*Выступление*

*Председателя Правления НАО «Центр поддержки гражданских инициатив»*

*Лимы Диас на мероприятии*

*17 сентября 2021 года*

Dear colleagues! Thank you for inviting me to participate in this event. I am very honored to be here today and tell you about the work that we do at the Civil initiatives support center.

As some of you may already know, Civil initiatives support center is a national operator in the field of grant financing with the Ministry of Information and Social Development as its sole shareholder. Our mission of developing civil society in Kazakhstan sounds pretty straightforward, but you cannot underestimate its significance for the society and the country as a whole. And it guides our work towards achieving the following 3 goals:

First and foremost, it is to improve the mechanism of interaction between the state and NGOs in Kazakhstan by providing state and non-state grants to NGOs and exercising control over their implementation.

Secondly, we perceive ourselves as the bridge between government, civil society and donor organizations because we strongly believe that only through consolidating efforts and resources, we can achieve meaningful changes and meet the society’s needs.

Lastly, there is no doubt that it is impossible to develop the capacity of NGOs and civil activists without non-financial support. And that’s why, especially during pandemic, we have strengthened the work of providing methodological, analytical, organizational, PR and consulting support.

Moving on. The range of social areas that NGOs operate in is very wide, and that why our provision of grants covers the most demanding areas in accordance with societal needs. You can familiarize yourself with all 15 areas from the screen. It includes topics like environment, education, healthcare, and protection of rights and promotion of national unity.

So how exactly our Center supports civil society? We pride ourselves in providing comprehensive multidimensional support to a wide range of initiatives via several instruments that we have on our hands. I will stop on each of the instruments and tell you about them in details. But first, let me give you a brief overview.

Since its establishment in 2016, Civil initiatives support center have provided almost 400 state grants totaling about 7 bln. tenge. Under this tool of state grants we support strategic and mostly national long-term projects between 1 and 3 years of implementation period. It should be noted that these are the grants that were funded by the Ministry of Information and Social Development. However, we are planning to engage local government bodies in provision of grants via the Center starting from next year.

In addition, since last year we have introduced a small grants program aiming at local and mid-term initiatives of up to 9 months that we administer in cooperation with existing large NGOs. The results of this program have exceeded our expectations, we received a lot of positive feedback mostly from local voluntary organizations and civil initiative groups.

As we’ve looked at financial support instrument that our center provides, let me turn to non-financial support that we at the Center find as much needed and necessary for civil society development.

Based on the success of the small grants program and the number of requests and submissions we received from small often inexperienced but passionate organizations and individuals, we are planning to introduce unified crowdsourcing and crowdfunding platform for individual and urgent initiatives lasting between 1 and 3 months.

Additional instruments include engaging donors to fund NGOs initiatives as part of our strategy to diversify the funding streams for civil society organizations, and implementation of the Academy of NGOs that aims at capacity-building. And we are currently implementing several projects in cooperation with local and international donor organizations.

And now I’d like to expand on our grant-giving activity in 2021. So far, we had 4 open calls and received 438 applications from 264 different organizations. Impartial and accountable competition committee determined 42 organizations that received grants. As a result, we are currently implementing 51 grant projects for the total amount of 1.5 bln. tenge funded by the Ministry of Information and Social Developed. The projects are being implemented in 17 regions of Kazakhstan and directly impact 2.6 mln. people.

In terms of small grants program that I mentioned earlier, the total budget of 8 small grants programs is 185 mln. tenge. Within these programs 294 small grants projects are being implemented in 17 regions of the country. On the screen you can see the goals of all 8 programs.

But let me move away from dry facts and numbers, and have a closer look on the impact that small grants make in rural areas. Also, I would like to note the development of a mechanism to support civil initiatives in rural areas was identified as a priority area for the upcoming year by the Head of State.

At the moment, Center in cooperation with our grantee have already provided 60 small grants (each for 500 000 tenge) to local initiatives to be implemented in rural areas all over Kazakhstan. The program has proved itself to be highly successful in terms of emphasis on local ownership that is critical to any development project.

