



ENGAGE

Enhance Non-Governmental Actors
and Grassroots Engagement



Future Search Envisioning a European Ukraine in the years to come

Executive Summary

Pact conducted a two-day Future Search workshop centered around a Past-Present-Future discussion with civil society experts. Participants looked back to the economic, social and political factors which led to social uprising in 2013; they identified key trends influencing citizen engagement in Ukraine today; and they envisioned the future and formulated strategic intervention directions. A widely expressed view was that civic engagement has improved since the departure of former President Viktor Yanukovich and his government. First and foremost, citizens began to unite and substitute deficient state institutions, for example, by providing support to the Armed Forces. At the same time, CSOs have not been able to effectively address new challenges and have had very limited connection with their constituencies.

Participants stated that the level of trust in government remains low and is likely to decrease in the coming year. This assessment is supported by different nationally-conducted polls. Diminished trust is primarily the result of the population's lack of understanding of ongoing reforms and their weak political inclusion into decision-making processes. This frustration finds fertile ground in lower living standards, which have declined since EuroMaidan.

Herein lies the root of existing mistrust. Reforming Ukraine requires a profound transformation which may take a long time, and a painful burden will fall on the shoulders of citizens, as has already happened, for example, with gas supply reform and tariff increases. With poor vertical communication, the lack of civic education and the existing gap between civil society organizations (CSOs) and their constituencies significantly increases the probability of renewed civil uprising. New political elites, no matter how determined to carry out reforms, could not resist political populism (for example, by raising the minimum wage to 3200 UAH¹) or political promotion of reforms instead of real implementation (as seen in the anti-corruption sphere).

The only way to avoid further degradation of the political and economic spheres resulting from corruption and populism is to ensure the inclusion of citizens in decision-making processes, give them opportunities to understand the essence of reforms (through education), and to establish effective oversight mechanisms through CSOs. Future Search participants provided specific recommendations to achieve these goals.

¹ \$118 <http://www.xe.com> Retrieved 12 February 2017

Event Overview

On October 27-28, 2016, Pact brought together 60 prominent Ukrainian civil society experts to participate in a Future Search workshop. This was the first public event of the USAID-funded ENGAGE activity and was an opportunity for civil society leaders to share their vision on citizen engagement for the next five years. The objectives of the meeting were:

- To analyze the development of citizen activism in Ukraine over the past five years, to identify the most important challenges faced by Ukrainian civil society organizations in engaging with citizens, and to identify key trends that affect or may affect the development of citizen engagement in the future.
- To create an aspirational vision for citizen engagement in Ukraine's European reform path and outline development scenarios for the period of 2017-2021.

The agenda covered:

- A reflection on citizen engagement in Ukraine (2011-2016);
- Key trends influencing citizen engagement in Ukraine today;
- Envisioning the future of citizen engagement on national, regional and local levels and the formulation of strategic directions for intervention.

On the first day, participants analyzed important events that occurred in the sphere of citizen engagement on national, regional and local levels as well as global events that affected the state of citizen activism in Ukraine. Participants were divided into five working groups.

The first activity was to identify trends that affect or may affect the development of grassroots engagement in Ukraine. Participants created a Mind-Map graphic representation of trends and events that influenced civil society actions. They then analyzed how these trends affect stakeholders and constituencies, as well as the measures they took to support positive trends or prevent negative ones.

On the second day, participants visualized the future of citizen engagement in Ukraine over the next five years. Each working group developed and presented a list of realistic and desirable results that they would like to see. In the final stage, participants identified the main strategic directions for enhancing citizen engagement in Ukraine.

Future Search participants reported that the event helped them to build new connections. Through group work, new ideas and designs were generated, and participants laid the foundation for future partnerships.

Key Findings

1. Many participants valued their participation in the event and the opportunity to be involved in key Ukrainian reform efforts. Participants intend to continue communication, including through the establishment of a social network, and plan to work collaboratively to achieve their goals.
2. Most participants were highly motivated and considered both theoretical and practical aspects of their ideas. Dialogue and consensus-building facilitated the development of common positions and elaboration of productive ideas.

3. All participants were experts in citizen engagement and civil society development, which contributed to a highly professional discussion. However, most participants represented national-level civil society organizations, thus the analysis and discussion focused mostly on the national agenda. Citizen engagement at the local level was not sufficiently covered and should be revisited in future workshops.

Developing a timeline of civic engagement in Ukraine

From 2011 to 2014, the potential for civil unrest was brewing within Ukrainian society. This sentiment initially presented itself as opposition to the policies of President Yanukovich and his government. Failure to sign a long-anticipated Trade Association Agreement with the European Union, coupled with the radical shift from pro-European development to Russian-aligned policies, provoked mass protests in November 2013. Three months of non-stop citizen demonstrations and intense political opposition culminated in the ousting of Yanukovich, which in turn triggered the paralysis of state institutions at all levels. Russia's military aggression against Ukraine only further aggravated the disarray.

