness-raising activities. It was recently involved in building nature tracks, setting up information signs and establishing a visitors' centre. It is also involved in sustainable agriculture, providing trainings for farmers on agricultural practices. It has also been successful in international project implementation (e.g. cooperating with Black Sea and Ramsar site rehabilitation projects).

CSO activities range from expert assistance, the preparation of assessments, research, and the provision of capacity building and trainings to informing, educating and raising the awareness of members of the population (by campaigning and publishing studies, newsletters and bulletins), and organising concrete local direct actions such as camps, summer schools and clean-up activities. Only a few CSOs implement pilot projects and campaigns that mobilise a bigger target group.

Some CSOs offer assistance and services to other civil society groups, provide re-granting for projects, develop and implement trainings and capacity building for other CSOs, assist in dialogue with the authorities at central level, and offer CSO platform building and communication assistance. A few centrally located bigger groups are involved in public participation in environmental decision making, providing input and comments on policies and legislation, lobbying, monitoring the activities of the authorities and watchdogging. (See the sections on CSO cooperation and networking and on the Aarhus Convention.)

Some of the bigger CSOs support the implementation of various international agreements and the approximation of Moldovan legislation to the EU and use these processes to put pressure on the government to achieve progress in national implementation (e.g. of the Climate Convention, the Water Convention, the Water and Health Protocol, the Aarhus Convention and the Espoo Convention). Several of the most active, bigger CSOs follow European or global environmental processes, such as Black Sea cooperation, EU integration, the Eastern Partnership, Environment for Europe, or the Rio United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) process and use them to achieve improvements in certain fields.

Many of the interviewed CSOs see a need for capacity building on tools and methods (e.g. on communication with the public; awareness raising; the effective collection, analysis, back-up and dissemination of information; the use of information to support decision making; and the effective participation of CSOs and the public in decision making) in order to strengthen their role in society and the community. They also regard it as important to build knowledge and skills in relation to playing their watchdog role in society, monitoring the activities of the authorities, making the authorities accountable for their legal and policy commitments, and lobbying for changes and improvements in the development and implementation of environmental and sustainable development policies and measures. They are also aware of the need to learn about opportunities and

techniques for public participation, public-private partnerships, access to justice and environmental advocacy.

Capacity building should also enable CSOs to engage in activities that offer more direct and longer-term impacts and benefits for the community in the environmental, social and economic fields. Such activities could also offer development perspectives for local people and farmers, for example in the form of eco-tourism, eco-agriculture, the promotion of local branding and agricultural best practices.

At the local level, in addition to practical activities and traditional information, educational and awareness-raising activities, it is also necessary to improve information management to allow for the more efficient collection, use and sharing of local information and knowledge. It is also essential to learn how to use more advanced IT tools and to introduce more intensive educational programmes either outside school or integrated in the existing civic education curricula.

There is a general need to set up/improve the communication strategies of CSOs, enabling them to cooperate with and support one another and their target groups and to share information about their activities and achievements using a greater number of electronic tools such as websites, social media, existing informational portals and electronic bulletins. Smaller, rural groups and Transnistrian CSOs in particular require training on using professional IT software and technical equipment, following the purchase of such equipment. There is still much to learn at all levels with respect to environmental journalism and working with the media.

Many CSOs do not have adequate capacities or skills to promote and present their results, experiences and knowledge to their closer constituency or community, or to improve their visibility and achieve greater transparency and broader acceptance by society (see the section on values and public trust). Training PR coordinators within CSOs would strengthen their promotional capacities and increase their transparency and public visibility.

CSOs require capacity building to improve their fundraising and project proposal writing skills as well as their expertise in specific fields and their project management skills. This will enable them to submit well-written, focused proposals, including budgets and logical frameworks, as well as better financial reports. Thematic trainings are also needed on social entrepreneurship and income generation, as well as for accountants working in or with CSOs, regarding recent changes in taxation and financial issues.

