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Civil Society Dialogue in Challenging Times

*The set-up of the Platform for Civil
Society Dialogue between Russia,
Belarus and Germany*



COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP STUDIES VOLUME 10



IMPRINT

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Date of Publication: June 2024

Collective Leadership Studies ISSN 2569-1171

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Volume 10 of the Collective Leadership Series focuses on the development of the Civil Society Dialogue Platform¹ between representatives of Russian, Belarusian and German civil society organizations engaged in the social sector, particularly focusing on inclusion and strengthening rights of marginalized social groups such as women, persons with disabilities, senior citizens and furthermore as a contribution to the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

The development of the Civil Society Dialogue Platform and the implementation of the local projects of 25 key representatives from civil society organizations from Belarus and Russia are based on the ©*Dialogic Change Model*, which is a methodology to design, facilitate and evaluate complex multi-stakeholder collaboration processes according to 4 Phases. Phase 1 is based on *Exploring and Engaging*, Phase 2 focuses on *Building and Formalizing*, Phase 3 is looking at *Implementing and Evaluating*, and Phase 4 focuses on *Sustaining and Expanding Impact*. It is a practice-oriented approach to leading change in complex multi-stakeholder settings.

Integrating the ©*Dialogic Change Model* into change processes as a methodology for planning and diagnosis leads to the implementation of more outcome-oriented and constructive co-creation. Once applied by the 25 key representatives during the capacity building interventions, this methodology enables them to assess and strengthen their local engagement strategies,

as well as to co-design and co-facilitate further engagement processes towards more resilient structures that can support social stability, trust and cohesion in the network of CSOs in the social field in Russia, Belarus and Germany. The ©*Dialogic Change Model* strengthens the collaboration skills of individuals and their local teams, helps to address concerns and needs through stakeholder collaboration and to increase collaborative effectiveness and impact Kuenkel, P., et al. (2020).

With increased skills in civil-society dialogue and collaboration between the above-mentioned countries the 25 key representatives will be able to promote the discussion of values which they wish to strengthen in their local communities as well as within the network they are building through the Civil Society Dialogue Platform.

Multi-stakeholder initiatives are an increasingly used approach to drive large systems change in action networks that bridge societal sectors across countries, e.g. in this case with Russia, Belarus, and Germany.

The following overview gives an impression of the content of this study:

Section 1 offers an introduction to the Civil Society Dialogue Platform between Russia, Belarus, and Germany within the political and pandemic context for CSOs in Russia and Belarus in 2020. Furthermore, it briefly describes the target of the Civil Society Platform and how its goals fit into the context of the UN Sustainable Development Goals as

¹ This Project was funded by the German Federal Foreign Ministry and is part of the Eastern Partnership Programme.

well as the partnering stakeholder system, which gives a more detailed overview of CLI's partner organization and initiators of the Civil Society Dialogue Platform.

Section 2 focuses on the application of the collective leadership and dialogic approach in the development of the Civil Society Dialogue Platform. It shows the development of the process design and project implementation with the help of the core partnering methodologies ©Collective Leadership

Compass and ©Dialogic Change Model and how they were contextualized and applied in this case.

Section 3 offers an overview of the results of the project at the local implementation level as well as at the network level and refers to next steps for the continuation of the Civil Society Dialogue Platform.

Section 4 gives a concise summary of the key learnings and insights.

1. The Civil Society Dialogue Platform between Russia, Belarus, and Germany: Background and Foundation

At the end of 2019 and beginning of 2020 most Russian and Belarusian CSOs did not consider partnership as a special competence and saw collaboration with other stakeholders often as "extra" work, additional and time-consuming efforts that are not worth to be invested and developed further.

Most of the CSOs prefer to act and implement their projects on their own, which leads to competitive pressure in regard to finding and receiving adequate funding resources as well as approaching the target groups. This thinking pattern reinforces divisions in the civil society sector in both countries, which in turn leads to opportunity losses in impact of the activities and strategies of the CSOs in Russia and Belarus, so that attraction to support CSOs or work for a CSO is decreasing, "members'" involvement changes from active to more passive forms and from lasting to temporary activities.

Additionally, this development undermines the important possibility to speak together in a shared language and to represent a common civil society voice to the outside and the policy processes.

One can broadly distinguish between two groups of civil societies in Russia and Belarus: Numerous organizations that provide social services, but are not engaged in advocacy. The other group consists of CSOs active in the field of human rights, environmental issues, and advocacy for public interests.

They see themselves as opponents, each doing it wrong, with one perceived too lax and without pressure on policy and thus not to be taken seriously, and the other seen as too harsh and with too much pressure on policy, which draws the negative attention of government to all CSOs without distinguishing who belongs to which group. Thus, both groups find it difficult to take each other seriously or to consider each other as possible collaboration partners (EU-Russia Civil Society Forum e.V. pp.10-18, 2020).

1.1. Development in context of political situation and pandemic circumstances for CSOs in Russia and Belarus in 2020

The government strategy in Belarus and in Russia focuses on regulating civil society, for example through strict laws or placing them under tight government control. The aim is to identify CSOs that are considered as 'useful' and limit those that are perceived as undermining the state (Monitor – Tracking civic space, 2020).

As the governmental circumstances have become more and more restrictive and partly arbitrary in their sanctions and penalties with an increase in constricting measures since 2010, the CSO landscape in Russia and Belarus has become lethargic and sometimes even sees no way out but to stop their work and disband. As a result, the citizens are left alone with the many needs the CSO structures attend to and CSO staff is intimidated.

In this particularly challenging time, CSO groups and volunteers, must find a common foundation of values that appeal to both to survive and ensure their impact. This needs new skills in communication and collaboration for CSO members the public, and the state or formal politics as well as private sector to increase the quality of dialogues on values.

Partnership is needed today for a better understanding of the core of social problems, bringing together organisations with different missions, and providing substantial, effective, and sustainable solutions. This is also recognized in the UN Agenda 2030 with the SDG No 17. Multi-Actor Partnerships can

lead to better, more effective and ultimately transformative effects.

Their success depends on the innovative strength and the quality of the partnerships - i.e. on the quality of the structure, the common goal setting and the common implementation. It often seems difficult or even impossible to bring together people with different perspectives and values.

This is a huge risk for the resilience of CSO structures in both Russia and Belarus, especially as the state tends to isolate civil society within the countries and repression against CSOs is daily routine. Today the Civil society in Russia and Belarus both face a problem of double isolation - pandemic and state repressions. It is problematic to find safe places to discuss the situation and work on possible solutions.

These circumstance cause CSOs to conduct activities separate from each other', which appears as disorganized and distracted to the outside and leads to less attention in the population and CSOs are less taken seriously. This concludes in opportunity losses in bringing value awareness and value conversations into society through lack of experience exchanges, collective reflections, networking, and collaboration (EU-Russia Civil Society Forum e.V. p.20; pp.103-110, 2020).

As the setting described above becomes more and more restrictive, collaboration and mutual support between CSOs becomes even more important.

Increased competencies in dialogue and collaboration can lead to higher quality in promoting discourse on values and the exchange between CSOs, which can strengthen the base for an inclusive society with impact-oriented actions on the local ground and contributing to the focus and implementation of SDGs.

