



CIVIL SOCIETY INDEX INITIATIVE

Case study

Impact of Environmental Organizations on Policy Change in Armenia



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IMPACT OF ENVIRONMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS ON POLICY CHANGE IN ARMENIA



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Impact of Environmental Organizations on Policy Change in Armenia

Introduction

Influencing policy is an important part of the development and rationale for many Civil Society Organizations' (CSO) actions. CSOs use a range of mechanisms to pursue their goals and place their issues on decision-makers' agendas. Information and expertise can be powerful and essential tools used to influence and shape agendas. CSOs lobby and campaign for and against specific policy options, often using a strong resource base to play a gate-keeping role in determining agendas and issues to be taken up. CSOs embark on sustained strategies of negotiation and cooperation to influence and inform policies. Using these and other mechanisms, CSOs systematically attempt to pinpoint development challenges, propose options and bring about changes in policy.

In the past few years, Armenian CSOs have marked certain achievements in impacting policies. They have been opening doors and making use of existing opportunities at both the national and municipal government levels through focused advocacy initiatives. As a result, the public perception of CSOs has been generally improving. Because of this public

trust, government entities now recognize that CSOs can be an asset to their policy agendas, and municipal government bodies have actively been soliciting CSO input on policy and program implementation. Finally, the executive branch is also taking CSOs more seriously in the implementation of public policy.¹

Within this setting, environmental organizations are one of the more trusted groups of Armenian CSOs. The 2009 CIVICUS CSI organizational survey² showed that 47.7% of the Armenian population has a high level of trust towards environmental organizations.³ This level of trust may be linked to another CSI finding, which found that one of the areas that Armenian civil society has been most active in attempting policy change is the environment. More specifically, 56% of the environmental organizations interviewed for the organizational survey have pushed for the adoption of environmental policies.⁴ Moreover, for the most part the environmental organizations come up in an alliance for combined action: in 2002 many environmental groups

- 1 United States Agency for International Development (2008): *The NGO Sustainability Index for Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia*, Yerevan: USAID, Bureau for Europe and Eurasia Office of Democracy, Governance and Social Transition. Retrieved September 10, 2009 from http://www.usaid.gov/locations/europe_eurasia/dem_gov/ngoindex
- 2 The purpose of the CSI organizational survey is to explore the data relating to the operations and governance of CSOs, among other items. Sample organizations are selected according to their regional coverage, diversity and a range of civil society organization types and characteristics.
- 3 The population's level of trust in environmental organizations is measured by CIVICUS on a 4-point scale, with 1 indicating a great deal of trust and 4 indicating none at all. The mean of the level of trust is computed, with 2 points or less taken as high level of trust.
- 4 Counterpart International/Armenia National Implementation Team (2010): *The CIVICUS Civil Society Index report for Armenia: Phase 2008-2010*. Data retrieved from the CIVICUS CSI organizational survey.

organized into a non-formal coalition which today consists of more than 35 environmental organizations and reacts to urgent ecological issues.⁵

This case study seeks to examine the effectiveness of this environmental coalition in influencing public policy and addressing the environmental challenges facing Armenia. The study hypothesizes that Armenia's environmental coalition is effective in its efforts to influence policy change. For the purposes of this study, effectiveness is measured through 1) the level of engagement of the Armenian ecological coalition in addressing/solving environmental challenges and 2) its ability to affect policy change. This is measured through in-depth interviews with the representatives of Armenian environmental organizations and the Armenian government to learn the perspectives of both sides on the impact the Armenian ecological organizations have. The study will use the recent major ecological campaigns identified by both government representatives and environmental organizations to uncover the topic of the study. The study will suggest how the effectiveness of environmental organizations can be further improved so that they can play a greater role in solving the ecological problems facing Armenia. It will also attempt to draw out how other civil society organizations can learn from the experience of ecological organizations and achieve wider success in their policy areas.

⁵ Danielyan, K., Sargsyan, L., Sargsyan, T. (2007): *Geo Yerevan: Assessment of the Local Environmental conditions 2004 – 2006*. Association for Sustainable Human Development/ UNEPCom, Yerevan: "Lusakn".

