

# The Responsibility of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) for Supporting Education

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## Abstract

In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, education has been changing form. It is everywhere and for everyone of any age and it is timeless. As a result, it is not the responsibility of educational institutions. Civic society has been showing interest to personal development courses and creating community awareness for that since the early years of the Century. Those Civil Society Organization (CSO) leaders, who are aware of their responsibility as intellectual leaders of their communities on the way of enlightenment, are trying to improve the communication and outreach between local authorities and other CSOs in order to collaborate for the future educational demands of the future leaders. For the realization of that precious dream, CSO leaders and members should gain awareness about their managerial roles and obtain the needed skills, such as; strategic planning, communication, management, project design, time management, conflict resolution and problem solving. This article is about the goals, objectives, main steps, conclusion, and recommendations of such an effort realized at a region of İstanbul City, piloted at the town of Datça of Muğla at first.

**Key Words:** Civil Society Organization; Collaboration; Responsibility; Education

## Sivil Toplum Örgütlerinin Eğitimi Destekleme Konusundaki Sorumlulukları

### Özet

21. Yüzyılda Eğitim şekil değiştiriyor. Eğitim, her yerde, her yaş grubundan bireyler için ve zamansız. Bunun sonucunda da sadece Eğitim kurumların sorumluluğunda değil. Sivil toplum bu yüzyılın başından beri kişisel gelişim kurslarına önem veriyor ve bu konuda toplum farkındalığı yaratmaya çalışıyor. Sivil toplum örgütlerinin liderleri toplumun aydınlanması konusunda sorumluluklarının ayırında olan entelektüel aydınlar olarak yerel yöneticilerle ve diğer sivil toplum örgütleriyle işbirliğine girerek ortak hareket etmeyi gelecek kuşakların eğitimle ilgili taleplerine bir şekilde destek vermek için gerekli görüyorlar. Bu değerli hedefin gerçekleşmesi için sivil toplum örgütlerinin başında olan bireylerin ve üyelerin bazı liderlik /yöneticilik özelliklerini ve becerileri kazanmaları gerekiyor. Bunların başlıcaları; stratejik planlama, iletişim becerileri, yönetim, proje tasarımı, zaman yönetimi, çatışma yönetimi ve sorun çözüme becerileridir. Bu makalenin amacı pilot çalışması Muğla'nın ilçesi Datça'da yapılan ve sonrasında da İstanbul'un bir ilçesinde gerçekleştirilen böyle bir çabanın hedefini, amaçlarını, adımlarını, sonucunu ve alınan derslerden yola çıkarak önerilerini paylaşmaktır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Sivil toplum kuruluşları; İmece; Sorumluluk; Eğitim

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Quality education necessitates the collaboration of all educational partners. Schools and educators are responsible for training new generations and equipping them well, however in order to realize that they need the support of families, business world, local governors including Civil

Society Organizations (CSOs). The author is living in one of the towns of İstanbul, called Sarıyer. She is a forty-five year experienced teacher trainer, researcher and author in addition to her membership many CSOs since 1995. Along with nineteen other educator friends she founded a non-governmental, non-profit association, named Association for Innovative Collaboration (Yenilikçi İmece Derneği / YİMEDER) in Sarıyer in order to help individuals and community members learn, internalize and put into practice the innovative approaches through various seminars and projects on 15<sup>th</sup> January 2015. YİMEDER members have aimed at leading people and institutions

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through innovative methodologies focusing on collaboration (=İmece) philosophy coming from Turkish culture on the way of learning and applying critical thinking and problem solving skills to attain a peaceful life. They work voluntarily through projects starting from families and then moving towards schools, business world and to the society. In other words, they aim at focusing on individuals first, but then moving to local, national and international gatherings through optimal technology use. In order to bring up volunteer qualified persons and organizations to realize a quality community of people who learn 'how to learn', they organize seminars, panels, conferences, scientific researches and conduct national and international projects. During those activities, equality (language, gender, religion, ethnic, socio-economic status, challenges) and adding value to the community are essential.

Starting from the spring months of the year 2017, they have started to a collaborative action\_a project for training volunteer community members and CSO leaders and members as feeling ourselves responsible for pursuing education, or at least creating awareness for that need. The project was called "name\_of the city/town/village İmece". İmece means; collaborative action to finalize a job or a project by means of working in teams harmoniously and fruitfully.

