

«Inclusive Developments for Equitable and Accountable Society (IDEAS)» Project

EXTERNAL EVALUATION

Final Report

Implemented by **Bridge of Hope** NGO

in a collaboration with **Mission East** Danish relief and development NGO

Funded by **CISU**

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Table of content

List of Acronyms	2
Executive Summary.....	3
About the Project	8
The Goal and Objectives of the Final Evaluation.....	9
The Methodology of the Final Evaluation	9
Project Relevance	11
Project Efficiency	15
Project Effectiveness	21
Civil Society engagement in the Project.....	26
Project Impact	29
Project Sustainability	32
Project challenges and Lessons learnt	34
Recommendations	37

List of Acronyms

ADS	Armenia Development Strategy
BoH	Bridge of Hope
CAAP	Community Advocacy Action Plan
CEOI	Centre for Equal Opportunities and Inclusion
CRPD	Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CWD	Child with disability
DA	Disability Advocates
DACD	Disability Advocacy Coalition of DPOs
DMCDD	Danish Mission Council Development Department
DPO	Disabled People Organization
HEI	Higher Educational Institutions
ME	Mission East
MOLSI	Ministry of Labor and Social Issues
PSG	Parents Support Group
PWD	People with disabilities
SDG	Strategic Development Goals
TOT	Training of trainers
UIES	Universal Inclusive Education System
YWD	Young people with disabilities

Executive Summary

Bridge of Hope is the local Armenian NGO that implemented «**Inclusive Developments for Equitable and Accountable Society**» Project (hereinafter the IDEAS Project) aimed at the inclusion of PwDs in civil society space in a collaboration with Mission East Danish relief and development NGO, with support of Civil Society in Development fund (CISU). The project is a part of a larger regional program: "Developing civil society for inclusive and resilient communities" that was implemented in Armenia, Nepal, Myanmar and Tajikistan that aimed to reinforce the voice and the role of civil society in advocating for human rights and a strong, inclusive and free civic space. Being a multi country intervention the project was intended to move the cooperation between ME and its local civil society partners to a new level of partnership leading to wider networks, partnerships for exchanging knowledge and best practices based on human rights and inclusive approaches to issues of various marginalized and discriminated target groups. The implementation period was from 2019 till the end of December 2021.

The scope of the evaluation covers the Armenian component exclusively. In Armenia the Project was implemented in the capital city, Yerevan and 6 marzes of Armenia (Shirak, Lori, Tavush, Gegharkunik, Armavir and Kotayk).

The ultimate goal of IDEAS Project was to strengthen the networks of DPOs/CSOs to lead the disability rights movement towards mainstreaming the disability issues into national priorities across sectors and improving the opportunities for boys and girls, men and women with disabilities to have equal access to inclusive education, social services and political participation in Armenia.

The purpose of the evaluation is to assess the quality and impact of the implemented Project among the direct beneficiaries and their communities and to provide recommendations for further programming, which includes understanding the compliance of the Project activities with the goals of the Project, Project Effectiveness, Project Efficiency, Project Impact, Project Sustainability, civil society engagement in the Project.

The Project is in line with “Bridge of Hope” (BoH) mission to assist social inclusion of children and young PwDs and their parents, and enhance full protection of their fundamental human rights and dignity in Armenian society. BoH was ME’s main partner in 9 disability rights focused large-scale projects, ME has played a significant role in strengthening the capacity and ability of BoH

to become a sustainable NGO. The Project targeted DPOs and CSOs, since they face different challenges which make it hard for them to access mainstream development funding and take part in general community development programs and Sustainable Development Goals realization. The Government of Armenia signed on to Agenda 2030 and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in September 2015. In late 2016 the process of developing national documents to target the SDG was launched.

The Project is **Relevant** since it is consistent with other initiatives in the country, it uses the organizational advantages of ME and BoH, their inclusiveness approach responds to the relevant needs of the rights-holders, the Project is aimed to strengthen the capacity building of DPOs and CSOs in Armenia to make the best use of national capacities available. The strengths and weaknesses of recipient DPOs and CSOs were carefully identified and addressed.

ME and BoH developed a number of reporting and monitoring tools to ensure the continuous collection of information on the outputs, periodically analyzing it and indicating the changes required. The thorough risk analysis was conducted prior to the Project implementation. Nevertheless, multiple unexpected risks occurred during the Project, which strongly affected the Project implementation: the post-revolutionary changes in the Armenian government in 2018-2019, the Covid-19 outbreak in 2020, the Artsakh War outbreak in 2020, Post-war crisis. Many of the Project activities were postponed first due to the Covid-19 outbreak, lockdown, emergency situations and restrictions, later because of the war and martial law in the country. Nevertheless, BoH adopted the remote work mode very quickly and succeeded not only to proceed the planned activities and produce the outputs, but also managed to cover more marzes, more DPOs and more direct beneficiaries than planned.

The Project was **Efficient**, all inputs were delivered. Skilled staff was adequately allocated and involved in different Project activities, trainings, work with DPOs and CSOs, work with beneficiaries etc. The experienced trainers were able to transfer their skills to the direct beneficiaries, high quality of trainings is reported by the participants. The Project was well managed and monitored by BoH and ME. Despite the difficult political and socio-economic situation in the country the Project managed to achieve reliable outputs for the policy dialogue.

The Project was Effective since the following main tangible outcomes of the Project were achieved:

1. 19 DPOs in 7 marzes and Yerevan (“We Can”, “The Voice of Silence”, “Teach me more”, “Skarp”, “Unison” and “Echo” in Yerevan; “Bridge of Hope” in Yerevan and its 4 centres in Tavush marz; “Agat”, “Right to dignified life”, “Pyunik” in Shirak marz; “Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities” in Lori marz; “Equal opportunities and inclusion” in Kotayk marz; “For equal opportunities” in Gegharkunik marz; “Huysi Metsamor” in Armavir marz and “Talin Huys” in Aragatsotn marz) were strengthened as self-advocates and lead advocacy towards equal rights to inclusive education, social services and community living on behalf of PwDs and their families.
2. Duty bearers from government and the parliament have increased knowledge and commitment to fulfill their obligations according to the conventions, laws and policies adopted towards the rights of people with disabilities to inclusive quality education.
3. CwDs right to quality inclusive education was safeguarded through participatory monitoring and ongoing rollout of UIES in Yerevan and 7 marzes of Tavush, Lori, Shirak, Armavir, Kotayk, Gegharkunik and Aragatsotn, where by the end of the project the UIES was already applied and there was a strong need to capacitate the PSGs and CSOs to become watchdogs of inclusive education in their areas.
4. Online Resource Library was created.
5. Bridge of Hope adopted ways of remote work, provided quality support to the target group in the context of COVID-19 and got technical support for computer labs in 4 centres of Tavush marz.

The activities for Outcome 4 were amended to the IDEAS Project because of COVID-19. BoH and ME partners were flexible enough to redesign the Project at this stage and address the needs of the target groups in times of the COVID-19 crisis and later the Artsakh war outbreak.

Civil society was fully engaged in the Project. The Project has been developed in a consultative and participatory way with direct contribution of beneficiaries, DPO members of DACD and other stakeholders. Overall, 19 DPOs of DAC, PwDs representing the activist groups from Yerevan and 7 marzes, active parents from the Parents’ National Network, 40 journalists, LSGs, International organizations, Mainstream Schools, Community pedagogic-psychological centers, Armenian Pedagogic University directly contributed to planning the specific parts of the project and

contributed to making the project objectives and plan needs-based, participatory and realistic in relation to timeframe, resources and local contextual constraints.