Capacity building should take the form of thematic training programmes, follow-up training, exchange programmes or study visits. CSOs would welcome capacity building organised in the form of training courses on the topics mentioned above.

It is crucial to build synergies between the various capacity-building programme elements and to involve CSOs participating in grant and viability programmes in the different types of trainings. This would build the capacities and knowledge of the grantees and support the implementation of their projects, while at the same time the

training course participants would be able to draw on the practical experiences of the grantees and on lessons learned from the discussion of real-life problems. The impact of such courses would be increased if at least some of the participants go on to share what they have learned by becoming trainers of others.

Exchange programmes or study visits need to be sponsored not only between Transnistrian and Moldovan CSOs but also to enable these organisations to learn from CSOs in EU countries and neighbouring countries such as Ukraine and Romania. Young leaders programmes and scholarships for young environmental leaders or activists would increase CSO capacities in leading and managing an organisation, and, through exchanges, would also offer opportunities for learning about environmental and sustainable development topics and examples of practical implementation.

Capacity building and cooperation with CSOs in Transnistria should avoid direct political or human rights topics, while all environmental topics, including waste and water management and the role of CSOs in them, are acceptable.

There is also a need to overcome the language barrier. Many of the smaller CSOs are unable to communicate in English and are therefore unable to cooperate with other European CSOs, join European networks, or apply for EU funds. Transnistrian CSOs, whose members usually speak only Russian, face additional barriers to cooperation within certain programmes (e.g. the JOP Romania-Ukraine-Republic of Moldova), where Romanian is used in addition to English. An institutional solution to the language problem, however, requires longer-term systematic assistance and support from several key players.

CSO cooperation and networking

Cooperation and networking among environmental CSOs began in 2011 in the framework of the NGO Forum, and although a second meeting was held in February 2012, cooperation is still at an initial stage. At the moment it is mostly the big CSOs and some regional-level CSOs that participate actively in the network. The NGO Forum is organised according to working groups (on water, waste and public participation) and has already achieved some results.

One successful example of CSO cooperation mentioned by interviewees was the elaboration by the NGO Forum, and the submission to the Public Environmental Council, of CSO comments and proposals on the Development Strategy of Moldova until 2020. The results are reflected in the strategy, as many of the comments and proposals were accepted by the government. CSOs have also prepared proposals regarding the National Strategy for the Environment, which is currently under preparation, but their opinions have so far not been included due to a lack of readiness to accept environmental considerations in other spheres of the government.

There has been a considerable improvement in terms of communication among CSOs, including electronic communication. EcoContact facilitates networking and communication among CSOs and, in addition to organising the NGO Forum, it also runs an electronic communication platform for CSOs, operates the VOX MD databases, and maintains several web pages for CSOs. EcoContact has been successful in finding funding for these activities, but the longer-term financial sustainability of these efforts needs to be addressed.

There are also some active smaller networks created and operated by EcoContact, Eco-TIRAS, the Ecological Movement and Ormax in the Cubolta River basin, as mentioned above. Eco-TIRAS has established eight resource centres in Transnistria, and similar information and consultation centres are supported by EcoContact. Sometimes ad hoc cooperative efforts are organised around a specific campaign (e.g. Clean Moldova) or environmental issue (e.g. Earth Day, poplar trees). Several CSOs have established youth networks. These smaller networks also need to enhance opportunities for more strategic cooperation with one another in addition to pursuing their particular objectives.

Many of the bigger CSOs are involved in international cooperation with CSO networks engaged in environmental protection and sustainable development, such as the European Environmental Bureau, the European ECO Forum, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), Women in Europe for a Common Future, Eco-Accord, Earth Friends Galati, or CSOs from the border areas of neighbouring countries (Romania and Ukraine) or other EU countries (Czech Republic, Poland, the Netherlands). CSOs also participate in, and enhance cooperation regarding, European and global international agreements and environmental policy processes in order to support their national implementation (including EU integration).

