

## **ANALYSIS: The effectiveness and sustainability of the civil society networks**

*Experience of the organizations in national, regional and local level networking*

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## Abbreviations

CSO	Civil society organization
CSOs	Civil society organizations
RM	Republic of Macedonia
CEA	Center for Economic Analyses
MCIC	Macedonian Center for International Cooperation
LAF	Law on Associations and Foundations
IPA	Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance
LSGU	Unit for Local Self-government

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## Introduction

It is generally accepted that the CSO networks are civil society groups, organizations and sometimes individuals who associate voluntarily to achieve common goals for social development or to promote democratic governance. These goals may involve a wide range of activities and undertakings such as sharing resources, addressing common social challenges, as well as expressing community or social group's identity. By associating in civil society networks, members typically retain their basic autonomy, their own identity, and their mission and work. Civic groups and organizations form networks to achieve common goals towards social development and democratic governance that they cannot achieve by themselves.

The networks can enhance the impact of the civic voice in the advocacy processes and the governance enhancement. Similarly, networks may link together the service providers through an information and resource exchange, or may develop a coordinated system for delivering those services. CSO networks can be partners of many international development organizations seeking for ways to maximize their programs' scope and impact, a trend that is increasingly noticeable in Macedonia.

Civil society networks through their successful initiatives make the citizens' voice stronger and make a greater impact on the policy makers, the policy implementers, the democratic governance and overall social change. In pursuing results, such as building peaceful and just societies or protecting and promoting the situation of

vulnerable categories, human rights abuses and the like, networks can provide: (1) a forum for people to share their experiences, express their identity, discuss and debate changes and define strategies for action; (2) protection for vulnerable groups against abuse or public expression of attitudes; (3) facilitate joint groups for campaign coordination and other joint activities; (4) legitimacy among policy creators/makers/implementers and other institutional leaders due to the representativeness and the identity of those seeking change.

The networks of civil society organizations in the longer run also contribute to the democratization of the societies, since the networks themselves are based on a relationship interdependency between individuals and groups (individuals, organizations) that engage the members in "some" form of mutual communication, decision making processes and are managing their structure and capacities.

Although networks are expected to have a greater impact compared with individual organizations, still in practice the CSO networks often face significant challenges and disappointments arising from the lack of or poor achievements compared to the initially expected results and effects. However, this also to a large extent depends on the overall context of the civil society sector and its "power" within the society, especially given the context of the civil sector in Macedonia in the period prior and during the political crisis.

Therefore, the expected positive aspects of the networks, as well as the challenges that they are faced with, was the motivation for an in-depth research to focus on ***whether in Macedonia the joint cooperation of the CSOs through networks is an effective form of association, achieves its goals; as well as to identify the motives for association and the main challenges the CSOs are faced with?***

## Methodology, approach and tools

Based on the perceived lack of cooperation through networking, as well as the sustainability challenges of the established civil society organizations' (CSOs)<sup>1</sup> networks, this case study will attempt to capture the effectiveness of the existing CSO networks in Macedonia in the past few years while considering:

1. The networks' perception for the needs of their existence - what are the networks, what are the goals of the networks and what is their scope?
2. The main goals of CSO networking, as well as the motives for those goals (sharing resources and knowledge, common social goal or expressing community or social group identity).
3. Whether the creation of networks is intrinsic - internally motivated by the need to achieve a certain common goal or extrinsically motivated by external factor and opportunities within the environment
4. Management models and organizational set-up and their functionality/non-functionality.

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<sup>1</sup> Перцепција на Граѓанските организации за степенот на развој на граѓанското општество во Македонија. Центар за економски анализи – ЦЕА, 2017. <<http://cea.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/CEA-analiza-od-Prashalnikot-FINAL.pdf>>

## 5. Challenges of the networks.

The research question focuses on: ***whether the joint cooperation through CSO network association in Macedonia is effective, i.e. do they achieve the goals? What are the motives for association and the main challenges that networks are faced with?***

In order to give an overview of an efficient / successful model of functioning and effective CSO network in the Republic of Macedonia, which is sustainable and functional for a longer period, the following text considers the forms of organization structure and management, formal versus non-formal structure, sources of financing, motivation, etc.

### Defining a network and selection criteria

For the purposes of this research, a network is defined as: "voluntary association of civil society organizations, as well as other forms of association, sometimes of individuals, for addressing common needs, achieving common interests and/or achieving common goals. These goals may include only information exchange or coordination, but also undertaking of mutual actions to achieve social changes. The members of the networks retain their own autonomy, i.e. their identity, goals, structure, etc." (Definition and scope used in the report "Perception of CSOs for Networking", MCIC, 2016<sup>2</sup>).

The networks can be informal or formal groups of civil society organizations or other members, with formal networks being institutionalized and registered as separate legal entities (under the Law on Associations and Foundations) and informal associations that use a variety of terms such as network, alliance, coalition, initiative, union, platform, federation, etc. In this report, the term networks covers all of the stated above and implies any form of association/networking of civil society organizations whether it is formal or informal, registered or unregistered as a separate legal entity and operating in Macedonia.

The term civic organization means an association, foundation, union or other form of association registered in Macedonia, according to the Law on Associations and Foundations.

The analysis includes findings from a field research conducted through open semi-structured in-depth interviews with ongoing functional networks that have been active in the last years as formal (registered) or informal networks composed of at least five members (CSOs) and have been active for at least two years. Ten formal/informal networks of civil society organizations were included in the research. The choice of networks was based on the principle of diversity in their scope of action, and on the basis of the activity and the prominence of the networks.

