

**AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF ARMENIA**

**NGO ADVOCACY AND LOBBYING IN ARMENIA**

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## **List of Abbreviations**

**NGO – Non-Governmental Organization**

**RA – Republic of Armenia**

**NA – National Assembly**

**MP – Members of Parliament**

**OSI – Open Society Institute**

**UNDP – United Nations Development Program**

**US – United States**

## **Abstract**

The theory of democracy proclaims that the citizen's full participation in public policy formation is the one of the fundamental grounds on which the accountable and truly representative government can be sustained. Citizens progressively demand more accountable and transparency from their governments and opportunity to participate in formation of public policies, that have immediate impact on their lives and lives of coming generations. One of the primary forms for citizens to participate in public decision-making is via non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that are involved in advocacy and lobbying.

The role of NGOs that are involved in advocacy and lobbying is to mobilize, articulate, and represent people's interests and concerns at the different levels of government: including locally and nationally. Informed about the needs and expectations of the poorer, disadvantages sectors of society, using information as a key tool, NGOs try to equalize unequal power relations, to change political discourse and effectively influence important decision-making processes. NGOs also use mobilization of public opinion as a tool for political pressure.

Advocacy and lobbying remains relatively new concepts for NGOs in Armenia. Very few NGOs are involved in advocacy and lobbying. The aim of this study is to assess the efficiency of those few NGOs' activities that are involved in advocacy and lobbying. Moreover, the purpose for undertaking this study is the need to discuss the importance of strong and viable NGO sector that actively involved in advocacy and lobbying and to reveal existing obstacles that hamper the development NGO lobbying in Armenia. Analysis has resulted in a number of important findings. Based on these findings certain recommendations have been put forward.

## **Literature Review**

### **The role of NGOs in democratic consolidation**

In the social sciences, one of the most recognized definitions of the civil society is the complex of public relations, independent from the state, but cooperating with it (Babayan, 2004). According to Leslie Holmes (1997), the term civil society is highly controversial. Historically, it can be traced back to Cicero in the first century BC. Nowadays, for some scholars civil society is more or less linked with the market. “In that market economies operate primarily on the basis of interaction between independent groups of individuals-companies, craft guilds, family businesses, etc-rather than via the state’s plan and ministries” (L. Holmes, 1997, p. 268). For others, this narrow economic definition of civil society is not acceptable. According to broader definition of the term, civil society is refers to the institutionalization and operation of social activities and groupings independent from the state, but at the same time interacting with it. The list of these activities include but are not limited to the economic, religious, political, social, professional, sports, private educational or medical ones.

Larry Diamond (1994) while discussing the role of civil society in democratic consolidation refers to advocacy NGOs. According to him, NGOs are the important part of civil society. In democratic society political parties, advocacy NGOs are necessary linkages between public opinion and representative government. They are mediating institutions. Although the main function of political parties to aggregate and articulate interests, NGOs can play the same role also. Unlike political parties, NGOs are not political institutions. Remaining somehow related to the state, NGOs do not seek to gain political and formal power. They are mostly concerned with public then private affairs. Other distinct features of NGO are pluralism, diversity and partialness. NGOs do not encompass whole society, only distinct and specific parts of it (Diamond, 1994).

While NGOs do not constitute the part of political society, it still can play an important role in democracy building and further sustaining.

Following the main logic of Diamond (1994), one of the main functions carried out by NGOs, which may contribute to democracy, is the limitation of state power. The consolidation of civil society, through NGOs, can lead to the abolishment of illegitimate, totalitarian rule. At the same time it puts constrain on the democratic form of government, serving as a tool for checks and balances and implementation of law.

Scholar also puts the stress on NGOs' ability to foster political participation through increasing political, democratic and civic awareness of citizens, providing political and legal knowledge. Other important functions of NGOs are dissemination of information and leadership recruitment. NGOs also can guarantee the participation of different segments of society in all levels of government. In order to be able to carry out all these activities NGOs need to be sustainable and capable to influence the public officials (Diamond, 1994).

Civil society provides the foundation for democracy when it creates opportunities for participation and influence at all levels of governance. It generates channels other than political parties for articulation, aggregation and representation of constituency interests at different levels of government. This role is more important especially for those groups of society that traditionally excluded from the access to the different levels of decision-making. Commonly these groups are women, ethnic minorities or less well of people. Only, organized pressure from below, will guarantee advancement of social and political equity within society (Diamond, 1994).

NGOs are entities, which role is to participate in public decision-making on behalf of the least powerful levels of society, make democratic unequal public relations within society and influence the government decisions about who gets what. Freedom of association is the key factor that strengthens the democratic way of government within the society. If citizens are



engaged in decision-making at all levels of government, it enhances not only the accountability, representativeness, inclusiveness and effectiveness, but also the legitimacy of the system and increase citizens respect towards the state. “In the end this improves the ability of the state to govern, and command voluntary obedience from its citizens.”(Diamond, 1994, p.11) Rich associational life can increase the ability of advocacy NGOs to improve their constituency welfare, independently from the state.

According to Lipset (1956) in large complex societies, the individuals and separate body of citizenry are unable to influence the policies of the state, if they do not belong to the politically and socially significant group. Entirely functioning civil society should also be a participant one. Groups of citizenry, by consulting with political institutions about the government projects that affect them and their beneficiaries, transfer accurate information to the citizenry and stimulate interests and activity in the large polity. “Civil organizations reduce resistance to unanticipated changes because they prevent the isolation of political institutions from the polity and can smooth over, or at least recognize, interest differences early on.” (Lipset, 1993, pp. 439-440)

Danielian (1992) puts the stress on the importance of availability of diverse information in promoting the liberal democracy. She argues that the advocacy NGOs are the natural by-product of democratic way of government in the era of globalization. She highlights the importance of some kind of private associational life. According to her plurality of interested voices, that can be introduced by NGOs, are the basic essence of liberal democracy. “Because a plurality of interested voices taking stands on various issues is as important assumption of our democratic state, one necessary question for analysis is whether or not such pluralities do indeed exist in the various forums for political participation.” (Danielian, 1992, p.64)

Therefore, advocacy NGOs represents the voice of constituency at different levels of government. Without this participation the policies can be adopted that are not meet and even

contradict the interests of constituency. Danielian (1998) argues that in democracies people can have real representative, accountable and responsive to their needs government, if they actively participate in politics. Otherwise, the system ceases to be peoples rule. One of the primary forms of political participation is via interests or lobby groups.

### **Lobby and advocacy NGOs**

NGOs are a new political reality in the era of globalization. The term is NGO understood as private, non-for-profit, self-governing organizations. The main role of NGOs is articulate, mobilize and represent people's interests or concerns at all levels of government. They try to promote people's interests, reduce the structural causes of poverty, to the protection of human rights, to protect environment and achieve sustainable development at different spheres of public life. (Jordan, 1998)

Some international organizations and some NGOs themselves, view the NGO sector as a private global system delivering such activities as education, health-care, and clean water. Nevertheless, this is not the sole role of NGOs. NGOs are the entities that stand close to local communities and consequently are well informed about the needs of constituency. As a result, the provision of social services by NGOs is cheaper and more efficient than by the state. Similarly, the opening of communication, exchange of opinions between the different levels of government and NGOs will lead to the improvement of not only in the aid-supported projects, but also in all kinds of public policies.

According to Jordan (1998), NGOs that have enough expertise and credibility should be informed about the needs of poorer or disadvantageous sectors of society. They should mobilize, articulate and represent interests of people at grass-roots levels at different levels of decision-making. In other words, NGOs should advocate the rights and interests of their constituency in all levels of government. Information is the key tool for NGOs in advocacy work. Through it, NGOs try to democratize unequal power relations.

A common definition of NGO advocacy is emphasizing the actions related to influence on public policies. Through advocacy NGOs try also to empower weaker sectors of society. This function is not limited to helping people to access information or providing them with the tools to get in touch with decision-makers and influence public policies. Another important aspect of advocacy is to boost the self-respect of weaker communities, to improve their self-confidence and promote mutual trust. NGO advocacy also entails fight against cynicism and disrespect towards powerless parts of society in political and social spheres of public life (Jordan, 1998).

Commonly the words “lobby” and “advocacy” are used interchangeably. The original meaning of “lobbying” is to influence public policies by persuading one or more legislators by approaching them in the “lobby” of the parliament. Today lobbying is more broader activity, which includes but not limited with the creation of policy options through conducting research and analysis, developing contacts with elected and appointed public officials, building awareness among larger community, mobilization of public opinion as a tool of public pressure. Lobby groups can organize group activities, and carry out public relations’ work with mass media. These group members might donate money to the group, write letters to decision makers participate in meetings, briefings and demonstrations or protests, work on election campaigns, and vote as a block (Danielian, 1998).

According to Danielian (1998), public policies in democracies can be changed under the strong public pressure, which can organize and mobilize NGOs that are involved in lobbying. Lobby groups are successful, if they possess resources, such as money, staff, expertise, and have realistic goals that are reachable gradually.