Throughout the project implementation and building the Civil Society Dialogue Platform, the 25 key representatives from Russia and

Belarus were trained to overcome perceived boundaries and divisions between them and other actors in the society so they can see each other as companions with a shared cause and develop strategic partnerships whose purpose will be beneficial for their target groups in the social sector: finding a common language between various actors, review relationships and develop new ones, finding potential synergies and complement each other in activities for a sustainable society.

1.2. The goals of the Civil Society Dialogue Platform and project approach

To address the challenges that CSOs face in Russia and Belarus, the Civil Society Dialogue Platform is focusing on the development of a safe space between representatives of Russian, Belarusian and German civil society organizations engaged in the social sector, particularly focusing on inclusion and strengthening the rights of marginalized social groups.

This dialogue platform's goal is to establish or strengthen a broad network among civil society organizations in the social sector. It aims to promote mutual learning, exchange experiences and promote the discussion of values. This is pursued with the aim of upscaling every organization's activities and impact in the implementation of their mission and activities at the service of marginalized social groups. In addition, this platform has built in an upscaling of competencies in dialogue and cooperation processes through multiplier effects: The directly involved 25 participants will work on their local and regional projects and involve people from local communities. Through this involvement the 25 participants can

distribute their new partnership competencies and practical experience to other, not directly involved organizations in the social sector. This way, the growth of collaboration on partnerships beyond the directly involved project members is built in to allow for local and regional collaborative expansion.

The 25 key representatives learn to use a common language based on collective leadership and dialogic approach between civil society organizations and develop a more resilient position as well as better contribution to policy processes. This will cause an increase in impact of activities of organizations and respectively sensitive awareness on rights and needs of marginalized social groups and level up the discussion of values.

The Dialog platform with the networked civil society organizations contributes to the implementation of several Sustainable Development Goals:

Goal 4 Quality Education

In case of the Civil Society Dialogue Platform the remote approach gave the opportunity to invite representatives from Civil Society Organisations from rural areas in Russia and Belarus and be as inclusive and equitable as possible.. Furthermore, the focus was on creating the possibility for qualitative lifelong learning opportunities for the adult participants, especially women.

Goal 5 Gender Equality

In case of the Civil Society Dialogue Platform the topic of gender equality was not only taken into account when the representatives of the participating CSOs were identified and selected, but also it was present as one of the main topics elaborated in the value discourse through projects, such as “Information campaigns and support for victims of domestic violence” or “School of Education and Development for Women”, through which awareness for gender equality and empowerment of women was increased.

Goal 10 Reduced Inequalities

The topic of reducing inequalities was key to develop a dialogue platform. Its aim was also to create a safe space for value discourse to increase awareness about inequalities within and among Russia and Belarus. The CSO's shared mission is to find tailored ways to reduce these inequalities, and to empower and promote the social inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, ability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status.

Goal 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities

As the urgency for sustainable development in cities and rural areas are becoming more and

more apparent, it is important to foster good examples of sustainable city and conscious community development. In case of the Civil Society Dialogue Platform, the projects of several participants focused on this topic, such as “Support for activities of local community for Sustainability” in Kingisepp, Russia, or the “Club of active people for sustainable development” in the Gomel region, Belarus.

Goal 16 Peace, Justice and strong Institutions

In the political situation in Belarus and Russia, civil society is demanding peace for inclusive societies, and justice for all as well as accountable institutions. The creation of the dialogue platform is one step closer to building capacities for stakeholder engagement. The adequate formulation of needs as well as requirements for a constructive exchange and sharing insights from the value discourse between CSOs helps to get in conversations with public sector in Russia and Belarus.

Goal 17 Partnerships for the Goals

Partnership for the goals is the base for developing a dialogue platform for value discourse in order to bring about transformation in all of the above described SDGs. All involved actors shifted their way of thinking, acting and working together during the period of the project and beyond in their established Civil Society Dialogue Platform as well as in their own local projects with respective teams. The dialogue platform and its projects were envisioned to create space for exchange, learning, and engagement of different actors to explore different ways of collaborating for a strong development of value discourses and increasing the resilience of the CSOs in Russia and Belarus.

1.3. Understanding the Stakeholder System of Partners in Russia and Belarus



The systemic, ongoing and wide-ranging challenges in Belarus and Russia have partly different origins, but in both countries the basis for democratic values is in danger, which has a dramatic impact on civil society. Opposition parties, free media and civil society are persecuted and tolerated only as marginal phenomena.

Three main organisations created the starting point for the Partner System, with the intention that this system will be able to scale up connections, exchanges, network and the value discourse through the involved civil society organizations from Belarus and Russia as well as from Germany.

The Collective Leadership Institute created a partnership with a Russian and Belarusian NGO: The Russian partner is the NGO Development Center (CRNO), founded in 2015. CRNO is an interregional, charitable non-governmental organization and acting as a Resource Center in St. Petersburg. It focuses on capacity building for civil society organisations in foundation, registration and legal support, consultations on accounting, finance and fundraising questions.

The Belarusian partner organisation² is a non-profit organization carrying out cultural, educational, social and information functions. Their aim is to promote the sustainable development of local communities by developing and promoting ideas of education throughout life.

With this constellation of the partner organisations from Russia, Belarus and Germany, the core group was set up and

started to identify and select civil society organisations in Belarus and Russia involved in the social sector, which created the target group 1 (TG1). TG1 consisted of the above mentioned 25 key representatives from civil society organizations in the social sector.

The wider target group (TG2) consists of up to 100 civil society organizations that take part in TG1's network and participate in the platform for civil society dialogue. TG2 participate in the exchange and the promotion of values as well as implementing new knowledge in their own organizations and their project activities.

Through impact-improved activities of these organizations develop in the dialogue platform, the CSO constituents ultimately reached– the disadvantaged citizens who need urgent social support – reached up to 500 people, all of whom experience discrimination based on their gender, age, physical limitations and other factors.

The 25 representatives of TG1 implemented their projects and increased impact on local ground. Furthermore, the involvement of the wider target group of TG2 in the dialogue platform network, the support of the disadvantaged social groups and coverage in local and regional media (including social media) it was possible to increase the awareness of rights and needs of socially marginalized groups. The activities reached up to 3000 members of the public and are contributing to the overall impact of the promotion of value discourses.

² To protect our Belarusian partner, we will use a pseudonym.

2. Applying a Transformative Approach in setting up the Civil Society Dialogue Platform: The Dialogic Change Model and the Collective Leadership Compass

The work of a dialogue platform is based on fruitful, inclusive and most of all structured exchange between all stakeholders interested, involved and affected by the change they want to drive in their communities and across countries. The focus is set on constructive and transparent dialogues instead of debates or negotiations that lead to win-or-lose perspectives.

For these reasons, CLI, CRNO and the Belarus partner organization supported TG1 to set up a dialogue platform based on a dialogic approach with the core methodology of the ©*Dialogic Change Model*.

