



ევროკავშირი  
საქართველოსთვის  
The European Union for Georgia



# BEST PRACTICE MANUAL

## OF THE PROJECT

“A COMMON FORUM FOR CSOs FROM  
GURIA, IMERETI AND RACHA-LECHKHUMI  
FOR PAR ROADMAP MONITORING”





**BEST PRACTICE MANUAL**  
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**GURIA, IMERETI AND RACHA-LECHKHUMI**  
**FOR PAR ROADMAP MONITORING”**

2021

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Published under the project “A Common Forum for CSOs from Guria, Imereti and Racha-Lechkhumi for PAR Roadmap Monitoring”

## INTRODUCTION

EXPERIENCE,  
PRACTICE,  
PROSPECTS



## INTRODUCTION - EXPERIENCE, PRACTICE, PROSPECTS

**TEA TORINAVA**

**Project coordinator**

**Cultural-Humanitarian Fund “Sukhumi”**

The Best Practice Manual has been developed within the project “A common forum for CSOs from Guria, Imereti and Racha-Lechkhumi for PAR Roadmap monitoring” implemented by the women’s non-governmental organization Cultural-Humanitarian Fund “Sukhumi”, the Fund of Women Entrepreneurs and the Imereti Scientists’ Union “Spectri”.

The publication aims to share Fund “Sukhumi” and partner organizations’ experience and lessons learned from the project with stakeholders, including local civil society organizations and local self-governments throughout Georgia.

***Cultural-Humanitarian Fund “Sukhumi” was set up in 1997 in Kutaisi and has been actively working for 24 years to establish a non-violent, peaceful and equal society throughout western Georgia. Through its efforts, women and young people are actively participating in the life of a democratic Georgia. The organization’s mission is to promote women’s social, economic, and political empowerment by developing their social, educational, and legal capacity, achieving gender equality, and involving them in decision-making.***

Fund “Sukhumi” was the project lead responsible for overall project management and assistance to civil society organizations in the Imereti region (Vani, Bagdati, Khoni, Terjola) in conducting project activities, facilitating their active involvement in PAR Roadmap monitoring.

***Fund of Women Entrepreneurs - a project implementing partner organization, was founded in 2003 in Kutaisi. It has been working to strengthen women’s civic capacity and active participation in the decision-making process. The organization operates in western Georgia and implements projects with various partners, establishing cooperation between the public and private sectors. Women’s economic development in urban and rural areas is paid particular attention.***

Within the project, Fund of Women Entrepreneurs supervised and assisted Racha-Lechkhumi (Ambrolauri, Tsageri) civil society organizations in carrying out project activities, involving them in PAR Roadmap monitoring in the target municipalities.

**Another partner organization implementing the project, the Imereti Scientists' Union "Spectri", is a non-governmental organization operating in Georgia since 1997.**

**The organization's goal is to promote Georgian civil society's development and participate in solving socio-economic and environmental problems at the local and regional levels.**

Within the project, "Spectri" supervised and assisted Guria (Ozurgeti, Lanchkhuti) civil society organizations to carry out project activities and facilitate their active involvement in PAR Roadmap monitoring in the target municipalities of Guria.

The partner organizations started implementing the above project in October 2019. It was a two-year project aimed to increase the capacity of civil society organizations in western Georgia through mutual cooperation with other CSOs in order to engage in decision-making process at local and regional level to monitor and implement the PAR Roadmap 2020.

**The project was rather ambitious, complex and full of different activities, implemented in eight target municipalities (Ozurgeti, Lanchkhuti, Bagdati, Vani, Khoni, Terjola, Ambrolauri, Tsageri) of three regions (Guria, Imereti and Racha-Lechkhumi).**

Despite the project complexity, Fund "Sukhumi" and its partner organizations were convinced that they could implement such a project and achieve the set goal and objectives since all three organizations have been cooperating with local self-governments and civil society organizations of western Georgia for a long time.

While developing the project, the stakeholders were informed and the civil society organizations to be joined the Common Forum for CSOs were identified.

The publication describes how the project activity started; how the Common Forum for civil society organizations was established; which organizations joined the forum; how they were strengthened and involved in the PAR Roadmap monitoring; and which mechanisms were used for monitoring and assessing the population's local needs. In addition, the publication contains interesting information on the mechanism of strengthening coordination and cooperation between CSOs and local self-government structural units, which facilitated the response to the gaps identified through the monitoring and the implementation of activities

focused on governance efficiency, transparency, accountability and inclusiveness in all three regions.

You will also learn about the e-petition model piloted in Khoni Municipality, the media role and importance in raising the visibility of CSOs, and successful examples of national level advocacy.

**Most importantly, the publication represents the changes that became visible by the end of the project, the impact that the project has had on civil society and government agencies, and how they have become closer, cooperating and promoting the country's better democratic development.**

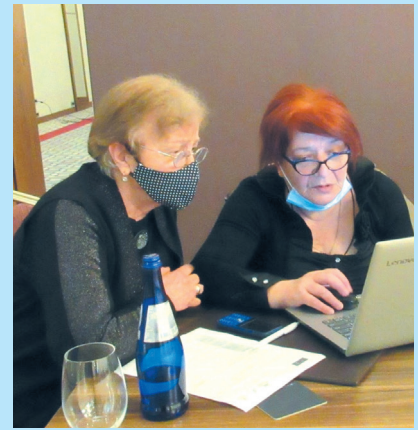
We hope that by sharing the best practices of our project, the civil society in other regions will also be developed, strengthened and actively involved in decision-making processes to promote better governance.



# CHAPTER I

## STRENGTHENING CIVIL SOCIETY - CREATING A PLATFORM FOR COOPERATION OF CSOs IN THE CONTEXT OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORM





### ამოცანა

**Objectives/ამოცანა:**

რისი მიღწევა სურს, რა ამოცანები აქვს დასახული მიზნის მისაღწევად



# STRENGTHENING CIVIL SOCIETY - CREATING A PLATFORM FOR COOPERATION OF CSOs IN THE CONTEXT OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORM

**KETEVAN TSKHAKAIA,**  
Project coordinator

The Imereti Scientists' Union "Spectri"

## □ CSO FORUM CONCEPT UNDER THE PROJECT DESIGN

According to the participatory democratic governance principles, it involves making informed, transparent decisions and managing risks;

- Developing the governing body capacities and efficiency;
- Involving stakeholders and ensuring accountability.

One of the Public Administration Reform's key objectives is to improve public administration transparency, accountability, and efficiency. Against this background, strengthening local civil society organizations and their inclusiveness in local processes as a key component of participatory democracy is gaining weight. The main advantage of the Public Administration Reform is its precondition - close cooperation between civil society, academic circles, government agencies and international organizations.

The project of the Fund "Sukhumi" and partner organizations "A common forum for CSOs from Guria, Imereti and Racha-Lechkhumi for PAR Roadmap monitoring" serves this purpose.

The project emphasized that civil society organizations play a significant role in the success of democratic reforms. They are a "pulling force" for changes. Therefore, it is essential to strengthen them as pursuers of EU-Georgia cooperation, especially in improving regional and local governance. It is necessary to involve actors like local civil society organizations who will significantly contribute to the country's large-scale commitments and implement the Roadmap at the local level.

Most of the civil society organizations dealing with good governance issues are located in Tbilisi. Many local CSOs are often limited in resources, intervention issues, the scope of activities, and partners. Consequently, more technical methods and experience essential for large-scale impacts remain accumulated in the capital. The organizations in the centre have relatively more opportunities, resources, qualified staff, and access to partners.

The local CSOs are limited in their activities. They often lack the resources to participate in local political dialogue. As a result, they have minimal impact on local processes, and it is reasoned by the lack of skills in collecting evidence-based information, analyzing and other necessary ones.

Studying and monitoring the citizens' local needs requires appropriate resources, competence and skills. Although most local CSOs lack the experience and resources for it, on the other hand, they have significant expertise regarding local needs and comprehensive information about local groups, trust and necessary contacts with local beneficiaries, often with local administrative structures.

After mastering the relevant skills in different areas, their activities and obtained materials can become invaluable information, which will become a basis of local political dialogue, timely identification of issues relevant for citizens and their advocacy at local and even central levels.

According to the findings, the project authors concluded that civil society organizations in western Georgia need adequate space for horizontal and vertical cooperation. Furthermore, knowledge from large organizations to smaller ones can be shared and transferred through horizontal collaboration. Therefore, it will significantly increase their capabilities. Vertical cooperation was used to develop and implement development strategies and open an interaction space for CSOs, local people, and the project target local authorities of Guria, Imereti, Racha-Lechkhumi.

Thus, considering the aspects mentioned above, it was possible to monitor PAR more effectively in Guria, Racha, Lechkhumi and Imereti, and to promote the reform main ideas successful implementation. However, it should be mentioned that according to the preliminary research conducted by Fund "Sukhumi", the Public Administration Reform with proper activities and results had not been introduced in Guria, Racha-Lechkhumi and Imereti. No tangible changes were observed regarding transparent, efficient and inclusive local governance, including e-governance and e-services. Therefore, the results of Public Administration Reform at the local level were minimal. Therefore, it was vital to increase the civil society role and impact on the reform successful implementation.

**According to the project, local stakeholders can play an essential role in PAR monitoring at the local level and become active to promote civil society inclusiveness (which remains very passive in Guria, Racha-Lechkhumi and Imereti). However, their impact is minimal due to small organizational potential (PR, financing, etc.) and a lack of transparency in local government activities. In addition, it was noted that local government agencies often fail to consider PAR elements at the regional and local levels. Therefore, it poses a significant risk to the reform success.**

The project also envisaged that government institutions could not properly assess the reform progress at the local level. The practice of introducing appropriate monitoring mechanisms

and tools is weak, which highlights the need for monitoring by an external entity (in this case, the civil sector).

The three main challenges identified were lack of awareness and digital literacy of local government staff on Public Administration Reform and its effectiveness at the regional and local levels, less receptivity to news and low motivation to change usual routine models.

To overcome this challenge and facilitate the Public Administration Reform implementation, a civil society forum of 16 local organizations was established within the project.

**Forum member organizations:**

- 1. Khoni IDP Initiative Group (Khoni);**
- 2. Education and Development Center “Edelweiss” (Khoni);**
- 3. “Tanadgoma - 2020” (Vani);**
- 4. N (N) LE “Citizens’ Activism for Effective Governance and Justice” (Vani);**
- 5. Civic Spectrum “Equality” (Bagdati);**
- 6. N (N) LE “Equality Now” (Bagdati);**
- 7. N (N) LE Union for Protection of Children’s Rights and Civic Education “Children - the Future of Georgia” (Terjola);**
- 8. N (N) LE “Women for the Future of Georgia” (Terjola);**
- 9. Georgian Rural Council (Lanchkhuti);**
- 10. Lanchkhuti Information Center (Lanchkhuti);**
- 11. Education and Equality Center (Ozurgeti);**
- 12. N (N) LE Young Teachers Union (Ozurgeti);**
- 13. N (N) LE Tsageri Women’s Rights and Equality Center (Tsageri);**
- 14. N (N) LE Active Citizen-Accountable Government (Tsageri);**
- 15. Racha - Lechkhumi and Kvemo Svaneti Self-Government Resource Center (Ambrolauri);**
- 16. Regional hub of Racha-Lechkhumi and Kvemo Svaneti - “Abkhazintercont” (Ambrolauri).**

**The project’s general logic was based on the thesis that local/regional governments do not have significant potential and readiness for dialogue with CSOs and do not understand its role in promoting Public Administration Reform. Further-**

more, the practice of sharing other municipalities' experiences and strategies to overcome the obstacles to successfully implementing Public Administration Reform was weak at the local level.

#### ❑ CSO FORUM - AS A WELL-COORDINATED MECHANISM FOR POSITIVE CHANGES

Forum for CSOs from Guria, Imereti and Racha-Lechkhumi was established in October 2019. The forum platform was aimed at consolidating the civil society organizations of Western Georgia, their development and strengthening. Initially, 16 organizations were the forum members. The forum brought together NGOs of "various calibers" from three regions - Guria, Racha-Lechkhumi and Imereti, which had the greatest motivation for joint cooperation with the Forum member partner organizations and the municipalities' government agencies.