Lobbying is the one of the most important tools for citizens to influence public policies at all levels of government. Public decision-makers are not the specialists in all shears and problems, about which they have to make decisions. Moreover, in many cases they can be

uniform about the basic needs and problems of their constituency. The role of lobby groups is to provide this valuable information to public decision makers, public and mass media by providing accurate information, position papers, testimony and ready answers to the pertinent questions (<http://www.aainc.org>).

Danielian (1994) refers to Lemert (1981), who provides the definition of the political power, which includes the ability to block or initiate public discussion, to influence decision-makers perceptions of public opinion, to define issues and opinions under discussion, to influence participation by others, and to persuade decision-making to adopt the desired policy. If to follow to the logic of scholar, NGOs or lobby groups have political power, if they can initiate the public discussion of an issue or they get an issue into the parliament agenda, and if they have ability or enough resources to pressure decision-makers to adopt desire decision.

### **Mass media and lobbying**

Mass Media is an important tool for NGOs to lobby successfully. One of the important aspects for pluralism is the availability of diverse information that allows constituency not only be informed about the important public decisions that will impact their lives , but also to understand possible consequences of public decisions and develop ability to take part in the formation of public policies. Only in that case, the public decisions that address the basic needs of constituency might be adopted.(Danielian, 1994)

Danielian (1994) studied how advocacy NGOs are represented in the news media, whether the access is limited, and if that effects political participation.

According to Danielian (1994), the mass media plays an important role in activation of advocacy NGOs. The basic argument is that the extent of contagion of the conflict determines its outcome. The best strategy for advocacy NGOs, when the direct access to decision- makers is available, is to keep the decision-making private and try to control the

scope of the conflict. At the same time, other advocacy NGOs that have not direct access, should try to enlarge the scope of the conflict by involving more participants, in order to influence the decision-making. That can be done through mass media. More influential and well organized the advocacy NGO, less probable that it will use mass media in order to influence the public opinion and decision-making.

Some scholars differentiate between economic/private interests and noneconomic/public interests. Danielian (1994) refers to some conducted studies that put the emphases on the importance of mass media as a tool to influence the decision-making. According to survey conducted in 1986 in US 72% of economic advocacy NGOs and only 46%, citizen action groups employed public relations experts or staff. This was growing. Most of advocacy NGOs used lobbying though mass media more then in the past. This was also growing. However, 50% of citizens' groups and only 19% of the groups representing corporate interests considered journalists as important channel for information and consultation. The conclusion is the following "Business interests may directly control news media coverage of issues through paid media access or through the direct financial support of "independent" think tanks that produce experts used as "objective" sources by the news media. And citizen action groups may be more dependent upon contacts with news workers who, through various gatekeeping and selection processes, ultimately control the news product." (Danielian, 1994)

### **NGOs in Armenia**

NGOs are a relatively new phenomenon in Armenia. Study of establishment of any democratic institution is impossible without taking into account the starting position and historical legacy of the country. Political stability is considered one of the primary achievements for Armenia, which also important precondition for democratic consolidation. Still it is not enough to have functioning democratic society. Without institutionalization and

full functioning of democratic institutions that guarantee citizens with opportunities to participate in policy formation, it is impossible to have representative, sustainable democracy. According to Danielian (2003), democracy is impossible without aggregation and magnification of voices from grass roots by advocacy NGOs, and structures that guarantee advocacy NGOs active participation in decision-making at all levels of government. Other essential factors for democracy are the existence of free press, structures and processes that guarantee creation and expansion of autonomous public opinion and representative parliament. These are the key factors that lead to the creation of active and effective NGO sector within the society.

Danielian (2003) argues that although there are hundreds of registered NGOs in Armenia, only few of them are functioning organizations. Very few organizations are involved in lobbying and try to influence public policies. Majority of NGOs are charitable and benevolent and do not consider themselves responsible to advocate for policy changes in favor of poor and powerless parts of society. They are also not involved in lobbying for bigger budget allotments for social welfare programs. Very few NGOs are involved in lobbying in Armenia. However, they do not have professional staff for these kinds of activities. They also do not have staff responsible for the contacts with mass media. Majority of NGOs do not consider mass media an important tool through which they can promote the interests of their constituency. Public is uninformed about the NGO sector in Armenia.

Armenia lacks proper legal framework that will regulate and promote the NGO advocacy and lobbying in Armenia. According to Danielian, Armenian constitution, adopted in a referendum on July 5, 1995, constitutes a barrier for institutionalization of NGO advocacy and lobbying in Armenia. According to former constitution, Parliament is a legislative body.

“The term “representation” is nowhere used in the constitution, and, instead, there is an article that states that deputies to parliament are to be “guided by their conscience” and that

they are “not bound by any imperative mandate.” (Danielian, 2003, 11p.)

Unfortunately, in the new amended constitution, adopted on November 27, 2005, the status of NA remains the same. According to Danielian (2003), such limited definition of the role of NA has negative affect on the citizens’ participation in the decision-making processes. If there is no representative governance, by-products structures, such as lobbying through organized citizen advocacy NGOs also cannot be with in the society.

According to UNDP (1998), in Armenia NGOs are not financially viable. They either do not function at all or depend on donor support, for which they have to compete. This fact reduces NGO sector capacity of social oversight, since they have to adopt their needs and objectives to the interests of the donors. Some organizations have been founded by public officials and can be considered as NGO only by their technical definitions. Donors mostly finance NGOs with global profiles, such as commitments to human rights, civic development and environmental protection. Domestic sources finance NGOs that are interested in preserving national culture and heritage.

According to Darbinyan (1999), the main factor that hampers the effective functioning of the NGO sector is poor cooperation between NGOs and public officials. Comparative Study of NGO/Government Partnerships (2004) puts the emphasis on the importance of Government consultations with NGOs, even if they do not always result in direct financing of NGOs. Both NGO sector and government complement each other in the functioning of society, and government contracts NGOs to provide services they traditionally provide. The adoption of mechanisms to finance NGOs is essential to ensure a constructive cooperation between the two sectors. This study highlights the formal and informal levels of possible cooperation. Formal level includes the participation and cooperation with Local branches of government. This process takes place mainly at the local level where NGOs and local communities are involved in local decision-making. It also can involve the participation

in Parliamentary hearings. The study also puts the stress on the possibility of state financed activities of NGOs as a result of cooperation.

Armenia NGO Sector Assessment: A Comparative Study 2004 argues that “systematic and comprehensive donor support programs can help Armenian NGOs to become better organized, more effective in delivering services, more effective in advocating their constituencies interests, and more likely to demonstrate financial viability, at least in the medium term.”

The survey, reveals that compared to 2001, the Armenian NGO sector, which received foreign funding, has made substantial progress. NGOs are better organized, better financed, and more skilled in working with government, media. They have a stronger organizational structure, and better financial accounting. Many NGOs show a greater understanding of the role of advocacy and ways of conducting advocacy initiatives. Some NGOs succeeded in achieving legislative reforms. Government at the national level and the National Assembly has started to include NGO representatives in committees and task forces.

The basic concern is that in Armenia NGOs have not developed broad associations in the local communities. There is lack of understanding among the population and local community leaders of the importance and main missions of NGOs. They have seen as “donor industry.” Most of the NGOs fail to have successful leadership transition and still heavily depends on the strong leadership, with no independent Board of Directory. Contacts with government or parliament are still mostly determined by personal connections of NGO leaders. Finally, the one of the most important weaknesses of NGOs is tremendous dependent on donor support. They lack consensus or action plan for achieving long-term sustainability.

According to Armenia NGO sustainability index (2003), there are 3565 registered NGOs in Armenia. There is remarkable increase in NGO advocacy initiatives. A contributing factor is the controversial Presidential and Parliamentary elections held in February and May 2003.



NGO community reveals some activity. They were organizing concerts to get out the youth vote, debate with parliamentary candidates on the issue of disability. Some NGOs monitored party platforms, others monitored media coverage while another monitored media coverage and political party financing. Most of the election related activities donor-driven. There were quite a few local initiatives to conduct domestic observation of the elections, to monitor political party financing, and the transportation of elderly and disable to polling stations.

Grigorian (2002) argues that the main reason for the recent popularity of establishing an NGO in Armenia is that international donors very generously have funded numerous projects and awarded grants to NGO's to achieve their mission statement. However, quantity does not necessarily mean quality. Only 10 percent of registered NGOs can be considered as actively and effectively functioning organizations.

However due to ongoing support from these donors, specially the USAID, the NGO's never felt a need to redirect their strategic planning for self sustainability, as they were sure that the funding of international organizations will continue forever. Although some prospering NGOs still get the funding from the international donors, but obviously the amount of the financial support is decreasing. As a result, the NGO sector cannot prosper and continue to operate effectively only based on grants received from the international organizations. Self-sustainability for the most of the NGOs is the basic concern now Grigorian (2002).

Self-sustainability is relatively new concept for most of the NGO's, as they always believed that the foreign aid is everlasting and there is nothing to be concern about. The big challenge that the NGO sector faces today is to find the other alternatives that will guarantee the self-sustainability of the sector (Grigorian 2002).

