

THE COALITION FOR TRUST IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS

STRATEGY 2016 - 2020



Norwegian Ministry
of Foreign Affairs



European Union

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COALITION
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1. BACKGROUND

Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, South Ossetia, Abkhazia and Nagorno-Karabakh are war-affected societies that are currently facing challenges with regard to establishment of the rule of law, dealing with past human rights abuses as well as reducing the number of human rights violations taking place today.

Among the most important impediments for effectively dealing with these challenges are poorly organized institutions, exhausted resources (or their misuse), endangered safety, traumatized and separated populations and difficult relations with neighbours.

In order to make progress, authorities and civil society needs to deal with numerous shortcomings, including:

- Lack of political will for reforms;
- Limited institutional independence within the legal sector;
- Absence of domestic technical capabilities;
- Lack of material and financial resources (to a lesser extent in Azerbaijan, although poverty affects large sectors of the population);
- Lack of public trust in Governments;
- A pattern of violations of human rights; and

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- A general absence of peace and security.

The authorities of the countries have faced great challenges regarding transition from dictatorial to democratic forms of government, including by institutionalising transitional justice mechanisms. There has been a widespread failure to deal effectively with these challenges. In order to succeed, there is a need for new “social elections” that imply the establishment of new relations within their own societies, but also with neighbouring countries.

The human rights situation, as well as the public discourse, vary between the countries in the region. There are, however, in all parts of the region collective as well as individual experiences of harsh and systematic abuses of human rights and traumatic wars. This has significant consequences for social, moral, and political relations, making dialogue, trust, acceptance and loyalty more difficult.

In all countries, there is currently almost no alternative opinion to the dominant discourse about “the others”. The result is that social and political groups do not tolerate other groups and act in accordance with the principle of “whom is not with us – is against us”. This prevents constructive dialogue on human rights issues.

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The interrupted normal relations between the people of different countries or groups in the region are clearly visible in their educational systems. They create, maintain and spread stereotypes about the members of minorities, “the others”, and about the members of the neighbouring countries. Rebuilding trust, reconciliation and transitional justice are not topics mentioned in the public discourses that prevail in Southern Caucasus, except among a small group of civil society activists.



Politicians, religious leaders, media representatives, intellectuals, including historians, representatives of the civil society, including victim associations and associations of war veterans, face a range of important questions, such as:

- What is their role in the establishment of institutions that would help improve the trust between different actors within their own society, and with actors of neighbouring countries?
- How to provide conditions for the required processes of repairing interrupted relations and rebuilding trust?

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- Who will start these processes, with what objective, when and with whom from “the other side” should they cooperate?

Unfortunately, the authorities of the countries in the region have failed to take an active role in starting a process of rebuilding interrupted relations and establishing new ones. Without this, an important precondition for social and individual “reconstruction”, development and peace is missing.

The wars that took place on the territories of the countries in Southern Caucasus have severely affected the psychological, individual and collective health of the society. They resulted, *inter alia*, in anxiety, sadness, posttraumatic reactions, hatred and distrust. Certain memories and beliefs regarding the conflicts became the memories and beliefs of the entire societies, constituting “collective memories”. Unfortunately, this does not only affect the generations that survived the war. The collective memories is effectively passed on to future generations.

By propagating “one only truth”, the regimes in the Southern Caucasus control the stereotypes and prejudices. “Historical truths” usually determine the guilt of other groups or nations.

On this background, the Coalition for Trust holds that non-governmental organizations, media and young people from the South Caucasus region, with the support of their equivalents from Norway and other countries, can be the initiators of needed processes by means of exerting influence on the authorities.

2. ABOUT TRUST

Trust constitutes the basis for coexistence and solidarity between individuals and groups. By trust, we understand the belief that other persons, groups of people, ethnic or national groups or institutions, mean no harm but on the contrary, they mean well. To have trust is to expect that they will not violate one's human rights, but enable the fulfilment of human rights.

