

Evaluation report – Executive Summary

Evaluation hbs Armenia and Georgia 2018-2022

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1. Executive Summary

1.1 Description of the project

The evaluation covers hbs project in South Caucasus during the period 2018 until mid-2022. The evaluation focusses on project activities in Georgia and Armenia. The budget for internal and partner projects grew from 212,000 Euro in 2018 to 403,000 Euro in 2022. As outlined in the GOPP 2021-2023, the project has following four component goals:

- A. Overall inclusive political culture opens room for public participation and democratic development and socio-ecological transformation. Green and pluralistic approaches challenge existing narratives.
- B. Gender equality including aspects of socio-economic development are part of the political and public discourse.
- C. Topics of environmental protection are addressed on societal and political levels. Socio-ecological transformation deserves meaningful attention in the discussions of the development in Georgia and Armenia.
- D. The overall quality of discussions on foreign and security policy has improved and different approaches on regional conflicts are introduced and discussed in closed political circles and the public discourse.

1.2 Evaluation approach

During the inception phase (October 2022), the evaluators conducted three online working sessions: one kick off meeting and two meetings on the evaluation questions. In addition, the evaluators and the hbs project teams in Tbilisi and Yerevan agreed on the list of interviewees and of project-related documents provided by the hbs.

During the evaluation phase (November-December 2022), the two local evaluators conducted 36 semi-structured qualitative individual and four group interviews with hbs partners and network, and one participatory observation. The main evaluator conducted eight semi-structured qualitative online individual interviews with selected institutions (hbs, embassies, donors, think tanks) in Germany, Georgia and Armenia and two with hbs South Caucasus staff. There were three online working sessions with the three hbs teams in Berlin, Tbilisi and Yerevan along the evaluation questions.

In the reporting phase (December 2022 – February 2023) the key evaluator analysed the following data: (1) transcripts of the semi-structured qualitative interviews and online working sessions; and (2) the provided and self-researched documents. Further on, the main evaluator - in coordination with the local evaluators - wrote the evaluation report according to the Terms of Reference. The draft report was validated in an online meeting in mid-February 2023. The final version of the report was submitted on 22 February 2023.

1.3 Key findings

General assessment

In hbs South Caucasus, the team is highly committed, open for learning, promoting new ideas and topics (e.g., nexus of ecology, social and economic issues as well as gender). In GOPP, key directions are defined and implemented in project work. hbs has an outstanding reputation as a cooperative, open-minded, flexible partner.

Relevance

Changing political realities

During the evaluation period, there were major political changes (2018 revolution in Armenia, 2020 war in Karabakh, since 2022 Ukraine war). These changing realities did not lead to major programmatic changes in the work of hbs.

Changing gender realities

Changes in gender-democratic political realities centred mainly around the Tbilisi Pride 2021 events, that increased creased controversies about LGBTQ* rights and approaches towards. As in the past, hbs South Caucasus contributed through articles, podcasts and articles to higher sensitivity about LGBTQ* issues, feminist agenda and masculinity discussion. In the light of rising women poverty during the pandemic, hbs Tbilisi started a new programme in the field of domestic care work.

Coherence of the programme design

In GOPP, there are ambitious component goals. While most programme goals are adequately formulated, some could benefit from narrowing down (e.g. A3). Indicators are mostly SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, timebound). While risks are included in GOPP, assumptions could be added.

Target groups and their needs

The target groups are clearly defined. These are mainly: environmental and social movements, feminist and LGBTQ* groups, representatives of non-governmental organisations, youth groups, young politicians, academics and journalists. hbs South Caucasus bases their assessment of the needs of the target groups on a broad range of sources (e.g. own employee's analysis, partners' analysis, feedback from hbs events, publicly available information). Through the interviews, the evaluators learned that the needs of the target groups identified in GOPP 2021-2023 were still valid by end 2022 (such as the need to continue with a balance, fact-based and gender-oriented discussion in memory politics). In addition, the evaluators identified capacity building needs among the partners. Some of them are newly established organisations, requiring continued support in proposal writing, project implementation and financial reporting. Interview partners also reported that already established partners require support – especially in project design.

Coherence

Internal and external cooperation

Internal coordination within hbs runs smoothly and primarily focusses on sharing information, joint implementation of activities, and defining joint policy approaches.

External coordination is challenged by the lack of coordination mechanisms. Wherever relevant coordination formats exist, hbs South Caucasus participates. These are mostly limited to information

sharing about project activities. The evaluators were not reported any coordination mechanism in which hbs participated that contributed to define joint policy approaches or launching joint advocacy campaigns.

hbs South Caucasus already uses ample opportunities to create synergies. Especially in the field of co-funding projects hbs could be more proactive.

Relationship with partners

Partners perceive hbs overwhelmingly as a partner and not as donor.