The *Dialogic Change Model* (DCM) was developed by the Collective Leadership Institute and is a process methodology that allows for the result-oriented planning and implementation of multi-stakeholder collaboration in four phases Kuenkel, P. (2015). CLI's methodology of the DCM is

complemented by the use of the ©Collective Leadership Compass. The Compass acts as a navigating and guidance tool for the Dialogic Change Model (DCM) Kuenkel, P. (2016).

Within the described project one can identify **two levels of the application of the ©*Dialogic Change Model***: the first level is at the partnering organisations level with a focus on developing the process design for setting up the Civil Society Dialogue Platform. The second level focuses on the process implementation with parallel attention on the local projects of the 25 key representatives. An additional observation will be shared on how the Compass gave guidance throughout the implementation phase.

In the following sections describe how these approaches were tailored to the specific context and then provided guidance throughout the complex undertaking.

2.1. The Development of the Civil Society Dialogue Platform Process Design

The main goal of **Phase 1** of the ©Dialogic Change Model, named ***Exploring and Engaging***, is to explore the context in the described project and engage with key stakeholders to create a core group that guides the project process development and the implementation of it.

Within this project to develop a Platform for Civil Society Dialogue, CLI as the lead organisation started to explore potential partners and reached out to the Russian organization CRNO, where contact from previous events was already established. CRNO is connected to the Belarus organisation and thus invited them to

participate in the first exchanges about ideas to strengthen Civil Society in Russia and Belarus. During the first meetings, all three organizations had the chance to come to a common understanding about the project idea as well as the current state and the needs of Russian and Belarus Civil Society in the context of the tense political situations. Through the first exchanges the following insights came up:

- new draft laws are making it increasingly difficult for civil society to work together, especially in international cooperation contexts.
- for civil society organisations, cooperation is seen as too much work, so activities are largely carried out alone. This again increases the perception that
- civil society organisations are competing for attention, target groups, funding and ultimately the *raison d'être*.

These insights helped to adapt the project idea more closely to the circumstances with three draft focus areas, which were further developed during phase 2 of the project.

The main goal of **Phase 2** in the ©Dialogic Change Model, called **Building and Formalizing**, is to develop a process for the envisioned project, clarify roles and responsibilities as well as establishing agreements on the common collaboration.

The three partnering organizations CLI, CRNO and the Belarus partner organisation identified three major goals that they wanted to achieve throughout the project:

- **Knowledge & Capacity Development:** the platform will be built around the partnership methodology the ©*Dialogic Change Model* for individual, systems and process competency development in order to sustainably enhance the knowledge and impact development of the organizations at the local level and between the above mentioned countries.
- **Strengthening Collaboration:** this dialogue platform supports upscaling of competencies in dialogue and cooperation processes through multiplier effects (ToT). By distributing the new learned partnership methodology and practical experience to further organizations in the social sector more people learn how to partner with other organizations for better implementation of local project activities.
- **Network Building:** this dialogue platform contributes to strengthening a broad network of civil society organizations in the social sector who take the opportunity of mutual learning, experience sharing and promoting the discussion of values, and upscaling of every organization's activities and impact in the implementation of measures.

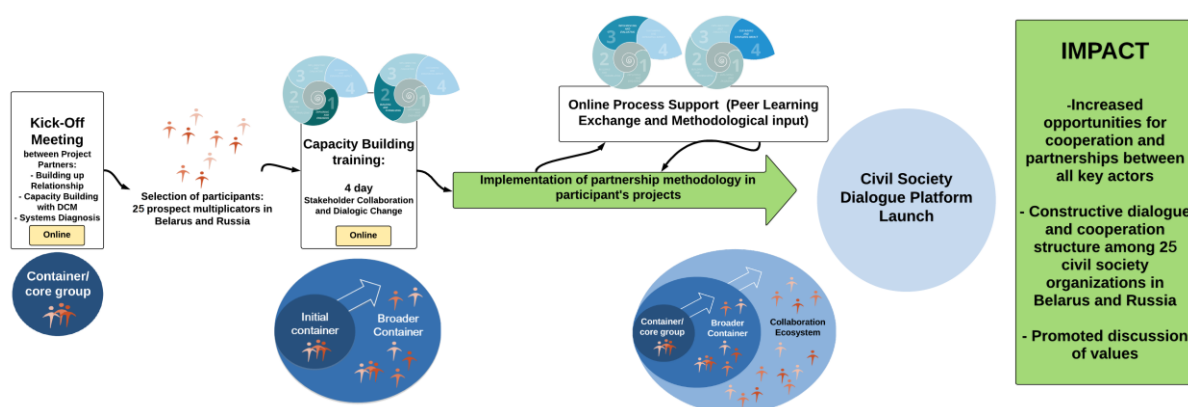


Figure 1: Process Architecture of the Project Civil Society Dialogue Platform

Based on these three major goals and the given time frame from June – December 2020, the partnering organisations designed the project process together with four major measures (see fig. 1).

In a first meeting the representatives of the German (CLI), Russian (CRNO) and Belarusian project partners conducted an analysis of challenges and key actors of Russian, Belarusian and German civil society organizations engaged in social sector. They formulated selection criteria for 25 key representatives of civil society organizations engaged in social sector (e.g. 50% women, CSOs must have a social mission and contribute to the inclusion and equal rights of disadvantaged population groups and preferably be in rural regions or have their sphere of influence there).

Through this first meeting a jointly developed and detailed understanding of the project implementation, of the core methodology and deeper trust in the relationship between the partnering organizations was established. Furthermore, a detailed joint situational diagnosis was conducted to deepen necessary common understanding of the context and dialogue process planning, including confirmation and invitation of TG1.

During the first capacity building intervention based on the methodology of the ©Dialogic Change Model TG1 could orient the to set up and implement the platform between the 25 key representatives of Russian and Belarusian civil society organizations engaged in the social sector. The representatives of the partnering organizations took part in the capacity building intervention and pass on their experience in the field of national and supra-regional partnerships, cooperation and

internal integration processes of experience, knowledge and value discourse. After this first capacity building intervention TG1 can (a) empower practice-oriented constructive dialogue and cooperation structures among organizations for the promotion of value discourses, (b) upscale opportunities for cooperation and partnership between the organization's key representatives involved, and (c) deepen local activities' impact via developed strategic implementation measures.

In the next step the three partnering organizations accompanied TG1 with online support in implementation of their local activities. Particular attention was paid to (1) mentoring to orient TG's1 local activities towards impact and (2) facilitation of peer exchange on common challenges and learning experiences among TG1 so that a consolidated network structure can develop that ensures mutual support and learning among TG1 to keep local activities impact oriented.

After that the Civil Society Dialogue Platform was launched and introduced by representatives of TG1 and the partnering organizations. Representatives of TG1 presented to their peers, colleagues and partners the development of implementation measures of their local activities; they exchanged about lessons learnt and develop proposals for further development of the dialogue platform as a network to heighten the impact of civil society organizations in the social sector in the three countries (e.g. communication agreements and exchange forums).

2.2. The Development of the Civil Society Dialogue Platform Process Implementation

Applying the **Collective Leadership Compass** as a lens to define systemic challenges crystalized the following details:

Wholeness and Future Possibilities:



In Russia and Belarus, Civil society organizations work mostly in isolation and do not see important interdependencies as well as potential for synergies; instead, they perceive each other as competitors and therefore do not see common goals or a collective purpose nor potentials for collective contribution and mutual support in implementing the SDGs through their projects to support a wider range of civil society community.

