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Sida Decentralised Evaluation

Tana Copenhagen

Evaluation of the CSO Core Support Programme in Moldova

Final Report

Evaluation of the CSO Core Support Programme in Moldova

**Final Report
December 2023**

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

CSCSP	Civil Society Core Support Programme
CSO	Civil society organisation
EQ	Evaluation question
FGD	Focus group discussion
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
HRBA	Human rights-based approaches
IR	Inception report
KII	Key informant interview
MFA	Ministry for Foreign Affairs
NCG	Nordic Consulting Group
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OECD-DAC	OECD Development Assistance Committee
PCA	Performance Capacity Assessment
QA	Quality assurance
QAE	QA expert
SDA	Swedish Development Advisers
SEK	Swedish crowns
TL	Team Leader
TOR	Terms of reference

Preface

This evaluation was contracted by Sida through the Sida Framework Agreement for Evaluation Services and conducted by Tana Copenhagen.

This report was prepared by the core evaluation team consisting of Team Leader Michaela Raab, and Team Members Anders Kragh Bingen and Ghenadie Cojocaru. Independent quality assurance was provided by Ingela Ternström. Isis Olivier provided support with the survey analysis and diagrams.

The team is grateful to the Swedish Embassy in Chisinau for their overall guidance and continuous support to the team.

Executive Summary

This evaluation has assessed key aspects of the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and likely impact and sustainability of the Civil Society Core Support Programme (CSCSP, 2016-2023) of the Embassy of Sweden in Moldova. This is the first evaluation of the overall programme. It is expected to support the Embassy's institutional learning and plans for a future phase. Nine questions (detailed in section 1.3) have guided this evaluation, which was carried out in a hybrid format by a gender-balanced, international team of Tana staff and consultants in October and November 2023, including a one-week field research phase. Data were collected from programme and external documentation, an online survey completed by 13 out of 18 (72%) civil society organisations (CSOs) that have obtained Core Support, and 33 interviews with 42 persons representing perspectives within and outside of the CSCSP.

The Civil Society Core Support Programme in Moldova reflects Sida's global guidance on programme-based approaches, providing funding to support CSOs' overall budgets. The Embassy of Sweden has implemented the programme in several cycles, supporting 18 CSOs (23 CSOs including those failing to obtain core support) in six cohorts of CSOs. Each CSO was selected by the Embassy and subsequently underwent a system-based audit (SBA) carried out by an international consulting firm. Subsequently, a Pre-Core Support phase generally lasting six to nine months¹ supported the CSO with standardised training, capacity strengthening tailored to specific CSO needs identified in the SBA, and civil society networking. After a follow-up assessment by the consulting firm, 18 out of 23 participating CSOs were successively awarded Core Support by the Embassy, generally in the form of a three-year grant supporting the overall organisation's strategic plan. The implicit theory of change is that an appropriate selection of CSCS participants and relevant training would ready the CSOs for core support, strengthen their effectiveness and efficiency, and ultimately contribute to a vibrant civil society that would “[create] inclusive dialogue and [contribute] to increase trust in society”², as envisaged in the strategy for Sweden's reform cooperation with Eastern Europe 2021 to 2027.

The evaluation has found that the Civil Society Core Support Programme has been highly relevant: It has responded to essential civil society needs, especially the need for stable funding and effective, resilient internal systems in Moldova's young CSO sector. Sweden's Core Support model is unique in Moldova and complements other donor activities, with only slight overlaps in CSO group training. **The Embassy's choice of CSO partners has been appropriate**, resulting in a balanced portfolio of

¹ Written communication by the Embassy – budget-neutral time extensions were not documented as amendments to the funding agreements.

² Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2008:8.

organisations working on Swedish priority themes in Eastern Europe which have proven capable of improving their strategy and internal systems. However, the informal and non-documented initial (pre-SBA) CSO selection process poses a reputational risk for the Embassy which should be addressed. Also, due to practical limitations, the Embassy has chosen mainly Chisinau-based CSOs, most of which with access to (project) support from other donors. However, the programme has commendably included CSOs in the Left Bank of the Nistru river region (disputed Transnistria Region), which are affected by administrative and language challenges, partly addressed in the CSCSP, for instance via translation into and from the Russian language in formal training events.

The programme has achieved its intended results, contributing to strengthening the participating organisations, with strong effects in the fields of organisational growth, and strategy- and results-based planning. **Key factors for success** have been the Embassy's selection of established and promising CSO partners; its trust-based, close relationship with the CSOs, and the consulting firms' system-based audits, followed by organisational mentoring and coaching tailored to individual CSO needs. However, due to language issues and other internal factors, as well as divergences in the support provided by external consultants, **not all participating CSOs have benefited equally** from the programme. Also, extra efforts may be needed to mainstream Sida's four approaches (human rights-based approach, gender mainstreaming, environment, and conflict sensitivity) more fully across the entire CSCSP. Finally, smaller, less experienced CSOs could have benefited from more proactive guidance on reporting to the Embassy.

In terms of programme efficiency, the Embassy's considerable investment into the programme has paid off: Strengthening established and promising CSOs in all Swedish priority sectors, its strategic value is considerable. However, inefficiencies and risks may have arisen because of the lack of a documented, monitored overall Programme strategy. **Monitoring and evaluation** have focused on the individual CSO level, using a well-structured approach to following CSO progress – from the baseline (SBA), to an assessment of the effects of Pre-Core Support (Follow-Up Report by the consulting firms), and to a final evaluation of progress in CSO internal systems at the end of the Core Support phase. This well-documented system contrasts with the lack of a monitoring system or overarching documentation to plan for, follow progress, and capture the results of the overall programme.

The programme has achieved demonstrable impact on Moldovan CSOs, which have transformed their strategic planning, governance, and internal systems as a result of the programme and strengthened their outreach. Many CSOs report continuing to use the knowledge, skills and tools acquired in the programme. However, **the sustainability of CSOs leaving core support is under threat:** The programme has generally provided core funding for a three-year period only, expecting CSOs to achieve financial autonomy at the end of that period. This is in contrast with Sida's global approach to Core Support. CSOs have received training on fundraising, and CSO commitment to raising money from other donors is a condition for Core Support. But

the transition from Core Support back to project-based funding reduces CSO opportunities to continue their internal development, offer regular salaries and a degree of job security, and focus on their own strategy. Some CSO partners whose Core Support has ended report burnout, and burnout risks. Senior staff must contribute to several projects to secure their salaries while managing the organisation; some CSOs may have to switch back to volunteer work because their activities do not correspond with donor priorities. Opportunities to raise money outside of the international development system are extremely limited. Therefore, **a broader reflection on the purpose of the programme and adjustments in its implementation is necessary for longer-term impact** and greater CSO resilience and sustainability.

The evaluation recommends for the Embassy to:

- **Consider longer-term core funding** for trusted CSOs and adjusting the duration and content of Pre-Core and subsequent CSO coaching support to **CSO-specific needs**, for greater impact and more sustainable results.
- **Ensure capacity strengthening activities match specific CSO needs and interests**, considering language issues and different levels of needs and interests regarding Sida's four priority approaches. The needs assessment should include a mapping of other donor activities on CSO capacity strengthening, to avoid overlaps.
- **Clarify and document the Embassy's overarching goals and strategy** for the overall Core Support Programme, including a strategic decision on the desirable size and structure of the Core Support partner portfolio.
- **Develop a system for overall Core Support Programme monitoring and learning**, possibly documenting the programme in a dedicated proposal and theory of change and making **CSO selection processes more transparent**. A dedicated Embassy focal point or monitoring and evaluation specialist could track the overall programme. Similar, more documented Sida programmes in other countries, e.g., Ukraine, Kosovo, and Albania, could serve as an inspiration but may need adjusting to the specific Moldovan context.
- **Consider adjusting the programme delivery model**, for instance, by working via a CSO intermediary for CSO strengthening activities and sub-granting, with or without the support of international consulting firms. The Embassies of Sweden in Kosovo and Ukraine, for instance, deliver Core Support via intermediary CSOs. Experience exchange with them could help in developing criteria and determining options for such a model in Moldova.

1 Introduction

1.1 BACKGROUND, PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The Embassy's Civil Society Core Support Programme (CSCSP, also referred to as "the Programme") has pioneered a new type of cooperation with civil society organisations (CSOs) in Moldova. In late 2023/early 2024, the Embassy plans to develop terms of reference (TOR) for the continuation of the Programme with a new batch of CSOs. The purpose of the evaluation is to assess key aspects of the Programme's relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability and to develop recommendations for its continuation. The primary intended users are the Embassy (Reform Cooperation team) and Sida (Divisions of Eastern Europe and Thematic Support in the Department for Europe and Latin America, and Division of Support to Civil Society in the Department of Partnerships and Innovation). Furthermore, the evaluation may be used by participating CSOs and other stakeholders, such as donors.

1.2 EVALUATION OBJECT AND SCOPE

The evaluation covers the Civil Society Core Support Programme implemented by the Swedish Embassy in Moldova since 2016. The Programme is briefly described in Chapter 3 below. Focusing on the overall Programme, the evaluation does *not* replace or control the systems-based audits and evaluations carried out with individual CSOs. However, in three case studies, the evaluation team reviews the progress made by specific CSOs to gain a deeper understanding of the way CSOs experience the Programme.

1.3 EVALUATION CRITERIA AND QUESTIONS

The original evaluation TOR (see Annex 1) encompassed 16 broad evaluation questions covering all OECD-DAC criteria (relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, sustainability). For a better match with the timeframe, the Embassy and the evaluation team jointly prioritised the evaluation questions. As a result of those adjustments, the following agreed questions have guided this evaluation:

1. To what extent have the intervention objectives and design responded to beneficiaries' needs?
2. How has the Programme selected CSOs, and to what extent has the process identified the most suitable CSOs in terms of Programme priorities?
3. To what extent has the Programme achieved, or is expected to achieve, its intended results, possibly including any differential results across groups?
4. Has the Programme M&E system delivered robust and useful information to assess progress towards outcomes and to contribute to learning?

5. How has the Programme mainstreamed and followed up on gender and human rights-based approaches, environmental responsiveness, and conflict sensitivity?
6. Could there be other, more cost-efficient ways to provide Core Support to achieve the same results?
7. What examples of CSO transformations can be linked to the Programme, especially regarding CSO efficiency (economic use of their resources) and effectiveness (benefits to their target audience and constituencies)?
8. What unintended and unwanted effects of the Programme have been observed?
9. To what extent has the Programme supported the sustainability of the participating CSOs and which aspects could be improved in this regard?

The questions still refer to all OECD-DAC criteria, but do not cover all possible aspects of these criteria, which is reasonable in view of the limited resources of this decentralised evaluation.

2 Methodology

2.1 OVERALL APPROACH

As the evaluation is expected to help inform future phases of the Programme, the evaluation team has applied a utilisation-focused approach, consulting with the Embassy when refining the evaluation questions, reconstructing the programme theory of change, selecting case studies, and jointly reflecting on tentative findings and recommendations. The evaluation is predominantly qualitative, using data from reports and other documents, interviews, group discussions and workshops, but has also included a standardised survey with participating CSOs. Finally, the evaluation has adopted an iterative approach, refining data collection tools throughout the evaluation process. In keeping with a human rights-based, gender-sensitive approach, the evaluation (i) ensured balanced representation of women and men in interviews, (ii) included an organisation focusing on women's rights in the case studies, and (iii) reached out to CSOs representing persons affected by intersecting discrimination, e.g., LGBTI+ and women living in the Transnistrian region (Left Bank). Furthermore, the evaluation team interviewed an external³ Moldovan gender specialist.

Process: After a brief inception phase, online data collection started in mid-October 2023 via remote interviews and an online survey. Face-to-face data collection in Moldova was carried out in tandem, with an international and a national consultant (both male) mainly during the second week of November 2023. The (female) team leader worked from her home base, carrying out online interviews in parallel and participating in hybrid workshops with the Embassy. Data were analysed jointly, both inductively (i.e., in an exploratory way), and along the evaluation questions and indicators (deductively).

2.2 METHODOLOGY

The evaluation covers the Civil Society Core Support Programme implemented by the Swedish Embassy in Moldova since 2016, i.e., a period of almost eight years. In view of that time span and the numbers of CSOs (18) supported by the Programme, the evaluation team had to find a balance between breadth and depth of analysis. Breadth was assured by (i) a document review covering documentation shared by the Embassy on the overall Programme, (ii) an online survey sent to all 18 CSOs that had received Core Support, and (iii) interviews with leaders in 11 CSOs in the Programme. To obtain a level of depth, the evaluators selected, in dialogue with the Embassy, 3 CSOs for case studies. The selection was guided by an effort to obtain a broad spread regarding

³ The term "external" refers to the interviewees position in the Programme, in that she did not participate in the programme.

themes, regions, and cohorts of CSOs (i.e., CSOs from the first batch of Core Support partners and one CSO from the on-going batch).

Table 1: Case study CSOs

Name of the CSO	Themes	Core Support in...
Independent Journalism Center	Media	2016-2018
National Environmental Center	Environment	2021 -2024
Resonance, Transnistrian region	Gender-based violence	2016-2018

2.3 METHODS AND TOOLS FOR DATA COLLECTION

Data collection was guided by indicators, summarised in an evaluation matrix (see Annex 2). The time between the evaluation kick-off and the field phase was too short for formal pretesting of key informant interview (KII) guides and the survey questionnaire. However, data collection tools (see Annex 3) were shared with the Embassy for comments; comments were considered in the final versions. The evaluation team used classical social research tools to collect data: document review, key informant interviews, an online survey, and hybrid inception and validation workshops. The survey, sent in English to 18 CSOs via the commercial version of SurveyMonkey, obtained 13 full responses, i.e., a good response rate of 72%. The document review included some 40, mainly internal, text documents and spreadsheets of varying length (see Annex 4). The team carried out 33 interviews with 42 persons (25 women and 17 men, see Annex 5), 26 of which were face-to-face in Moldova (Chisinau and Tiraspol), with persons representing diverse perspectives: Embassy of Sweden, CSOs with Core Support, CSOs with Pre-Core Support only, and external specialists (e.g., donor representatives, academics). The interviewees were identified in dialogue with the Embassy to cover a wide spread of perspectives within and beyond the Programme, including, among others, 13 CSOs of diverse sizes and thematic orientations that had been or were part of different cohorts of Core and/or Pre-Core support. The three case study CSOs received the evaluators at their offices and shared documentation (e.g., internal CSO policies). Evaluators interviewed case study CSO members in different functions (e.g., Board member, executive director, financial manager). In two cases, two evaluators worked in tandem; the third case study was carried out by the national evaluator.

2.4 PROCESS OF ANALYSIS AND DEVELOPING CONCLUSIONS

The evaluation team members took extensive notes, and then coded interview data and documents both manually and with MaxQDA qualitative analysis software. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse survey data, as well as text analysis for open questions. To limit researcher bias risks, team members continuously exchanged insights from

data collection in weekly online reflection sessions. Also, the two evaluators who carried out interviews in Moldova worked partly in tandem, and partly in parallel, comparing their initial insights daily. At the end of field work in Moldova, the evaluation team jointly developed tentative findings and recommendations, and shared them in a hybrid validation workshop with the Embassy. The ensuing discussions and further analysis co-shaped this report.

The evaluation applied light touch Contribution Analysis, a theory-based method, to assess the extent to which the Programme contributed to its intended outcomes – i.e., to assess causality between the Programme and the intended outcomes. That included (i) reconstructing the Programme theory of change, discussed with the Swedish Embassy in an online workshop, (ii) analysing data on observed Programme outcomes and on internal and external aspects linked to those outcomes, (iii) constructing a ‘contribution story’ describing plausible Programme contributions to the outcomes (see section 4.3 below), and (iv) reflecting on alternative explanations for the outcomes.

The evaluation team is confident that the triangulation of different sources and methods has provided a sound basis for our findings. Although most data are from programme stakeholders, there are diverse, arguably opposite perspectives within the programme – the donor (Embassy staff) and the supporting consulting firms on one hand, and the intended beneficiaries (CSO staff) on the other hand. Furthermore, the evaluators interviewed external specialists in CSO development and relevant thematic fields (gender, human rights, environment), who provided their views on CSOs in their sector of activity and general CSO development in Moldova.

Finally, the evaluation team took care to limit survey bias by distributing the survey to all CSOs in the Programme, keeping it brief and anonymous, and designing the questions with care (to avoid social desirability and question order bias). Ethics

The evaluation team abides by professional and ethical guidelines as required by the Quality Standards for Development Evaluation defined by OECD-DAC (2010). It has been mindful of gender roles, ethnicity, ability, age, sexual orientation, language, and other differences when designing and carrying out the evaluation. As the international evaluator did not receive positive travel advice to visit the Left Bank, interviews in Tiraspol were carried out solo by the national evaluator. The evaluation team has treated all information provided by individuals in interviews and surveys as strictly confidential; data collected have been stored in a password-protected digital space responding to GDPR norms for data protection.

