

**AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF ARMENIA**

**USE OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES IN  
CONSTITUENCY MOBILIZATION AND OUTREACH BY CIVIL SOCIETY  
ORGANIZATIONS**

**AN INTERNSHIP POLICY PAPER SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF  
POLITICAL SCIENCE AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS  
FOR PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER'S OF ARTS**

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**AUGUST 2012**

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August 2012

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to express my deep gratitude to my Faculty Advisor Dr. Arthur Drampian for his helpful guidance, invaluable support and contribution from the initial to the final level. I am deeply convinced that it would not be possible to write this Internship Policy Paper without his persistent help and supervision.

I am heartily thankful to the staff of Counterpart International Armenian Office, especially the Chief of Party Mr. Alex Sardar to give me the opportunity of having my internship in Counterpart International and my Internship Supervisor Ms. Lusine Hakobyan whose encouragement, great support and guidance throughout writing the policy paper enabled me to develop an understanding of the subject.

I am very grateful to the American University of Armenia and, in particular, the School of Political Science and International Affairs, as studying in the field of Political Science and International Affairs gave me a huge supply of knowledge and skills of analytical and critical thinking along with leadership qualities due to the high quality education and up-to-date teaching methodologies applied at AUA.

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## **Abstract**

The main purpose of the research is to study the efficiency of using ICTs by different types of CSOs in mobilization and outreach to their constituents.

The paper starts with the exploration of the international experience on the use of ICTs in constituency mobilization and outreach by CSOs.

The paper next focuses on presentation and analysis of findings of the interviews with the heads of Armenian formal and informal CSOs, as well as exploration of the official websites of CSOs and/or their pages on social networks such as Facebook and Twitter to have a general idea about their activities and their use of ICTs in constituency mobilization and outreach.

The final part of the paper presents a set of recommendations to Armenian civil society organizations to increase the efficiency of using ICTs in mobilization and outreach.

## **Introduction**

This study has been conducted as part of internship policy project at Counterpart International Armenia.

The research project aims at exploring the efficiency of using ICTs by different types of Armenian CSOs in mobilization and outreach to their constituents.

For the purpose of the study constituents are defined as beneficiaries and interested groups of civil society organizations.

For the purpose of this research mobilization is conceptualized as calling people for an action, organizing for a purpose, moving people to action.

For the purpose of the current study outreach has the meaning of provision of information.

The difference between formal and informal CSOs is that formal CSOs are formally established and legally registered organizations, as opposed to informal CSOs which are informal movements and active groups.

The following research questions are purposed for the current study:

*RQ1. How have ICTs changed mobilization and outreach techniques deployed by CSOs?*

*RQ2. How have ICTs changed the capacity of CSOs in mobilization and outreach?*

*RQ3. What are the peculiarities of use of ICTs by formal and informal CSOs?*

The paper consists of Introduction, Methodology, Literature Review, Findings, Analysis, Conclusions and Recommendations. In the Literature Review the international experience on the topic is explored. The methodological framework of the current paper is described in the Methodology. In the sections of Findings and Analysis the results of the research will be presented and analyzed respectively. Last but not least, conclusions will be drawn and some policy recommendations will be given.

## **Methodology**

The methodological framework of the current Internship Policy paper includes primary data analysis collected via face to face interviews with the heads of selected formal and informal CSOs, as well as secondary data review, including research articles, books, reports, scholarly works to explore the international experience on the topic being studied. In addition, the websites of CSOs and/or their pages on social networks such as Facebook and Twitter were explored to have a general idea about their activities and their utilization of ICTs in constituency mobilization and outreach. Qualitative methods of analysis will be used for analyzing the data.

The sample size of the research was 10 CSOs including 5 registered NGOs and 5 informal grassroots movement, which were selected from a larger universe of CSOs from the database of Counterpart International civil society organizations.

The selection criteria of interviewees were based on geographical distribution of CSOs around Armenia and according to their roles and functions (advocacy vs. service providers). Overall goal of this methodology was to ensure diversity of selection.

The methodology of selection of the interviewees was the following:

- a) Five heads of formal CSOs were purposefully chosen considering geography and type of organizations
- b) One informal CSO was initially chosen for interviewing, intending to expand the scope of the study to five others by means of snowballing method.

For the purpose of conducting interviews a questionnaire was developed (See Appendix A) which included open-ended questions tailored to obtain answers to the research questions proposed for the study. Also, space was provided for additional questions and responses in case topics required further discussion. Furthermore, responses were recorded

during the interviews and later transcribed. After completion of all the interviews the transcriptions were analyzed for predetermined research questions.

## **Review of the Literature**

The concept of civil society is not new, as it has been debated within political philosophy, sociology and social theory for hundreds of years. What is new is the increasing emphasis on the concept over the last decades. The reason for that is that this sector, which has been widely recognized as an essential “third” sector, has seen unprecedented growth.

Various definitions are purposed of civil society and its role in global governance. Civil Society Index, in particular, defines civil society as “the arena, outside of the family, the state, and the market – which is created by individual and collective actions, organizations and institutions to advance shared interests” (Civil Society Index, 2010, 14). It should be noted that the term “arena” is meant to describe the particular space in a society where people come together to debate, discuss, associate and seek to influence broader society, as distinct from other arenas in society, such as the market, state or family.

According to Ghaus-Pasha (2004), civil society should not be equated to non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Non-governmental organizations constitute only a part of civil society, despite the fact that they sometimes play a significant role in making or influencing policy, as well as in activating citizen participation in socio-economic development and politics, in particular, in mobilizing particular constituencies (the vulnerable and marginalized sections of masses) more fully to take part in public affairs and politics. Thus, the author considers civil society to be a broader concept that includes all organizations outside the state and the market.



The same argument is put forward by the authors Pollard and Court when they introduce the definition of CSOs, according to which “CSOs are considered to be any organizations that work in an arena between the household, the private sector and the state to negotiate matters of public concern” (Pollard and Court, 2005, 2). Furthermore, as noted by the authors, CSOs encompass a very wide range of organizations, from large formal to informal local ones, including non-governmental organizations, religious organizations, mass movements and action groups, political parties, trade and professional associations, non-commercial organizations and community based organizations, media organizations, research institutes and think tanks.

Thus, a division can be made along two lines – formal and informal CSOs (formally established organizations vs. informal movements and active groups) and their size and scope of activities (starting from small community-based organizations, neighbourhood groups up to international movements, environment, peace, anti-globalization, loose networks etc).

As far as the role of civil society is concerned, of great significance is to mention the fact that civil society is considered to be an increasingly important actor for promoting good governance, which encompasses transparency, effectiveness, openness, responsiveness and accountability, as its strength can have a positive impact on the state and the market. Broadly speaking, civil society can further good governance in several ways including regulation and monitoring of state performance and the actions of public officials; policy analysis and advocacy; building social capital and enabling citizens to identify and articulate their values, beliefs, civic norms and democratic practices; development work to improve the well-being of their own and other communities; as well as mobilizing particular constituencies, and in particular the vulnerable and marginalized parts of masses, to participate more fully in politics and public affairs (Ghaus-Pasha 2004). Thus, all CSOs need means of communication 1) to communicate among its members and supporters; and 2) to send

messages to the outer world. While for many decades this was done using conventional avenues of communication (word-of-mouth, regular mail, telephone services, radio and lately TV) the 20<sup>th</sup> century offered completely new technologies that exponentially broadened communication channels and increased the speed.

The Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have transformed every sphere of life in human communication. ICTs are generally defined as tools used in creation, processing, transferring and sharing of information. Modern ICTs is umbrella term that includes any communication device or application, encompassing: radio, television, cellular phones, computer and network hardware and software, satellite systems and so on, as well as the various services and applications associated with them, such as videoconferencing and distance learning (Bargh and Mckenna, 2004). In addition, in regard to the worldwide ICT adoption process, a digital divide, which refers to the inequality of information and communication technologies (ICTs) distribution and usage between and within nations, characterizes the development in different regions (Evers and Greke, 2004).