## 2. AN İMECE PROJECT FOR CSOS

YİMEDER started the pilot study in Datça, Muğla in March 2017 to bring civil community organizations and individuals together living there. The aim was to prototype a grass-roots structure for "Innovative leadership in problem-solving" instead of waiting for all actions to come from the local government. With the support of local governors, voluntary individuals and CSOs were informed about the pilot project. Then, with the participation of 50 willing citizens living in Datça, seven problem-solving teams (İmece Circles) formed. They were as follows:

- 1) Guiding village kids, especially girls, to sports activities,
- 2) Guiding them to arts
- 3) Improving the educational level of students through in-service training programs of teachers/ principals
- 4) supporting local cultural values
- 5) Improving communication skills of local leaders
- 6) Supporting the local disabled people
- 7) Teaching 'Leadership skills' to all CSO leaders.

Those teams created interest among the local people. New teams soon arose. The pilot project seemed to add some value to the town. That was shared in the weblog of the author (Köksal, 2017). In addition to those community circles, the principal of a Primary School located at the

centre of Datça asked to design a seminar for the teachers and parents within the school to start a similar action. It was a very thought provoking for the participants.

Therefore, the governing team of YİMEDER intended to start a full-scale project at the province Sarıyer, Istanbul, Turkey. Members of the Sarıyer City Council supported and announced the action happily (Kentkonseyisariyer, 2018). In Sarıyer (Istanbul, Turkey), there are approximately 245 active Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). Many lack the ability to meet their missions without having road maps or strategic plans. They also need to enhance communication skills. The Project would help fill those gaps. We proposed; to strengthen administrative, advocacy and communication skills of CSOs in Sarıyer (Istanbul, Turkey) so that they could contribute to the solution of the local problems in a democratic manner. YİMEDER would provide them with guidance in preparing their strategic plans and mentor leaders conducting collaborative projects that focus on target problem areas that emphasize public, private and civic sector partnerships, including international ones, using a refinement of our methodology, which was granted a World Bank award in 2005.

## 3. DESIGN OF THE PROJECT

### 3.1. Goals and Objectives

Specific objectives of the project were listed as follows:

- Give seminars to voluntary local CSO leaders and members to help them improve their administrative skills such as: democratic and transparent leadership; contemporary decision making processes; strategic long-term organizational planning; ethics; monitoring and assessing the improvement within CSO; designing, implementing and evaluating projects after collecting and analyzing data in a scientific manner.
- Improve the advocacy skills of voluntary CSO leaders and members by means of research-based scientific projects using 'award-winner' problem solving "İmece Circles" methodology, based upon the PDCA Mindset (Plan-Do-Check-Act). Thus, developing problem solving, strategical analyzing and policy development skills for CSOs.
- Improve communication skills in CSOs by sharing knowledge from the Innovative Teaching Program and giving seminars on 'Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)'.
- Start projects within each voluntary CSO located in Sarıyer, focused on the solution of the main local problems. Coach them to develop a strong civic power to influence the policy-making processes.
- As a final step, organize a "Sharing Day" Activity for all participating CSOs and share the outcomes of all studies on a Blog, and in a Book with CD to share best

practices, lessons learned. That Forum for sharing will build reputations and encourage continuation partnerships

YİMEDER would create a critical mass of capability among the 490 registered/245 actively working CSOs in Sarıyer. It will prioritize newly founded CSOs. They would be coached on preparing and implementing strategic plans tuned to stakeholders needs. After attending many training seminars and conducting collaborative projects, CSOs will gain skills, improve relations and be able to effectively take part in policymaking.

### 3.2. The key stakeholder groups, their attitudes towards the action

Two main key stakeholders were considered as the key stakeholders. They were as follows:

- a. Active local CSOs of Sarıyer would be invited to the first informative meeting to establish the main list of participating bodies on a voluntary basis. A questionnaire would be used to determine the willing, newly founded CSOs that are keen on collaboration.
- b. City Council authorities of Sarıyer. They expressed enthusiasm for the pilot, confirmed a great need in CSOs to prepare strategic plans and road maps and identified a need of improving communication skills.

### 3.3. Proposed Activities and Steps

YİMEDER would hold a “General Meeting” of all active local CSO leaders to initiate the Project. Sarıyer City Council and Sarıyer Municipality would help about the announcement, venue and local transfers. Participating leaders would get the needed information about the project and would be given a Questionnaire to learn which ones would be volunteer to take part in the project. After the analysis of the data collected, the following steps would be taken:

- Leadership seminars for 10 CSOs per interest group. Their strategic plans will be prepared together following a timetable. From each CSO five members would participate- an estimated 300 participants (60 CSOs x 5 people).
- Strategic Planning step: every CSO would determine their project topic based upon target community needs.
- A project management seminar would teach participants project management steps and how to prepare monthly progress reports.
- In the Implementation step, a monthly general meeting: to share experiences and teach a different seminar theme such as: communication skills, democratic and transparent leadership, contemporary decision making process, strategic long-term organizational planning, ethics, monitoring and assessing the improvement, designing, implementing and evaluating projects after collecting and analysing data in a scien-

tific manner.

