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FINAL REPORT

Project Title: Transnistrian dialogues: advancing Track 2 cooperation between society leaders to generate new solutions in the context of the protracted Transnistria conflict

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I. Project Basic Information

Duration:	2018-2019
Absorbed funds:	\$269,594 USD
Coverage:	Republic of Moldova, including Transnistrian region
Beneficiaries:	The beneficiary group consisted of 60 people from both riverbanks (at least 50% women, at least 45% from either side – experts in relevant fields (from conflict-related, to economic, social affairs, environment, etc.), CSO representatives, journalists, etc.
Partners:	UNDP partnered with local NGOs from both banks, best positioned to support in reaching out to the most relevant and influential persons from both banks, the Institute for Strategic Initiatives from the right bank and SIGMA from the left riverbank.
Project Summary:	The project the project sought to build and maintain a community of “ local conflict resolution leaders ”, who would serve as an important resource in supporting confidence-building in the communities affected by the Transnistria conflict. Its Theory of Change (ToC) is based on the idea that, by bringing together and training 40 people, representing various high-impact societal fields (civil Society, journalists, experts, grassroots activists), they will promote cooperation, change the public attitudes towards conflict resolution on both banks, prepare the environment and public opinion for compromises, generate and implement innovative ideas that will benefit people on both sides and therefore spur positive cooperative dynamic, as well as feed these ideas into the official negotiations for the settlement of the Transnistria conflict. The project was funded by the UNDP Funding Window for Governance for Inclusive and Peaceful Societies, Conflict Prevention Sub-window.
Objectives:	<p>Men and women on both banks of the Nistru River have better livelihoods and living conditions, due to improved cross-river cooperation between key actors across the post-conflict divide.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Output 1. A functional, institutionalized Track 2 platform for policy influential groups between experts, influencers, journalists, civil activists, opinion makers, CSOs and representatives of intellectual elites from both banks, championing for constructive approaches that would prepare the ground for a sustainable settlement of the Transnistria conflict; • Output 2. Improved capacities of national experts, CSOs members and journalists to generate and implement joint initiatives benefitting people on both banks of the Nistru river.



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Expected results:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Main forces and societal actors included in the conflict settlement process, increasing the possibility of resolving disputes between the sides;• Improved understanding, capacity and the skills of dialogue participants in conducting constructive engagement, resolving disputes with counterparts on the other side, engaging in constructive communication and increasing trust between key actors• An efficient Track 2 platform set up for policy influential groups on both banks for regular meetings and engaging in communication and search for solutions, as well as advocacy. The platform would allow to bring the Transnistria issue back on the forefront of the political agenda, with constructive solutions being backed by prominent influencers in the country• 40 local conflict resolution leaders (at least 50% women, at least 45% from either side) equipped with relevant tools to advance the confidence building agenda on both banks in various sectors• Measurements of public opinion through several questions in public opinion polls conducted by Moldovan polling agencies• Improved public and societal understanding of the compromises required to achieve the settlement of the Transnistrian conflict;• Improved quality of conflict-related coverage in mass-media of the two banks. An increase in the number and quality of objective articles in local press, to counter and reverse domination of biased articles distorting the real state of affairs and hampering wider public's better understanding of issues, especially in Transnistrian media outlets;• Identified solutions for important issues in different areas that both sides are faced with, including trade, economy, taxes.
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II. SUMMARY

The goal of the Transnistrian Dialogues project was to establish a Track 2 platform for regular engagement between experts, influencers, journalists, civil activists, opinion makers and CSOs from both banks and to equip and train this group to deliver innovative solutions to conflict-generated issues.

At the first stage potential beneficiaries from both banks were identified and the long list was compiled. During the selection process 48 top level people were selected to take part in the project. Later the group was expanded to a total of 60 participants. Half of participants are from each side, and 27 of them are women.

During the project implementation phase, the project implementation partner, IPIS, established an environment conducive to dialogue. Thus, three intensive 3-day sessions outside of Chisinau, with



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participants from both banks. The sessions included trainings by high-level local and international experts and conflict resolution professionals.

During the second stage of the Project, cross-river partnerships were established among civil society representatives and media professionals which led to subsequent generation and implementation of 9 ideas/solutions through joint small projects, each project by right and left banks NGOs/journalists.

