



National Assembly-CSO Cooperation Platform for Women's and Men's Equal Rights and Opportunities

ASSESSMENT REPORT

Assessment Bases for Platform Activities

Analyzed were:

- Platform Memorandum of Understanding
- Lists of participants in all Platform meetings
- Agenda for all Platform meetings
- Communiques of all Platform meetings
- Responses of the Platform participants to the assessment questionnaire /ten participants/
- In-depth interviews with the Platform participants /eight interviews/

PART I

PLATFORM ACTIVITIES

1.1. Background of the Platform Creation

- Pre-election debates¹ on *Women's Agenda for Development*, November 2018



The debates aimed at clarifying, during the pre-election period, the positions of political forces running in the parliamentary elections to issues incorporated in the document *Women's Agenda for Development*.

- Post-electoral working meeting, December 28-29, 2018



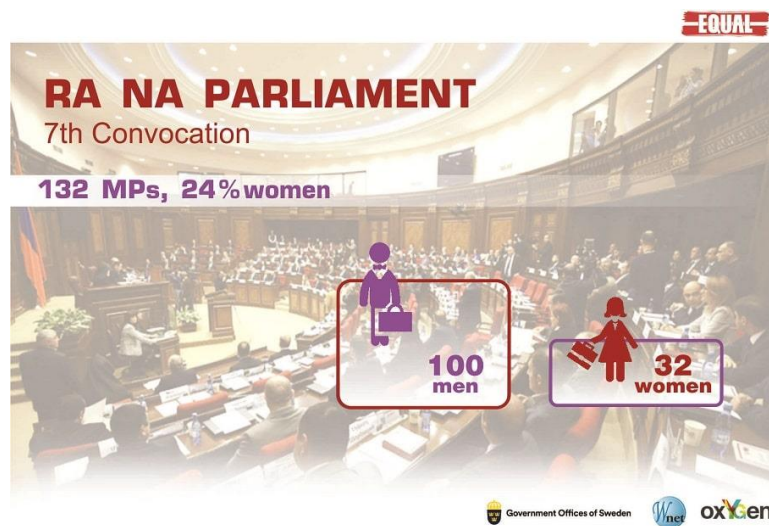
The working meeting² aimed at discussing the issue of forming a cooperation platform between representatives of the political forces that made it into the Parliament and NGOs dealing with women's issues to address the problems identified in the document *Women's Agenda for Development*.

¹ The debates were organized by the OxyGen Foundation within the framework of the European Union-funded project *Electoral Preparation and Monitoring by Civil Society Organizations in Armenia: Elections for All* and the Government of Sweden-funded project *Equal: Promoting Women's Political Participation*.

² The event was organized within the framework of the project *Equal: Promoting Women's Political Participation at the National Level*, which was implemented by the OxyGen Foundation in collaboration with ProMedia-Gender NGO experts and WomenNet.am website through funding support from the Government of Sweden.

It was decided:

- To establish the National Assembly- Mass Media – NGOs tripartite cooperation platform, which would operate through the support of the Coordinating Council and would be made up of political forces, local NGOs and mass media representatives;³
 - To organize, at the initiative of the platform, public hearings at the National Assembly on March 8 on issues included in the document *Women’s Agenda for Development*. The *OxYGen* Foundation would coordinate the preparatory work.
- The interviews “Are you ready to defend women’s interests in the Parliament?” January-March 2019



The survey was conducted among the newly elected women MPs within the framework of the project *Equal: Promoting Women’s Political Participation at the National Level*⁴ and was aimed at clarifying their positions on protection of women’s rights.

1.2. Signing of the Memorandum of Understanding, March 8, 2019⁵

Representatives of the National Assembly and NGOs dealing with women issues signed a Memorandum of Understanding at the RA NA golden hall.

³ The later formed National Assembly-CSO format included also journalist NGOs.

⁴ The project *Equal: Promoting Women’s Political Participation at the National Level* was implemented by the *OxYGen* Foundation in collaboration with ProMedia-Gender NGO experts and WomenNet.am website through funding support from the Government of Sweden

⁵ Was organized within the scope of the project *Equal: Promoting Women’s Political Participation at the National Level* with funding support from the Government of Sweden.