Quality of implementation and visibility

Control instruments

Control instruments are in place, however, not always sufficiently enforced. The activity documentation is the key document for planning projects, however, not always used in the planning phase. hbs South Caucasus is already aware of this issue and has started to use the activity documentation also for planning in January 2023.

Internal hbs planning and learning meetings for the past year are too late in the year (beginning of the next year) to allow also take decision that might impact on partnerships/projects in the next year.

Effectiveness of hbs management

The management between hbs Berlin and hbs South Caucasus as well hbs South Caucasus is quite effective – with some room for improvement in the communication flow (Berlin to hbs South Caucasus) and in communication about the project design (e.g. how to formulate results at impact and outcome levels) (hbs South Caucasus – partners).

Visibility

hbs Yerevan and Tbilisi have communication strategies for programme components and communication plans for major activities such as the memory politics conference. hbs Tbilisi has communication documents for selected projects on their own which are based on GOPP and the internal communication strategy for all hbs offices.

The strategic priorities of hbs are only extensively mentioned on hbs South Caucasus webpage.

hbs webpages and social media formats are used by partners, primarily as a source of information about hbs topics (environment, gender), hbs events and hbs calls for proposals. There is room for presenting more in-depth and more often hbs projects and more strategically launching discussions to reach out to decision makers even better and the wider public.

Partners are aware of hbs communication policy, and many follow the guidelines.

Reputation of hbs South Caucasus

While hbs Tbilisi has built up a clear reputation in the field of ecology/environment and gender/LGBTQ*, hbs Yerevan's reputation is to be further developed, and the reason for this are the limited time of presence in the country as well as the limited human and financial resources of hbs Yerevan.

Efficiency

Human and financial input

Human and financial resources are concentrated in hbs Tbilisi and on programme component A. The current ratio of internal and partner projects was appropriate.

hbs could implement more projects in Armenia – taking also into consideration the geopolitical situation, requiring a more public discourse about Armenia’s geopolitical orientation. In case hbs decides to give hbs Yerevan a bigger role, this would also have implications for the staffing.

Effectiveness and impact

Achievement of objectives

During GOPP 2018-2020, hbs reported to BMZ to have fully achieved 6 out of 8 indicators and partially 2 out of 8. For GOPP 2021-2023, the evaluators could not assess the level of achievement of the indicators as the activity documentation lacked information on this issue and interviews on the projects did not provide sufficient information.

Positive unintended positive effects centred around stimulating a dialogue about new topics and creating new opportunities for hbs participants (e.g., launching their organisation), while negative unintended effects were wherever possible mitigated by hbs South Caucasus (e.g. through proper communication).

Changes at political and societal levels

Due to a lack of descriptions of project results at different levels in the activity document, there is limited information about the projects' potential impact at political and societal levels. Interviews, however, showed: Wherever hbs South Caucasus worked long-term and target on certain topics, they could achieve changes within the hbs network (e.g. in the frames of the Green Academy and the memory politics activities), in university education and professional training as well as at political and societal levels.

Contributing and hindering factors

The relative high number of hindering factors, out of which most cannot be mitigated by hbs South Caucasus, point to an even more difficult working environment which restrict hbs' and their partners' abilities to contribute to changes at political and society levels.

Sustainability

Most partners would not be able to continue with similar project activities in case hbs South Caucasus would stop funding; many of them have co-funding.

hbs Tbilisi Institution building efforts with Sovlab were partially successful. Key lesson learned is: institution building takes time and should not be combined with too many other ambitious projects.

Implementation of the cross-sectional task of gender democracy

In GOPP, gender is explicitly mentioned only in one programme goal and respective indicators.

The overwhelming majority of projects (2021: 90% of the projects) and of project budget (2021: 81% of project budget) is allocated to G1 gender marker project, having implicit gender objective.

In their projects (and consequently in their activity documentation), hbs could be better in elaborating on gender-sensitivity and gender-transformativeness of the project activities.

Projects with gender marker 2 list women/LGBTQ* persons as specific target groups, formulate gender-sensitive activities and outcomes; indicators are not formulated in a gender-sensitive way. Projects with gender marker 1 do list women also as target groups, however, their key topic and outcome is not primarily focussed on women/queer issues, even though gender/LGBTQ* issues are being in the focus of the project.

There are a number of hbs projects that specifically aim at impacting on gender realities at different levels (at society and political levels, at local community and institutional level, at individual level).

1.4 Key recommendations

Relevance

Reaction to political changes

- For the next GOPP planning, hbs should carefully consider how to best include the shifting geopolitical realities into the agenda and how to appropriately support Georgia's EU perspective. Especially in Georgia, there is a need to further contributing to a fact-based discussion.