Legal environment in Armenia cannot be considered as encouraging for NGO sector development. According to Armenia NGO Sustainability Index (2003), despite the fact that

law provide NGOs with opportunity to register freely, they often face bureaucratic difficult. As a result, registration process can take several months. Another problem for NGOs that are located in the regions is that all NGOs should be registered in Yerevan. This is additional burden for NGOs that are operating out of Yerevan. There are some inconsistencies in RA law concerning NGO income taxation. According to current legislation, all grants are exempted from taxation. At the same time, individuals who donate to NGOs receive no exemptions.

The law is unclear about whether or not NGOs that earn income are required to pay tax on that income (Armenian NGO Sustainability Index, 2000). National legislation does not provide NGOs with the right to participate in drafting legislations. In general, NGOs are allowed to participate in some discussions on draft laws; however, their views and opinions are seldom taken into consideration. While in the past the Law on NGOs was publicly discussed with NGOs, it is not the case with the current draft Law on Lobbying. Majority of NGOs consider that if the new law on lobbying will pass, this will mean that NGO sector will artificially be deprived from the right to participate in legislative processes in Armenia.

According to draft law on lobbying, only those organizations and/or individuals with special licenses will have right to lobby. Taking into account the financial problems that face majority of NGOs and bureaucratic complexities that can face NGOs during the process of getting those licenses, it becomes obvious, that for most of the NGOs the adoption of draft Law on Lobbying means end of lobby activities (Cooperation for Open Society, 2005).

### **Hypothesis and Research Questions**

1. NGOs' successful lobbying relates to resources available.
2. Is power to influence decision-making related to financial viability of NGOs?
3. Do NGOs consider themselves capable and responsible to influence decision-making at various levels of government?

4. How NGOs in Armenia mostly try to influence the decision-making at various levels of government?
5. How NGOs try to influence public opinion in Armenia?
6. Do NGOs tend to lobby through mass media more then in the past?
7. Which is the most important strategy for NGOs to get mass media access?

## **Methodology**

According to Armenia 2003 NGO Sustainability Index provided by the OSI, more than 2000 NGOs now are registered in Armenia. Only part of them are well organized, functioning organizations. There are many charity organizations among them. Due to special nature of the study, purposive sampling has been chosen. Probabilistic sampling was not applicable, because some NGOs exist only on paper and it was useless to include them in the sampling frame.

For the purpose of this study, fifteen in-depth interviews with NGOs that are involved in advocacy have been conducted in Yerevan. For purposive sampling as a sampling frame, the database of NGO Strengthening Program has been chosen.

## **Findings**

This section presents the findings on the NGO advocacy and lobbying in Armenia. Fifteen in-depth interviews have been conducted in Yerevan with the members of NGOs, which are involved in advocacy.

### **NGO- government cooperation**

#### **NGO sector and Parliament**

The answers to the question “Is your organization capable to influence the legislative processes in Armenia? For example to participate in drafting a new legislation?” can be combined into three categories. Only small part of the NGOs gave negative answers. Two of

them explained that they have no resources available, mostly financial, to be able to influence legislative processes in Armenia. Another two explained that they do not participate, because they did not believe, that their participation could change anything. Two NGOs did not consider that they should participate in legislative processes in Armenia, as they had not such statement in their missions.

The participation in legislative processes is not involved in the mission of our organization. In all cases, I do not think that such participations might be fruitful in Armenia.

The majority of NGOs, nine representatives of NGO sector, said that they had an influence on the legislative processes in Armenia. However, four of them could not give an example of successful participation.

To the question how they can influence the legislative process in Armenia, this group of NGOs named usage of mass media, participation in round tables, briefings, having large support of beneficiaries, having large human and financial resources available.

Five NGOs from this group named some cases of successful impact on the formation of some legal norms, through lobbying in different levels of government, participation in NA Committee discussions as well as through individual contacts with NA Committee members, deputies and other key public figures at different levels of government.

It is very important to participate in legislative processes in Armenia especially during elections. Our organization, through participation in NA committee dealing with the problems of refugees, contributed to the adoption of law that gives refugees the right to privatize their temporary houses.

Due to lobbying of our organization in different levels of government, the law on civil services has been adopted.

Only three NGOs, whose members have been interviewed, participate in Parliamentary hearings, and consider them fruitful.

We participate in Parliamentary hearings and our recommendations are always heard.

A majority of NGOs consider Parliamentary hearings not productive. The main reason that most of them mentioned was the lack of trust to current MPs and inability of deputies to work constructively.

We do not participate in Parliamentary hearings, because there are not productive. NA itself is unable to work constructively. It lacks the ethic of listening. I am very frustrated.

It is fruitless to cooperate with current NA; they themselves do not know how to work. Majority of deputies have surnames. I don't know how to work with these kind of people.

Four respondents pointed out the unwillingness of governing elites to cooperate with NGO sector as a factor that made the parliamentary hearings unproductive. According to them the NGO sector is too weak and powerless, almost has no financial resources, so why governing elites should cooperate with them.

The other four respondents considered participation in parliamentary hearings just a tool for NGOs to show off and a tool for the government to demonstrate to the international community that there are some elements of civil society in Armenia. According to them, such participations are titular and not designed to have any real effect.

Participation in NA hearings is not very productive, because of lack of deputies' will to cooperate with NGO sector.

To participate in NA hearings means nothing. All you can do is to listen and talk without any practical consequences. There is not real understanding of importance among deputies to involve NGOs in legislative processes.

### **NGO sector and local governments**

A majority of NGOs does not participate in decision-making at local level at all. Two respondents considered that it was not their business to participate in decision making at local levels.

Our NGO does not involved in development of civil society, so we do not participate in decision-making at any level of government. There is no tool to put pressure on decision-makers in Armenia.

Five NGO representatives, although valued highly the importance of NGO participation in decision-making at local levels, did not consider such participation possible and fruitful. The main obstacle for productive participation they saw was the unwillingness of public officials to cooperate with NGOs. Two of them pointed out that there was not any official mechanisms that might guarantee the productive participation of NGOs in local level decision-making.

We do not even try to participate in decision-making at local level. It is useless. These are very close institutions. The limited cooperation is possible only during elections, when public officials are willing to cooperate with NGOs.

The NGO sector and local governments hate each other. NGOs always criticize local governments. The cooperation among them is impossible, because local authorities are not in a position to cooperate with NGO sector.

We do not cooperate with local level government, because we have not personal close associations with public officials.

Two NGO members said that they regularly cooperate with local level decision-makers. Both of them are involved in joint programs with local governments. Two other two respondents said that they cooperate with local authorities from case to case. According to one NGO representative there was some NGO participation in decision-making at local levels, but currently there is tendency of reduction of NGO and local government cooperation.

To the request to assess the capacity of NGOs to influence decision making at local levels, the majority of respondents, who cooperated with local level officials, answered that they had insignificant influence on decision-making. Only one respondent expressed satisfaction with the level of their impact on decision-making at local levels. Most of the

respondents considered NGO participation in decision-making at local levels unsatisfactory. Two NGOs considered such participation even dangerous, because, according to them, local officials often used those kinds of cooperation during elections. Another two NGO representatives blamed NGOs. They explained that many NGOs did not try to promote the interests of their beneficiaries but instead to solve the financial problems of their own organizations.

The most frequent response to the question, how NGOs participate in decision making at local levels was by using personal contacts with key public officials. Five NGOs gave this answer. Four NGO representatives said that the most important tool of participation in decision-making at local level was to be involved in joint public programs with local government. The less popular answer was by using tools of public pressure. One respondent named demonstrations. Two respondents named mass media discussions, another two mentioned mobilization of public support. One respondent considered written complaints as the major tool to get involved in local decision-making. One NGO representative named cooperation with international organizations.

To the question “what is the most successful way to persuade decision makers to adopt desired decision?” NGO representatives gave the following answers. The opinions almost divided equally. One third of interviewed NGOs saw no means to make the decision-makers to amend or adopt any public decisions.

We are not involved in any relations with Local level governments. We do not tend to do paid favors for any of them. If there is no fear election, there cannot be any tool of pressure on governing elites.
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Another one third of respondents named lobbying as a major tool to influence the decision-making in Armenia.

The most productive way of persuasion of public officials to adopt an appropriate decision is lobbying.

Another four NGO representatives named individual contacts with key public officials as productive device of persuasion in public life.

The participation in decision making at local level is not satisfactory and limits with personal contacts.

Two NGO members believed that the only way to influence decision-making at the public level was to persuade decision-makers that they could gain from those decisions as well. Only one respondent believed that through written complains NGOs can transform public decisions. Another one named demonstrations as a main tool of pressure on public officials.

To the question, “what is the most important tool for NGOs to influence public policies in Armenia?” four interviewed NGOs named the formation of appropriate public opinion as a tool to influence the public policies. Another four respondents named personal contacts with high-level public officials. Two NGO representatives named mass media as a basic tool of influence on public policies. Another two respondents named finances. One NGO representative named the strengthening of the NGO sector through cooperation with different international organizations and institutions as a basic tool to be influential in developing public policies. One NGO representative named demonstrations. Another respondent pinpointed that the problem could be solved only if the criminal elements would be removed from the government. One respondent did not believe that there was a way to influence public policies in Armenia.