**"The forum is a space for collaboration. Civil society organizations learn from each other and share best practices from one municipality to another. Thus, the CSO Forum is an opportunity to collect opinions and proposals from civil society organizations, which differ from each other in scale, geographical and thematic scope".**

#### ❑ EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES FOR THE CSO FORUM MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS

Within the project, training series were organized to increase the potential of civil society organizations. For example, how should changes be advocated at the regional and national levels? How to reach out to the local population? Why is social media important for civil society organizations? It is a shortlist of the forum members' issues during the training.

The forum had meetings every two months, mainly in Kutaisi. The forum members "tested" the training materials and theoretical knowledge in practice between the meetings and training sessions. Under the guidance of supervisor organizations, they monitored the Public Administration Reform and conducted a needs assessment in 8 municipalities. In addition, they stayed in touch with the local population. They piloted active civic positions, new and innovative attitudes, were involved in an active dialogue with the self-government to advocate the identified issues.

## ❑ CSO FORUM MEETINGS AGENDA:

The first meeting of the Forum for CSOs from Guria, Imereti and Racha-Lechkhumi was held in Kutaisi, on 22.11.2019, in the Public Defender of Georgia Kutaisi regional office. The project “A common forum for CSOs from Guria, Imereti and Racha-Lechkhumi for PAR Roadmap monitoring” was represented at the meeting.

The forum participants discussed the Public Administration Reform Strategic Framework-Objectives, Tasks and Principles. In addition, a discussion was held around the issue.

The invited expert’s opinions were interesting for the participants. They had an interactive discussion on the public administration of the municipalities regarding PAR monitoring results; received comprehensive information on the opportunity of involving civil society in monitoring the Public Administration Reform (PAR) Roadmap and the Roadmap at the local level; Public Administration Reform the strategic framework objectives, tasks and principles. “Public Policy and Reforms - Georgia’s Public Administration Reform Roadmap 2020 - Overview”; “Monitoring and Evaluation - Objectives and Tools”; “The role of civil society in the monitoring process - sharing the participants’ experience” were also on the agenda. The action plan - 2019-2020 and the tasks set in the direction of self-government; strengthening local self-government - decentralization strategy - goals and indicators were also discussed.

The forum meetings focused on participatory budgeting and its importance in the context of Public Administration Reform. On February 22, 2020, the Forum members met to discuss civil budgeting and get acquainted with the practices of more experienced municipalities in this field. “Random” topics were not discussed on the forums, which became evident through its intense multiplication. In the following chapters, we will discuss the municipalities where the civic, i.e. participatory budgeting program has been successfully introduced.

The Covid-19 pandemic induced restrictions also affected forum meetings. Some of them were held online.

The Forum members were the leading implementers of the project activities - monitoring, needs study, advocacy and lobbying. Within the project, generating ideas in working groups set up in municipalities was also their niche.

The online forum held on November 30, 2020, was dedicated to reviewing the activities of the working groups set up to facilitate the implementation of public administration in the target municipalities and their strategic plans.

The topic of the following meetings (January 28, 2021, Kutaisi) was dedicated to the

action plans developed and approved and their practical results. Situational analysis of the target municipalities was made. Changes in the Public Administration Reform (PAR) Roadmap implementation at the municipal and civil society levels were analyzed.

April 8, 2021. Batumi: “Current Situation in Target Regions regarding Support/Funding of CSOs - Organizational Development Opportunities, Donor Cooperation Practices and Prospects”.

May 21, 2021, Kutaisi: The meeting topic - “Identified needs based on the local population study materials - changes and challenges”- on the example of Khoni, Terjola, Bagdati, Vani, Tsageri, Ambrolauri, Ozurgeti, Lanchkhuti municipalities.

The agenda of the CSO Forum meeting, June 26, 2021, covered the topic: “Analysis of the changes identified through the needs assessment/study conducted within the project according to the municipalities”.

The topic of the CSO Forum held on 28.07.2021 reflected the project grant component positive results: “Results of projects implemented in the municipality - what changes the projects brought to the municipality and what impact they had on the community”. The information provided by the forum participants highlighted the importance and social effects of the implemented projects within the grant component and the benefits for the organizations.

This incomplete list of forum topics also shows that every meeting held with the participation of the forum member organizations confirmed that project’s each new phase is a step on the path to strengthening organizations and institutional growth. They have gradually developed into civic actors with significant expertise. The gap that existed at the beginning of the project between relatively experienced and more resourceful and smaller organizations is gradually disappearing. It is the achievement of networking, success and best practices, sharing experiences.

Despite the pandemic-induced restrictions, they successfully held exchange meetings and invited partners with their best expertise in the municipality to share this or that critical issue with colleagues and working groups. It must be said that they had the unequivocal support of the municipal leaders in this matter.

## **□ DECLARATION OF THE CSO FORUM ORGANIZATIONS**

The terms of cooperation and partnership of the organizations consolidated in the CSO Forum were formally concluded with a declaration, which highlighted the corporate values of the Forum organizations and the issues on which the Forum members made a particular commitment:





**CSO FORUM CONTRIBUTION TO ADVOCACY AT THE CENTRAL LEVEL ON ISSUES NECESSARY FOR PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION**

As a full-fledged entity involved in the Public Administration Reform implementation, the CSO Forum was not limited to issues to be resolved at the local level. Based on citizens' needs studies, evidence-based information has revealed one of the critical challenges in introducing e-services, a key component of Public Administration Reform: the lack of Internet access among a significant segment of citizens. In response, an appeal was made on behalf of the Forum, signed by its member organizations. Through the efforts of the Fund "Sukhumi" Tbilisi representation, further advocacy of this issue was provided, which was reflected in the practical steps taken by the government to facilitate the process of internetization in the municipalities most in need:

**“To Administration of the Government of Georgia,  
Public Governance Reform Council,  
Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure of Georgia**

**APPEAL OF FUND “SUKHUMI” AND CSO FORUM OF WESTERN  
GEORGIA:**

*We would like to inform you that the Cultural-Humanitarian Fund “Sukhumi”, in partnership with the Fund of Women Entrepreneurs and the Imereti Scientists’ Union “Spectri and with the financial support of the European Union, is implementing the project “**A common forum for CSOs from Guria, Imereti and Racha-Lechkhumi for PAR Roadmap monitoring**”, which serves to promote the Public Administration Reform (PAR) effective and proper implementation of at the local level.*

*Within the project, PAR Roadmap three monitorings and the population’s needs assessment in PAR implementation have been carried out in 8 municipalities of western Georgia.*

*Through the monitoring conducted in the self-governments and the population’s needs study, one of the most acute problems in the target municipalities is **the poor Internet coverage, which significantly hinders the population’s access to e-services** and proper implementation of local government reform.*

*The provision of quality Internet coverage and the population’s need to access electronic systems and services throughout Georgia are particularly pressing due to the situation related to Covid-19. Weak internet coverage, which is especially problematic for the rural population, prevents it from receiving information on local self-government social programs, sending letters, applications and petitions to City Council or City Hall representatives, participating in online public hearings, participating in participatory budget programs; etc. In addition, the rural population cannot access the various public e-services available at the central level, use the support services offered by state or civil society organizations to vulnerable populations, receive a quality education, and work online.*

*In addition to poor Internet coverage, the inaccessibility of e-services is also affected by **the high cost of Internet services, the lack of appropriate technological means (computer, smartphone) for a large part of the population and poor skills.***

*Unfortunately, there is a sharp **digital inequality in Georgia** today, mainly reasoned by geographical and economic factors.*

*Given the situation caused by the Covid pandemic and the government commitment to develop e-governance and services, it is essential to accelerate and im-*

plement the process of internetization throughout Georgia. Besides, it is necessary to inform the population, involve them in the decision-making process, and provide access to e-services and infrastructure development in the regions.

Based on the above, we ask/request the administration of the Government of Georgia, with the inclusiveness of the Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure, to fulfil the obligation imposed by the Constitution and take all possible and necessary measures to eliminate digital inequality and provide the Georgian population with the Internet.

**Therefore, it is important to take the following actions immediately:**

- *Actively negotiate with ISPs to strengthen Internetization or Internet signal to provide the population's access to e-services;*
- *For the socially vulnerable people living in the Internet coverage area, but unable to pay for the Internet due to lack of funds, the state should subsidize the Internet fee;*
- *To facilitate the development of appropriate skills in the population to use electronic services, special service centers and/or mobile technical groups should be established in the self-governments, which will serve the population on the spot and provide practical assistance/instruction on the use of electronic systems.*

**Signatory organizations: (the appeal was signed by the Forum 33 member organizations)**

**(More on Advocacy Results in Chapter 5)**

## **□ A METHODOLOGICAL GUIDELINE FOR CSOs TO MONITOR PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORM (PAR) AT THE LOCAL LEVEL**

The project implementing organizations paid permanent attention to the Forum member CSOs during the whole project cycle. Educational events were held, and consultations with the inclusiveness of qualified experts were provided. In parallel with the Forum, regular meetings, exchange of experience, personal assessment of current processes, and educational series of training were held.

Appropriate manuals and training modules were prepared before each training and based on them, and it was decided to create a relevant guideline within the project. It will enable the forum participants and many start-up organizations to benefit and receive important information.

### **The publication topics are:**

- ✓ Public Administration Reform Roadmap monitoring and civil society participation;
- ✓ Public Administration Reform Roadmap (PAR) and Civil Society participation in PAR Roadmap Monitoring at the local level (Part 2);
- ✓ PAR Roadmap monitoring implementation at the municipal level;
- ✓ Public Administration Reform (PAR) implementation monitoring at the local level;
- ✓ Citizens' needs assessment;
- ✓ Assessment of regional needs with the participation of the general public for implementing the PAR Roadmap at the local level (Part II);
- ✓ Public policy advocacy and the role of civil society organizations;
- ✓ How to plan and conduct an advocacy campaign;
- ✓ Lobbying;
- ✓ Ensuring the publicity of civil society organizations;
- ✓ Effective PR methods to ensure the publicity of civil society organizations and increase their competence. Part I.
- ✓ Effective PR methods to ensure the publicity of civil society organizations and increase their competence. Part II.
- ✓ Effective PR methods to ensure the publicity of civil society organizations and increase their competence. Part III.
- ✓ Effective PR methods to ensure the publicity of civil society organizations and increase their competence. Part IV.
- ✓ Effective communication;
- ✓ Institutional development of civil society organizations;
- ✓ The importance of civic activism and citizens' inclusiveness;
- ✓ How to register a civil society organization;
- ✓ Grant application development process and main stages;
- ✓ Obtaining funding, developing a grant application and managing a project.

### **□ CSO FORUM INFORMATION SUPPORT**

The CSO Forum activities were maximally covered in the project (more on this in Chapter VII), which allowed the current dynamics, achievements or challenges to become visible. Particular importance was attached to the PR strategy in the long run, so that at the project completion, the forum member organizations could effectively position themselves in their community, with donors, remain reliable partners and a source of innovation since due to the

project, there is a positive expectation from them. Maintaining this positive image and trust of the public and the government will be necessary to maintain maximum influence over positive civic processes.

#### **□ CSO FORUM IMPACT – RECOGNITION OF THE CITIZENS’ PARTICIPATION IMPORTANCE BY LOCAL AUTHORITIES**

When discussing the CSO Forum member organizations, their impact on local civil processes, their importance, their expertise in various issues, the desire to cooperate with them is emphasized in all eight municipalities. Thus, following in the footsteps of the CSO Forum, citizens’ participation in local policy in the target municipalities is recognized as a precondition for socially essential processes.

Local authorities have realized that this cooperation is essential for greater legitimacy of government decisions and relevant activities, to consider the views and interests of all segments of society in the public policy process, to provide more efficient services to a variety of citizens, including the most vulnerable ones. Therefore, a niche where the public and the government see the CSOs’ role has been identified. It includes establishing collaborative relationships with government officials, informing and educating, researching, initiating policy issues, offering alternatives to existing approaches, monitoring and evaluating programs and projects, advocating for the citizens’ relevant issues, etc.