The Project **Impact** was observed in BoH, DPOs and CSOs, mainstream schools and community pedagogical-psychological centers, among journalists and other experts. The capacity building, empowerment, participation, mobilization and networking provided strengthening of DPOs and PwDs and enabled them to participate fully in consultations and monitoring processes of legislation, policies and the SDGs. IDEAS Project helped the state and especially MOESCS during the transition period from special education facilities to UIES. Teachers and supporting professionals from 250 mainstream schools and 7 community pedagogic-psychological centers got trainings on inclusive education. These trainings capacitated the professionals to evaluate CwDs, provide need assessments, find appropriate schools for them, support their transition, provide individual approach to every child throughout the transition process, support and capacitate the parents of CwDs and teachers. Parents of CwDs changed their attitude to the education of their children because of the continuous work with schools, teachers and parents provided by BoH. The “Kindness lessons” at mainstream schools contributed to the development of tolerance and establishment of the inclusive environment. IDEAS project provided a serious shift in attitude toward problems of PwDs. Teachers, parents, experts and other stakeholders report changes in their perceptions, their attitude towards disability issues transformed from medical model of disability¹ to the social model². CEOI has become the place and resource for strengthening the capacities and knowledge of community-based groups and organizations to become empowered, feel confident as advocates when voicing and advocating for the right to inclusive education, social services (support services, employment, housing, community living, etc.) as well as political participation of the right holders to make the policies, legislation and practices responsive to their needs and rights. Online Resource Library created as IDEAS Project output contributed to the capacity building of the professionals working with CwDs and the parents of CwDs to provide the

¹ The medical model of disability says that people are disabled by their impairments or differences, which should be ‘fixed’ or changed by medical and other treatments, even when the impairment or difference does not cause pain or illness. The medical model looks at what is ‘wrong’ with the person and not what the person needs. It creates low expectations and leads to people losing independence, choice and control in their own lives.

² The social model of disability says that disability is caused by the way society is organized, rather than by a person’s impairment or difference and looks at ways of removing barriers that restrict life choices for disabled people.

sustainability of Project impact. The monitoring tools for the assessment of the inclusivity at schools were developed, probed and reviewed to be used by experts and beneficiaries and monitor the situation at mainstream schools. 181 duty bearers from national, regional/marz and local authorities (MOLSI, MOESCS, National Assembly, LSG, marz administration) and 1220 duty bearers (local authorities, psycho-social service providers, educators – mainly teachers) from marz level institutions got knowledge and confirmed their commitment to fulfil their obligations according to the conventions, laws and policies adopted towards the rights of PwDs to inclusive quality education, community living and political participation was increased.

About the Project

“Bridge of Hope” Armenian NGO in collaboration with Mission East Danish relief and development NGO has implemented “Inclusive Developments for Equitable and Accountable Society (IDEAS)” Project (hereinafter IDEAS Project), which was funded by CISU Civil Society in Development Association of Danish CSOs. The Project duration was 3 years, it started in January 2019 and was finalized in December 2021. The Project was implemented in the capital city Yerevan and 7 marzes of Armenia (Shirak, Lori, Tavush, Gegharkunik, Armavir, Aragatsotn and Kotayk).

Mission East designs its programs on the human rights-based approach and on the localization of aid and development activities by working through local NGOs and grassroots civil society groups as a strategy to incorporate accountability, ownership and capacity building of local communities making them actors of their development. Mission East has worked for over 15 years with local Armenian NGOs advocating for the rights of PwDs and therefore have significant experience of civil society capacity building in the area of disability and inclusion. With support of Civil Society in Development fund (CISU) Mission East has been implementing a regional program that aims to reinforce the voice and the role of civil society in advocating for human rights and a strong, inclusive and free civic space, covering four countries: Armenia, Nepal, Myanmar, and Tajikistan from 2019 till the end of December 2021. IDEAS Project implemented in Armenia is part of this regional program, it is aimed at the inclusion of PwDs in civil society space.

The ultimate goal of IDEAS Project was to strengthen the networks of DPOs/CSOs to lead the disability right movement towards mainstreaming the disability issues into national priorities across sectors and improving the opportunities for boys and girls, men and women with disabilities to have equal access to inclusive education, social services and political participation in Armenia. The intervention approach of IDEAS Project was to have strong DPOs capable of influencing the disability inclusive policymaking and to hold the government officials accountable to PwDs. IDEAS Project contributed to the enhancement of DPOs and PwDs leadership through their capacity building, empowerment, participation, mobilization and networking. The project’s activities were directed to enable people with disabilities and their associations to become the watchdog of their own rights, to advocate and make sure that they can influence relevant policy- and decision-making processes, mainstream disability issues into national priorities and across

sectors; and engage meaningfully with partners and relevant stakeholders. This was done through trainings, seminars and mentoring of self-advocacy groups of PwDs and their DPOs. BOH disability experts, experts in human rights and inclusive education, delivered most of the trainings and coachings.

The Goal and Objectives of the Final Evaluation

The purpose of the evaluation is to assess the quality and impact of the implemented Project among the direct beneficiaries and their communities and to provide recommendations for further programming.

Evaluation objectives are:

- Understand the compliance of the Project activities with the goals of the Project
- Evaluate the Effectiveness of the Project
- Evaluate the Efficiency of the Project
- Evaluate the Project Impact
- Evaluate the Project Sustainability
- Assess the involvement of civil society in the Project.

The Methodology of the Final Evaluation

The following evaluation methods were used to address the Evaluation questions:

Content analyses of the Project related documents:

- Project proposal
- Status report
- Logical framework of the Project
- Mid-term evaluation reports
- Project concept papers, Theory of change
- Communication materials developed during the project
- Monthly workbooks 2019-2021

- Quarterly reports 2019-2021

20 Individual interviews:

- Interviews with 5 stakeholders were conducted to gather insights on the Project context, partnership and tangible changes that occurred during Project implementation
- Interviews with 4 project managers and implementing professionals, public relations manager, youth advocacy group members, as well as Mission East's staff provided detailed information on Project activities, progress and challenges, lessons learnt
- 11 direct beneficiaries of the Project, partners from NGOs working with people with disabilities were interviewed to gather and observe the beneficiaries' experience, success stories and changes in their attitude, activities and behavior caused by the Project

9 Focus group discussions:

- 6 focus group discussions with young people with disabilities provided evidence on their experience within the Project and changes caused by the Project. The information gathered during the focus group discussions helped to evaluate the effectiveness, impact and sustainability of the Project
- 3 focus groups with the representatives of newly established NGOs provided information on the institutional frameworks developed within the Project

The chosen methodology ensured the collection of information on the project's contribution to cross cutting policy drivers: inclusion and non-discrimination, gender equality, norms and social dialogue, medium and long-term effects of capacity development initiatives.

The methodology included examining the project Theory of Change in the light of the intervention strategy and approach, including identified risks and assumptions, the logical connection between levels of results and how the desired change contributes to global goals.

Project Relevance

Behind the rationale of the IDEAS project was to have strong DPOs capable to influence the disability inclusive policy-making and to hold the government officials accountable to PwDs.

The Project is in line with BoH mission to assist social inclusion of children and young PwDs and their parents, and enhance full protection of their fundamental human rights and dignity in Armenian society. The expansion of inclusive education in Armenia has been pushed forward by BoH advocacy efforts, mobilizing key civil society stakeholders to influence the Armenian policies and practices. BoH Projects resulted in the adoption of a legal framework ensuring the sustainable development of IE.

In 2014, based on pilot project of ME and BoH, the National Assembly adopted the revised law on mainstream education of Armenia which declares that by 2025 all mainstream schools in Armenia will become inclusive.

BoH was ME's main partner in 9 disability rights focused large-scale projects on inclusive education, vocational education and training needs assessment, community-based services, advocacy for disability rights and policy change. ME has played a significant role in strengthening the capacity and ability of BoH to become a sustainable NGO with effective management, financial system, material resources, technical expertise and strong human resources. ME has worked for over 15 years in Armenia with local NGOs and has built up a vast experience in the disability sector as well as the capacity building of civil society organizations. Within its past programming, ME Armenia has worked together with BoH and other local organizations to help establish a forum for civil society groups working on disability issues. The Disability Advocacy Coalition (DAC), which includes 23 disability NGOs from different marzes of Armenia works to ensure the rights of PWD through advocacy and promoting inclusive approaches. DAC is a partner of ME in all the disability projects implemented in the country. ME has worked with DAC to organize awareness campaigns, lobby for legislative reforms, provide trainings for PWD and their family members, and provide trainings for coalition members on project design and management, team building, monitoring and evaluation, fundraising, etc. ME continues to support BoH to carry out advocacy and lobby work and to participate in networks with like-minded organizations, to enter a dialogue with key authorities on the formulation of policies and practices which best meet the needs of children and youth with disabilities and their families.