The interviewed CSOs recognised the benefits of networks, which include the opportunity to find new partners, obtain new information and learn about or achieve new results. However, they currently see greater benefits in participating in international networks and cooperation.

Only a few CSOs cooperate with CSOs from the non-environmental sector with the aim of improving the CSO sector's situation, including its legal framework and taxation issues. Eco-TIRAS, for example, has worked with the European Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ECNL) on these issues. It participated in the development of a recently adopted strategy for civil society and has cooperated with the Parliament, lobbying for positive changes to conditions for CSOs. It is important for more environmental CSOs to join such collaborative efforts in order to achieve greater benefits for the environmental CSO sector, too.

CSOs need to strengthen and improve their capacities to work together more strategically and on a regular basis. Determined efforts towards long-term, stable planning for intra- and extra-organisational networking and cooperation, targeting not only dialogue with the central governmental authorities but also opportunities for mutual assistance and the sharing of expertise and experience among various civil society groups, will yield greater benefits. CSOs need to develop initiatives for expanding

cooperation among CSOs at national and other levels and for improving the capacities of organisations to work together, to build up a common environmental platform and to look for national and other financing opportunities/programmes.

Such opportunities could be provided by capacity building, viability support and grants to strengthen the national CSO network and to make it more stable, efficient, influential and effective. Networking should not be confined to the national level but should also reach out more to CSOs in different regions, enabling them to participate in the national network but also allowing them to have their own networks and/or consultations on regional or local-level problems and to bring these perspectives to the national level. In Transnistria, it would also be beneficial for CSOs to develop their own network in the future. Groups in Transnistria would probably need a longer time and more systematic and deeper capacity building to develop such expertise and capacities, and Moldovan CSOs with experience could assist in this process.

The various components of a future civil society support programme should contribute to strengthening the capacities of CSOs and to building up the viability of the network/s for efficient cooperation and influential lobbying on decision making on environmental and sustainable development issues, as well as for joint initiatives and mutual assistance. Environmental CSOs need to be more involved in tackling issues that affect the civil society sector in general in order to improve the sector's situation by, for example, the creation of more favourable legislation and a taxation system that includes tax preferences for CSOs.

Cooperation with the government

CSOs operating at regional and local level usually have relatively good relations with the relevant authorities. Several of them have cooperation agreements with municipalities or district councils, who help them to carry out their work with in-kind support (e.g. construction materials, transportation, some limited human resources etc.).

Cooperation with CSOs that are developing and submitting proposals often takes the form of municipalities or district councils providing letters of support or making a commitment to provide in-kind contributions. Where there is a lack of funds, such opportunities may also be beneficial to the local and district authorities in accomplishing their environmental agenda and may bring benefits to the communities. Cooperation is most effective where such projects are being or have been implemented and CSOs can become strategic partners for the local or district authority. However, there are not many CSOs that are active at the regional level and that are implementing projects. Many smaller CSOs act only at local level and may not be able to access project funds.

CSO expertise is often used during environmental decision-making processes by these authorities, as they lack the appropriate capacities in the environmental field. Sometimes CSO experts are invited onto the advisory council of the district council (the president of EMM Stefan Voda, for example, is the chair of the council). CSOs can also indicate

problems identified by the local community and can lobby the municipal and district authorities to solve them (e.g. monitoring well water, protecting local water resources and river banks, ensuring health protection, implementing waste management measures).

Good examples of cooperation have been reported by Ormax, which has cooperation agreements with the Dniester District Council and with the 17 mayoralities on the Cubolta River, and which implements projects for the protection of the river basin. The CSO EMM Stefan Voda was involved in developing and implementing the LEAP for the district level and is currently participating in the revision of the LEAP and its further implementation.