All nine selected project proposals had a strong CBM component, which was a key selection criterion. Out of nine projects, four were media products were focusing on issues related to cross-river people-to-people contacts and confidence building and gender issues. Two projects focused on cross-river cooperation in the sphere of culture; two were joint researches, including one on gender issues; and one project focused on joint promotion of two banks of the Dniester/Nistru as one tourist destination.

Participants also applied and 25 were selected for a study visit to Vienna to learn about OSCE and its politico-military, economic and environmental, and human-related efforts. 25 others were selected for a similar visit to Brussels where participants had a series of meaningful meetings with EU bodies and think-tanks, with a focus on the EU role on the domestic and international arena and in the 5+2 process. Project activities were concluded with a Final Conference in Chisinau with national and international experts and political influencers on the panel.

III. CONTEXT

Since the ceasefire agreement in July 1992, the official peace process had been sinuous, based on a rudimentary consensus on the broad parameters for negotiations. Within this process, the OSCE has been acting as co-mediator alongside Russia and Ukraine, in a five-sided negotiation format, while the EU and the US have joined as observers in the autumn 2005 (since then the format has been referred to as the "5+2"). Despite cross-river contacts becoming more regular and constructive over the past years, paving the way for confidence building, a meaningful progress towards conflict resolution could be hardly registered. At the technical level, eleven Working Groups were formed, involving institutions and experts from both banks aimed at cooperation and technical approximation of the two distinct socio-economic, institutional and legal systems, to facilitate the development of Republic of Moldova as a whole.

However, within this 25-year period, relations between the two banks of the Nistru River were affected by increased alienation, lack of engagement, involvement and general disinterest. The settlement of the conflict has been mostly a "small circle" affair with little involvement from the larger society, reduced mostly to the interactions between high-level officials and international mediators.



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In this context, the project sought to build and maintain a community of “**local conflict resolution leaders**”, who would serve as an important resource in supporting confidence-building in the communities affected by the Transnistria conflict. Its **Theory of Change (ToC)** was based on the idea that, by bringing together and training 60 people, representing various high-impact societal fields (Civil Society, journalists, experts, grassroots activists), they will promote cooperation, change the public attitudes towards conflict resolution on both banks, prepare the environment for compromises, generate and implement innovative ideas that will benefit people on both sides and therefore spur positive cooperative dynamic.

The intervention directly addressed one of the main priorities established within the **United Nations Partnership Framework for Sustainable Development 2018–2022**, agreed with the Moldovan Government, in particular, **Outcome 2: *The people of Moldova, in particular the most vulnerable, have access to enhanced livelihood opportunities, decent work and productive employment generated by sustainable, inclusive and equitable economic growth.*** It was also in line with UNDP’s Country Programme Document for Moldova, in particular Output 2.2.: *Women, youth and people from regions with special status benefit from better skills, access to resources and sustainable jobs and livelihoods.* Also, it aimed to support Moldova’s progress towards the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals 1, 8,9,10, and 16.

IV. REVIEW OF PROGRESS AND RESULTS ACHIEVED

The goal of the Transnistrian Dialogues project was to build a Track 2 platform for regular engagement between experts, influencers, journalists, civil activists, opinion makers, CSOs and representatives of intellectual elites from both banks and to equip and train them to deliver innovative solutions to conflict-generated issues.

At the first stage of its activity, a selection committee comprising UNDP, UK Embassy and EUD representatives, and in close consultation with IPIS and SIGMA Expert, have identified potential beneficiaries from both banks who showed interest - high-profile journalists, CSO representatives and experts and **selected out of them 60 top level people**. Half of participants are from each side, and 27 are women.

The initial stage of the project therefore has brought together journalists, civil society leaders, opinion makers and has **established links between them** to help to get know each other, to exchange knowledge, to share their professional experiences. Also, during the first phase, each of the participants had the opportunity to present their views on the Transnistrian conflict and the vision of what should be done to change the current situation, by advancing a number of joint confidence- building initiatives in their thematic area. Participants in the Transnistrian Dialogues project demonstrated significant



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potential to further develop projects in different area of expertise for confidence building between organizations, institutions and professionals of the two banks of the Dniester.

Having identified key priorities in the conflict resolution field which represented interest to stakeholders from both banks, IPIS conducted **three intensive 3-day sessions**, outside of Chisinau, with participants from both sides. The sessions included trainings by high-level local and international experts and conflict resolution professionals. The trainings grew in complexity, involving progressively more conceptually complex issues. Apart from formal sessions, the format provided space for **guided informal interaction among participants** – communication games, conflict resolution scenarios, interviews, aimed at fostering and strengthening informal links between participants, as well as their understanding of the current and future issues and building up their capacity to work together to address conflict perception in societies on both banks through media reporting, joint expert work.