To the question about whether they can bring an example of public policy that has been reviewed or adopted as a consequence of NGO contribution, most of NGO representatives could not bring any example. Only five respondents brought an example of legislative acts



that had been adopted or reviewed as a result of their participation more than four years ago. These NGOs are involved in coalitions, have long-lasting contacts with politicians, which occupy key governmental and legislative positions, have access to mass media, and have large membership, branches in the different regions. All of them have some financial resources. For three of them grants is the main source of financing. One of them is financed via donations of organization's members and another one by a public official.

### **NGO resources**

For majority of NGOs, the most important factor that can enhance the role of NGOs in society and in public decision-making is financial resources. Eight NGO members said that the lack of financial resources was the major obstacle that hampers the productive functioning of the NGO sector in Armenia. Four NGO representatives put the stress on the importance to have human resources available. Three respondents mentioned the lack of government support as a major barrier for NGOs to work constructively.

### **NGO coalitions**

Ten NGOs cooperated with other NGOs. The majority of the NGOs considered cooperation with other NGOs very important for enhancing the NGO sector's role in public life of the country. Three NGO representatives said they considered NGO coalitions as the major tool for consolidation of mass support. For them it was a method to get human resources, which was very important tool of pressure on public officials.

It is very important for NGO to cooperate with other non-governmental institutions. To be a member of NGO coalition, for our organization means to have more people ready to work. As you know this means to have large amount of human resources, which is the one of the significant tools of pressure in public life. As many people supports you, as stronger your ability to influence public decision-making.

Two NGOs considered very important to cooperate with international organizations in order to get some financial support. They were involved in NGO coalitions only in order to meet the requirements of international donor organizations. According to them NGO coalitions had more chances to be financed by international organizations, so they tried to cooperate with other NGOs in order to get financial support.

Two NGO representatives said that NGO coalitions were very important tool for information and experience sharing. One respondent said that NGO coalitions contributed to transparency within NGO sector. Another one said that without cooperation NGOs could not solve global problems. Two NGOs although had been involved in NGO coalitions for many years considered them not productive. They said that NGOs cooperation was just a vision. In reality, they did nothing, but talking and not listening to each other.

Five NGOs were not involved in any NGO coalitions and considered NGO cooperation impossible. According to three of them, there was some kind of competition among NGOs for getting funds for their programs. Programs are similar and have the similar targets, while the funds are limited and the funding will get only limited amount of NGOs. As a result, the competition for grants makes the NGO cooperation nominal and not constrictive. Two of these organizations' members considered that they did not need to participate in any NGO coalitions because their missions were very specific.

### **NGO cooperation with politicians**

The majority of NGOs that have been interviewed have some contacts with politicians at different levels of government. Five of them cooperated with public officials at all levels of government, including national and local levels. Four of them cooperated only with Members of Parliament. Four of those NGOs, which have contacts with politicians considered their cooperation not productive.

We cooperate with different politicians, deputies, local level public officials. However, the productivity is very low, because our politicians used to say one thing, but to do another thing.

Our organization is always ready for cooperation with politicians. For example, we have cooperated for many years with Artashes Gegamyan, and some other politicians. However, these are useless and not productive cooperation, because for most politicians are more important the interests of their own party than the interests of the country.

Two other NGOs considered such cooperation very productive at all levels of government. One NGO member said that cooperation with politicians was important for successful lobbying. Another NGO member said that through cooperation with politicians NGO could get some financial support. Six NGOs did not cooperate with politicians.

### **Membership**

The majority of the NGOs have either less than fifty members, or more than two hundred people membership. Five NGOs have branches in different regions. Five NGOs have more than two hundred members, four of those have branches in different regions. Two of them have about three hundred members. Two NGOs have about hundred members. Four NGOs have about thirty members. Another two have about fifteen members. One NGO has sixty members. Another one has only three members.

### **Financial resources**

The interviews revealed that the majority of NGOs, that is seven NGOs, do not currently have available financial resources. Four NGO members said that their financial resources were about fifteen thousand dollars. Financial resources of one of the NGOs were about thirteen thousand dollars. Three NGO members assessed their organization financial capacity as unsatisfactory.

For the majority of interviewed NGOs the main source of financing was grants. Five NGO members said that grants were the main financial source for their organizations. For

four NGOs, the basic source of funding was donations. Two of them got financial support from businessmen, one from government official. Three NGO members said that they had not any source of financing. Two NGOs' basic source of finance was membership charges and donations of founders. One NGO got money from the sale of brochures. Two NGOs mentioned that the major problem of NGO sector in Armenia was the lack of government financing.

### **Experience**

Majority of interviewed NGOs have been established in late 1990's. Six NGOs have from six to eight years of experience. Four NGOs have more than thirteen years of experience. One NGO has been established in 1985. Five NGOs have been established in 2002-2003, and have not more than three years of working experience.

### **NGO participation in the formation of public opinion**

An absolute majority of interviewed NGO members considered that their organizations were capable of initiating public discussions. Twelve respondents gave an affirmative answer to a question about whether their organization is able to initiate public discussions of an issue that they consider important for their constituency. Three NGO members thought that they were unable to initiate public discussions. All of them mentioned lack of resources as a key reason.

We are not capable to initiate public discussions mostly because of some objective reasons. Our organization is too small and works only based on the pure enthusiasm of few members. We do not look for grants, but without them, we have problems with getting funds for our activities.

Our organization has not enough capital in order to be able to initiate public discussions. For example how we can initiate discussion, or round table, if we lack even the room where we can organize meeting and invite different representatives of community and government.

It is impossible to initiate discussions of any issue, if the organization does not have elementary conditions, such as room for meetings. Moreover, without financial resources you cannot organize any meeting and guarantee the participation of public. For example, how does physically handicapped person, who lives in the region, can participate in our discussions, if the problem of transportation is not solved?

To the question, how NGOs can influence public opinion, five NGO members said that for NGO sector mass media was the basic tool of influence on public opinion in Armenia. Three NGO leaders answered that for them the primary tool of influence on public opinion was the usage of close, immediate, personal contacts with constituency. Two respondents pointed to the importance of demonstrations as a basic tool to influence public opinion. Two other NGOs gave the primacy to the seminars and other educational programs. One NGO member said that the transparency of NGO sector was the major devise that could guarantee NGO successful influence on public opinion. Another respondent said that in order to influence public opinion NGOs should cooperate with government.

Without government support, NGOs cannot have any impact on the formation of public opinion within the country. All resources are in the hands of governors. Most NGOs have no resources. What you can do with limited human and especially financial resources? Nothing!

One NGO member said that NGO networking is the basic tool that NGOs can employ in order to influence public opinion in Armenia.

To the question, what the key factors are that can enhance the capacity of NGOs to make the first move in public discussions, a majority of respondents named financial resources. Eight NGO members said that the lack of financial resources was the basic obstacle that faced NGOs while trying to make the first move in public discussions. Three respondents considered that support of government elites would enhance the productivity of NGOs to make first move in public discussions. Two NGO representatives said that it was very important to have members that were experts in this field. One NGO said that the most important factor, that might enhance the ability of NGOs to make the first move in the public

discussions, was the members' devotion to their job. Another NGO member gave the primacy to international organizations' support.

### **NGO-mass media cooperation**

NGO leaders gave big importance to mass media coverage. Only four from fifteen interviewed respondents said that they did not consider important mass media coverage for their organizations' activities. To the question how NGOs commonly get access to mass media, six NGO leaders answer was by paying for TV broadcasting. Four NGO members thought that the most common way to get access to mass media was to conduct interesting meetings, briefings, discussions or demonstrations and give announcement about that. Two NGO representatives answered that being recognized, functioning organization was the key factor for getting access to mass media. Other two NGO members pointed out personal contacts with mass media representatives and only one being pro governmental as a key elements to get access to mass media.

To the question why NGOs try to appear in the news, a majority of NGO representatives answered to gain recognition. Two NGO members used mass media coverage as a tool to influence public opinion. For another two respondents mass media coverage was a tool to pressure on public decision makers, and to gain weight in political bargaining. Two NGO representatives considered that mass media coverage played no role in Armenia and that to appear in the news for NGOs was useless. Seven NGO representatives used mass media in order to inform about their programs, to advertise their organization, to gain recognition and disseminate information about their organization. Only two NGO members through mass media coverage tried to inform their constituency about important events, to raise public awareness about such key questions as how to report about the violations during elections, and how to appeal to courts.

Only four NGOs used mass media as a tool for lobbying.

According to majority of NGO members, the coverage of NGOs activities by mass media has increased during last years. Nine NGO members considered that mass media coverage of NGO activities increased drastically. Seven of them considered that the reason was the NGO sector strengthening and well functioning. According to them, NGOs have started to value the role of mass media and use them for lobbying.

Many NGOs start to think more seriously about the role of mass media. Moreover, they start to use them more actively for promoting their goals and interests of their constituency. These are only those organizations that are already well established and have enough resources.