Based on the scope of actions the interviews were conducted with networks in the areas of: legal action, democracy and rule of law, civil society development, youth network, fight against poverty, agriculture, Roma issues and gender issues. The selection of a sample for conducting semi-structured interviews is based on the most frequently mentioned networks in 2016, however, in order to cover multiple sectors, i.e. issues, goals of networks, those that overlap were replaced and networks with another scope were covered. The

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<sup>2</sup> Перцепција на граѓанските организации за вмрежувањето. МЦМС, ТАКСО, 2016.  
<<http://www.mcms.org.mk/images/docs/2016/perceprijata-na-graganskite-organizacii-za-vmrezuvanjeto.pdf>>

interviews were conducted with the CSO representative which is currently leading the network, founders and/or current representative of the network.

Additionally, in order to increase the scope for a local and/or regional level, a comprehensive questionnaire was sent to more than hundred CSOs in the country, which provided answers for their perception of their network membership or non-membership, the factors for joining networks, the degree of the goal achievement and the like. Full answers were received from a total of 64 CSOs, whose responses were reviewed.

### Networks' organization structures

The networks in Macedonia are usually informal, however they are also formal i.e. legally registered entities under the Law on Associations and Foundations (LAF)<sup>3</sup>. The networks hold different names that are linked with the term network such as coalition, alliance, association, association, initiative, federation, platform, forum, etc. Depending on the identity and the context of the network, they can be formal - unions, but more often they appear as citizen associations or are informal networks, which through spontaneous association work towards achieving the goals of the network.

Since our legal system, through the Law on Associations and Foundations, recognizes only associations of citizens, foundations and unions, the formal networks are established primarily as civic associations, with special sections in their Statute of the association that it will function as a network of organizations, alliance, platform or some sort of association or union.

The informal networks, on the other hand, may arise spontaneously by advocating a specific idea in front of the policy makers through certain initiatives that have emerged as necessary at a certain time, as a result of a project activity or a project representation in front of a donor for achievement of a specific purpose for which a need had arose. This emphasizes the necessity for the organizations to act together with coordinated activities and consistent attitudes in order to achieve change in the society.

### Networks' leadership structure

The networks, in their essence, are democratic form of governance. Depending on the context or the goals to be achieved, but also on the views of the individual member organizations, the networks are differently structured and each in its own way. However, managing the network can be in informal or formal. Based on the conducted interviews, the following forms of leadership have been identified and grouped into at least three groups:

- I. **Informal guidance/leadership** – led by informal leaders (individuals) of a certain member organization, whose motivation is basically their personal motive and organizational identity in achieving the mission they are advocating for. In that system one member organization, usually on a voluntary basis, conducts administrative and coordinative activities or is implementing a donor

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<sup>3</sup> Law on Associations and Foundations. "Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia", no. 2/2010 and 135/11

funded project where other members of the network are only members/beneficiaries of the network, or the goal of the project itself is to establish a network in which case the network functions very similar to a partnership.

An example of such national networks is RIA - Better Legislation Network, Coalition for Budget Monitoring, unnamed informal networks as a network of women's CSOs, an informal network of organizations Blueprint, and the alike.

- II. **Representative informal or formal management** - the network is managed by a representative organization selected by its members, which is usually a leader - initiator of a former or an ongoing project activity, and the decisions are made through representativeness of all members with an equal or different weight.

Representative management may be rotational by alteration of the managing member after a certain period of time, but representative leadership/management can also be on a continuing basis - by one leader organization, a form that occurs both among the formally registered and unregistered networks.

An example of such national networks is the Civil Society Platform for Fight against Corruption, Network 23 and others.

- III. **Coordinated and formal leadership/management** - a registered association based on the Law on Associations and Foundations, which has got all formal structures for functioning of the association, but within the Statute it is defined as a network of organizations. The union as a form of registration, which would also be classified here, was not covered by the sample of interviewees.  
An example of such national networks is the Coalition of youth organizations SEGA, the Macedonian Anti-Poverty Platform; National Federation of Farmers, National Youth Council of Macedonia, etc.

It cannot be straightforwardly stated whether a formal or informal legal registration is more common among the networks in Macedonia, although the perception is that the number of informal networks prevails (especially at the foundation of the network). The networks are often referred to as a coalition or a platform however, formalized networks are usually registered as a citizens' association and are statutorily defined as a network of civil society organizations, or it is an informal association that has been instigated as an initiative of a former or current project activity. There is a significant number of networks that belong either to one or to the other form of association.

The CSO networking is not a recent trend only present in the last few years, but as a form has emerged in 1994, when the first association of citizens functioning as a union was formed. The establishment of the union aimed at creating a representative organization that would involve all local organizations and on one hand, will build their capacities and represent them in front of policy makers, and on the other hand, will have local support closer to the target group and thus act in a timely and efficient manner.

A significant portion of the CSO networks have been functioning since the first decade of the 2000s, but in the recent years the CSO association within networks has become more pronounced. This trend can also be related to the donor influence in motivating the CSOs to network in order to increase the civil sector visibility

and to have a greater impact on the national policies. Out of the ten interviewed networks, three have been established in the last five years, while the rest have been functioning for about ten years.

### Size and scope

The size of CSOs networks depends on the type of activities it undertakes and the goals. The research covered networks with more than a hundred member organizations (three out of ten networks), but also networks with lower number of members and networks with a narrower scope with about fifteen member civil society organizations.