Handling comments and criticism on the evaluation report: This is an external evaluation, i.e., the findings, conclusions, and recommendations reflect the views of the evaluation team. However, if the Embassy disagrees with the findings in this draft evaluation report, the evaluation team will re-verify its data and analyses. If the disagreement between the evaluation team’s and the Embassy’s interpretations persists, the final evaluation report will transparently discuss these differences.

2.5 CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

Survey bias: When designing the survey questionnaire, the evaluation team built on lessons learnt from a similar survey carried out as part of an evaluation for the Embassy of Sweden in Ukraine (early 2023), thus enhancing the reliability of the evidence. However, the evaluation team does not know which five CSOs have not responded to the survey. If they were all from the same region (e.g., Left Bank) or all had problems responding in English (despite assurances by the Embassy that the CSOs could respond in English), then the survey would not be fully representative. However, in view of the 72% response and completion rate, it still reflects the views of most programme participants.

Lack of an overall monitoring system: Although the Embassy provided the evaluation team with a comprehensive set of documents about the Core Support programme, and documentation on specific CSOs, the lack of an overall monitoring and learning (or knowledge management) system for the Core Support Programme was a challenge. To mitigate the lack of an overall Core Support Programme proposal/document or results framework, the evaluation team reconstructed the theory of change from Embassy procurement documents, contracts with the consulting firms, the consulting firms' activity reports, and interviews with current and former Embassy Programme Officers (POs). Furthermore, one interview was conducted with a senior policy advisor at Sida headquarters, and evaluation reports from other regions reviewed, to gain a fuller understanding of Sida's Core Support around the world.

The timeframe for the evaluation was shorter than proposed in the TOR, as the Embassy advised to start field research in the second week of November 2023 only, while the final evaluation report would still have to be submitted by mid-December. As a result, only light-touch contribution analysis could be carried out, which may have affected the strength of our findings on effectiveness. The timeframe also limited possibilities to conduct additional interviews after the validation workshop or in response to comments on the draft report, e.g., to probe deeper into the role of the consulting firms, e.g., in shaping CSOs results framework. Also, it was not possible to fully assess the mainstreaming of a human rights-based approach (HRBA), gender, environmental concerns, and conflict sensitivity across CSCSP.

3 Evaluation object

3.1 CORE SUPPORT IN SWEDISH DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

Core Support to CSOs is a characteristic feature of Swedish development cooperation. In accordance with OECD-DAC policy, **Sida defines Core Support as “support to the overall strategic plan and operations of a CSO, including administrative costs. It is an un-earmarked grant to the organisation towards its strategy and overall work plan, going to the main account and not separated from other funding sources. Auditing, procurement and reporting use the organisation’s systems and procedures, not the donor’s”** (Sida 2020:16).

Core Support responds to one of Sida’s five guiding principles for programme-based approaches, which is that “full alignment should be the first option for financial support to a government or an organisation’s programme”, rather than financial earmarking (Sida 2008:2 and 22). Unlike programme and project support, Core Support “allows CSOs to pursue their own set priorities and plans, and to implement the strategies and approaches they themselves have defined, in a predictable manner. This form of funding is therefore also most effective in facilitating CSO programming in ways that align with and are owned by their partners and constituents” (Sida 2019:13).

A recent study concludes that Core Support does not come with higher corruption risks than project support; Core Support can even prevent corruption because it provides donors with a fuller understanding of the CSO’s internal systems and its financial situation (Karlstedt 2020:155). The same study has found that in contexts with high levels of corruption, corruption risks are high for any funding modality, and that corruption prevention must focus on the partner organisation’s internal systems, regulations and governance structures (Karlstedt 2020:35-36).

Evaluations of Swedish Core Support programmes to civil society organisations in partner countries have acclaimed this modality as highly effective. For instance, an evaluation of Core Support to 24 Palestinian and Israeli human rights organisations concludes that [CSO] “ownership of the agenda is key to improved performance of the CSOs,” lauding the Swedish Embassy for trusting the principle “what is good for the CSO is good for us” (Karlstedt et al. 2015:23).

3.2 THE CIVIL SOCIETY CORE SUPPORT PROGRAMME IN MOLDOVA

The Civil Society Core Support Programme in Moldova was developed under the *Results Strategy for Sweden’s Reform Cooperation for Eastern Europe, the Western*

Balkans and Turkey 2014-20, with Result 2.2 (Eastern Europe) focusing on “increased enjoyment of human rights and greater opportunities to exercise democratic influence”.⁴ The strategy frames civil society as a “force for change” and a “catalyst for democratic development” in Eastern Europe, and calls for Swedish support to increase the capacity and sustainability of civil society.⁵ Within that strategic framework, the Embassy of Sweden in Moldova started identifying CSOs for its Civil Society Core Support programme in 2015, with the first cohort of CSOs receiving Core Support in 2016. The programme continues under the current *Strategy for Sweden’s reform cooperation with Eastern Europe for 2021-2027*, which emphasises the role of civil society development in “creating inclusive dialogue and contributing to increased trust in society”.⁶ According to interviewed Embassy staff, the Programme has been designed to strengthen CSOs in the three stages outlined below. At the individual CSO level, each stage is documented in a dedicated report prepared by the international consulting firm:

- i. **Purposeful selection**, by the Embassy, of promising CSOs that agreed to undergo a system-based audit (SBA) and fulfil organisational and thematic conditions to join the Programme. The selected CSOs underwent a SBAs with recommendations for each CSO.
- ii. **Pre-Core Support**, generally planned for 6 months and *de facto* lasting 8-10 months in most cases (no-cost extensions), with standardised training (e.g., on HRBA, gender, environment, and conflict sensitivity), capacity strengthening support tailored to CSOs according to SBA-linked recommendations, and networking activities. Their progress was assessed in a so-called Follow-Up Report.
- iii. **Core Support**, i.e., funding for CSOs to implement CSO Strategic Plans developed during the Pre-Core Support phase, with additional capacity strengthening support tailored to CSO needs, and annual financial audits. A final external evaluation concluded the Core Support phase.

Since 2016, the Embassy has granted Core Support to 18 CSOs in six cohorts, all of which followed the process outlined above. Five CSOs, the Association for Participatory Democracy (ADEPT), the Center for Investigative Journalism (CIJ), the Librarians’ Association, Platforma and Mothers of Large Families and women-entrepreneurs of Gagauzia (VESTA), completed the Pre-Core Support stage but did not obtain Core Support. By September 2023, nine Core Support partnerships ended, with the remaining ones expected to finish in 2023 (2), 2024 (2), 2025 (4) and 2026 (1) respectively. The grantee’s thematic fields have been spread across Swedish priority topics: human rights and governance/anti-corruption, gender equality, free media, and environment (see also CSO list in Annex 5). Although national in scope, the Programme has involved mainly organisations based in Chisinau. Two participating CSOs are in the North of the country (Balti and Drochia), and two are on the Left Bank.

⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) 2014:3.

⁵ MFA 2014:10.

⁶ MFA 2020: 8.

The Embassy of Sweden has integrated Core Support into its thematic programmes. There is no separate Core Support Programme document, budget or programme officer at the Swedish Embassy in Moldova. The programme has been managed by three Sida Programme Officers (POs) based at the Embassy, who jointly decided on new CSCSP partners (without any formal public calls for proposals) as part of the Embassy's regular internal Development Cooperation meetings. Upon selection of a partner, the relevant PO created a case/folder in the Sida monitoring platform.⁷ Two consulting firms were contracted to carry out SBAs, capacity strengthening, and CSO monitoring and evaluation: Nordic Consulting Group (NCG) in 2017-18 and Swedish Development Advisors (SDA) in 2015-17 and 2019-22 respectively. The total consultancy costs amounted to SEK 10,690,472⁸ from 2015 to 2022, including preliminary activities before Core Support to the first cohort of CSOs.

Both SDA and NCG followed the three-stage process outlined above, producing at the end of each stage, for each CSO, a report documenting the CSO's 'baseline' or starting situation (in the form of the SBA), progress made in the Pre-Core phase (Follow-Up Report), and its situation at the end of Core Support (evaluation). SDA and NCG reporting formats differ slightly but encompass the same aspects – broadly speaking, CSO mission and strategy, governance and management, financial management and control. The SBAs and Follow-Up Reports come with long lists of recommendations, some 15-20 of which are marked as priorities. Pre-Core Support provided training and small grants to participating CSOs for their implementation of the recommendations. NCG or SDA documented progress against the recommendations (Follow-Up Report), and what that meant for the CSO's readiness for Core Support. That assessment was accompanied by further (and previous) recommendations for follow-up during the Core Support phase.

The evaluation team has reconstructed the underlying implicit theory of change and validated it with the Embassy. Visualised in Figure 1, the theory of change can be summarised as follows: The Embassy aims to contribute to an effective, independent, democratic, human rights-, gender-, environment-, and conflict-sensitive, sustainable civil society in Moldova [intended impact] by targeted Core Support, which follows the three steps outlined above [outputs]. Upon completion of the Core Support phase (usually 3 years), CSOs are expected to be fully operational, well-performing, and increasingly independent from Embassy funding [outcomes]. In Figure 1 below, blue rectangles display the main Embassy activities, pink rectangles are those of the consulting firm (SDA and NCG), and purple ones are shared responsibilities. The theory of change is based on logical assumptions, including the following:

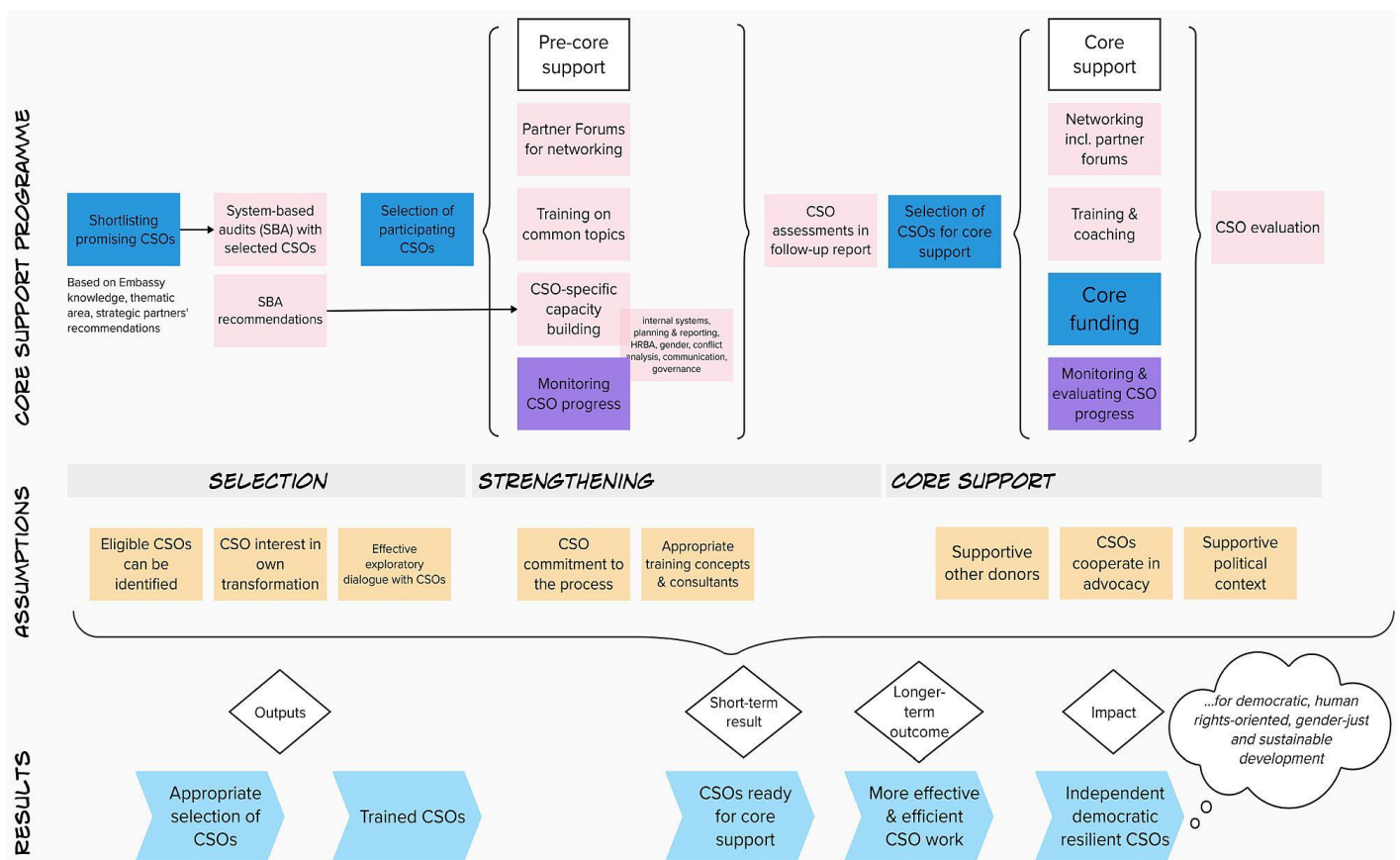
- The Embassy selects appropriate CSOs for the programme.
- The CSO training (capacity strengthening support) is appropriate (approach, themes, trainers).

⁷ Information on the selection and approval process from the Embassy (interviews and written communication).

⁸ Evaluation TOR.

- The CSOs will undergo an organisational transformation towards more democratic, transparent decision-making and better administration to be able to absorb Core Support.
- The participating CSOs use Core Support to strengthen their organisation, its effectiveness and efficiency, and its outreach.
- Strengthened CSOs are more independent, democratic and resilient.

Figure 1: Reconstructed theory of change



4 Findings

This section presents the evaluation findings against all evaluation questions, organised roughly along the OECD-DAC criteria of relevance and coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability.

4.1 A UNIQUE RESPONSE TO NEWLY DISCOVERED CIVIL SOCIETY NEEDS (RELEVANCE)

This section focuses on evaluation question (EQ) 1: To what extent have the intervention objectives and design responded to the intended beneficiaries' needs?

Overall, the Civil Society Core Support Programme has largely responded to vital CSO needs, especially stable funding and effective internal systems, and addressed other important issues. Sida's unique Core Support approach complements other donor activities in Moldova; there are however some overlaps in CSO training activities.

Finding 1: The CSCSP has provided much-needed funding and activities for CSO capacity strengthening.

The Core Support model stands out from the norm of activity-based (project) funding in Moldova and offers a more **innovative and trust-based approach**, which has been highly appreciated by the partners. The CSOs emphasise the significance of Core Support in that it enables them to establish their own strategic framework with distinct indicators and budget lines, and it offers a high level of flexibility in their interventions, which is challenged in more project-specific funding modalities. According to the overwhelming majority of CSO interviewees, the **Programme has been important for their growth and strategy development**. On the other hand, interviewees who did not obtain Core Support felt they needed more support for them to meet the requirements.

As evidenced in interviews and our survey, the paramount issue for CSOs in Moldova is adequate **access to stable funding**, especially for fixed expenses (e.g., administrative costs) which are not or are inadequately covered by other donors. The CSCSP has acknowledged and addressed this need, providing non-earmarked funding supporting the CSO's overall budget (i.e., core funding) and encouraging CSOs to raise more money.

Across the board, CSO representatives – particularly from less established CSOs – described Programme activities as **eye-opening**, as few had been fully aware of their organisation's needs when joining the Programme. The system-based audits reviewed, with each participating CSO, their systems for (i) organisational governance and

management, (ii) mission and strategy, and (iii) financial management and control, to develop some 40-50 detailed recommendations, and 15-20 were prioritised.⁹ Priority recommendations usually focused on key aspects of democratic governance, results-based management and financial control. CSO interviewees singled out **strategy development** and the formulation of a **results framework**, new features for many CSOs, as particularly helpful. Those features have reportedly fostered a sense of autonomy. The quotes below illustrate how the CSCSP prompted new insights and opened up a rare window of opportunity for participating CSOs:

"It was a surprise to be able to get this kind of capacity building and it was necessary." (Interview with less established¹⁰ CSO)

"We were to make our own strategic decisions, nothing was imposed. It was a free choice and our responsibility. So many donors provide activity-based funding. The Core Support was different. We were the ones establishing the indicators, and developing budget lines. There was great flexibility in the intervention." (Interview with well-established CSO)

Finding 2: CSCSP design, with its three stages and its mix of standardised training, CSO-specific advisory services and networking, has been highly relevant in the Moldovan context, where CSOs started to emerge in the 1990s only.

Interviewed CSOs have assessed the three-phase design of the programme (initial selection and SBA, followed by Pre-Core and Core Support phases) to be a meaningful way of picking and preparing CSOs for the capacity-building efforts encompassed by the support. The Pre-Core Support phase defines expectations and requirements that CSOs need to fulfil to qualify for Core Support. As the CSO sector in Moldova is still quite young, many CSOs have worked without formalised internal systems (as evidenced in a large number of SBA reports) – a situation that donors tend to perceive as a major risk.