A number of studies have been conducted in different countries to evaluate use of ICTs in constituency mobilization and outreach by CSOs. Here is a review of studies of international experiences conducted by some authors in order to compare later on the international experience with the Armenian one.

Saeed, et al., (2008) argue in their research article that the Internet and other ICTs, together with traditional mobilization methods for social movements, serve as tools for information dissemination and organizing protest. Furthermore, the use of ICTs is becoming increasingly important in developed countries, as compared to developing countries where social movements very often are not accustomed to ICT usage. As the authors note, there are many reasons which prevent civil society organizations from using ICT in their

organizational settings, among them are unavailability of infrastructure, lack of IT literate people, public's ICT accessibility, etc.

Another fact worth mentioning is that civil society is dependent on the direct physical interaction of people. As stated by Van de Donk et al., (2004), direct interaction has always been complemented by various media such as leaflets, brochures and newsletters, which are directed to reach large numbers of people both within and outside the organization. In addition, major movement activities were covered by means of newspapers, and later, radio and television. By the late 1980s, computer-based communication became the principal channel for dissemination of civil society information. With the introduction of information and communication technologies (ICTs), citizen groups and social movements reached a new and higher level in the ways they mobilize, build coalitions, inform, communicate, lobby and campaign.

The same argument is put forth by Nugroho and Tampubolon (2008), who have a firm belief that the introduction and advancement of information technology (particularly, the Internet) has stimulated the reinvention of civil society providing opportunities for the civil society to find new ways to reach the public. As the authors state, these technologies have given chances to non-activist people to become involved in issues of social significance, despite the fact that participation in social movements has always been the domain of professional activists.

Surman and Reilly (2003) try to explore the question of how civil society organizations use networked technologies strategically. In addition, they look at four areas of strategic use of these technologies, including collaboration, publishing, mobilization and observation. According to the authors, the ability of civil society organizations to publish and share information has increased significantly with the introduction of network technologies. Furthermore, networked technologies transformed significantly the practice of producing and

distributing information. The three cases discussed by the authors come to prove this change. Moreover, Surman and Reilly emphasize the fact that one of the most widely discussed uses of networked technologies within civil society is online mobilization and activism. As mentioned by the authors, civil society organizations increasingly rely on networked technologies to support advocacy and move people to action. The main argument put forth by the authors is that these technologies, as different from previous mobilizing information technologies, provide a number of opportunities, among them to mobilize globally, directly and quickly. Moreover, the Internet makes it possible for civil society to take direct control of mobilization media. Groups and individuals no longer have to rely on manipulating the content of mainstream media channels. In addition, networked technologies give the possibility to reach a large group of people quickly and affordably, while at the same time targeting the communication to interested or relevant groups. Furthermore, activists along with others have the possibility to talk back, responding with e-mail including questions and elaborations. Also, not less significant fact is the potential for ICTs to reduce the resources which are necessary for mobilization. Thus, the Internet may be a lower cost way of constituency mobilization in some cases than other tools and methods. However, Surman and Reilly point out that Internet organizing seldom takes place in isolation, as the success of mass events (for instance, the Seattle WTO protests) hinges on the use of multiple media and organizing tactics. Nevertheless, the fact is that online organizing tools give an opportunity to increase the scale of some organizing efforts whereas keeping costs low. The best illustration of this is the difference between direct mail and targeted e-mail. Simply put, one can send out thousands of announcements, calls for action with e-mail for the price of a dozen direct mails.

While studying the role that new information and communication technologies (ICTs) play in civil society's involvement in public and political life in Jordan, Wootton and Zweiri state that "New ICTs don't feature prominently in CSOs attempts to mobilize, partly, because

most mobilization activities are directed towards policy-makers and legislators; in Jordan, e-mail may be used to help set up an in-person appointment, but new technologies don't appear to have affected the basic strategy and tactics. In addition, the public activities of CSOs frequently don't seem to fall into the category of mobilization, but rather persuasion, except in the sense that contacts are mobilized privately in order to facilitate the events at which persuasion is to occur" (Wootton and Zweiri, 2009, 33). On this occasion it is worth mentioning that Amanjordan.org can be considered to be the best example of a traditional CSO (SIGI Jordan) that utilizes the web to bring to public notice events and encourage people to get involved in activism. Furthermore, new ICTs have allowed CSOs to mobilize attendance for events such as concerts and poetry recitals. According to estimates, the use of social networking websites, and in particular Facebook, by civil society organizations has increased significantly the attendance of civil society events and awareness of various campaigns (Wootton and Zweiri, 2009). Thus, while Surman and Reilly (2003), as discussed above, have identified various uses of new ICTs which change the nature and patterns of mobilization (for instance, blurring the boundaries between those who mobilize and those being mobilized) the study did not reveal signs of this development in Jordan.

Saeed et al., (2008) approach to the issue by trying to investigate the use of ICT in mobilization and the information dissemination process of Pakistani civil society. After examining a recent movement in Pakistan, the authors found that people have begun using web as a resource for information dissemination and organizing online and offline protesting. However, the use of information technology services in Pakistani civil society is very limited, even most of the organizations do not have their own website. As mentioned by the authors, Pakistan is confronted by political, social, economic, institutional, and governance problems. Therefore, there is a strong need of advocacy for social and economic justice in the country by civil society. The increased threats of terrorism pose a significant danger for conventional

protesting in the country, and in this scenario modern ICTs can serve as an alternative sphere for civil society. In addition, they suggest that, in spite of the fact that there are initial signs that people start to use these technologies, there is growing need to study empirically the Pakistani civil society for ICT usage in mobilization process. Thus, it can be said that there are other advantages for Pakistani civil society together with the inherent advantages of computer-mediated communication (e.g. high speed, low cost communication, reach to distant actors, etc.). In particular, the poor law and order situation, extended vulnerability to terrorist attacks and government's opposition to conventional protesting makes cyber activism much more important for Pakistani civil society.

On 13 June 2009, thousands of Iranians poured into the streets to protest what they believed to be an imperfect and fraud national election. The roads were clogged with people who held what became one of the most important tools for the grassroots movement: the mobile phone. As the Iranian regime restricted internet access and banned journalists' access to key demonstrations, communications via text messaging and social networks like Facebook and Twitter became a crucial tool for information sharing between the protesters and the outside world, and even a source for the news media (Pillay and Maharaj, 2010).

In a more recent article Manrique and Mikail (2011) study the role of new media and communication technologies in Arab transitions. As stated by the authors, the events in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya in early 2011 identify Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) as an important catalyst of the Arab spring. In addition, ICTs helped the revolution by mobilising important parts of the population and creating alternative discourses to authoritarian regimes, which found international backing. One of the arguments put forth by the authors is that ICTs cannot by themselves guarantee regime change or the success of democratization, but they will constitute an important focal point of the political struggle.

Since Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have become indispensable part of everyday life from commerce to entertainment to information dissemination and decision-making, a number of women's organizations are also trying to take advantage of the effectiveness of those technologies as tools for women's empowerment. However, women's worldwide presence in the area of ICT in terms of political, economic and social participation continues to be low, despite the fact that new information technologies have given women the opportunity to share information and interact on a scale hard to imagine previously. In particular, women in developing countries may have difficulty in having access to these technologies and information (United Nations research project, 2001).

As far as the case of Armenia is concerned, civil society's history in Armenia can be considered to be a long one if we look at it from associational, communal life perspective, outside of the state. On the other hand, if it is looked at as a modern agent of democratization, it is quite a young phenomenon. In this form, civil society gained importance in Armenia only in the late 1980s. Beginning from the 1990s, civil society organizations mostly relied on foreign assistance, mainly financial aid provided by international donors and private foundations. Nevertheless, civil society is still weak in terms of its influence on policy and important social issues because it is mostly dependent only on a small part of Armenian population. In addition, they did not succeed to extend their outreach, having low level of citizen participation in their activities, conditioning low membership and volunteering levels with Armenian CSOs (Civil Society Index, 2010). (For a list of CSO types in Armenia, see Appendix B).