Literature review

Existing debates about the impact of environmental organizations in Armenia are grounded in their rapidly evolving history, which provides an important backdrop for their current activities. In the late 1980s, environmental protection was one of the most common and popular causes for public campaigns and outreach in Armenia. People held strikes, demonstrations, signed petitions, issued complaints and occupied buildings and roads to protest against the operation of hazardous industrial enterprises in the country.⁶ In fact, the environmental movement's claim against the operations of ecologically dangerous plants was so powerful that it resulted in shutting down the huge synthetic rubber chemical plant at Nairit, the Medzamor nuclear power plant and several other heavily polluting industrial facilities.⁷

These industries were the major revenue-producing components of the national economy. With their closure the Armenian economy collapsed. The situation worsened with the armed conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, the energy blockade imposed by Azerbaijan at the end of 1991 and later by Turkey, and

6 Aslanyan, S., Adibekian, A., Ajabyan, N., Coe, B.A. (2007): *Civil Society in Armenia: From a Theoretical Framework to a Reality*. Yerevan: CIVICUS World Alliance for Citizen Participation and Center for the Development of Civil Society.

7 Ter-Nikoghosyan, V., Karamian, N. (1996): *Development and Enforcement of the New Armenian Environmental Protection Legislation: Problems and Solutions*. Vol. 2, Pp. 971 - 982, Conf. # 4. Retrieved November 3, 2009 from <http://www.inece.org/4thvol2/ter-niko.pdf>

the 1992 war between Georgia and Abkhazia which closed the route to Russia through Georgia. With only one undeveloped link to the outside world via Iran, even fuel had to be imported by air.⁸ For three years until the winter of 1995, Armenians had been living with no (or one or two hours a day at best) electricity and no heating.

- ✓ Among other things, these three winters caused:
Extensive deforestation: to survive the cold winter, Armenians began cutting down the trees to use them as firewood. Illegal wood cutting increased sharply because the people needed fuel to cook, for warmth, and to function economically. The trees provided an excellent source of fuel: three percent of Armenia's forestland was cut down for cooking and heating (eleven percent of Armenia is forestland).⁹
- ✓ Release of water from Lake Sevan (the only fresh water reservoir for the whole region) for energy production needs: the blockade of natural gas supplies via Azerbaijan has meant that Armenia has had to rely largely on a network of hydroelectric power plants for 70% of its total electricity production.¹⁰ Speedy eutrophication (excessive richness of nutrients in a lake which causes a

8 Boudjikianian, Piloyan (2006): *Armenian Independence and Deforestation*. American University, Washington. Retrieved November 10, 2009 from <http://www1.american.edu/TED/ice/armenia-forest.htm#r1>

9 Ter-Nikoghosyan, V. (1998): *Armenian Bottleneck: Building Authorities and Public Groups Capacities for Environmental Enforcement*. Vol. 1, Pp. 85 - 96, Conf. #5. Retrieved November 3, 2009 from <http://www.inece.org/5thvol1/ter-nikoghosyan.pdf>

10 Der Manuelian, M. (1995): *Armenia: Economic Crisis and Meeting the Challenge of reform*. Armenian Center for National and International Studies, Yerevan. Retrieved November 9, 2009 from http://www.acnis.am/publications/1995/OP_9.pdf

dense growth of plant life and death of animal life from lack of oxygen) of the lake has become a real unmanageable environmental problem since then.¹¹

As can be seen, the attempt against environmental degradation turned into ecological disaster, causing high rates of deforestation and depletion of the precious hydropower resources of the already-dying Lake Sevan. After all, the potentially hazardous Metamor Nuclear Power plant was reopened due to the circumstances of the economy and energy crisis. Among other things, Armenian environmental organizations suffered a blow in public opinion. The environmental activists were blamed for a lack of foresight, and distrust toward environmentalism became a widespread attitude among the public and the leadership in Armenia.¹²

Since 1996, along with an energy supply increase and economic revival, a new environmental movement has emerged in Armenia. However, the new environmentalists were faced with low levels of environmental education, funding and, importantly, lack of public credibility. Despite these problems, they worked to advocate for public participation and involvement in decision-making and to collaborate

11 Ter-Nikoghosyan, V., Karamian, N. (1996): *Development and Enforcement of the New Armenian Environmental Protection Legislation: Problems and Solutions*. Vol. 2, Pp. 971 - 982, Conf. # 4. Retrieved November 3, 2009 from <http://www.inece.org/4thvol2/ter-niko.pdf>