Output 1. A functional, institutionalized Track 2 platform for policy influential groups between experts, influencers, journalists, civil activists, opinion makers, CSOs and representatives of intellectual elites from both banks, championing for constructive approaches that would prepare the ground for a sustainable settlement of the Transnistria conflict.

Under output 1 a functional Track 2 platform for policy influential groups between experts, influencers, journalists, civil activists, opinion makers, CSOs and representatives of intellectual elites from both banks, championing for constructive approaches was created and institutionalized. The platform brought together a total of 60 participants, aside of the Project Staff. Three three-day sessions/seminars were conducted with high-level former and current officials involved in the negotiation process on the panel.

The group created within these joint activities was a mixture of men and women of all age groups, of different ethnicities, professions and of different political views, including among same-bank representatives. Thus, the project helped create an inclusive environment of open dialogue, free exchange of opinions and trust not only between the two banks of the Dniester/Nistru, but also among groups from each bank.

Project activities have had good and positive media coverage, and the project has also produced media reports and press stories with a strong emphasis on convergence and common values. Such alternative to negative and mistrustful public discourse which tended to be mainstream on both banks will help create a more benign environment around the settlement process.

Output 2. Improved capacities of national experts, CSOs members and journalists to generate and implement joint initiatives benefitting people on both banks of the Nistru river.

Under this output, cross-river partnerships were established among civil society activists and media professionals through a **Small Grants Competition**, opened to non-profit organizations from both

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banks, represented by the participants in the Transnistrian Dialogue project, which led to subsequent implementation of **9 small projects jointly**, each project by right and left banks NGOs/journalists.

All nine selected project proposals had a strong CBM component, which was a key selection criterion. Out of nine, four were **media products** on issues related to cross-river people-to-people contacts and confidence building and gender issues. Two projects focused on cross-river cooperation in the sphere of **culture**; two were joint **researches**, including one on gender issues; and one project focused on joint promotion of two banks of the Dniester/Nistru as one **tourist** destination.

Project output	Project output indicator	Achievements against indicators (quantitative only)
Output 1: A functional, institutionalized Track 2 platform for policy influential groups between experts, influencers, journalists, civil activists, opinion makers, CSOs and representatives of intellectual elites from both banks, championing for constructive approaches that would prepare the ground for a sustainable settlement of the Transnistria conflict;	1.1 An efficient institutionalized platform set up for influential groups to influence policy in Transnistria and Moldova proper. both sides, to support cross river dialogue	1
	1.2. Number of trend setters equipped with relevant tools to advance the confidence building agenda on both banks in various sectors	30 (40% from left bank, 60% from right bank) (50% women)
	1.3. Number of top-level high-impact meetings organized to inspire creative joint solutions to be fed in development programming and policies on both banks	3
	1.4. Number of programs aired on TV channels with wide coverage of both sides, to support cross river dialogue	15
	1.5. Number of policy papers developed and provided as advocacy tools to key decision-makers in the settlement process	1
Output 2: Improved capacities of national experts, CSOs members and journalists to generate and implement joint	2.1. Number of insider mediators equipped with necessary tools and enabled to innovate and promote co-designed solutions benefitting the population on both banks of the Nistru river	13 (53.8% from right bank, 46.2% from left bank) (53.8% women)

initiatives benefitting people on both banks of the Nistru river	2.2. Number of innovative solutions generated and implemented with the FW funds	9
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V. SUSTAINABILITY OF RESULTS

The project has created **sustainable links** between public tribunes, including journalists, experts, opinion makers, who will continue to produce results and replicate the knowledge and connections they received during the project. It is estimated that, in a way or the other, the platform will continue beyond the lifetime of the project to become a group of insider mediators who will address key pressing issues.

One key result which is expected to sustain in the future is the **nine practical partnerships established between project** participants who have gained positive and successful experience in jointly conceiving CBM initiatives, drafting project proposals and their joint implementation. Many of the small grant winners had this as their first project implementation experience.

Sustainability was also ensured through constant engagement and “**coaching**” by project management and experts of insider mediators to share knowledge and build bridges, as well as ensure their **gradual empowerment** that would turn them into respect voices on conflict resolution among their constituencies. Local ownership is therefore key to the sustainability of the project.