There is a great deal of research and literature, as discussed above, on the use of ICTs in constituency mobilization and outreach by CSOs of various countries worldwide.

However, limited research is available about how ICTs are used by Armenian CSOs in constituency mobilization and outreach.

In order to illustrate what tools were used almost a decade ago in Armenia to mobilize and outreach constituents, one of environmental campaigns, the “S.O.S Shikahogh”, is worth first considering. Civil Society Index Initiative (2010) explores and analyzes the policy impact of the Armenian environmental coalition by highlighting the environmental campaigns when the coalition brought to a significant change, as well as those cases that failed despite the coalition’s high level of engagement and efforts. “S.O.S Shikahogh” was the first organized movement in the history of the environmental coalition of Armenia to bring to a policy change put forward and advocated by the environmentalists. In other words, environmentalists managed to have an influence on public policy through coordinated efforts up to the point of changing the decision of the government and bringing over accepting their proposed alternative.

Thus, the problem was the following. In 2005, a plan was developed to construct freeway which would have cut through the Shikahogh Nature Reserve which is the second largest forest reserve in Armenia. Of great significance is the fact that the inaccessible forest has been a forbidden area by regulations even during the 1992-1996 energy crises and the subsequent unprecedented deforestation of the country. The reaction of environmentalists was very quick. They formed the S.O.S Shikahogh coalition of more than 40 local and international civil society and scientific organizations. A broad mobilization strategy was worked out by the coalition targeting a wide range of potential stakeholders. They demanded from the high-ranking Armenian officials to stop the illegal construction. Protests, public hearings, expert analyses, as well as dissemination of information through letters and leaflets were used to raise awareness and mobilize the grassroots. In addition, journalists were brought on a media tour of the reserve to provide on the ground information, which was



followed by a press conference warning the public about the dangers of the developed project. Furthermore, an action alert was issued asking international organizations and Diaspora Armenians to raise their concerns to the government of the country. Last but not least, the potential risks to the forests were revealed by a documentary which had been made by a number of CSOs and played an important role in informing government opinion as to possible alternatives. Importantly, the policy of the government that was on its way to becoming a reality was suspended and irreparable damage was avoided as a result of the public concern raised by the environmentalists.

In conclusion, a number of factors were key to the success of the campaign, among them is that a network of CSOs was fighting for a common cause, rather than each organization pursuing a separate goal. So, acting in a network allowed CSOs to mobilize large constituencies for the cause. In fact, it was a well coordinated movement, while lacking a formal structure (Civil Society Index Initiative, 2010).

The Save Teghut civic initiative is another environmental movement in Armenia which is against exploitation of the Teghut<sup>1</sup> copper and molybdenum deposit (Civil Society Index Initiative, 2010). The initiative was created in November 2007 by young Armenians concerned with environmental threats in Armenia. While the number of activists involved in the initiative was initially 20, currently Save Teghut has over 6,000 followers on Facebook, as well as many more supporters in the regions of Armenia with no internet access. Moreover, groups supporting the Save Teghut movement have been formed in Moscow, Los Angeles and Germany

([www.tufenkianfoundation.org/?laid=1&com=module&module=static&id=375](http://www.tufenkianfoundation.org/?laid=1&com=module&module=static&id=375)).

Despite considerable efforts, the campaign, in fact, failed to succeed. Importantly, the project has created a situation of a trade-off between environmental damage and economic

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<sup>1</sup> Teghut is a village in Tavush marz

development. Thus, the development of the deposit, on the one hand, will result in economic development in the region, providing new employment opportunities. On the other hand, the environmental NGO community has raised its concerns over the environmental impacts of Teghut mining project. It should be mentioned that during the campaign the number of ecological organizations making up the environmental coalition increased to 60. A number of actions protesting exploitation were organized by the activists including letters to officials, signals to thousands of local and international NGOs, bike rides, etc. As a result of considerable efforts, substantial changes took place in public attitudes towards the issue. However, the construction of a copper and molybdenum mine was officially announced by the government in November 2007 (Civil Society Index Initiative, 2010).

Since the adoption of the decision by the government to launch the project, public resistance has intensified and took various forms. Mobilizing NGOs and concerned individuals, the Teghut Protection Group has held numerous demonstrations, rallies, petition drives, public hearings and press conferences. In addition, local residents in their turn organized campaigns to complain against the miserable compensation paid by ACP (The Armenian Copper Program) for their fertile lands and crops and eventual loss of their homes (“Save Teghut” Facebook group webpage).

To conclude, media coverage is significant, and the Teghut issue is covered in articles, newspapers, TV interviews, and YouTube clips. In addition, Save Teghut has launched its website and an online petition. Furthermore, the information dissemination and mobilization process by the activists takes place mainly via social networks, and in particular Facebook, under the hashtag “Save Teghut” ([www.tufenkianfoundation.org/?laid=1&com=module&module=static&id=375](http://www.tufenkianfoundation.org/?laid=1&com=module&module=static&id=375)).

According to some sources, over the past several weeks environmental activists in Armenia have been protesting a city council decision to allow the construction of boutiques

in one of the last remaining green spaces in the capital Yerevan - the Mashtots Park. The movement has been widely relayed online, with activists using the web to raise awareness and mobilize public support. In addition, a number of rallies have taken place around the park in recent days trying to convince the local authorities to alter their decision and abandon the project. As a result of the lack of response from the authorities, the activists decided to take further steps by taking occupation of the building sites, in a bid to stop further construction. Importantly, the operation was mainly organized via social networks, under the hashtag “Occupy Mashtots Park”, and as a result some activists were arrested by the police. Moreover, as mentioned by several sources, the city council appears to have found a way to overcome this obstacle, by giving instructions to employees to work through the night. In spite of the fact that the authorities seem to be ignoring the demands of environmental activists, they continue to spread their message via the local blogosphere, and the movement is gaining a growing number of supporters. A fact worth noting is that this Facebook group has been created specifically for the cause, called “It’s our city” or “We are the owners of this city” and already has over 4000 members ([www.france24.com/en/20120223-2012-02-24-2049-wb-en-webnews](http://www.france24.com/en/20120223-2012-02-24-2049-wb-en-webnews)).

Overall, the main goal of the civic initiative “We are the owners of this city” (also called “This city belongs to us”, «ՄԵ՛ՆՔ ԵՆՔ ԱՅՍ ՔԱՂԱՔԻ ՏԵՐԸ») is to make public’s voices heard and decisive for the solution of environmental and social problems in Yerevan and have a quick and effective influence on the decisions made. In fact, the initiative is not a formal registered organization and is just a unity of citizens for the purpose of solving the problem of “Ուսանողական այգի”, thus struggling for the protection of green zones and public parks. In other words, the purpose of the group is to use all means envisaged by the RA legislation including all methods of expressing public opinion to call the destroyers of green areas accountable and hold them legally and socially responsible, and to protect the

parks in Yerevan. The initiative was launched in 2010 for the sake of ceasing the construction in “Ուսանողական այգի”. In addition, the initiative has struggled for “Ուսանողական այգի”, “Վիշապների պուրակ”, “Mashtots Park” and many other green territories. The most famous one was the movement of “Mashtots” in which several civic initiatives were involved, among them “This city belongs to us” and Teghut movement. Thus, the problem of Mashtots Park gave rise to an unprecedented movement as a result of self-organization of individuals sharing the same beliefs and problem (“This city belongs to us” Facebook group webpage).