Re-building trust is key in order not to remain hostages of the past. Societies in countries in transition experience lack of trust in individuals and social institutions alike, leading to fear, suspiciousness and passivity, which prevents them from engaging in conflict settlement. In post-conflict societies, the issue of restoring social relations, including restoring trust, is an issue of central importance.

The Coalition holds that strengthening positive attitudes and initiate actions regarding trust building, establishing networks and developing solidarity across different groups, are prerequisite to conflict settlement both at the level of local communities and at higher levels.

We argue that development of a positive “emotional infrastructure” is a key to unlock post-war recovery, community development and establishing lasting peace. Naturally, in the face of trauma, which in one way or the other is experienced by an entire society, it is an exceptionally difficult task

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to establish points of “encounter” and develop mechanisms in order to help people regain trust in humanity, themselves and the others.

Putting great expectations, most often of the others, as preconditions for engaging in overcoming conflict are often cited as one of the obstacles to trust building. The expectations of the others may include that they should admit their guilt, tell the truth, and assume responsibility.

Based on a recognition of these difficulties, the following questions arise: How can we advance the social reality by means of transforming *potential* trust into *actual* trust? What do we need to do in order to build trust?

1. The Coalition holds that the key prerequisites to building trust include the following:
2. Willingness to build trust and future coexistence;
3. Willingness to understand and explain the conflict;
4. Transforming the social beliefs about ourselves, about the group we belong to, and about the others. We need to transform the beliefs that had led to the conflict into those that would lead to peace;
5. Dealing with the negative legacy of the past;

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6. Shedding light on the positive memories of the former coexistence and the examples of “the good” that was done by members of the different groups towards the others during the conflict;



7. Re-humanising and de-collectivising “the others” and present signs of their acceptance;
8. Establishing a culture of memory, which teaches us how to remember the past so that it serves the purposes of peace instead of as a basis of future conflicts;
9. Developing a different language and a different knowledge, the language of peace and the knowledge of peace.

FOR TRUST

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3. THE COALITION FOR TRUST

The Coalition was established in June 2015 by a number of representatives of non-governmental organizations from the South Caucasus and Norway. The coalition resulted from three years of work done in the framework of an EU sponsored program, run by the Norwegian Helsinki Committee in cooperation with Coalition members, with the aim of establishing a coalition for trust. The Coalition has been registered as an international association in September 2015 in Oslo, Norway. It is built on a regional approach, fostering cooperation and partnership.

As the members have envisaged it, the Coalition will:

- Be a strong platform for trust and relations building initiatives and activities by civil society in the region;
- Be an effective network among regional and relevant international non-governmental organizations;
- Not involve itself in political decisions nor get involved in political negotiations for resolution of conflicts, but rather facilitate a humanistic approach to rebuilding relations and trust;
- Seek to work across divisions shaped by historical and political conflicts, and seek to address such divisions with an aim towards peaceful co-existence and peace building.

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THE MEMBERS OF THE COALITION ARE:

1. NORWEGIAN HELSINKI COMMITTEE, NORWAY
2. ASSOCIATION OF WOMEN OF ABKHAZIA
3. CIVIL SOCIETY INSTITUTE, ARMENIA
4. INSTITUTE OF NATIONAL DIPLOMACY, NAGORNO KARABAKH
5. CAUCASUS INSTITUTE, ARMENIA
6. HUMAN RIGHTS CENTER, GEORGIA
7. PUBLIC MOVEMENT "MULTINATIONAL GEORGIA"
8. CENTRE FOR HUMANITARIAN INITIATIVES, SOUTH OSSETIA
9. DEMOCRACY MONITOR" PUBLIC UNION, AZERBAIJAN
10. JOURNALISTS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS. SOUTH OSSETIA