Two NGO representatives agreed that the mass media coverage of NGO activities increased, but the main reason, according to them, was the change of government elites' attitude.

Governing elites begin to understand how important for their democratic image to cooperate with NGOs. They encourage NGO activities' coverage by TV to show European communities that the elements of civil society are in place.

For majority of NGOs, that has been interviewed, the problem was not as much the lack of access to mass media, but the quality of commentaries that are released by mass media. The lack of journalistic professionalism, the continuous race for sensational stories as well as lack of free press makes some NGOs even unwilling to cooperate with mass media.

The real problem in Armenia is not the quantity but the quality of mass media reports about NGO sector. Sometime it is better not to appear in the news. If you do not have personal contacts with reporter and you cannot guide him in his writings about your organization, you risk getting a stab in the back.

In most cases, reporters are looking for sensations or money. You will never see analytical, serious articles about the NGOs and their roles. Instead there are many boring reports about meaningless briefings, from which public can understand almost nothing about the real missions of NGOs.

## Lobbying in Armenia

### Understanding of lobbying

The leaders of NGOs were asked to define what is lobbying, what is the role of lobbying in Armenia, and what is the role of lobbying in developed democratic countries.

Five NGO representatives defined lobbying as promotion of interests of specific group of people at various levels of government.

Lobbying is the promotion of interests of some specific group of people in the all levels of government. It can be at the local level government, or at the parliament of the country.

Three respondents defined lobbying as a tool of pressure on public officials.

Lobbying is a tool to put pressure on public officials for making them to adopt various laws and regulations. On one hand, it is good, if it is done by NGOs; on the other hand, it is very dangerous, if it is done by international organizations.

Two respondents defined lobbying as a tool of cooperation with governing elites. According to them through non-official meetings and contacts, NGOs try to introduce and endorse their policy proposals.

Sometimes, we invite government members, introduce our policy proposals and programs, and start to work together.

This is some kind of cooperation with public officials, during which you try to introduce new proposals and explain how it is important to promote them.

One respondent defined lobbying as a process of influencing the legislative body of the country in order to adopt or review laws in favor of nation.

Through lobbying, you try to reach your goals and try to force, pursue deputies to adopt laws that will lead to the improvement of social conditions within country and will improve socio-economic discrepancies.



Four NGO members could not clearly specify what lobbying was. Two of them said that for them it was hard to explain what lobbying was. Two others gave vague explanations, which did not define lobbying.

Lobbying existed in the past. It exists now. Moreover, it will exist always. It is very difficult to explain what it is. It is not the new phenomenon.

In immoral society, everything is immoral, including lobbying.

### **The role of lobbying in developed democracies**

To the question what is the role of lobbying in developed democracies a majority of respondents did not give any specific explanation.

Six interviewed NGO members did not know what the role of lobbying in developed democracies is.

How I can know, what the role of lobbying in developed democracies is, if I have never been in any of the developed democratic countries. If I were, probably I would know.

For me it is very difficult to answer to that question, because the theory can be very different from practice. I cannot say what the role of lobbying in developed democracies is.

Three respondents explained that the role of lobbying in developed democracies is a huge one and that it serves to the promotion of interests of different group of people and done by professional lobbyists, who have adequate skills and tools, do this. Two respondents said that lobbying in developed democracies is the protection of rights of population.

In democratic countries through lobbying people try to protect not only the rights of businesspersons, but also ordinary population rights.

Lobbying in developed democracies involved everything, because the rights of people can be violated everywhere and always. If there is law in place, rights of people can be protected. One of the tools to protect human rights is lobbying.

Another two respondents explained that the lobbying in developed democracies serve the promotion of national interests and has national importance.

Lobbying is an accepted game in developed democratic countries. All participants of this game are well informed and know the rules of the game. As a result, there the lobbying eventually serves for the interests of whole nation.

One of the NGO members said that the role of lobbying in developed democracies is to address environmental and social problems of the population. Another NGO member said that lobbying is an activity conducted by different groups of people in the lobby of parliament, in order to have some key influence on the decisions made by NA members.

### **The role of lobbying in Armenia**

To the question to explain what the role of lobbying in Armenia is, a majority of NGO members said that lobbying played no role or almost insignificant role in Armenia. Four respondents said that lobbying played no role in Armenia, and two respondents said that the role of lobbying in Armenia was very insignificant.

Lobbying plays absolutely no role in Armenia. All these mass around lobbying is nothing more than a worthless attempt to play democracy.

In Armenia, lobbying plays insignificant role. It is aimed to promote the interests of business people and to some degree to solve social problems. But still, the impact that this activity has is negligible.

The next most frequent answer to the question, what is the role of lobbying in Armenia, is the promotion of interests of the specific group of people. Two NGO members specified that lobbying in Armenia served as a tool in the hands of businesspeople to promote their interests at the different levels of government. Two other respondents said that only the oligarchs and criminal clans could promote their interests through lobbying in Armenia.

In Armenia, oligarchs through lobbying in Parliament and in other levels of government promote their interests very successfully. Therefore, the role of lobbying in Armenia is the promotion of interests of oligarchs.

The only way to be involved in lobbying is to have resources. Who has resources in Armenia? Of course, businesspeople have. Look, every law that has been adopted in Parliament is aimed to protect the interests of businesspeople. The main public policies are designed to

promote and develop business in Armenia. The rights and interests of other groups of population are completely ignored in Armenia.

One respondent said that each group of people that had resources available, such as money, close relations with public officials, access to higher levels of government, Parliament, could use lobbying to promote its group interest. Four NGO members answered that they did not know what the role of lobbying in Armenia.

### **Involvement in lobbying**

In-depth interviews revealed that majority of NGOs, that have been interviewed, are not engaged in lobbying. Only five NGO members, from fifteen, said that their organizations had been engaged in lobbying.

To the question, who should be engaged in lobbying, eight NGO members from fifteen interviewed respondents, said that NGOs should be engaged in lobbying. One of them specified that only those NGOs should be evolved in lobbying that are not financed from abroad. Three respondents thought that everyone that had ability, knowledge and resources required could use lobbying. One respondent said that professional lobbyists should do the lobbying and they should be paid for their job. Another one said that the lobbying should be used by state agencies to promote nation wide interests. Two respondents answered that they did not know who should do lobbying.

To the question whether lobbying is a productive tool of influence on public policies, seven respondents gave positive answer. Five NGO members said that lobbying was a somewhat helpful tool to influence public policies. Two NGO members answered was “don’t know”. Only one respondent said that lobbying was not a productive tool to influence public policies.

To the question, which is the most important factor that can guarantee successful lobbying,

four respondents said financial resources. Another four pointed out the importance of professionalism of those who do lobbying. One NGO member said that in order to succeed the lobbyist should have enough information about decision-makers and policy alternatives. Two NGO members pointed out the importance of personal close contacts with key decision-makers. Another one mentioned about the importance of being persistent. One respondent said that the major attribute of successful lobbying is demonstration. Two NGO members have difficulties in identifying the major important aspects of successful lobbying.

There was not any question about the draft of the law on lobbying in RA in the questionnaire that had been provided to the NGO representatives during the in-depth interviews. However, some NGO members talked about that law during the interviews. Majority of them considered that we did not need any law on lobbying. They thought that these would lead to the limitation of the rights of NGOs to participate in lobbying. Some of them said that this was another method to take money from NGO sector. Another part said that this was just a waste of time because there were many laws in Armenia, but no one was going to implement them.

### **Understanding of advocacy**

During this study, fifteen in-depth interviews have been conducted with NGOs that, according to their mission-statement, are involved in advocacy. To the request to identify what is advocacy majority of respondents gave very broad and vague answers.

Six of them said that advocacy is something that incorporates all features of lobbying in it. According to them, advocacy is lobbying in its broader understanding. Although the majority of interviewed NGOs are involved in advocacy, they claim that they are not involved in lobbying. Four NGO members defined advocacy as protection of the rights of their constituency and beneficiaries.

Advocacy means protection of basic human rights, such as freedom of speech, social and political rights of people. The main objective of advocacy is to guarantee at list minimal living standards for people.

One NGO member said that NGO advocacy is the protection of rights of those organizations which fund the NGO. According to this point of view, NGOs in Armenia are obliged to protect the rights of those who give them money necessary for survival.

NGOs are not free in Armenia. They are financed by different sources; as a result, they obliged to protect the rights of those, who give money. In Armenia NGOs through advocacy should protect the interest of our country, but they are serve to the interests of foreign governments.

Another four respondents defined advocacy as a function of NGOs, through which they solved different issues in favor of their constituency.

NGOs, which are involved in advocacy, have important social mission to improve reality, contribute to the advancement of living conditions of their constituency and solve other important problems.

Advocacy is one of the important missions of NGOs. It means operation of NGOs in every field, where the rights and interests of their constituency can be violated.

One NGO member defined advocacy as offering legal consultations free of charge, providing technical support, helping people, if they were in very bad social conditions. Two NGO members could not define advocacy and said that it was very broad term; it would be very difficult to explain it.