## **Findings / Results**

### **Interviews with the chiefs of Armenian formal and informal CSOs**

For the purpose of this research the heads of selected formal CSOs (Professionals for Civil Society NGO (PFCS NGO), NGO Center (NGOC), Public Advocacy Union (PAU), Partnership and Teaching (“P&T”) NGO, Communities Finance Officers Association (CFOA)) and the leaders of informal groups were interviewed. A questionnaire was formed (See Appendix A) which included open-ended questions directed to obtain extended answers to the research questions proposed for the study. The responses of the developed questionnaire are summarized and analyzed below:

According to interviewees, Information and Communication Technologies can be said to be relatively new phenomenon in Armenia. In addition, there has been a significant progress in the usage of ICTs since the 90’s and ICTs are nowadays widely used by Armenian CSOs both for internal interactions between the organizations’ staff, as well as in constituency mobilization and outreach. In fact, transfer of the internal communication of the organizations’ staff into an electronic format has considerably reduced paperwork and made the working process more efficient and productive.

The techniques deployed previously (3-5 years ago) by CSOs in constituency mobilization and outreach included group e-mail communication (mailing lists), land-line phone calls, newspaper publications, dissemination of leaflets, brochures and newsletters.

In spite of the fact that the interviewees were heads and representatives of different CSOs, almost all of them stated that a few years ago the provision of information to their constituents was mostly done via printed publications. For example, Partnership and Teaching (“P&T”) NGO has published the newspaper “Ուսուցիչ” (“Usutsich” – “Teacher”) since 2000 and “Կամք պլուս” (“Kamq plus” – “Will plus”) ([kamqplus.blogspot.com](http://kamqplus.blogspot.com)) since

2006 and Communities Finance Officers Association (CFOA) the newspaper “Համայնք” (“Hamajnq” - “Community”) since 2003 to reach out constituents. In addition, e-mail and phone calls served as the most effective techniques in terms of constituency mobilization. Furthermore, if an event or conference was to be organized, phone calls were followed by writing messages to the constituents the day before to remind them about the upcoming event.

As mentioned by one of the respondents, the head of Communities Finance Officers Association (CFOA), according to the results of the survey conducted by the organization in 2007, municipal servants got different kinds of information about Local Self-Governance through printed publications. Thus, only 6% of the latter had noted to have access to the Internet, out of which 2-3% only used the Internet for the purpose of obtaining information on the various changes taking place in the sphere of Local Self-Governance.

Some of the interviewees expressed the view that despite the fact that social networks (Facebook and Twitter) are nowadays considered to be the most effective tools to outreach and mobilize constituents, nevertheless, it should be noted that the users of Facebook and Twitter are predominantly young people and if there is a need to bring together the earlier-established NGOs, this is done via e-mail and phone calls.

However, not all the CSOs used the techniques mentioned above a few years ago to mobilize their constituents and reach out the public. For instance, Public Advocacy Union (PAU), along with phone calls, used also so called “live communication” which presupposed the constituents to visit the organization and associate with the members for the purpose of getting informed and sharing their problems. Besides, mailing a letter (sending a regular letter via post-office) served the purpose for some time which was costly and time consuming as compared to transfer of information through deployment of modern methods. In addition, campaigns were organized by the organization (5-7 years ago), initiative groups were formed

beforehand, which communicated with the constituents, reached them out and brought information about their problems to the organization.

In case of informal CSOs, the scenario is somewhat different. The dissemination of information for the first time has been done through pictures (flickr.com). Moreover, e-mail, leaflets, campaigns, announcements, interviews, blogs, and later social networks (Facebook and Twitter) were the tools applied previously to disseminate information and call people for an action. Social networks have been used (and continue to be used), in particular, for the purpose of organizing events and have been expedient in terms of informing people and inviting them to events. As for e-mail, it has always been applied to disseminate announcements by the activists, primarily for mass media. Mailing lists, which are used by the activists until now, have also played a significant role in mobilization and outreach. Particularly, those taking part in the movement left their e-mail addresses to become informed about further developments. Another fact is that a few years ago people were informed about campaigns through phone calls, mainly from their acquaintances. That is why, as one of the activists put it, “for a long time campaigns have been per se meetings with familiar people and friends.” Currently strangers also have the chance to participate in campaigns due to the dissemination of announcements through social networks.

As far as the cases of constituency mobilization through deployment of traditional tools are concerned, the ones recalled by the CSOs of the sample were of various nature because of having different spheres of activity, different roles and functions, as well as different constituents.

Professionals for Civil Society NGO (PFCS), in particular, used e-mail on the Volunteer’s Day to promote activity and participation among the youth. Later, a project was launched with the purpose of facilitation of volunteerism in Armenia and the improvement of legislation regulating volunteer activities. In the framework of this project, funded by US

Embassy, draft law and the web site on volunteerism have been developed-  
[www.volunteer.am](http://www.volunteer.am).

As noted by the leader of another CSO, Public Advocacy Union (PAU), there had been several cases of mobilization by the organization, the two of which are especially noteworthy. To begin with the first one, the problem referred to violation of consumer rights. A few years ago (5-7) ArmenTel (Armenian Telecommunication Company) had a monopoly on telecommunication services. In other words, it was the country's national telecommunications provider, which had been granted with the exclusive right to provide all telecommunications services in Armenia, including public landline telephony services (fixed-line telephony) and mobile telephony, as well as internet services. There was no other company being competitive in the sphere of telecommunication services. Taking the opportunity, in case the customer failed to pay any of the above-mentioned telecommunication services or the payment was delayed, ArmenTel terminated the provision of the whole package of services. Such behavior was the manifestation of consumer rights' violation. To address the problem and to solve it (as the mission of the organization is to represent and protect the consumer rights and interests in the regulation process of public services), a mobilization strategy was worked out which presupposed organizing a campaign, meeting with the Public Services Regulatory Commission (PSRC) by the consumers to discuss the issue, as ArmenTel, in fact, had ignored the consumers' complaints and legal justifications several times. In addition, the function of PSRC is balancing of the interests between the consumers and service providers and having a regulating role in their relationships. Thus, 10,000 signatures were collected by the organization for the purpose. A group of 150 consumers was brought together for the purpose of negotiating with the Commission. The goal was to induce the Commission to make a decision, according to which only the provision of the service for which the consumer did not pay should be terminated,



and not the whole package of services. However, such a decision was not made by the Commission. After turning to the PSRC for several times the decision remained unchanged, despite some qualitative changes. In particular, the Commission drew its attention once again on the fact that not only the rights and interests of service providers should be represented by it, but also those of consumers. Furthermore, it had the obligation to organize discussions and listen to both sides regulating the relationships and problems. This was one of the cases of constituency mobilization by the organization applying phone calls and campaigns.

In 2002, when amendments were being made to the Law on Local Self-Government and a new Law on Condominiums was being developed, another case of mobilization was organized by Public Advocacy Union (PAU) in the National Assembly. The representatives of Condominiums (the main constituents in this case, about 50-60 people) participated in the public hearings organized by the National Assembly and expressed their claims concerning the changes proposed by the Government in the Law on Local Self-Government and the Law on Condominiums. According to the representatives, Condominiums should be exempted from profit and value-added taxes, as they are non-profit organizations. Importantly, this case of mobilization by the organization succeeded and the requirements of constituents were satisfied, on the contrary to the previous case, as discussed above.

Partnership and Teaching (“P&T”) NGO has also had experiences of moving constituents to action. One such example has been collecting signatures in the schools by the organization for the purpose of making changes in the Charter of School Councils. The list of signatures has then been sent to the Ministry of Education and Science for consideration.

When asked to recall a case of constituency mobilization through the deployment of previous tools, the chief of NGO Center (NGOC) could not remember one, as, according to her, the organization is mainly concerned with providing grants to implement social projects and monitoring their implementation.