The partner CSOs are highly diverse and face different challenges, underscoring the need for flexible approaches to capacity strengthening. The Programme has included more general and standardised training activities, but also encompassed more specific work with partner CSOs. Interviewed CSOs have unanimously described such CSO-specific training as a relevant part of their organisations' journey towards stronger strategic capacity and direction.

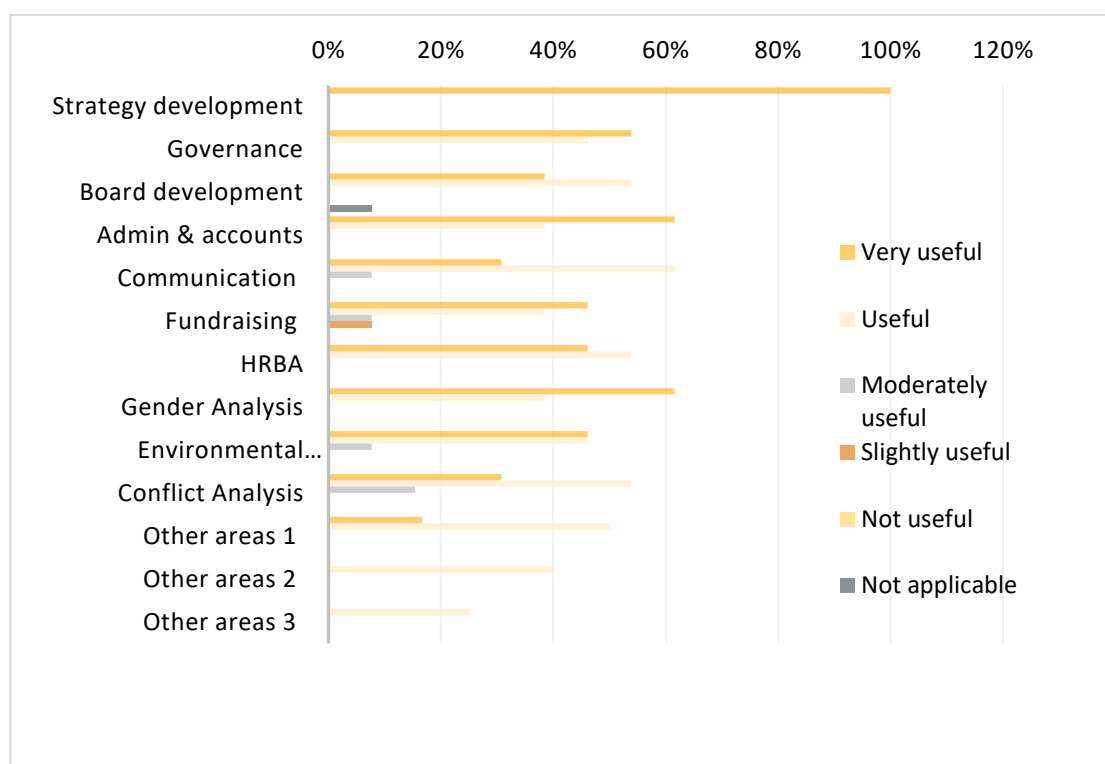
Most interviewed CSO managers reported that training – especially training tailored to specific CSO needs – offered in the CSCSP was highly relevant in that it played a central role in their CSO's transformation. **Strategy development**, including building a results framework, was considered the most useful topic, as corroborated in the survey answered by 13 CSOs, all of whom (100%) rated strategy development as "very useful".

⁹ Estimates based on a rapid review of 10 SBAs.

¹⁰ "Well-established CSO", in this evaluation, has been defined as a CSO that had paid staff and funding from international donors when entering the CSCSP.

Most CSO interviewees underlined the **necessity of more needs-based training** aligned with specific organisational goals. Also, they pointed out the **high relevance of advisory services to individual CSOs** (referred to as “coaching” and “mentoring”¹¹), in comparison with standardised training. Such tailor-made training is an effective way to foster a deeper understanding and integration of new skills (see also section 4.3 below). On the other hand, training on Sida’s four mainstreaming approaches (gender, human rights-based approach, environment, and conflict sensitivity) appears to have been a welcome but only partly effective addition: Many partner CSOs described the standardised mainstreaming training as inspiring but did not necessarily translate new insights into their organisational practice (see also section 4.3).

Figure 2: Training topics considered as very useful by participating CSOs



Finding 3: There are opportunities for strengthening coherence and limiting duplication with training provided by other donors.

Sida’s model of Core Support is unique for Moldovan CSOs. However, some CSCSP group training packages delivered by SDA and NCG reportedly duplicated to some extent training provided by other donors, e.g., UNDP and USAID. That could be avoided in the future by offering more unique models and CSO-specific coaching and mentoring. Most survey respondents reported having received training on human rights

¹¹ The terms “coaching” and “mentoring” are frequently used to designate one-on-one relationships. In the CSCSP, both terms designate consulting activities that are tailored to the needs of individual CSOs, as opposed to more standardised group training.

and gender equality via other donors; about one-third reported having had training on (i) strategy development, (ii) organisational systems and (iii) proposal and report writing respectively.

4.2 AN EFFECTIVE CHOICE OF PARTNERS – WITH THE POTENTIAL FOR A MORE TRANSPARENT PROCESS (RELEVANCE AND EFFECTIVENESS)

EQ2: How has the Programme selected CSOs, and to what extent has the process identified the most suitable CSOs in terms of Programme priorities?

The Embassy has selected a suitable mix of civil society organizations for the Programme, with a preponderance of Chisinau-based CSOs. In future phases, the selection process may need adjusting to be more inclusive and transparent.

Finding 4: The CSO selection process used by the Embassy, although informal, has yielded a strategically relevant, appropriate set of CSOs that appear to be civil society leaders in Sida's priority sectors.

The Embassy has applied a **strategic selection process** of partner CSOs with clearly defined stages – SBA, Pre-Core Support, and Follow-Up Assessment to determine whether the CSO was ready for Core Support. As a rule, upon ‘graduation’ from the 6-month Pre-Core Support, CSOs entered a 3-year Core Support agreement (see also Chapter 3). The well-established East European Foundation (EEF) obtained a 5-year Core Support grant; the Women’s Law Center (WLC) benefited from two successive Core Support grants. The Embassy extended the Pre-Core Support period in some cases, so that CSOs could implement all or most priority recommendations resulting from the SBA and the Follow-Up Assessment. **The rate of organisations ‘graduating’ from Pre-Core to Core Support has been high (18 out of 23**, as per the information provided by the Embassy), suggesting that the Embassy successfully selected those CSOs for the Programme that were likely to embark on a demanding organisational growth journey. The evaluation team interviewed members of more than 50% of the supported CSOs and found good reasons for the choice of all supported partners, aligned with the Embassy’s strategic priorities. Although the selected CSOs had already proven their commitment to effective civil society activism at the time they were selected, most – as evidenced by the SBAs – had weak internal systems that needed strengthening before Core Support could be granted.

System-based audits, assessments after Pre-Core Support and evaluations at the end of Core Support are based on clear criteria and documented in comprehensive reports written by SDA and NCG. In our three case studies, all reports were by SDA; they were well-structured and comprehensive. SBAs tended to be the longest

documents (50-64 pages), followed by Pre-Core Follow-Up Reports (22-28 pages); the final evaluation reports (after Core Support) were considerably shorter (13-14 pages).¹²

However, **the Embassy's pre-SBA process to identify and select CSOs, although clearly effective, has been only patchily documented.** The selection appears to have been based on intuition, informal consultation with partners and other donors, and institutional memory. Current and former Programme Officers (POs) have described the process as a collective one, with the POs responsible for different themes discussing and agreeing together on the mix of CSOs for each cohort in the Programme.

The informal character of that process has caused uncertainty among (potential) CSO partners in the small Moldovan CSO landscape. Also, the Embassy is currently challenged by the departure of some experienced Programme Officers holding that institutional memory. Quotes from interviews with diverse stakeholders illustrate that situation:

"We still need some criteria on who to choose. [The CSOs] should be 2-3 years old to ensure a level of commitment, but I am not sure whether this is written down somewhere. Now it seems to be based on institutional memory." (Interview with PO)

"We have requirements [for CSO selection], but we should be more open about them." (Interview with PO)

"They had their own selection process, no competition as such. Others asked how did you manage to get this support? I am not sure of the procedures." (Interview with well-established CSO)

The benefits of the current selection model are that the Embassy has been able to handpick strategic partners that match Embassy priorities. There are also lower administrative costs involved in the current model compared to launching open calls for proposals. The risk is that the Embassy has difficulties in agreeing on or justifying the specific mix of partners it supports in the Programme. All Core Support partners have qualified via SBA and the Pre-Core Support requirements, but there is no clear definition of what it takes to join the Programme (pre-SBA). There is also considerable **reputational risk** for the Embassy when intuition and personal relationships flow into the selection process. That dilemma was highlighted in several interviews with CSO representatives, the Embassy and external specialists.

"Some organisations said it was unfair that there was no open call. But we have to reduce bureaucracy and there are not that many. No need to make it super bureaucratic." (Interview with PO)

"Equity should be considered. Selection should be as transparent as possible, also to avoid the risk of corruption. Open calls seem more fair." (Interview with international organisation)

¹² The shortness of the evaluation reports can be explained by the fact that the documentation has focused on capacity strengthening matters, i.e., strategic, management, communication, and administration matters – not on the services, advocacy, and other activities of the CSOs.

Finding 5: From a HRBA perspective, the evaluation has found a predominance of Chisinau-based CSOs, and more limited access to the Programme for CSOs in other regions.

The CSO partners in the Programme present various degrees of organisational development, different fields of work and (to some extent) diverse geographical coverage. Some CSOs in the Programme have been leaders in their fields, enjoying high visibility, and handling larger budgets than most Moldovan CSOs. For instance, the Women Law Center and East European Foundation have worked with several, including multilateral, donors and have been active internationally. Others – especially in more recent cohorts – are smaller and less experienced, e.g., Women’s Initiatives in the Transnistrian Region. **Chisinau-based partners make up the majority of the CSCSP portfolio**; 14 out of 18 CSOs that received Core Support have been based in the capital. One could argue that the Programme has enrolled mainly organisations that were already in a privileged place – probably one of the conditions for success.

It is to the Embassy’s credit that it has chosen to include CSOs in the Transnistria Region (Left Bank), where CSOs face major challenges. The *de facto* authorities severely control civil society activity; they restrict public protests, advocacy, and independent or investigative journalism, but welcome CSOs as social service providers, e.g., for people with disabilities and children. As a result, the civil society sector is less developed than in the rest of Moldova. The Moldovan government has no direct power over the Left Bank. The Russian language dominates communication in the region. Very few donors transfer money into bank accounts in the Transnistrian Region; to access funding, CSOs in the region must register and maintain bank accounts both in Chisinau and in Tiraspol, which causes additional efforts and specific difficulties in reporting. Despite the specificity of the situation, donors do not launch specific calls for proposals for the region; Transnistrian CSOs must compete with CSOs from the entire country.¹³

Also, as the evaluation team has inferred from interviews with Left Bank CSOs, **a lack of English and/or Romanian language skills may have limited Transnistrian CSOs’ access** to online networking events, such as the “Tuesday Dialogues” introduced by the Embassy, considered by many non-Transnistrian interview partners to be an effective and cost-efficient, informal way of staying in touch.

4.3 TANGIBLE RESULTS IN CSO DEVELOPMENT (EFFECTIVENESS)

This section combines findings from two evaluation questions, EQ3 and 5.

EQ3: To what extent has the Programme achieved, or is expected to achieve, its intended results, possibly including any differential results across groups?

¹³ See for instance the final narrative progress report of the *One UN Joint Action to Strengthen Human Rights in the Transnistrian Region of the Republic of Moldova*
https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2023-01/one_un_ja_hrs_tn_2022_final_report_jul2022.pdf

EQ5: How has the Programme mainstreamed gender and human rights-based approaches (HRBA), environmental responsiveness, and conflict sensitivity?

The Programme has achieved its intended results, although not all CSOs have benefited equally. CSOs focusing on human rights (including women's rights), gender equality and environmental issues are strongly represented in the cohorts. Key factors for success have been the apt selection of CSO partners, the trust-based relationship between the Embassy and the CSO, and organisational mentoring and coaching based on SBA findings and tailored to individual CSO needs. Additional efforts may be needed to mainstream Sida's four approaches more fully across the entire Programme.

Finding 6: The Programme has achieved intended results, contributing to strengthening Moldovan CSOs, especially in the fields of organisational growth, and strategy- and results-based planning.

The implicit theory of change of the Programme is that CSOs that (i) undergo an SBA, (ii) follow up on SBA recommendations in the Pre-Core phase, and (iii) continue developing themselves while receiving Core Support, would become more effective, efficient, and resilient (see chapter 3 incl. Figure 1). Based on data collected and triangulated in this evaluation, the following **contribution story** can be crafted to describe **how the Programme has plausibly contributed to the CSOs' development**:

- i. The Embassy's selection process, although lacking transparency, identified suitable, mission-driven civil society organisations interested in developing their organisations (as discussed in section 4.3 above).
- ii. The SBAs formulated appropriate recommendations for organisational and strategic growth – the SBAs were comprehensive, addressing the full range of conditions for organisational and operational development (see also Chapter 3 above). 18 out of 23 CSOs managed to act upon those recommendations to the extent that the CSOs were found suitable for Core Support. In the case studies, SDA Follow-Up reports noted that the CSOs had fully or partly implemented 17/20, 12/23 and 10/19 respectively of the high-priority recommendations listed in their SDAs.
- iii. Capacity strengthening during the Pre-Core and Core Support phase and non-earmarked (Core Support) funding enabled most participating CSOs to transform themselves, from respectable ones to influential, high-performing organisations, and – for smaller CSOs – from informal groups to well-organised CSOs, as documented in the individual CSO evaluation reports and corroborated in interviews with CSOs (see discussion below and in section 4.6 on impact).

Most CSO interviewees also reported having adjusted their results frameworks and internal policies to keep them relevant in the changing contexts. However, some of them could not immediately produce related documents upon the evaluators' request – an observation suggesting that those documents have not been a daily necessity to all CSO staff.

The contribution story outlined above has been corroborated by participating CSO respondents, who affirmed, in interviews and the survey, that **Pre-Core Support**

prompted a leap forward in their organisational and strategic development. Many of the reviewed CSOs had started as activist groupings, often formed around one or two committed leaders, with informal or limited internal governance and management systems. Several interviewees pointed out that the Programme enabled CSOs to think more strategically, **empowering them to focus on the strategic path they wanted to pursue** in a longer-term perspective – instead of adjusting their activities to changing donor priorities.

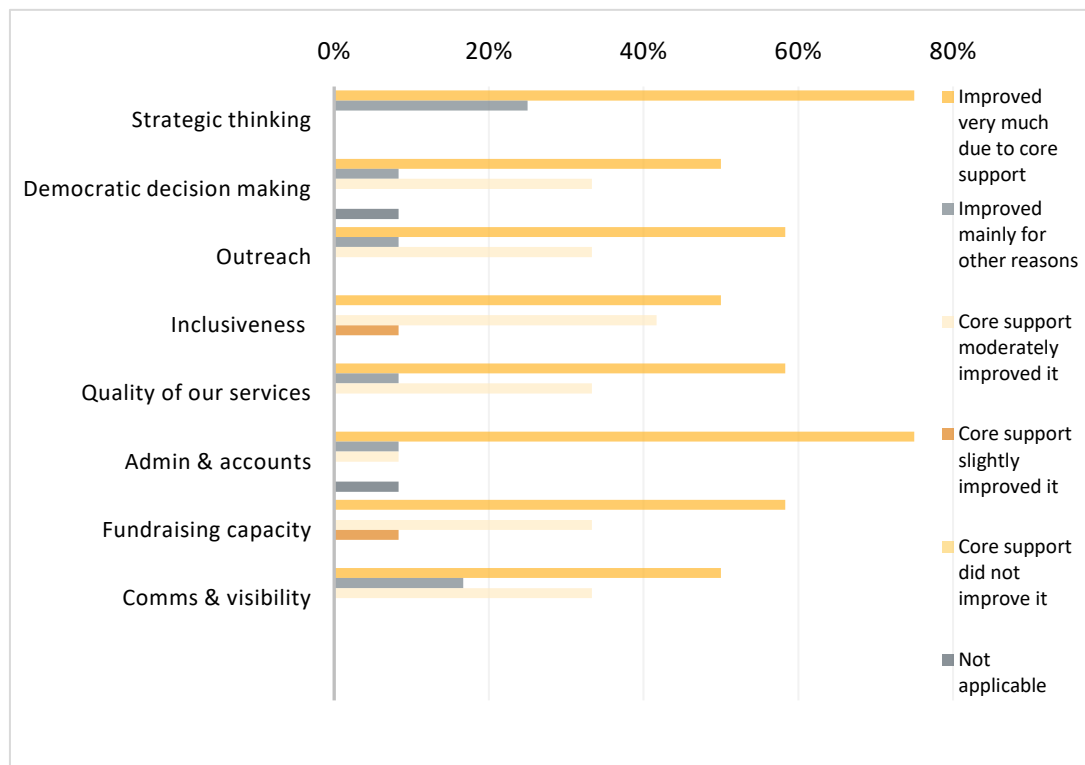
A tangible example has been the **results framework** that all CSOs had to develop as part of the CSCSP. The interviews have shown that that was a challenging exercise for most interviewees, but they also appreciated that form of structured thinking. Interestingly, the sample results frameworks reviewed as part of this evaluation were rather activity- and output-focused – but interlinking those elements into a results chain or matrix has apparently made a difference. Most interviewed CSO representatives stated they continued using and adapting the results framework, as illustrated below:

"The programme helped us to think strategically. We started not to think only in projects, but in achieving results." (Interview with less established CSO)

"The first thing we expected from the support was the strengthening of strategic planning skills and applying a Result Based Approach – and we got what we expected. These skills have been developed through very good training." (Interview with well-established CSO)

The Programme's effects on strategic thinking have also been illustrated in the survey (see Figure 3), showing that close to 80% of the respondents found their strategic thinking had improved thanks to the CSCSP – on par with the Programme's effects on the quality of internal processes and accounting.