12 Ter-Nikoghosyan, V., Karamian, N. (1996): *Development and Enforcement of the New Armenian Environmental Protection Legislation: Problems and Solutions*, Vol. 2, Pp. 971 - 982, Conf. # 4. Retrieved November 3, 2009 from <http://www.inece.org/4thvol2/ter-niko.pdf>

with the ministries. Their efforts, however, were hampered by two major obstacles, typical of all the civil society groups in Armenia. First, competition for scarce financial resources prevented Armenian environmental organizations from making use of coalitions and umbrella groups to jointly work towards common goals. Second, insufficient experience and capacity in managing their organizations and weak advocacy skills hindered the effective functioning of the environmental groups and organizations. As a result, Armenian environmental organizations had little influence on decision making processes when they first reappeared.¹³

The next stage in the history of Armenian environmental organizations began in 2002 when a coalition of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) for the Protection of Yerevan's Green Areas was established in a joint attempt to improve urban development policy. Since the number of environmental problems kept expanding, the coalition was transformed into the Civic Environmental Coalition (hereinafter referred to as environmental coalition). The coalition consists of more than 35 environmental organizations and reacts to urgent issues via the creation of relevant working groups.¹⁴

Today, Armenian environmental organizations

13 Ter-Nikoghosyan, V. (1998): *Armenian Bottleneck: Building Authorities and Public Groups Capacities for Environmental Enforcement*. Vol. 1, Pp. 85 - 96, Conf. #5. Retrieved November 3, 2009 from <http://www.inece.org/5thvol1/ter-nikoghosyan.pdf>

14 Danielyan, K., Sargsyan, L., Sargsyan, T. (2007): *Geo Yerevan: Assessment of the Local Environmental conditions 2004 – 2006*. Association for Sustainable Human Development/ UNEPCom, Yerevan: "Lusakn".

constantly speak out for the improvement of the environmental situation and are among the most active civic organizations in the country.¹⁵ They play a widely recognized and crucial role and have been able to sensitize and mobilize the public around environmental issues.¹⁶ It is the responsiveness and impact of this environmental coalition that the study will attempt to explore. Hypothesizing that Armenia's environmental coalition is effective in its efforts to influence policy change; the study will draw on the factors behind the identified successes and/or failures. Such an analysis will develop guidance and information on how to enhance environmentalists' capabilities to influence policy and how to transfer the generated practical and professional know-how to other civil society groups and initiatives in the country.

Methodology

Throughout the development of Armenian civil society sector within a dynamically expanding historical context, the Armenian environmental organizations evolved from loosely and separately operating institutions into a vibrant coalition for joint action. However, the operational impact of this coalition remains unexplored. In an attempt to fill in

15 Danielyan, K., Sargsyan, L., Sargsyan, T. (2007): *Geo Yerevan: Assessment of the Local Environmental conditions 2004 – 2006*. Association for Sustainable Human Development/ UNEPCom, Yerevan: "Lusakn".

16 Aslanyan, S., Adibekian, A., Ajabyan, N., Coe, B.A. (2007): *Civil Society in Armenia: From a Theoretical Framework to a Reality*. Yerevan: CIVICUS World Alliance for Citizen Participation and Center for the Development of Civil Society.

this data gap, the present case study seeks to address the effectiveness of Armenian environmental coalition on policy change.

The case study presents a qualitative analysis of interviews with representatives from the environmental coalition of Armenia and government representatives on their opinions on the impact that environmental organizations have in solving the ecological problems facing Armenia. The findings of the study are derived from semi-structured interviews with the representatives of eight randomly selected organizations from the environmental coalition (five leaders of the organizations and three program officers) and two randomly selected representatives from the Ministry of Nature Protection of the Republic of Armenia (a head of a division and a deputy head of a department at the ministry), as a decision-making body on environmental issues. The study approached these ten interviews and all of them expressed their willingness to participate in the survey. Confidentiality was promised and provided to the survey participants. The environmental campaigns identified through the respondents for the study serve as the basis of this analysis.

A preset questionnaire was used during the interviews (the questionnaire can be found in Annex1). However, space was provided for additional questions when topics required further discussion. Responses were recorded during the in person face-to-

face interviews and later transcribed. The interviews were held at the offices of the respondents, where no other people were around to influence the course of the interview in one way or another. The interviews were then analyzed for perspectives on two issues – 1) the level of engagement of Armenian environmental coalition in addressing/solving environmental challenges and 2) its ability to affect policy change.