#### **□ CSO FORUM – TOOLS FOR RESPONDING TO LOCAL PROBLEMS**

Through the project, whose main actors were civil society organizations, several challenges in implementing public administration reform were identified. Furthermore, it led to relevant recommendations for the target municipalities, central government agencies and local NGOs.

In line with these recommendations, the civil society organizations’ activeness went on with systematic consultations with self-governments. As a result, the working groups, which included the Forum organizations, managed to initiate several issues in the budget (*more about it in the following chapters*). Also, in response to the identified needs and challenges, a total of 46 projects submitted by them were funded by Fund “Sukhumi”.

#### **□ EXPANDING THE FORUM**

The CSO Forum consolidating 16 organizations operating in 8 municipalities became a full-fledged space for sharing information, successes and challenges, and ways to over-

come them. As a result, CSOs with minimal experience have significantly improved their competencies and mastered the skills to take full advantage of opportunities, which has become a prerequisite for positive changes in the Public Administration Reform process. In the project's next phase, 14 newly-established organizations joined the Forum, and their number is currently 33 including the project lead and partner organizations. With the help of mentor organizations, they quickly began to participate in local processes. With the help of Fund "Sukhumi", they have already implemented their first projects regarding public awareness, education, and needs study. They have acquired skills in project management, are raising awareness regarding the organization's visibility, identifying needs, advocating for socially relevant issues, a culture of civic activism, campaign planning and conducting. On a relatively small scale, but they are involved in the Public Administration Reform local monitoring.

#### **Newly-established organizations that have joined the forum:**

1. Youth Inclusiveness Center (Khoni);
2. Organization of Persons with Disabilities "Phoenix" (Khoni);
3. People and Freedom (Vani);
4. LTD "Vani - XII century" (Vani);
5. Solidarity - XXI (Bagdati);
6. Youth from Terjola (Terjola);
7. N (N) LE "Alao" (Terjola);
8. "Amridi" (Terjola);
9. N (N) LE "Ruduni" (Lanchkhuti);
10. N (N) LE "Lanchkhuti Youth Movement" (Lanchkhuti);
11. N (N) LE "We create the future" (Ambrolauri);
12. Center for Humanitarian Initiatives and Development (Ambrolauri);
13. "Center for Local Self-Government Promotion and Citizens' Inclusiveness Organizations in Tsageri Municipality" (Tsageri);
14. "Democracy, Support, Trust" (Tsageri);

#### **❑ Forum outcomes**

Since the Public Administration Reform is a horizontal and multi-sectoral policy, and its implementation depends on the inclusiveness of the executive, decision-makers and high-ranking

officials, this project has once again demonstrated the importance of monitoring the reform process for the public policy successful implementation.

This monitoring was not a public structure internal measure (which is also essential, and the recommendations regarding it were voiced in the research conducted within the project). Instead, it was the opportunity for external actors (in our case, the CSO Forum and civil society in general) to participate in public policy. The CSO Forum functioning has proved that one of the public policy success preconditions is the civil society inclusiveness in monitoring its implementation.

The project used a result-oriented monitoring system to obtain more information from local groups and accumulate knowledge/expertise on their needs and challenges, which was shared with the government daily. In addition, it assisted the authorities of all eight municipalities to observe the successful practices, the progress and the dynamics of changes.

**The network organizations' intensive work allowed for rapid sharing and multiplication of partners' success, which was reflected in the prompt introduction of innovations (for example, Lanchkhuti e-manager; Khoni e-petition, etc.).**

**The Forum member organizations became a "locomotive" for multidisciplinary working groups (which was reflected in developing training strategies for officials, ethics code, anti-corruption regulations, strategies, modernization of websites).**

**In the heart of the Forum, ideas voiced by its member organizations in the municipalities were generated. They became the implementers of these ideas: the pace of introducing civil budgeting in Terjola; actualizing gender equality issues; anti-corruption strategies, measures for informing citizens - "pioneering" outsourcing practices in the region, etc.**

**The idea emerged at the CSO Forum meetings, which brought unprecedentedly close communication with the local government (an application in Lanchkhuti, multiplied actively).**

Thanks to CSO Forum, some actions are taken in municipalities after acknowledging the importance of needs assessment and program impact. However, it is done at a slow pace.

It is evident that the resources of CSOs strengthened through the project are acknowledged and sought to be used.

The achievement of the CSO Forum and project working groups is an unprecedented scale of inter-municipal cooperation and exchange of experience. However, this pace will probably be challenging to maintain, although all municipalities have recognised its effect.

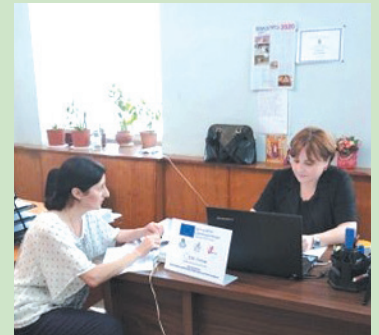
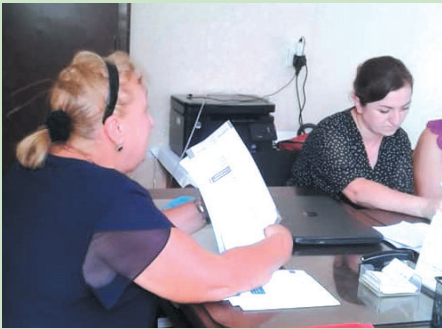
One of the project's most significant achievements is a consensus on the common values of government and civic groups, without which it is impossible to establish democratic standards.



## CHAPTER II

# CSOs' INVOLVEMENT IN THE PAR ROADMAP MONITORING





# CSOs' INVOLVEMENT IN THE PAR ROADMAP MONITORING

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The project had a coalition format, and through the cooperation of three NGOs (Fund "Sukhumi" as a curator organization, the Imereti Scientists' Union "Spectri" and Fund of Women Entrepreneurs), it became possible to ensure the inclusiveness of CSOs operating in 8 municipalities of three large regions (Imereti, Guria and Racha-Lechkhumi) in PAR Roadmap implementation. In this regard, the project created a unique opportunity for the organizations operating in the municipality, which are located in the project geographical area.

## □ CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED IN THE MONITORING BY REGIONS:

### **Cultural-Humanitarian Fund "Sukhumi" was Imereti region curator supervising 4 municipalities:**

- Bagdati Municipality: N (N) LE "Equality Now" and N (N) LE Union of Persons with Disabilities "Faith and Hope";
- Vani Municipality: N (N) LE "Tanadgoma" and N (N) LE "Citizens' Activism for Effective Governance and Justice";
- Terjola Municipality: N (N) LE Union for Protection of Children's Rights and Civic Education "Children - The Future of Georgia" and Terjola "Association of the Persons with Disabilities";
- Khoni Municipality: N (N) LE "Education and Development Center "Edelweiss" and N (N) LE "Khoni IDP Initiative Group".

### **Fund Women Entrepreneurs supervised the organizations operating in Racha-Lechkhumi region:**

- Ambrolauri Municipality: Racha-Lechkhumi and Kvemo Svaneti Self-Government Resource Center and Racha-Lechkhumi and Kvemo Svaneti Regional Hub - "Abkhazintercont";
- Tsageri Municipality: N (N) LE Center for Women's Rights and Gender Equality, "Active Citizen - Accountable Government".

**Imereti Scientists' Union "Spectri" supervised the following 2 municipalities of Guria region:**

- Lanchkhuti Municipality: N (N) LE Georgian Rural Council and N (N) LE Lanchkhuti Information Center;
- Ozurgeti Municipality: N (N) LE Education and Equality Center.

It should be noted that the role of flagship of such experienced organizations as Fund "Sukhumi", Women Entrepreneurs Foundation, the Imereti Scientists' Union "Spectri" gave the green light to regional organizations to realize their resources in the PAR monitoring.

On their part, civil society organizations have fully understood the responsibility and purposeful use of their resources in the local public administration ongoing processes.

In addition to strengthening existing CSOs, the formation of new CSOs and the creation of guarantees of their sustainability and viability by engaging in sub-grant projects can be considered a significant achievement in the project. At the end of the project, 14 new regional organizations were added to the 16 existing civil society organizations, which have already tested their strengths from scratch. Moreover, the projects developed within the project sub-grants proved to be a springboard for newly established regional organizations that could be involved as new actors in PAR monitoring at the local level (more on that in the publication's relevant chapter).

Due to the specifics of the activities of civil society organizations, the cooperation leverage with the self-government is wide. It implies the establishment of constructive communication with local authorities, including local policy study, monitoring, assessment, and initiation of relevant issues according to the obtained results and advocacy. By adhering to these principles and formulating the partnership concept, the project ensured sustainable cooperation between civil society organizations and local government agencies, which eventually led to various successful initiatives in a particular municipality.

#### **□ FROM LOW LEVEL OF CIVIL SOCIETY INCLUSIVENESS AND ACTIVISM TO FURTHER POSITIVE DYNAMICS**

Civil society inclusiveness and participation in the process of local public policy reform contributes to increasing government transparency and accountability, which ultimately leads to the optimal form of democratic governance.

It should also be noted that for many NGOs, Public Administration Reform **monitoring was not an area of discussion and interest at the project beginning**. It was mainly due to the civil society low awareness of PAR.

The non-governmental sector did not realize the need to use its resources and engage in creating effective local governance.

Such a position was not one-sided. **The self-governments did not try to cooperate with the non-governmental sector**, highlighting the need for its inclusiveness.

Against this background, the civil society engagement in the PAR monitoring has introduced significant innovations in the activities of individual municipalities, which has manifested itself primarily in establishing a new partnership, relations between self-government and civil society.

As a result of the communication built on cooperation, the local organizations involved in the monitoring soon realized their responsibility, and the process of forming local public policy became their area of interest. In addition, inclusiveness in the monitoring process set significant precedents for strengthening the capacity of local CSOs in individual municipalities through dialogue and discussion with government officials.

**The activity of civil society organizations rose from monitoring to monitoring. Consequently, it was reflected in their increased competence.**

#### ❑ **CSOs AUTHORITY AND COMPETENCE IN THE MONITORING PROCESS**

In order to identify the quality of Public Administration Reform Roadmap implementation, the project envisaged conducting four monitoring sessions aimed to study the efficiency, transparency and inclusiveness of local government activities.

The monitoring process involved the already listed target segments: 16 civil society organizations in Khoni, Bagdati, Terjola, Vani, Ozurgeti, Lanchkhuti, Tsageri and Ambrolauri municipalities.

Before the monitoring process, the project implementation team and partner organizations developed a monitoring plan.

A monitoring tool was created in the next stage - a questionnaire, which included three areas: transparency, efficiency and inclusiveness. Each direction was assessed with pre-selected indicators, and the current situation was studied according to 32 indicators.

Before the monitoring, training sessions were conducted for the representatives of the CSOs involved in the project to increase their competence and develop the necessary skills. Against the background that most of the participating organizations had no experience in monitoring, the raining sessions had significant importance and contributed to the complete management of the process.

Official internet resources of the municipalities (websites and Facebook pages) were identified as one of the primary monitoring sources. In addition, legislation regulating self-government activities, normative acts, and municipalities' regulations were also studied and analyzed during the monitoring process.

Monitoring organizations had the opportunity, within their power, to use telephone communication to obtain additional information from a particular respondent. In addition, they could meet with the representatives of the municipality relevant services, if necessary.

Before the monitoring process, based on a pre-designed plan, representatives of public organizations held informational meetings with municipal officials. The monitoring tasks and objectives, working methods and tools were introduced to Self-government officials. Preparatory meetings paved a new path for cooperation between civil society and municipalities.

The self-governments were fully prepared to carry out the monitoring process from the beginning, which later turned into practical actions. All municipalities cooperated with the representatives of CSOs, and the field monitors were provided with the necessary materials and information.