Moldovan CSOs cooperating with Transnistrian CSOs find it easier to work with the local authorities than with the central authorities, especially if a project or activity is directed at solving an environmental problem. The local or regional authorities are ready to cooperate and provide in-kind, technical support in such cases. The interviewed CSOs from Transnistria reported good relations but less-intensive cooperation with the regional and local authorities. CSOs invite officials to their meetings and activities, and the officials usually attend. However, CSO comments and proposals are not often accepted when it comes to decision making.

Cooperation with businesses

Cooperation with businesses is usually confined to similar in-kind support as received from the local government. CSOs working at regional or local level reported on cooperation mainly with local businesses, primarily farmers, who offer in-kind assistance during project activities (e.g. construction materials, transportation, cars, tractors).

Several CSOs working regionally or locally reported initiating and implementing projects or activities, even without funding, with local farmers or farmers' associations in order to educate them about organic agriculture, good agricultural practices and eco-tourism.

The interviewed Transnistrian CSOs usually have the same experience: they cooperate at local level with small agricultural businesses that provide small-scale financial support and in-kind assistance for CSO meetings or educational activities. Some negative experiences were also mentioned: these were joint project applications when the business partners wanted to have an immediate big profit and were not interested or willing to invest time or other resources into writing a good proposal and implementing activities taking a step-by-step approach.

Cooperation with bigger companies at national level was not mentioned by interviewees. There have apparently been no efforts so far regarding the promotion of social and environmental corporate responsibility among companies, or pollution prevention and reduction initiatives, including joint initiatives. Such opportunities should be explored and better utilised in the future. Cooperation is also needed with both businesses and the authorities on developing and implementing a publicly accessible reporting system and pollution inventories (pollution release and transfer registers [PRTR]). CSOs require

capacity building on how to work with businesses, and on the kind of strategies and activities that can be developed and implemented in this regard, especially in ecologically sustainable fields and the green economy at the national, regional and local levels.

Recommendations

Enabling CSOs to take action

- CSO capacities to promote and present their results, experiences and knowledge to the community, improve their visibility, increase their transparency and achieve broader acceptance by society, are crucial. Trainings are also required on fundraising, social entrepreneurship, project proposal writing (including budgets and logical frameworks), financial reporting and project management skills.
- Capacity building should include thematic training programmes, exchange programmes and study visits. Synergies should be ensured between different capacity-building programme elements, and CSOs participating in grant and viability programmes should be involved in the various types of trainings. A train-the-trainers approach should also be promoted.
- Capacity building and cooperation with CSOs in Transnistria should focus on environmental topics and the role of CSOs within them.
- Exchange programmes or study visits need to be sponsored not only between Transnistrian and Moldovan CSOs but also to allow learning from CSOs in EU countries as well as neighbouring countries such as Ukraine and Romania.
- The lack of English-language skills should be addressed. However, an institutional solution to the language barrier requires longer-term systematic assistance and cooperation from several key players.

CSO cooperation and networking

- CSOs should strengthen and improve their capacities to work together more strategically and on a regular basis. Networking and cooperation should be more stable and planned for the longer term. The framework for cooperation should be better elaborated, including functioning, strategy, goals, priorities, working methods and financing, and should encourage broad membership from across the CSO community.
- In addition to dialogue with the central governmental authorities, cooperation and networking should create opportunities for CSOs to assist one another and benefit from the sharing of expertise and experience. To this end, the capacities of

organisations to work together should be enhanced and they should look for financing opportunities/programmes that allow them to do so.

- Networking and cooperation among CSOs should not be confined to national level but should also reach out to more CSOs in different regions and enable them to participate in the national-level network. Environmental CSOs need to be more involved in cooperation with other CSOs in order to build better conditions for the civil society sector.
- CSOs in different regions should also have their own networks and consultations and bring their perspectives to national-level cooperation forums. Transnistrian CSOs should also develop their own cooperation network in the future. These groups may need a longer time and more systematic and deeper capacity building efforts to develop such expertise and capacity. Moldovan CSOs active in this area should assist in a joint effort.
- Support should be provided for CSO cooperation and networking initiatives in the form of capacity building, viability support and possibly grants to strengthen the national CSO network and to make it more stable, efficient, influential and effective.
- The different components of a future civil society support programme should contribute to strengthening CSOs' capacities and to building the viability of the network/s, allowing CSOs to cooperate more efficiently, to have greater influence when lobbying on decision making on environment and sustainable development issues, and also to take joint initiatives and assist and support one another.