Currently CSOs predominantly use their official websites, e-mail communication, blogs and cell-phones (calls and messaging), social networks (Facebook) to outreach and mobilize their constituents. Interestingly, when asked whether they use ICTs for constituency mobilization and outreach or not, all of the chiefs of CSOs, without exception, uttered absolutely the same words saying, “It is impossible not to use these new technologies in this century.”

Formal CSOs are more inclined to use their official websites, e-mail communication, blogs and mobile phones (calls and messaging) for the purpose of reaching out and mobilizing their constituents. First the information is posted on the official websites of the organizations and the constituents obtain the information they need through websites. For instance, as noted by the head of Public Advocacy Union (PAU), recently an announcement and information on new water tariff of Yerevan were posted on the website of the organization which was followed by phone calls asking questions on the issue.

E-mail communication, which was also used a few years ago – though not so actively, is nowadays widely applied by formal CSOs to transfer the approaches and the decisions of the organizations that are necessary for the constituents and are accepted by government officials.

Cell-phones (calls and messaging) can be said to have wider application in mobilization and outreach by formal CSOs as compared to land-line phones. According to interviewees, there is easiness in using cell-phones, besides its usage is more operative and effective despite the fact that it is more consuming.

Nevertheless, as stressed by the respondents, much depends on the volume of information. If it is large, then it is more effective and preferable to disseminate the information via e-mail. In case of small volumes of information cell-phones can be used, as well.

Several attempts have been made by the leaders of formal CSOs to use social networks for the purpose, however, in their deep conviction, use of social networks is more effective in Yerevan and other major cities of the Republic, as many constituents inhabiting and carrying out an activity in regional communities do not always have Internet access. Taking into consideration this fact, phone calls are more effective to be used for mobilization and outreach, as to them.

On the other hand, there is one among the formal CSOs of the sample (NGO Center (NGOC)) that uses Facebook and YouTube, along with the tools mentioned above.

Communities Finance Officers Association (CFOA) has also created an on-line information system ([www.logincee.org](http://www.logincee.org)) which is a database of research papers, books and other publications, legal acts related to the sphere, etc. Furthermore, since 2010 there has been also a forum where different issues on Local Self-Government can be discussed. In addition, community heads' telephone numbers database has been created which provides an opportunity to get in touch with them by phones.

Informal CSOs tend to use social networks (Facebook), cell-phones and e-mail lists in constituency mobilization and outreach. In spite of the fact that many activists believe that social networks hinder people from going out into the street and making their demands from the street, informal CSOs predominantly carry out their activity in social networks, and particularly on Facebook, within the framework of the same group. In addition, social networks (especially Facebook) are used both for reaching out the public about the process of the campaign, further developments, expected large-scale campaigns (actions), as well as for organizing and coordinating the work within the groups of activists. These are virtual spaces where the essence of the problem is made clear through discussions and the information on it is disseminated, being followed by mobilization and actions.

As stated by the activists, social networks can be good tools – but only if these are used correctly, because these can become both the reason for success and the cause of failure. Of great significance is not to participate in the discussions initiated by the opposing side in the same social networks, as it may lead to another direction, confuse those not oriented themselves yet, distort the problem and fail in the end. Therefore, based on their own experience, the activists believe that it is always expedient to initiate in social networks than to respond and thus reproduce the content of those trying to distort the picture on purpose.

Informal CSOs disseminate their announcements and notifications, official opinions and comments, information on events via e-mail lists.

Mobile phones are mostly used by the activists to get in touch with each other in everyday life, to mobilize activists in the park in a short period of time, as well as to inform people about the upcoming campaigns via text messages.

Thus, currently formal CSOs predominantly use their official websites, e-mail communication, blogs and cell-phones (both for the purpose of calling and messaging) to outreach and mobilize their constituents, whereas informal CSOs for the most part use social networks (Facebook), mobile phones and e-mail lists for the purpose. In fact, the main difference between formal and informal CSOs is that the former use their official websites and the latter use social networks (Facebook) to mobilize and outreach their constituents.

Concerning the difference between ICTs and previously used mobilizing tools, there is a widespread opinion among the interviewees that ICTs offer a number of opportunities, as compared to the previous techniques used for mobilization and outreach. First and foremost, they give the possibility to reach a large group of people quickly and affordably while at the same time targeting the communication to interested or relevant groups. In this sense, ICTs can be said to be effective tools in terms of increasing awareness among people, as even if some people do not take part in mobilization process, they become informed at least. In

addition, ICTs allow quick dissemination of information, they have a snowball effect – those who “like” the information on social networks, pass it forward (“share”). Mass media have become electronic and very often integrate in social networks thus promoting quick dissemination of information. Also, there is the possibility of sending and receiving significantly larger volumes of information through ICTs, on the contrary to the techniques used earlier. As interpreted by the respondents, one can upload large volume of information on the Internet, however, it is impossible to read the same information by phone, for instance, to inform people about something.<sup>2</sup> Another advantage of ICTs is that the latter provide an opportunity of finding people sharing the same beliefs, interests and problems. Not less significant is the ability of CSOs to collect various opinions on the issue and analysis. Furthermore, ICTs make it possible to talk back, responding with e-mail including questions and elaborations.

Other advantages of ICTs include low cost, time effectiveness, flexibility and creativeness, as opposed to the tools used previously. As for the cost of outreach and mobilization, previously informing a group of constituents in written form was a rather expensive postal service, which is currently much cheaper by e-mail and text messages. All of the interviewees think that ICTs are better ways of mobilizing and outreaching constituents in comparison with earlier-used ones.

One of the interviewees expressed the opinion that although the nature of information has basically remained unchanged, what has changed is the way of its provision becoming much more attractive and affordable for the user.

However, along with advantages, several drawbacks of ICTs were also highlighted by the respondents. Of great importance is meeting the initiators of an action face to face and getting answers to many questions during the live communication. Otherwise, according to

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<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that the respondents did not consider smartphones, either.

interviewees, it is not that much reliable to join initiatives through social networks because of uncertainty. Another thing is that, as mentioned by one of the respondents, criticism on the problem was more substantial through previously used mobilizing tools (for instance, a newspaper), which has become personified and has changed into a light dispute nowadays through the use of ICTs (Facebook).

According to some ideas, despite the fact that use of ICTs in constituency mobilization and outreach is more quickly, cheaper, affordable and there is the possibility of quick response with the new technologies together with many other advantages, nevertheless, there is a need also to take into consideration who the target group of the message is (as the targets may be different) and accordingly to choose the method, because some people may not have access to the Internet. For instance, if there is a need to mobilize villages, the new technologies will not work in this case, on the contrary to phone calls. Otherwise stated, if the target group under consideration uses ICTs, then, of course, these technologies are inexpensive, less time consuming and more preferable than phone calls. Besides, use of ICT may mobilize completely unrelated or even undesirable people.

ICTs have transformed the nature of mobilization and outreach. The content of information has become open and free. In addition, there is a strong belief among the respondents that ICTs both can have a positive and negative influence on the content of information, as they do not have control on dissemination. It is impossible to control the dissemination of information, the only thing that can be done is making efforts to counterbalance it with other or discrepant information. It is very easy to distort the content, mislead, distract, to give false information and distort the picture. Such an example is so called “Բազմազանություն էրթ” (“Bazmazanutyan ert”) taken place only recently which was discredited because of electronic media terror, whereas, according to interviewees, they could avoid the temptation of writing cheap sensational items and not to stir up a scandal. In

fact, up until now the organizers of “Բազմազանություն էրթ” try to explain what it was in essence that is organized every year.

Even there have been cases when the photos of activists in social networks were used to ridicule people, to discredit the movement, etc. In such situations activists use the tactics called by them “leave the mischief-maker alone”, in other words, not to communicate with the latter, not to discuss the provocation done by them, not to respond, thus restricting the opportunities of dissemination of information voiced by them. On the other hand, as an indirect response, the activists create their content of information and disseminate in an organized manner to target groups.