Figure 3: Reported effects of the Core Support Programme on CSOs



Furthermore, the programme enabled supported partners to **improve their governance**, most notably by ensuring their Boards took a more active role in strategic direction and oversight, and by specifying distinct roles and functions within the CSO. CSO respondents considered not only the outcome as rewarding, but also the process of formulating internal policies and clarifying roles and functions within the organisations, as illustrated in the following quotes from CSO interviews.

"Since the beginning, we had recommendations to develop internal policies. In the beginning, we thought it is just something on a piece of paper we don't use – but now we have used them, and it works. It works like internal regulations and new staff members can read them and understand how our processes work". (Interview with well-established CSO)

"[One] good result of the training was [...] good governance. We managed to separate the General Assembly and the Board." (Interview with less established CSO)

"As a financial manager, I find Core Support valuable enabling me to work with budgets strategically, which improves budget planning. This does not only apply to Sida funding, but for all other sources of income." (Interview with less established CSO)

Several CSO interviewees, also representing different functions within the same organisations or serving as Board members in other CSOs, which strengthens the evidence, emphasised that the role of CSO Boards had become more active and more productive because of the Programme.

"When we started this project, we started to make our board more involved and more active – this was also a change in our organisation. We worked a lot to activate our board members."
(CSO interview)

Another achievement – and probably a factor that has contributed to CSO and broader civil society development – has been the **enhanced networking and partnerships** between CSOs. Such networking support has been part of the Embassy contracts with NCG and SDA. Furthermore, Embassy staff organised "Tuesday Dialogues" – regular informal online gatherings bringing together CSOs from different CSCSP cohorts. Some interviewees reported that as highly useful, while Left Bank CSOs appeared to benefit less fully due to language issues. Residential group training (i.e., training at a venue where participants would stay overnight) for members of different CSOs and different CSCSP cohorts also provided opportunities to exchange experiences. During training sessions, CSOs formally shared their experience in presentations; informal networking happened in the margins of the events, especially the residential training courses. The evaluation team has found cases of leading CSCSP grantees serving on each other's Boards, and of joint activities fostered by networking. Joint activities outside the Programme's domain have included joint campaigns and co-financing of projects.

In keeping with the Contribution Analysis approach, the evaluation team has reflected on alternative explanations for the effects we have found. The changes cannot be attributed to other, comparable programmes in Moldova, as the CSCSP has been unique in the country. Some CSOs may have been better positioned than others to perform well in the programme – but the vast majority of the smaller, less experienced CSOs that participated in the Pre-Core Phase managed to 'graduate' to core support. A causal link between the Core Support Programme and the outcomes at CSO levels is highly plausible.

Finding 7: The trust-based relationship between the Embassy and its CSO partners has been a factor for its success. However, some less experienced CSOs and CSOs with limited English language skills might have needed stronger guidance.

CSOs have appreciated the flexibility of Core Support. Representatives of participating CSOs that received funding from other donors described the flexible 'Swedish style' of funding as particularly helpful, allowing them to pursue this strategy, leverage additional funding from other donors, and react flexibly to new opportunities and threats.

Conversely, interviewees from less donor-savvy CSOs reported feeling overwhelmed by the task of following up on SBA recommendations. They had expected more technical support to advance towards meeting the requirements for Core Support, for instance, templates for reporting. Also, language skills may have created barriers – although CSO training was routinely provided with interpretation from and into English, Romanian and Russian (four participants from the Left Bank), CSO progress reports to the Embassy had to be delivered in English.

It would have taken additional data collection and analysis to assess how exactly the CSO experience with other donors, the presence or absence of ‘handholding’ and technical support, and language issues may have influenced the quality and the extent of CSCSP outcomes. Based on our data, the evaluation team can only flag that there might be a factor; it has not been possible to determine whether specific CSOs were disadvantaged compared to others. It may be advisable to consider the different starting situations of CSOs when planning for the future CSCSP, or to define clearer criteria on this when selecting CSOs.

Finding 8: The Programme has made valuable efforts to mainstream gender and human rights-based approaches (HRBA), environmental responsiveness, and conflict sensitivity, with mixed effects.

Training on Sida’s work with mainstreaming was mandatory for all CSOs in the programme. While the training was generally well-received, the extent to which it has influenced organisational practice is unclear. Arguably, addressing all four aspects within a single 2-3-day group training course is likely to strengthen participants’ knowledge, but is not sufficient to mainstream the full package into organisations. About half of the CSO interviewees described aspects of that training as relevant and reported integrating them into their strategy; others did not see the added value of streamlining all features. Gender mainstreaming appeared to receive the most attention among the participating CSOs, as illustrated in the following quotes from CSO interviews. That has also been evidenced in the survey (see Figure 3 above.)

“We were taught how to do gender mainstreaming, gender lens in processes – how you speak, how you address men & women in training – we were given tools – all that is anchored in our long-term strategy and RBM tool.” (CSO interview)

“Gender mainstreaming and gender policies were very useful. Now this is part of our statistics. It was a mandatory requirement that we should focus on this in our RAF [results assessment framework].” (CSO interview)

The evaluation team did not have a chance to verify whether that success was caused by CSCSP training itself, by the contact with supported feminist CSOs, by external factors (e.g., training and other efforts by other donors), or – most likely – by a mix of all factors. There is anecdotal evidence of feminist organisations within the Programme, such as the LGBTI* rights group GenderDocM, playing a role in informally sensitising fellow Core Support recipients to gender issues.

4.4 UNUSED POTENTIAL IN MONITORING, EVALUATION AND LEARNING (EFFECTIVENESS)

EQ4: Has the Programme M&E system delivered robust and useful information to assess progress towards outcomes and to contribute to learning?

EQ8: What unintended and unwanted effects of the Programme have been observed?

CSCSP monitoring and evaluation has been thorough in tracking individual CSO progress, but lacks a system for documenting the goal, intended results, and progress for the overall Programme. The patchy growth of participating CSOs' monitoring capacity may be an unintended effect of the Programme implementation structure.

Finding 9: Although the Embassy has obtained good results, the lack of a system to plan for and capture results of the overall Core Support Programme risks hampering future effectiveness.

As detailed above, the programme has been delivered well, and the Embassy and Sida staff know the Programme well. In interviews, they have articulated a lucid understanding of what has worked, of results achieved, and of shortcomings in the Programme and the CSOs supported. However, little of that implicit knowledge is documented. As pointed out earlier, the CSCSP does not have its own results framework or overarching progress reports. Progress reports by the consultancies focus on their activities; they do not report against specific programme indicators, and they cover only the contract periods of NCG and SDA respectively. They are output-based and there is little, if any, reflection on the Programme's overall results and likely impact.

"Measuring the impact is missing. I am confused on how this works. It is difficult for the CSOs to meet this expectation. Data-driven information is the future, also for the government, so we should pay attention to this." (Interview with Embassy staff)

In interviews, the Programme Officers have outlined a thorough, joint CSO selection process, but its specific steps and criteria are not documented. They have described the impact they expect from the programme – CSOs that would have grown into respected, influential, independent but well-networked, and sustainable organisations –, but that expectation is not written down anywhere. Some Programme Officers verbally explained the role of CSCSP in their overall thematic programmes – for example, as a way to support local initiatives more effectively and efficiently than via international partners, and as a source of information on what happens at grassroots levels. However there is no overarching theory of change or description of the programme rationale that would clarify why the Embassy has its CSCSP.

That degree of informality – which has the advantage of being flexible and non-bureaucratic – may have contributed to the lack of insufficient clarity on the division of responsibilities between the consultancy firms and the Embassy. The monitoring responsibility reportedly lies with the Embassy, but monitoring and evaluation responsibilities were also included in the contract with NCG and SDA.

Finding 10: The programme has strengthened CSO's capacity to plan strategically and results-oriented manner. However, additional guidance might have been necessary for less experienced CSOs to deliver appropriate progress reports to the Embassy.

As stated earlier, the participating CSOs are now in a better place when it comes to planning for results. However, CSO interviewees have acknowledged that monitoring is still a complicated matter for them, and that generally, they have not been able to

recruit dedicated staff for monitoring. The quality of the progress and final reports presented by the case study CSOs to the Embassy has been modest. Although some changes can be noted over the years – for example, in one case, annual reports have become increasingly detailed –, all reviewed CSO progress reports focus on activities and outputs only. The results assessment frameworks (RAFs) in the case studies are also strongly activity- and output-oriented. In one of the cases, the CSO has included specific numeric targets for each activity and output; the corresponding progress are simple tables stating planned versus achieved figures. While this approach helps to account for progress against plan, it does not necessarily foster strategic thinking about broader outcomes and longer-term impact, adaptation to context changes, and learning about implementation quality and why and how certain results have been achieved (or not).

The Embassy reports having made a conscious choice of not providing templates for the CSO results frameworks or for progress reporting. While the underlying intention to provide flexibility to the grantees is laudable, not all CSOs in the Programme were ready to devise their own systems. Some interviewed CSOs have appreciated that approach, as it gave them greater responsibility and flexibility. But other CSOs would have liked to have more guidance. That dilemma is reflected in contrasting CSO statements:

"They did not provide a template for the report, which was good. This enabled us to focus on the results [we wanted to achieve] instead of presenting activities. The feedback from the Embassy has been open-minded." (Interview with well-established CSO)

"No templates are available. How can we present this document (results framework)? We were uncertain when this was good enough. We could have benefitted from experiences of other organisations." (Interview with less established CSO)

The evaluation team has not been able to delve deeper into the role the consulting firms (NCG and SDA) played in shaping CSO RAFs and reports. As the consulting firms' own reports to the Embassy focus on activities, it could be that they have (consciously or inadvertently) steered the CSOs into the direction of activity- and output-based planning and reporting. Also, the fact that the consulting firms were responsible for recording CSO progress against the recommendations issued in the SBA and Follow-Up Report, might have been a missed opportunity to transfer monitoring responsibilities and skills to the participating CSOs. While the evaluation does not have sufficient evidence to uphold these hypotheses, it may be a good idea to keep them in mind when designing the future phase of the Programme, as indications are pointing towards varying degrees of absorption by the CSOs of the capacity support offered, in particular during the pre-core support.

4.5 A RESOURCE-INTENSIVE BUT REWARDING PROGRAMME (EFFICIENCY)

EQ6: Could Core Support have been provided in a more cost-efficient way, considering the time and resources programme managers have spent in managing the Core Support contracts with the CSOs? Could there be other more cost-efficient ways to provide Core Support to achieve the same results?

The Embassy's considerable investment into the Programme appears to have paid off. In the long run, efficiency could be improved by clarifying the purpose, structure and processes of the Programme.

Finding 11: Embassy staff have invested considerable resources to make the Programme a success. Covering Moldovan CSOs in all Swedish priority sectors, its strategic value within the overall Swedish development efforts in Moldova has been worth the cost.

All interviewed Embassy staff have characterised the Programme as demanding. Programme Officers have invested much into jointly identifying appropriate CSOs, following their progress, procuring international consulting services, and providing handholding support to CSOs. There appears to have been some duplication between the Embassy and the consulting firms' tasks, especially in monitoring the CSO process and advising on reporting. But the Embassy has had sole responsibility for CSO selection and contracting agreements. There have been spells of time without international consultancy support, e.g., in 2023.

Interviewed CSO representatives have highly appreciated their relationship with the Embassy, many pointing out the importance of close communication – as illustrated in their quotes below.

"It was smooth working with the person from the Embassy – they are really easy. Important to have close communication – going through processes together is important for us!" (CSO Interview)

"The focal person [PO] at the Embassy has been important for the cooperation." (CSO Interview)

"All the team from the Embassy was very easy to work with, very understanding, supportive, didn't feel bureaucratic." (CSO Interview)

However, all present and former Embassy staff interviewed agree that providing close attention to all participating CSOs stretches the capacity of Embassy staff. Every Programme Officer manages a comprehensive thematic portfolio; the CSCSP partners are only one element in that portfolio, next to other partners that absorb considerably larger grants. That makes it difficult to continuously share knowledge with other Programme Officers and provide hand-holding support to CSOs. Embassy staff find the Programme resource-intensive. Core Support grants have typically amounted to some 5 million SEK per CSO, with few exceptions (notably EEF and WLC, with Core Support grants totalling some 13 million SEK and close to 27 million SEK

respectively). As most participating CSOs had not handled budgets of that size before, it would have been rash to offer larger grants in most cases. Conversely, grants to international partners, e.g., multilateral organisations such as UN Women or UNDP and international development NGOs have been a multiple of typical CSCSP grants. The perception of interviewees in the Embassy is that such larger grants do not require as much effort as CSCSP partners.

It is evident that some partners require more Embassy support than others and that it would be easier for the Embassy to manage fewer organisations with larger grants. However, restructuring the portfolio would need to fit with Swedish strategic priorities, which call for civil society support. Embassy staff also consider that a greater share of grants given to local CSOs reaches the intended ultimate beneficiaries (as compared to grants to multilateral and international organisations). Also, one interviewee emphasised the importance of supporting local CSOs to stay abreast of the reality “on the ground”, and to learn about the local effects of larger (other) programmes supported by the Embassy.

Finding 12: Inefficiencies may have been caused and opportunities for adjustments missed because of the lack of a documented, monitored programme strategy.

The commitment of Sida Programme Officers at the Embassy has contributed to CSCSP’s achievements. But interviewees admitted that they were not able to support participating CSOs as much as they found it necessary. As pointed out earlier, there is no dedicated CSCSP programme officer or programme document. Developing an overarching CSCSP document, theory of change, monitoring system and reports would have meant an extra investment of limited Embassy staff time. **But it is difficult to hand over knowledge that is informal, implicit, and non-documented.** That is the current challenge for new POs who have joined the Embassy team in 2023. They need clear information to take on their new role and to understand how the Programme works. With the benefit of hindsight, it would have been helpful to invest in developing a written Programme document with clearly defined roles, criteria and indicators earlier on – the investment would have paid off in terms of more systematic monitoring, greater transparency, and more effective management of transitions within the team.

According to Embassy data, the Programme spent over 10 million SEK for seven years of SDA and NCG consultancies, accompanying successive batches of CSOs. Consultancy support was necessary for the Programme. Data from Embassy and CSO interviewees, and responses to the CSO survey, broadly expressed satisfaction with SDA and NCG services; the limited criticism voiced in interviews was mainly about the mode of delivery. However, **early adjustments could have made the consulting services more cost-effective.** For instance, early in the Programme, the consulting firms could have been asked to support the development of an overall Programme theory of change and monitoring framework, with a clear delineation of responsibilities between the Embassy and the consulting firms. An overall, light touch (perhaps internal) evaluation with the first batch of CSCSP grantees at the end of their Core Support, could have revealed **which types of training were most necessary and**

appreciated across CSOs. For instance, organisational mentoring and coaching with individual CSOs reportedly generated greater practical value for the CSOs than group training, as illustrated in these quotes from CSO interviews:

"Training is needed but should be needs-based. Avoid obligatory training where they expect you to be there." (CSO Interview)

"I feel that there is an overlap in training activities. Should we merge some of them? Donors are not coordinating so well." (CSO Interview)

It would have exceeded the limits of this evaluation to carry out a detailed comparison between the costs of CSO-specific advisory services and the cost of multi-day residential group training, delivered by teams of international consultants at a hotel or other conference venue in Moldova. The costs for group training might exceed that of more CSO-specific capacity-strengthening services. However, residential training offers networking opportunities that do not automatically come with individualised mentoring.