BoH has reinforced the social model of disability in Armenia and mainstreaming disability in a number of policies and programs in the fields of education and social protection. Hence, BoH is perceived to have popular legitimacy to speak on behalf of PwDs and their families as these persons are actively involved in its programs, the choice of BoH as a local partner for the Project implementation is well justified.

The lessons learnt, best practices and experience of previous projects have strengthened the relevant expertise of BoH and contributed to the success of the IDEAS Project.

In April-May 2018, Armenia experienced dramatic changes in its political system and life. A new Government came to power through democratic and peaceful (non-violent) revolution and proclaimed the launch of wide-ranging fundamental reforms. The Revolution marked a major step in Armenia's history towards more democratic society. It created a favorable atmosphere that gives fresh impetus to reforms and drastic transformations.

Prior to Project processes the implementing Partners have accurately analyzed the context of Armenian society, namely Geographic, Socio-Economic, Political, Demographic contexts and the Statistics on PwDs were studied. PwDs are among the poorest of the poor, the rights of women and girls with disabilities are even more violated than those of men and boys with disabilities.

On 1 December 2014 the Parliament of RA adopted new changes to the Law on Mainstream Education proclaiming universal/total IE as a guarantee for exercising the right to education for every child. IE policy aims at ensuring accessibility of education, equal participation opportunity and quality guarantee for every child. It indicates that by 2022 the special schools have to be transitioned into region-based pedagogic-psychological support centres for inclusive mainstream schools, and by 2025 all mainstream schools in Armenia will become inclusive. This political decision has created the right momentum for Armenian CSOs to push forward the universal inclusive approach to the system of mainstream education and propose a UIES model that is tested and evaluated to be replicable in all marzes through CISU funded "Living Together, Learning Together" project in Tavush marz and Yerevan.

SDG implementation is considered to be an important instrument of internal reforms, which can be effectively tackled only through collective and concerted action by all – the Government, international partners, private businesses, civil society organizations, households and each and

every individual of the society. With this understanding, Armenia started a participatory process of SDG nationalization and implementation in 2015, by forming a Post-2015 Task Force in collaboration with stakeholders and international community. Armenia is in process of designing Armenia Development Strategy (ADS), an overarching strategy document that will benefit from the SDG framework, which provides a comprehensive set of targets and indicators necessary for effective planning and monitoring of development objectives. To facilitate and support the SDG implementation process, Armenia has already established a comprehensive National SDG Statistical Platform with the support from the UN Office in Armenia. BOH is actively involved in the process of nationalization of SDG #4. This good experience can serve as a basis for establishing National SDG Platform for planning and monitoring the progress of the implementation of sustainable development activities in the country. This project directly relates to national priorities for the SDGs.

IDEAS project is closely related to several priorities and plans in Armenia:

1. Policy of rolling out the UIES through Armenia. IDEAS project puts larger focus at raising the awareness and enhancing common understanding in promotion and support to UIES among both duty bearers and the right holders.
2. The project has taken into account the process of SDG nationalization and has planned to influence the process to ensure that the disability right is prioritized by the Government and disability has disaggregated objectives and indicators in planning and reporting (as with gender).
3. The whole concept of the project has taken into account the UN CRPD as key human rights instrument for disability right promotion in the country.

IDEAS project can be seen as an extension of the current and previous projects “Giving Disability a Voice: Empowering the Disability Rights Movement in Armenia”, focusing on the advocacy sector run by civil society organizations and designed to support the movement of disability organizations to lead advocacy efforts for disability rights in Armenia, aiming to strengthen the disability rights movement in Armenia in order to promote equal rights and equal opportunities for PwDs in independent living, employment, education and freedom to make their own choices. Former projects “Healthy Start”, “Towards Education For All” and ”Vocational Education for

Youth with Mild and Moderate Learning Difficulties” also led a solid background for Armenian disability right movement. In order to strengthen the disability movement and the advancement of disability rights in Armenia, the Danish structure for disability organizations and their national representation was used as a model and was successfully modified to the specific Armenian context with the technical support from the Danish disability organization DSI (now Danske Handicap organisationer DH) to the establishment of DAC. The National Disability Council (NDC), based on the Danish Disability Council, was established as a national platform of representatives from the Armenian Government and civil society organizations. One of the key lessons learnt was that for enhancement of a more efficient and stronger disability movement in Armenia there is a need for a greater number of strong and committed DPOs in all regions of the country in order to raise the social legitimacy of the movement, the level of advocacy work and the profile of DAC and its members both on regional and national levels.

SDG #1, SDG #4 and SDG #10 are supported by BoH mandate and certain activities are implemented to meet these goals. There are a number of areas of concern that require attention and action, including poverty, education and inclusion. Children with disabilities continue to be the largest group of out of school children despite the policy of towards universal inclusive education. Only 1/3 (80% in rural areas) of CwDs are enrolled in preschools in Armenia. In fact, children with disabilities do not appear in national statistics, becoming “invisible” to decision makers, service providers and the public.

Behavior change communication tool was developed for the advocacy actions. It targeted the public, influencers and decision-makers. The awareness raising should have resulted in the change of attitude and behavior, and further increase of media coverage, advocacy capacity among public and political actors. Increased public will or support should result in successful mobilization of public values, the stronger coalitions providing collaborative actions among partners and the new political champions ensuring political change.

The Project is relevant since it is consistent with other initiatives in the country, it uses the organizational advantages of ME and BoH, inclusiveness approach of ME and BoH responds to the relevant needs of the right-holders, the Project is aimed to strengthen capacity building of DPOs and CSOs in Armenia to make the best use of available national capacities. The strengths and weaknesses of recipient DPOs, CSOs and state organizations were carefully identified and

addressed. Lessons learnt from previous projects have been effectively incorporated. IDEAS project contributed to fill in the gaps existing within the disability movement in Armenia and became added value of what has been achieved during the previous projects of ME and BOH.

Project Efficiency

IDEAS Project monitoring was undertaken at several levels: Daily monitoring, Periodic ‘Field’ Monitoring, Half year monitoring review, mid-term review and external final evaluation of the Project. ME and BoH developed the Project Monitoring Workbook that ensured the continuous collection of the information on the outputs, periodically analyzed and indicated the changes required. The Workbook was based on the logframe indicators and included activity level indicators to chart the progress.

The contextual, programmatic and institutional risks were evaluated by BoH prior to the Project implementation. The appropriate mitigation actions were planned to address the risks.

The risk of lack of meaningful participation of PwDs and their families in project implementation for reasons related to transportation, environmental and cultural barriers was evaluated medium in Yerevan and high in marzes and especially rural communities with possible high impact on the Project result. BoH addressed specific needs related to access to the physical infrastructure, transportation and communication during its planning and implementation phases to mitigate this risk.

The risk of duplication or overlapping with other activities was evaluated as low with medium possible impact on the Project result. BoH consulted with multi-level stakeholders’ platform to ensure that possible interventions in the same targeted areas are added values and don’t duplicate each other.

The risk of poor cooperation with duty bearers and other CSOs was evaluated as low with medium possible impact on the Project result. To mitigate this risk BoH developed a wide and open communication platforms with all stakeholders at local and national levels to ensure that the project objectives and trends are clearly explained and spread.

The risk of lack of motivation and capacities of authorities to fully contribute to the project, and unwillingness to involve CSOs in decision-making processes at the community level was evaluated as medium on community level and as high at national level with medium possible impact on the Project result. To mitigate this risk during the Project planning and implementation BoH employees were intensively communicating project's approaches, trends, the expectations from authorities and their expectations from IDEAS Project.