Cooperation with the government

- CSOs at regional and local level, especially in Transnistria, should improve their skills, capacities and knowledge on how to engage in activities where cooperation is possible or where joint initiatives could be taken with regional and local authorities.
- CSOs need to learn how to act and present themselves as reliable, capable and attractive partners for such cooperation and should also take initiatives. On the other hand, regional and local authorities need to realise the potential in working together with and receiving support from CSOs.
- Opportunities should be explored in fields where concrete improvements could be made to the environment or nature protection in the region or municipality from which the community can also benefit. Involvement in the development and implementation of LEAPs could also be pursued.

Cooperation with businesses

- CSOs at all levels should learn about and mainstream the concept of environmental corporate responsibility in the business sector and should benefit more from opportunities for cooperation with businesses.
- Legislation and tax preferences should be developed in order to provide incentives through tax exemptions to businesses that support CSO activities.
- Opportunities for social and environmental corporate responsibility and for pollution prevention and reduction initiatives should be explored and efforts enhanced. Cooperation could also be established between the authorities, CSOs and businesses.
- CSOs need to learn how to work with businesses and what strategies and activities can be developed and implemented in this regard, especially in ecologically sustainable fields and the green economy at the national, regional and local levels.

Module IV — Public accountability and impact on society

Main findings

CSO values/Transparency/Impact on society

- CSOs in Moldova are mainly mission driven but also have to follow donor priorities, as they are unable to find other resources. At the same time, many CSOs are working with very limited funds, and often without funding, relying on volunteers to carry out their activities.
- Although many CSOs consider it important to be open, it is difficult for CSOs at all levels to report regularly to the broader public or the community about their activities, and to be open about their plans and financial performance.

Implementation of the Aarhus Convention

- Only moderate progress has been made regarding the implementation of the Aarhus Convention. CSOs experience difficulties regarding the provision of information upon request and the active dissemination of environmental information, especially from non-environmental authorities.
- The biggest barriers exist in relation to the access to justice pillar and include a lack of awareness and knowledge about the rights and opportunities for access to justice, a passive attitude and a lack of motivation on the part of CSOs and the public, and the high level of the court or lawyers' fees. Another obstacle may be that, due a recent change in the law, CSOs need a specifically licensed lawyer in order to initiate a court case.
- More CSOs are now taking advantage of their rights regarding public participation, but despite some successful examples they often complain that their comments are not taken into account and that no feedback is provided as to why.

CSO values

Most CSOs described themselves as mission driven and their main goals as being to protect the environment, achieve improvements in the quality of the environment, promote environmental sustainability, educate the broader public, raise awareness and change people's attitudes.

Several CSOs promote environmental rights, citizens' rights, human rights and democracy, aiming to improve the environmental legal framework and build a better dialogue between CSOs and the authorities.

In terms of funding, mainly the bigger CSOs admitted that, since CSOs are in need of funding, in 50 percent of the cases they have to follow the donors' priorities. However, in Moldova, especially at regional and local level, and in Transnistria, many CSOs work with very limited funds, or often without funding, relying on volunteers to carry out their activities.

No major gender balance problems were detected. More women than men tend to work in the environmental CSO sector. Only a few CSOs mentioned the leading positions in the organisations being occupied by men, and the composition of boards is usually gender balanced.

Transparency and public accountability

There are several national-level groups that promote the transparency of environmental decision making. Most CSOs see themselves as being very transparent in their activities towards the public and the community. No cases of corruption have been reported related to CSO activities. At present, CSOs are required by law to submit an annual report to the Ministry of Justice about their projects and activities and to publish their financial balance sheet. However, not many CSOs fulfil this requirement.