VI. LESSONS LEARNT

Key project successes	<p>Please describe what has worked well.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What have been the key successes of this project? - Creation of a civic platform that brought together a total of 60 participants. The group created within these joint activities was a mixture of men and women of all age groups, of different ethnicities, professions and of different political views, including among same-bank representatives. Thus, the project helped create an inclusive environment of open dialogue, free exchange of opinions and trust not only between the two banks of the Dniester/Nistru, but also among groups from each bank. - Cross-river partnerships were established among civil society activists and media professionals which led to subsequent joint implementation
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	<p>of 9 small grants with a strong CBM component, which was a key selection criterion.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What factors supported this success? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inclusiveness in selecting project participants - Openness in planning and designing project activities - Tailored approach in designing the small grants program and focused support for joint CBMs initiatives, in particular for new and inexperienced CSOs and civil activists.
<p>Project shortcomings and solutions</p>	<p>Please describe what have been the main challenges of this project?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What have been the main challenges/ shortcomings/ unforeseen circumstances of this project? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Limited openness for a dialogue at the beginning of the project. - Lack of experience in project application drafting and project implementation among some of the SGP winners. ○ How were they overcome (if they were). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - An environment conducive to dialogue and trust was created, this leading to more open discussions and new partnerships based on mutual trust. - SGP winners re-designed their calendar plans to meet new deadlines. Some of the project activities were reconsidered, some were merged to reduce implementation times while keeping the planned level of impact. - Partner NGO provided assistance in application drafting. - The project management provided training and mentoring in project reporting. ○ Were the project results attained? If not, what changes need to be made to achieve these results in the future? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The overall results of the project were achieved. The challenges pertained mainly to shorter implementation times. In the future it is recommended that a full twelve-month project implementation cycle is secured.
<p>Lessons learned</p>	<p>The project was very country-specific in essence, however its successes could be replicated provided that the following key principles are respected/ followed through: inclusiveness including gender balance, openness and transparency in activities, prior consultations with key stakeholders to ensure their buy in.</p>



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VII. MANAGEMENT

UNDP was the Implementing Partner of this project and was responsible for producing outputs and use of resources. As such, it bears the overall accountability for delivering the project in accordance with its applicable regulations, rules, policies and procedures.

Project Board

The project was managed at the highest level by its Project Board. The Board composition, decided during the Local Project Appraisal Committee, included representatives of UNDP, the Bureau for Reintegration, European Union, Sweden Embassy, UK Embassy, Ada, SDC. The Project Board was responsible for approving the annual work plan and the final report.

Selection Committee: As the Project envisaged grants provision, a Selection Committee was established. The Selection Committee evaluated proposals against the selection criteria and made recommendations to the Project Board for financing. The Project Board made the final decision.

VIII. MEDIA COVERAGE /VISIBILITY

The project activities enjoyed good audiovisual and online media coverage on both banks, in part due to the large representation of journalists among project participants, but not only. Moldova's national public broadcaster Moldova 1 covered key events, including the seminars and the final conference.

SGP winners have also ensured good media and social media coverage of their projects and also ensured UNDP visibility.

IX. CONCLUSIONS AND WAY FORWARD

The project has succeeded in achieving its set goals despite limited time and scarce administrative resources. The direct beneficiaries have indeed constituted a civic platform of people united by shared values and desire to promote development by further building trust and cooperation. The partnerships established among the participants and supported through the small grants program have proved that difference can be made even with limited resources within limited time.

What made this project truly unique is that it brought together and engaged in joint activities a mixture of men and women of all age groups, of different ethnicities, professions and of different political views, including among same-bank representatives. Such inclusive approach ensured an environment of open dialogue, free exchange of opinions and trust not only between the two banks of the Dniester/Nistru, but also among groups from each bank.

To build on the success of this project and expand the impact on broader public on both banks, one would have to consider a future broader participation of youth and young professionals for a possible



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continuation of the project. The youth on one hand have less and less knowledge about their peers from the opposite bank of the river, but on the other they often lack the burden of painful memories of the conflict. Hence, it is easier for them to overcome negative stereotypes and build trustful relations and partnerships from a scratch. Thus, any continuation of such initiative in a format or the other would have to address the issue of greater engagement of active youth and young professionals while sticking to the principles which laid the foundation for the success of this project – inclusiveness, diversity, openness, transparency and free exchange of views and opinions.