Analysis and Findings

This section analyses the responsiveness and impact of the environmental coalition in three key environmental campaigns - the ‘S.O.S Shikahogh’, ‘S.O.S Teghut’, ‘S.O.S Sevan’ - as well as a number of other smaller-scale environmental campaigns which were highlighted by participants during interviews. This analysis explores the policy impact of the Armenian environmental coalition by highlighting those cases when the coalition resulted in a substantive change (i.e. a change in policy itself) as well as campaigns that failed or came to a deadlock despite the coalition’s high level of engagement. The information and details of the campaigns uncovered by this study came out of the interviews conducted. The study presents the reasons that, according to survey respondents, have accounted for successes and failures.

CSOs Affecting Policy Change

“S.O.S Shikahogh” was the first organized campaign in the history of the environmental coalition of Armenia to result in a substantive policy change proposed and advocated by the environmentalists.¹⁷ As an interviewed government representative put it, “through steadfast, vigorous campaigning and coordinated efforts, the coalition managed to influence public policy to the point of changing a governmental decision and convincing to accept their proposed alternative.”

In 2005, a plan to construct a freeway surfaced, which would have cut through the Shikahogh Nature Reserve - the second largest forest reserve in Armenia, home to an incredible diversity of flora and fauna including 1,100 species of plants, 70 of which are endangered species. “It’s a virgin forest untouched by the feet of man,” said one environmentalist. The inaccessible forest has been off limits to loggers even during the 1992-1996 energy crises and the subsequent unprecedented deforestation of the country. “The dangerous decision was already there, on the table. It required immediate and decisive action,” said another.

Reacting quickly, environmentalists formed a working group, which soon turned into the S.O.S Shikahogh coalition of more than 40 civil society and scientific organizations, both local and international. The coalition formulated a broad mobilization strategy

¹⁷ Information taken from qualitative interviews carried out as part of the case study. See Annex 1 for details of the full questionnaire.

targeting a wide range of potential stakeholders. They made an appeal to high-ranking Armenian officials with the demand that the illegal construction be stopped. Protests, public hearings, expert analyses and dissemination of information through letters and leaflets were used to raise awareness and mobilize the grassroots. An action alert was issued asking Diaspora Armenians and international organizations to communicate their concerns to the president of the country. A group of journalists was brought on a media tour of the reserve to provide on the ground information. And a subsequent press conference further warned the public about the dangers of the planned project. Finally, a documentary made by a number of CSOs revealed the potential risks to the forests and played a key role in informing government opinion as to possible alternatives. “The intense campaign set a precedent of joint efforts and a united victory. The governmental policy that was on its way to becoming a reality was suspended, irreparable damage was avoided and a bypass route was implemented in response to the public concern raised by environmental groups,” commented a government representative interviewee.

A number of factors were determinant to the success of the campaign. First, a network of CSOs was fighting for a common cause, rather than a single organization pursuing a solitary goal. “Lack of joint efforts has often been the cause behind the failures of Armenian CSOs. This time we united,” said an interviewee from

an environmental organization. Operating in a network allowed CSOs to mobilize large constituencies for the cause. While lacking a formal structure, it was a well coordinated campaign. “Working in a network also allowed us to create a division of labor. It would have been very difficult for one CSO to cover all the issues involved in the campaign,” explained an environmentalist. Second, the coalition actively cooperated with the local administration and residents of the region, linking local groups to the success of the campaign. As a government representative explained during interview, “the campaign got off to a good start: the environmentalists were able to first reconcile the wider societal interests with those of the local population.” “The locals were with us to the end. Mobilizing local support was the key to our success,” agreed an interviewee from an environmental organization. “What was even more important was that we didn’t merely call for suspension of the project. We found the route to suspension - an alternative route,” another CSO representative commented. What the environmental organizations suggested was another highway which would, although seven kilometers longer, bypass the nature reserve rather than cutting it through. The rational alternative solution proposed was another driver for the campaign’s victory.