Although many CSOs consider openness to be important, it is difficult for CSOs at all levels to report regularly to the broader public or the community about their activities and to be open about their plans and financial performance.

There is room for improvement regarding transparency about CSO activities, and more information should be provided about planned activities, including regular narrative, financial, evaluation and audit reports in hard-copy or electronic format, for publication on the CSO's website along with information on on-going projects, finances and sources of financing.

While CSOs claim to promote transparency in governmental decision making and accountability, they should respect the principles of democratic decision making in their own organisations and promote internal and external transparency in relation to their own activities.

Impact on society and public trust

CSOs can have a significant impact on society by influencing the elaboration of national and local policies or law drafting, or by promoting particular policies. Many CSOs, and

especially smaller CSOs working at local level, empower the community and the public through education and public awareness raising, and by providing information, advice and assistance, developing local development strategies, building the capacity of stakeholders and enabling action. CSOs can provide alternative education through summer schools, camps, activities for the young, lectures and resource centres, and can offer a variety of environmental, technical and legal services. Some CSOs can involve lawyers and specialists when needed, although at the moment no specific environmental legal advisory service exists.

A small number of CSOs are involved in watchdogging and monitoring the performance of governmental authorities, although not usually in a systematic way.

Although CSO activities in the environmental field contribute to positive social changes, this impact is indirect rather than deliberate. The activities of environmental CSOs are also easier to carry out in Transnistria than activities in politically sensitive fields such as human rights.

CSOs are seen by the Ministry of Environment as having an added value for society, representing the general public even if weak. They contribute to developing and promoting transparency and legal norms, public access to information and the transparency of decision making. At the same time, it was recognised by several CSOs that over the years the CSO sector has lost some of its influence and that CSOs and communities must be strengthened and enabled to influence policy making and society more efficiently.

Many CSOs consider it important to be open, to listen to the comments and proposals of the community, to respond to them and to gain support from them for CSO activities. They want to help to solve local problems and address local concerns. Some regional and local groups hold public presentations in villages and communities on planned project activities or the development of new projects, for example. However, there are relatively few groups that operate like this at regional or local level and that are closely rooted in the community.

Many CSOs do not have sufficient direct contact with the community and the public when designing and implementing their activities. It is even more difficult for national-level groups to demonstrate such direct links with community needs and to show that they are “responsive” and able to voice society’s concerns effectively. CSOs need to improve their connectivity with the community and society and better understand their role.

Although the public usually has more trust in CSOs than in the government, the majority of the population does not know much about CSOs. The impact of CSO projects at national level is not well known and information about CSO achievements and results is not well disseminated, thus people are generally unaware of what CSOs are doing. CSOs are usually regarded as more credible at the local level where their work is known.

Only a few CSOs reported performing the role of catalyst to facilitate community cooperation on environmental issues. EMM Stefan Voda, for example, has cooperated

with community centres and the unemployment office to involve unemployed people as volunteers in CSO activities, and has offered trainings on organic agriculture and organic honey production to enable these people to make a living by launching an environmentally friendly small business. Similar efforts and local community building can be very fruitful for both community and individual development and should be further explored.

Very few CSOs share a common platform and work together with other actors in the community on joint activities and campaigns for environmental causes. Very few participate in the activities of other CSOs, including non-environmental CSOs, church groups, women's groups, youth groups and trade unions. A few church groups are interested in working on environmental issues, but there is no significant cooperation between environmental CSOs and these groups. Nor are there are close links with trade unions or labour organisations regarding chemical- and health-related issues, or with consumer protection groups. Such alliances and coalitions could bring new opportunities and create a broader social and environmental impact at national as well as regional and local level, and they should be enhanced.