And I am personally impressed with background stories of the initiatives that turn into a wide range of targeted issues and innovations introduced by the rural NGOs and initiative groups, from environment and sports to protection of children’s rights. For instance, the project of organizing repair shop to repurpose old clothes and accessories both creates jobs in rural area and promotes recycling.

In this regard, small grants programs allow the center to see the whole picture of social needs and demands as well as capabilities of local initiative groups and NGOs. Based on this information, we will be expanding this instrument of small grants provision to a long-term solution engaging local governmental bodies and international grant-giving organizations and businesses.

Turning to the results of individual national projects, I want to bring to your attention the Academy of NGO that aims at professionalization of the activities of NGOs through the creation of a training system for NGO representatives.

In our experience working with various NGOs, we recognize that despite the passion and creativity, they often lack needed qualifications and skills to provide high quality services to the society. Therefore, as part of our multidimensional support tool, the national project Academy of NGO has been first introduced in 2020 as a short-term project but after receiving positive feedback and demand for its continuation, it has received another this time bigger grant for its implementation.

And this year, within the framework of the project, a general educational course was developed in two languages on three main topics, which are NGO training, Training of trainers of the civil sector, Social Entrepreneurship School. Total number of participants and trainings you can see on the screen.

So, as you can see from what I’ve said so far about the Center, the benchmark that guides our work is the effectiveness of provided grants. So, let's look now at our 4 main instruments that we use for this purpose:

First, Center ensures the effectiveness of all our projects as we work hand in hand with our grantees. Our hands-on approach consists of thorough monitoring mechanism during the implementation, and evaluation of project results after their completion according to the developed Methodology. Monitoring includes but not limits to collecting, processing and analyzing information on the implementation of social projects, conducting on-site monitoring in the grantee’s office or the place of project implementation, attracting independent experts to monitor the implementation in case of detected risks.

Secondly, starting from this year Center is going to utilize scientific approach when planning grant projects. To be precise, what we will do is use the data that we collect on daily basis from our projects and constant interactions with NGOs, citizens and donors, and create a map of priorities and directions of grant funding for planning within the context of regions and spheres of activity, then analyze the results of sociological research, recommendations of the local and central government bodies, and also conduct facilitation and foresight sessions with the involvement of the expert community and NGOs to discuss and develop solutions. These all will allow us to use scarce fund and resources more efficiently.

Thirdly, having to operate government and non-government funds, Center prioritizes transparency and accountability of grant implementation. We constantly introduce improved techniques and address public concerns. For instance, this year we have implemented into our work the following:

* to ensure comprehensive monitoring of grants, Center forms groups for public monitoring,
* and publishes a full package of project documents on its website,
* we also introduced public presentations of the projects.

And last but not least, all this work and achievements are possible because of the Center’s dedicated and professional team. We at the civil initiatives support center invest in human resources development. So, we are expecting our employees to begin the process of professional development and obtaining certificates in project management, financial management, monitoring and evaluation, and fundraising. This process is funded by the Asian Development Bank as part of the joint Government of Kazakhstan and ADB Knowledge and Experience Exchange Program.

Having said all that, I would like to emphasize that we highly value cooperative activities in the name of civil society development and we are open for cooperation with both local and international organizations that share our values. Moreover, the overwhelming response to our current national project Marathon of Good Deeds shows that Kazakhstani community is ready to be mobilized around the idea of generosity and kindness. Let me highlight for you the way we see our partnership.

First, we are open and looking forward to operating grant/small grant programs for Kazakhstani NGOs in the framework of cooperation with foreign and local government agencies or private organizations.

Secondly, we are very interested in looking into co-financing state grant projects achieving SDGs implemented by the Center in the framework of consolidating the efforts of interested parties with the involvement of foreign and international organizations.

Thirdly, we are eager to provide a dialogue platform with the involvement of local and international experts to discuss questions on the development of civil society in order to ensure the capacity building of the non-governmental sector.

To sum up, the Center is ready to provide its expertise, wide network of partners, professional and highly experienced team, as well as innovative approach to civil society development, and international cooperation.

Thank you for your attention! I’m more than happy to answer any of your questions now or later on after the event.