Nevertheless, multiple unexpected risks occurred during the Project, which strongly affected the Project implementation. Among those are:

- Post-revolutionary changes in the Armenian government in 2018-2019,
- Civil society transformations,
- Covid-19 outbreak in 2020,
- Artsakh War outbreak in 2020,
- Post-war crisis.

In 2019 before Corona pandemic the following Project activities have started. An agreement was signed with web-development company "Future Systems" and the "Centre for Equal Opportunities and Inclusion" and the development of online resource library was completed. A number of trainings and meetings have been organized to build the capacities of disability experts. The participants were capacitated with the knowledge on corresponding methods and tools required for a successful project writing. Ongoing meetings and discussions have been carried out with PwDs and PSGs in order to provide regular resource and advocacy services to PwDs, PSGs and their DPOs. BoH experts team has been working with the newly formulated active group in Shirak marz. Shirak Active Group organized a walkatone in Gyumri with the message of having an "Accessible City" and had a meeting with the mayor of the city who stated that they are ready to give support to the group on their initiatives. CAAP was realized at universities and mainstream schools of Yerevan by a Yerevan-based DPO "We Can". Two meetings have been organized with parents of CwDs who have moved from special to mainstream schools. Meetings with several mainstream schools in Yerevan, Armenian State Pedagogical University, representatives of Armenian National SDG Innovation Lab and a UNDP Program Officer were organized etc. BoH experts and Yerevan

active group attended 20 mainstream schools in Yerevan with "Lessons of kindness", gave a training to Shirak Active Group on how to manage "Lessons of kindness" in Gyumri and a preliminary schedule for the activities to be held at mainstream schools of Gyumri was fixed. 250 children from Yerevan schools attended the "Lessons of kindness".

*““Kindness lessons” at mainstream schools contributed to the development of tolerance and establishment of the inclusive environment.”
(Yerevan Municipality, Representative of Education Department)*

SDG nationalization process was slowed down because of major changes in the political system of Armenia in 2018. The key actors dealing with the SDG implementation process in the country stated that the nationalization process will be resumed starting from January 2020. That is why the planned public debates and round table discussions for 2019 have been postponed and shifted to 2020.

The UIES rolling process in Yerevan actually started from September 2019, this affected the implementation schedule of some Project activities.

Some of the Project activities were postponed and/or reframed first due to the Covid-19 outbreak, lockdown, emergency situations and restrictions, later because of the war and martial law in the country. Pandemic required and preconditioned not only the changes of the mode, but also the content of the Project events and activities.

In relation to COVID -19 outbreak, the organization of many Project activities passed to an online regime. Thus, the number of the meetings and the participants increased. Staff capacity building trainings and consultations were switched to the online mode, working tools were adopted and shared with beneficiaries and other stakeholders. BoH Financial Manager was trained on online accounting program ArmSoft, which allows to carry out the overall financial accounting (salary calculation, supplier calculation) of the organization remotely and smoothly, which was very useful and timely regarding the Covid-19 restrictions, when all the cultural, sports, trading, entertainment, etc. institutions, all schools and HEIs were closed.

Due to COVID-19 outbreak, the TeDX campaign targeting Article 24 of the Convention, was cancelled and a new plan for awareness raising events against the COVID-19 was developed by BoH PR team. Photos encouraging to stay home and save lives were taken by BoH staff and children and spread in social media with appropriate hashtags (#IDEAS#StayHomeSaveLives,

#StaySafe, #SocialDistancing, #FlattenTheCurve, #TogetherAtHome). A number of videos were made by youth active groups from Yerevan and marzes to encourage people to stay home, stay safe and to protect oneself during the pandemic. Painting and poem competitions among CwDs on the topic “Against COVID-19” were announced. A great number of posters were developed by PR team in relation to COVID-19 pandemic. In order to organize awareness raising events a number of videos, electronic posters, manuals, brochures and videos was produced. Weekly posters were shared online with #BoHTalks and #BoHSuccessStory hashtags to raise the visibility of the donor and the events organized. Posters and videos were dedicated to the International Knowledge Day, International Deaf Day, International Day of Teachers, World Children's Day etc. Trainings and seminars on the topics "From words to stereotypes", "The voice of PwDs in 2020. COVID-19 restrictions", "The voice of PwDs in 2020. War", "Journalistic approach to disability", etc. have been organized to capacitate the young disability experts to act as change-makers and role models for their peers.

In order to ensure the continuity of education and psychological support for the CwDs of Tavush marz during the pandemic smartphones were bought and internet access was provided for most vulnerable families of CwDs in Tavush region, who were unable to get connected themselves or lacked appropriate devices. 24 CwDs got the smartphones and internet access presented.

Because of the Artsakh war outbreak number of events were transformed. BoH experts organized an event on the right of education of every child in war situations, an essay writing competition was announced among schoolchildren on the topic "Life for life".

Multiple societal crises created a number of unexpected challenges for the BoH and forced a number of different implementational and rescheduling changes. To proceed and succeed with the Project BoH has undertaken the following measures:

- In the situation of COVID-19 and war, the planning and organization of large-scale meetings and trainings was more difficult than ever. The planned events and activities have been cancelled or postponed. Those possible to move to online mode were switched to Zoom. The online platform gave the opportunity to unite the youth with and without disabilities from 7 marzes of Armenia.
- The organization of the activities concerning SDGs was impossible as the duty bearers were fully concentrated on the war situation and the martial law in the country.

- In relation to the COVID-19 restrictions and war situation in the country the training topics and meetings were readapted. Those inappropriate to the context were cancelled and replaced with other more appropriate and matching to the current need.
- The psychological support consultations were provided for those PwDs, DPOs and other stakeholders affected by the war in Artsakh.
- In regard to the COVID-19 spread, a mitigation plan has been developed by BoH and the organization has taken measures to work remotely.
- The BoH staff's capacity to work with online platforms and tools was developed.
- The lockdown was used to strengthen the BoH staff's capacities in fundraising strategies and methods, in online working programs, principles, tools and methods, development of mitigating plans in COVID-19, etc. They participated in a number of national and international webinars.
- DAC coalition of 23 organizations was not fully functioning before the Project launch due to several internal issues, mainly related to political stances and tendencies of several organizations. It became evident during the parliamentary elections in december 2018 that some CSOs became politicized since some of their members were elected in the Parliament. BoH and some other DPOs of DAC were not happy with it and tried to convince them not to become politicized because it will damage the reputation of DAC and also its members. This issue was discussed in DAC board at the end of 2017 and decision was made to freeze temporarily the operation of DAC. The DPOs targeted by IDEAS project, continue the partnership with BOH and with each other.
- BoH developed the statement and submitted it to the UN Committee on the Rights of PwDs to be represented by one member of BoH young advocacy group at the online event "From isolation, invisibility and segregation into inclusion of PwDs in the community. Identifying and overcoming barriers to the successful process of deinstitutionalization". The statement was devoted to the challenges that are experienced by PwDs and their families in COVID-19 when they were largely left behind Government's responses to the pandemic and related measures to control it, to the deinstitutionalization of CWDs and their resettlement in family settings.

Good relations with local actors and stakeholders and clear communications supported risk monitoring and adaptations. Project partners shared information on the evolution of risk via ongoing communications and recorded the information in the “Project Monitoring Workbook”. Risks were also discussed during monitoring visits and review meetings.

Nevertheless, BoH succeeded not only to proceed with the planned activities and produce the outputs, but also managed to cover more marzes, DPOs and direct beneficiaries than planned (*See Table 1 for further details*).

Table 1. Planned and achieved Outcome Indicators.