### **Advocacy in Armenia and in developed democracies**

According to a majority of NGO members the main difference between advocacy in Armenia and in developed democracies is not the goals but the ways to reach them the actors that are involved in it, as well as they are different in their productivity levels. Two NGO members could not give any definite answers to the request to define the role of advocacy in Armenia and in developed democracies. Another four NGO members explained that in

developed democratic countries through advocacy big institutions and corporations protected the interests of the nation-state. While in Armenia, criminal organizations were involved in advocacy and they promoted their own interests though advocacy.

Advocacy in Armenia is an important tool in the hands of some group of people to promote and protect their interests. It does not serve in favor of common population and does not address the basic needs of ordinary people. In developed democracies, unlike it is in Armenia, advocacy serves to the needs of all parts of society.

In developed democracies big corporations and state institutions, such as army, NGOs, state agencies, are involved in advocacy and they try to promote the interests of whole nation. It is not the case in Armenia. Some criminal groups, who try to promote and protect their own interests, do advocacy.

In Armenia, unlike other developed democratic countries, advocacy serves to the interests of different groups of people. It is not right. Advocacy should serve to the interests of whole nations.

Four NGO members considered that in Armenia advocacy played no role, or played an almost insignificant role. While in developed democratic countries, it has its major role in life of the country. Two NGO members thought that the advocacy was starting to play a significant role in Armenia, and almost the same as it was in developed democracies. Three respondents said that in theoretical level there was not any major difference between the advocacy in Armenia and in other developed democracies. However, there are major discrepancies between them in practice.

There is a law in Armenia that regulates the advocacy of peoples' rights within the country. However, this law does not work. There are major problems in implementation of those laws. This is not the problem in developed democracies, because people know their rights, and laws in place to protect them.

There is not major difference between the advocacy in Armenia and in developed democratic countries in theory. However, in reality they are quite different. In Armenia through advocacy NGOs try to address some social problems, to improve the living conditions of people, while in developed democracies they deal with more broad issues.

There are some analogy between the advocacy in developed democratic countries and advocacy in Armenia. The major difference is within the mentality of population. They have mentality of satisfied man, while our population have the outlook of hungry person. What

NGOs do in Armenia? They try to meet the basic, minimal financial problems of their members. It is more like business, although NGO sector has another legal setting.

## **Analysis**

### **NGOs' successful lobbying relates to resources available.**

Based on the findings of this study on advocacy and lobbying in Armenia, it is possible to make some conclusions about the NGO participation in public decision-making, and underline what the main factors of successful lobbying in Armenia are. The basic assumption that can be drawn is that successful NGO lobbying in Armenia is related to resources available.

As the findings show all NGOs that report that they have at least some significant influence on public decision-making possess some key financial resources. They have contacts with politicians. They are involved in coalitions with other NGOs and have large membership. Some of them also have branches in different regions. These NGOs also have access to the mass media. The overwhelming majority of interviewed NGO members believe that financial resources are the key factor that can guarantee successful lobbying in Armenia.

### **Is power to influence decision-making related to financial resources?**

The findings show that for a majority of NGOs the main tool to influence decision-making in Armenia is through mobilization of public opinion. Contacts with public officials remain the next important tools of influence on decision-making at different levels of government. Although the financial resources are not seen by the NGOs as the key element to influence decision-making, financial resources remain the most important element that guarantees successful lobbying for NGOs. NGOs also consider financial resources as a key factor that can enhance the capacity of NGO sector to initiate public discussions. The major obstacle that faces NGOs, when they try to initiate public discussions is the lack of financial

resources. Financial resources are the key element for NGOs in order to get mass media access.

Following the logic of Lemert (1981) and analyzing the main attributes of power, it becomes obvious that financial resources relates to the power to influence decision making in Armenia. Lemert (1981) defines power as “Relative ability to block or initiate public discussion of potential issues, to influence perceptions of public opinion held by key decision-makers once an issue “goes public”, to define issues and opinions under discussion, to influence participation by others, and to induce decision-making to adopt the desired policy” (p. 163).

Based on the findings the following implications can be drawn. The ability to initiate public discussions, which is the attribute of power, relates to the financial resources of NGOs. If NGOs do not have enough resources, they cannot organize briefings, meetings and discussions, as well as to get access to mass media, which are considered the one of the main tools to initiate public discussions in Armenia. The mass media are used by NGOs not only as a tool to initiate, but also to block the publicity of an issue. As the findings show the most common way to get access to mass media, is by paying for access.

Another attribute of power is to influence participation by others, which also relates to financial capacity of NGOs. If NGO does not financed and does not have any financial resources available, how it is going to assure the participation of beneficiaries, public officials and other interested individuals in discussions, meetings and demonstrations. Transportation, audience hall, availability of equipments for presentations, are some major problems that can be solved through financial means. To influence perceptions of public opinion held by key decision-makers once an issue “goes public” can be done through lobbying, through participation in Parliamentary Hearings.



Findings reveal that the main barrier for NGOs to lobby successfully is the lack of financial resources. Therefore, the assumption that the influence on the perception of public opinion held by key decision-makers also to some extent depends on the financial resources also can be drawn based on the findings. Findings show that for NGOs, participation in Parliamentary Hearings is not productive. Some of them point out the unwillingness of governing elites to cooperate with NGO sector as a factor that makes the parliamentary hearings unproductive. According to them, NGO sector is too weak and powerless, has no financial resources, so why governing elites should cooperate with them. Therefore, it becomes obvious that financial capacity of NGOs also has its role.

The last attribute of power, discussed by Lemert (1981) is the ability to induce decision-makers to adopt the desired policy. Findings show that one of the major tools for the NGOs to induce decision-makers to adopt the desired policy decision is to lobby. As already mentioned, according to overwhelming majority of interviewed NGO members, the successful lobbying depends on the availability of financial resources.

The analyses of findings reveal that NGO power to influence decision-making relates to financial resources. If NGO possesses financial resources, it possesses power to influence public life. Financial resources remain the key factors for NGOs in order to initiate public discussions, to block or initiate public discussion of potential issues, to influence perceptions of public opinion held by key decision-makers once an issue “goes public”, to define issues and opinions under discussion, to influence participation by others, and to induce decision-making to adopt the desired policy.

According to findings, the lack of financial resources is the main obstacle that hampers the ability and power of NGOs to influence decision-making at various levels of government. Almost all NGOs assess their financial capacity as unsatisfactory. Majority of them have no

financial resources currently available. Only three NGOs possess about fifteen thousand dollars, which are not the permanent funds. NGO sector has not any source of permanent funding. This makes them dependant. Lack of financial capacity deprives them from the power to influence public life of the country.

**Do NGOs consider themselves responsible and capable to influence decision-making at various levels of government?**

Findings show that in Armenia advocacy NGOs do not fully realize what their main functions are in society. There are NGOs, which according to their mission statement are involved in advocacy, that do not consider their duty to participate in public decision-making. NGOs mostly consider themselves being capable to influence decision-making at national level. The majority of NGOs, that has been interviewed, think that they are capable to influence legislative processes in Armenia. There are some examples of successful participation of NGOs in legislative processes of the Republic of Armenia. New legislation has been adopted and some improvements have been made in standing legislation once as a result of NGO participation.

The basic concern is that all successful participation in legislative processes reported by the NGOs took place more than four years ago. There were no reports about recent successful NGO participation in legislative processes in Armenia. This might mean the decline of NGO participation in decision-making at the national level. According to the findings, such a tendency explained by the lack of trust in current MPs and their inability to work constructively. Another major assumption that can be drawn from the findings is that there is an unwillingness of governing elites to cooperate with NGO sector and that it hampers productive NGO participation in decision-making at the national level.

Findings show that the NGO participation in decision-making at local level is unsatisfactory. Majority of NGOs does not participate in decision-making at local level at all.

Those few NGOs that cooperate with local governments consider their impact on decision-making almost insignificant. Some NGOs do not consider their responsibility to participate in decision-making at local level. Most NGOs although value highly the importance of NGO participation in decision-making at local level, do not participate. The main reason for such a poor participation in decision-making at local level majority of NGOs see not only the unwillingness of local officials to cooperate, but also lack of adequate legal mechanisms that will guarantee the fruitfulness of such participations. NGOs felony is also the factor that hampers the fruitful cooperation of NGO sector and local governments. According to findings, some NGOs try to promote not the interests of their beneficiaries, but try to solve the financial problems of their members.

Based on findings the conclusion could be drawn that NGOs do not fully consider themselves responsible to participate in decision-making at different levels of government. They blame the government that it does not provide them with the necessary resources to participate in public decision-making. The viewpoint that it is the government's responsibility to guarantee the participation of NGOs in decision-making is overwhelming. NGOs are more or less capable to participate in decision-making at national level. There are some basis to assume that NGOs capable to influence legislative processes in Armenia. The assumption is supported by the various examples of NGO successful participation because of which some important changes has been done in legislation. According to findings, NGOs are incapable to influence decision-making at local level.