Collective Intelligence and Engagement:



Based on the above-mentioned reasons most civil society organisations are not interested in exchanging ideas and using the treasure of diverse perspectives, know-how, expertise, and lessons learned as it is perceived as time consuming, ineffective additional work effort that should be reduced. This has a dramatic effect on the networks and connections between relevant stakeholder institutions which further leads to poor engagement of collaborative initiatives and joint stewarding of necessary changes.

Innovation: As exchange and collaboration is not desired by most civil society organizations the introduction of best practices, new ideas, methods, new solutions and iterative learning cycles

are limited to internal organization structures and are not distributed or exchanged with others. Most organizations are doing their own business but do not use the opportunities to explore how other organizations have approached similar issues. This leads to innovative ideas are kept inside small circles and are not open for adjustments towards the improvement of situations.

Humanity:



The above-described issues in the previous Compass dimensions have an immense impact on the human side and the development of collective values. This has a negative impact on the cultivation of respect and trustful relationship, and reconciliation seems to move further away so that opportunities to meet people as people, understanding their interests, concerns, and constraints are fading.

Furthermore, the understanding and the exchange about collective values is becoming more silent, so that the appreciation among stakeholders and the level of awareness regarding the need for change is flattened.

The observation of the systems patterns helps to better understanding where the system stands and where the need for special attention is necessary.

These observations were guiding the project team in the implementation of the project process plans done with the ©Dialogic Change Model. This was done as follows:

In **Phase 1 – Exploring and Engaging** – of the ©Dialogic Change Model, the 25 key representatives of the civil society organisations from Russia and Belarus took part in the capacity building intervention focusing on the topic of Stakeholder Collaboration. During this training, participants had the chance to gain awareness about their **individual competencies for collaboration**. This included increased conscious understanding of own dialogic skills as well as understanding competency patterns in their local **collaboration ecosystems** as an essential element for leading change collectively. While participants (re-) explored contexts of their local projects they developed their **process competences**. Exercises centring on stakeholder mapping and analysis, development of engagement strategies for their key stakeholders as well as own project process development including future events helped the participants to move their projects focusing on inclusion and strengthening rights of marginalized social groups. It also helped to further and better understand needs of their local target groups as well as see interconnections and use cross-country contacts between Russian and Belarusian participants.

In **Phase 2 – Building and Formalizing** – of the ©Dialogic Change Model, the 25 key representatives deepened context understanding and detailed analysis of stakeholders' needs. Participants created their own local projects' core groups and clarified goals, established step-by-step processes and developed agreements with clearly distributed roles within their local collaboration ecosystems.

Bridging from Phase 2 to Phase 3 the 25 key representatives joined process support sessions with external expert inputs focusing on tailored topics with local knowledge like Understanding motivation of partners for collaboration, Building relationships with the authorities as a stakeholder, Businesses as stakeholders, and Project promotion.

In **Phase 3 – Implementing and Evaluating** – of the ©Dialogic Change Model, the 25 key representatives gained knowledge and motivation to move on in the implementation of their projects. The participants' projects centred on the **four thematic focus areas**:

1. **Developing and strengthening local communities;**
2. **Improving conditions and rights for women, children, and families in difficult circumstances;**
3. **Promoting inclusion and connecting generations;**
4. **Strengthening sustainable cities and resilient communities by promoting cultural initiatives.**

Participants developed feedback loops with their target groups and used iterative learning cycles with their cross-country peers as well as with their local core team to adapt their future steps in implementing and monitoring their projects.

In **Phase 4 – Sustaining and Expanding** – of the ©Dialogic Change Model, the celebratory conclusion event took place where the 25 key representatives had the chance to present successes and achieved milestones of their projects. All 25 key representatives and representatives of the partnering organizations participated in the dialogue platform's conclusion event. It was organized in form of a conference divided in an internal day and a public day.

During the internal day, all 25 key representatives presented their project outcomes to each other. The public day was open to external guests and focused on value discourse and the importance of partnership for sustainable development in all three countries. The final conference successfully focused on exchange of experience and discourse plans for consolidation for the establishment of the dialogue platform to heighten the impact of social work organizations in the three countries. After M4, a survey was conducted in which 24 out of 25 key representatives took part. 100% of the 24 key representatives have confirmed that they want to stay in touch with each other beyond the projects end. Additionally, several proposals have been made by the key representatives for sustaining the platform and using it for exchange of experiences and knowledge transfer. Furthermore, the participants defined in which realms they want to use the platform in the future:

- **Organizing peer consultations for mutual support,**
- **Planning mini-seminars and short webinars,**
- **Sending announcements of events,**
- **Exchange of literature, audio and video materials.**

Some of the key representatives took the chance to establish closer bilateral relationships and developed ideas on how they can enrich each other's projects by joining as experts and giving inspiring and interesting speeches at events or presentations at workshops across country borders to showcase and share best practice experience at first hand.

3. The Results of the Civil Society Dialogue Platform

The process of building a dialogue platform for representatives of Russian, Belarussian and German civil society organizations in the social sector particularly focusing on inclusion of vulnerable social groups has reached all its objectives: The platform has successfully created an environment for networking and mutual learning that led to an upscaling effect of every participating organization's activities and impact. This has been achieved by building competencies in dialogue and

cooperation as well as creating and navigating processes which additionally led to a multiplier effect within the key stakeholders' organizations and beyond. In all three countries awareness on rights and needs of vulnerable social groups has heightened through the project's implementation phase and media outreach despite the pandemic situation and the difficult political circumstances.

3.1. The Results at Local Implementation Level

Throughout the projects' implementation period from June until December 2020, the 25 key representatives experienced multiple benefits of collaborating with other civil society organizations within their countries and beyond country borders.

At the **relationship level**, the 25 key representatives were able to strengthen the trust relationship between each other, within their organizations as well as with important stakeholders supporting the local implementation of their projects. The 25 key representatives were able to strengthening and re-freshen their dialogic skills, so that better and more transparent communication structures within their organizations as well as with their stakeholders was possible.

Quote from a participant:

"I am very glad that I was in such great team at this difficult time, it was very important for me personally to get new knowledge, new acquaintances, not to stop the learning process. The knowledge turned out to be useful for the

implementation of my social project, we also applied the suggestions that were made during the work on the project and were able to bring its implementation to a new level with our internal team and our contributing stakeholders."

At the **concrete and tangible results level**, the 25 key representatives explored that through a greater **variety of knowledge** and expertise during decision making processes the **quality of decisions** increased as well as the **credibility of decision**, as various interests were balanced and integrated into the local projects development through the guidance of the ©Dialogic Change Model. This led to more creative and **innovative ideas** as well as **integrative solutions**. Through this direct involvement of important stakeholders the implementation of local activities was ensured as people felt **responsible for the local development** and realized that their contribution matters and their **ownership enhanced**. The 25 key representatives and their local collaboration ecosystems experienced a **higher quality of cross-civil society and cross-**

sector relationships, as they consciously took the chance to meet each other as people and overcome stereotypes or prejudices for common goals and reaching the envisioned local and regional impact. More concretely, the 25 key representatives developed stakeholder analyses and solid engagement strategies for inviting further stakeholders in their collaboration ecosystems; together they elaborated **action plans, distributed roles** accordingly to their agreements for implementation of projects to support local civil society to find responses to their needs.

