

## **Evaluation summary**

### **Initiative for youth-led civic dialogue and action project, South Caucasus – Internal evaluation**

January 2019

## **Evaluation theme**

Conflict sensitive development and humanitarian programming

## **Introduction**

This summary outlines the findings of the final evaluation of the Initiative for youth-led civic dialogue and action project. The project took place in the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict context and in selected third countries between September 2015 and December 2018 and the final evaluation was published in January 2019. It supported youth participation in civic initiatives and critical thinking on various socio-political problems, including the conflict, in respective contexts to encourage youth to influence social change and promote a culture of peace.

The intervention produced a clear increase in interest in civic activism on both sides of the Ingur/i river, as well as interest in conflict analysis and the ability to use it. Participants better understand the origins of various problems within their own societies as well as conflicts and regional disparities, and groups of young leaders are beginning to emerge in civil society. Cross-conflict interactions in the South Caucasus regional context had a mostly positive, educational impact however participants need further opportunities to meet.

## **Background to the project**

The project was intended to promote civic initiatives in the Georgia-Abkhazia and Georgia-South Ossetia conflict contexts. However, due to developments in South Ossetia between project design and implementation it was impossible to operate there. Therefore, the project deepened focus on the Georgia/Abkhazia conflict context.

The overall goal of the project was “by November 2018, a new generation of potential leaders will have mobilised, actively participating in and influencing pro-peace social change through cross-divide dialogue with peers within the South Caucasus regional format, and civic initiatives within their own societies.”

The specific objectives of the project were:

1. Participants have developed knowledge, skills (i.e. in critical thinking, debating/speaking, advocacy, etc.) and values that are important for civic leadership and activism in their respective community.

2. Participants have formed bonds and maintained relationships with peers from across the South Caucasus.
3. Participants have become actively engaged in local discussions, civic initiatives and policy dialogues at a local level and across the conflict divides.

There were 4 levels of activity designed to achieve these objectives: civic education courses, conflict-analysis workshops in both societies; regional meetings that brought young Georgians and Abkhaz together alongside their peers from Armenia, Azerbaijan and Nagorny Karabakh; small grants for civic initiatives in both locations.

## Methodology

This final evaluation is a follow-up to the mid-term evaluation carried out in May 2017. The mid-term evaluation concentrated on changes in the context and the ongoing applicability of the theory of change and provided a set of recommendations for the second half of the project. This evaluation contains a review of the theory of change, a focus on project results as set out in the logframe after its revision in December 2016, and charts learning occurred during the second half of the project. The evaluation used a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection to assess the success of the project against the indicators mapped in the project logframe.

## Summary of findings

- 259 young people attended civic education courses (88 men, 171 women); 112 attended conflict-analysis workshops (42 men, 70 women); 59 attended regional meetings (24 men, 35 women). Over 80% found these activities useful. There were calls for learning more practical and theoretical skills, but what these practical skills should be was not clearly articulated.
- Interest in civic activism was significantly higher among young women; however, speakers and lecturers on civic education courses were predominantly men. Male perceptions of civic activism as 'women's space' reduced slightly, but in terms of future participation in civic activism it was primarily young women who showed greater motivation, particularly in Abkhazia.
- A first step has been taken for cross-conflict interaction within the South Caucasus format between young people; while motivations for attending regional meetings differed according to location, the act of meeting the other side has had a mostly positive, educational impact. Some participants subsequently overcame reluctance to participate in other international events at which their cross-conflict peers were present.
- Language continues to be a sensitive issue, as Russian is becoming less of a lingua franca across the South Caucasus region, and English has not taken its place in all locations.
- Tentative re-engagement with youth from South Ossetia was successful, using art as a convening prism.
- The consortium functioned well and delivered results; however, all communication between the Tbilisi-based and Sukhum/i-based partners was channelled through International Alert.

## Lessons

- The final regional meeting in Cyprus, which convened both new participants and project alumni, showed clearly that the chance to meet again can result in positive discussions and joint analysis. It also made it clear that relationships develop better with prolonged contact over time. Participants felt that the expectation that relationships could form over the course of 5 days was artificial.
- Alert convened a one-off workshop for artists from all the contexts of the South Caucasus in Berlin. This event showed that art can act as a convening prism and hinted at its wider peacebuilding potential. It allowed Alert to engage with a broader set of stakeholders not normally involved in peacebuilding interventions. None of the content was explicitly conflict focused, yet had a peacebuilding outcome.
- Externally facilitated social media spaces have not worked well. Arguably, for cross-conflict interaction to take root, conversation and dialogue must be led by participants themselves using the communication applications and technology they prefer and with which they are comfortable.

## Recommendations

- Cross-conflict engagement through online mechanisms must be organic and initiated by participants themselves, otherwise participation is limited.
- Young participants from across the conflict divide who met require more face-to-face opportunities to normalise their ideas of 'the other' and allow relationships to take root. Participants stated they were ready to meet again; convening around common themes that affect youth across the South Caucasus context may boost participation.
- In inception, there needs to be clearer definition of terms (e.g. baseline, gender, leaders) that is shared across the consortium and by the donor; with ambiguity comes confusion later in a project.
- Monitoring systems, particularly indicators, must be finalised in participation with implementing partners. Indicators need to make sense to partners so that they can be followed, they also need to be frequently reviewed with partners to ensure adaptive programming. Additionally, this participatory planning and monitoring can help to ensure that gender is more effectively mainstreamed into reporting, particularly where the word 'gender' may have negative social connotations.
- Periodic reviews of the logframe by Alert and its partners are necessary to test assumptions and assess indicators to ensure they remain robust against changes in context and progress.
- Conflict-sensitivity is of the utmost importance in politically charged contexts such as these, and the principles of conflict-sensitive implementation should be mutually understood by all parties involved. Therefore, in future project design, it is worth including a budget for a participatory approach to conflict-sensitivity involving partners and donors, through workshops and working groups and so on.
- Participants interested in a future in civic activism said that they wanted analytical writing skills. This requires a restructuring in terms of mentorship and participants would need to ensure they have the time for written assignments. A simple solution

might be to make the addition of two (interlinked) lectures on project design and management, including reporting and financial management (with an assignment in between).