The goal of the Memorandum of Understanding is

To create a cooperation platform between representatives of the RA legislative power and civil society organizations to join efforts aimed at ensuring de facto equality of women's and men's rights and opportunities.



The Main Provisions of the Memorandum of Understanding:

1. **The sides are willing**, within their jurisdiction, to ensure the participation of civil society in legislative initiatives targeting to legally empower women in the political, economic and social areas, as well as to promote women's and men's equal rights and equal opportunities;
2. **The sides agree** to carry out joint public events with the defined periodicity to promote women's and men's equal participation in the country's development processes;
3. **The sides are** ready to consult on issues incorporated in the document Women's Agenda for Development and other issues of common interest, as well as to discuss the process of jointly implemented activities and plan for further joint actions.

“I believe that the creation of such a cooperation platform with the National Assembly is unprecedented. It is the logical continuation of the already implemented programs and taken steps. The timing was very important: there were favorable conditions and framework for the civil society to create that platform and there was a political will on the part of the National Assembly.”

Margarita Hakobyan, Director of the *OxYGen* Foundation

“The platform is intended to ensure a very important permanent link with NGOs, which know the issues in practice and, I believe, have the necessary expert potential to outline solutions to them. In other words, NGOs have the necessary knowledge and experience, and MPs have the levers and willingness to introduce changes.”

Lena Nazaryan, The RA NA Deputy Speaker

1.3. The Platform Activities, April-December, 2019

Meeting: *Women in the Labor Market, Problems and Solutions*, April 12, 2019⁶



The objectives:

- To map the proposed policies aimed at improvement of the area under consideration,
- To develop a joint agenda to promote women's involvement in the labor market,
- To develop policy improvement suggestions and legislative initiatives aimed at solving the sector problems,
- To initiate, if necessary, meetings of narrower sector working groups.

The discussed issues:

- A non-effective use of women's potential and existence of discrimination against women in the labor market,
- Lack of opportunities for reconciliation of work and family responsibilities,
- The roadmap for ensuring women's labor rights and opportunities.

Results:

- The RA Ministry of Labor and Social Issues has given its preliminary approval to the proposal submitted by the Platform on changing of up to a two-month-long unpaid

⁶ The meeting was organized by the *OxYGen* Foundation with funding support from National Democratic Institute /NDI/.

leave provided to the spouse of a woman on a childcare leave, as stipulated in Point 1, Part 2, Article 176 of the RA Labor Code, to a paid leave. Such regulation of the issue was considered expedient, but it was suggested that it be additionally discussed among the stakeholders to estimate the possible financial burden and to provide for a realistic regulation.

- The Ministry has approved the Platform's proposal to include the period for care of disabled children and elderly in the work record. It was noted that this issue had often been raised in letters addressed to the Ministry and, currently, it is being discussed to regulate this issue through development of the institution of personal helpers.
- The Ministry has not accepted the Platform's suggestion to calculate the maternity allowance of those working based on civic-legal contracts in accordance with the way it is defined for hired workers.

It was decided:

- To organize an **expert meeting** to discuss the position of the Ministry of Labor and Social Issues /June 12/,
- To organize a **public discussion**, jointly with the Ministry of Labor and Social Issues, on changes to the Labor Code /June 25/,
- To amend, if necessary, the suggestions and to present them again to the Ministry and other stakeholders.

Legislative solutions: adopted and in progress

- **Fixed-term contracts**, which make employees, especially women, vulnerable
 - It has been proposed that in the event the same employer signs more than two contracts with the same employee, it be deemed permanent. This regulation is to benefit all, irrespective of sex.
- **Functions of the Inspection Body**
 - According to an MP, the ideal option is to divide the RA Healthcare and Labor Inspectorate into two separate bodies. The current solution is through certain expansion of the functions of the existing Inspection Body.
- **Prospects for introduction of actio popularis**
 - Currently, a working group is in place regarding the issue and joint discussions are being held to introduce changes to the Law on Trade Unions.
- **An option for rechanneling the penalty flows for violation of the Labor Code**
 - It is proposed that the significant portion of the means resulting from fining the employer be given to the aggrieved employee.