During the monitoring process, individual meetings were held with the persons in charge to collect information, and the ways of verifying the data were specified. Qualitative and quantitative indicators were processed, and monitoring reports were prepared at the municipal level.

**Obstacles and risks created by the Covid-19 pandemic:** There were some obstacles to monitoring during the Covid-pandemic period. Under the state regulations, when face-to-face meetings were restricted entirely, and the obtaining information and meeting with specific individuals were at some risk, the civil society maximum efficiency was especially evident. Through its efforts, the planned meetings were conducted online. The full support of public officials accompanied this process. As a result, the risk of delays in monitoring was eliminated, and it was carried out smoothly with the maximum support of local government agencies.

Business relationships have increasingly linked CSOs and self-governments. It highlighted the common interests of both parties and created an entirely new, collaborative space that facilitated the establishment of a healthy partnership.

## □ MONITORING STAGES: IDENTIFYING EXISTING CHALLENGES, CONSULTING ACTIVITIES WITH SELF-GOVERNMENTS, AND INNOVATIONS TO MAKE POSITIVE CHANGES

The success of Public Administration Reform is significantly determined by public awareness and support. Unfortunately, at the beginning of the project, it became evident that

the low level of public awareness of PAR in the regions posed obstacles to the public interest in the issue. As a result, there was no motivation to improve the population's interest in the positive outcomes of public governance.

The monitoring process has demonstrated that the challenges regarding e-governance and access to e-services are affected by low public awareness and inadequate internet skills. In addition, the municipalities' strengths and weaknesses, challenges, and shortcomings regarding the ongoing Public Administration Reform have been identified. The situation was assessed based on the obtained data analysis, and relevant recommendations were developed, which became an integral part of the project plan.

The civil sector, which, according to the project, was considered to be one of the main actors in the project, became a permanent participant in the whole process.

The inclusiveness of civil society organizations in the monitoring process has made significant progress in introducing cooperation with self-governments. Furthermore, creating a common system for stakeholder dialogue facilitated the introduction of new approaches in the target municipalities.

The first monitoring was conducted in January-February 2020.

As a result of the monitoring, a detailed report was prepared, reflecting the shortcomings identified during the reform process, and relevant recommendations were developed for all target municipalities.

(Consolidated report was made based on 8 reports).

### ➤ **CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED BY THE FIRST MONITORING:**

The **first** monitoring<sup>1</sup> showed that various obstacles hampered the implementation of the Public Administration Reform process in the municipalities. In particular, the website was not fully operational in some municipalities during the monitoring period, which was inconsistent with the reform process and complicated the assessment of the reform implementation. In addition, interviews with public officials and data obtained through observation were used by monitors to supplement the information.

The monitoring revealed that officials' contact information **was insufficiently available on the websites of all eight municipalities**. Besides, **there was no practice of publishing electronic reports of different services** in some self-governments, or often it was fragmented. **In addition, there were gaps in the rules for publishing public information (orders, decrees, procurement reports, audit reports)**.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://csoforum.ge/index.php/en/news-3/alternativepar/500-the-first-monitoring-report>

There was no favourable situation regarding online communication between the self-governments and the population in all the target municipalities. **Therefore, most of the websites needed to be improved, maintained, updated, and brought in line with the standards** to electronically facilitate the submission of complaints and proposals to citizens. **During the monitoring period, none of the municipalities had an anti-corruption plan and a code of ethics.**

The monitoring revealed that **participatory budgeting was not introduced in other self-governments except Ozurgeti and Lanchkhuti**, which is entirely contrary to the democratic principles of citizens' inclusiveness and participation in the budget formation process. It also appeared that gender budgets were not introduced in the municipalities and, in most cases, gender-sensitive activities broken down in social or other programs formed local gender policies.

The monitoring showed that **municipal officials did not have open consultation days and hours in many cases, and they were not indicated on the website.** Many respondents did not see the need for this, saying that they were ready to meet the citizens every day. In their opinion, citizens can communicate with responsible persons at any time.

The monitoring also showed that **inclusiveness and participation of vulnerable groups in the municipalities are low. For example, most municipalities do not have entrance ramps for people with disabilities**, emphasising the needs of vulnerable groups in budget programs.

## ➤ **SECOND MONITORING - PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES:**

The second monitoring<sup>2</sup> was conducted in August 2020, using the same tools and the principle. One of its main objectives was to measure the progress of the initiatives implemented after the first monitoring.

The analysis of the obtained results revealed the positive dynamics that was achieved through the CSOs inclusiveness. During this period, the **modernization** of websites in the municipalities has accelerated significantly, and the shortcomings hindering the complete operation of the electronic space have been more or less improved. Access to civil servants' CVs and contact information has been improved. In addition, online visits to public officials have become more available.

They started **uploading periodic reports of various services. In addition, citizens' reception days were specified and made available on the website.**

The second monitoring confirmed that the municipalities had started actively developing a code of ethics and anti-corruption plans. A "hotline" has been launched in various municipal-

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<sup>2</sup> <https://csoforum.ge/index.php/en/news-3/alternativepar/755-public-administration-reform-par-roadmap-monitoring-in-8-municipalities-of-western-georgia-second-report>



ities to strengthen online communication with citizens (Khoni Municipality). In addition, active preparatory work has started for introducing **civil budgeting** (Terjola Municipality).

At the same time, NGOs continued to work on the challenges identified by the second monitoring:

The list of problems identified by the second monitoring needed more effective and targeted intervention by NGOs. It has become evident that **the lack of monitoring and practice, which is common to all municipalities (except Ozurgeti)**, remains a significant challenge and significantly hinders the effectiveness of public administration. It is difficult for the self-government to assess the effectiveness of existing programs objectively. As the **citizens' satisfaction with municipal services** (only Bagdati municipality has some experience in this direction) **is not analyzed**, it is difficult to assess the usefulness of individual services.

The monitoring showed that **there is no strategy for training and raising the qualifications of public servants** in the self-governments. Everything depends on external resources (offers of non-governmental organizations).

The practice of citizens' needs study is a severe obstacle. It is often fragmentary and is mainly linked to the projects of specific NGOs (*the next chapter of the publication deals with the needs studies conducted by the CSO Forum members*).

The monitoring showed that most municipalities **had not adopted anti-corruption plans and a code of ethics for officials**. As a result, self-governments are less aware of the importance of sharing successful practices, and similar precedents are less common.

**The existence of gender-segregated data is not among the priority issues of municipalities**, which hinders the strengthening of gender policy.

**The lack of a civil budget (except for Ozurgeti and Lanchkhuti) remains a challenge**, although the impact of consulting work in this direction is evident.

It is necessary to raise public awareness of e-services since the level of citizens' inclusiveness is minimal. The monitoring has shown that **access to e-services is still low**, especially in the peripheral part of municipalities which is reasoned by the lack of internet or inadequate skills for online services.

Another essential mechanism with the inclusiveness of CSOs was used to ensure overcoming the obstacles to the reform identified during the monitoring. **Within the project, interdisciplinary "working groups" were set up in all eight municipalities** consolidating civil society organizations, self-government representatives, the media, and various vulnerable groups under one umbrella. It contributed to creating an effective, operational, coordinating system (*more on the work of working groups - in the fourth chapter of the publication*). It must be said that this mechanism has made it easier to overcome the obstacles identified by monitoring. From monitoring to monitoring, the positive changes in a particular municipality became increasingly apparent. Along with other members of the group, CSO representatives were its co-authors.

### ➤ **THIRD MONITORING RESULTS, POSITIVE TRENDS AND CHALLENGES**

**The third monitoring<sup>3</sup>** was conducted in February 2021. It highlighted the need for new operational interventions in the process of implementing Public Administration Reform.

New data appeared in the list of positive indicators during this period:

Lanchkhuti Municipality created and launched an online **application Lanchkhuti Municipality City Council Electronic Manager**, which is considered an innovative technology and is especially popular among the population. Websites of Khoni, Ambrolauri and Tsageri municipalities were updated. In Ozurgeti Municipality, a graphic diagram of the organizational structure was added to the website.

Khoni, Baghdati Municipality undertook an anti-corruption plan and made changes in the action plan in this direction.

For this period, **significant progress has been made in Ozurgeti Municipality in terms of anti-corruption measures**. There is a strategy for increasing transparency and good faith for 2019-2022, which is the municipality anti-corruption document.

**Vani Municipality was one of the first** to approve the Code of Ethics for the Local Self-Government Public Servants. This fact contributed to resolving one of the essential issues developed by the monitoring. This factor proved to motivate the rest of the municipalities, and the dialogue around the issue started more intensively in self-governments.

**The practice of monitoring the City Hall services has been introduced in Terjola Municipality**. Once every three months, the City Hall staff work is monitored through a points system.

**The practice of assessing the population's satisfaction with municipal services continued in Ozurgeti Municipality**, and the necessary forms for evaluation were developed.

In the case of **Bagdati Municipality**, an important novelty has been observed: **a form of population satisfaction assessment with social service programs** has been developed at the Social Service, which citizens can fill out. The analysis of the information obtained through this form provides an opportunity to identify the population's satisfaction.

**Progress was apparent in creating an adapted environment for people with disabilities**. For example, in Bagdati and Khoni, the municipalities assessed the issue's priority, **and an adapted outdoor space for people with disabilities was arranged**.

The positive changes continued with the creation of various councils to strengthen participatory policies. For example, a **Civil Advisory Council** was established in Vani municipality. In addition, following the monitoring recommendation, a **Youth Advisory Council** was added to the existing councils in **Bagdati Municipality**.

**Progress was made** regarding appointing persons in charge of dealing with vulnerable groups in the **Lanchkhuti Municipality**. **As a result, a person responsible for**

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<sup>3</sup> <https://csoforum.ge/index.php/en/news-3/alternativepar/961-public-administration-reform-par-roadmap-monitoring-in-8-municipalities-of-western-georgia>

**dealing with civil society organizations was appointed in the municipality.**

**A normative, legal act was created in Bagdati and based on it, people with disabilities are involved in managing local issues.**

**The municipalities showed a growing interest in introducing civil budgeting.** In Bagdati and Terjola, active work is ongoing to share successful practices, and necessary conditions are created to introduce a participatory budget. The civil budget amount was significantly increased in **Ozurgeti** and was set at 300000 GEL.

Through the efforts of the platform member CSO, Khoni Municipality started active work **to introduce an e-petition** and improve the citizens' inclusiveness in e-services, which has been successfully continued.

It should be noted that the situation was unchanged for the third monitoring period, and **the lack of a monitoring and assessment system** remained a significant challenge in the activities of municipalities.

**There are still problems regarding public servants' training/professional development, and an appropriate system could not be introduced everywhere due to pandemics.**

Significant changes began regarding the introduction of participatory budgeting. However, most municipalities have not thought about this issue, which is not among their priority issues.

**The situation has not changed regarding the strengthening of gender policy.** Despite the readiness in most municipalities in this regard, no significant changes have been made so far. There are no separate gender programs and gender statistics, gender equality action plans, and council members' contact information on the website.

**An important factor in responding to the challenges identified by the monitoring was the grant projects for the target organizations (more details in Chapter Six).**

#### ➤ **FOURTH MONITORING - RESULTS AND CHALLENGES**

Fourth, the last monitoring<sup>4</sup> was conducted in July 2021. It aimed to record the positive dynamics of implementing the recommendations developed through the monitoring and create new recommendations based on the existing challenges.

It can be said that the positive dynamics regarding e-services in the municipalities for the fourth monitoring period is maintained. Websites are being modernized in stages, and the design of individual services is being improved. In addition, electronic platforms for citizen participation and access to electronic resources have been improved.

In Lanchkhuti, there is progress regarding assessing the population's satisfaction with

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<sup>4</sup> <https://csoforum.ge/index.php/en/reports-publications/alternative-par-progress-reports/1129-public-administration-reform-par-roadmap-monitoring-in-8-municipalities-of-western-georgia-fourth-report>

municipal services. Lanchkhuti Information Center has developed and conducted a study of the population's satisfaction with municipal services. Also, the "Georgian Rural Council" commissioned by the City Hall surveys the population's satisfaction with social programs, which is an essential precedent for introducing the outsourcing method in the municipality.