4. PRINCIPLES OF THE WORK OF THE COALITION

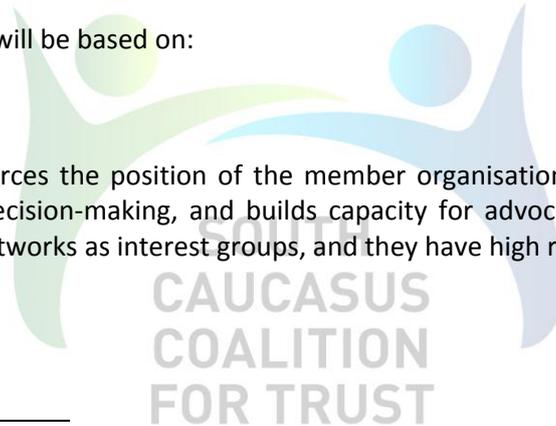
In order for the Coalition to function as envisaged, to foster trust between civil society and the peoples of the region, its work must be guided by some common principles.

The work of the Coalition will be based on:

1. Networking

Networking reinforces the position of the member organisations in the society, improves participation in decision-making, and builds capacity for advocacy. Governments and the public perceive networks as interest groups, and they have high regard for them.¹

¹ The objectives of civil society networks include: reducing social distance and building trust as social capital; connecting people, ideas and activities; facilitating exchange of services, participating in joint activities and conducting campaigns; opening communication channels, producing information and facilitating information exchange; developing solidarity, providing protection to network members and building “collective courage”; shaping and defining the civil sector as a single community and not as a sum of individual organisations.





strong responsibility to them.

2. Shared values

Coalition members shall collaborate based on shared values, common ground and for the good of society. The main principle is to serve peace. The coalition is formed by the members and for the people and the society. The Coalition take as a premise that people are the supreme value. It sets a high value on the connection with people and feel a

3. Principle of impartiality and not engaging in political discussions

Coalition members leave behind the historical and political problems in order to avoid getting involved in political discussions. Such discussions seldom have a positive impact on problem solution at the regional level, and taking part in them might disturb the Coalition's work. The Coalition members shall maintain independence and not be aligned or affiliated with any political party.

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4. Transparency

The Coalition as well as its members seeks to enhance its own reputation by performing their tasks, including financial tasks, with a high level of transparency and accountability. At the same time, the Coalition members will seek to elaborate general approaches in their own countries and regions on socio-political issues discussed by the Coalition without contradicting the principles and objectives of the Coalition. They shall refrain from approaches that can harm support for the Coalition and donor credibility.

5. Freedom of expression

The Coalition holds that full respect for freedom of expression is important for fully understanding all relevant ideas, and for it to work effectively and productively. During the Coalition's discussions, freedom of expression will apply both to Coalition members as well as to people from outside invited to take part in specific discussions.

6. Collegiality

Within the framework of its activity, the Coalition declares trust and respect to the people, the society and to Coalition members. The principle of collegiality includes reaching

agreement on common values, as well as abstaining from publicizing different opinions on political issues that may exist among Coalition members.

7. Equal opportunities

Equal opportunities for the involvement of all Coalition members and other interested parties in Coalition activities should be secured. This is important in order to ensure plurality and increasing creativity of the work of the Coalition.

8. Adaptive to change and mutual support

Collaboration between Coalition members are to be adaptive to change. Changes in their relationship shall be developed through cooperation, and not be forced by any of its members.

Coalition members might need help and support at certain times. In case any member of the Coalition need help from other members, the latter should render the required assistance within their scope. Such assistance may include advocacy for and defence of the human rights of Coalition members.

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9. Avoiding conflict of interests

The Coalition states in its regulations that it has its own interests, which consists of the totality of the interests of its members. The Coalition members hereby confirm that they seek not to neglect the interests of other members and that they will adhere to the interests of the Coalition as a whole.

In its work, the Coalition shall not tolerate the following:

1. Non-democratic decision-making. As an example, stronger organisations should not make decisions without consulting others;
2. Competition between member organisations;
3. Disproportionate sharing of burdens and obligations among Coalition members, with some being overburdened while others remaining passive;
4. Disrespect of the provisions of the Statute and the Code of Ethic of the Coalition.