Meeting: *the RA Law on Local Self-Governance*, May 21, 2019⁷



Suggestions were introduced to:

- The RA Electoral Code
- The RA Law on Local Self-Governance
- The 2019-2023 RA Strategy on Gender Policy Implementation and Action Plan

Meeting: *Women's Reproductive Health*, July 16, 2019⁸



The agenda included:

1. Summarizing the results on improvements in the area of women's labor rights protection,

⁷ The meeting was organized within the scope of the program *Women in Politics*, which is implemented by UNDP jointly with the RA Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure and the *OxYGen* Foundation with the support of the UK *Good Governance* Foundation.

⁸ The meeting was organized within the scope of the program *Women in Politics*, which is implemented by UNDP jointly with the RA Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure and the *OxYGen* Foundation with the support of the UK *Good Governance* Foundation.

2. Presenting proposals on improvements of policies in the area of women’s reproductive health,
3. The annual prize giving ceremony of the advocacy campaign “EQUAL.”



The Pioneers of “EQUAL”

Symbolic prizes for being the pioneers of the advocacy campaign “EQUAL” were awarded to partner NGOs and the RA NA MPs, including Lena Nazaryan, Anna Kostanyan, Arsen Julfalakyan, Gayane Abrahamyan, Shake Issayan, and Heriknaz Tigranyan.

Meeting: Domestic Violence Issues, August 22, 2019⁹



Main proposals¹⁰

- It is necessary to introduce a united registry system on domestic violence statistics,

⁹ The meeting was organized within the scope of the program *Women in Politics*, which is implemented by UNDP jointly with the RA Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure and the OxYGen Foundation with the support of the UK Good Governance Foundation.

¹⁰ The noted proposals are in progress.

- The necessity of introducing changes and additions to the RA Law on Prevention of Violence in the Family, Protection of Persons Subjected to Violence in the Family and Restoration of Harmony in the Family,
- The necessity of establishing the institution of the Children’s Ombudsman,
- The necessity of reviewing the procedures for applying to court,
- The necessity of reviewing the referral procedures.

Meeting: *Improvement of the Law on Parties through gender mainstreaming.*

September 30, 2019¹¹



Decisions, Further Steps:

- To submit the package of changes to the Law on Parties and related changes to the National Assembly by year end. The whole process will take from about one year to a year and a half.
- In order to create additional opportunities with respect to the Law on Parties, to organize a joint expanded meeting together with the Working Group on Electoral Reforms through engagement of extra-parliamentary forces, which will also present their proposals on reforms.

¹¹ The meeting was organized within the scope of the program *Women in Politics*, which is implemented by UNDP jointly with the RA Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure and the *OxYGen* Foundation with the support of the UK *Good Governance* Foundation.

- To present examples of international experience related to gender mainstreaming of the Law on Parties at the next meeting.

An Expanded Meeting: *Promotion of Women’s Political Participation*, October 11, 2019¹²



The goal was:

To discuss the proposed changes for gender mainstreaming in the RA Law on Parties with engagement of extra-parliamentary forces.

Meeting: *Hate Speech in Media, Women as Targets*, December 2, 2019¹³

The meeting objectives:

- To present the preliminary results of the research on *Sexism and Violence on Television and Online Media: how gender sensitive the Armenian media is*,
- To discuss the issue of hate speech manifestations in media and online platforms,
- To collect suggestions aimed at effectively combating hate speech on media platforms.

¹² The meeting was organized by the OxYGen Foundation with funding support from National Democratic Institute /NDI/.

¹³ The meeting was organized within the framework of the program *Modern Parliament for Modern Armenia*, which is implemented jointly by the UNDP Armenia, the RA National Assembly, the OxYGen Foundation, Westminster Foundation for Democracy, and International Center for Human Development with the support of Great Britain’s *Good Governance* Foundation and the Government of Sweden.



Suggestions aimed at the improvement of the area under consideration:

- Legislative and political regulations
- Regulation of the media field
- Regulations related to the Commission on Television and Radio
- Suggestions related to barriers of human rights protection activities

Further steps agreed upon as a result of the discussion:

- To establish a working group on the above noted issues at the National Assembly with the involvement of representatives of civil society organizations.
- To circulate the final monitoring version, which will also include qualitative research results and proposals aimed at improvement of the area under consideration.
- To initiate one more discussion on this topic in January of the next year and invite to the discussion MP Vahagn Tevosyan, who is currently studying the international experience concerning the legislative regulations of mass media and will be leading the activities related to the above noted issues at the National Assembly.