- I. **Horizontal Complementary Networks** - are those where the membership of the CSOs depends on the topic each covers, that is, they involve one organization per different area to complement each other. These networks have wide range of activities, encompass different organizations which are profiled in a particular area, for example, an organization that addresses issues of economic development, another organization that treats rule of law, third human rights, then the environmental issues and similar. In this way, a network with a credible member organization for each area is built, and the network will respond in a timely manner to an occurring societal need (for example, Network 23, Blueprint - Proposal for urgent democratic reforms, etc.)
- II. **Vertical / sector based networks** – is another type of networks which are fully targeting a particular area/subject, for example, a platform that targets specific group such as farmers, young people or specific issue such as legal assistance. This type of networks has member organizations that work in the same "sector" or have a program tackling a specific issue (for example, the Coalition of Citizens' Associations - All for Fair Trials, the National Federation of Farmers, JADRO - the Association of Independent Cultural Scene, etc.)
- III. **Horizontal general networking** - the third type of networks have a general scope of actions that is focused on an interdisciplinary topic which in essence involves each of the CSOs but in different activities. These types of networks are the ones that most often work on advancing and strengthening the development of civil society, fighting for better living conditions, raising the standard of living and the like. Within this type of networks, each organization can contribute with own actions at a given moment for achievement of the network's mission (For example: IPA Mechanism 2, Civil Platform of Macedonia, Union "Macedonia without Discrimination", Front for Freedom of Expression, Network for Financial Sustainability of CSOs, etc.).

The geographic coverage of all interviewed networks (by sample choice) is at a national level. Some of these networks, in addition to acting at a national level, act on the local or regional level as well depending on the objective, the activities and the membership coverage. It can be noted that when the network members act solely on a national level, their impact on a local level is unusual, while the networks that are established by members mostly active on a local level, the network has a typical advocacy role at the national level while an informative role and awareness raising role at the local level.

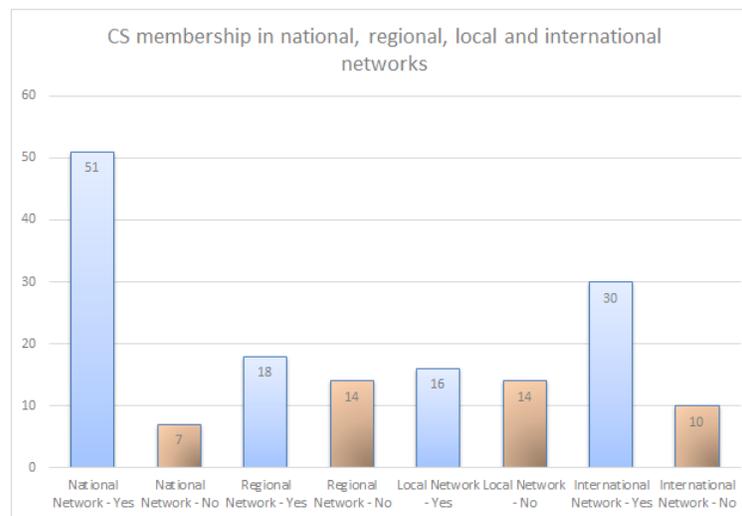
The sample networks scopes of action generally cover the following activities and objectives:

1. **Initiatives for legislative changes:** alert on uncertainties in existing laws, identify potential problematic legal issues, propose specific legal changes, thus introduce or propose specific alterations of the laws and bylaws.
2. **Monitoring of the governance** and identifying and alerting for irregularities in the work of the executive authorities.
3. **Watchdog activities** and attention to the rule of law, seeking accountability and pressuring for efficient and effective public resource spending, elections, protection of rights, access to information.
4. **Active citizenry** - seeking opportunities for citizens' participation through the civil sector in the processes of creation of public policies, participation in working groups or involvement in the preparation of public strategic documents and active participation in the creation of action plans of specific institutions.

The scope of the local networks in turn, in general applies for the following activities:

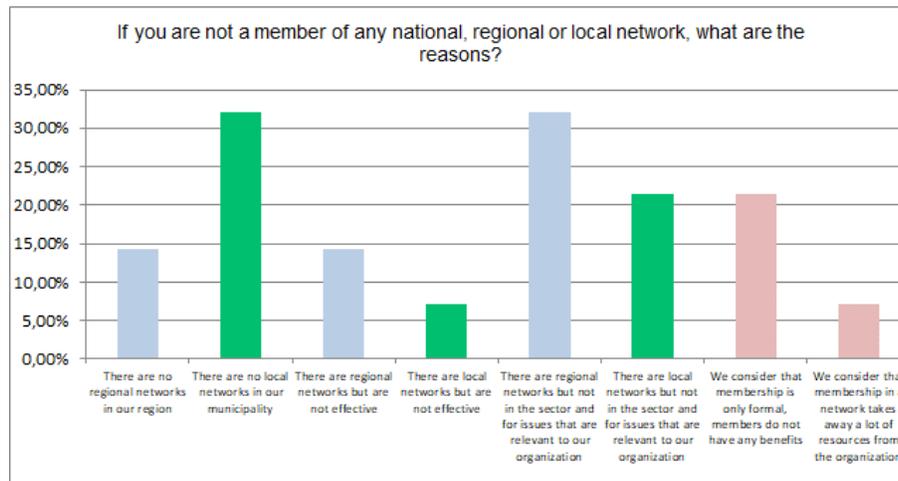
1. **Informing** the local population about various topics of social life and raising public awareness for exercising rights or provision of assistance intended for a specific target group,
2. **Providing direct assistance** by animating different vulnerable categories to facilitate their access to services and inclusion,
3. **Providing advice** on improving quality of life or directing/linking them with institutions that provide services appropriate to their needs,
4. **Advocating** in front of the local authorities on decisions and policies that are being implemented at a local level,
5. **Collecting information** through direct communication with the local constituents.