5. MISSION

The mission of the Coalition for Trust is to contribute to rebuilding trust on various levels in the South Caucasus, including between conflicting communities, towards public institutions inside the communities and between individuals, as well as to promote the importance of trust as a social value.

More specifically, the Coalition will promote:

1. Cross-border trust including in border areas;
2. Inter-group trust and interpersonal trust;²



² *Interpersonal trust* is an individual feeling derived from positive experience in relations with the others. Some philosophers maintain that it is a natural feeling, which every human is born with. It is nevertheless developed and shaped based on the traditional patterns of the group we belong to, our personal experiences and

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3. Trust in institutions;³
4. Trust in civil society and trust within the civil society itself and among civil society organisations.⁴

validation of the interpersonal relations founded on universal values. Trust rests at the heart of all human relations. It enables people to connect with each other, thus making coexistence possible. Naturally, it is hard to talk about trust in post-conflict societies. Individual trust may be rebuilt only once we are ready to recognise and tell our own story in relation to and through the story of the others, and once we are ready to allow somebody else to tell their own story.

³ *Institutional trust* is the connective tissue of a society, enabling its functioning and development. In post-conflict societies, this form of trust tends to be either rather scarce or unrealistically high (in the case of long-awaited change of government). Therefore, one of the key tasks facing the governments is gaining or regaining trust in the government itself and its institutions. The institutions include the education system, media, police, social protection and justice systems, parliament and civil service.

⁴ *Trust in civil society* plays a special role in post-conflict societies. The key issue is to create a positive interrelation between solidarity, trust and participation. Through such consolidated effort, civil society is able to enhance its capacities and achieve much better results compared to those attainable by individual efforts or efforts of individual organisations.

6. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE COALITION

The Coalition aims to:

1. Promote trust, confidence building and peace based on a humanistic approach. It will facilitate and support the work and co-operation of its members and of civil society to these ends in the South Caucasus;
2. Be a platform of respectful civil society dialogue and co-operation. It will avoid becoming a vehicle for making political decisions or being involved in official negotiations for resolution of conflicts between entities;
3. Be a platform for innovative civil society co-operation across divides within and between societies;
4. Promote its aims at local, national, regional and international levels.

To achieve the overall aims for the period 2016-2020, the Coalition for Trust sets the following objectives:

1. **To contribute to tackling intolerance, discrimination, hate speech through monitoring and capacity building.** It is hard to imagine that society will be able to respect the rights of foreigners or strangers if intolerance and disrespect for minorities and vulnerable groups is widespread. In societies where a culture of

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tolerance prevail, the will and ability to solve conflicts peacefully strengthen. The Coalition will collect best practices on enhancing tolerance and tackling hate speech and develop recommendations tailored to the communities in question.

More specifically, the Coalition will achieve the objective through:

- 1.1. Monitoring of hate speech. Such monitoring will be targeted and include most evident examples of xenophobic, racist and other discriminatory statements;
- 1.2. Engagement in dialogue and peace building of people most affected by the conflict. For example, the Coalition will support establishing networks of mothers and widows of persons killed during cease-fires, refugees, and internally displaced persons;



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- 1.3. Establishment of social media resources for peace and fighting hate speech;
 - 1.4. Working with bios and real stories. Each party to a conflict believes that it suffered and continue to suffer most because of the conflict. First-hand accounts, stories and bios (not excluding positive ones) of people affected by conflicts and discussions between people from conflicting parties will allow better understanding of the opposite party's situation. This may result in more sensitivity towards each other and strengthening empathy. Among the target groups involved in these activities may be municipalities, different groups of the society, the public and individuals, as well as representatives of the international community.
- 2. To contribute to ensuring transitional justice, respect for international humanitarian and human rights law through monitoring and registration of cross-border incidents, advocacy and promotion of trust in the affected communities.** Currently, the conflicts in South Caucasus are considered to be frozen, not solved. At the same time, cross border incidents occur regularly with casualties both among the military and civilian population in parts of the region.