Another fact noted was that when a piece of information is put in social networks, it is usually followed by a discussion during which new ideas may flash across the author’s mind. As a result, he/she may wish to review the content of information and try to reappraise it. Thus, a discussion on the information itself presupposes change in nature. On the contrary, the same information sent by mail may be read, however, there is no possibility of feedback and the impression of readers is not clear.

In regard to the content of information, one of the interviewees expressed the impression that ICTs, and in particular, social networks are used exclusively for the purpose of reporting bad news. That is the reason that some people are inclined not to follow the announcements and calls very often.

As for the target group of the message, on the one hand, these are different in case of ICT usage and that of older techniques such as phone calls, for instance. On the other hand, the target group of the message becomes much larger; it is possible to reach a large group of people for a short period of time while at the same time targeting the communication to interested groups, according to interviewees.

However, there were some diverging answers concerning the target group of the message. Some have a firm belief that there is the adverse phenomenon from the point of view of mobilization, when it comes to the target group. In spite of the fact that the target group is larger in case of ICT usage, nevertheless, there is little guarantee that all those who have promised to come to an event will do so. On the contrary, mobilization through phone calls becomes more official and ensures the participation in the sense that people feel responsible and obliged to take part in a given event as promised.

On the other hand, a piece of information on an issue may be read by numerous people in the Internet, provoke interest, but that interest may soon be buried in oblivion. The advantage of phone calls is that concrete people are addressed and a concrete issue is put forth. In the respondents' belief, every single technique used in mobilization and outreach has an advantage over the other and if there is a possibility to disseminate the information through all or many tools, the mobilization and outreach will be more effective.

Besides, it is a matter of difficulty to bring the target group from the state of online mobilization to that of offline one. It is easy enough when the mobilization takes place online, the discussions are online, some documents are signed online, anyway, in case an attempt is made to bring this group to an offline event, it is almost impossible as this is the group that prefers to participate in online events.

The number of people raising their awareness through the Internet (electronic newspapers) is nowadays larger than that of those reading printed newspapers. In addition, the target group of the Internet, and particularly, social networks is composed of the youth.

According to interviewees, ICTs are quite diverse, which provides ample opportunities to disseminate the desired (required) information to target groups. It is possible to find a specific tool for each particular case which makes the dissemination of information more effective. An illustration of this is the 2008-2009 on-line survey conducted by



Communities Finance Officers Association (CFOA). The window of the survey opened immediately after one visited the website. This provided an opportunity to conduct the survey among the website visitors. Conducting this kind of survey through other techniques (for example, phone calls) would be less effective as difficulties may occur in regard to obtaining information on users of the website or the number of calls would be great to have the desired number of the website users interviewed.

As far as the design is concerned, ICTs provide a chance to use a variety of pictures, effects while outreaching and mobilizing constituents. A number of tricks are used to arouse interest such as sending messages via pictures and images. There is a possibility to develop texts in a short period of time according to the target group and the nature of an event and to design these with pictures in order to be more prominent. Very often such pictures are set as principal images of the activists' personal Facebook pages in order for different people to have the same image at the same time, attracting attention and resulting in a unique campaign. Similarly, writing the same informative status makes it possible to send the message quickly and effectively to the target group. These serve as effective tools in terms of constituency mobilization, as to the respondents.

Thus, the ways of presenting the content of information, design, length, have become quite flexible with the emergence of ICTs. One can write something, make some changes, as well as use pictures and videos with the text. It is possible to make the information apparent very easily and quickly for large numbers of people, setting it in previously formed large target groups.

All of the interviewees, without exception, emphasized the fact that ICTs have significantly increased the opportunities and effectiveness of CSOs in mobilization, as a result of improvement of organizations' capacity. However, different interpretations were given by them to the question.

Some of them highlighted the fact that the capacity of the organizations' staff/members has changed and increased considerably with the emergence of these new technologies due to trainings, conferences, round-table discussions and self-education. Numerous training courses and conferences were organized with the support of international organizations (USAID, UNDP, GIZ, etc.) as a result of which new opportunities came forth for CSOs to organize their work more effectively. Several CSOs of the sample have participated not only in trainings in Armenia, but also those in foreign countries. In particular, one of the chiefs of CSOs interviewed noted to have taken part in a conference in Lithuania last year devoted to efficient use of ICTs and organized by Hillary Clinton Foundation. The influence has been that the organization has started to follow the developments in the field and gradually use these new technologies.

There are organizations that are members of a number of networks and have obtained the capacity to participate in discussions and constantly communicate with each other via the Internet. The organizations also have a list of decisions that can be approved by them also electronically. In this respect ICTs are believed to increase the effectiveness of CSOs in their activity and the influence is significant.

In addition, as noted, the opportunities and effectiveness of CSOs in mobilization has increased undoubtedly with these new technologies as the heads of CSOs can work with and mobilize people living in the regions that are unfamiliar to them. Furthermore, ICTs have increased the opportunities to find people worldwide for a common cause.

All of the representatives of informal CSOs positively answered to this question, stating that the capacity of the movements to outreach and mobilize constituents has increased, as with joint efforts activists can disseminate very quickly the information on the campaigns, texts, pictures, messages among the groups in social networks.

As opposed to the leaders of formal CSOs, activists noted that they had basically learnt the opportunities of ICT application for the purpose of organizing campaigns based on their own experience. However, as added, the fact is that there is still much to learn in the field, in particular, how to create online information databases, interactive maps, etc.

**Exploring the Websites of Armenian Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)**

The second part of the research deals with the exploration of the official websites of CSOs and/or their pages on social networks such as Facebook and Twitter to have a general idea about their activities and their use of ICTs in constituency mobilization and outreach.

The sample of the study includes 5 websites of formal CSOs (Table 1).

**Table 1.**

	<b>Official Web sites</b>	<b>HTTP Address</b>
1.	Professionals for Civil Society NGO (PFCS NGO)	<a href="http://www.ngo.am">http://www.ngo.am</a>
2.	NGO Center (NGOC)	<a href="http://www.ngoc.am">http://www.ngoc.am</a>
3.	Public Advocacy Union (PAU)	<a href="http://www.hpm.am">http://www.hpm.am</a>
4.	Partnership and Teaching (“P&T”) NGO	<a href="http://www.gumiso.am">http://www.gumiso.am</a>
5.	Communities Finance Officers Association (CFOA)	<a href="http://www.cfoa.am">http://www.cfoa.am</a>

Taking into consideration the fact that the informal CSOs of the sample for the most part do not have their official websites, they are not included in this part of the research. Their pages on social networks such as Facebook and Twitter have already been studied and described in the part of Literature Review to illustrate the Armenian cases of mobilization and outreach.

Thus, the findings of the study of official websites of CSOs are briefly presented below.

Exploring the official website of Professionals for Civil Society NGO it can be said that the information provided on the website is up to date, which means that the organization actively uses its official website to outreach the constituents.

The examination of the official website of NGO Center reveals the fact that information on both the projects implemented previously and the ones being implemented currently is available. Thus, it can be inferred, that the website is constantly updated by the organization to raise awareness of its constituents about its activities and future plans.

After studying the official website of Public Advocacy Union (PAU) it should be mentioned that despite the fact that the information is provided to the constituents only in Armenian, it is periodically updated by the organization.

Reviewing the official website of Partnership and Teaching (“P&T”) NGO it can be said that the constituents of the organization have the opportunity to become informed about the recent news and events from the website, as it is uploaded with fresh information.

Thus, having studied the official websites of the formal CSOs of the sample, it should be emphasized that the information provided by the organizations on their websites is up to date. Thus, the implication is that formal CSOs actively use their official website to reach their constituents out.