As more and more stakeholders are involved in the local project implementation processes, the outreach to different stakeholder groups increased and the local system shifted to more awareness in local value discourses.

Table 1.1: Overview of Country Projects

The following table shows **an overview of the local projects** with short descriptions to give a more concrete impression about the 8 Belarus and the 12 Russian projects:

Country Project	Description
Belarus	
Interaction of three generations (Zhirkovich)	The project is aimed at improving the quality of life and the physical and emotional condition of former victims of National Socialism living in Zhirkovich and Zhirkovich district through the organization of leisure activities and accompanied care assistance.
School of Education and Development for Women "Ladystar" (Bobruisk)	The project is aimed at solving problems of the lack of conditions in the city Bobruisk for the intellectual development and creative abilities of women aged 50+ with the opportunity to communicate with like-minded women for learning, realizing their creative potential and improving the quality of life.
Kormyan business meetings (Korma, Gomel region)	The project is aimed at developing international cooperation of the Kormyan district of the Gomel region with various stakeholders, enhancing public participation. Project activities Are a component of the Green Urban Development Plan "Korma 2040 – Impossible is possible".
Roma education: a new perspective on the future (Gomel)	The project is aimed at assisting in solving current problems in the sphere of education and development of Roma society and especially Roma children, their involvement in the process of education on a permanent basis, including parents and other community representatives.
Club Active people for sustainable development (Gomel)	The project is aimed at uniting active citizens, representatives of the public, private sector and civil society to discuss sustainable development issues, conduct educational events, and encourage public activity through participation in the activities of the club.
Online Academy "Youth and Entrepreneurship" (Gomel)	The project is aimed at promoting the development of youth entrepreneurship through training, education of economically literate, prepared for successful activity, proactive, enterprising, confident in themselves and their future young people.
Art as a method of social inclusion (Gomel)	The project's activities contribute to the development of inclusion in the field of arts, education and social protection, increase the competence of professionals and change attitudes towards the participation of people with disabilities in society in the Gomel region.
Cultural Initiative in Rechitsa – creation of the Mural devoted to Efim Kopelyan at the cinema (Rechitsa)	The idea of the project is to involve active women, youth and citizens in the cultural and social life of the city by creating the first art project - a mural at the cinema in honor of the People's Cinema Artist Yefim Kopelyan, a native of Rechitsa and famous actor during soviet times.
Russia	
Information campaign "St. Petersburg against violence" (St. Petersburg)	The campaign "St. Petersburg without Violence" will continue with the global campaign of the same name "16 Days without Violence", which is held annually from November 25 to December 16. The idea of holding the Urban Art Challenge before anyone else in the world is not a coincidence: while violence occurs in the world every day, it is also important to talk about it every day.
Family for children (Yekaterinburg)	The project is aimed at creating endowment capital to provide financial stability for addressing systemic orphanhood issues to solve the problems of social orphanhood.
Creation of jobs for women with children in difficult life situations (Yekaterinburg)	The project aims to construct a farm with a greenhouse complex as a crisis center for women and to create jobs within the farm.
The Elder Generation of the Leningrad Region the	The project creates conditions for creative realization of older people using elements of art therapy and biographical methods. Participants in the events select photo materials from

city of Tosno, 2020 (Tosno):	their personal archives and create thematic photo albums of memories with the help of the organization's staff. Photo albums are a good reason to meet different generations.
We must Live – Development of the Association for Assistance to Victims of Terrorist Attacks and Disasters (St. Petersburg)	The purpose of the Association is to unite caring citizens and organizations to provide material, legal, psychological and social help to victims of terroristic attacks and families who have lost their relatives and friends, to participate in work to improve legislation in this area, to strengthen friendship and harmony between the peoples.
Support for local community activists (Kingisepp, Leningrad region)	This is the first program to support local community initiatives in the Kingisepp region. Public and non-profit organizations, municipal institutions of Kingisepp district, such as libraries, museums, houses of culture, initiative groups of citizens, as well as non-profit organizations from St. Petersburg and the Leningrad region take part in the project. Thematic focus of the project is environmental protection, preservation of culture and traditions, improvement of public spaces.
Inclusive labor workshops as a platform for communication, training and work of people with disabilities (Krasnodar)	The project is working on are inclusive labor workshops. The organization builds relationships with partners from business, government and NGO sector to replicate the best practices in the Krasnodar region.
Time of Opportunity (St. Petersburg)	The project aims at sharing experience among organizations working with elderly people in St. Petersburg. Ageing of the population is a global problem that needs to be addressed at the local level.
Otdushina – The center of social adaptation for homeless people (Gatchina)	The Project aim is to open a kind of space in Gatchina - "a respite territory", where a person who finds himself in a crisis can rest, wash, wash and dry his clothes, get advice on how to solve life problems. This requires cooperation with many stakeholders, including the city administration.
Local development support: the role of resource centers on the example of GRANI Center (Perm)	GRANI Resource Center works with organizations and resource centers that help vulnerable groups. It played a particularly important role in the pandemic to help vulnerable groups. It is important to understand regional specifics, identify them and discuss how to find ways to provide better and more effective assistance. Another issue is the fight against poverty: GRANI works closely with the local Ministry of Social Development.
New Year in the Neighborhood: The Power of Community (Vladimir Region)	The project unites local residents with the idea of organizing a holiday in their village, while at the same time it unites and strengthens ties. Gifts for children from small towns and villages are purchased at the expense of benefactors.
Information campaign to support HIV+ women (Samara)	The project aims to educate and support people living with HIV in need of help and support, and to have a long and quality life.

At the **process level**, the 25 key representatives were able to develop process competences and practice these in establishing engagement strategies with important stakeholder as well as their own project process strategies for more than 6 months in the future as well as visualize these for better exchange with important stakeholders and their local project teams.

Through regular review and milestones evaluation with local project teams, the process competences were enhanced at local level so that actors of the local project teams can contribute to the further development of the process architectures and adapt them to changing circumstances and communicate transparently to their broader containers.

3.2. The Results at Network Level

While the above section is looking at the results of the local projects' implementation level, this section is focusing on the results at the level of the established network.

At the **relationship level**, the 25 key representatives, their local organizations and further additional organisations established connection points between regions and across countries and use the chance to meet each other for exchanging for the benefit of mutual learning which is contributing to a multiplier effect so that knowledge dissemination for civil society in the social sector is happening across regions and country borders (see figure 2).

At the **concrete and tangible results level**, the network reached a boost in awareness about needs and rights of vulnerable social groups that was not envisioned beforehand at that rise. In the beginning of the project, **it was planned to reach up to 500 disadvantaged people** through impact-improved activities of the organizations, however through the enormous engagement of the local collaboration ecosystems of the 25 key representatives **it was possible to reach**

4.525 beneficiaries directly and 48.390 indirectly through the organizations' impact-improved project activities (see figure 3). These numbers were drawn from the participants' evaluations of their target groups and the scope of their projects reach.