The last monitoring has revealed that in Bagdati Municipality, a Youth Advisory Council has been added to the existing councils, and an anti-corruption regulation is being drafted.

A significant achievement of Vani Municipality is allocating funds in the budget for the modernization of the municipality's website.

The monitoring confirms that positive dynamics are maintained in all eight municipalities, and the situation in terms of efficiency, transparency and inclusiveness is satisfactory.

**Despite the positive changes, there are still challenges that need to be addressed in the long run.**

In some municipalities, the lack of monitoring of the City Hall service activities, insufficient practice of municipal services, and population satisfaction assessment remained a problem.

Deficiencies are evident regarding citizens' letters, systematization and analysis of complaints. Less available are audit findings.

The lack of anti-corruption plans remains a challenge in many municipalities. It contradicts the democratic characteristic of efficiency and transparency.

Training and raising qualification of civil servants regarding gender budgeting remains a challenge. It hinders positive changes in this direction, although municipalities have started using 1% of the budget for training.

To increase the transparency, efficiency and inclusiveness in the municipality's activities, most of them, except for Ozurgeti, Lanchkhuti, Terjola, have to work to introduce a proper system of civil budgeting.

The new recommendations for the municipality to address the existing shortcomings should help the self-governments maintain the existing progress and not slow down the pace of Public Administration Reform.





# NEEDS ASSESSMENT OF THE POPULATION IN THE PROCESS OF PAR IMPLEMENTATION

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## □ PREREQUISITE FOR CONDUCTING A NEEDS ASSESSMENT ACCORDING TO THE PROJECT

The project design of Fund “Sukhumi” and partner organizations emphasized that effective and efficient state governance, which is the basis of democratic governance, will not be established in a short time. Reforms aimed at increasing state policy effectiveness have not yet achieved the desired changes. It is especially evident in the peripheries, away from the centre. In addition, local governments in Imereti, Guria and Racha-Lechkhumi do not yet have the experience and readiness necessary to implement Public Administration Reform successfully.

A regional needs assessment component was included in the project with the participation of local target NGOs. It is vital for them to express the population’s interests and to increase trust and cooperation between CSOs and the public.

The needs assessment should have shown the citizens’ awareness of the Public Administration Reform, the results of its implementation in the target municipalities, especially regarding e-services and the introduction of good governance. Needs assessments would become the basis of local advocacy processes for citizens, especially their most vulnerable groups; identify interested local groups that would subsequently register as new civil society organizations.

After studying the regional needs, the project envisaged the development of local action plans by these groups, improving the monitoring mechanism regarding implementation of the PAR Roadmap main components in Guria, Racha-Lechkhumi and Imereti self-governments through the indicators of local governance transparency, efficiency, inclusiveness.

The relevance of the needs assessment component was identified by recent local needs surveys (including in Imereti and Guria) conducted by Fund “Sukhumi” in western Geor-

gia. They highlighted the lack of population's awareness about local politics and the need for more space for increased political participation of different groups of citizens and cooperation between local government and civil society.

## ❑ **NEEDS ASSESSMENT PREPARATORY WORK**

Needs assessments were conducted with the resources of 16 CSOs selected in the project target eight municipalities (the previous chapters provide the target organizations' list).

The organizations had different experiences regarding skills in obtaining evidence-based information.

Preliminary research revealed that representatives of some organizations conduct qualified studies, while some do not have any interviewing experience and have never even been survey respondents.

It was planned to create an optimal educational program to correct the existing imbalance, and a permanent counselling service regime was identified.

The training module "Regional Needs Assessment with the participation of the general public - for the implementation of the PAR Roadmap at the local level" was developed. In addition, training on evidence-based information retrieval skills was provided to 32 representatives of the target CSOs.

## ❑ **TRAINING ON NEEDS STUDIES AND ITS OUTCOMES**

Training "Regional Needs Assessment with the participation of the general public - for implementing the PAR Roadmap at the local level" was held for the representatives of target organizations (training was held on February 21, 2020, in Kutaisi, Hotel Bagrati). The target group included non-governmental organizations from Khoni, Terjola, Vani, Bagdati, Ambrolauri, Tsageri, Lanchkhuti, Ozurgeti (32 people).

The training aimed to develop the needs study skills of the representatives of the target NGOs. Participants were allowed to learn about the research methodology and tools necessary to assess local needs. Having conducted the relevant work in this regard, they developed relevant recommendations based on evidence-based information, which were proposed to the target municipalities to be included in the local action plans and made a significant contribution to the implementation of PAR in their municipalities.

Before the training, a study tool (Needs Survey Questionnaire) was developed and agreed



upon between the partners. It enabled the project participants to test the questionnaire draft and consider the participants' comments and recommendations.

All necessary theoretical materials were provided during the training. Group activities and simulation focus groups, interviews and surveys were also conducted with the activeness of the participants. They exchanged experiences. All their questions were answered.

As expected, the project target organizations had a completely different experience in organizing and conducting a study. However, almost all organizations had a good "background" in close communication with beneficiaries and protection of their rights. In addition, they were well aware of the specifics of self-government in general and their municipality's situation and had the necessary contacts.

All set tasks were performed at the different training stages: introducing theoretical materials; identifying a research problem; developing a survey program or "survey concept" (*answers to the questions: What should we study? What should we study? Where, what and under what conditions should we study? What research tools should we use?*), recruiting the questionnaire. In addition, the rules and criteria for selecting respondents, data processing issues were identified as well.

The training was also attended by representatives of the project implementing organizations, which made the target organizations' abilities visible to them. In addition, it helped identify the future strategy of organizing and conducting the research, working with the target organizations.

Participants were provided with a training module to reinforce the received material, including all the necessary advice for novice researchers. A periodic consultation regime was also identified.

**As a result of the training, its main task was achieved. The representatives of the target organizations were equipped with the necessary skills to study the needs within the project.**

Consultants' findings and recommendations were shared with project implementing organizations and target groups.

**The training participants were provided tips** to make use of most of the methodological material offered to them (Training manual #3)<sup>5</sup>, which will help to strengthen the information and relevant skills received at the training; collect as much information as possible about the target groups and follow the principle of their selection quota before conducting fieldwork; select an in-depth interview expert with particular observation. By

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<sup>5</sup> <https://csoforum.ge/index.php/en/reports-publications/training-manuals>

interviewing him/her in advance, we must make sure that the respondent has the motivation to share his/her visions and the relevant expertise and in-depth knowledge on issues of interest to us. When working on the report, the principle of correct formulations (problem, need, recommendation) should be followed as much as possible to avoid the mistakes that novice researchers often make. It was explained that the focus group or interview, the survey findings and conclusions are described in the usual narrative style, with a neutral statement of facts, trends, data. The proposed recommendations are a clearly outlined future activity, so to say, a reference made in a constructive form that must be followed to achieve the desired outcome.

**Proposals were also made to project implementing organizations.** Establishing an orderly system of consultation, information, and exchange of experience with the target organizations is essential to provide them with appropriate methodological assistance.

**It was explained** that the different experiences of the target organizations put them in an unequal starting position. That is why it is advisable to redistribute the work based on their resources. Furthermore, to generalize the research data and prepare the final report, it is desirable to involve qualified specialists/consultants.

At the next stage, the research team has finally identified the needs study aim and methodology. It (citizens' needs study) aims to study and evaluate the efficiency, transparency, and inclusiveness of local government services and develop specific recommendations to improve local services according to evidence-based information. It was explained that the citizens' needs, including those of special needs identified through the study, will be advocated in the relevant agencies at the local and national levels; citizens' priority issues will be integrated into the municipality's action plan to facilitate PAR local implementation.

Research dates and geography were identified. Finally, the selection of survey respondents was determined on a quota basis. Considering gender approaches, other socio-demographic indicators were identified as well. The curator organizations led the research process in the target municipalities: Cultural-Humanitarian Fund "Sukhumi" in Imereti, the Imereti Scientists' Union "Spectri" in Guria and Fund of Women Entrepreneurs in Racha-Lechkhumi.

The needs study was conducted using quantitative and qualitative research methods and research tools. Its indicators were agreed with the project partners, and quantitative and qualitative study questionnaires were developed. A structured questionnaire was developed for the quantitative research, which mainly consisted of closed-ended questions. However, the respondents were allowed to express their opinion on a priority issue or

choose several answers. The qualitative research used focus group discussion techniques and in-depth individual interviews using a predesigned structured questionnaire. After the surveys, the data were processed by the target organizations. After it, the needs study reports were prepared according to the municipalities and based on them; a consolidated report was made.

Needs studies were conducted twice within the project. The findings at both stages are based on a general analysis of the survey data from 8 municipalities and provide insight into the citizens' needs regarding service delivery during the PAR implementation process.

**The study geography and target groups:** The study included citizens of three regions and 8 municipalities of Georgia - Imereti, Guria, and Racha-Ghlechkhumi of Kvemo Svaneti. These studies are representative and allow for generalization. Respondents were selected considering the different socio-demographic characteristics of the citizens.

**The first study**<sup>6</sup> included 1425 people living in the target municipalities, including 882 women and 543 men. The research was conducted in April-May 2020.

**The second study**<sup>7</sup> was conducted in May-June 2021. 1455 people from 8 target municipalities were involved in the study, including 849 women and 606 men. Respondents were selected again on a quota basis, taking into account their different socio-demographic characteristics.

Both phases of the study had limitations. The study was conducted during the COVID-19 induced emergency state. Consequently, the majority of respondents were interviewed online and by telephone.

## ❑ STUDY RESULTS: KEY FINDINGS AND TRENDS

The study was conducted taking the components of transparency, efficiency and inclusiveness into account.

**The level of transparency of local processes in self-government** was assessed based on the level of public awareness about PAR and e-services, access to services and public information. Obstacles to obtaining services were identified using specific indicators:

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<sup>6</sup> <https://csoforum.ge/index.php/en/reports-publications/needassessment-pub/663-assessment-of-population-needs-new-publication>

<sup>7</sup> <https://csoforum.ge/index.php/en/reports-publications/needassessment-pub/1111-second-report-on-needs-research>

*Do you have information on Public Administration Reform/service? If so, where did you learn about this reform? Do you think that Public Administration Reform will improve the quality of citizen services? How well informed are you about municipal e-services? Which municipal e-services did you use last year? In your opinion, what should be the reform focus to improve the transparency and quality of services provided to the population? Which e-services do you use to get local services?*

**The efficiency of self-government activities** was assessed in the context of the self-government municipal programs' purposefulness and the provision of service forms tailored to the needs of citizens. The intensity of the use of electronic systems by the population and the level of satisfaction with the response to the issues raised by the following indicators were also studied: *How do you think is it easy to apply to the self-government agencies for services electronically? Did you use the electronic registration principle to meet with the representative of the desired agency during the last year? On what issues did you address to the local self-government agencies during the last year? Did you or your family member solve the specific problem/problems you addressed? Has the self-government solved a specific problem/problems for you or your family member you have applied for? Does your municipality take care of the needs of vulnerable groups? Do you think that the local government provides the population with complete information about their activities and services? etc.*

**Citizens' participation in self-government** was assessed according to their use of forms of participation, the intensity of submission of proposals to local authorities, and the impact on local policy. *Do you think local public officials are aware of the citizens' inclusiveness importance? In what issues is citizens' inclusiveness encouraged/ensured? Which form of civic inclusiveness have you used? Did you have the opportunity to submit your service-related comments to the relevant agency? How did you manage to do that? What is your primary need to ensure constructive greater inclusiveness and constructive dialogue with the self-government? How many civil society organizations do you know at the local level/within your municipality involved in local political dialogue? How effective is their cooperation with local authorities in promoting the citizens' well-being? Name three (or more) specific activities that you need to meet your local needs.*

Through the study, the information received from 8 municipalities was interpreted, and relevant reports were submitted. Further qualified experts reconciled the results and created a consolidated report summarising the current PAR progress and challenges. It also demonstrated the beneficiaries' needs regarding e-services and municipal services. Based on the study recommendations, the action plans of the multi-sectoral working

groups set up in each municipality included issues advocated in local policies and practices. Budget support was provided for some of them, and approaches to specific issues were changed (*more on the topic - in the next chapter of the publication*).