4.6 A TRANSFORMATIVE PROGRAMME WITH POTENTIAL FOR SUSTAINABLE EFFECTS AND UPSCALING (IMPACT AND SUSTAINABILITY)

EQ7: What examples of CSO transformations can be linked to the Programme, especially regarding CSO efficiency (economic use of their resources) and effectiveness (benefits to their target audience and constituencies)?

EQ9: To what extent has the Programme supported the sustainability of the participating CSOs and which aspects could be improved in this regard?

The Programme has demonstrably contributed to strengthening Moldovan CSOs. However, the implicit ambition to make them independent from donor funding should be abandoned – it may take further Sida Core Support to foster civil society resilience and sustainability.

Finding 13: Participating CSOs have transformed their strategic planning, governance and internal systems as a result of the programme, and strengthened their outreach.

As pointed out in the discussion on effectiveness, the Programme has tangibly strengthened the capacity and sustainability of civil society organisations. Both in survey responses and across interviews, CSOs reported that the Programme had transformed their **strategic thinking and planning**, enabling them to work in a more mission-driven way. Embassy staff and external specialists have corroborated the CSOs' self-assessment. CSOs have contrasted such strategy-informed work with their previous situation when they fully depended on project-based funding and kept adjusting their activities to donor priorities. In several interviews, CSO representatives single out the **Results Assessment Framework** as an eye-opener, and a tool they continue using internally for strategic thinking and discussion.

“The Core Support [enabled] us to think more strategically and to look at the organisation as a whole and not being just project-based oriented” (survey quote).

CSOs have **reached more people** thanks to Core Support, and several interviewees report gaining greater influence, as illustrated in the following quote from our survey:

“Expert support and counselling was provided [by the CSO] to more than 4.000 women during this period. [...] The organisation's activities were oriented towards supporting agents of change to become leaders, through coordination and networking and Coalition building, monitoring the implementation of new laws [...], additional pressure was put on the government to be more accountable, transparent, and responsive in advancing reform in the field.”

Such increased influence has also been evidenced in CSO representative’s participation in international fora; for example, a representative from the Women’s Law Center took our online interview in the margins of a conference at the European Council as a member of the mechanism overlooking the implementation of the Istanbul Convention against violence against women and domestic violence. Another example of strengthened impact is the establishment of the School of Journalists by the independent Journalism Center.

Finding 14: A key factor for the sustainability of strategy-driven CSOs is stable funding, which the Programme has generally provided for a period of 3 years only.

A key element for sustainability is stable funding, which the CSCSP has provided for the 18 participating CSOs, typically for 3-4 years. Interviewed Embassy POs have described the Core Support Programme as an opportunity for committed CSOs to transform themselves into larger, professional, mission-driven, influential, and possibly financially autonomous organisations. **In contrast with Sida’s broader policy on Core Support (see section 3.1 above), interviewed POs did not seem to envisage Core Support as the preferred, ideally standard mode of supporting trusted CSOs over longer periods.** Their apparent expectation was that CSOs would graduate from Core Support and yield their place in the Programme to new cohorts of the CSOs ready for their transformation. As of November 2024, only one participating CSO has received two successive Core Support grants. Another CSO transited from Core Support to project funding from the Embassy (i.e., a grant for a specific project, with limited money for fixed costs).

CSOs that receive Core Support must commit themselves to raising money from other donors. Most survey respondents already received funding from other donors when joining the CSCSP. However, 7 out of 13 survey respondents were sure it was **due to the programme they could attract new donors** – not only because seeking extra funding was a requirement, but also because their participation in the CSCSP was reportedly perceived as a ‘quality seal’ by other donors. Improved internal systems (management and administration) strengthened CSO credibility with international donors (as corroborated in interviews with donor representatives). Organisational growth, also in terms of hiring new staff, has enabled them to raise their profile and obtain more funding.

However, when asked about their biggest challenges for the coming years, most survey respondents expressed **worries about the financial sustainability of their CSOs**, as illustrated in the following quotes:

“A new Strategy on Fundraising was developed during 2022 however the organisation has just started implementing fundraising initiatives. It appears that the organisation still needs capacity building in some of the key areas including in the development and implementation of fundraising plans.”

“The Core Support program is almost at the end and we need to get new programs in order to pay the team, workspace etc. Unfortunately, there almost nothing possibly [sic] to get some new programs.”

“Thanks to the Embassy for the support. It is desirable to develop programmes that support those who have completed Core Support. In the case of our organisation that is developed, we have major insufficiency of resources, which can lead to the disappearance of the organisation.”

Even CSOs that had secured several contracts with other donors reported sustainability risks. That was because most donors have provided project funding, covering no or very limited management and administrative costs (typically 5% of the project). Several survey responses and interviews quoted “work overload” as a major challenge, with top management staff having to take on project management roles to ensure their salaries were covered via several project grants. Also, CSOs have reported that juggling the paperwork needed to satisfy different donor requirements was stressful; two organisations mentioned burnout risks, or actual occurrences of burnout among their staff. Finally, the lack of qualified individuals motivated to work in a CSO was also quoted as a major challenge, which was probably linked to the lack of stable job prospects in CSOs dependent on project- and relatively short-term funding.

Still, Sida Programme Officers involved in the programme appear to expect CSOs to become fully independent from international donors. That is overambitious in Moldova, with its young CSO scene, the difficult economic situation and the scarcity of government funding for CSOs. **In this context, Moldovan CSOs continue to depend on international funding.**

5 Conclusions

As explained in our findings and related evidence presented in Chapter (4) above, the Embassy's unique **Civil Society Core Support Programme has been highly relevant to CSOs operating in Sweden's priority thematic fields** for development cooperation in Eastern Europe – both to relatively young, smaller groups and to more established, larger Moldovan civil society organisations. Although mainly Chisinau-based CSOs have benefited from the Programme so far, the CSCSP has also reached the marginalised Transnistrian Region, where CSOs experience intersecting challenges arising from its status as a “frozen conflict zone”, a repressive political context and language issues, among other difficulties. The Swedish thematic priorities are fully reflected in the selection of partner CSOs.

The Programme has **tangibly contributed to strengthening CSO capacity**. Most participating CSOs report being in a better place after/near the end of the Programme, especially regarding organisational growth, internal systems, and results-oriented planning. The **well-structured approach to CSO strengthening**, starting with a thorough assessment of CSO systems and related needs (the SBAs), and continuing with professional, intensive and closely monitored CSO strengthening to prepare the CSO for Core Support (in the Pre-Core Support phase), has enabled 78% of the participating CSOs (18/23) to be granted Core Support by the Embassy. As pointed out above (section 4.2), the Embassy's choice of CSO partners has also been a key success factor. Supported CSOs have been unanimous pointing out that Core Support – i.e., multi-year funding that they can use for any item in their budget – has made a big difference to their organisational development and the ability to pursue their mission without having to adjust to changing donor priorities. The only significant unwanted effect the evaluation team has found is the sustainability risk for CSOs that have grown in the Programme and are facing difficulties in securing stable funding for their core costs after the end of Core Support.

However, a **broader reflection on the purpose of the Programme and adjustments in its implementation** is necessary for longer-term impact and greater CSO sustainability and resilience. It seems that the Embassy has conceived Core Support as a tool to support CSOs that wished not only to improve their internal structure, processes, and strategic thinking, but also to expand the scope of their work. So far, only one CSO has received a second Core Support grant; for all others, the grant period was limited to 3 years (5 years only in the case of EEF). As a result, several former CSCSP partners are back to chasing project grants, or reducing the staff because the type of activity is currently not attractive to international donors. **CSO sustainability after core support is at risk.**

Finally, evaluation findings on efficiency are mixed. **The Programme has been resource-intensive but rewarding.** The CSCSP does not have its own budget or Programme Officer; the Embassy has not developed a dedicated Programme document, results framework, and overarching monitoring system for the Programme. While there is excellent documentation on individual CSO process, the consulting firms' progress reports focus on activities only and do not examine whether the overall Programme has produced the (implicit) expected results. **That short-term saving on strategy and planning may have caused inefficiencies** and has certainly complicated the induction of new Programme Officers taking charge of it in 2023. At this point, it may be time to pause and reflect on the purpose and goals of the Programme – for the Embassy and within wider Swedish strategies on Civil Society Support –, to develop a more explicit strategy and add transparency to selection processes (see Chapter 6 below).

6 Recommendations

Core Support has proven to be a relevant and effective way to strengthen Moldovan civil society and Sida's thematic portfolios in the country. Therefore, **our overall recommendation is to continue and possibly expand the Programme**, so that a greater share of Swedish development funding supports like-minded Moldovan CSOs pursuing their strategies, to the benefit of their constituencies. The following specific recommendations aim to clarify the Programme's purpose and strategy, make it more accessible and transparent to potential CSO partners, and strengthen its efficiency and sustainability.

For greater impact and more sustainable results for participating CSOs, it is recommended for the Embassy to ...

- **Consider longer-term core funding for trusted CSOs.** Sida has promoted Core funding, i.e., non-earmarked financial support to the overall multi-year budget of an organisation, as the favoured mode of supporting civil society organisations. As evidenced in Mozambique and Palestine, among other examples, Sida has provided multiple rounds of core funding to CSOs.
- **Adjust the duration and content of Pre-Core Support to CSO-specific needs.** For CSOs that are early in the development of their strategy and internal systems, a six-month pre-core support phase has proven too short. In that situation, there is a risk that external consultants take an overly active role in developing CSO strategies and internal policies. A longer pre-core support phase (about one year) considering the different starting situations of each CSO would yield more learning benefits and greater CSO ownership. On the other hand, established CSOs with well-functioning systems might not need any pre-core support and could be funded directly.
- **The programme could offer more specific coaching activities or follow-up more closely on some of the earlier activities.** CSO needs vary; some could benefit from more guidance (e.g., coaching) not only during the pre-core stage but also as part of the core support. Working with a results framework is new to many of them and it would strengthen the likelihood of a longer-term impact if the training was revisited during core support.

For a better definition of the Programme's place within the Embassy's overall development portfolio in Moldova and consequent decision-making on the CSCSP delivery structure and budget, it is recommended for the Embassy to...

- **Clarify the overarching goals it pursues with the Core Support Programme.** Is the Programme expected mainly to contribute to a vibrant civil society in Moldova, to strengthen civil society participation in the EU accession process, to develop

balanced temata programme portfolios with significant funding to Moldovan CSOs (as opposed to international ones), or a mix of these or other reasons? Those purposes and goals should be made explicit.

- **Make a strategic decision on the size and composition of the CSCSP partner portfolio.** So far, the Embassy appears to have chosen to include as many CSOs as possible, within the limits of available funding and Programme Officer capacity. A Programme strategy should add clarity to the desired size of the programme and its **geographic scope**: for instance, should Chisinau-based organisations continue to make up the majority of CSCSP partners, or should the Embassy aim for regional diversity? Should the Embassy invest across the country, or focus on specific regions, e.g., complementary to EU regional development efforts?
- **Based on a clearer strategic direction, decide whether the future CSCSP should be a stand-alone programme** with its own PO or continue to be spread across Programme Officers. Also, clarity on the goals will enable the Embassy to decide whether core support should be spread to more and more CSOs, or whether a more limited number of CSOs should receive larger core grants.

For a more relevant approach tailored to the intended beneficiaries' needs, it is recommended for the Embassy to...

- **Make mainstreaming of gender and human rights-based approaches, environmental responsiveness, and conflict sensitivity more relevant and applicable for the beneficiaries.** The programme has successfully introduced the concepts as part of the standardised training and some CSOs have utilised elements thereof. However, the programme could revisit the current activities to ensure that all partners find them meaningful and understand how these concepts could be integrated into their activities or why they do not need to be included.
- **Ensure capacity-strengthening activities match specific CSO needs and interests.** That could include limiting mandatory residential training courses, increasing on-site CSO-specific support, and providing extra guidance to CSOs that have no experience in donor reporting. Guidance should be light-handed (but not hands-off) – e.g., by providing a simple checklist of aspects that must be covered in progress reports (instead of a template, or no guidance at all).
- **Bear in mind language barriers in working with Transnistrian CSOs** – not only in capacity-building activities, but also in networking events, including informal ones, e.g., providing interpretation from and into Russian.

For more effective Programme steering and delivery (regardless of its decision on the overarching Programme goals and purpose), it is recommended for the Embassy to...

- **Document the overall Programme goals**, expected results and how they are supposed to come about (causal assumptions) in a **CSCSP proposal, theory of change and/or results framework**.
- **Develop a system for overall CSCSP monitoring and learning.** The monitoring system does not need to be heavy – it for instance, could simply consist of quarterly

or semi-annual, documented meetings between POs administering CSCSP grants and possibly the consultancy involved where overall progress, gaps, new insights and needs for adjustment would be discussed. A dedicated Embassy focal point or monitoring and evaluation specialist could track the overall programme.

- **Reduce the risk of biased selection and reputational risks by making selection processes more transparent**, especially criteria and processes to enter the programme, and criteria for ‘graduation’ into core support. While the selection process appears to have yielded a relevant and effective set of CSOs, the Embassy should consider developing open calls for proposals to cast a wider net.

Sida provides core support to CSOs in a wide range of countries; some have been well documented and evaluated, e.g., in Albania, Kosovo and Ukraine. The Embassy of Sweden in Moldova could draw from these examples to develop a system that is appropriate for Moldova.

For a more efficient use of CSCSP resources, it is recommended for the Embassy (in addition to the recommendations above, which are also linked to efficiency) to ...

- **Enhance donor coordination to reduce the risk of duplication of training efforts** by making capacity strengthening plans even more CSO-specific and needs- and interest-based, considering other donors’ activities. The Swedish Embassy has close ties to UNDP, which is one of its main partners in implementing programmes. However, as more donors and more funding are entering Moldova, in particular in light of the accelerated EU accession process, the Embassy needs to pay more attention to similar programmes in the CSO sphere.
- **Consider adjusting the Programme delivery model.** To reduce pressure on its own staff, the Embassy could contract one, or a set of, trusted CSO(s) in Moldova to implement the CSCSP, with or without the support of international consulting firms. EEF has experience with sub-granting to smaller CSOs; CONTACT Center has delivered CSO capacity building under a USAID programme; GenderDocM, WLC and other feminist organisations might be in a good position to deliver training on gender sensitivity, to quote a few examples. The Swedish Embassy in Ukraine handed over civil society support programmes to the Renaissance Foundation, a member of the Soros foundations – a similar arrangement with one or several intermediary CSOs could be considered in Moldova.

Annex 1 – Terms of Reference

Terms of Reference for the Evaluation of the *Core Support Programme for Civil Society Organisations in Moldova*

Date: 1 August 2023

1. General information

1.1 Introduction

The Regional Results Strategy for Sweden's Reform Cooperation for Eastern Europe, the Western Balkans and Turkey 2014-2020 ([See link](#) for the full document) in its Result 2.2 focuses on increased enjoyment of human rights and greater opportunities to exercise democratic influence:

- More pluralistic civil society, including political parties with strengthened popular support
- Improved conditions for democratic accountability to the people and participation in political processes, including the promotion of free elections
- Freer and more independent media
- Partner countries better fulfil their international and national commitments on human rights, gender equality (including the EU's strategy for equality between women and men) and non-discrimination
- Women and men have, to a greater extent, the same power to shape society and their own lives
- Increased trust between the parties in protracted conflicts.

In the light of this formulation of the Strategy objectives, it becomes clear that the Government of Sweden consistently channels its efforts to build capacities of CSOs in Moldova (see Annex A "Useful resources on the CSO sector development in Moldova" for more relevant researches in findings about the sector).

Since 2016 until 2023, 20 Moldovan CSOs have been accepted as core support partners and have benefitted of organizational support. For further planning tailored support to local organizations, the Swedish Embassy in Chisinau decided to assess the previous programmes/interventions. In this regard, the experience of the Swedish Embassy in Kyiv will be replicated and evaluation services will be contracted.¹⁴

¹⁴ An evaluation of the *Core Support Programme in Ukraine* done in 2014 found this intervention relevant in relation to the Swedish results strategy aimed at enhancing European integration, strengthening democracy, respect for human rights, increased rule of law and a better environment. Supported strategic CSOs were seen as change agents contributing by promoting reform agenda, drafting legislation and engaging in policy dialogue in all areas. It was noted that the programme had strengthened the CSOs as development actors by insisting on CSOs' ownership of their own agendas, long term strategic plans and of their organisational change processes. The supported CSOs had become more strategic and mission driven.

1.2 The concept of core support

To ensure that beneficiary CSOs can spend Swedish funds in a responsible manner, a System-Based Audit (SBA) is undertaken prior to any agreement. This is both a diagnostic tool, but in many cases, it is also a motivation and a hugely significant learning process. The results and recommendations of the SBAs are also used as a basis for further monitoring purposes of progress achieved.