Apart from the intrinsic value of the campaign’s success, it was also important because of the capacity it built – now that the environmental organizations

Box 1.1: “Barren City”

On October 29, 2005, a group of people gathered for a concert and march devoted to Yerevan’s cultural and ecological problems. It was staged to protest the expansion of a cafe adjacent to the Chamber Music Hall. A documentary film titled *Barren City* was shown. The film told about the gradual conversion of the city into a desert. Afterwards, an open letter was sent to government officials, demanding that they find an immediate solution to the problem. The response was quick.

“Although we never would have believed it would happen, they began tearing down portions of the cafe being constructed. They were tearing up the pavement they had just put down and the crane nearby the starting point of the rally was there to REMOVE the skeleton of the roof they had just built the week before,” comments a CSO representative.

Result: The cafe was not built.

had mastered the necessary skills and winning strategies, they could spend less time on planning and more on actions when reacting to future ecological issues. In addition, this campaign inspired new initiatives. It provided momentum for many other ecological campaigns that led to policy changes (see Boxes 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4 for examples). Still, not all the campaigns led by the environmental coalition of Armenia achieved their intended goals or resulted in substantive policy changes. The following section will attempt to use two large-scale environmental campaigns led by the coalition to describe both the level of engagement of Armenian CSOs in ecological causes and the obstacles that prevented them from reaching the ultimate objectives of the campaigners.

CSO Level of Engagement in Solving Environmental Challenges

The study shows that the Armenian environmental coalition is persistent and unrelenting in its efforts, even if the initiated campaigns do not end with policy change. As a government representative commented during interview, “many environmental organizations cooperate with us effectively; others contest [issues] hotly. Yet, whatever their behavior, they are active and unremitting. This makes them winners at the end of the day.”

One such struggle is the S.O.S. Sevan environmental campaign, targeted at the plans of a gold-extracting company to build a gold processing plant only about 10 kilometers away from Lake Sevan.¹⁸ “One should not forget that Lake Sevan is a catch basin for the whole Caucasus. The strategic stock of water provides the whole region with fresh water. In addition, rivers and underground sources are formed there. We cannot risk putting the lake in danger,” explained an environmentalist. Poisoned fresh water stocks and irrigation system, areas unsuitable for agricultural use, as well as devastated recreation areas and fishing zones are listed among the threats that the planned plant entails.

In June 2008 the campaign S.O.S. Sevan was started and the alert was again disseminated through various channels: protests and public hearings were organized,

¹⁸ Information taken from qualitative interviews carried out as part of the case study. See Annex 1 for details of the full questionnaire.

Box 1.2: “Endangered Species for Hunt”

In 2008 a discovery put environmentalists on alert: the website of an Armenian company was inviting tourists to come to Armenia to hunt birds in the Armash water-logged territories. About 140 bird species are registered in the Armash reservoir, of which 29 are listed in Armenia’s Red Book and 28 more will be soon. Not only were the endangered species put in greater danger, but the hunting season promoted on the website made them even more vulnerable – it called for bird hunting in spring, their breeding season.

The environmentalists began by raising the public’s awareness. One CSO created a photo gallery featuring birds killed in Armash. The gallery served as a powerful visualization of the atrocities occurring there. Next a statement was disseminated about the company and signatures were collected in protest of it.

Result: The website was closed and hunting during the spring (breeding season) was outlawed.

a documentary titled “A Gold Mine for Lake Sevan” was produced and the campaign appealed to the country’s high-ranking officials to stop construction. The campaign also targeted international organizations. The S.O.S. Sevan network gradually expanded: the first to respond to the S.O.S signal was the “Women in Europe for a Common Future Network” (WECF), which includes more than 100 NGOs from 30 countries. WECF then spread the S.O.S Sevan call internationally, to which more than 20

NGOs from the USA, the UK, Mexico, Venezuela, Kyrgyzstan, Bulgaria, Uganda responded. Finally, the campaign was supported by the IPEN Network, which includes about 400 NGOs from all over the world. In addition, the “gold appetite” of the mining company was discussed at the International Conference on

Chemicals Management held in Geneva, where conference participants expressed willingness to support the fight against the plant's construction in Sotk.