We are interested in more general trends and evidence of their relevance. For example, data from two phases of needs studies show that despite the PAR steady pace, beneficiaries' problems and needs have not changed much over the past period, and only some have been addressed.

Despite the consistent introduction of e-service modules and the improvement of service forms, many citizens, especially in mountainous areas, do not have access to e-services due to the lack of Internet or its low speed. Also, many beneficiaries lack proper skills and do not have the proper technical equipment. Therefore, the need for internetization of remote communities, uninterrupted access to electronic services for citizens was identified. In response to these problems, it was recommended to advocate for cooperation with ISPs and increase Internet access for citizens.

The first study report identified the need to provide adequately staffed, well-equipped centres close to the citizens' house; strengthen the responsibility of the mayor's representative institution in this matter to provide uninterrupted electronic services to citizens, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The second study also identified problems in many municipalities regarding local staff qualifications and identified the need to equip them with appropriate e-literacy skills to provide good services to citizens. It is especially evident in communities far from the centre. It is necessary to arrange properly equipped spaces where customers will be assisted in receiving proper service. It is noteworthy that in many municipalities, as a result of the study recommendations, decisions have been made to create similar spaces, equip them properly, and provide relevant budget funds.

Needs studies in many municipalities highlighted the need for proper web hosting, access to essential public information, which is being addressed in stages in most municipalities. Websites have been modernized to create a more flexible and simple system. The electronic platform was filled with appropriate fields, becoming more interactive.

Regarding service effectiveness, needs studies have identified the challenge that most target municipalities do not (or are fragmented) study the needs of vulnerable groups and do not have a well-functioning service assessment system. In this regard, the importance of the following issue is obvious: to introduce needs assessment, service evaluation system identifying the different groups' needs in the municipality, including the most vulnerable ones; analyze data, adjust existing programs based on them, or initiate new ones.

The recommendations reflected the importance of using the NGO sector, which has already been achieved to some extent. Reports of surveys conducted by non-governmental organizations in various municipalities to evaluate different social programs were represented. Needs studies of various vulnerable groups have also been conducted.

In response to the identified challenge, a recommendation has been developed:

**“It is important to introduce service efficiency assessment standards in the municipality to assess the impact and effectiveness of existing services on the population. For this, electronic assessment forms can be introduced to receive beneficiaries` assessment easily and with minimal costs.”**

This recommendation has been implemented in several municipalities. Simple and convenient assessment forms are being introduced. The service quality has been already assessed through them.

In response to the need to raise the local officials' qualifications identified by the study, most of the project target municipalities have started using 1% of the budget provided by law and the recommendation is provided:

**“It is necessary to conduct needs study regarding professional development in the self-government and based on it, elaborate a professional development strategy for municipal employees and local public servants, which will outline a specific professional development plan. In addition, educational pieces of training will be conducted to meet the identified needs.”**

Following the needs assessment first phase and relevant recommendations, the practice of “selling” the research service is welcome when the municipality uses the resources of a qualified civil society organization to collect and analyze data. However, after the second stage of the study, there is still a need to raise the qualifications of the municipality various services, and the need for service institutionalization is obvious. Moreover, there is a shortage of CSOs in many municipalities. According to the consolidated report of the study, “regarding informing and educating citizens, monitoring and controlling the reform

process, identifying and advocating problems, there is a lack of an institutionally strong third sector in several municipalities”.

The challenge was identified at both stages of the needs assessment - slow decentralization pace, the limited powers of the municipality in some cases, and the disproportion of financial resources in self-government to the local needs, which is a significant barrier in terms of offering effective services.

At both stages of the study, the citizens expressed their need to increase their self-government powers, which they believe would allow local authorities to concentrate more on their problems (the decentralization of social work, in particular, the granting of socially vulnerable status was emphasized. They think that it would guarantee greater social justice).

In response to these challenges, a recommendation was suggested to the central government:

**“Strengthening the municipality autonomy and proactive implementation of the decentralisation policy through increasing the local government power, transferring financial resources and separating powers between the central and local authorities.”**

The central government should study self-governments needs and existing resources throughout Georgia to analyze the decentralization risk. To increase the social protection quality of vulnerable families, it is necessary to revise the social assessment current centralized system to make the existing criteria more transparent and fair. It is desirable to identify the self-government role in the assessment system because they have the most accurate information on the socio-demographic situation in the municipality and have closer communication with citizens in need of state care. When deciding on granting, revoking or restoring the status of a socially vulnerable person, it is advisable to consider the recommendations of the local self-government relevant social service. It is also vital to speed up the time for re-examining cases not to aggravate the situation of highly vulnerable families. It is desirable to increase the municipality authority in resolving issues such as giving names to municipal facilities, managing natural resources and municipal roads. The central government needs to provide the necessary methodological assistance to the self-governments in introducing new e-governance modules.

The central government has taken no effective steps to address these needs yet. According to the materials of the second study, all the above issues are still on the agenda.

One of the essential issues going at a dynamic pace is the establishment of child rights departments in the municipalities. It can be considered as an answer to the social work decentralization issue. However, its introduction is not carried out at the same pace everywhere.

The recommendation of the first needs study report was to create interactive electronic online platforms where reports will be published, and it will be possible to receive feedback from the population and engage in active communication. An innovative e-portal (Lanchkhuti Municipality) has already been introduced in several municipalities for the follow-up needs study. It has introduced a system of online communication and transparent feedback of citizens with local government officials. Fortunately, most of the target municipalities are beginning to multiply this practice.

Needs studies highlighted the need to introduce citizens' participation and inclusive policy support measures in municipalities, including the promotion of statutory forms of participation: promoting e-petition, participatory budgeting, and various mechanisms of citizens' inclusiveness - the Gender Equality Council, the Civil Advisory Council, the Council of Persons with Disabilities in the implementation of PAR.

In cooperation with the local government and as a result of the project-supported activities, an electronic petition system was introduced in the target municipalities. The amount of participatory budgeting and administration rules were identified (more in other blocks of publication). They provided an adapted environment for people with disabilities. Both phases of the needs studies highlighted the need for gender-segregated data and gender statistics to implement a fairer and more inclusive policy towards vulnerable groups. It is gratifying that the importance of this issue is understood in most of the municipalities. It was reflected in the projects initiated in cooperation with the self-governments of the target municipalities, which resulted in improving the gender equality action plans and the start of work on a gender strategy.

The increasing interest of the Civil Service Bureau in overcoming this challenge in the municipalities is welcoming. Thus, a process is underway that will inevitably bring results in the target municipalities and the practice of the self-governments in general (It should be emphasized that Fund "Sukhumi" addressed several recommendations to the Civil Service Bureau at various times in response to these challenges).

Increased attention to issues related to private sector participation in local self-government can be considered a serious achievement of needs studies. If only positions on this issue were heard in the materials of the first study, the second study identified the specific areas where this cooperation is essential. In addition, the study experts' views



were expressed on how to make the private sector interested, increase their corporate responsibility and interest in participating in local processes.

This issue became especially relevant in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, when, in almost all municipalities, the private sector resources were used to help the vulnerable. Therefore, the recommendation of the studies was to promote long-term local cooperation, which will inevitably have an impact on local care policy or those to strengthen different groups, and should therefore be encouraged.

A special place in the study of the needs was given to the NGO sector's role in the reform's success. Both stages of the survey revealed that citizens and local government officials consider that CSOs should be actively involved in informing citizens about PAR and e-services. Besides, they [CSOs] should be engaged in projects to strengthen various vulnerable groups, cooperate with municipalities regarding needs study, service assessment, etc.

The recommendations emphasized the importance of encouraging and strengthening local CSOs, which was supported by the project and reflected in support of existing CSOs, as well as in promoting the establishment of new CSOs within active citizen groups to increase the number of actors in advocating the citizens' needs at the local level.

The needs studies also identified the issues that the target CSOs subsequently intervened in: modernizing the website and raising the staff qualifications; setting up an electronic petition; informing about e-services; activating gender equality issues; conducting needs studies; introducing participatory budgeting; promoting anti-corruption measures, etc.

The recommendations of the needs studies carried out within the project reflected the issue - strengthening inter-municipal cooperation to solve relevant issues for the citizens promptly. In response to this recommendation, relevant work was carried out in the inter-municipal format of the working groups. In addition, a series of debates was devoted to this issue (for more details - in the following blocks of the publication).

The needs assessment documents and consolidated reports were available on the Fund "Sukhumi" official websites and in printed versions. In addition, the reports were translated into English and posted on electronic platforms.

Information on the results was disseminated to the media through conferences, briefings, and TV shows. In addition, relevant materials on research findings and specific needs were published in various agencies.

## □ **NEEDS ASSESSMENT BENEFITS FOR TARGET ORGANIZATIONS**

The project relevant component played a crucial role in the history of 16 target organizations. They facilitated the local implementation of PAR and the realization of important issues under the self-government responsibility. They promoted communication between the municipality and local civic groups, thus reflecting various needs-based programs in the budget. They were equipped with relevant evidence-based information, knowledge of beneficiaries' needs, and self-government social processes through the research. They became accountable actors in local civic processes, gained beneficiaries' trust and increased the awareness of organizations, acquired new skills or enhanced existing knowledge in the process of needs assessment, data collection and interpretation; acquired new contacts and brought inter-municipal partnerships and exchange of experiences to a new level.

## CHAPTER IV

# WORKING GROUPS - A MECHANISM OF PAR IMPLEMENTATION AT THE MUNICIPAL LEVEL





## WORKING GROUPS - A MECHANISM OF PAR IMPLEMENTATION AT THE MUNICIPAL LEVEL

**Guranda Gvantseladze**

**Project assistant**

**Cultural-Humanitarian Fund “Sukhumi”**

Why is it necessary to create groups when our partner civil society organizations are already actively working on the ground? What will be the mission of the groups? - These are the questions asked in almost all municipalities when we started introducing this mechanism at the project new stage.

We explained that as one of the essential components of PAR is local self-government reform aimed to improve the decentralization process and achieve better governance at the local level, the active work of CSOs could not give rapid and visible results. Therefore, significant contributions to these processes must be made by local self-government representatives.

To implement Public Administration Reform, its new action plan envisaged two main objectives: a) strengthening of local governments through increasing their power; b) gradual development and improvement of electronic services in municipalities for improving their accessibility in local self-government.

To ensure significant and tangible changes on the ground, the Government of Georgia has unequivocally recognized the need to increase civil society awareness and inclusiveness at all stages of the reform implementation and in the monitoring process. However, implementing this at the local level would be impossible without creating a strong mechanism.

**Four phases of Public Administration Reform (PAR) Roadmap monitoring and 2 phases of local needs study were carried out within the project. As a result, 16 different profile CSOs from 8 municipalities were involved in the project. Working groups were considered the best advocacy mechanism according to the recommendations developed through the monitoring sessions.**

Therefore, to strengthen coordination and cooperation between CSOs and local self-government structural units in the PAR implementation process on the ground and to analyze the gaps identified through the monitoring and to respond to them, “working groups” were set up in all target municipalities. It is the first coordination mechanism for the proper implementation of Public Administration Reform in the target municipalities. It brings together local authorities, civil society organizations (including forum members), the media and vulnerable groups (persons with disabilities, single women, IDPs, families with many children, etc.) representatives (10-12 people).

Consultations with local self-government officials preceded the formation of groups in the municipalities. It is noteworthy that they showed a serious attitude towards this particular activity of the project. Furthermore, through intense work carried out by the project implementers and the partner CSOs, local self-government representatives were particularly carefully selected as group members since they were seen as leading lobbyists at the local level to achieve the goals set out in the working plan.

The primary purpose of the working groups was to reflect the findings and recommendations of the monitoring conducted by civil society organizations in the target municipalities for their further advocacy in local plans and, consequently, in the budgets.