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A main problem is that justice is not ensured. Impunity prevails. This hinders reconciliation and building of trust between the communities involved. There is a lack of transitional justice mechanisms in all affected communities. There is also a lack of capacity for ensuring transitional justice.

In light of a threat of escalation and reactivation of military hostilities, there is a pressing need to protect the civilian population. Apart from security risks, the civilian population remains affected by the conflict and its consequences in various ways. Human rights protection remains very weak. There is a need to conduct regular monitoring of incidents, reporting and sharing information on both sides of the border.

The population of the region are protected by the European Convention on Human Rights and have the possibility to apply in individual cases to the European Court of Human Rights. However, this remains only a theoretical option for people living in territories outside state control. Even in the state controlled territories human rights protection remains weak.

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On this background, the Coalition have an important role in proposing ideas aimed at reconciliation by implementing relevant judgments by the European Court of Human Rights. This could contribute to enhanced human rights protection, peaceful settlement and trust building.

The likely engagement by the International Criminal Court (ICC) in investigating and prosecuting war crimes committed in Georgia during the 2008 war, is an important development. The Coalition have an important role in making these investigations known, supporting the ICC in communicating with affected people and with the society at large.

The Coalition will achieve this objective through:

- 2.1. Lobbying on international level for establishment and strengthening of measures aimed at monitoring adherence of the cease-fire by the parties, and in particular instances of violations of the cease-fire targeting the civilian population;
- 2.2. Support initiatives to work with bordering villages, including initiatives of international and local non-governmental organizations;
- 2.3. Monitoring of execution of judgments by the European Court of Human Rights.

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Even judgments, which are not against any of the states in the region, may be relevant because they concern relevant and important human rights issues for the region;

2.4. Support ICC investigations in Georgia and communications with affected people.

3. **To strengthen the capacity of the Coalition, expand its membership, including through enhancing trust among coalition members and ensuring solidarity with international friends of the Coalition.**

Until now, various efforts have been undertaken aimed at peace building in the region. However, most of them have proven not to be comprehensive or sustainable. To raise the effectiveness of such efforts, *consolidated* efforts are needed. Membership that is more inclusive will allow the Coalition and its members to enhance trust between different civil society actors both inside the communities in question and across borders. Engagement of international actors will contribute to the promotion of the Coalition's cause and allow raising issues on the international level, as well as to enhance the expertise and capacity of the Coalition to deal with issues of interest.

The Coalition will achieve this objective through:

- 3.1. Implementation of long-term projects, as well as short-term supplementary actions, aimed at building capacity (including both theoretical and practical skills) to deal with conflicts, diagnosing escalation and finding possible ways of intervening;
- 3.2. Implementation of projects aimed at empowering non-governmental organisations, such as support for networking, sharing experiences, etc.;
- 3.3. Preventing escalation of conflicts.
In situations with risk of escalation, apart from presenting positive scenarios of conflict resolution, it is also necessary to present scenarios of “the unwanted future”. Such scenarios show how further escalation of the conflict affects societies negatively. This will serve as a stimulus for the societies in



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question as well as for politicians of the conflicting parties to work on preventing further escalation;

- 3.4. Elaboration of recommendations aimed at de-escalation of the conflict, for example recommending tactical moves of de-escalation initiated by one side, such as GRIT-tactic where one of the parties undertakes unilateral steps to de-escalate tensions, and awaits a response from the other side at every level. It is empirically proven that such behaviour is considered as goodwill, not as a sign of weakness. Such steps might be elaborated not only for the authorities in question but also for the civil society;
- 3.5. Establishment of an international (ad hoc) group consisting of civil society representatives from former Soviet countries, the Black Sea region, the EU and the US, as well as researchers and public figures to support the cause of building trust among the conflicting sides in the South Caucasus based on analysis of research and practice;
- 3.6. Lobbying for creation of, as well as initiating efforts to create, opportunities both locally and internationally to communicate across borders, among others by establishing meeting points via border diplomacy (e.g. Sadakhlo village in Georgia, etc.);
- 3.7. Seeking creation of place(s) for dialogue with authorities, and seeking

opportunities of initiating dialogues with the Governments of the region on topics related to the situation of the civil society.