Based on the answers of the CSOs' sample with regards to the geographical coverage of the network, the national networks membership and international network memberships is most common, while significantly less number of networks operate on a regional or local level. 12.5% of all respondents answered that they are not members of any network at all, while those organizations that are members of networks, are in average members of more than two networks at the same time (2.05).



Source: Data based on questionnaire answers

Those non-networking organizations, usually state that the reasons for not being a member of any network is due to 1) their perception that they do not have sufficient benefits from the membership and 2) membership takes more of their resources than it provides benefits. Regarding the regional and local networks, however, CSOs consider that 1) there are no regional or local networks and therefore are not members of any, 2) these networks are ineffective or 3) those that exist are not in the areas in line with the objectives/field of organizations.



Source: Data based on questionnaire answers

### Management models and membership

As already mentioned above, each of the interviewed networks is unique in terms of its management structure or style. Each of the network has its own management structure, which is defined within the documents for the formal networks.

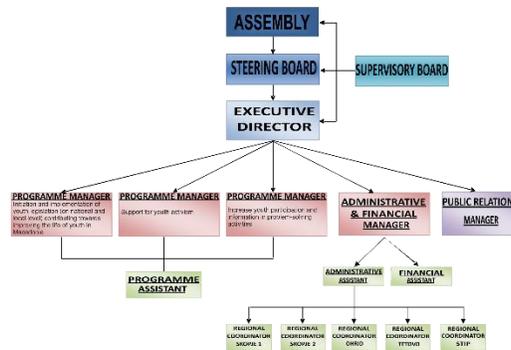
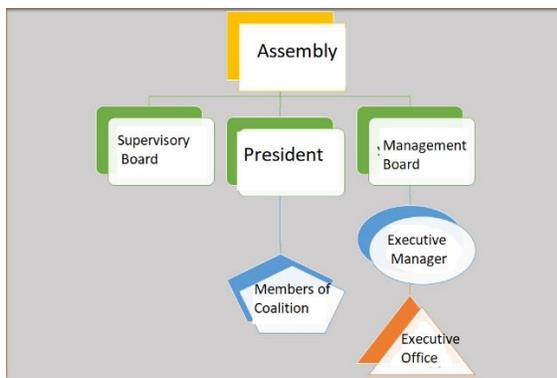
The formal networks, that is, those registered under the Law on Associations and Foundations, have defined their status of a network within their statute and each of these complies with at least the minimum standards that should be covered as a legal obligation, i.e. there is an existence of an Assembly, Board of Directors, Supervisory Board and Executive Office.

Formal networks which are managing a large number of members, cover a management structure which is more complex, for example, there are subnetworks in the form of programs such as women's network or youth network. The choice of members is more intricate, with a differentiation of "active" members those who have the right to vote for the governing structure i.e. the right to make decisions on behalf of the network, and members who only occasionally contribute to the network or only use the services of the network, and thus have a "passive" members role and have no voting or decision making rights.

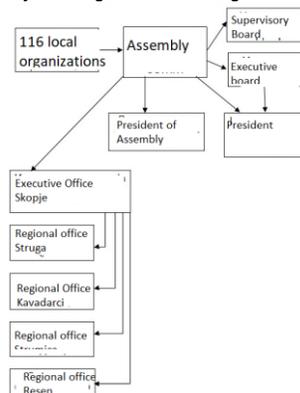
Formal networks can function as umbrella organizations, which constantly have the daily management role and have the capacity to administratively and financially coordinate the other member organizations. The role of umbrella organizations among other things is to increase the capacities of the smaller member organizations, to inform and coordinate their joint activities, and to represent them in front of the stakeholders.

There are cases when the formal networks may be managed by the organizations on a rotational basis, that is, after the expiration of the mandate of one managing organization, another organization is chosen for a next mandate to perform the role of a network coordinator through voting and consensus, a process determined by the statute or the network's rulebook. Additionally, formal networks in their governing structure, besides boards, may also have a secretariat and special working groups.

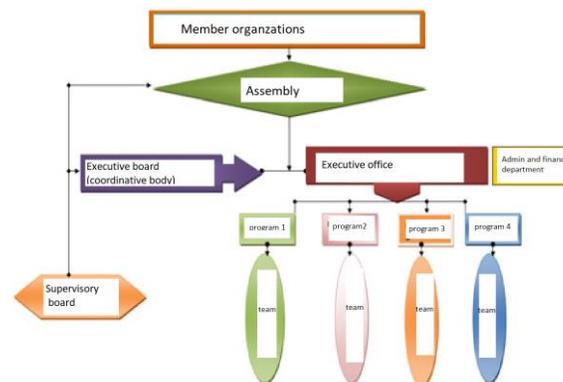
Examples of the structure of some of the networks in Macedonia that are publicly available and published on websites:



Source: Coalition "All for Fair Trials". <http://all4fairtrials.org.mk>, translation of the original MK version  
 Source: Coalition of youth organizations "Sega". <<http://www.sega.org.mk>>



Source: National Council for Gender Equality. <http://www.sozm.org.mk>, translation of the original MK version



Source: Women's Civic Initiative "Antico". <<http://www.antiko.org.mk/struktura.asp>>

Informal networks, however, normally operate on the basis of a network's Rules of procedure, which defines the procedures for functioning. Some of them are managed by a Secretariat that coordinates the partner organizations and represents them in front of the stakeholders.