Furthermore, **it was planned to increase the awareness** about rights and needs of socially vulnerable groups for **up to 3.000 members of the public**, however through media reports about the project (using social media channels such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and websites) by CLI, the partners' and the participants' organizations **a total of 42.373 members of the public were reached**. This has contributed considerably to raising awareness of rights and needs of socially vulnerable groups in their local societies and to engage with them in conversations about value discourses in all three countries.

At the **process level**, the 25 key representatives developed several proposals for sustaining the network platform and using it for exchange of experience and knowledge transfer.

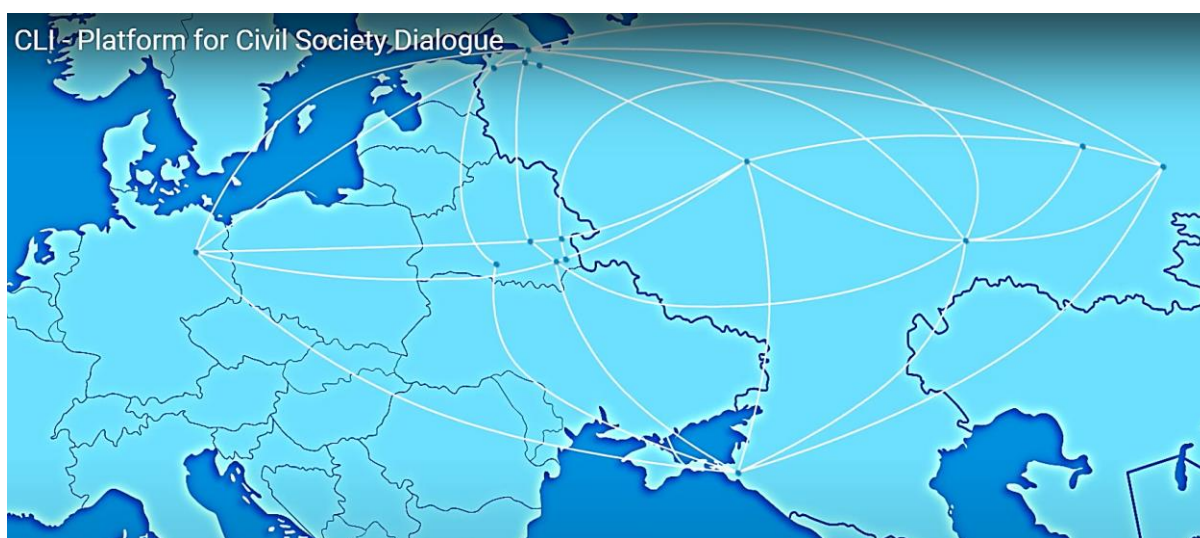


Figure 2: The Network of the Civil Society Dialogue Platform

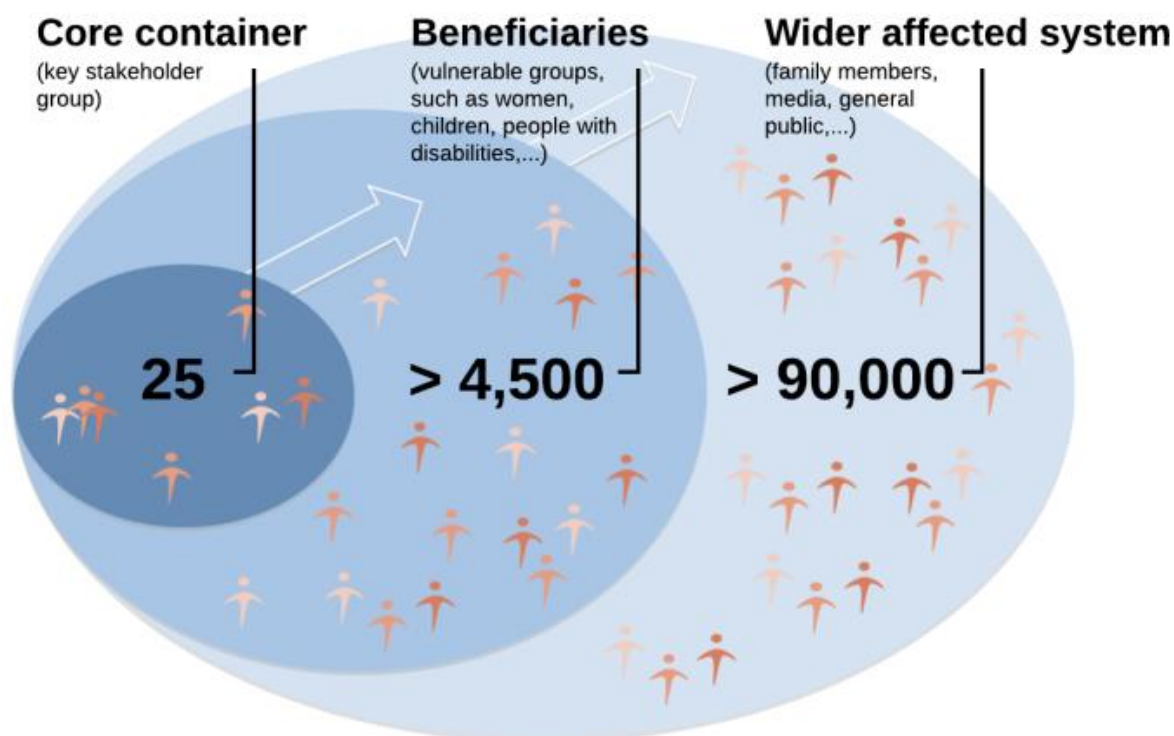


Figure 3: The Scale of Change

Furthermore, the key representatives defined in which realms they want to use the platform in the future:

- Organizing peer consultations
- Planning mini-seminars and short webinars
- Sending announcements of events
- Exchange of literature, audio and video materials.

Applying the **Collective Leadership Compass** at the level of network establishment crystalized the following positive developments:

Wholeness and Future Possibilities:



The 25 key stakeholders and their local organisations see and understand common challenges in the civil society development in Russia and Belarus and realize their personal and institutional contribution of change to a larger goal as well as the benefits of

complementary cooperation with other initiatives.

Collective Intelligence and Engagement:



While in the beginning of the project most civil society organisations were not interested in exchanging with each other, at the end of the project, the 25 key representatives and their local organisations use their skills consciously to structure dialogue for enabling knowledge exchange and understanding different perspectives by involving more and more stakeholders into the established network platform in favour of the envisioned future to strengthen civil society and the needed value discourse. This is positively influencing the multiplier effect by sharing and disseminating knowledge about the methodologies of the ©*Dialogic Change Model* as well as the different tools to conduct stakeholder analysis, develop engagement strategies, process architectures for the local projects and using the evaluation tools for reflection and adaptation of the future steps.

Innovation: As the observation in the beginning showed that exchange and collaboration was not desired by most civil society organizations the approach of establishing a network platform for Civil Society Dialogue for mutual learning exchange and mutual support is an innovative approach by itself, which helped to increase creativity in the development of processes, outreach and stronger focus in complementary impact of the local project activities but also across countries and steward the change initiatives towards the common purpose of strengthening value discourse.