The working group activities, functions and powers were set forth by the relevant regulations and approved by the municipalities. It is noteworthy that during the project, for improving e-governance at the local level, the “working groups” developed local action plans - “Local Government and Civil Society Joint Action Plan 2020-2021 for the PAR Roadmap Implementation”, which are reviewed, adopted and approved by the City Council.

Local Action Plans include recommendations on improving the PAR Action Plan implementation indicators in the respective municipality. For example, it may include regularly publishing financial reports on the website, increasing the number of electronic services, etc.

All this will contribute to maintaining the quality of activities and relations with the local government.

Therefore, the municipality local self-government and the civil society joint action plan includes specific goals and objectives aimed at monitoring the PAR implementation and

eliminating the shortcomings identified by the local population needs study and addressing existing problems to achieve efficient, transparent and inclusive administration.

Accordingly, the plan identified three main directions: promoting local government transparency; increasing the local government efficiency and inclusiveness.

Relevant tasks were planned to achieve these goals, facilitating the PAR implementation at the local level. For example, to promote local government transparency, it was planned to update municipalities' websites and inform the public about the increased operational data, promote anti-corruption measures, introduce a municipal hotline, support its work technically, etc.

To increase the local government efficiency, the plans include facilitating the process of standardization and consistent implementation of staff training with a focus on e-services and posting information on municipal websites on the number of days to meet with the Mayor, City Council Chairman and other officials.

To achieve the third goal (to increase the local government inclusiveness), the following tasks were planned: ensure the populations' participation in the decision-making process using electronic resources, which aims to assess the needs of vulnerable groups, hold information meetings with citizens; strengthen the local self-government advisory council and other councils' work.

The working group members actively worked to achieve the set goals. Monthly planned meetings were held. In addition, the groups in the municipalities had active communication with each other to share best practices and experiences.

The most outstanding achievement of the working groups should be considered that the business relations made the linkage between the civil sector and the self-government representatives stronger.

The working process highlighted the common interests of both sides. Consequently, a new platform for cooperation was created, which brought many good outcomes for all municipalities. The civil sector inclusiveness was particularly valuable and essential in these processes. This group pursues public interests most actively.

The working groups set up in the municipalities enabled us to voice the community needs systematically. It has become a valuable mechanism for both parties. They also raised many issues for self-government that remained beyond their attention.

The working groups actively started to analyze the shortcomings identified through the monitoring carried out within the project in the municipalities and plan activities to ensure their response effectiveness. The dynamics varied between the monitoring sessions, and the results of the groups' activities became obvious after each monitoring. Unlike the first monitoring, each subsequent monitoring reduced the list of recommendations, which was periodically reflected in the working groups' plans.

If we follow the project dynamics, the working groups' work results can be arranged as follows:

- ❖ It became possible to post the contact information of officials on the websites of all eight municipalities.
- ❖ The practice of publishing electronic reports of various services and the rule of publishing public information has been introduced (orders, decrees, procurement reports, audit conclusions).
- ❖ The reception days and hours with the municipal officials were identified and posted on the websites.
- ❖ A "hotline" has been launched in municipalities to strengthen online communication with citizens.
- ❖ The municipalities' websites are being modernized, and the design of individual services is being improved. In addition, electronic platforms for citizen participation and access to electronic resources have been improved.

Regarding the results, some municipalities also had their niche. The work was more or less different depending on the specifics of the municipalities:

- ❖ As a result of the Ozurgeti Working Group recommendations, the 2020-2021 budget includes expenditures that will ensure the adaptation of the Municipality Hall and the City Council building for people with disabilities. Also, as a result of the working group recommendations, the 2021 budget includes expenditures for translators for ethnic minorities (Russian). Fund-



ing for the civil budget program - “Be a co-manager” has increased the municipal budget. The practice of assessing the population’s satisfaction with municipal services has started, and the necessary forms for the assessment have been developed.

- ❖ At the initiative of the Lanchkhuti working group, a training strategy for public servants has been developed, and an electronic communicator has been introduced to communicate with City Council and City Hall officials during the pandemic. The online application “Lanchkhuti Municipality City Council Electronic Manager” is considered an innovative technology and is especially popular among the population. The person in charge of relations with CSOs has been appointed at the City Hall.
- ❖ Vani Municipality was one of the first to approve the “Code of Ethics for Municipality Local Self-Government Public Servants”.
- ❖ A code of ethics has also been developed and approved in Tsageri and Khoni municipalities.
- ❖ Regarding creating an adapted environment for people with disabilities, progress has been made in Baghdati and Khoni. The municipality has assessed the priority of the issue, and an adapted outdoor space for people with disabilities has been arranged.
- ❖ Positive changes continued by creating inclusive councils in various directions. For example, a Civil Advisory Council was established in Vani municipality.
- ❖ Work is actively underway in Terjola using the sharing of successful practices, and all the necessary conditions have been created to introduce a participatory budget.
- ❖ Vani Municipality significant achievement should be considered the allocation of funds in the budget to modernise the municipality’s website.
- ❖ Anti-corruption provision has been developed and approved in Lanchkhuti Municipality.
- ❖ In Bagdati, the municipality working group has developed an anti-corruption strategy, which is in the process of approval. Vani working group is working on a similar document as well.

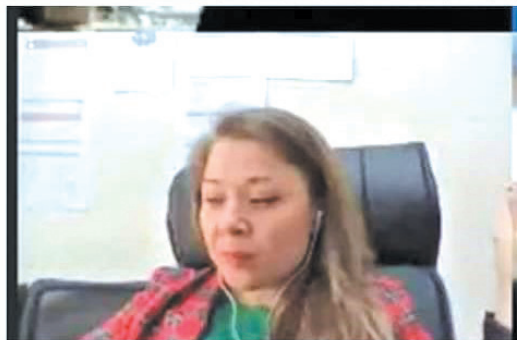
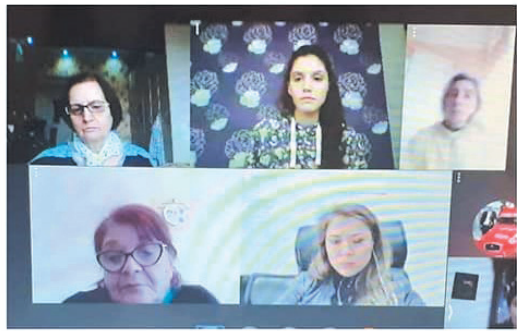
- ❖ An online petition field has been added to the websites of Khoni, Vani and Bagdati municipalities.

**Working groups can be recognized as an essential tool for the effective implementation of e-governance. In addition, public servants' responsibility has increased through their diligent work. As a result, they are improving e-governance access and citizens' inclusiveness.**

It was the best platform to solve the population's needs through joint efforts and introduce the practice of coordinated cooperation with self-government, which contributed to self-government benevolence and increased the population's trust.

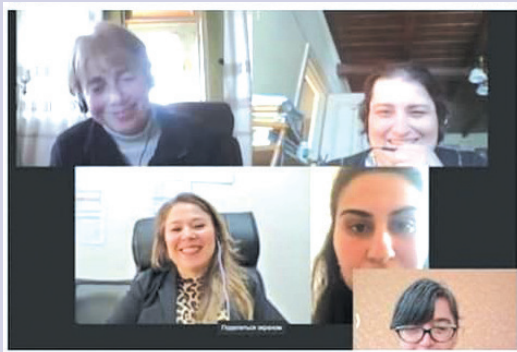
# CHAPTER V

## NATIONAL LEVEL ADVOCACY – LESSONS LEARNED



**ადვოკატირების გეგმის ელემენტები**

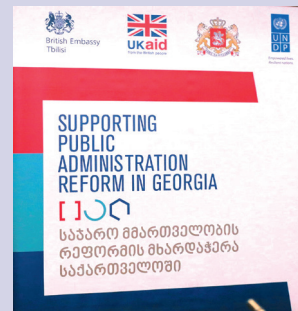
- **პრობლემის განსაზღვრა** - შეეადი ნაილად განსაზღვროი პრობლეს, რა შედეგს იქვს და რა არის აღნიშნული პრობლემის მიზეზი? მოდერნი მიზეზების გამოსვლენად და სწორი პასუხების საპოვნელად, მუდმივად დასვით კითხვა „რატომ“?
- **ინფორმაციის შეგროვება** - რიგ არსებული პრობლეს ეფუძვნა ფაქტობრივ მატერიალურებზე დამყარებულ ინფორმაციას, არსებობს პრობლემის აქტუალობის შესახებ ბევრად სხვა სხვა და აღნიშნული პრობლემის გადაწყვეტის აუცილებლობა შესაბამისი სასწრაფო ეკლესიის დარბეზებს ყოველთვის უფრო ადვილად (სასარგლოდ ასევე სხვა ქვეყნებში მსგავსი პრობლემის მოგვარების სახაროლებრივი ან პოლიტიკური გზების, მათ შორის ინფორმაციის მიღების შესახებ ინფორმაციის მოპოვება).
- **ინფორმაციის გადელაგება** - მნიშვნელოვანი თქვენს ხელი არსებული ინფორმაციის ცვლელი, ანალოგი, პოლიტიკური დოკუმენტი, საინფორმაციო მუკალი ადვოკატირებრივი, ასევე სერთიპობის დონეზე (მოიფიქროვებთ, სელომულების წარმომადგენლობის, საერთო საკლხოვობის) ეს დაეხმარებათ მოკვებრების პოვნაში და ასევე მს ქვეყნების მსგავსი პრობლემის მოგვარების წარმატებული გამოცდილების





**საჯარო მმართველობის რეფორმა საქართველოში**

საჯარო მმართველობის რეფორმის სამცხვი




**კულტურულ-ჰუმანიტარული ფონდი „სუქუმი“**  
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**ევროკავშირი საქართველოსთვის**  
 The European Union for Georgia


**CSO Forum**

საქართველოს მთავრობის ადმინისტრაციას,  
 საერთაშორისო რეგიონალური რეზიდენსის საბჭოს,  
 საქართველოს ეკონომიკის და მდგრადი განვითარების სამინისტროს  
 საქართველოს რეგიონული განვითარების და ინფრასტრუქტურის სამინისტროს,  
 ფონდი „სუქუმი“ და დასავლეთ საქართველოს სამოქალაქო საზოგადოების  
 ორგანიზაციების ფორუმს

**მიმართვა**

საქართველოს ეკონომიკისა და მდგრადი განვითარების სამინისტრო


**MINISTRY OF ECONOMY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF GEORGIA**

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**23 / თებერვალი / 2021 წ.**

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თებერვალი 2021 წლის 23 მარტის N18345 მიმართვისთანავე დაკავშირებით, საქართველოს ეკონომიკისა და მდგრადი განვითარების სამინისტროს კომპეტენტური წარმომადგენელი შეხვედრა საკითხებზე გასწავლის, რომელშიც საქართველოს მთავრობის 2020 წლის 10 თებერვლის N92 განკარგულების დამატებითი პასპორტის დართოლოგიური კვლევის განვითარების 2020 – 2025 წლების ეროვნული სტრატეგია და მისი განხორციელების სამართლებრივი გეგმა, რომელიც სამინისტროს მიერ მომზადებული იქნა ევროკავშირის ცენტრული მართვის საბიზნესის პროექტის HDME4429/ს-ის ფარგლებში, შეიძლება განვიხილოთ. სტრატეგია შემუშავებულია ევროკავშირის კომპლექსური სამრეწველო სტრატეგიის მიზნების განხორციელების მიზნით და შედგება ცენტრული ეკონომიკის და სამეცნიერო-სამრეწველო განვითარების მიზნით ევროკავშირის და საქართველოს საჯარო მხარდაჭერის ჩვენს მიერ მომზადებული პროექტის და რედაქტირების

# NATIONAL LEVEL ADVOCACY– LESSONS LEARNED

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## ADVOCACY PRINCIPLES AND CHANNELS

Advocacy is a healthy democracy foundation based on the unity, cooperation and participation of a group of people to protect the living environment, rights and interests of the people in villages, towns or countries, and make beneficial changes in their lives.