Professionals for Civil Society NGO (PFCS NGO), founded in 2004, is the successor of the USAID funded Armenia NGO Strengthening Program implemented by World Learning for International Development. The organization supports the establishment and strengthening of civil society institutions in Armenia through cooperation with the democratic structures. PFCS NGO follows the following values while implementing its mission: Professionalism, Democracy, Participation, Transparency, Cooperation and Unity,

as well as Constructiveness. The constituents of the organization are NGOs and CSOs. A number of projects have been and continue to be implemented currently by the organization that directly relate to the sustainability and strengthening of Armenian NGO Sector. Among these projects are: *Maintenance of a web site on Armenian NGOs database and its regularly update- [www.ngo.am](http://www.ngo.am)*, funded by UNDP Armenia, *The facilitation of volunteerism in Armenia and the improvement of legal field regulating volunteer activities ([www.volunteer.am](http://www.volunteer.am))*, funded by US Embassy, as well as up to now the project on *Financial Sustainability of Armenian NGO Sector* is in the process of implementation which is funded by Civic Advocacy Support Program of Counterpart International, along with other projects ([www.ngo.am](http://www.ngo.am)).

Another one of the formal CSOs of the sample, NGO Center (NGOC), started its activities in 1994. The goal of the organization is to promote democracy through civil society development. In addition, the objectives include encourage citizen participation; promote social justice through ensuring availability of resources; support scientific research to track civil society dynamics; as well as promote civil society participation in anti-corruption processes. The target beneficiaries of the organization are NGOs, community based organizations (CBOs), civic action groups (CAGs) and other civil society elements/entities. It is worth mentioning the fact that the number of officially registered Armenian NGOs who used NGOC services exceeded 1000. It should also be noted that the NGOs benefit from training, technical assistance/consultancy service, grants, information, Resource Center and other programs and services. To achieve its goal, the NGOC on the one hand works on strengthening the organizational and institutional capacities of civil society entities, and on the other hand, promotes the increased profile of the latter. Therefore, the identified stakeholders are legislative and executive branches of the Republic of Armenia authorities, local governments, private sector, mass media, academia, and specific beneficiary groups,

public at large. The organization is working towards reaching civil society elements both on a national level and regional (Caucasus) level.

Since its establishment the NGOC has been involved in providing training and technical assistance on advocacy and public policy advocacy as well as awarding relevant grants to NGOs whose activities have been and are directed towards influencing decision making systems. Starting from 2001, the organization was actively promoting the concept of social partnership ([www.ngoc.am](http://www.ngoc.am)).

As far as Public Advocacy Union (PAU) is concerned, it is an Association of Legal Entities. That is to say, the organization is a unity of a number of non-governmental organizations dealing with issues related to consumer rights, environment, human rights, etc. Public Advocacy Union has been established to represent and protect the consumer rights and interests in the regulating process of public services. The mission of the organization is to promote fair, transparent and balanced decision-making in public services sector through protecting the interests of citizens. As PAU is concerned with the regulation of problems in public services sector (energy, gas, water), the constituents of the organization are all the users of public services, along with Condominiums ([www.hpm.am](http://www.hpm.am)).

Partnership and Teaching (“P&T”) NGO was established in 2000 to form a collective organization for developing civil society and promoting change within the Armenian educational sphere. The organization implemented lots of projects designed to address educational (government, new teaching methods, etc.) issues and conduct advocacy for different groups of community. The constituents of the organization are educational institutions (schools, kindergartens, as well as teachers), NGOs and Foundations in CSO sector, Local Government bodies and community citizens.

P&T NGO has been the Intermediate Service Organization (ISO) partner of the Counterpart International Armenian office since 2005, serving Southern Armenia (Syunik

and Vayots Dzor regions) within the framework of the Civic Advocacy Support Program (CASP). Within this partnership, the organization delivered services such as trainings, consultations, assessments, grants administration aimed to support local CSOs.

In October 16, 2009 under USAID funding from Counterpart International, P&T NGO successfully passed an Organizational Certification Process to qualify for direct contracting by donor community. The organization has developed and implemented a number of systems to streamline its operation and to advance its stage of development and capacity-building. The certification process covered six main areas: Strategic Management and Governance; Financial Sustainability; Public Relations; Service Quality Control; Human Resources; and Financial Management.

The current initiatives of the organization are civic society development in the communities of Goris region, advancement of the organizational abilities for the protection of the citizens' benefits and advancement of the organizational School Management Information System ([www.gumiso.am](http://www.gumiso.am)).

The activities of the Communities Finance Officers Association are directed to acquiring modern methods and mechanisms of financial management, introducing and applying these in the communities of the Republic of Armenia, strengthening community financial services, increasing the importance of the community finance officer within local government, supporting the formation and development of local government system in the Republic of Armenia.

The CFOA's objectives include enhancing the improvement of legislation on local governance; providing methodological and advisory assistance to the municipalities' staff connected with issues of developing 4-year development plan and budget; assisting the improvement and modernization of the municipalities' financial and asset management methods by organizing discussions, seminars and conferences; promoting the automation of

municipalities' management processes; creating a database in order to ensure the effectiveness, publicity and transparency of local governance; supporting collaboration between municipalities; promoting the development of the citizens' participation in local governance; collaborating with Armenian, foreign and international organizations related to the local governance issues; presenting and preserving interests of the municipalities and the municipal employees in various bodies of state apparatus.

The constituents of the organization are local governments, local active groups and civil society organizations ([www.cfoa.am](http://www.cfoa.am)).



## **Analysis**

The data presented above give an overall description of the use of ICTs by Armenian CSOs in mobilization and outreach to their constituents. The data were collected by conducting interviews with the heads of selected formal and informal CSOs, as well as exploring the websites of CSOs and their pages on social networks, in particular, Facebook and Twitter.

The first research question proposed for this study referred to how ICTs have changed mobilization and outreach techniques deployed by CSOs. It was found out from the interviews with the heads of CSOs that previously CSOs used land-line phone calls, group e-mail communication (mailing lists), newspaper publications, dissemination of leaflets, brochures and newsletters to mobilize and outreach their constituents. In addition, they were more inclined to provide information to their constituents via printed publications, whereas e-mail and phone calls were considered by them to be more effective techniques in terms of constituency mobilization. However, this is not the case for all the CSOs of the sample. A few of them used also other tools, along with phone calls, for the purpose of mobilizing and reaching out the public, including mailing a letter, live communication, campaigns, etc. Besides, the picture is somewhat different in case of informal CSOs when it comes to the previously used tools. The first thing to be mentioned is the dissemination of information by them for the first time through pictures ([flickr.com](http://flickr.com)). Further, leaflets, campaigns, announcements, interviews, e-mail, blogs, and later social networks (Facebook and Twitter) were applied previously by them to reach out and move people to action.

In fact, with the emergence of ICTs these traditional tools of mobilization and outreach have gradually been replaced by or complemented with the new ones by CSOs. In particular, currently official websites of the organizations, e-mail communication, blogs and

cell-phones (calls and messaging), social networks (Facebook) are mainly used by CSOs to outreach and mobilize their constituents.

It is worth mentioning the fact that significant progress in the use of ICTs has been noticeable since the 90's. Being relatively new phenomenon in Armenia, ICTs have transformed people's lives and facilitated the dissemination of information, communication and mobilization. It goes without noting the fact that currently Armenian CSOs use ICTs widely both for internal communication between the organizations' members, as well as in constituency mobilization and outreach.

The next research question referred to how ICTs have changed the capacity of CSOs in mobilization and outreach. As far as the changed capacity of CSOs in mobilization and outreach is concerned, ICTs provide a number of opportunities on the contrary to the previously used techniques, among them possibility of transferring significantly larger volumes of information; dissemination of information in a considerably short period of time; possibility of increasing awareness of large group of people, including at the same time interested or relevant groups; opportunity of finding people having the same opinions, interests and problems; capability of collecting different opinions on the problem, as well as analysis; possibility of feedback, questions and elaborations. In fact, to take advantage of the above-mentioned opportunities provided by these new technologies, members of most of the CSOs' have improved their capacity in mobilization and outreach participating in various trainings, conferences, round-table discussions, as well as due to self-education. Besides, training courses have contributed significantly to the improvement of CSOs staffs' capacity to transfer the internal communication into an electronic format, which has considerably reduced paperwork and made the working process more efficient and productive.