The organizations that were selected based on the SBA received *pre-core support*. This was considered a preparatory stage which allowed for further assessment of the organizations' willingness and skills as well as capacity to implement a selected number of SBA's recommendations including drafting a Strategic Plan and institutional strategic budget. The combination of systems based audits, internal change projects, verification missions and financial audits according to international standards, guided through the interaction with the Swedish Embassy, has proved to be a successful approach for organisational development. The degree of transformation was found to depend on the commitment of each CSO, the variations in starting points, the internalisation of the new concepts, the timeframe the CSOs are able and willing to devote to internal transformations, and the management capacity to assume ownership and manage process and its challenges.

Based on a *pre-core support evaluation* conclusions, the Embassy decides to conclude *core support* agreements with CSOs that succeeded pre-core support conditions. The core support is based on the institutional Strategy, the Results Assessment Framework (RAF) mainstreamed on core values like gender equality, environmental and conflict perspective integration and institutional strategic budget. The support addresses also internal institutional development of the beneficiary CSO and enhancing the role of the boards.

1.3 Evaluation object: Intervention to be evaluated

The evaluation object is the Core Support Programme in Moldova.

The objective of the Core Support Programme is to pioneer a new strategic type of support (institutional/core support) to CSOs in the areas of democracy, human rights, media, rule of law, gender equality and environment by upgrading their internal systems and enabling them implement their own organizational strategies against RAF. In other words, the programme aims at transforming project-focused NGOs carefully observing donors' trends in funding into mission-based CSOs working through implementation of their strategies.

One of the by-products and outputs of the core-support contributions is a Phase One process of the internal organizational transformation, when CSOs are in the process of updating their strategies, setting up their external boards in accordance with the European practice, tidying up their structures, processes and policies. It aims to make the organization mission-based and functional.

Methodology

I. Phase One - Selections and System Based Audit

Selection. Given the specific nature of Swedish support with a limited number of potential partners and challenging demands to a partner organization, the programme

does not utilise a competitive approach for selection. Based on a continuous dialogue with various CSOs, the Embassy decides on what organisations are aligned to the Swedish priorities, strategic objectives, and are ready to boost its institutional development.

Initial System-Based Audit. A consultancy company procured by the Embassy through the Sida Framework Agreement undertakes an audit in an organization. ToRs for such audits are attached are agreed with the Embassy. The audit's aim is to provide an overall organizational diagnosis to organizational health and the level of development and to give clear recommendations for systems improvement in the order of priorities as well as advising on the process of further systems building. The top-priority recommendations constitute the basis for an initial improvement project to fix the most critical problematic zones in institutional development. As a rule, they embrace such issues as governance, strategy and its RAF with SMART indicators and financial control systems, audit history as well as procurement and anti-corruption policies.

II. Phase Two - Pre-Core Support Phase

Pre-Core Support Improvement Project. On the basis of the Priority Recommendations provided by the System Based Audits, the CSO submits a pre-core support proposal. After the negotiations Sida signs an Agreement with the organization for a tentatively defined duration of 6 - 12 months and a limited budget planned to cover mainly the work on received recommendations.

During the pre-core support implementation, CSOs are supported by consultants and their learning and organizational transformations are accompanied in an number of ways: workshops and learning events, coaching sessions and coaching sessions and technical assistance related to the recommendations to be addressed in this phase (usually related to the RAF; institutional budget, institutional strategy, internal policies and mainstreaming of gender, environment, conflict sensitivity, etc.) implemented by the consultancy company procured by the Embassy.

The organisations are encouraged to network and to learn from each other by exchanging their policies or solutions.

The completion of the pre-core support phase ends with an external evaluation of progress done by the same consultancy company certifying the improvement changes recommended previously by the system based audit. The evaluation also comments on the quality of the Strategy and its results assessment framework, which should be SMART for meaningful follow-up. The verification report gives the recommendations to Sida and to the organisations as to how to proceed. As a rule, there may be some untied ends or unfinished business in priority recommendations, which can be done during the core phase, therefore, Sida will most often proceed to the next phase.

III. Phase Three - Core-Support Phase

The length of this phase and amounts of disbursements vary, depending on the organisation's plans, confidence/ambition and maturity. The longest programmes lasts 3-4 years.

There are specific issues to be borne in mind while evaluating the programme:

Engagement between Sida and CSO. During the core phase, Programme Officers in charge of a particular CSO, follow the activities and attend some of the events, arrange meetings or visits to the organizational offices, invite organisations for learning events. Our own assessment is that the Programme Officers, would need to do more of such meeting/visits, but given the workload, it is not possible. For formal follow-up there are Annual Meetings followed by the agreed minutes.

Audits. A financial annual audit undertaken in accordance with European standards (IFAC) is not only a means of checking the financial control functions, but a development objective on its own right. The organisations require a considerable preparation, flexing up financial rules, procedures, manuals, software, which in their totality lead to a more responsible and transparent management. To follow up this direction, the Swedish Embassy approves Annual Audit ToRs for Core Supported Organisations (Annex C – latest update in July 2023).

IV. Method and Expert Support

Consultancies. To make the programme happen, the Embassy relies on the expertise which comes from consultancies procured from Sida's Framework Agreements. Formerly, two consultancy companies have been helping to implement this programme in Moldova:

- (i) Swedish Development Advisers have been contracted in 2015 for system-based audits and assisted in implementing organisational changes and recommendations of the audits by June 2017.
- (ii) Nordic Consulting Group – a joint call off agreement for 2017 – 2018 was signed which covered Moldova and Ukraine - consultancy with expertise in system-based audits and effectiveness areas.
- (iii) Swedish Development Advisers have been contracted, based on a public procurement process, in 2018 for system-based audits and assisted in implementing organisational changes and recommendations of the audits by May 2021 (with a cost extension until August 2022).

Total costs of supporting the professional expertise for the programme for over 7 years amount to SEK 10 690 472:

- Swedish Development Advisors in 2015-2017 – SEK 2 823 427.
- Nordic Consulting Group in 2017-2018 – SEK 2 223 506.
- Swedish Development Advisors in 2019-2022 – SEK 5 643 539.

The consultancy provided by the selected company covers:

Selection of Candidates

- Undertaking system based audits (including management of the organisation, of risk and anti-corruption, procurement and financial management, gender, environmental and conflict perspective mainstreaming) and giving recommendations on improvements to CSOs in order of priorities and advising on the process of systems building. The ToR closely consulted with the Embassy;

- Giving recommendations to the Embassy as to CSOs candidates' eligibility to participate in the core support programme based on criteria such as: relevance, organizational capacity, willingness, mandate and scope, etc;
- Developing tailored support measures and tools for CSOs to address specific capacity weaknesses identified within system based audits (trainings, capacity development and strategic plans for the medium-term period, etc).

Capacitation and ongoing support

- Expertise and support in drafting CSOs institutional strategic plans and results assessment frameworks according to Sida's requirement (reflecting Sida's core values in working with CSOs);
- Providing support (trainings/coaching events) to the CSOs in the following areas, according to Sida's requirements: results based approach, gender mainstreaming; rights-based approach; integrity and anti-corruption; environment mainstreaming; conflict perspective, results-based reporting, monitoring/assessment systems and tools for data collection/assessment to strengthen the analytical dimension of the institutional progress reports;
- Providing expertise and support to develop internal systems of supported CSOs procurement, internal audit and evaluation, transparency and integrity, strategic planning, strategic budget's planning and monitoring, communication, fundraising, HR, volunteering, etc – depending on the individual needs;
- Providing mentoring support/implementation monitoring on the progress made within organisational development, including, but not limited to activating boards/advisory boards of Sida-supported organisations, implementing checks and balances systems to safeguard implementation of CSO good governance principles and values; developing the methodology for impact self-assessment and advice on impact monitoring/assessment and reporting. Provide trainings and coaching sessions to engage boards' members in exercising their mandates effectively considering content and time dimensions (respecting a certain periodicity and ensuring a continuous activity even after core-support);
- Supporting the development of effective internal and external communication tools (including communication of results and advocacy) and visual/institutional identity of supported CSOs. Helping in networking and budding cooperation with relevant resource CSOs/networks/platforms in the region but also worldwide (where appropriate). This may also include tools for improvement in presentation techniques which can be applied when conducting trainings or seminars;
- Address other possible organisational development issues emerging during the implementation of the *pre-core* and *core* support programme – on demand basis and subject to the agreement provisions.

Monitoring and Evaluation of programme

- Assist the Embassy to continuously monitor and follow up on the results and effectiveness of the core support to CSOs
- Supporting and helping the Embassy in assessing and monitoring partners' progress after pre-core support and core-support completion (strategic plans' implementation and compliance with the system based audit's recommendations)

per each core-support organisation). The ToR closely consulted with the Embassy;

For further information, the intervention proposal is attached as Annex D (“Organisational development for core-support partners, Swedish Development Advisors, February 2019”).

The list of partner CSOs which entered in Core Support Agreements with the Embassy is displayed below:

Name of the CSO	Area of operations	Support period	Budget, SEK
IDOM	Human rights, people with disabilities	2016 – 2018	4 945 912
Resonance, Transnistrian region	Gender-based violence	2016 – 2018	4 857 052
Independent Journalism Center	Media	2016 – 2018	4 675 336
East European Foundation	Human rights, vulnerable groups, economic development	2016 - 2020	26 855 481
Women’s Law Center	Gender – based violence	2016-2019 2020-2022	4 080 266 9 249 372
Legal Resource Center from Moldova	Justice and human rights	2018 – 2021	5 139 995
GenderDocM	LGBTQ+	2018 – 2021	4 949 978
EcoVisio	Environment	2018 – 2021	5 346 640
EcoContact	Environment	2018 – 2021	4 987 990
Artemida	Gender – based violence	2020 - 2023	4 988 995
AJMTEM	Environment, media	2020 - 2023	4 998 672
National Environmental Center	Environment	2021 - 2024	4 997 641
CONTACT Center	CSO support, community development	2021 - 2024	4 769 629
Biotica	Environment	2022 – 2025	4 998 947
Women’s Initiatives Tiraspol	Domestic violence and trafficking in human beings	2022 – 2025	3 500 000
Center for Analysis and Prevention of Corruption	Anti-corruption and justice	2022 – 2025	5 895 843
Center for Policies and Reforms	Gender and good governance	2022 – 2025	4 928 349

Legal Clinic, Balti	Justice and human rights	2023 – 2026 (tbc)	6 324 590
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The intervention logic or theory of change of the intervention may be further elaborated by the evaluator in the inception report, if deemed necessary.

1.4 Evaluation rationale

Since 2016, the Embassy of Sweden in Moldova has provided core support to 20 different CSOs in the country, active in human rights, good governance, community development, environment and other sectors. The team of the Embassy is planning to design terms of reference for the procurement of a new framework for consultancy services that will capacitate and provide ongoing support to the new batch of CSOs. The rationale of this evaluation is to harvest the learnings of the previous programme and successfully integrate these in the design of the future intervention and core support programme.

2. The assignment

2.1 Evaluation purpose: Intended use and intended users

The purpose or intended use of the evaluation is to assess the overall effectiveness, efficiency and impact of the programme of core support to CSOs in Moldova with the reference to its overall goal of promotion of European standards and effectiveness of partner-CSOs to become mission-driven and deliver their own strategies. As a consequence, this shall help Sida and the Reform Cooperation team at the Embassy learn from what works well and less well in the Core Support Programme. The evaluation will be used to inform decisions on how the Programme may be adjusted and improved in its new phase.

The primary intended users of the evaluation are Embassy of Sweden in Moldova, and namely the Reform Cooperation team, Sida (mainly the Department for Europe and Latin America, the Divisions of Eastern Europe and thematic support, as well as the Department of Partnerships and Innovation, Division of Support to Civil Society), the management teams of the evaluated CSOs, other donors and stakeholders.

The evaluation is to be designed, conducted and reported to meet the needs of the intended users and tenderers shall elaborate in the tender how this will be ensured during the evaluation process.

During the inception phase, the evaluator and the users will agree on who will be responsible for keeping the various stakeholders informed about the evaluation.

2.2 Evaluation scope

The evaluation scope is limited to the impact of the Core Support Programme over the operational capacities and sustainability of the above-mentioned partner CSOs. For instance, the Consultant shall assess how processes related to strategic planning, strategic budgeting, M&E, board's development, theory of change, internal and external communication have improved in the CSOs after the completion of the Core Support Programme cycle. A sample of CSOs to be interviewed or assessed will be selected by the Evaluator in cooperation with Embassy team.

The evaluation shall also assess the progress of the implementation of strategic plans and compliance with the system based audit's recommendations per each core-support organisation. Both the success rate but also challenges will be analysed and

the cases of CSOs that did not fulfill the requirements and were not promoted from pre core support stage to core support will be also assessed.

The scope of the evaluation may be further elaborated by the evaluator in the inception report.

2.3 Evaluation objective: Criteria and questions

The objective of this evaluation is to evaluate the *relevance, coherence, effectiveness, impact, sustainability and efficiency* of the Core Support Programme in Moldova and formulate recommendations on how the Embassy can improve the design of this intervention in future.

The evaluation questions are:

Relevance: Is the intervention doing the right thing?

- To what extent has the intervention objectives and design responded to beneficiaries', country, and partner/institution needs, policies, and priorities, and have they continued to do so if/when circumstances have changed?
- To what extent have lessons learned from what works well and less well been used to improve and adjust intervention implementation?

Coherence: How well does the intervention fit?

- How compatible has the intervention been with other interventions in the country, sector or organisation where it is being implemented?
- To what extent the selection procedure, assessment, follow up assessment contribute to filtering the most relevant, well structured and well implemented contribution?
-

Effectiveness: Is the intervention achieving its objectives?

- To what extent has the intervention achieved, or is expected to achieve, its objectives, and its results, including any differential results across groups?
- Have the M&E system delivered robust and useful information that could be used to assess progress towards outcomes and contribute to learning?

Efficiency: How well are resources being used?

- To what extent has the intervention delivered, or is likely to deliver, results in an economic and timely way?
- Could core support have been provided in a more cost efficient way, considering the time and resources programme managers have spent in managing the Sida/embassy core support contracts with the CSOs? Could there possibly be other more cost efficient ways to provide core support to achieve the same results?

Impact: What difference does the intervention make?

- Analyse CSOs transformations: benefits vs efforts and costs, benefits to CSOs target audience/constituencies; ownership, dependency, tensions with sustainability; experiences: difficulties, specific issues, lessons learnt, what could be done differently or better; unintended consequences?
- To what extent has the project or programme generated, or is expected to generate, significant positive or negative, intended or unintended, high-level effects?

- Has the project had any positive or negative effects on gender equality? Could gender mainstreaming have been improved in planning, implementation or follow up?
- Has the project had any positive or negative effects on the environment? Could environment considerations have been improved in planning, implementation or follow up?

Sustainability: Will the benefits last?

- To what extent will the net benefits of the intervention continue, or are likely to continue?
- What aspects could be improved in terms of selection, assessment and design of new contributions?
- Is there an existing core-support partner which has the capacities in place to run a core-support programme on its own and be a focal point to the local CSO sector?
- How may the core support be revised to enhance sustainability, to make sure capacities of the CSOs are maintained while phasing out dependency of Swedish funding?

Questions are expected to be developed in the tender by the tenderer and further refined during the inception phase of the evaluation.

2.4 Evaluation approach and methods

It is expected that the evaluator describes and justifies an appropriate evaluation approach/methodology and methods for data collection in the tender. The evaluation design, methodology and methods for data collection and analysis are expected to be fully developed and presented in the inception report. Given the situation with Covid-19 or/and neighbourhood war related restrictions, innovative and flexible approaches/methodologies and methods for remote data collection should be suggested when appropriate and the risk of doing harm managed.

The evaluator is to suggest an approach/methodology that provides credible answers (evidence) to the evaluation questions. Limitations to the chosen approach/methodology and methods shall be made explicit by the evaluator and the consequences of these limitations discussed in the tender. The evaluator shall to the extent possible, present mitigation measures to address them. A clear distinction is to be made between evaluation approach/methodology and methods.

A *gender-responsive* approach/methodology, methods, tools and data analysis techniques should be used¹⁵.

Sida's approach to evaluation is *utilization-focused*, which means the evaluator should facilitate the *entire evaluation process* with careful consideration of how everything that is done will affect the use of the evaluation. It is therefore expected that the evaluators, in their tender, present i) how intended users are to participate in and contribute to the evaluation process and ii) methodology and methods for data collection that create space for reflection, discussion and learning between the intended users of the evaluation.

¹⁵ See for example UNEG United Nations Evaluation Group (2014) Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluations <http://uneval.org/document/detail/1616>

In cases where sensitive or confidential issues are to be addressed in the evaluation, evaluators should ensure an evaluation design that do not put informants and stakeholders at risk during the data collection phase or the dissemination phase.