Humanity: Most importantly, the 25 key representatives, their local organisations, and further civil society organisations within the network platform took the chance



to cultivate relationship within the countries as well as across country borders and acknowledging that similar issues exist, which can be overcome easier through a better understanding of different and even opposing perspectives. Mutual respect and deep conversations helped to create meaningful value and re-explore the importance of the organizations' work as well as the interdependencies and how they can help to better understand all facets of influencing circumstances, whether pandemic, political or other challenging conditions. Members of the network platform take the opportunity for joint reflection and enhanced empathy for each other through conscious listening and mutual understanding of collective values which is positively influencing the promotion of value discourse and the rights and needs of vulnerable social groups across countries.

4. Insights and Summary of the Development of the Civil Society Dialogue Platform

Through the jointly developed process architecture the envisioned goals could be reached with an impact on

- Increased opportunities for cooperation and partnership between all involved key stakeholders,
- Constructive dialogue and cooperation structure among 25 key representatives of civil society organisations in Belarus and Russia, and
- Promotion of value discourse.

Clear roles were divided, specifically: the Russian and Belarusian partner organizations took responsibilities regarding Russian and Belarusian participants identification, selection and coordination of information flow as well as coordination of gatherings between the participants at local level. The German partner organisation was responsible for carrying out the overall process and the content development for the capacity building interventions based on the ©Dialogic Change Model.

The main goal of **Phase 3** in the ©Dialogic Change Model, called **Implementing and Evaluating**, is to conduct the planned measures throughout the process, create learning mechanisms and evaluate the development of project in each major step.

Implementation of all measures was done collaboratively. In addition, a communication and learning structure was set up, with structured input and feedback rounds with the key representatives throughout the process.

The main goal of **Phase 4** in the ©Dialogic Change Model, called **Sustaining and**

Expanding Impact, is about consolidating the outcomes of a project into sustainable structures. This can mean taking the development of the platform to the next level, replicating it in another geographical area, integrating new topics or issues, or further institutionalizing the dialogue platform on a more formal level.

After successfully implementing the project with all planned measures, the three organizations handed over the platform coordination to the participants to use it for further exchange and mutual support. Furthermore, throughout the implementation phase (Phase 3) the idea was developed to deepen knowledge in systems transformation and collective leadership as well as to scale up the network with more organisations to develop a Transformative Dialogue platform for Civil Society Organisations with organizations from (Eastern) Europe, Belarus, and Russia.

After exploring the application of the ©Dialogic Change Model at the first level between the partnering organisations with a focus on developing the process design for the Civil Society Dialogue Platform in the next section the focus will be on the second level concentrating on the process implementation with additional observations based on the application of the ©Collective Leadership Compass.

The platform has successfully created an environment for networking and mutual learning that led to an upscaling effect of every organization's activity and impact. This has been achieved by building competencies in dialogue and cooperation as well as process competencies through the intensive

engagement and practicing the application of the ©Dialogic Change Model with its four phases based on the observations of the ©Collective Leadership Compass:

The development of dialogic and collaboration competencies and the skills to apply the ©Dialogic Change Model methodology as well as different tools within each phase led to a multiplier effect within the organizations of the 25 key representatives and the partnering organisations and beyond. The project surpassed its objectives regarding the impact on disadvantaged groups and the public awareness raising in both countries Russia and Belarus with up to 90.000 people who were following the development.

Through lenses of the ©**Collective Leadership Compass** and its' six dimensions – *Future Possibilities, Engagement, Innovation, Humanity, Collective Intelligence, and Wholeness* – it is possible to observe positive development of the overall situation in the civil society sectors in Belarus, Russia, and Germany working in the social field. The

Compass was particularly helpful in identifying complementary competences and understanding where specific focus is needed at the overall platform as well as in each of the participant's projects. With this awareness the organizations can conduct peer consultations with the help of seminars as well as exchanging materials and literature. The Dialogic Change Model provided crucial guidance in developing and strengthening local communities with the help of developed feedback loops and iterative learning cycles with cross-country peers as well as with local core teams to monitor and adapt projects. In all three countries awareness of the rights and needs of vulnerable social groups has heightened through the project's media outreach.

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6. Annex

Here you can find a detailed overview of both main partnership methodologies, the Dialogic Change Model and the Collective Leadership Compass.

6.1. The Dialogic Change Model

The ©Dialogic Change Model is CLI's process methodology for result-oriented, structured planning of dialogue and transformation processes involving several stakeholder groups. It differentiates the process in four Phases:

Phase 1: Exploring and Engaging

Phase 2: Building and Formalizing

Phase 3: Implementing and Evaluating

Phase 4: Sustaining and Expanding Impact.

the dialogue, and the dynamics of the complex system within which the Stakeholder Dialogue will take place. Talking informally to selected but relevant stakeholders and opinion leaders in this Phase can help to clarify the prospects and potential obstacles for the initiative. Central to Phase 1 is building trust, creating resonance, and building the case for dialogue and change. The quality of an engagement process is the key element in Phase 1. Good relationship management and a broader

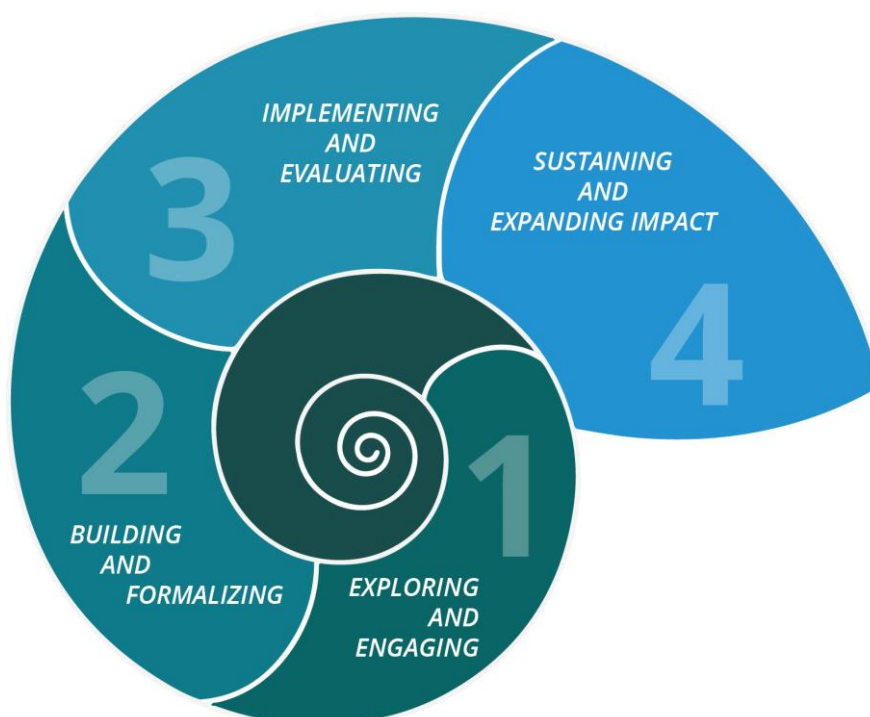


Figure 4: The Dialogic Change Model

In **Phase 1, Exploring and Engaging**, core stakeholders explore the dialogue's context, thereby taking other existing initiatives and the people involved into account. This requires understanding the external circumstances, the factors that will influence

understanding of the context are crucial. Formal structures for the Stakeholder Dialogue, agreements or defined procedures are not a priority at this point.