Membership in both management forms is on a voluntary and predominantly pro bono basis, while depending on the scope, in the more specific networks (with respect to the purpose or goal), member acceptance is subject to submitting a request, review process and possible approval of new membership by the other members or by the assembly, while among the larger networks (in terms of the number of members and the wider scope), which we named as horizontal - general, most often the accession is based on signing an application form or a declaration of interest. The annual membership fee for a given network is also determined in the funding documents and appears as a condition for membership in some of the networks.

The main strategic documents common among the CSO networks are: Statute of the network, Rules of Procedure, Medium-term strategy of the network. The networks with more complex structure and greater capacity, may have other documents as well such as: Rules of procedure, Rulebook on communication, Rulebook on prevention of conflicts of interest, Code of ethics, Communication strategy, Reports (narrative and financial) or others.

The networks, according to one of the frequently quoted international articles on the forms of network organizing and their characteristics of Ashman (2012), considers five forms.

Table: Five forms of networks, according to Ashman et al. (2012)

Shared Purpose	Level of Interdependence	Change in decision-making	Change in ownership of governance	Types of network structure
(1) Exchange information, learn from one another	Low	Little joint decision-making	None	Informal relationships; Single agency convenes mtg(s); Responsibility of member ass'n. to convene members
(2) Coordinate policies, programs, or activities	Medium-low	Limited joint decision-making by executives or delegates	Requires formal or informal agreement	Group or committee of authorized representatives
(3) Obtain common funding	Medium	Some joint decision-making, focused on finance	Requires formal agreement & often legal organization	Project management unit, hosted by one member or jointly created
(4) Create new joint social value, e.g. advocacy campaigns, service delivery	Medium-high	Some joint decision-making, focused on program action & finance	Requires formal or informal agreement; may involve new coordinating organization	Coalition, alliance, service delivery network. Coordinating organization may be hosted by one member or jointly created.
(5) Strengthen members' long-term common identities & interests, e.g. policy, legislation, reputation, etc.	High	Permanent joint decision-making by representation of executive or senior delegate	Requires formal legal organization, bylaws, etc. as provided by legal code and social norms/practices	Member association, apex body, federation, etc. Usually involves a general membership, elected board, and a hired staff who work in a coordinating unit or secretariat.

Source: Ashman, Civil Society Networks: Options for Network Design, (2012)

### Motives for network establishment

The association in networks is motivated by various reasons. Based on the conducted interviews, the motives that they share are the following:

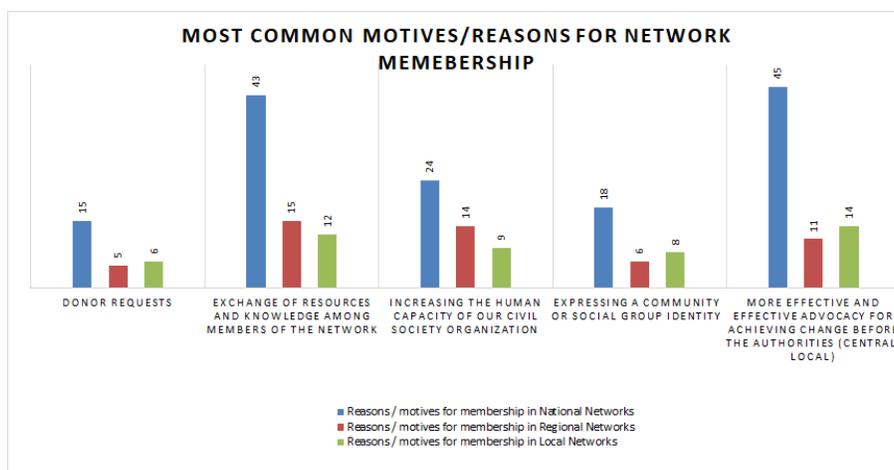
- Reaching a social change - if an organization individually undertakes the actions for reaching the envisaged social change, it would be slower, less effective, and more complex.
- Organizational association - to facilitate mutual interaction and knowledge sharing, with particular emphasis on capacity building of the smaller member organizations through learning;
- Faster and more efficient transmission and information sharing - are important for the societal issues, in both directions: organizations that act on a national level have a greater possibility of advocacy, but local organizations possess the information that are directly collected from the field;
- Platforms provide coordination of programs, activities and resources of several smaller organizations to achieve commonly pursued policy or program objective;
- Reducing the barriers that exist due to donor centralization and concentration of the organizations in the capital city;
- Increasing the availability of the centralized organizations for the constituents/target groups through regional or local offices;
- Increasing the credibility and legitimacy of the organizations in their advocacy process in front of the policy makers (e.g. the Government) and the donors as accountable and effective stakeholders

implementing social development policies and programs that reach the poorest, most isolated or marginalized communities;

- Greater efficiency through joint management bodies with a coordinated program, monitoring and evaluation and implementation;
- Sharing technical capacities, which are of great importance, especially for the smaller grassroots organizations;
- Greater access to funds thus financial sustainability of the member organizations.