Year-End Wrap-Up Meeting: *Platform Agenda – 2020, December 19-20, 2019*¹⁴

More than 50 representatives of the National Assembly, the Government and Civil Society participated in the meeting and made their contributions to the formulation of the Platform agenda.

¹⁴ The meeting was organized within the framework of the program *Modern Parliament for Modern Armenia*, which is implemented jointly by the UNDP Armenia, the RA National Assembly, the OxYGen Foundation, Westminster Foundation for Democracy, and International Center for Human Development with the support of Great Britain's *Good Governance* Foundation and the Government of Sweden.



The meeting goal was:

- To wrap up the results of the National Assembly-CSO Cooperation Platform meetings and to outline mechanisms for making the Platform more active and effective,
- To develop the National Assembly-CSO Cooperation Platform’s Action Plan for 2020 targeting to improve gender policies in the country.

Results:

-The joint discussions resulted in the formulation of the Platform’s Action Plan for future activities.

PART II

ASSESSMENT OF THE PLATFORM ACTIVITIES

The assessment of the Platform activities was carried out based on eight in-depth interviews among the participants and the responses to a questionnaire by ten participants. Analyzed were the opinions of those permanent participants in the Platform meetings, who had participated in almost all Platform meetings.

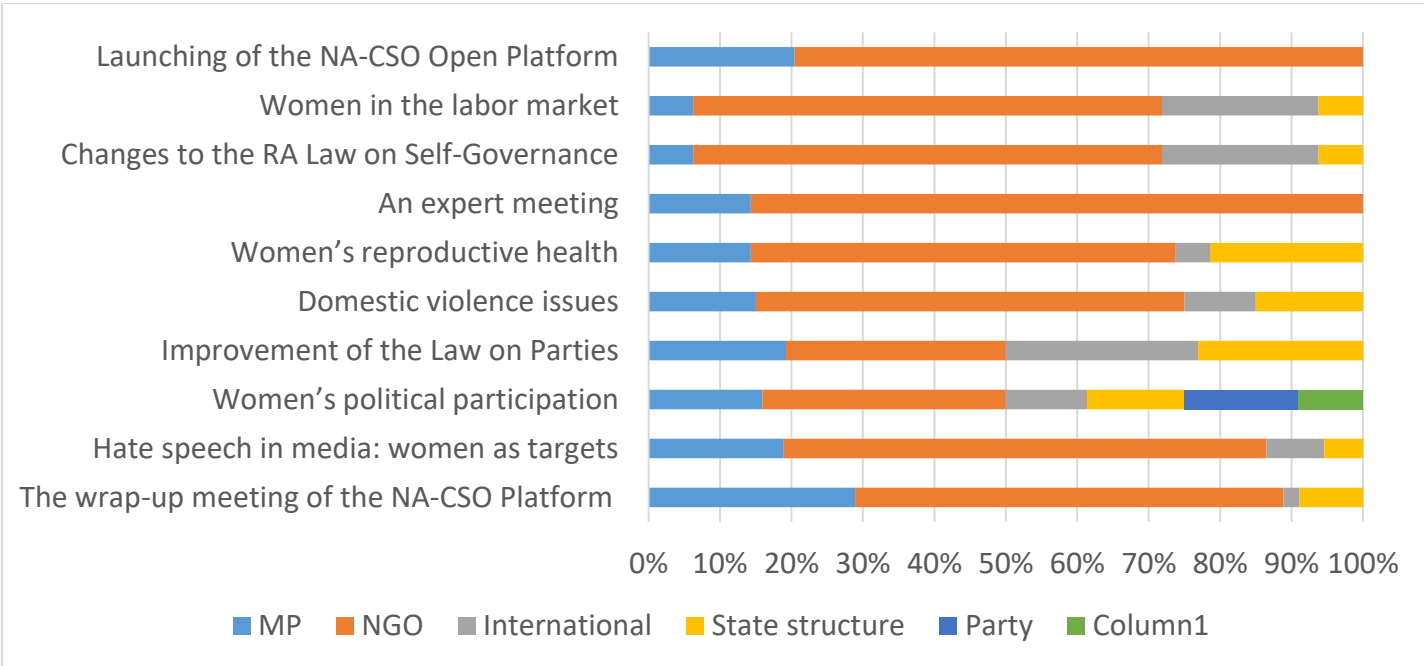
2.1. The Platform Meetings: An Analysis of Participation