	Outcome Indicator	Planned number	Achieved number
Outcome 1	Multidisciplinary trainers/experts teams	25	32
	Training sessions (offline and online webinars)	66	84
	Consultations and outreach support provided to DPOs, PwDs and their families	165	246
	DPOs empowered and supported to develop and realize CAAPs in their communities	7	19
	CAAPs realized	7	9
Outcome 2	Trainings and round tables for representatives from MOES and MOLSI, Armenian Parliament and respective local governments and agencies	6	28
	Training and round table participants	120	1068
	Public debates and round table discussions on SDG # 1, SDG #4, and SDG #10	4	8
	DPO representatives invited to join the Public Committees affiliated to the ministers of education and social issues	7	10
Outcome 3	Stakeholders from targeted governmental and non-governmental and international institutions, human rights defenders’ office	120	181
	Journalists	40	53
	Online activities	80	93
	Staff members trained for improved psychological support skills and financial management	11	53
	CwDs and youth in Tavush region provided with digital communication devices to get access to distance learning and services	15	24

The budget was spent in accordance with the distribution planned in the proposed budget to cover the Project activity costs, local staff wages, local administration and monitoring costs, Danish project monitoring visits, reviews and evaluation, Project administration costs in Denmark. ME amended additional technical support for 4 BoH centers in Tavush marz by the end of the Project, which will ensure the sustainability of the Project Impact and the PwDs and DPOs in the region.

Despite all the difficulties and obstacles that occurred during the Project implementation it was efficient, all outputs were delivered. Skilled staff was adequately allocated and involved in different Project activities, trainings, work with DPOs and CSOs, legislation analyses etc. Experienced trainers were able to transfer their skills to direct beneficiaries, high quality of trainings is reported by the participants. Many activities were postponed and rescheduled, but BoH used the time efficiently to adapt to the changes and make use of the new challenges. The Project was well managed and monitored by BoH. Despite the difficult political and socio-economic situation in the country the Project managed to achieve reliable outputs for the policy dialogue.

Project Effectiveness

IDEAS project contributed to raise the profile of civil society partnership both at national and international level. Most of the Project efforts were focused on development of DPOs' skills and abilities for individual, group and public advocacy. This was done through trainings, seminars and mentoring of self-advocacy groups of PwDs and their DPOs. Most of the trainings and coachings were delivered by BoH disability experts, experts in human rights and inclusive education.

BoH was responsible for programme activities implementation, target group mobilization and engagement, networking with local authorities and communities, sharing programme information with other relevant stakeholders, monitoring and reporting of their activities, participation in overall programme steering and management, sharing learning and experience with other partners, identifying own capacity issues and driving own organizational development.

Mission East provided technical expertise via own staff and experts, overall programme coordination and budget management, consolidation of global programme monitoring data, facilitation of cross-programme sharing for exploitation of synergies and learning, consolidated reporting to donor, connection to international alliances and networks, and building of public understanding of development challenges via sharing of programme information with Danish public.

The primary target group of the Project are 3,897 people including PwDs, parents of CwDs representing 19 CSOs of/for people with disabilities from Yerevan and 7 marzes (Tavush, Lori, Shirak, Armavir, Kotayk, Gegharkunik, Aragatsotn), national and local authorities, service

providers, educators.

The secondary target group of the action encompass:

- National and local government
- The municipalities
- Educational institutions (schools, colleges and universities)
- Journalists from different Media in Armenia

The primary target groups were beneficiaries and at the same time the 'benefactors' of the project as they were empowered to act as agents for change in their respective organizations, communities, institutions and neighborhoods.

The main tangible outcomes and outputs of the Project are:

Outcome 1. 19 DPOs in 7 marzes and Yerevan ("We Can", "The Voice of Silence", "Teach me more", "Skarp", "Unison" and "Echo" Yerevan; "Bridge of Hope" in Yerevan and its 4 centres in Tavush marz; "Agat", "Right to dignified life", "Pyunik" in Shirak marz; "Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities" in Lori marz; "Equal opportunities and inclusion" in Kotayk marz; "For equal opportunities" in Gegharkunik marz; "Huysi Metsamor" in Armavir marz and "Talin Huys" in Aragatsotn marz) were strengthened as self-advocates and, on behalf of PwDs and their families of their communities, lead advocacy towards equal rights to inclusive education, social services and community living.

- **Output 1.1.** The know-how platform of experts in disability, human rights and inclusive education "Centre for Equal opportunities and Inclusion" (CEOI) was established within BOH and is acting as resource and advocacy centre for disability rights promotion and mainstreaming. CEOI capacities were built to tackle inclusiveness, the human rights and education issues in the country. The target community of the center are children and youth with disabilities, their parents, DPOs, schools, professionals, policy makers from national and local levels and services. This required the following activities:
 - Creation of Online Resource Library,
 - Building of Multidisciplinary trainers/experts teams,
 - Revision of IE Monitoring tools to be used by experts and beneficiaries,
 - 12 youth activists of BOH became knowledgeable and educated,

- 35 program staff and volunteers of targeted CSOs of/for PwDs were trained by multidisciplinary experts of the CEOI of BoH to disability advocates and trainers within their organizations and transfer the knowledge on disability rights and inclusive developments within their DPOs, networks and duty bearers of their respective regions/areas.
- 84 training sessions (offline and online webinars) for 1500 PwDs, their family members, duty bearers from the government, schools, services and local communities were delivered,
- 246 consultations and outreach support for DPOs, PwDs and their families were provided.
- **Output 1.2** DPOs and civil society groups in targeted areas were capacitated as agents for change and influence the duty-bearers (local authorities, service providers and professionals) and community members to be responsive to their rights to education, social services and community living. This required the following activities:
 - 19 DPOs were empowered and supported to develop and realize CAAPs in their communities.
 - 9 CAAPs were realized in Yerevan, Lori, Shirak, Gegharkunik and Kotayk Marzes (planned for rolling out the UIES).
 - Workshop on disability language and work with Mass Media was organized.
 - The skills were reinforced by mentor support of BOH youth advocates in organizing and running debates and meetings with different stakeholders.

Outcome 2. Duty bearers from government and the parliament have increased knowledge and commitment to fulfil their obligations according to the conventions, laws and policies adopted towards the rights of PwDs to quality inclusive education. BOH in collaboration with other DPOs/CSOs achieved rating on agreed policy influence goals reflecting improved realisation of rights of PwDs, in particular in sectors of education and social protection. This required the following activities:

- **Output 2.1.** Targeted knowledge was transferred from PWD / DPO representatives via trainings, meetings, participation in relevant committees, policy inputs. This required the following activities:

- 28 workshops on UIES and different models and approaches to disability for more than 1068 participants from CSOs, MOESCS, MOLSI, national and local government, Armenian parliament, educational and social agencies.
- Public debates and round table discussions on SDG # 1, SDG # 4 and SDG # 10 with attendance of representatives from CSOs, relevant ministries and focal points for SDG promotion in Armenia to ensure that they are disability inclusive and have disability and gender disaggregated objectives and indicators in planning and reporting.
- Lobby for involvement of 10 DPO representatives in Public Committees affiliated to the MOESCS and MOLSI to raise the voices of PwDs for inclusion their rights in development.

Outcome 3. CwDs right to quality inclusive education was safeguarded through participatory monitoring and ongoing rollout of UIES in Yerevan and 7 marzes of Tavush, Lori, Shirak, Armavir, Kotayk, Gegharkunik and Aragatsotn, where by the end of the project the UIES was already applied and there was a strong need to capacitate the PSGs and CSOs to become watchdogs of inclusive education in their areas.