Phase 2, Building and Formalizing, is geared toward consolidating the system of

stakeholder collaboration and formalizing the stakeholders' commitment to change. The objective of this Phase is to find an appropriate formal structure to move an initiative forward and to build a stable collaborative system for implementation. Goals are agreed upon jointly, and roles and resources are defined. This usually leads to agreements – the signing of a contract, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), a project plan, or a public address in the interest of the change endeavour. The initiative shifts to a formalized process. In more complex dialogue processes, there may also be issues of division of tasks, decision-making, resource allocation, or internal and external communication strategies.

Phase 3, Implementing and Evaluating, can be seen as the actual implementation of planned activities and includes the establishment of an internal monitoring system to ensure results and learning. Its focus is on creating visible results in a reasonable time frame so that all actors involved can see the success of the dialogue. If a dialogue process never moves past the stage of discussion and exchange of ideas, it may be a sign that the stakeholders can discuss the issue but are not willing enough to implement actual change. However, for such dialogues to deliver, it is crucial that stakeholders perceive visible change during the dialogue process; otherwise, they might lose interest in the dialogue and in implementing change. Result orientation is a key factor for success. The complexity of a

process often becomes evident during this phase, sometimes in the form of a crisis. Crisis symptoms may include criticism from external parties, counter initiatives, or endless non-productive discussions. The more stable and trusting the relationships that have been created in Phase 1 and 2, the better such phases of instability can be overcome.

Once a dialogue process has reached the agreed-upon results at the beginning of **Phase 4**, the question remains whether an initiative should stop there, or whether it should be further developed. If the desired goal has been achieved, success should be adequately celebrated: participation and contributions of individual stakeholder groups should be acknowledged and appreciated. Many dialogues terminate successfully after Phase 3. Some dialogue processes may want to consolidate their outcomes into sustainable structures. This may mean scaling the endeavour up, replicating it at another location, integrating a new issue, or further institutionalising the dialogue on a more formal level. The goals of Phase 4 differ from dialogue to dialogue; for example, they can be institutionalising a successful dialogue form or using the experience gathered in the dialogue in another process. If conducted correctly, a dialogue process can ultimately ease the implementation processes and help attain sustainable results, as actors will begin to shift their perspective on the issue at hand (Kuenkel et. al. 2020).

6.2. The Collective Leadership Compass

The Collective Leadership Compass is a tool for supporting individuals, teams, and organizations to strengthen leadership dimensions and build vibrant and robust “collaboration ecosystems” in change processes. The Compass is designed to assist process competence throughout any initiative. It can be used both as a diagnostic tool and a process methodology. The Compass focuses on invigorating human interaction systems as core drivers of

FUTURE POSSIBILITIES: Take responsibility and consciously shape reality towards a sustainable future. This gives priority attention to goal clarity, governance and accountability of the process.

HUMANITY: Reach into each other’s humanness. Attention here is on an appreciative approach to all stakeholders, to a balance of power and influence, and on mutual understanding.

ENGAGEMENT: Create step-by step engagement towards building effective collaboration ecosystems. Focus points are process and relationship management and result orientation.

COLLECTIVE INTELLIGENCE: Harvest differences for progress – this relates to attention to diversity, inclusivity and learning mechanisms.

INNOVATION: Create novelty and find intelligent solutions by being open to new approaches, ensuring sufficient knowledge and expertise on the issue at hand and managing disagreements and crises with agility.

WHOLENESS: See a larger picture and stay connected to the common good. Context management, capacity development and shared value creation are the areas of attention in this dimension.

The Compass’ focus on simultaneous intervention points matches the interconnectivity of the SDGs and significantly improves the possibilities for successful achievement of the goals (Kuenkel et. al. 2020).



Figure 5: The Collective Leadership Compass

transition processes to assess, plan, and enact the collaborative change required for sustainability. It helps navigate complex challenges by introducing a meta-level guiding structure, which becomes a fractal of the competence and collaboration pattern that needs to emerge for the transition envisaged.

The six dimensions of the Compass that need to be attended to are:

6.3. About the Author

Alina Grün is senior project manager at the Collective Leadership Institute (CLI) with a focus on the development of academic education programs and project management in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

With her extensive facilitation experience she supported multi-stakeholder collaborations globally with the focus on Citizens and Civil Society engagement for good governance in Ukraine, Russia, Belarus but also in Laos, India, Mexico, South Africa and Germany.

With her educational background in the areas of sustainable urban and regional management as well as intercultural management, she has international experience in the areas of sustainable and long-term oriented development of cooperation and increasing the potentials through dialogue and cooperation for Sustainable Development.

6.4. About the Collective Leadership Institute

[The Collective Leadership Institute gGmbH](#) is an internationally operating non-profit organization located in Potsdam (Germany) and Cape Town (South Africa) with focus on educational programs around Collective Leadership and Stakeholder Dialogues.

We offer capacity building for sustainable approaches in stakeholder dialogues, provide process consultancy, research, and build networks and communities. In Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America, we work with leaders, project managers, and change agents from the private, public and civil society sector. We support and empower them to create and implement collaborative change initiatives for innovative and

sustainable solutions to global, societal and local challenges.

We specialise in large-scale change processes around sustainability with a focus on transformation through high-quality stakeholder engagement and with Collective Leadership as our core methodology.

The Collective Leadership Institute is a cutting-edge organization with deep expertise in bringing emerging paradigm leadership concepts to multi-stakeholder processes and projects to support achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. This work is vitally important to the long-term flourishing of the human family, as well as serving the preservation of life and its beauty on planet earth.

6.5. Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the Collective Leadership Institute for the opportunity and encouragement to reflect on the project so that I can now share it with interested readers in the form of this study issue.

In addition, I would like to express my special thanks to my colleague Elisabeth Kühn, who has always motivated me to write this study and helped me to structure my thoughts.

My colleagues Theresa Kuschka, Martin Fielko and Ursula Plötz have been and continue to be the best team one could wish for in the successful implementation of such a complex and multi-layered project.

Additionally to that, of course, there are our partners from the Russian and Belarusian organisations, without whom we would not have found the great and committed participants and consequently would not have been able to carry out such a great and successful project. Furthermore, only through our common extensive and continuing exchanges it was possible to adapt the partnering methodologies, tools,

and procedures to the country needs and the cultural settings.

The participants have shown a lot of strength and determination and, with the methodology they have learned, have contributed to making the network and parts of the civil societies in Russia and Belarus more resilient.

Finally, I would like to thank the German Federal Foreign Office for their trust in our core team, consisting of the Russian and Belarusian organisation and the CLI, to implement our project idea in reality and to support us financially.



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Collective Leadership Studies ISSN 2569-1171