Table 1. Participation in the Platform Discussions

#	Date	Topic	Participants according to structures	Number
1	08.03.2019	The launching of the NA-CSO Open Platform	MP	9
			NGO	35
			International	
			State structure	
			Total	44
2	12.04.2019	Women in the labor market: problems and solutions	MP	3
			NGO	20
			International	3
			State structure	1
			Total	27
3	21.05.2019	Proposed changes to the Law on Local Self-Governance from the perspective of ensuring equal rights and opportunities of women and men	MP	2
			NGO	21
			International	7
			State structure	2
			Total	32
4	12.06.2019	Expert meeting	MP	1
			NGO	6
			International	
			State structure	
			Total	7
5	16.07.2019	Women's reproductive health	MP	6
			NGO	25
			International	2
			State structure	9
			Total	42
6	22.08.2019	Domestic violence issues in Armenia	MP	3
			NGO	12
			International	2
			State structure	3
			Total	20
7	30.09.2019	Improvement of the Law on Parties through gender mainstreaming	MP	5
			NGO	8
			International	7
			State structure	6
			Total	26
8	11.10.2019	Promotion of women's political participation: discussion	MP	7
			NGO	15
			International	5
			Party	7
			Media	4
			State structure	6
			Total	44
9	02.12.2019	Hate speech in media: women as targets	MP	7
			NGO	25
			International	3
			State structure	2
			Total	37
10	19.12.2019	Year-end wrap-up meeting of the NA-CSO Cooperation Platform	MP	13
			NGO	27
			International	1
			State structure	4
			Total	45

An analysis of the participation in the Platform meetings demonstrates that, on average, the number of participants fluctuated within 30-40 persons and the number of MPs and NGO representatives was different. The largest number of the MPs participated in the launching of the Platform and its wrap-up meeting, and during the rest of the process, the MP participation was much lower as compared to that of NGOs. This was noted also during the in-depth interviews. Among the reasons was noted the fact that MPs were busy with their main responsibilities and displayed a selective interest in the discussed topics. The number of interested NGOs participating in the meetings was conditioned by their presentation of suggestions concerning the discussed topic.

Diagram 1 Participation in the Platform Discussions



Regarding the composition of participants, the respondents expressed an opinion that although they were satisfied with the composition, it might be worth expanding it through engagement and cooperation with representatives of the marzes, the Office of Ombudsman, the Council on Women Issues adjunct to the Government and other interested structures.

2.2. The Evaluation of the Platform Activities

The participants have all together positively evaluated the Platform activities, which has been expressed in the responses of all respondents. The larger part of them have also expressed their satisfaction with the Platform activities.

Table 2. Your evaluation of the NA-CSO Platform activities.

	Response	Percentage
1	Positively evaluating	100%
2	The activities during the past months are more than satisfying	60%
3	The NA-CSO Platform is a necessity	100%
4	Thank you for existing and working to the benefit of our public	5%
5	A very important initiative, which should also be continued next year	5%

Table 2 . What were your expectations of the Platform and have they come true?

	Response	Percentage
1	The Platform has really served its purpose	60%
2	The expectations have fully come true	60%
3	The expectations have come true in some respects	40%

The expectations of the larger part of the respondents related to the Platform activities have fully been met, and the expectations of some part of the respondents have come true to some extent. If the MP expectations were connected with transforming of suggestions into a larger number of legislative initiatives, the NGOs found it more important that the problems identified by them be resolved and their voice be heard from the Parliament's podium.

2.3. The Platform Achievements

Table 4. What are, in your opinion, the Platform's main achievements?