Despite these motives for networking, part of the networks, especially those that do not have stringent selection criteria for their members, stress that the member organizations that are not particularly active in the network view the membership as an opportunity for personal interest.

On the other hand, it is emphasized that network membership is increasingly necessary, since donors often do not have the capacity to administer smaller activities and direct the funds towards larger number of organizations but to an already proven partner or organization that show capacity to carry out larger activities, something that the smaller civil society organizations do not have the capacity for and are not able to respond to all formal requirements.



Source: Data from the answers to the CSO questionnaire

The most common reasons for networking and membership in the national networks, according to their members are: a) more effective and efficient advocacy, b) resources and knowledge exchange, and with lesser intensity: increasing human capacities, expressing an identity or solely due to donor requirements. In regards to the regional networks, the most common reasons are a) resources and knowledge exchange, b) increase of human capacities, c) advocacy. For local network membership, whose number is significantly lower, the most common reasons are: a) advocacy and b) exchange of resources and knowledge.

The most frequently brought up networks, based on the answers of the CSOs which have answered the electronic questionnaire, with more than one answer are: Coalition "Sega", Anti-Poverty Platform, National Council for Gender Equality, National Network Against Women and Domestic Violence, National Youth Council, etc. In addition to these responses, over thirty other networks with only one respondent were mentioned as well.

<b>Most frequently listed membership in CSO networks</b>	<b># responses</b>
Coalition "SEGA"	6
Macedonian Platform Against Poverty	5
National Council for Gender Equality	5
National Network Against Women and Domestic Violence	5
Rural Development Network of the Republic of Macedonia	4
National Youth Council	4
Anti-Corruption Platform	4
IPA Mechanism 2	3
Coalition "All for Fair Trials"	3
Roma Advocacy Network	3
Association of the Independent Cultural Scene - JADRO	2
Network "Antico"	2
Coalition for Budget Monitoring	2
Network for Financial Sustainability of CSOs	2
Platform for Multiculturalism	2
Federation of Farmers of the Republic of Macedonia	2

Source: Data from the answers to the CSO questionnaire

## Sustainability

The sustainability of the networks is a major challenge and equally great for each of them. The financial resources and their stability and predictability are a key sustainability element. Likewise, the enthusiasm and commitment of the individual member organizations while working towards their common goals are important elements. The sustainability of the networks is necessary to be based on a strategic planning where all members contribute.

Half of the networks interviewed, started their work as a donor project, which later on only strengthened its position. Some of them are already formalized as registered associations, others are working towards formalization, while a third group does not see the need to formalize at all. There are examples when a formal network of organizations operates as a civil society organization, while the benefits of the other member organizations are merely greater visibility through web and social media promotion, access to information, and when appropriate involvement of other organizations in project partnerships.

Part of the networks uses the principle of membership fee payment as funding source, however the funds collected through membership fees are generally used to cover the administrative running and coordinating costs of the network.

Although the financial sustainability is a challenge for the networks that are mainly funded by donor projects, the number of member organizations in each of the interviewed networks is increasing, that is, the interest of the COSs in network membership is increasing.

Still, some of the networks do not continuously function, that is, continuous activities are noted among those networks that are implementing a donor project in which case there are defined time frames and specific activities that must be implemented in order to achieve the specific project results. Since each of the organizations operate individually, each is aiming at fulfillment of their own activities. At a certain moment when an issue that concerns the network is actualized, coordination activities are carried out and handled according to the needs.

As some of the networks have highlighted, as long as the network does not allocate financial resources to its members, the cooperation among the members is greater and the risk of competition among the members is reduced to a minimum. There was no example of any network or organization with an adverse effect on the particular organization arising from the network membership.

### The advantages versus the weaknesses of the networks in Macedonia are a paradox

The advantages are often also the weaknesses of the networks, which in itself is a paradox, however these should be managed and structured. Namely, the most common weaknesses are the membership differences, i.e. diversity of members, (lack of) financial resources and the level of formal institutionalization.

- i) The **differences and diversity** of the members in terms of their missions, ideologies, values, sectors (area, topic), management structures. These differences as a strength or advantage of the network enables a greater variety of ideas, different knowledge sharing, as well as variety of constituents, which strengthens the network's position and especially of those that at their core have the goals of citizens' organization, encouraging social attitudes and representing their "voice" in a public debate.

However, on the other hand, the differences and diversities can also turn out to be a source of identity conflict, especially when there is a need to put the brand of the group before the individual branding; conflicts and inconsistencies due to different individual organizations' values, lack of trust, passivation of part of the membership, even leaving the network, etc.

#### Example 1:

One of the networks in the Republic of Macedonia, which is horizontal and broad in scope and with a significant number of members, is faced with the problem of creating a common position, previously aligned with the network's structures. Namely, there are members who declare positions in the name of the network, but they are inconsistent with the views of the entire network. Hence, the coordination and control of such differences, ideas, ideologies, etc. are not easily controlled while the clear-cut line between ones individual attitudes (of a given organization) and the collective attitudes (of the network) is not always visible.

#### Example 2:

One of the networks with legal status (a legal entity) has a clearly defined area of action i.e. to advocate in front of policymakers as an apex organization, while its members play a role in local constituents mobilization, local level action implementation and direct communication with the constituents, which is a result of clear responsibilities and roles as well as the structure of joint decision making (through delegates, assemblies, etc.). This makes diversity an advantage, although it may have a negative effect in terms of timeliness i.e. the swiftness of reaction.