Coherence of the programme design

- In the next GOPP, hbs should consider first, which impact hbs South Caucasus wants to achieve. Based on this decision, they then should formulate outcomes and outputs that contribute to the achievement of the impact, hereby decreasing the level of ambition by formulating achievable goals at impact and outcome levels. At the same time, hbs should consider decreasing the component goals to three (e.g. by integrating component B into the other three components), providing gender-sensitive formulation of component goals and minimising the number of projects per programme component (especially within hbs Tbilisi). – **priority recommendation**

Cooperation

Internal and external coherence

- hbs Berlin, Tbilisi and Yerevan should assess in as far the current division of tasks and distribution of human and financial resources between the offices Yerevan and Tbilisi could be improved to allow the Yerevan office more independence – especially by promoting topics that are also seen as key priorities by partners. Visibility and acceptance by partners could be further improved by providing more funding to hbs Yerevan and showing more presence in Armenia, e.g., by engaging in public discussions – especially in the light of the current geopolitical situation – **priority recommendation**
- hbs Tbilisi could consider convening quarterly / bi-annual coordination and information sharing meetings with partners working on similar topics.

Cooperative relationship with partners

- hbs South Caucasus (especially hbs Tbilisi) should seek more pro-actively co-funding for their projects.
- hbs South Caucasus should strive to clarify already when designing the project jointly with the partner the level of engagement the partner is requiring/seeking from hbs during project implementation.

Quality of implementation and visibility

Internal control instruments

- hbs South Caucasus should continue using the Maßnahmendokumentation (activity documentation) as key document in the project design phase, to assess not only the hbs gender categorisation, but also contribution of the project to GOPP objectives. – **priority recommendation**

Effectiveness of management of hbs South Caucasus

- hbs Tbilisi should carefully consider which administrative work could be merged/given into the hand of one administrator, leaving more time to programme managers to work on strategic planning and to advice on content matters.

- hbs South Caucasus and their partners should carefully plan what realistically under the current political circumstances and with the limited financial resources could be achieved; any advocacy campaign sufficient time should be allocated.

Effectiveness of management of hbs Berlin

- hbs should consider analysing their relationship within hbs and with partners in the light of the overall discussion on decolonialisation (relationship director – local staff, hbs Berlin – local staff, hbs Tbilisi – hbs Yerevan, hbs South Caucasus – partners).

Visibility

- The project reporting in the activity documents should continue to present the media coverage of hbs activities/events/projects jointly with key results of this media coverage (e.g. topic for the first time presented in the media, topic taken up by other media outlets/stakeholders).
- hbs South Caucasus could consider drafting communication plans for each country in order to provide more targeted outreach.

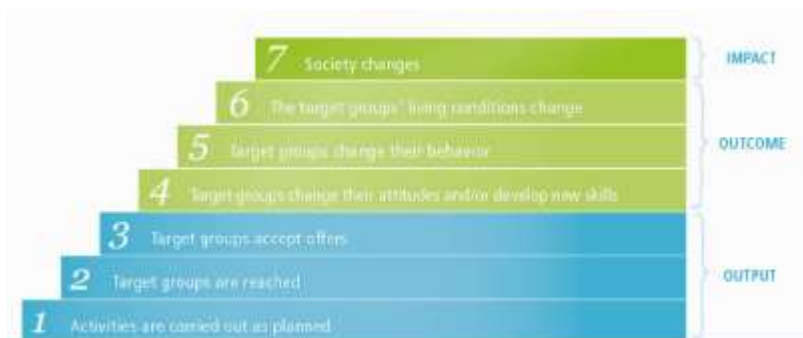
Efficiency

Adequacy of inputs in relation to the results

- Objectives could be reached with different inputs as follows:
 - realistic planning of projects to avoid high level engagement during project implementation (this would include less project activities, less ambitious objectives, clear outcome-/impact- and sustainability-orientation of the projects);
 - clear definition of roles of both hbs and the partners in the project implementation (in as much hbs is providing also content-wise input);
 - extending the duration of projects (e.g. to two years instead of one year) to ensure better and more sustainable results; developing and implementing research projects and carrying advocacy campaigns take time; and
 - hbs establishing partnerships with other donors to fund joint projects, herewith ensure more impact and sustainability.

Effectiveness and impact

- In their activity documentation template, hbs should clearly define the different results level, so they can also clearly identify changes at political and societal levels. The below Phineo impact stairs could serve as a reference for differentiating between the different levels. (see graphic) – **priority recommendation**



Implementation of the cross-sectional task of gender democracy

- In their activity documentation (project design), hbs could more explicitly elaborate on gender issues – **priority recommendation:**
 - providing an analysis about the gender-sensitivity of ways of reaching out to different target groups, e.g. how best to attract them as readers of publications/articles or as participants of events
 - always referring to the level of representation of gender when selecting participants, researchers, recipients of mini-grants and research fellowships (e.g. equal representation)
 - including gender as one criterium when selecting recipients of mini-grants and research fellows (e.g. equal representation)
 - reflecting on gender power relationships e.g. in memory politics projects, and reflecting on genders-sensitivity of the content presented in book projects/translations