There have already been some successes. As a CSO representative put it, "as a first stage we have managed to bring a rather closed process to the public's attention and scrutiny. We revealed who the players of the project are and secured a powerful support base for the campaign. Moreover, as a result of the warnings raised by the environmental group and other concerned social activists, a number of Armenian ministers have come out in opposition to the plans to build a gold reprocessing plant on the shores of Lake Sevan." The head of the Commission on Sevan also stated that no factory in Sevan would be constructed. The representative of the Ministry of Nature Protection attributed great importance to the efforts of environmentalists, "were it not for the opposition so sharply expressed by them, the plan probably would not have been frozen, which is what happened."

Despite these successes, the environmental organizations do not feel secure since the project has not yet been banned officially. Therefore, the S.O.S Sevan campaign is ongoing, with environmentalists preparing for further action. They are planning to conduct public monitoring of the mining company's implementation of its ecological obligations, research

international experiences of such companies and continue informing the public about the danger connected with construction of the plant near the Sevan basin.

S.O.S. Teghout campaign is another environmental campaign, which although intense, failed to succeed.¹⁹ The campaign is against exploitation of the Teghout copper-molybdenum deposit. As is often the case, the project has raised a trade-off between economic gain and environmental damage. On the one hand, the development of the deposit promises economic revival in the region through new employment opportunities. On the other hand, many ecological organizations are concerned that it will ravage over six hundred hectares of forested lands, along with the many rare species living in the area.

During this campaign, the environmental coalition expanded to about 60 ecological organizations, and got to work. Letters to officials, alerts to thousands of local and international organizations, bike rides and other actions protesting exploitation were organized by the activists. The efforts had a sensitizing impact, bringing about substantial changes in public attitudes towards the issue. According to a young campaigner, “our cause found wide resonance within the public. Now people know and realize that it is a dangerous project.” The representative of the Ministry of Nature Protection also attached great importance to the

¹⁹ Information taken from qualitative interviews carried out as part of the case study. See Annex 1 for details of the full questionnaire.

campaign, “now the mining company knows it has to keep its promises, because of potent public oversight and monitoring,” said the interviewee, recalling the reforestation promise made by the copper extracting company.

Nevertheless, the construction of a copper and molybdenum mine was officially announced. While preparatory activities for construction of the Teghout mine and processing plant are already underway, the environmentalists have not given up. Persistent in their struggle, they are again sending appeals to high-ranking government officials, to which thousands of citizens are signatory. They have also filed a case with the Administrative Court, aimed at banning the exploitation of the deposit. If the Court rules against them, they will apply to higher courts. In addition, they have initiated a boycott of the banks that are planning to fund the project. All these efforts point to a high level of engagement and commitment to the initiated causes. Yet the actual failure in preventing the exploitation of the deposit is an indication of certain structural weaknesses in the efforts of the campaigners.

Some of the interviewees link the defeat to divisions in public opinion. The project has provoked opposing reactions: on the one side there are the environmental organizations and ecological activists that are struggling to ban the project. Yet on the other side are the local people of the region, who have long been

Box 1.3: “A Handful of Soil to Your Pit”

A construction was begun in the surroundings of the Yerevan Opera House, a place where many green areas have already been destroyed to make room for cafes and restaurants. Authorities claimed to not know who was responsible for digging a large hole in the site. Time was passing and the hole was becoming larger. Environmentalists issued an alert. Soon, the “mysterious expansion” of the hole was suspended.

Yet it was still there, with officials claiming that they had “no soil to fill in the hole.” Environmentalists appealed to public: “Everyone, please bring some soil.” Around two hundred people came to symbolically drop dirt into the pit in an attempt to “bury” it under the slogan directed at the government “A handful of soil to your pit.” What followed was another quick response from the municipality who finally filled in the pit.

Result: The area was covered with grass.

waiting for employment opportunities and therefore see the opening of the mine as the start to a brighter future. The issue has polarized the environmental organizations, too. The local CSOs accuse activists of the S.O.S. Teghout campaign of being too extremist in their views and disseminate statements expressing their indignation in regard to the Teghout campaign

supporters. In turn, the Teghout campaign supporters in Yerevan blame local CSOs for being bribed by the owner of the Teghout deposit. “Environmental organizations have succeeded when they have been able to win over public opinion and make it the dominant instigator of action. This time, however, the interests of the local people were not reconciled with the common good – local people wanted to get work and so did not support the project. This is, perhaps, one of the reasons that the campaign did not reach all its goals,”

observed a government representative. Another interviewee considers that this campaign has not drawn the necessary attention and support of the Armenian Diaspora, thus undermining the potential success of the coalition's advocacy efforts and eventual victory. "We did not succeed in attracting more Diaspora Armenians," the campaigner commented during the interview. Another drawback stems from the low level of organization of many environmental organizations, which shapes their weak potential to secure victories. "There are too many violations of the law and we often lack the necessary [financial] resources," confessed a representative from the coalition. Furthermore, more often than not the environmentalists' efforts are directed to reforming harmful policies, rather than initiating new policies and preventing the potentially harmful ones. "I would say the environmental organizations in Armenia do