- ii) **Financial resources** are necessary for achieving the goals of the networks; however external funding is not always the sole key factor for the sustainability of the network (in Macedonia) because when the finances are worn out, especially by the extrinsically project motivated networks, then the networks cease to function. Hence, “cannibalism” can often arise, that is, when financial resources are limited the members can often compete within the network.

**Example 1:**

One of the interviewed networks, formed as a vertical network (dealing with a specific topic/sector), has an internally unwritten rule of coordination when submitting project funded applications. If there is a specific financing opportunity for project activities, based on an internal agreement and self-selection the applicant/s is selected in order to avoid unnecessary mutual competition.

**Example 2:**

Among the formal networks that have the status of legal entities (as associations) and with a professional executive office team, the network is the holder and manager of the potential and the received funds, while members are usually the beneficiaries of the activity outputs.

- iii) **Formalization and institutionalization** - some networks may begin to function as a formally registered legal entity from its beginning, which in itself benefits from: asset ownership, legitimacy, legal entity and identity, effective coordination, capacity for absorbing funds, etc., However, the legal registration can also cause demotivation among some of the members and even abandonment of the network as a result of a reduced or lack of spontaneity, emergence of competition and thus weakened cooperation. Additionally, the administrative burden of a formal institution, including organizing and conducting meetings, keeping minutes, managing finances, answering to legal obligations, public appearances, communication with media, etc., can significantly burden the network with bureaucracy and administration, thus the purpose of the

existence of the network may be lost. On the other hand, informal management provides more flexibility, speed and timelines in a joint member response.

**Example 1:**

Increasing number of the networks in Macedonia are initially established as an informal group, and over time they tend to formalize, although according to the current regulation, the most common form is through establishment of citizens' association. Informal networks, which exist for a longer period, are most often active on a temporary basis, that is, when there is a need for opening up a certain issue of common interest. This type of association is more efficient, faster responding, with amplitudes of greater or lower activity levels within the society. Hence, the border of cooperation vs. networking is not clear.

- iv) **Networking through branding** – After years of effective operations, some of the networks in Macedonia have a firm positioning within the society as professionals, to the extent that they are recognized as a brand. Based on their recognition, networks are consulted and desirable to participate in working groups when policy-making processes are initiated, the monitoring activities and shadow reports are treated as relevant and credible source. These networks are usually vertical, and specialize in a particular issue with high degree of professionalism and are often in a cooperation "relationship" with the decision-makers.

The brand of the network can also be an obstacle, an issue which was highlighted by most of the members, in the sense when and to what extent the promotion is as an individual organization and when as a network, especially if it is known that the coordination and building a common position is a robust process especially for large-scale networks. The control over expression of views on behalf of the network is also a challenge for network coordination.

Based on the interviews, as well as the reasons why certain organizations are not members of any networks, it is evident that the advantages of network membership prevail over the weaknesses, primarily because of their voluntary association, consolidation and gaining greater credibility, especially in the processes of advocacy.

## Challenges

The most common challenges that arise among CSO networks can be categorized into three groups:

- I. **Inability to achieve the desired and expected results** in terms of scope or impact, especially in the advocacy processes. Namely, the formal and informal setting of networks can have both

positive and negative aspects when necessary to react quickly, while a certain social issue is subject to a debate. Among those networks with complex formal management procedures, the rapid response to a situation is sometimes slowed down as each proposal needs to go through several stages of resolution, or it takes time to reconcile the views inside the network. On the other hand, the urgent action in informal networks can cause a conflict within the network.

- II. **Collaboration or attempts of co-operation that led to conflict among members**, as well as refusal of cooperation. Although there is no example of a member that has left the network, passiveness of a particular organization has occurred within the networks. Sometimes it is a challenge for the networks to choose a specific partner organization for projects outside the network, making sure not to ruin the relationships within the existing network.
- III. Networks that were initially established on the basis of external financing or as project activities **fail to maintain their program effectiveness** (sustainability) upon completion of donor assistance. In that case, some of the organizations become passive and the network coordinator finds it difficult to motivate active participation. The inaction of some of the members is mainly due to the volunteering role within the network.

These challenges arise from the network complexity, since it requires involvement of autonomous and individual organizations, each of whom has their own mission, management structure, and stakeholders whom they "serve and respond", hence the alignment of common attitudes and steps for a longer period is a challenge. Organizing and running networks means coordination and interaction on multiple levels, starting from technical support, management sharing (horizontally) to implementing actions that respond to specific issues in a consistent and timely manner.