- **Output 3.1.** Inclusive education practices are monitored by PSG and DPO monitors and experts of BOH CEOI in Yerevan and and in Tavush, Lori, Shirak, Armavir, Kotayk, Aragatsotn and Gegharkunik marzes of Armenia. This required the following activities:
 - Inclusive education monitoring standards and toolkit were developed using Index for Inclusion framework and tools and finalized to be used by parents of CwDs, CSOs and MOESCS.
 - Armenian PSG members and DPOs were trained to use the monitoring standards and toolkit.
 - UISE monitoring was conducted at 250 schools practicing universal inclusive education in Yerevan and seven marzes.
 - The monitoring reports were shared through social networks, PSG online platform, CEOI online resource library and during online Zoom sessions with stakeholders.
 - PSG national conference on achievements and gaps of IE was organized.
- **Output 3.2.** Advocacy campaigns were conducted to reduce attitudinal barriers for CwDs

to access inclusive education. This required the following activities:

- 3 advocacy campaigns Towards Access to Inclusive Quality Education for CwDs were organized in Yerevan.
 - The messages were spread nationwide through social media, social networks and mass media.
 - 181 stakeholders from targeted governmental, non-governmental and international institutions, human rights defenders attended workshops and round table discussions.
 - 40 journalists were promoted to spread the findings of the report and report on disability as human rights issue.
 - 3 Human Rights and disability national media contest were realized.
 - 2 PSA were spread via social media and FB pages of DPOs and CSOs.
 - 14 multimedia radio programs were broadcasted during 7 months with a slogan “Living together, learning together”.
 - About 270 posters, banners, brochures about findings of the survey were published.
- **Output 3.3.** IDEAS Project continued to help the state, namely MOESCS and Yerevan Municipality during the transition period from special education facilities to UIES. Teachers and supporting professionals at 250 mainstream schools and 7 community pedagogic-psychological centers got trainings on inclusive education. Only 56 mainstream schools at Yerevan out of 153 had experience of inclusive education before the transition to UIES. Children from 3 special schools were transitioned to 56 old and about 20 new inclusive schools. Parents of CwDs transitioning from special schools to mainstream schools were capacitated and empowered to participate meaningfully in advocacy for education and social inclusion of their children.

“It would be very difficult to provide quality technical conditions for the transition to the UIES until 2025 without BoH Project. The state has not enough resources.” (MOESCS representative)

The activities for Outcome 4 were amended to the IDEAS Project because of the COVID-19. BoH and ME partners were flexible enough to redesign the Project on this stage and address the needs of the target groups in times of COVID-19 crisis and later Artsakh war outbreak.

Outcome 4. Bridge of Hope adopted ways of remote work and provided quality support to target group in the context of COVID-19.

- **Output 4.1.** Remote work methods were adopted, providing adequate support to target group in context of COVID-19. This required the following activities:
 - The hygiene and safety of BoH Staff and 5 centres in COVID-19 was ensured.
 - Online management of Project activities was provided.
 - BoH sustainability and capacity in COVID-19 was ensured. Costs for staff training for improving psychological support skills and financial management for 11 BoH staff members were provided.
 - 24 CwDs and youth in Tavush region were provided with digital communication devices and internet connection to get access to distance learning and other services.
 - In December 2021 4 computer labs in Tavush marz were established and equipped with 42 computers and other supplies to continue to train CwDs and their parents in computer basic skills and knowledge, using of different social networks and information sharing. The purpose was to strengthen and reinforce the resilience of target groups during expected and unexpected emergency situations when education and other services are provided in remote mode. 360 children and youth with disabilities are included in computer labs and classes.
- **Output 4.2.** Awareness raising materials to reduce risk of transmission for target group were tailored.
 - Awareness raising events and materials (posters, banners, brochures, video and audio materials) in COVID-19 were produced and distributed.

Civil Society engagement in the Project

The project idea has been developed in close consultation and cooperation with 19 DPOs/CSOs, that are members of DAC. The primary target groups have been selected in a consultative approach and were considered to be beneficiaries and at the same time the 'benefactors' of the project as they were supported to become empowered to act as agents for change in their respective organizations, communities, institutions and neighborhoods. IDEAS project is grounded on a human rights-based approach to disability and aims at empowerment of civil society organizations of and for PwDs.

Project results influenced the duty bearers to recognize their obligations and commitments to CRPD implementation through disability inclusive policies and budgeting. Proceeding from human rights-based approach the project also encouraged cross sectorial cooperation between duty bearers, right holders and watchdogs. This cooperation and improved knowledge in various aspects of disability as a human right issue increased accountability of state to the civil society at a large and the right holders specifically.

Nevertheless, the challenge of SDG nationalization process is still in place. No meetings have been organized by the SDG national council established, at least BoH is not aware and was not invited. In this regard, Bridge of Hope initiated a collaboration with the SDG Innovation Lab of Armenia, which recently started to act actively in the field, to have joint round-table discussions, to invite the national SDG council and UNDP official representatives, to come up with suggestions, etc.

The following groups of stakeholders were identified and enrolled in the project activities as the key right-holders and duty-bearers.

1. 1800 PwDs and 700 parents of CwDs have received support and were involved in accessing and monitoring services, participating in community change activities.
2. The strong civil society groups and DPOs were empowered to have political participation and social dialogue with policy and decision makers to make all development programming inclusive and accessible to PwD.
3. Parents of CwD got support and were empowered as watchdogs to be included in larger networks to be able to monitor the inclusiveness of education at schools.
4. Armenian State Pedagogical University got methodical support to teach the future professionals and capacitate them to reinforce UIES in Armenian mainstream schools.
5. The community pedagogic-psychological centers were also in the process of transition from special schools to the entities supporting the inclusivity at mainstream schools. IDEAS Project was very important to help them throughout transition process. They have got technical and methodical support and learned how to collaborate with mainstream schools and how to support the CwDs and their parents throughout transition process.
6. 250 mainstream schools got trainings and support throughout transition process. They have learned how to work with CwDs transitioning from special schools and their parents.
7. There is a well-established and continuous cooperation with TUMO Center for Creative

Technologies. It has initiated a project called 42 Yerevan, which aims to involve and attract as many PwDs as possible to apply for the tuition-free programming school designed to train the coders of the future. A two-day intensive training was organized by BoH young advocacy group for TUMO staff, upon their request, on the right of children and youth with disabilities to education, the ethics, the disability models, etc. The training turned out very impressive and informative and there was a suggestion to keep the close cooperation for future initiatives.

8. Volunteers were fully engaged with Project activities; they supported the organization of “Lessons of kindness” at schools.
9. Journalists reinforce the positive image of CWDs in media. They participated in the trainings on the social model of disability and disability language and ethics and dissemination of project messages nationwide.
10. Parent Support Groups became key mobilizers and empowered the partners targeted by the project.
11. A large-scale community action plan was organized on the topic "My inclusive school" with the active participation of 481 schoolchildren from 120 schools managing a series of awareness raising events.
12. Republican Pedagogical-Psychological Center consulted with mainstream schools, parents of CwD and DPOs on the importance of provision of reasonable accommodations in education to support equal participation and inclusion of children. In addition, Republican Pedagogical-Psychological Center provided technical assistance and support in different types of accessibility formats.

BoH team supported all the target audience by meetings, seminars, organized motivational events to help people overcome the difficult situation in the country because of COVID-19 and Artsakh war outbreak to mitigate the unexpected risks.

The local civil society partner’s profile was raised in Armenian civil society by increasing national recognition of their role as initiator of the larger movement towards the disability rights among expert community and the decision-makers.

Project Impact

The project focused especially on the low level of civic engagement and public participation of PwDs including a particular focus on women and girls with disabilities, especially regarding their access to education and social services. The project empowered DPOs to influence relevant policy- and decision-making processes; mainstream disability issues into national priorities across sectors; and engage meaningfully with partners and relevant stakeholders, supporting state agencies and DPOs to establish an effective collaboration, which will promote the political participation of PwDs and will enable them to participate fully in consultative and monitoring processes of legislation, policies and the SDGs.

IDEAS Project helped the state and especially MOESCS during the transition period from special education facilities to UIES. IDEAS Project contributed to the inclusiveness at mainstream schools. Teachers and supporting professionals at 250 mainstream schools and at 7 community pedagogic-psychological centers got trainings on inclusive education. This trainings capacitated the professionals to evaluate CwDs, provide need assessments, find appropriate schools for them, support their transition, provide individual approach to every child throughout the transition process, support and capacitate the parents of CwDs and teachers.