2.5 Organisation of evaluation management

This evaluation is commissioned by the Embassy of Sweden in Moldova. The intended user are the relevant teams at Sida and Embassies of Sweden. As the evaluation will serve as an input to the decision on whether the Core Support Programme shall continue in the current format or needs adjustments, receive continued funding or not, the intended user is the commissioner. The evaluated CSOs have not contributed to the ToR, but will be provided with an opportunity to comment on the inception report as well as the final report, but will not be involved in the management of the evaluation. Hence the commissioner will evaluate tenders, approve the inception report and the final report of the evaluation. The start-up meeting and the debriefing/validation workshop will be held with the commissioner only.

2.6 Evaluation quality

All Sida's evaluations shall conform to OECD/DAC's Quality Standards for Development Evaluation¹⁶. The evaluators shall use the Sida OECD/DAC Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation¹⁷ and the OECD/DAC Better Criteria for Better Evaluation¹⁸. The evaluators shall specify how quality assurance will be handled by them during the evaluation process.

2.7 Time schedule and deliverables

It is expected that a time and work plan is presented in the tender and further detailed in the inception report. Given the situation with war outbreak in Ukraine and challenges related to travel to Moldova, the time and work plan must allow flexibility in implementation. The evaluation shall be carried out between August – December 2023. The timing of any field visits, surveys and interviews need to be settled by the evaluator in dialogue with the main stakeholders during the inception phase. The table below lists key deliverables for the evaluation process. Alternative deadlines for deliverables may be suggested by the consultant and negotiated during the inception phase.

Deliverables	Participants	Deadlines
1. Start-up online meeting	Evaluation team and Development Cooperation team at the Embassy of Sweden	15 September 2023
2. Draft inception report		Tentative 5 October 2023
3. Inception online meetings	Partner CSOs	Tentative 6 – 20 October 2023

¹⁶ OECD/DAC (2010) Quality Standards for Development Evaluation.

¹⁷ Sida OECD/DAC (2014) Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results Based Management.

¹⁸ OECD/DAC (2019) Better Criteria for Better Evaluation: Revised Evaluation Criteria Definitions and Principles for Use.

4. Comments from intended users to evaluators (alternatively these may be sent to evaluators ahead of the inception meeting)		Tentative 20 October 2023
5. Data collection, analysis, report writing and quality assurance	Evaluators	21 October– 15 November 2023
6. Debriefing/validation workshop (meeting)	Evaluation team and Development Cooperation team at the Embassy of Sweden	Tentative 20 November 2023
7. Draft evaluation report		Tentative 25 November 2023
8. Comments from intended users to evaluators	Evaluation team and Development Cooperation team at the Embassy of Sweden	Tentative 2 December 2023
9. Final evaluation report		Latest 10 December 2023
10. Online or offline seminar	Evaluation team and Development Cooperation team at the Embassy of Sweden TBC: CSOs selective attendance	Tentative 14 December 2023

The inception report will form the basis for the continued evaluation process and shall be approved by Sida before the evaluation proceeds to implementation. The inception report should be written in English and cover evaluability issues and interpretations of evaluation questions, present the evaluation approach/methodology *including how a utilization-focused and gender-responsive approach will be ensured*, methods for data collection and analysis as well as the full evaluation design, including an *evaluation matrix* and a *stakeholder mapping/analysis*. A clear distinction between the evaluation approach/methodology and methods for data collection shall be made. All limitations to the methodology and methods shall be made explicit and the consequences of these limitations discussed.

A specific time and work plan, including number of hours/working days for each team member, for the remainder of the evaluation should be presented. The time plan shall allow space for reflection and learning between the intended users of the evaluation.

The final report shall be written in English and be professionally proof read. The final report should have clear structure and follow the layout format of Sida's

template för decentralised evaluations (see Annex E). The executive summary should be maximum 3 pages.

The report shall clearly and in detail describe the evaluation approach/methodology and methods for data collection and analysis and make a clear distinction between the two. The report shall describe how the utilization-focused approach has been implemented i.e. how intended users have participated in and contributed to the evaluation process and how methodology and methods for data collection have created space for reflection, discussion and learning between the intended users. Furthermore, the gender-responsive approach shall be described and reflected in the findings, conclusions and recommendations along with other identified and relevant cross-cutting issues. Limitations to the methodology and methods and the consequences of these limitations for findings and conclusions shall be described. Evaluation findings shall flow logically from the data, showing a clear line of evidence to support the conclusions. Conclusions and recommendations should be substantiated by findings and analysis. Evaluation questions shall be clearly stated and answered in the executive summary and in the conclusions. Recommendations and lessons learned should flow logically from conclusions and be specific, directed to relevant intended users and categorised as a short-term, medium-term and long-term.

The report should be no more than 35 pages, excluding annexes. If the methods section is extensive, it could be placed in an annex to the report. Annexes shall always include the Terms of Reference, the Inception Report, the stakeholder mapping/analysis and the Evaluation Matrix. Lists of key informants/interviewees shall only include personal data if deemed relevant (i.e. when it is contributing to the credibility of the evaluation) based on a case based assessment by the evaluator and the commissioning unit/embassy. The inclusion of personal data in the report must always be based on a written consent.

The evaluator shall adhere to the Sida OECD/DAC Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation¹⁹.

The evaluator shall, upon approval by Sida/Embassy of the final report, insert the report into Sida's template för decentralised evaluations (see Annex E) and submit it to Nordic Morning (in pdf-format) for publication and release in the Sida publication database. The order is placed by sending the approved report to Nordic Morning (sida@atta45.se), with a copy to the responsible Sida Programme Officer as well as Sida's Evaluation Unit (evaluation@sida.se). Write "Sida decentralised evaluations" in the email subject field. The following information must always be included in the order to Nordic Morning:

1. The name of the consulting company.
2. The full evaluation title.
3. The invoice reference "ZZ980601".
4. Type of allocation: "sakanslag".
5. Type of order: "digital publicering/publikationsdatabas".

2.8 Evaluation team qualification

¹⁹ Sida OECD/DAC (2014) Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results Based Management.

In addition to the qualifications already stated in the framework agreement for evaluation services, the evaluation team shall include the following competencies

- In-depth expertise in evaluation and review of development cooperation interventions focused on civil society and CSOs operations. Clear understanding of CSOs internal systems and their governance, trends in development support to civil society.
- Knowledge of Sida, its themes and policies.

It is desirable that the evaluation team includes the following competencies

- Knowledge of Moldova, its context and civil society.
- A good command of Romanian and/or Russian.

A CV for each team member shall be included in the call-off response. It should contain a full description of relevant qualifications and professional work experience. It is important that the competencies of the individual team members are complimentary. It is highly recommended that local evaluation consultants are included in the team, as they often have contextual knowledge that is of great value to the evaluation. In addition, and in a situation with Covid-19, the inclusion of local evaluators may also enhance the understanding of feasible ways to conduct the evaluation

The evaluators must be independent from the evaluation object and evaluated activities, and have no stake in the outcome of the evaluation.

Please note that in the tender, the tenderers must propose a team leader that takes part in the evaluation by at least 30% of the total evaluation team time including core team members, specialists and all support functions, but excluding time for the quality assurance expert.

2.9 Financial and human resources

The maximum budget amount available for the evaluation is SEK 800 000.

Invoicing and payment shall be managed according to the following: the Consultant may invoice a maximum of 30% of the total amount after approval by Sida/Embassy of the Inception Report and a maximum of 70% after approval by Sida/Embassy of the Final Report and when the assignment is completed.

The contact person at Sida/Swedish Embassy is Evghenia Snitco, National Programme Officer. The contact person should be consulted if any problems arise during the evaluation process.

Relevant Sida documentation and contact details to intended users (cooperation partners, other donors etc.) will be provided by the Embassy of Sweden in Moldova. The evaluator will be required to arrange the logistics (booking interviews, accommodation and transportation) including any necessary security arrangements.

3. Annexes²⁰

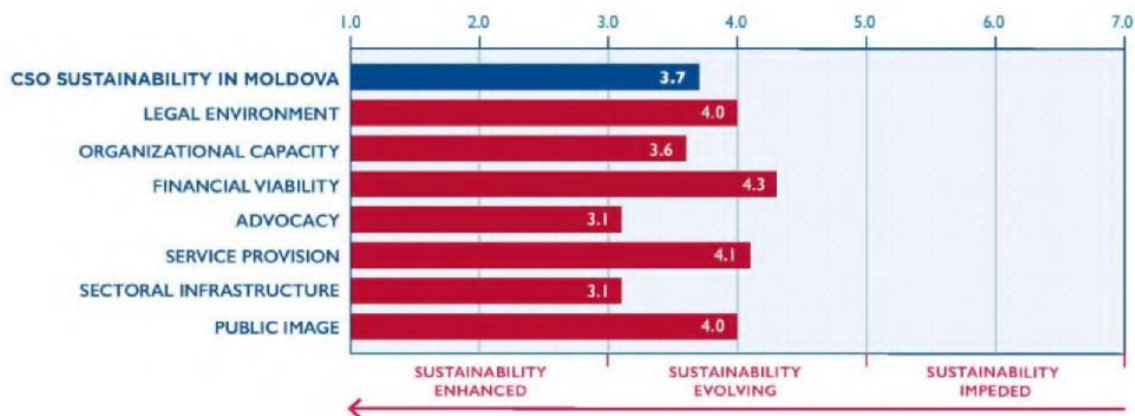
Annex A: Useful resources on the CSO sector development in Moldova

- The [Varieties of Democracy \(V-Dem\)](#) project ([V-Dem](#)), housed at the University of Gothenburg in Sweden, aims to measure democracy via five principles: electoral, liberal, participatory, deliberative, and egalitarian. Its [2023 Democracy Report](#) (covering the year 2022) found that the worldwide level of democracy had plunged to 1986 levels. Report presents some lessons learnt from 8 bouncing countries, including Moldova, specifically that - *A unified coalition of opposition actors in alliance with civil society seems to be a key element that can also strengthen the following factors – one factor that seems to motivate people to protest is corruption, judicial independence, and unified opposition coalescing with civil society.*

Opposition coalitions in alliance with civil society made democratic reversals possible in at least seven cases: Bolivia, Ecuador, Moldova, North Macedonia, Slovenia, South Korea, and Zambia.

Civil society also constitutes a fundamental defense against autocratic rule with its capacity to mobilize people against the government.

The annual Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index assesses the strength and viability of CSOs in 71 countries in Asia, Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia, sub-Saharan Africa, and the Middle East and North Africa, examining seven



The [European Center for Not-for-Profit Law](#) also implements a “[CSO meter](#),” [Moldova | CSOMETER](#) which it defines as “A Compass to Conducive Environment and CSO Empowerment.” According to its [2022](#) report [2022 Moldova CSO Meter Country Report English.pdf](#), Moldova averages a score of 4.7 across a range of 11 different areas addressing both legislation and practice.

Other resources tracking the status of civil society include [CIVICUS](#) and the [CIVICUS Monitor](#), which provides data on the state of civil society and civic freedoms in 196 countries, and rates each country’s civic space as closed (red),

²⁰ Annex C and Annex D are available as separate documents complementary to the current Terms of Reference.

repressed (orange), obstructed (yellow), narrowed (light green), or open (green). [Moldova](#) is designated as a narrowed environment, as of September 2021. [CIVICUS](#) also publishes the annual [State of Civil Society Report](#). [Civil Society holding the line in contested times: 2022 CIVICUS State of Civil Society Report](#)

Annex B: Data sheet on the evaluation object

Information on the evaluation object (i.e. intervention)	
Title of the evaluation object	Evaluation of the Core Support Programme for Civil Society Organisations in Moldova
ID no. in PLANIt	15963
Dox no./Archive case no.	UM2023/26551/CHIS
Activity period (if applicable)	August – December 2023
Agreed budget (if applicable)	SEK 800,000
Main sector	Other (civil society)
Name and type of implementing organisation ²¹	tbd
Aid type	Core contributions
Swedish strategy	Sweden's Reform Cooperation for Eastern Europe, the Western Balkans and Turkey 2014-2020

Information on the evaluation assignment	
Commissioning unit/Swedish Embassy	Embassy of Sweden in Moldova
Contact person at unit/Swedish Embassy	Evghenia Snitco, Programme Officer
Timing of evaluation (mid-term, end-of-programme, ex-post, or other)	End-of-programme / ex-post evaluation
ID no. in PLANIt (if other than above).	N/A

Annex E: Decentralised evaluation report template

Please complete the information in yellow below with your data:

Series: Decentralised Evaluation

Serial number: (Nordic Morning create this number)

Report type: **Final report, Synthesis report, Xxxx**

Title: **XXXXXXXXXX XXXXXXXX**

Subtitel: **XXXXXXXX XXXX**

Consultancy firm: **XXXXXXXX XXXX**

Imprint/colophon:

²¹ Choose from the five OECD/DAC-categories: public sector institutions; NGO or civil society; public-private partnerships and networks; multilateral organisations; and other (e.g. universities, consultancy firms).

Authors: **Xxxx XXXXXXXX**

The views and interpretations expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, Sida.

Commissioned by Sida, Department for **XXXXX XXXXXXXXX**

Photos: **XXXXX** **If photos in document, describe picture and name of photographer.**

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Date of final report: **20XX-XX-XX**

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Text on back cover:

Write a short abstract, maximum 1200 characters incl. spaces (as the yellow text below).

The abstract should contain key information such as the purpose of the evaluation, a brief description of the evaluation object and highlights of conclusions and recommendations.

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Annex 2 – Evaluation matrix

The table below shows how the evaluation team combined different sources and methods to answer the evaluation questions.

Evaluation questions	Indicators/ fields of exploration	Data collection instruments	Sources of information	Data analysis
1. To what extent have the intervention objectives and design responded to beneficiaries' needs?	Strategic and practical fit with (i) political and socio-economic context in the project period and (ii) civil society needs in the Programme period	Interviews, survey, review of documents	Participating CSOs, Programme doc., external specialists and literature	Qualitative, deductive text analysis
2. How has the Programme selected CSOs, and to what extent has the process identified the most suitable CSOs in terms of Programme priorities?	Quality of implementation structure and processes Implementation capacity of CSOs in the Programme (case study CSOs)	Interviews, survey, review of project documentation	Embassy programme staff, participating CSOs, documentation of selection process, possibly CSOs outside of the Programme	Light-touch Contribution Analysis using qualitative, deductive and inductive text analysis
3. To what extent has the Programme achieved, or is expected to achieve, its intended results, possibly including any differential results across groups?	Realisation of stated objectives against target indicators, performance capacity of three case study CSOs	Interviews, survey, review of documents	CSOs' self-assessment, SDA, Embassy, project documentation, CSO products, external specialists	Light-touch Contribution Analysis (as above) in case studies
4. Has the Programme M&E system delivered robust and useful information to assess progress towards outcomes and to contribute to learning?	Quality of the Programme's monitoring and evaluation system and its utilisation in participating (case study) CSOs	Interviews, review of M&E documentation	M&E guidelines and templates, M&E products by CSOs reports (sample), Embassy, SDA, participating CSOs	Qualitative, deductive text analysis
5. How has the Programme mainstreamed gender and human rights-based approaches (HRBA),	Quality of implementation structure and processes, focus on HRBA (incl. gender), environment and conflict sensitivity	Interviews, survey, review of project documentation	Embassy programme staff, participating CSOs, programme	Qualitative, deductive text analysis

environmental responsiveness, and conflict sensitivity?	Implementation capacity of CSOs in the Programme (case study CSOs)		documentation, external specialists	
6. Could Core Support have been provided in a more cost-efficient way, considering the time and resources programme managers have spent in managing the Sida/Embassy Core Support contracts with the CSOs? Could there possibly be other more cost-efficient ways to provide Core Support to achieve the same results?	Planned vs. actual use of time and funding Programme cost vs. that of comparable initiatives in Moldova (if existent)	Interviews, review of documentation	Embassy programme staff, programme doc., SDA, other actors with similar programmes	Text and budget analysis, light touch “follow the money” analysis, inductive text analysis
7. What examples for CSO transformations can be linked to the Programme, especially regarding CSO efficiency (economic use of their resources) and effectiveness (benefits to their target audience and constituencies)?	(i) Improved CSO resource use and (ii) improved CSO outreach (greater outreach, better results) that can be linked to the Programme	Interviews, review of CSO documentation (case studies)	Selected CSOs and representatives of their constituencies/ target audiences, internal documentation by and products of selected CSOs	Light touch Contribution analysis triangulating internal and external perspectives in case studies
8. What unintended and unwanted effects of the Programme have been observed? (EQ8)	Perceptions on unanticipated success and failure or missed opportunities Variation of effects between population groups (case studies)	Interviews, survey, review of documentation	Embassy, SDA, CSOs, external specialists	Inductive text analysis
9. To what extent has the Programme supported the sustainability of the participating CSOs and which aspects could be improved in this regard?	Perceptions on the likely sustainability of benefits in the changing national context	Interviews, review of documentation	Embassy, CSOs, external specialists	Deductive text analysis

Annex 3 – Data collection tools

Survey questionnaire

This questionnaire was sent as an online survey of 18 CSOs who had received Core Support. The draft was reviewed by the Embassy; the final version of the questionnaire has considered all comments.