### **How NGOs in Armenia try to influence the decision-making at various levels of government?**

Findings show that the personal contacts with key public officials remains the main tool of influence on decision-making at local level. The important promotion in this aspect could be considered the fact that some NGOs try to influence the decision-making at local level by

involvement in joint public programs with local governments. Another important tool of NGO influence on decision-making at local level is the mobilization of public opinion, through demonstrations, through mass media. Demonstrations still used by some NGOs to influence decision-making at local level, but this is declining. Another tool of influence on decision-making at local level for NGOs is the cooperation with international organizations.

Based on the findings the basic assumption, that can be drawn is that although NGO participation remains insignificant in public decision-making, the basic understanding of the successful strategies to influence the decision-making are in place. The tendency of reduction to use demonstrations, and support of international organizations as the tool to influence decision-making shows that NGO sector is strengthening. Demonstrations are the tool of feeble. Demonstrations are the tool of those advocacy NGOs who have not enough resources and do not possess any other more prominent tools of influence. At the same time, in the post/reduced donor environments, the understanding that the international organizations no more can be the source of support for NGO sector might be an important indication that NGOs are adapted to the newly established environment.

Findings show that the one of the ways that uses NGOs use to influence decision-making at the national level is the mobilization of public opinion to built political pressure around the certain issues. For that purpose NGOs use mass media coverage and organize briefings and round tables. Large human and financial resources are the key factors to succeed. According to findings, for NGOs lobbying is another tool of influence on decision-making at national level. Findings also show that NGOs do not consider parliamentary hearings a productive tool to influence the decision-making at national level. Participation at NA Committee meetings is used by some NGOs to affect policy choices. Individual contacts with key officials are less used by the NGOs to influence decision making at national level then in local level.

The analyses of findings lead to the conclusion that individual contacts with key officials are less influential in decision-making at the national level than at local level. They are considered less productive. NGOs more tend to use lobbying to influence public decisions at national level, then in local level. Another important finding, that should be highlighted, is that public opinion is considered to be an important factor to influence the decision making at national level. The basic assumption is that at national level the NGO activities are more open. The methods that NGOs use to influence public decisions are more democratic and accepted in developed democracies. Majority of NGOs accept the role of mobilization of public opinion as a major tool to influence decision-making. At national level, personal contacts cease to be the key tool of influence on decision-making. Based on these findings, the conclusion can be drawn, that at national level public opinion has some value since NGOs use them to pressure on the public officials. This means, that at national level one of the important stages of democratic public policy formation is developing. Public opinion starts to gain value and power in political and social life of the country. This is a major attribute of democratic society.

Another important fact is that NGOs most frequently use lobbying to influence the decision making at national levels. This shows that in Armenia for NGO sector lobbying is not a foreign phenomenon. Moreover, lobbying is already seen as an important instrument of influence on decision-making at national level. The major question is how effective it is in Armenia, what factors are, that might hamper the effectiveness of lobbying.

Findings show that lobbying is considered a productive tool to influence public policies. Although there are very few NGOs which are involved in lobbying despite the fact that an overwhelming majority of respondents consider that lobbying should be done by NGOs. According to the findings, lobbying is used by businesspeople and oligarchs who successfully promote their interests in different levels of government. This means that only some specific

groups in society that possess key instrument to influence public policy have a major impact on their formation of public policies, while these policies influence the life of whole society.

NGOs mention that lack of financial resources is the key factor that hampers their ability to lobby. However, findings show that there are other important reasons for NGO poor involvement in lobbying. Findings show that in Armenia advocacy NGOs have superficial knowledge about the role and importance of advocacy and lobbying in promotion of democratic way of government. There are NGOs, which according to their mission statement involved in advocacy, but still do not consider their duty to participate in public decision-making. Although majority of NGOs, consider advocacy as a phenomenon that includes all aspects of lobbying, being involved in advocacy they do not involved in lobbying.

NGOs that are involved in advocacy do not have idea what are the key functions of advocacy in developed democracies. NGOs identify advocacy as a tool through which they protect the rights of constituency and help to solve different issues in favor of their constituency. There is also the opinion, according to which, advocacy is a protection of rights of organizations that fund the NGOs. Most of them do not consider their business to participate at decision-making at different levels, others refused to participate because the governors do not provide them with the necessary resources to participate in public decision-making. The viewpoint that it is the government's responsibility to guarantee the participation of NGOs in decision-making indicates the fact that soviet mentality of public organizations sponsored by the state is still alive. At the same time, the recent history of flow of funds from international donor organizations is still inspires some NGOs, to wait the help from abroad. Most of NGOs involved in advocacy consider that it plays an almost insignificant or no role in Armenia. In other words, NGOs that are involved in advocacy assess their activities and their impact as insignificant. The major question is whose responsibility to improve the situation.

Findings show, that in Armenia advocacy NGOs do not consider themselves responsible to endorse procedures in order to mobilize, articulate and represent people's interests or concerns and introduce them at different levels of decision-making, including locally and nationally. This is another obstacle, which hinder fruitful and productive NGO participation in public policy formation.

### **How NGOs try to influence public opinion in Armenia?**

Findings show that advocacy NGOs consider public opinion an important factor to influence public policy decisions at national level. Advocacy NGOs not only use public opinion as a tool of pressure on public decision-makers, but also try to influence public opinion. The overwhelming majority of NGOs believe that they are capable to influence public opinion, by using mass media, close immediate, personal contacts with constituency, as well as through demonstrations and educational programs, seminars. According to advocacy NGO members, transparency of NGO sector, NGO coalitions and networking, as well as cooperation with governors are factors that can guarantee NGO greater influence on public opinion.

Based on findings the assumption can be drawn that advocacy NGOs realize the importance of having influence on public opinion. NGOs not only try to use public opinion as a tool to influence public policies, but also they try to shape public opinion. Findings show that NGOs recognize the importance of NGO-public relationship. The question is whether NGO-public relationship is in place and how well it works.

For advocacy NGOs, the major tool of influence on public opinion is the mass media. Although findings show that mostly because of lack of financial resources or other key factors NGOs do not use mass media. They more tend to influence public opinion through seminars and round tables.

### **Do NGOs tend to lobby through mass media more now, than in the past?**

Majority of interviewed advocacy NGO members consider that mass media coverage of NGO activities has increased. The reason, which was most frequently mentioned by NGO leaders, is strengthening of the NGO sector. However, most NGOs use mass media coverage as a tool to gain recognition and advertise their organizations. Few NGOs use mass media as a tool to influence public policies and public opinion. Even fewer NGOs use mass media for lobbying. Most NGOs do not have regular contacts with journalists. However, majority of NGO leaders do not consider problem for their organization to get access to mass media. The main problem for them is the quality of mass media reports. The lack of free press, lack of professional journalists is the main problem that has been mentioned by NGO leaders.

### **Which goals NGOs try to achieve while seeking access to mass media?**

Findings show that advocacy NGOs have stated to understand the role and importance of mass media and partially begin to use power of mass communication in favor of their organization. Majority of NGO leaders that has been interviewed consider important mass media coverage for their organization.

Like resource-poor interest groups, in Armenia the majority of NGOs seek access to mass media in order to achieve such goals as to inform the public about their programs, to advertise their organization, to gain recognition and disseminate information about their organization. Very few organizations use mass media coverage as a tool to pressure decision makers and to gain weight in political bargaining. Even fewer NGOs use mass media to influence public opinion. Only four NGOs use mass media for lobbying.

Findings show that the mass media is not used by NGOs as a link that connects public opinion and public policies. The fact that very few NGOs use mass media as a tool to increase awareness of population about important public issues, and put pressure on public officials lead to the conclusion that one of the important links connecting public opinion with public policies does not functioning in Armenia. Some organizations avoid mass media



coverage. However, unlike business interest groups in democracies, not because they have direct access to the decision makers and can influence decision making behind the close doors, but because of low quality of mass media reports.

### **Which is the most important strategy for NGOs to gain mass media access?**

Findings show that majority of NGOs get access to mass media by paying for TV broadcasting. According to them, NGOs that have financial resources can get access to mass media easily. According to some NGO leaders, in Armenia journalism is nothing more than race for sensations. So in order to get access to mass media NGOs should conduct demonstrations, interesting briefings or other events that can attract journalists and announce about them.

Few advocacy NGO leaders consider that being pro governmental can play a key role in getting access to mass media. For NGOs, the major problem is the quality of mass media reports and almost all NGO representatives agree that only close cooperation with journalists can guarantee, that article will not harm the reputation of their organization. Despite this fact, still very few NGOs consider important to develop personal contacts with journalists and personal contacts with journalists are not the main method to get access to mass media for NGOs.

### **Study limitations**

The Study on NGOs Advocacy and Lobbying in Armenia has been designed to assess the capacity of NGOs that are involved in advocacy to influence public policy. It is aimed to find out whether advocacy and lobbying institutionalized in Armenia, what are major problems that limits the ability of NGOs to lobby successfully, what are the main factors that can lead to further development of the NGO advocacy and lobbying in Armenia.