	Response	Percentage
1	The existence of the Platform is an achievement by itself	50%
2	The periodicity and consistency of the meetings have been ensured	100%
3	Has been based on needs	60%
4	It has a broad-based, established and active structure	40%
5	It is a strong and exemplary cooperation	40%
6	Proposals presented by the non-governmental sector are accepted	60%
7	The Platform is an opportunity of jointly discussing priority issues	60%
8	Accountability and feedback are ensured	100%

In their responses regarding the Platform achievements, all respondents have noted the periodicity and consistency of the meetings. Many have also mentioned that, on the one hand, that has become possible thanks to *OxYGen's* organizational efforts and, on the other

hand, thanks to the good will shown by the NA Deputy Speaker Lena Nazaryan and a number of MPs. Of no less importance among the Platform achievements is its accountability and feedback, which have also been noted by all respondents. The larger part of the respondents have noted as an achievement the fact that the Platform is based on actual needs and that the proposals presented by the NGO sector are accepted. Half of the respondents believe that the creation of the Platform is an achievement by itself. Many have also noted that the Platform’s creation is an unprecedented initiative.

2.4. Most Effectively Discussed Topics

In terms of the content, the respondents have noted those topics, the discussion of which, in their opinions, has been most effective. The analysis demonstrates that the respondents have evaluated as effective those topics, as a result of the discussion of which the presented proposals were either immediately transformed into concrete legislative initiatives or are in the process of that transformation. Those topics include women’s participation in the labor market, changes to the Law on Self-Governance, hate speech in media, the Law on Parties, and domestic violence. In fact, almost all discussions have been evaluated as successful to this or that extent with the exception of the discussion on women’s reproductive health, which has been found deficient by 80% of the respondents. In their opinion, the main reason for that was lack of preparatory work with respect to proposals: “more preparation was needed regarding the sensitive issues, for example, for the topic on the reproductive right, it was necessary to present additional justifications.”

Table 5. Which are most effectively discussed topics?

	Response	Percentage
1	Women’s participation in the labor market	80%
2	Women’s participation in local self-government bodies	80%
3	Hate speech in media: women as targets	45%
4	Discussion of the Law on Parties	40%
5	The meeting devoted to domestic violence	35%
6	During this year, the topics were very well selected and were based on common needs	20%

It is noteworthy that the respondents were positive about the selection of the discussed topics believing that “during this year, the topics were very well selected and were based on common needs.” For the future, they proposed to be guided by the principle of urgency and suggested that, perhaps, the topics to be discussed be put to vote in advance “to determine to what extent they are a priority and urgent and whether there is a need to include the given

issue on the agenda.” An opinion has been expressed that the selection of topics for discussion should be based on the priorities of the 2019-2023 Strategy for Gender Policy Implementation adopted by the RA Government, which are consonant with the approaches of the document *Women’s Agenda for Development*, which serves as a basis for the Platform activities in accordance with its Memorandum of Understanding.

2.5. The Platform Shortcomings and Obstacles

Table 6. What are, in your opinion, the Platform shortcomings?

	Response	Percentage
1	Few suggestions were transformed into legislative initiatives, which was a little disappointing	40%
2	The Platform is only focused on the capital city	30%
3	The issues raised are very topical and important, but ways of overcoming them are murky in some cases	20%
4	The number of participant female MPs is low	50%
5	Few men are involved	10%
6	Representatives of relevant departments are not always present	30%
7	Little time is devoted to the discussion of each issue	10%
8	The Platform has not responded urgently to the attacks /hate speech/ against female political figures and female human rights activists	5%
9	Do not see any shortcomings	10%
10	I believe that there have not been any major shortcomings	10%

The shortcomings noted by the majority of respondents are related to the participation in the Platform discussions. Thus, one of the main shortcomings was deemed low participation of female MPs in the Platform meetings. Noted was also non- participation of representatives from the marzes and relevant departments. Forty per cent of the respondents believe that few proposals were transformed into legislative initiatives, and 10% of the respondents believe that little time is devoted to issue discussion. The respondents have noted as a drawback also the fact that the Platform has not provided an urgent response to the attacks /hate speech/ against female political figures and female human rights activists. Twenty per cent of the respondents have noticed no shortcomings in the Platform activities.

Closely related to the shortcomings is the question about obstacles, although 60% of the respondents believe that there have been no obstacles to organizing the Platform activities, and 5% think that they are surmountable. Overall, the main obstacle was considered to be lack of financial resources and time.

Table 7. What obstacles to the organization of the Platform activities do you see?