Box 1.4: CSOs Ready to Protect Jrvezh Till the End

The RA Government decision to remove a unique part of Crimean pine trees in the Jrvezh forest from government protection provoked outrage among the scientific and environmental community. The forest is a part of the Reserve-Park Complex, a specially protected territory of the Ministry of Nature Protection of Armenia. It is the only significant green space adjacent to Yerevan, which can be called the city's "lungs".

CSOs sent a letter to government officials. At a meeting with government representatives held at the Armenian Prime Minister's request, CSOs took a firm position in regard to the issue of returning the land to the park. The government not only listened to the NGOs and journalists but it also accepted the NGOs' demands.

Result: Government of Armenia amended the decision adopted earlier.

have an impact on policy-making,” commented an environmentalist. “However our efforts would be much more constructive if we used our potential for cooperating with decision-makers, rather than to waste time struggling against adopted policies.”

Discussion and Implications of the Study

Over the past few years Armenian environmental organizations have accumulated sufficient skills and know-how for initiating campaigns against environmentally hazardous policies, increasing the public’s exposure and awareness of environmental issues and threats and leading public campaigns. In this quest, the environmental organizations have managed to overcome certain obstacles that paralyzed their effective operations before. Many environmental organizations have shifted from ‘staying separate’ to cohesive and joint work for common goals. Further, they have developed their advocacy skills that contributed to their effective functioning. More often does the strategy for a policy change of environmental organizations target all the relevant layers and instances of decision-making: they address the local and national level authorities; they use both formal and informal channels to present their findings; they mobilize the media, either to publicly shame particular companies for environmentally hazardous projects or to attract

public attention to a general problem; and develop their own data and solutions as a valuable additional source of information. Additionally, two external factors shape the ability of Armenian environmental coalition to influence environmental policy – the Armenian Diaspora as an important and influential player in domestic decision-making of the Republic of Armenia and involvement of an international network of environmental CSOs, mobilized by the Armenian environmental coalition around the issues deemed perilous. As this study shows, the synergy of all these factors serves as a catalyst of success of Armenian environmentalists' campaigns.

As a result, many of the campaigns led by the environmental coalition of Armenia have resulted in substantive policy changes. Some are high profile campaigns, significant for achieving unprecedented success and influencing the government to reverse its decision and accept a proposed public alternative. Others are smaller victories which, despite bringing about only one-off changes, are nevertheless valuable. Whether through a substantive impact on the policies themselves, or whether through sensitizing public attitudes towards the issues, the Armenian environmental coalition does influence policy. As a representative of the RA Ministry of Nature Protection put it, “they [environmental organizations] play a significant role. Most often they raise vital issues and make them resonate both with the public and the

authorities.” Even if the coalition efforts do not result in large scale policy changes or any change at all, the environmental organizations in Armenia actively and uncompromisingly struggle for their cause. They remain persistent critics of and relentless campaigners against what they perceive to be dangerous ecological policies.

This study found that Armenian environmental organizations were less effective when: 1. Local interests were not reconciled with wider societal interest and local support was not mobilized to back up the campaign; 2. Realistic solutions were not thought of and suggested by campaigners as valid and optimum alternates to the contested decisions; 3. Diaspora Armenians were not extensively engaged and attracted, to render the campaigns truly pan-Armenian. Furthermore, attempts at redressing ecologically hazardous one-off initiatives, rather than proactive approach in influencing long-term environmental policies currently hinders the overall effectiveness of the Armenian environmental organizations. This study puts forward the following recommendations:

- ✓ CSOs should remain engaged on environmental trends and developments. They should continue to monitor, alert and respond;
- ✓ CSOs should not only react to dangerous practices but also anticipate their initiation. Environmental organizations should engage in all stages of the policy process, rather than only redress errors;