«We can't just tell the CwDs and their parents: "You have to attend the mainstream school up tomorrow". This is a continuous support and awareness raising process». (Representative of MOESCS)

The teachers' assistant institute was introduced in Armenian schools in 2018. IDEAS Project supported the institutionalization of this institute as well. The teachers' assistance also participated in the trainings and could improve the inclusive practices. Thanks to the BoH Projects mainstream schools reinforce the inclusivity approach and know that they need further trainings to improve inclusive education practices.

"About 300 children from 3 special schools in Yerevan, that we are supervising, were transitioned to the mainstream schools during a 3-month period, which is very short. We lacked pedagogical and professional resources. IDEAS Project helped us to proceed the transition with minimal stress." (Yerevan Municipality, Representative of Education Department)

Parents of CwDs usually underestimate the socialization issues of their children, which can be

“Special schools were functioning mostly as care institutions. The parents of CwDs could not understand how to take care of their children at home, how to bring them to school and back every day. With BoH support we managed to develop individual transition plans, highlighting both educational and social needs for every child.” (Yerevan Municipality, Representative of Education Department)

addressed only if the CwDs are present in the classroom with other children. They stress the importance of individual lessons for their children and some parents bring their children to schools only for the individual lessons. On one hand IDEAS Project contributed a lot to change this attitude

through continuous work with schools, teachers and parents. On the other hand, “Kindness lessons” with children at mainstream schools contributed to the development of tolerance and establishment of the inclusive environment.

IDEAS project provided a serious shift in attitude toward problems of PwDs. Teachers, parents,

“I have to acknowledge that it was hard for me to recognize that CwDs can attend the same classroom together with other children. I even had a discussion with Susanna Tadevosyan, head of BoH. But her speech made me change my mind and attitude and accept that every child has a right to education. They have to be enrolled in kindergartens and schools.” (Representative of Armenian State Pedagogic University)

experts and other stakeholders report changes in their perceptions, their attitude towards disability issues transformed from medical model to the social model. They do not consider the disability as a disease to be cured, it is seen as a socialization challenge.

The Armenian State Pedagogical University was capacitated to apply new methods of work with children with SEN in an inclusive environment and will transfer this capacity to the new generations of students to become teachers at inclusive schools.

CEOI has become the place and resource for strengthening the capacities and knowledge of community-based groups and organizations to become empowered, feel confident as advocates when voicing and advocating for the right to inclusive education, social services (support services, employment, housing, community living, etc) as well as political participation of the right holders to make the policies, legislation and practices responsive to their needs and rights.

Online Resource Library created as IDEAS Project output will contribute to the capacity building of the professionals working with CwDs and the parents of CwDs to provide the long-term sustainability of the Project impact. More than 10000 materials are uploaded to the platform, more than 735 views were registered until March 2022.

Monitoring tools for the assessment of the inclusivity at schools were developed, probed and reviewed to be used by experts and beneficiaries and monitor the situation at schools. Thus, parents' advocacy and watchdog initiatives will ensure the schools to meet the unique educational needs of their children and create an environment where all children are accepted and valued equally.

181 duty bearers from state and local authorities (MOLSI, MOESCS, National Assembly, marz Administration and LSG) and 1220 duty bearers (local authorities, psycho-social service providers, educators – mainly teachers) got knowledge and confirmed their commitment to fulfill their obligations according to the conventions, laws and policies adopted towards the rights of PwDs to inclusive quality education, community living and political participation was increased.

The knowledge acquired during the trainings trickled down and young people with disabilities became effective peer trainers, advocates and leaders in their organizations and communities, mobilizing and training other youths.

Strengthening PwDs and their organizations increased the possibilities for them to influence the development agenda of Armenia to be more inclusive to disability rights. Building the capacity of organizations of PwDs in advocacy and service delivery as advocates improved access to inclusive education, social services and political participation of the target groups at least in the targeted areas.

Improved technical capacities of 4 BoH centers in Tavush marz provided ongoing trainings for PwDs, CwDs and their parents to improve their computer skills.

Bridge of Hope adopted remote work methods and provided quality support to target group in the context of COVID-19. New skills are being successfully implemented also after lockdown. BoH team became more flexible combining online and offline working methods. Online management methods set during the project optimized the management systems of BoH. These measures ensured BoH sustainability and capacity in COVID-19 and also for other emergency situations. CwDs and youth in Tavush region were provided with digital communication devices and internet connection and got sustainable online access to distance learning and other services. 4 computer labs established in Tavush marz provided the continuous education and training for CwDs and their parents in computer basic skills and knowledge, using different social networks and

information sharing, which strengthened and reinforced the resilience of target groups during expected and unexpected emergency situations.

BoH staff became experienced in behaviour change communication during development and dissemination of awareness raising materials on COVID-19 prevention (posters, banners, brochures, video and audio materials).

Project Sustainability

IDEAS Project envisaged to continue in further phases by creating grounds for a larger expansion of the human rights based approach to disability issues. The continuous disability advocacy resulted not only in programs and policies, but also ensured the inclusive budgeting to meet the indicators of disability rights obligated by UN CRPD and reflected in nationalized SDG targets and indicators.

The project was implemented by NGOs with well-established management systems, professional staff, committed members and a strong sense of ownership of the project. BoH enjoys the trust of its beneficiaries and has gained a positive reputation in Armenian society in general. Due to the good advocacy work and skills in public relations BoH gets continuous state financial support for provision of delegated services. The combination of the established reputation and availability of funding sources outside this project will contribute to the independence after the Project ends.

19 DPOs, which received customized capacity training in vital areas, became self-advocates to lead advocacy and awareness raising in their communities towards disability inclusive education, services and community life and support them to implement CAAP. This will develop their skills and knowledge to secure financial independence after the project end. Essential to the phase-out is inclusion within the project activities, the development and fundraising for 9 CAAPs for these organizations. The fact that these organizations are grassroots, volunteer-led organizations, means that they will be able to survive as long as they have the commitment and motivation of their members to continue voluntary involvement. This can also be supplemented with small-scale funding for activities whenever possible.

The newly established Center for Equal opportunities and Inclusion, with BoH's support and with its multidisciplinary trainers and experts' team has greater opportunities to raise funds through the expanded national and international networks established during this project. In the long-term, CEOI will become well established resource and counseling center of BOH continuing to empower the right holders to become knowledgeable in their organizations or at individual level and voice their rights. The center will act as a resource and knowledge center for educational institutions and professionals in advancement of inclusive education and or inclusive methods in teaching and learning. The resource library will continue to be used by a larger community with continued enriched materials, literature, audio, visual materials in accessible formats.

The participation of target groups in the development of the project approach increased their understanding and ownership of the project. The sustainability plan was well incorporated in the project plan.

Organizational sustainability was ensured through close collaboration of BoH with DPOs. BoH has been working within the field of disability for many years and have a strong reputation and standing. The NGO is wholly committed to the project and the advancement of disability rights and strive to support PwDs throughout Armenia. 19 DPOs have received in-depth and diverse capacity development and trainings for advocacy to become self-confident to sustain their DPOs. Through the rights-based approach of this project, which empowered actors on various sides of the issue of PwDs rights, including DPO's, NGO's working for PwDs, PwDs themselves as well as government and media, PwDs' rights issues are tackled from both the perspective of the rights-holders as well as that of those defending the rights of PwDs and those in a position of power to provide for those rights. This approach addresses the root causes of PwDs' development issues in a more holistic fashion, thus leading to more effective and sustainable results.

Institutional sustainability was ensured through technical capacity development to PwDs to set up and run their own self-representation organizations to advocate for their specific needs and disability rights in general. The acquired knowledge will remain within the institution DAC and its member organizations, making it available for future members as well as on-going advocacy and policy work.

Financial sustainability was ensured through capacity training in vital areas to support beneficiary organizations to develop skills and knowledge to pursue community support and

stability. DPOs were capacitated to gain further support from other donors. And even without external support the DPO's will continue to represent their members' interests by operating on a volunteer basis to continue their advocacy roles.

Political sustainability. Armenian government has ratified the UN CRPD and has committed itself to fulfil implementation and realization of the convention and its rights which ensures sustainability beyond the duration of the project.