	Response	Percentage
1	The Platform has been operating under the limited resources, lack of financial resources	30%
2	Without the necessary resources, it is not possible to solve the issues of transportation expense for participants from the marzes (administrative-territorial units)	10%
3	The obstacle is the slow pace of actions, the authorities should be compelled to reckon with the Platform	5%
4	The heavy workload of the participants. The extremely tight daily schedule of the sides makes it impossible to participate in some meetings of the Platform	20%
5	I believe that there are no obstacles	60%
6	There are no obstacles that we cannot overcome	5%

2.6. Suggestions

The suggestions made by the respondents on increasing the effectiveness of the Platform can be grouped in the following way:

On the composition of the Platform participants:

- To expand links with organizations dealing with protection of women's rights, to establish cooperation with the Ombudsman's Office, the Council on Women Issues and other relevant departments;
- To engage more female MPs, including those who do not share the positions voiced at the Platform;
- The MPs are passive, to expand the participation of MPs, including male MPs;
- To ensure two-way links and communication with the marzes. Either to organize visits to the marzes or to organize some meetings right in the marzes; to maintain an inclusive approach by engaging female representatives of local self-government bodies in the Platform activities, particularly, in the discussions on changes to the Laws on Self-Governance.

On expansion of the content:

- To create working groups on issues requiring more professional discussions and to convene parliamentary hearings, as necessary;
- To organize visits to the marzes, including important issues for a given marz. This way the issues on the Platform's agenda can also be discussed with target groups;
- To carry out preparatory work for discussion of sensitive issues;

- To carry out work targeting to transform greater number of proposals into legislative initiatives;
- To generate more suggestions, which will enhance the effectiveness of the activities;
- To respond to legislative initiatives on women issues at e-draft website;
- To develop suggestions on legislative regulation of the social protection of rural women;
- To continue work towards improvement of the Electoral Code, using as its basis the roadmap on protection of women's labor rights submitted to the Government by *OxYGen*;
- To initiate activities aimed at creation of self-regulatory mechanisms against gender violence and its propaganda in mass media;
- To carry out preparatory work to introduce gender-responsive budgeting;
- To develop an action plan to increase the role of women in local self-government bodies through legislative initiatives and advocacy campaigns.

On selection of topics:

- In order to select topics, to use as a basis the priorities of 2019-2023 Strategy on Gender Policy Implementation adopted by the RA Government, which are consonant with the approaches of the document *Women's Agenda for Development* serving as a basis for the Memorandum of Understanding signed by the Platform;
- To put the topics to be discussed to vote in advance to determine the priority order and urgency of their discussion.

On other formats and modes of activities:

- To make the Platform meetings more frequent;
- The Platform can come up with statements on urgent issues;
- To present the suggestions made at the Platform in the form of a unified document;
- To create also an online platform so that the agenda becomes more flexible and it is possible to discuss the current issues and to present suggestions at that very platform.

On publicity:

- The Platform's being closed is an advantage, but it is worth ensuring publicity regarding some issues;
- In some cases, the discussions can be broadcast live to ensure the participation of a wide public so that it is clear that the women at the National Assembly are solving problems and should be reckoned with;
- To publicize the Platform activities through annual reporting and periodic press conferences.

On capacity building:

- To raise the public awareness of international documents and conventions not only among the Platform participants, but also among students and youth;
- To organize presentation of the international experience and international documents associated with the discussed topics for MPs;
- To build the capacities of the NA MPs and to create expert groups to ensure the gender sensitivity of bills and speeches, as well as to provide relevant documentary materials.

According to the respondents, when planning the activities for 2020, it is necessary to reflect on and evaluate the work carried out by the Platform throughout 2019. It is necessary to understand which points of the discussed topics were addressed more effectively and which were not, as well as to understand what can be done to make the cooperation stronger and more effective. This report is, in fact, an effort aimed at realization of this very suggestion.

The report has been developed by OxYGen Foundation (Expert Tamara Hovnatanyan) within the framework of “Modern Parliament for a Modern Armenia” project. The Project is implemented by UNDP in Armenia in partnership with the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia, OxYGen Foundation, Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) and International Center for Human Development. The project is funded by the UK Good Governance Fund and the Government Offices of Sweden.