Fifteen in-depth interviews were conducted in Yerevan with NGOs that are involved in advocacy because of limited resources and time available. As a result, findings reveal only

the common patterns of the advocacy NGO sector. This study lacks representative sampling that might be seen as a detail portrayal of NGO sector in Armenia. In particular, NGOs that are operating in regions can have different patterns of lobbying and advocacy.

Another limitation of study is the lack of involvement of public officials in sampling frame, because of limited time and available resource. As a result, explanations for why public elites poorly cooperate with NGO sector, are one sided. Findings are based on the NGO sector representatives' opinion only.

### **Conclusions and policy recommendations**

In the era of globalization and representative democracy, citizens' full participation in public policy formation is the one of the fundamental grounds on which the accountable and truly representative government can be sustained. Citizens progressively demand more accountability and transparency from their governments and opportunity to participate in formations of public policies that have immediate impact on their lives and lives of coming generations.

In developed countries, with well-established traditions of representative democracy and civil society, there are various ways for citizens to participate in public decision-making within the framework of representative democracy. Key factors are educated and well-informed citizens.

Civil Society is a complex of public relations, autonomous from the state, but cooperating with it. The important attribute of it is the non-governmental sector. In developing countries, which are lacking well-established traditions of representative democracy and civil society, the role of advocacy NGOs is very important. The existence of a strong, well functioning NGO sector indicates that country adopted the democratic way of development. The level of effectiveness of NGO sector can serve as an indicator of a degree of democratization of society. Active participation of people is the key factor for having

responsive and accountable government. Citizens should have clear understanding of the structure and processes of political system and know how they can influence them. The system that lacks such important characteristics is not a people rule.

On the one hand, there is expanded NGO sector in Armenia. The popularity of establishing an NGO rose extensively in Armenia during the last 10- 15 years. During this period, more than 3000 non-governmental organizations have been registered. On the other hand, only small part of these registered NGOs can be considered as actively and effectively functioning organizations. Most NGOs are benevolent and charitable organizations. Few organizations are involved in advocacy of rights of their constituency and even fewer involved in lobbying and try to influence public policy decisions in favor of poorer and weaker parts of society. The current study aimed to assess the efficiency of those few NGOs' activities that are involved in advocacy.

This study shows that one of the important attributes of sustained democratic society is just barely functioning in Armenia. The NGO sector, particularly the NGOs which are involved in advocacy are which are to provide the links between the representatives and appointed public officials and society, do not fulfill their major functions. This study has shown that lobbying and advocacy are still very poorly developed in Armenia. The NGO sector remains uninvolved in public decision-making and has very limited impact on the formation of public policies.

The major problem for advocacy NGOs is lack of financial resources. Financial aspect is the most problematic and hampers NGOs ability to affect public policies though lobbying. Armenia is a country of post-donor environment. Grants and funds of international donors cannot serve as a main source of financing for NGO sector. The efforts of NGOs should be directed in finding new sources of financing. New donors for NGO sector can be Armenian Diaspora. For that, high transparency and effectiveness of NGO sector are imperative. NGO

sector should be highly efficient in its activities, competent in its mediatory role between public opinion and public policies. This is not the case in Armenia.

This study shows that NGOs that are involved in advocacy do not have a good idea what are the key functions of advocacy in developed democracies. Most of them do not consider their business to participate in decision-making at different levels of government; others think that it is government's responsibility to guarantee the participation of NGOs in decision-making. A soviet mentality of public organizations that are sponsored by the state is still alive. At the same time, the recent history of flow of funds from international donor organizations is still inspires some NGOs, to wait the help from abroad. While in current stage of NGO sector development in Armenia, the main role of international organizations should be providing educational trainings for NGO sector about their role in society, important strategies that NGO sector should employ to reach its goals, including lobbying.

Advocacy NGOs should realize that it is their responsibility to endorse procedures and legislation for successful lobbying and overall participation in formation of public policies. The active participation of NGO sector in the drafting of new legislation, that will regulate the lobbying in Armenia, is imperative. The whole vigor of NGO sector should be directed into this direction, to build up a law that will bring the lobbying activities into legal and transparent field.

The financial problems of NGO sector cannot be solved solely through donations of Armenian Diaspora. Self-sustainable NGO sector is the next important accomplishment that can lead to further development of the sector and enhance its role in public decision-making. New strategies should be developed that would advance self-sustainability of NGO sector in Armenia.

A strategy to develop self-sustainable NGO sector is one of the major undertakings which should be introduced and developed in Armenia. The thesis of the next research

project could be the study of the NGO self-sustainability in Armenia and possible perspectives for its development. Research under this topic will lead to the development of policy alternatives regarding the ways in which NGO sector can sustain itself. The future research should also analyse how NGOs solve their financial problems in other post soviet countries and whether practices that employed in other post donor environments are applicable for NGOs in Armenia.

In Armenia NGO - mass-media relationship is not functioning properly. NGOs should pay more attention to their contacts with mass media. They should have public relations experts, who will guarantee the mass media – NGO tight cooperation. In other words, NGOs should understand that journalists are important channels for dissemination information and creation proper image for organization. Therefore, development proper contacts with mass media representatives should be the one of the primary goals for NGOs.

The incompetence and inert pose of NGOs is not the only factor that hampers the development of sector and enhancement of their role in public policy formation. Without government support the NGO sector cannot develop. Existing cooperation between NGO sector and public officials mostly carry a non-official character, especially at the local level. Individual contacts with key public officials remains the main tool for NGOs to influence public decision-making. Although at national level there is some progress, still NGOs have very limited influence on public policies.

Armenia lacks legislation that would make the government cooperation with NGO sector compulsory. Existing legal framework does not provide the NGO sector with basic mechanism to influence public decision-making. According to NGOs, it is left upon discretion of public officials to cooperate or not with NGO sector.

NGO lobbying in parliament has had some positive outcome, if it is taken into account the ability of NGOs to influence legislation. However, these are just a few cases and do not

constitute a common pattern. Participation in parliamentary hearings is fruitless for NGOs. Armenia needs new legal mechanisms that will guarantee the participation of NGOs in public policy formation at national level. The advancement of this kind of legislation also should be the one of the primary objectives of NGO sector.

The NGO sector is one of the important catalysts of representative democracy. Via NGOs that are involved in advocacy and through lobbying society participates in formation of public policies, and puts the pressure on public officials to adopt decisions that are meet public interests. Political system that lacks such mechanisms as active NGO sector, that links the public opinion and public policies, also lacks real representative government. The absence of multiple voices that try to pursue decision-makers, and at the same time to influence public opinion, absence of channels through which public can influence public decisions is a warning about the deficit of fundamental democratic structures and procedures within society. The question is whether this society can be considered as a democracy.

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## Appendix A: Questionnaires for in-depth interviews

### QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Is your organization capable to initiate public discussions of an issue that your organization consider important for your constituency? If yes, can you explain how are you going to act? If not, can you explain the reasons?
2. What are the key factors that can enhance the capacity of NGOs to make the first move in public discussions?
3. Is it important for your organization to have well established contacts with your constituency? Can you explain your answer? Why?
4. Is your organization capable to influence the legislation processes in Armenia? For example to participate in drafting a new legislation. Can you explain your answer? If yes, how? Have you ever succeeded in it? Bring an example of successful participation. If not, why? What can be done to improve the situation?
5. Do your organization members participate in parliamentary hearings? Why?
6. In general, what do you think is NGOs participation in parliamentary hearings productive and what can be done to make them more fruitful?
7. Try to assess the capacity of NGOs to influence decision making at local level. Is it satisfactory? What can be done to enhance the NGO role in local decision-making?
8. What is the most successful way to persuade local decision makers to adopt desired decision, if there is one? Can you explain your answer?
9. Do you participate in decision making at local level? If yes, how? If not, why?
10. Does your organization cooperate with other NGOs, how long? Is this cooperation important for your organization?
11. Does your organization cooperate with politicians? How long? With whom? Is this cooperation important for your organization?

12. We would like to know how important the mass media coverage for your organization? Can you explain, why?
13. What do you think, how NGOs most frequently get access to mass media?
14. Which characteristic NGO should have in order to get access to mass media?
15. What do you think, why NGOs try to appear in the news?
16. According to your personal observations, the coverage of NGOs activities by mass media lately increased or decreased? What do you think, why?
17. What is advocacy?
18. What is the role of advocacy in democracies?
19. What is the role of advocacy in Armenia?
20. What is lobbying?
21. What is the role of lobbying in democracies?
22. What is the role of lobbying in Armenia?
23. Is your organization involved in lobbying?
24. In your opinion, is lobbying productive tool to influence decision making in Armenia?
25. What are the important factors for successful lobbying?
26. In general, in Armenia how NGOs can influence public opinion? Can you explain your answer?
27. Which is the key factor for NGOs to influence public policies in Armenia: financial capacity, personal contacts with key officials, access to mass media, participation in parliamentary hearings, ability to mobilize the public support (ex. demonstrations, large supporting constituency and membership)? If there is another factor that you consider more important, please name it. Can you explain your answer?
28. Can you name the date of foundation of your organization?

29. How many members have your organization?

30. How your organization is financed? Can you approximately assess your financial recourses?