Environmental sustainability was ensured since the Project activities don't have an impact on natural resources or on the environment out of the normal range of human use.

Project challenges and Lessons learnt

The extraordinary challenges that the Project faced from its beginning have enriched the lessons learnt during the Project. The post-revolutionary crisis, the Covid-19 pandemic, the Lockdown and Covid restrictions, the Artsakh war, Martial Law, the post-war crisis affected almost all the Project activities and processes.

Governmental institutions' resources and efforts were directed to the search for mitigation possibilities against the pandemic spread. Parliamentarians were engaged in numerous activities to address the internal political issues. Thus, the national representatives, duty bearers and parliamentarians were overloaded with work and it became difficult to ensure their participation in the planned activities within the project (e.g. inviting to workshops on SDG nationalization processes, Inclusive Education system, etc.). Such risks have to be assessed on the Project development stage and result in proactive activities to mitigate the risk, having the prospective of engaging more stakeholders, decision-makers and duty bearers of different levels, so that they admit the importance of their contribution to project activities for achieving meaningful outcomes.

A number of reorganizations have occurred in the governing system of Armenia which affected the SDG realization in the country. New governmental bodies, new structures and reorganizations, newly appointed people at ministries and organizations that should be dealing with the SDG realization in Armenia are not aware of the issue and the procedures. They need to be trained, capacitated and supported by the CSOs.

The organization of the Project activities switched to online mode because of the pandemic. Thus, the number of meetings and participants increased. Everyday online staff meetings were organized with the whole BoH staff and weekly planning was presented and discussed. This challenge resulted in a positive outcome of adopting new tools and making use of a combination of online tools within present activities and flexibility in case of emergency. BoH staff became very experienced in organizing and managing the activities online. Mostly the Zoom platform was used. This let the CSOs include as many people as possible in one place at the same time, especially in this period of lockdown. This working method was incorporated and applied in future trainings and meetings as well, since it was evaluated as very effective by the Project team.

The shift to online education helped to identify the most vulnerable groups of PwDs and CwDs, who don't have internet access and appropriate devices, and develop activities targeting their needs. BoH provided them with the devices needed and internet access.

A great number of PwDs and CwDs and their families needed psychological support and consultations in times of pandemic and lockdown. A great number of calls and letters were directed to BoH and the corresponding guidance was provided by BoH experts on a daily basis. A decision was made to keep a registration book for these calls and messages to record incoming inquiries and to have a better follow up on them. There is a need for hotlines addressing the needs of PwDs and CwDs, data recording, collection and analysis.

In war and post-war times there was a lack of human and expert resources. A great number of planned events were cancelled at the very last moment. The unpredictability affected the Project events greatly. BoH team tried to ensure that the planned activities are realized with the involvement of experts who are less likely to be affected by outer factors.

Transition process from special to mainstream schools was really stressful. CwDs, their parents, mainstream school community, including children, parents and teachers faced a lot of challenges. Children were not socialized together; that's why resocialization is needed on both sides. Parents are not used to the active participation in the educational processes of their children, they are not used to share the responsibility with school. BoH supported all the parties throughout the transition process, provided methodical support for teachers and parents, psychological support for CwDs and their parents.

«BoH supported schools, parents and teachers throughout the transition process». (Representative of MOESCS)

Schools were resistant to the professionals from outside of schools and the community pedagogic-psychological centers' professionals could not find an appropriate collaboration mode. During the Project the community pedagogic-psychological centers acquired new experience and adopted new formats of collaboration with mainstream schools.

Equal participation in the classroom was also addressed during the Project. Parents were capacitated to become watchdogs of their children's rights, to monitor the inclusive practices at schools.

There is still a low level of inclusion of CwDs at the high school level. They were mostly transitioned to vocational education institutions. In this regard the further surveys and research are needed to understand the educational need and the risks for teenagers and youth with disabilities and their inclusion in high schools.

Mainstream schools that are not experienced in inclusive education practices try to redirect CwDs to more experienced schools. BoH keeps including new schools in its activities and events to address this issue and contribute to the dissemination and improvement of the inclusive education practices.

PwDs turned to be the most isolated among all the people isolated during the pandemic. This had a negative impact on all the rights of PwDs. The resilience of the PwDs and their DPOs to confront such situations and advocate their rights on the policy level is needed.

The country was not ready for the emergency situations. It was ignorant to the disability issues during the global crises. Rapid assessment mechanisms are needed in the emergency situations. The adoption of Washington group 6 questions³ on disabilities could be one of such tools.

³ Washington group questions (<https://hhot.cbm.org/en/card/washington-group-questions>).

Recommendations

The Final Evaluation of IDEAS Project let us derive the following recommendations for the further development of the ME, BoH, DPOs and their activities in the field of right protection and advocacy.

- Promote collaboration between ME and local Armenian NGOs in the field of experience exchange between inclusive schools and DPOs in Armenia and other countries.
- Teachers need ongoing trainings, brain storming and experience exchange to learn new methods of work with children with SEN, probe different approaches, benchmark the international experience for the Armenian educational context and find the most appropriate one for every child.
- Teachers' creativity in inclusive classrooms should be supported, so that teachers feel free to probe and to find the most appropriate way to work with every child.
- Success stories should be disseminated among teachers, parents and other stakeholders.
- Extracurricular activities and aftercare are highly recommended for mainstream schools. Many parents have social problems, they work long and don't have family members or friends who are able to help them.
- There is a need for value education at schools for children and parents. This component is missing which affects the interiorization of inclusive practices negatively. Positive parenting training should be introduced for the parents at mainstream schools.
- Schools need additional financing for the supportive facilities for CwDs and didactic materials.
- Inclusive education should be disseminated throughout different levels of education starting from kindergarten and up to the university level of education.
- Teachers' assistant workplace should also be introduced in kindergartens.
- DACD networking has to be continued especially after the Covid-19 crisis, when the communication opportunities were shortened and people got isolated. BoH could become the leading networking organization and improve the PwDs rights advocacy practices, because it is one of the most experienced, consistent, sustainable and goal-oriented NGOs in the field.
- The trainings agenda for the DPOs should be enlarged. Trainings on the new methods of

work, inclusion and rehabilitation for PwDs with different disabilities (autism, motor, mental, seeing, hearing and other) should be introduced with special emphasis on new technologies.

- Continuous awareness raising campaigns for DPOs and PwDs are recommended. There are a lot of cases when they do not get the information on the issues and changes that are important for them in a timely manner or don't get it at all. That's why DPOs and PwDs are often not on the same page.
- Inclusive professional orientation trainings for teenagers with disabilities with the usage of an individual approach at mainstream schools is needed. It has to be focused on the professions that are more likely to provide independent living for PwDs.
- Ongoing activation programs for parents of CwDs are needed. Such programs will help the parents of CwDs to find jobs that correspond to their needs and the needs of their children. So that parents can provide care for their children and also get income.
- Trainings agenda for the journalists and media experts in the field of media coverage on disability issues should be enlarged and developed to keep the media community in line with recent developments in the field. They have to learn how to talk to PwDs and how to present them verbally and visually in media. More PwDs should be invited to TV and radio programs to reinforce equity and equality. Sensitive vocabulary for disability coverage should be introduced. There are still journalists who use terms associated with disabilities in an offensive way.
- Enlarge media coverage of the disability issues, inclusion and BoH activities. The BoH theatre may become a very interesting example to trickle down the problem-solving capacities.
- The governmental reforms in the field of PwDs rights protection should be participatory. So that PwDs are aware of the justification and possible impact of the reform on their lives to be able to raise their voices accordingly and express their needs and wishes in a timely manner.
- Increase the awareness of the online Library as an open resource for PwDs, CwDs and their parents. It will serve as a mutual comprehensive online platform for PwDs, where they will find and share information and get the consultancy they need.
- Advocate the Washington group questions to be included in the data collections

concerning PwDs.

- Ensure the resilience of PwDs in emergency situations.