In the face of governmental inability, citizens began to unite and take on the roles and responsibilities of state institutions, such as supporting the Armed Forces, revitalizing governance at different levels, and designing the agenda of pro-European reforms for Ukraine. Citizens were actively involved in shaping the reform agenda, fighting corruption, implementing public control over government, and reforming government itself through civic platforms, coalitions, and initiative groups. Many civil society actors leveraged their experience in activism and became public servants to ensure democratic governance.

The period from 2014 to 2016 showed that mature CSOs have not been able to effectively address new challenges and they lack meaningful connections to their constituencies. Instead, spontaneous grass-root groups were more flexible, focused on citizens' needs, and effectively communicated with their constituencies.

The role of grass-roots groups and newly-created organizations has significantly increased since the decentralization reform started in 2015. The decentralization reform process delegated some authorities and resources from the national and regional to local levels. Civil society groups have an increased role in strategizing their community's development, the decision-making process, resource distribution, and combating corruption.

Present

During the session "Focus: PRESENT," participants identified key trends affecting citizen engagement in Ukraine today, taking into account the broader context (social, economic, political, religious, financial, environmental, technological, etc.). A mind map of key trends affecting citizen engagement was created.

Participants identified several trends affecting citizen engagement in Ukraine.

Main trends for civic engagement in Ukraine, as identified by Future Search participants (2016)



Despite many existing opportunities for active citizen participation in reforming Ukraine in accordance with European standards, there are many challenges to citizen inclusion in the reform process. These include a lack of available information, inadequate means of communication, political populism, a lack of civic education, and the gap between CSOs and their constituencies.

Citizens without any CSO affiliation were able to quickly organize and initiate changes in their own communities. However, they need to be supported in their transition to the new quality and to ensure sustainability.

Positive examples of citizen self-organization are already in place but they are not documented or replicated, and there is a need for maximum dissemination of best practices. New information technologies and e-learning can be used for sharing best practices across Ukrainian communities. The history of failures and lessons learned should also be shared widely.

Future

The session "Focus: FUTURE" focused on creating an aspirational vision for citizen engagement in Ukraine's European reform path and outlining development scenarios for the period of 2017-2021.

Aspirations of civic engagement for the Year 2021:

1. *Favorable conditions for civic engagement, including in the legal environment, created.*
 - The process of state registration for small initiative groups simplified.

- Civic education in schools and universities introduced; civic education extra-curricular courses effectively implemented by CSOs.
 - Civic activism is socially uplifting.
2. *Efficient procedures for public participation in policy-making and implementation on state, regional and local levels ensured.*
 - Legislation on citizen participation in the policy-making process amended, approved and implemented.
 - Citizens understand and successfully implement various tools of participatory democracy (public hearings, local initiatives, local referenda, public meetings, etc.) in their own communities.
 - Policy-making processes are based on consultations with all stakeholders.
 - Public monitoring of local/regional budgets and implementation of local/regional policies introduced.
 3. *Civil society participation in the socio-economic development of Ukraine encouraged.*
 - Community-based organizations and CSOs have equal access to the local/regional/state budgets and can provide high quality services with support from the local/regional/state budget.
 - Social entrepreneurship is widely promoted.
 - The mandatory involvement of CSOs in the assessment of citizens' needs related to social, administrative and other services introduced.
 4. *Financial sustainability of civic engagement ensured.*
 - Civic engagement supported from local/regional/state budgets and private funds.
 - Financial support for institutional development of CSOs provided.
 5. *Networking of civil society groups enhanced.*
 - Functional and effective cross-regional networks to share experience in civic engagement built.
 - Existing national CSO networks to support reforms are improved, represented in all regions and become influential on the regional level.

Conclusions

The Future Search workshop confirmed the results of earlier research, polls, and Pact's assumptions about the main challenges for civic engagement in Ukraine and further actions to improve the situation.

During the workshop, Pact's civil society partners identified several main challenges and suggested solutions to overcome them.

The level of trust in government at both national and local levels is catastrophically low and there is clear citizen demand for change in public governance and the service delivery system. There is momentum to improve both public governance and the service delivery system through citizen engagement and grassroots activism using

decentralization reform and amalgamated communities. This will help to overcome the polarization of society and bring services closer to citizens.

The transformation from a post-Soviet nation to a European one requires a responsible citizenry. Civic education should be introduced and should become the cornerstone for ensuring the sustainability of positive changes in the country.

The role of CSOs in citizen engagement for shaping the country's transformation is crucial, even though there is a gap between CSOs and their constituency. CSOs should actively communicate and build sustainable relations with their constituencies, join forces with each other through the creation of networks, and practice effective communication. Particular attention should be paid to the development of regional and local CSOs, as well as new local community initiatives. CSOs have become an effective tool for citizen engagement and their power should be effectively harnessed for positive change.

Pact considers the Future Search workshop as a starting point for further dialogue and the involvement of partners from civil society into ENGAGE's implementation. Future Search reinforced the work plan and strategy developed by the ENGAGE team.