3.8. Enhancing solidarity across borders among civil societies around common challenges;

In order to achieve the objective, the Coalition will initiate measures that will:

- Reduce social distance and building trust as social capital;
- Connect people, ideas and activities;
- Facilitate exchange of services, participating in joint activities and conducting campaigns;
- Open communication channels, producing information and facilitating information exchange;
- Facilitate swift response in the event of crisis as objectives are agreed in advance and communications networks are established;
- Develop solidarity, provide protection to network members and build “collective courage”;
- Shape and define the civil sector as a single community and not as a sum of individual organisations.

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4. **To work with certain target groups:** refugees, internally displaced persons, former combatants and their family members, family members of killed persons, journalists and youth. These categories of people are most affected by the conflicts and its consequences. Building trust among them towards other community members requires a special approach. On the one hand, they are most vulnerable and are a source of mistrust for the entire community, on the other hand, they carry the strongest potential for reconciliation and trust if certain work is done properly.

5. **To engage and work with Track I, II and III levels and increase trust between them.** Currently, contacts and activities between actors belonging to all Tracks have decreased. However, it is key to re-activate contacts on all levels, including between:
 - Track I: high-level political and military leaders, international mediators, etc. of each affected community;
 - Track II: academia, religious leaders, leaders of non-governmental organisations and other civil society actors;
 - Track III: people-to-people, individuals and private groups

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The Coalition will facilitate and encourage inter-Track contacts both inside the communities and across borders. Despite there being a number of local and regional initiatives and projects aimed at peace-building, on grass root level there is a lack of understanding of the role of non-governmental organisations in peace-building. At the same time, there is a

gap and lack of understanding between decision makers and civil society actors involved in the process. To contribute to enhancing trust between them, there is a need to facilitate dialogue and create opportunities for exchange of opinions in public meetings and in meetings based on Chatham house rules.

The Coalition will achieve this objective through:

5..1. Advocacy for (re-) starting discussions of the problems, visions and resources by the Track I and Track II together and elaboration of joint proposals for resolving

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the problem(s). It is important to involve influential persons in the process for achieving this goal;

5..2. Advocacy for more acceptance of the Coalition and what it is going to do;

5..3. Joint work on Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation (DRR/CCA) issues of common concern;

5..4. Carrying out activities emphasizing and expanding the role of women in peace building;

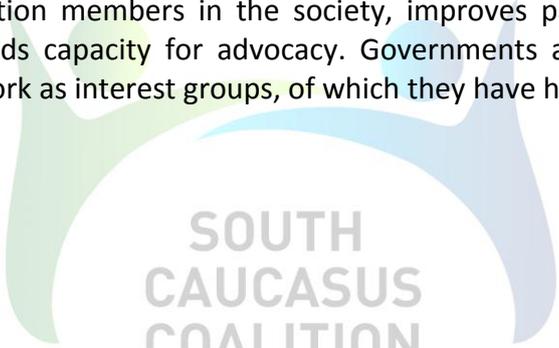
5..5. Carrying out activities aimed at tackling the problem of understanding the meaning and types of trust.

6. **To conduct surveys, research, needs assessments etc. on ways to strengthening the level of trust with a view to develop research programmes.** Public opinion surveys, needs assessments, research, analysis of relevant best practices of other states, briefing notes of the discussions, etc. will allow the Coalition and its members to develop programmes and trust-building measures specifically developed and tailored to identified needs of communities and target groups. This will enable the Coalition to increase the effectiveness of the proposed measures.

6.1 The Coalition will gather and analyse information to raise awareness of other

relevant actors on the needs of the communities in question.

- 7. Activities aimed at strengthening networking are of paramount importance.** Members of the Coalition will work to strengthen networking, which reinforces the position of Coalition members in the society, improves participation in decision-making, and builds capacity for advocacy. Governments and the public perceive such larger network as interest groups, of which they have high regards.



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