In addition, organizations, being members of a number of networks, are able to participate in various discussions and interact with each other via the Internet. Another thing

is that with the emergence of ICTs the organizations also have obtained the capacity to make important decisions electronically.

Thus, as a result of improvement of organizations' capacity, it can be said that ICTs have significantly increased the opportunities and effectiveness of CSOs in mobilization and outreach.

The third research question proposed in this study asked what the peculiarities of use of ICTs are by formal and informal CSOs. What should be mentioned on this occasion is that while formal CSOs at present for the most part tend to use their official websites, e-mail communication, blogs and cell-phones (both for the purpose of calling and messaging) in constituency mobilization and outreach, in case of informal CSOs the picture is somewhat different in the sense that these are mainly inclined to use social networks (Facebook), mobile phones and e-mail lists for the purpose. In fact, the peculiarities of use of ICTs by formal and informal CSOs are that the former predominantly use their official websites and the latter use social networks (Facebook) to reach out and call constituents for an action.

Concerning the next part of the methodological framework of the policy paper which deals with the exploration of the official websites of CSOs, it can be inferred from the data, that formal CSOs actively use their official websites for the purpose of reaching their constituents out, as the information provided by the organizations on their websites is constantly updated.

## **Conclusions**

The goal of the research project was to study the efficiency of using ICTs by different types of CSOs in mobilization and outreach to their constituents. The study has specifically focused on how ICTs have changed mobilization and outreach techniques deployed by CSOs, how ICTs have changed the capacity of CSOs in mobilization and outreach, as well as what the peculiarities of use of ICTs are by formal and informal CSOs.

According to the data collected via interviews, the traditional techniques deployed by CSOs in constituency mobilization and outreach included group e-mail communication (mailing lists), land-line phone calls, newspaper publications, dissemination of leaflets, brochures and newsletters, whereas currently official websites, e-mail communication, blogs and cell-phones, social networks (Facebook) are applied by them for the purpose.

ICTs exponentially broadened communication channels and increased the opportunity of CSOs to mobilize their constituents and reach out the public. What sets ICTs apart from the previously used tools is their ability to mobilize globally, directly and quickly. In addition, the advantages of computer mediated communication include high speed, reach to distant actors, low cost communication and accuracy of information.

ICTs have transformed the nature of mobilization and outreach. In fact the content of information has become open and free. Furthermore, there is the possibility of using a variety of pictures and effects with these new technologies. Importantly, the target group of the message is much larger, at the same time targeting the communication to interested groups.

In fact, the main peculiarity of use of ICTs by formal and informal CSOs is that formal CSOs are predominantly inclined to use their official websites, whereas informal CSOs use social networks (Facebook) to reach out and call constituents for an action.

In conclusion, ICTs have significantly increased the opportunities and effectiveness of CSOs in mobilization and outreach as a result of improvement of organizations' capacity.

## **Recommendations**

While analyzing the efficiency of using ICTs by Armenian formal and informal CSOs in constituency mobilization and outreach, the following recommendations are given to the Armenian civil society organizations:

1. To take into consideration who the target group of the message is (as the targets may be different) and accordingly to choose the method of mobilization and outreach, as many of Armenians, especially in the villages do not have access to the Internet or are computer illiterate.

2. As every single technique used in mobilization and outreach has an advantage over the other, for the mobilization and outreach to be effective, many or every possible tool should be applied by CSOs for the purpose.

3. The employees of CSOs should be periodically retrained and be prepared for using ICTs in their organizations to interact among each other and to be able to handle all the paperwork electronically.

4. CSOs are recommended to collaborate with IT companies to be updated on recent developments and start to use new tools and techniques.

5. It is recommended that formal and informal organizations share their experience to mutually reinforce each other.

6. CSOs should organize conferences and round-table discussions to reveal and discuss the problems of outreach and mobilization through the use of ICTs, develop suggestions to give solutions to these problems.

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## Appendix A. Questionnaire for the heads of CSOs

1. Could you, please, note who the constituents of your organization are before we proceed?

Նախքան առաջ անցնելը խնդրում եմ ասացեք, թե ովքեր են ձեր կազմակերպության շահառուները:

2. Do you use ICTs (Computer, Internet/E-mail, Mobile phone, etc.) for mobilization and outreach to your constituents? If yes, what ICTs are used by your organization in mobilization and outreach?

Օգտագործում եք, արդյոք, տեղեկատվական և հաղորդակցական տեխնոլոգիաներ /համակարգիչ, ինտերնետ/էլեկտրոնային փոստ, բջջային հեռախոս, և այլն/ ձեր շահառուներին տեղեկատվություն տրամադրելու և մոբիլիզացնելու /ինչ-որ գաղափարի շուրջ հավաքելու և գործողության մղելու/ համար: Եթե այո, ապա ի՞նչ տեղեկատվական և հաղորդակցական տեխնոլոգիաներ եք *դուք* օգտագործում տեղեկատվության տրամադրման և մոբիլիզացման համար:

3. Could you say what were the techniques deployed previously (3-5 years ago) by your organization in mobilization and outreach? Please, recall a case of constituency mobilization through deployment of these tools.

Ասացեք, խնդրում եմ, ինչ միջոցներ եք նախկինում օգտագործել տեղեկատվության տրամադրման և մոբիլիզացման համար: Եթե կարելի է, պատմեք մոբիլիզացման մի դեպք նախկինում օգտագործվող միջոցների օգնությամբ:

4. What do you think makes ICTs different from previously used mobilizing tools?

Ձեր կարծիքով, ինչն<sup>օ</sup>վ են ՏՀՏ-ները տարբերվում նախկինում օգտագործվող մոբիլիզացման միջոցներից:



5. Based on your experience, how are ICTs affecting and possibly transforming the nature (the content of information, design, the target group of the message, etc.) of mobilization and outreach?

Ձեր փորձից ելնելով, խնդրում եմ ասացեք, թե ինչպես են ՏՀՏ-ները ազդեցություն ունենում և կամ փոխում տեղեկատվության տրամադրման և մոբիլիզացման բնույթը:

6. Would you agree that ICTs have increased the opportunities and effectiveness of CSOs in mobilization. If so, then how have these new technologies changed the capacity of your organization in outreach and mobilization?

Համաձայն եք, արդյոք, որ տեղեկատվական և հաղորդակցական տեխնոլոգիաները մեծացրել են ՔՀԿ-ների մոբիլիզացման հնարավորությունները և արդյունավետությունը: Եթե այո, ապա ինչպե՞ս են այս նոր տեխնոլոգիաները փոխել ձեր կազմակերպության՝ տեղեկատվություն տրամադրելու և մոբիլիզացնելու կարողությունը:

## Appendix B. Types of CSOs in Armenia

1.	Farmer/Fisherman group or cooperative
2.	Traders or Business Association
3.	Professional Association (doctors, teachers, etc.)
4.	Trade Union or Labour Union
5.	Neighbourhood/ Village committee
6.	Religious or Spiritual group
7.	Political group, movement or party
8.	Cultural group or association (e.g. arts, music, theatre, film)
9.	Co-operative, credit or savings group
10.	Education group (e.g. parent-teacher association, school committee)
11.	Health group / Social service association (e.g. association for the disabled)
12.	Sports association
13.	Youth group
14.	Women's group
15.	NGO / civic group / human rights organisation (e.g. Rotary Club, Red Cross, Amnesty International)
16.	Ethnic-based community group
17.	Environmental or conservational organisation
18.	Hobby organisation (e.g. stamp collecting club)