Improvements are needed in public outreach and in the presentation of CSO activities and achievements at various levels in order to promote a more positive image of CSOs. The capacities and abilities of CSOs need to be improved in order to enable them to play their role in the community in a more conscious and strategic way, so as to achieve longer-term, lasting impacts.

Implementation of the Aarhus Convention

The Ministry of Environment is more open than the other authorities to cooperation with CSOs and to the implementation of the Aarhus Convention. The legal framework is almost complete: a few laws are currently being drafted or revised to meet the requirements of the convention and EU legislation. However, there has been no major progress or concrete results in the practical implementation of the convention's three pillars.

A general Access to Information Law exists, and CSOs have also proposed the development of a specific law on environmental information. The authorities, especially in non-environmental sectors, are not aware of and do not fulfil their obligations regarding the provision of information upon request, the active dissemination of environmental information, or charges for information. There were reports from Transnistria of cases when information requests were refused due to confidentiality claims.

The current Law on Environmental Expertise does not include obligatory public participation, although the new EIA Law will take into account the Aarhus Convention and EU requirements. It will provide opportunities for CSOs and citizens to participate in decision making, and the authorities will be obliged to consider the results of this public participation. More CSOs participate at national and regional level in public hearings, but

they report that their comments are not taken into account and that no feedback is provided to explain the reasons for this. Despite some successful examples of CSOs having an opportunity to influence decision making on the development of a policy, law or plan, it is still a typical problem that CSOs are unable to be involved in the early stages of decision making, at both local and national levels, when options are still open.

The biggest barriers regarding the third pillar are defined as a lack of awareness and knowledge about access to justice rights and opportunities, a passive attitude and lack of motivation on the part of CSOs and the public, as well as the high level of court or lawyers' fees. Due to a recent change in the Civil Code, CSOs or members of the public need a specifically licensed lawyer in order to initiate a court case. At the moment there are only three environmental lawyers in the country who are able to help CSOs.

In recent years, two successful court cases as well as a communication to the Aarhus Compliance Committee were initiated by CSOs, demonstrating that CSOs are using the Aarhus Convention to achieve practical improvements in various fields.

Capacity building and grants opportunities are needed for CSO projects on how the Aarhus Convention can be used in different concrete fields (not only EIA and SEA but also climate change, water management, waste management, nature conservation, energy issues, and water and health, for example). CSOs that have recently started to exercise their rights under the Aarhus Convention, and that have become involved in its practical implementation and in public participation in decision making, should be targeted in particular. Aarhus Convention trainings are still needed for officials, mainly at the local level and in the non-environmental sector, but also for judges in order to achieve a change in their attitudes and to familiarise them with the convention's requirements.

Recommendations

CSO values/Transparency/Impact on society

- Transparency should be improved in relation to CSO activities, and more information should be provided about planned activities, including the publication, in electronic or hard-copy format, of regular narrative, financial, evaluation and audit reports. CSO websites should also publish information about on-going projects, finances and sources of financing.
- Watchdogging and performance monitoring of governmental authorities should be developed in a systematic way.
- CSOs need to work together with other actors in the community and mobilise joint activities, alliances and coalitions. These new opportunities should be enhanced to achieve a broader social and environmental impact at national as well as

regional and local level.

- CSOs should improve their capacities and abilities to enable them to play their role in the community in a more conscious and strategic way and achieve longer-term and lasting impacts.

Implementation of the Aarhus Convention

- The practical implementation of all three pillars of the convention needs to be improved, and in particular the barriers to access to justice need to be overcome.
- CSOs need to be more active in assessing needs and in proposing concrete measures for improvement to the Ministry of Environment.
- A mechanism should be developed to provide legal assistance to CSOs and citizens.
- Capacity building and grants opportunities should be provided for CSO projects on how the convention can be used in different concrete fields (not only EIA and SEA but also climate change, water management, waste management, nature conservation, energy issues, water and health).
- Capacity building of authorities and judges is needed in order to enable them to implement the requirements of the convention in practice.