Introduction

The Swedish Embassy has contracted a team of evaluation experts from **Tana Copenhagen** and FCG Sweden to carry out an **evaluation of the Core-Support Programme for Civil Society Organisations** in Moldova.

The main purpose of this evaluation assignment is to assess the overall effectiveness, efficiency and impact of the programme and help Sida/Sweden to adjust the programme in its new phase.

Since your organisation is or was a beneficiary of the core-support programme, we would be grateful if you could dedicate approximately 15 minutes to complete the survey. Your organisation is invited to fill it in **only once**. This can be done by a leading member of the organisation, or more persons can come together as a team around the same computer and answer the survey together.

The survey is confidential; all results will be used in an aggregated way only, and no individual responses will be traced.

Please complete the survey by Monday 6th of November 2023.

If any technical problems or questions should arise, please get in touch with our colleague Isis at io@tanacph.com (in English).

Questions	Choices
1. What is your gender? (If you fill in the survey as a group, please mark all relevant genders.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Female• Male• Other
2. What is your position in your organisation? (If you fill in the survey as a group, please mark all relevant positions.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Senior manager• Project manager• Member of the Board• Other position
3. How many people are you in your organisation all together (including: on permanent basis, on project basis and unpaid volunteers/interns)?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Less than 10• 10-50• 51-100• More than 100• Don't know

4. The Core Support Programme was supposed to strengthen certain areas of your organisation. How useful have you found the Programme for the following areas?

Category of capacity support	Not useful	Slightly useful	Moderately useful	Useful	Very useful	Not applicable
Strategy development						
Governance (board)						
Setting up and ensuring efficient work with the Boards						
Management, accounts and admin.						
Communication and visibility						
Fundraising activities						
Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA)						
Gender Analysis						
Environmental Protection						
Conflict Analysis						
Other areas 1 (please specify in the comment box below)						
Other areas 2 (please specify below)						
Other areas 3 (please specify below)						

If you have included other areas, please list them below. Please start with ‘other areas’ number (1, 2, 3) for each: _____

5. The Core Support Programme encompassed different types of activities. From your point of view, how useful have the activities been for your organisation?

Type of activity	Not useful	Slightly useful	Moderately useful	Useful	Very useful	Not applicable
System-based audit of our organisation						
Group training (in groups of organisations)						
Training with our organisation only						
Partnership forum						

Evaluation of our organisation						
Visits by Embassy of Sweden staff						
Other activities 1 (please specify below)						
Other activities 2 (please specify below)						
Other activities 3 (please specify below)						

Information on other activities – please start with ‘other activities number (1, 2, 3)’ for each: : _____

6. Overall, to what extent has the Core Support Programme met your organisation’s needs?

Type of need	Need not met at all	just slightly	to a great extent	totally met	There was no need
Clarity on mission and strategy					
Democratic decision-making					
Effective management					
Setting up and ensuring efficient work with the Boards					
Economic use of resources					
Reaching more people					
Reaching influential people					
Reaching marginalised people					
Money for the organisation (administrative costs)					
Money for activities					
Paying our staff					
Other needs 1 (please specify below)					
Other needs 2 (please specify below)					
Other needs 3 (please specify below)					

Information on other needs – please start with ‘other needs number (1, 2, 3)’ for each: _____

7. Have other organisations apart from The Swedish Embassy/Sida supported your organisation during the time when you received Pre-Core and Core Support from the Swedish Embassy?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

If yes, please list the organisations: _____

8. If you answered “yes” to the previous question, please indicate which types of support you have received from other organisations (not The Swedish Embassy/Sida)

- Project funding
- Core/institutional funding
- Training to strengthen organisational systems
- Training to strengthen strategy (including training on results-based management)
- Training on human rights-based approaches and/or gender equality
- Training on communication and advocacy
- Training on proposal and report-writing to donors

Other, please explain _____

9. Did your organisation obtain funding from new donors (donors that did not fund you before) after you joined the Core Support Programme?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

10. If you have answered “yes” to the previous question: Do you feel it was because of your participation in the Core Support Programme that you received new or more funding from other donors?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Room for additional information: _____

10. From your point of view, what aspects of your organisation (and its work) have improved most because of the Core Support Programme?

Aspect	Core Support did not improve it	Core Support slightly improved it	Core Support moderately improved it	Improved very much due to Core Support	Improved mainly for other reasons (not because of Core Support)	Not applicable

Strategic thinking						
Democratic decision-making in the organisation						
Outreach (activities reaching more people)						
Inclusiveness (reaching hard-to-reach people)						
Quality of our services						
Management, accounts, and administrative functions						
Fundraising capacity						
External communication and visibility						
Other (please explain)						

12. If the Core Support Programme has helped your organisation to strengthen itself and to work better, please give one or two examples for improvements that are particularly important for the organisation and its work:

13. Are there any unexpected changes (good or bad changes) that have happened because of your participation in the Core Support Programme?

14. What are the biggest challenges for your organisation and its work now, in late 2023, and what is most needed in your organisation for you to fulfil its mission in the coming years? Please write a few sentences.

15. Did your organisation receive sufficient information and assistance from the Embassy during the Core Support Programme and did your organisation find the procedures (reporting, amendment, agreement) easy to work with?

16. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Guiding questions for key informant interviews (KIIs)

The following list combines questions for all KII guides. For each KII, the interviewer selected relevant questions, adding and removing questions depending on the interviewee's profile. KII guides were refined iteratively to deepen certain points as

needed. Also, in our three case studies, questions to CSOs were adjusted depending on the respondent (e.g., management vs. board vs. volunteer in CSO activities).

- i. Introduce the evaluation and the evaluator – Tana has been asked to evaluate the Core Support Programme for Civil Society Organisations in Moldova supported by the Swedish Embassy and Sida. I am a member of the evaluation team... [1-2 sentences about the interviewer]
- ii. Request informed consent – Explain that the responses will be used by the evaluation team only, treated as strictly confidential, and the sources of specific findings will not be named. And that, if at any point during the interview or afterwards they wish to change or retract anything they have said, they are free to do so.
- iii. Use the semi-structured interview guide below to inform your interview. This topic guide is modular: **text which is italicised in orange** indicates which type(s) of respondent each question is relevant to. The priority is to ask all main questions for the respective respondent type (this may mean skipping some prompts and less prioritised questions). Main questions are in **bold print**.

Section 1: Introduction

- *All respondents:* Do you have any questions before I start asking ours?
- *All respondents:* **What is your role at [organisation name]?** What are your main responsibilities, in one sentence?
- *Embassy of Sweden & Sida, SDA/NCG:* Could you briefly describe your role in the Core Support Programme?
- *CSOs:* Could you summarise in a few sentences what work your organisation is doing?
- *Other donors/external specialists:* Can you say in a few words what you know about the Swedish Support for Civil Society Organisations Programme?

Section 2: Relevance and coherence

- *Embassy of Sweden & Sida, SDA/NCG:* From your point of view, what do civil society organisations in Moldova need most – and how does the programme respond to these needs?
 - Major changes in CSO needs and interests since 2016
 - Anticipated needs from 2024 on
- *Former Embassy of Sweden Programme Officers:* How did you – or the Embassy – get the idea of launching the Core Support programme?
- *CSOs:* Could you summarise briefly how your organisation got selected for the Embassy's Core Support Programme?
 - Why has the Embassy selected your organisation for Core Support – what do you think?
- *CSOs:* What other support do you receive from other international organisations or donors?
 - *Probe for types of funding and types of capacity building*

- *CSOs:* What are the main needs for civil society in Moldova today, and in the next few years?
 - *Probe:* How could the Embassy address those needs?
- *All respondents:* From your point of view, what makes the programme special compared other to CSO strengthening programs by other players in Moldova?
- *Other donors/external specialists:* How does the programme fit with your/other civil society strengthening work in Moldova?
- *Probe for:* Overlaps, coordination, (potential) conflicts...

Section 3: Effectiveness and likely impact

- *CSOs:* What did you expect regarding the content of the Programme when you joined it – and to what extent has the Programme addressed the needs of your organisation?
 - Example for specific needs and how they were addressed
 - Example for **unmet needs**
- *CSOs:* How well was the programme tailored to your organisation and its work?
 - Type of the needs for capacity building
 - Flexibility in implementing the Program
 - Frequency and Schedule of the training and other support
 - Expertise of the trainers
- *CSOs:* From your point of view, has the programme strengthened your organisation and its work?
 - ➔ Yes: What aspects has it strengthened – and how (specific examples)
 - ➔ No: Why?
 - Prompt: Can you give us a good example of your work in terms of:
 - Your internal structure and processes (governance, efficiency)
 - Individual or common initiatives / communication and advocacy/campaigning
 - Services and intended beneficiaries
 - Changes at the community level
- *CSOs:* Who or what else have contributed to strengthening your organisation?
- *CSOs:* What should change in a future phase of the programme so that progressive Moldovan civil society, in its diversity, can benefit more from it?
- *CSOs:* Are there any changes in your organisation and its work that could not have happened, or that would have taken much more time, without the Programme?

- *Embassy of Sweden & Sida, SDA/NCG*: From your point of view, what are the most important Results of the Programme?
 - Specific examples
 - Other actors/factors contributing to the results.
- *Embassy of Sweden & Sida, SDA/NCG*: **Are there any CSOs that have benefited less from the Programme** – and what are the reasons for that, from your point of view?
 - *Probe for*: CSO-inherent reasons, reasons linked with the selection of CSOs, external context
- *Embassy of Sweden*: **How has the Programme M&E system worked for you?** And has it delivered the information needed for you to assess progress and learn from the Programme?
 - *Prompt*: SDA/NCG and Embassy’s M&E systems
- *CSOs*: How has the Core Support Programme contributed to integrating (or “mainstreaming”) the following aspects in your organisation and its work?
 - Gender mainstreaming
 - Human rights-based approaches
 - Environmental responsiveness
 - Conflict sensitivity

Probe for specific examples!

- *All respondents*: Have there been any unintended effects of the programme (positive or negative)? Please give concrete examples.
- *All respondents*: From your point of view, what makes it difficult to strengthen CSO capacities in Moldova today, and how can these challenges be overcome?
 - Probe for the effects of the war in Ukraine

Section 4: Efficiency

- *Embassy of Sweden & Sida*: How would you compare the cost/benefit ratio of the Core Support Programme with that of other programmes?
 - With the benefit of hindsight, do you think the Programme could have achieved the same results as at a lesser cost? Why/why not?
 - Probe for Embassy time invested
- *CSOs*: Are there any aspects of the programme that you have found unnecessary or less useful than others? Why?
 - Probe for unnecessary/ineffective training

Section 5: Sustainability

- *CSOs*: What needs to happen so that your organisation can continue to develop itself and to do good work in the longer term – and to what extent has this happened so far?
 - What has your organisation done? What else does it need to do?
 - What has the Embassy/SDA/NCA done? What else can the Embassy do?
 - What else needs to happen (external context, other actors...)?
- *Embassy of Sweden, SDA/NCG*: **Which aspects of the Programme support sustainability** and should be maintained, and which aspects needs to change to promote sustainability?

A.

- *All respondents*: Is there anything else you would like to add?

MANY THANKS FOR THIS INSIGHTFUL INTERVIEW!

Annex 4 – Documentation

Project documentation and related literature

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Swedish Development Advisors (2016), System-based Audit of Genderdoc-M Final Report

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Swedish Development Advisors (2020), System-based Audit of the Centre for Analysis and Prevention of Corruption (CAPC) Final Report

Swedish Development Advisers (2021), *Bi-annual report for the program: Organisational development for "Core Support partners" in Moldova, Period: July to December 2020*

Swedish Development Advisers (2022), *Bi-annual report for the program: Organisational development for "Core Support partners" in Moldova, Period: May to December 2021*

Swedish Development Advisors (2022), *Final Report for the Program: Organisational Development for Core Support Partners in Moldova, Period: June 2019-June 2022*

Swedish Development Advisers, Workshop for HRBA, Gender, Environment and Conflict integration in RAFs of Generation III CSOs in Moldova

Swedish Development Advisors (2019), *Bi-annual report for the program: Organisational development for "Core Support partners" in Moldova Period: June to December 2019*

Swedish Development Advisors, Work plan for: "Organizational development for "Core Support partners" in Moldova", Period: June 2019-Dec 2019

Documentation on case study CSOs

For each of the case study CSOs (n=3), the evaluation team performed a rapid review of the following types of documents:

- System-based audit, Follow-Up Report and evaluation (by SDA or NCG, up to 100 pages per CSO)
- Core Support agreement (and any amendment), CSO strategy and budget, as well as annual and final CSO reports to the Embassy
- CSO website and sample internal policies developed by the CSO
- Completion memo by the Embassy

Furthermore, the evaluators briefly reviewed CSO websites, SBAs and occasionally other documentations on other CSOs interviewed in this evaluation.

External literature

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Sida Civil Society Unit (2020), Guide for Core Support management.

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Swedish Embassy in Tirana (2022), *Guidelines for Core Support*.

Annex 5 - List of interviewees

Overall, the evaluation team interviewed the following types of stakeholders, online and face to face (field research from 7 to 14 November):

- Embassy of Sweden staff, with a focus on current and former Programme Officers directly involved in the implementation of the CSO Core Support Programme
- A Sida specialist in Core Support
- SDA and NCG consultants involved in implementing the Programme
- Leading representatives of 13 participating CSOs including 2 CSOs did not receive Core Support after the Pre-Core phase
- In each of the three CSO case studies, 3 to 5 persons representing different positions within the CSO (staff, board). It was planned to interview volunteers as well, but that could not be arranged with any of the case study CSOs.
- External specialists knowledgeable of CSO development in Moldova, e.g., representatives of multilateral organisations (EU, UNDP), an academic researcher and a high government official.

Number & gender	Organisation	In presence or online?
2 men	IDOM	Online
1 woman, 2 men	Resonance	In presence
3 women, 1 man	Independent Journalism Center	In presence
2 men	East European Foundation	In presence
2 women	Women's Law Center	Online
1 woman	GenderDocM	Online
2 women, 1 man	EcoVisio	In presence
2 women, 1 man	Artemida	Online
3 women, 2 men	National Environmental Center	In presence
1 woman, 1 man	CONTACT Center	In presence
1 woman, 1 man	Center for Analysis and Prevention of Corruption	In presence
1 woman	Centre for Investigative Journalism	In presence
1 woman	Association for Participatory Democracy ADEPT	Online
1 man	UNDP	In presence
5 women, 1 man	Embassy of Sweden / Sida in Chisinau	Online / In presence
1 woman	SDA	Online
1 man	NCG	Online
1 woman	Moldova State University/ Academic gender expert	Online
1 woman	Sida / Stockholm	Online
2 women	EU Delegation	Online

Annex 6 – List of Core-Supported CSOs

The following list has been provided by the Embassy of Sweden.

Table 2: List of CSOs that have received Core Support, 2016-2023

Name of the CSO	Themes	Support period	Budget, SEK
IDOM	Human rights, people with disabilities	2016-2018	4 945 912
Resonance, Transnistrian region	Gender-based violence	2016-2018	4 857 052
Independent Journalism Center	Media	2016-2018	4 675 336
East European Foundation	Human rights, vulnerable groups, economic development	2016 -2020	26 855 481
Women's Law Center	Gender – based violence	2016-2019 2020-2022	4 080 266 9 249 372
Legal Resource Center from Moldova	Justice and human rights	2018-2021	5 139 995
GenderDocM	LGBTQ+	2018-2021	4 949 978
EcoVisio	Environment	2018-2021	5 346 640
EcoContact	Environment	2018-2021	4 987 990
Artemida	Gender – based violence	2020 -2023	4 988 995
AJMTEM	Environment, media	2020 -2023	4 998 672
National Environmental Center	Environment	2021 -2024	4 997 641
CONTACT Center	CSO support, community development	2021 -2024	4 769 629
Biotica	Environment	2022–2025	4 998 947
Women's Initiatives Tiraspol	Domestic violence and trafficking in human beings	2022–2025	3 500 000
Center for Analysis and Prevention of Corruption	Anti-corruption and justice	2022-2025	5 895 843
Center for Policies and Reforms	Gender and good governance	2022-2025	4 928 349
Legal Clinic, Balti	Justice and human rights	2023-2026 (tbc)	6 324 590



Evaluation of the CSO Core Support Programme in Moldova

This evaluation report presents the assessment of the Civil Society Core Support Programme (CSCSP) implemented by the Embassy of Sweden in Moldova from 2016 to 2023. The CSCSP aimed to support civil society development through funding and capacity building. The purpose was to evaluate relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and potential impact and sustainability of the programme. The evaluation involved data collection from various sources and key findings highlight the programme's relevance and success in strengthening CSOs, but concerns exist regarding the selection process, geographic coverage, and sustainability of post-core support. Recommendations include longer-term funding, tailored capacity building, clarifying programme goals, implementing a monitoring system, and considering alternative delivery models.

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