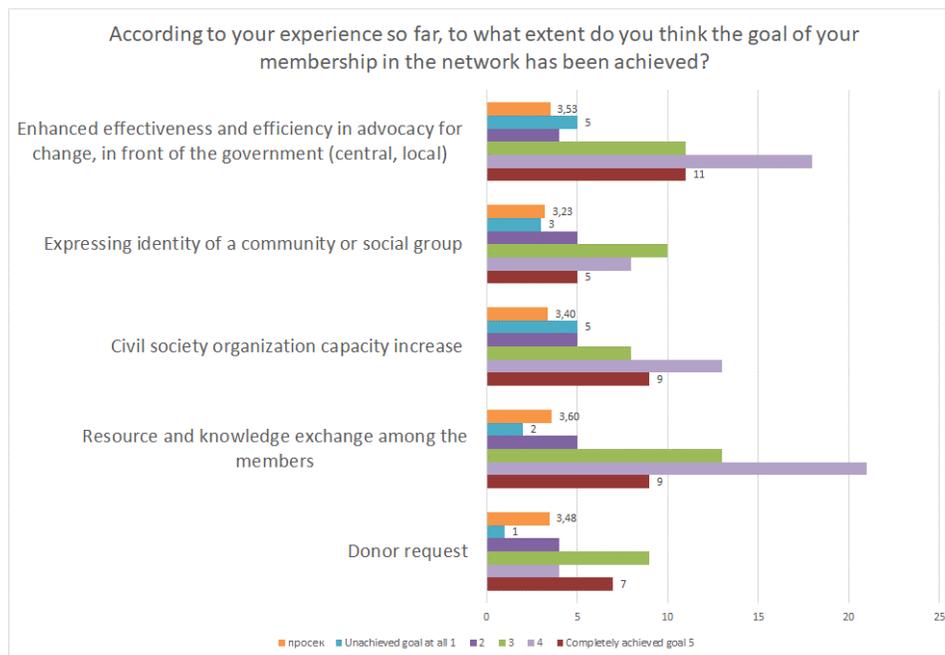
### Effectiveness of networks

The effectiveness of the networks in the Republic of Macedonia, considering the aforementioned challenges and advantages, suggests that they depend on a number of factors:

- Limited networking possibility for the small grassroots organizations that predominantly act locally,
- Context of work within the society,
- Credibility of the network and members faced with challenge to be a factor providing advocacy suggestions,
- Diversity of individual organizations,
- Different level of development among the organizations and the civil society as a whole,
- Credibility of the civil society in front of its constituents and the citizens in general,
- Degree and need for formalization,
- Leadership and effective leadership and coordination,
- Building common positions,
- Challenge of sustainability, especially long-term financial sustainability,
- Interest in building internal capacities and sharing knowledge,
- Scope and functions of the network (which range of action will be undertaken),

- Clear management agreement,
- Quality of evidence,
- Complementarity of values and skills.

Given the opportunity to state and rank the level of achieved network goals, almost all civil society organizations members of the networks, responded that these are: a) effective and efficient advocacy, b) expressing the identity of the community or group, c) increasing capacities, d) sharing resources, e) donor requirements and responded with an average score ranging from 3 to 3.6 (on a scale of 5 to 1, where 5 is a fully accomplished goal, and 1 the goal of the network is not reached). The highest scores are given for achievement of resource exchange (sum of the total awarded points - 180) and effective advocacy (sum of the total awarded points - 173).



Source: Data from the answers to the CSO questionnaire

The above results indicate that the advocacy as a goal is a priority to the networks, and most CSOs consider it as effective however the need to improve the efforts and effectiveness needs to be further promoted.

## Conclusions

1. The networks' management structure is diverse, however, all networks preserve a democratic form of governance, with all social and legal norms within their management structures. Networks can be grouped according to the way they are managed as: 1) informal guidance/leadership 2)

representative informal or formal management and 3) coordinated and formal leadership/management. Membership is generally on a voluntary basis and each of the members aim at preserving one's own identity.

2. The legal formalization of the networks in the Republic of Macedonia tends to indicate a trend among the larger and older networks. Formalization provides greater sustainability, credibility and policy-influencing structure at the national level. The most common form of formalization as a legal entity is the form association of citizens.
3. According to the scope, the networks can be broad and specialized in specific sectors and issues they are working on and may be grouped into three major groups: 1) horizontal complementary networks, 2) horizontal general networks and 3) vertical / sector based networks, specializing in given question/area.
4. The most common reasons that motives networking within national networks are primarily: a) effective and efficient advocacy, followed by the need for b) exchange of resources and knowledge, and to a lesser degree need for increasing the human capacities, expression of an identity or as an answer to a donor requirement.
5. Sustainability of the networks is a major challenge and equally great for each of the networks. The financial resources and their predictability are a key sustainability element. At the same time, the enthusiasm and commitment of the individual member organizations are also important elements. It is of essence for the sustainability of the networks to be based on a strategic planning where all members contribute.
6. Advocacy is a key motive for networking in Macedonia, and the perception of the member CSOs indicates the need for even greater efficiency and effectiveness of the advocacy processes. In that sense, an enhanced use of evidence in the advocacy process is needed. The CSO networks, as well as the CSOs individually, have limited impact over the policies and the citizens in general, this is partly due to policy making processes in the Republic of Macedonia; the civic space for the CSOs (the possibility of giving own insights while faced with obstacles and re-examination), but often it depends on the capacities of CSOs. Therefore, more intense evidence-based advocacy would contribute to the effectiveness of the networks, as well as to their legitimacy.
7. The need for donor support is evident to ensure an environment of free civil sector actions, as well as greater transparency of the policy making processes while increased involvement of the civil society sector. Donors should continue and more intensely assist with initiatives supporting the "pressure" over the policy-makers, to provide more freedom and increased civic space and inclusion, as well as to diversify their support, accompanied by financial support for inclusion in the process of carrying and evaluating the policies.
8. There is a need for strengthening the position, credibility and actions of the networks, in particular the networks that will address advocacy and monitoring of local policies. Networking at a local level, for the purposes of advocacy, is considerably weaker compared with the national level, which is a

reflection of the lower degree of development of the civil society locally. Building the capacities of local networks, especially in the area of advocacy, is compulsory.

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