- Through a monthly reporting system, YİMEDER would follow and support all CSOs during their projects.
- After the implementation step of the projects, the success rates would be determined and sustainability would be emphasized.
- All the outcomes will be shared through IT (social media and Blogs) and a “Sharing Day” which would be held in Sarıyer to award the participants.
- Finally, their stories would take place in a book prepared by YİMEDER. Thus, all the CSOs will be in a strong communication and problem-solving tie. Partnerships would add strength to civil society.

The project would last 12 months. The first three months would be set to planning, seven months to project implementation and process managing. Last two months would be set aside for sharing and presenting to the whole community. A book about that collaboration would also be prepared including all the steps of civic society development.

### 3.4. Expected Results

That project was piloted at Dağa on a very small scale during the spring months of the year 2017 and its objectives, expected and observed outcomes were announced through social media. The news, attracted attention of some local governors and other CSO leaders. They asked how to start such a movement in their own towns and cities. It is clear that such a collaborative project would be beneficial especially for newly founded CSOs, who are in need of strengthening their capacities for preparing strategic plans for being active in policy and decision making processes. Pilot results demonstrate that participating CSO leaders and members would improve their administrative and leadership skills. They would improve action research abilities and problem solving skills, thus they would develop cooperation among other CSOs and public sector. Through lobbying, they would have more policy influence within the community. They would improve their communication skills and as a result, they would create new partnerships and build new coalitions within and outside country borders. Thus, they would improve their existing networks. In order to share their projects and developed relations, they would be able to use technology more effectively and innovatively.

There is a lack of knowledge and skills in both target groups and final beneficiaries about communicating each other, managing time, preparing a strategic plan, solving problems in an analytical manner, lobbying, and using technology. Our project would serve to meet the needs and remove the restrictions/barriers of target groups and final beneficiaries through trainings, seminars and workshops about information and communication technolo-

gies, total quality management, time management, conflict resolution, meeting management, and motivation and leadership skills training for CSO leaders. Preparation of projects concerning the needs of each CSOs' target groups will be very useful to show how theory is put into practice. Project design, implementation and assessment steps would form the essence of the project. Our goal was to give individuals in target groups skills that they could use in their work and in their lives and to equip them to spread this knowledge to the final beneficiaries that their projects were designed to support.

### 3.5. Particular Added-Value Elements and Action

The target district was Sarıyer and the target group were local CSOs attending City Council activities regularly and in an active manner. Those who wanted to be in our project would get all the needed trainings for administrative, advocacy and communication skills in addition to the preparation of their strategic plans. Based upon these they would prepare their model problem-solving projects concerning the needs and problems of their members. All those activities would create a high-level awareness among the newly founded, local CSOs of Sarıyer district. During those trainings, all CSOs would have the great opportunity of coming together, setting collaborative actions and establishing a strong network between the City Council and CSOs. Their work would be featured in a book to be distributed after the project. That book would help spread best practices, build a CSO's credibility, and be a good role model project for all other districts of Istanbul and cities of Turkey.

The first meeting was held at Sarıyer Yaşar Kemal Cultural Center on 26<sup>th</sup> November 2018 to create awareness and to conduct a survey to the leaders of CSOs. The authorities of Sarıyer City Council (2018) made the announcement, and the news about the meeting was shared in the local newspaper (Sarıyergazetesi, 2018). Twenty-seven participants had come from fifteen various CSOs of Sarıyer. They filled in a survey including their probable contributions, needs and requirements in addition to their contact information, after listening to the goals and main steps of the project. They looked very ambitious and hopeful as well. If the European Union had approved the Project, a very detailed project would have started for the Civic Society Organizations of Sarıyer; however, it did not come into realization.

## 4. FINAL WORDS

Love for learning and sharing determines our routes. Our way lies at sharing and caring each other. Business world and other community members might afford the budget of such a project. The contribution of YİMEDER lies within the design, implementation, and guidance and at the evaluation steps of the project. Through our expertise, trainings and guidance the project would blossom not only in our country but also in every volunteering

country.

On 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2019, YİMEDER was given the "Institutional Quality Award of the year 2019" by the World Council for Total Quality and Excellence in Education (WCTQEE) due to its efforts for improving the educational level and quality of civic society (YİMEDER, 2020). The quality leaders of thirty member countries had found that project very beneficial for the world unity and quality.

Our dream started and it still goes on. We hope such thoughts ornament the plans of every CSO. For, education is everywhere and for every one of us. The desired issue is a strong collaboration with universities and Research Centers founded in the district. For higher education, institutions are the backbones of the communities.

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