- ✓ CSOs should come up with alternative solutions to environmentally hazardous projects that are beneficial both for the economy and the environment;
- ✓ CSOs should focus on the political context and external influences that impact the issue and the players involved. In this respect, they should involve Diaspora Armenians in their campaigns early on and in a planned fashion, taking into consideration the influence and pressure they can exert;
- ✓ CSOs should realize that mobilized local support is the key to their success. They should therefore first link the local interest to the larger public benefit, look for allies within the population and then advocate for the common cause;
- ✓ Broad networks of civil society groups have a greater effect than individual undertakings. This has proved true in the case of Armenian environmental coalitions. CSOs should capitalize on the partnerships that have already been built and expand cooperation.

Possibly the major lesson that all Armenian civil society organizations can draw from the experience of the environmental organizations is that the trust and support of the grassroots is crucial when engaging in policy influence. It is not surprising that the campaigns of environmentalists were most successful if and when they were backed up by firm sponsorship of the public.

Further, the Armenian Diaspora has always proven to be a strong figure in the social and political life of Armenia. This is a powerful player that should not be left out. Public communication and mobilization campaigns should therefore be used widely to guarantee the strength and breadth of public pressure for the desired policy changes to policymakers. Presenting viable alternatives to the contested projects has proven to be another instrument which helps environmental campaigns to succeed. Finally, history has shown that when acting alone, the impact of Armenian CSOs is limited in scope and scale. The practice of Armenian environmental organizations to engage in policy influence through joint, rather than standalone initiatives, has to be duplicated if Armenian CSOs are to engage in policy processes more effectively.

Conclusion

The competition between many environmental organizations in Armenia, stemming from scarce resources, has resolved into cooperation and coalition-building. Today many of these organizations have joined the informal environmental coalition, creating potential for joint action and effort. This study supported the proposed hypothesis that Armenian environmental coalition is effective in its efforts to influence policy change. A high level of engagement

of the Armenian ecological coalition in addressing environmental challenges is a guarantor of their effectiveness. The environmental organizations have also amassed considerable resources and know-how with regards to campaigning for and achieving policy change. They have done this by developing their organizational capacity and human resources, by creating broad networks with local and international actors, by mobilizing broad constituencies for policy change. Using tools such as CSO lobbying, advocacy and campaigning, these organizations often influence public agendas when they raise critical ecological concerns. In doing so, these organizations have begun to leave their mark on environmental policy in Armenia.

As a general trend, Armenian environmental organizations actively respond to operative problems and ecological alerts. However, on closer inspection, it becomes clear that in most cases the efforts of the environmental organizations are triggered by dangerous policies that are already in place or crisis situations that are on their way to becoming a reality. Just as important, this study found that failure was more likely when Armenian environmental organizations did not ensure the necessary societal representation in the design and conduct of their campaigns; when alternative and realistic solutions were not thought of and proposed by the environmentalists and when external forces, including the Armenian Diaspora and

the international network of environmentalists, were not mobilized to back up and propagate the ecological movements. This study also found that proactive, rather than reactive, measures will render the whole process more strategic. Further, mobilized and powerful local support, alternative solutions in stock and involvement of all the relevant and influential stakeholders are critical for the campaigns of the environmentalists to effectively induce policy changes. By building on factors for success and learning from tactics that failed, the Armenian civil society as a whole can benefit and enhance its capabilities to impact policies.

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Semi-structured questionnaire for “Impact of Environmental Organizations on Policy Change in Armenia” case study:

- 1) How would you assess the capacity of environmental organizations in affecting policy?

- 2) What specific actions or campaigns of environmental organizations could you identify within the past 2-3 years?

- 3) Who are/were running those campaigns?

- 4) Are/were the environmental organizations acting alone or in an umbrella organisation and coalition?

- 5) Could you describe the process of the campaign itself: agenda-setting, policy development and policy-implementation?

- 6) What are/were the objectives of the environmental organizations in taking up the issue at hand? To what extent were they realised?

- 7) How were you mobilizing grassroots' support?

- 8) What is/was the outcome of each of the actions/campaigns? What do you think, why?

- 9) How would you assess the overall impact of the success or failure of the campaigns (impact on public policy, attitude change, etc.)?

Additional space for follow-up discussion