One of the essential principles of Fund “Sukhumi” is to identify the population’s needs and challenges to ensure their well-being and decent living conditions. It involves mobilizing and strengthening civil society on the ground and impacting decision-makers to address or prioritize issues identified through consultation with them.

**Fund “Sukhumi” advocacy at the national level** to facilitate the effective and proper implementation of Public Administration Reform at the local level was **based on these basic principles**:

- ❑ **Collecting evidence-based data** and identifying problems through monitoring the Public Administration Reform implementation, studying the reform effectiveness and its impact on the population;
- ❑ Identifying priority issues and significant challenges through active **consultation with CSOs in target municipalities**;
- ❑ **Sharing information with decision-makers on ways to address needs and challenges at the local level** through different forums or platforms.

**Problems identified during the project were brought to the attention of decision-makers through several channels, including:**

- ❖ Sharing evidence-based reports and studies on implementation, progress and efficiency of PAR at the local level with stakeholders, the representatives of the relevant line ministries and government agencies;
- ❖ **Participating in the Public Administration Reform Council meetings** and focusing on the factors hindering the proper introduction of e-governance and services in state agencies, municipalities;

- ❖ Government administration participation in focus groups and consultations to develop a new PAR strategy and action plan for 2021;
- ❖ Participating in conferences, training series or workshops with state agencies, sharing information about achievements and challenges;
- ❖ Sending joint appeals with the CSO Forum organizations.

## SUCCESS STORY

### Internetization - one of the essential preconditions of developing e-services in local self-government

**Identified problem** - poor internet coverage, a barrier to the development and availability of e-services

**The Public Administration Reform National Action Plan for 2019-2020 foresees two main objectives regarding the local self-government:**

- *Strengthening of local governments through increasing their power;*
- *Gradual development and improvement of electronic services in municipalities for improving their accessibility in local self-governments.*

Accelerating e-governance reforms, developing e-service platforms and providing the population's access to them is crucial, especially in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. According to our publication's relevant chapters, the monitoring conducted in the self-governments and the population's needs study revealed that **the lack of access to e-services** and the proper implementation of PAR at the local level are significantly hampered by **poor Internet coverage** in target regions. Inaccessibility to quality internet, which is especially problematic and relevant for the rural population, prevents the population from using services such as receiving information about local self-government social programs, sending letters, applications and petitions to City Council or City Hall representatives, participating in online public hearings, participating in participatory budget programs, etc. In addition, according to the village population, they do not have access to the various public e-services available at the central level, use the support services offered by state or CSOs to a vulnerable population, receive a quality education, and work online. Access to e-services is also hampered by the **high Internet fee, the lack of appropriate technological means (computers, smartphones) and skill in large part of the population.**

## STEPS TAKEN TO ELIMINATE THE PROBLEM

- ❑ **Sending monitoring reports, populations' needs studies and targeted letters** reflecting the existing problem to relevant government agencies;
- ❑ Actualization of this issue to attract the attention of the state agencies' representatives at various forums;
- ❑ Sending the joint appeal by Fund "Sukhumi" to the representatives of Government Administration of Georgia, the Public Administration Reform Council, the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development, the Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure signed by 33 CSOs operating in eight municipalities consolidated in the CSO Forum, reflecting the problem and relevant recommendations.<sup>8</sup>

Active work with local authorities, especially within the project, through working groups set up to facilitate PAR implementation on the ground, where local authorities' attention was constantly drawn to the importance of developing e-services and the need for more efforts to advance the issue of internetization.

## ADVOCACY POSITIVE RESULTS

The Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia, in a reply letter to the Fund "Sukhumi" appeal, confirmed that on January 10, 2020, approved the "Georgia's 2020-2025 National Strategy for the Development of Broadband Networks and Action Plan for Its Implementation" under the Decree #60. It aims to overcome the still existing digital inequality, develop the digital economy and information society in the country, and pursue policies and regulations in line with EU and international best practices. To implement the main directions of the "Georgia's 2020-2025 National Strategy for the Development of Broadband Networks and Action Plan for Its Implementation", the project "Log-in Georgia" was launched with the World Bank, which consists of three components: 1. Increased broadband internet access; 2. Promoting the use of digital services connected to high-speed Internet; 3. Project implementation support. In addition to increasing rural high-speed Internet coverage, training and technology skills development programs are planned across the country to facilitate digital services. The project also aims to improve access to broadband services so that rural ISPs can provide competitive, high-quality Internet services at a low cost. Furthermore, special measures are planned to promote the use of the Internet and digital services by women, ethnic and social minorities and people with disabilities.

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<sup>8</sup> <http://fsokhumi.ge/index.php/en/publications/gender-mainstreaming>

It is noteworthy that through advocacy and multifaceted efforts, internetization has actively started in the project individual target municipalities. In particular, in **Vani Municipality**, agreements have been signed with several providers intensively providing full internetization throughout the municipality. Likewise, in **Bagdati Municipality**, negotiations are underway to sign an agreement soon.

Representatives of the local self-government and CSOs emphasize the Fund “Sukhumi”’s efforts at the central and local government levels to actualize and solve the internetization issue in specific municipalities.

## **LESSONS LEARNED**

Several valuable lessons were highlighted during the project that contributed to the advocacy campaign effectiveness.

**Unity strengthens** - Creating an integrated platform for CSOs, and the consolidation of their efforts has made the advocacy campaign much more effective. The organizations in the project differed in size, experience, organizational capabilities, and geographical focus. Separate actions would have much less impact on the actualization of issues. Joint efforts and acting on behalf of the CSO Forum have profoundly impacted attracting decision-makers attention and making the social order valid.

**Importance of consulting approach and intersectoral cooperation** - The advocacy campaign was based on evidence-based information obtained from monitoring and citizens’ needs studies. Problems and priority issues were identified through the active inclusiveness and consultation of citizens, CSOs and local self-government representatives, making the advocacy process more intense and legitimate. In addition, it raised the population and the local self-government’s trust in the developed recommendations and actions taken.

**The central government openness** and creating forums and platforms for the civil society representatives’ inclusiveness (e.g. the civil society inclusiveness in the PAR Council work) significantly facilitated communication with decision-makers regarding the problems on the ground.

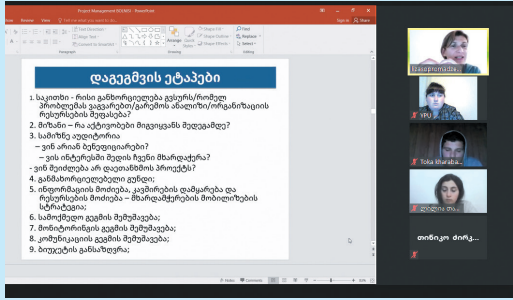




## CHAPTER VI

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# IMPACT OF REGIONAL CSOs' SMALL GRANTS ON CHANGES IN THE MUNICIPALITIES (PROGRESS BEST EXAMPLES)



# IMPACT OF REGIONAL CSOs' SMALL GRANTS ON CHANGES IN THE MUNICIPALITIES (PROGRESS BEST EXAMPLES)

**Meri Gelashvili**

**Project coordinator**

**Fund of Women Entrepreneurs**

Successful implementation of Public Administration Reform (PAR) plays a fundamental role in Georgia's way to EU integration and is a key precondition for Georgia's successful development and welfare.

The civil society sector and citizens' inclusiveness in the decision-making process during the reform are prerequisites for its success. It ensures the implementation of democratic, open and needs-based solutions and increases the population's trust in the political system and strengthens the legitimacy of made decisions.

One of the reform strengths is the precondition outlined in the reform - close cooperation between CSOs and government agencies.

This tandem is also mentioned in the report by the Public Administration Department of the Government Administration and the Policy Planning and Coordination Department of May 2021: "Representatives of public agencies, civil society, academia, international organization/development partners are actively involved in the development of the public administration reform strategy".

One of the main directions of the project was the engagement of the target local NGOs in the reform process. Therefore, it was planned and implemented by involving them in project activities and by strengthening these organizations through training programs. Then, through a competition, funding "small grants" to promote progress and change in the Public Administration Reform (PAR) process.

This chapter analyzes the changes made through small grants in the target municipalities and discusses the best examples of progress.

The project envisaged funding small grants to target organizations. Accordingly, the component was implemented in all sixteen target organizations of all three regions (Imereti, Guria, and Racha-Lechkhumi).

At the next stage, 14 new organizations established within the project joined them.

The grant competition was announced three times: the first - in 2020, under which 16 projects were funded; the second and third - in 2021. As a result, 16 projects have been funded so far. In addition, 14 projects have been funded within the third grant competition.

A total of 46 projects have been funded and implemented.

## PROJECTS FUNDED BY THE FIRST GRANT COMPETITION (2020):

#	Name of the organization	Municipality	Project name
1	Khoni IDP Initiative Group	Khoni	<i>"Increasing citizens' access to ensure greater inclusiveness"</i>
2	Education and Development Center "Edelweiss"	Khoni	<i>"People`s voice in self-government"</i>
3	"Tanadgoma – 2020"	Vani	<i>"Informing the population about the importance of their participation in the process of implementing Public Administration Reform at the local level"</i>
4	N (N) LE "Citizens' Activism for Effective Governance and Justice"	Vani	<i>"Needs and requirements of young people and people with disabilities in the administrative unit of Vani Municipality Salominao community, awareness and promotion of inclusiveness in the decision-making process"</i>
5	Civic Spectrum "Equality"	Bagdati	<i>"Informing citizens on the Public Administration Reform Roadmap"</i>
6	N (N) LE "Equality Now"	Bagdati	<i>"The population's participation of in the process of implementing Public Administration Reform at the local level"</i>
7	N (N) LE Union for Protection of Children's Rights and Civic Education "Children - the Future of Georgia"	Terjola	<i>"Participatory budget - the way to democracy"</i>
8	N (N) LE "Women for the Future of Georgia"	Terjola	<i>"Way to changes"</i>
9	Georgian Rural Council	Lanchkhuti	<i>"The City Council accountability and transparency electronic communicator"</i>
10	Lanchkhuti Information Center	Lanchkhuti	<i>"Promoting raising of public servants qualifications in the medium term"</i>
11	Education and Equality Center	Ozurgeti	<i>"Be informed - be strong"</i>

12	<b>N (N) LE Young Teachers Union</b>	Ozurgeti	<i>“What is public administration”</i>
13	<b>N (N) LE Tsageri Women’s Rights and Equality Center</b>	Tsageri	<i>“More awareness, more inclusiveness”</i>
14	<b>N (N) LE Active Citizen-Accountable Government</b>	Tsageri	<i>“The role and effect of civil society in the Public Administration Reform”</i>
15	<b>Racha - Lechkhumi and Kvemo Svaneti Self-Government Resource Center</b>	Ambrolauri	<i>“Ambrolauri citizens’ inclusiveness in the implementation of Public Administration Reform”</i>
16	<b>Regional hub of Racha-Lechkhumi and Kvemo Svaneti - “Abkhazintercont”</b>	Ambrolauri	<i>“Accountable and transparent self-government - informed population”</i>

#### **PROJECTS FUNDED BY THE II GRANT COMPETITION (2021):**

<b>#</b>	<b>Name of the organization</b>	<b>Municipality</b>	<b>Project name</b>
1	<b>Khoni IDP Initiative Group</b>	Khoni	<i>“Increasing the citizens’ inclusiveness in the decision-making process in the municipality”</i>
2	<b>Education and Development Center “Edelweiss”</b>	Khoni	<i>“Gender policy - inclusiveness tool”</i>
3	<b>“Tanadgoma – 2020”</b>	Vani	<i>“Increasing the professionalism of local government, including mayor’s representatives, to raise the population’s awareness on the municipality website structure and content”</i>
4	<b>N (N) LE “Citizens’ Activism for Effective Governance and Justice”</b>	Vani	<i>“Survey of the socially vulnerable and disabled people in Kumuri community, Dutskhuni and Maisouri villages of Vani municipality, in-depth interviews, advocacy and questionnaire, based on Public Administration Reform and creating an accessible environment”</i>

5	<b>Civic Spectrum “Equality”</b>	Bagdati	<i>“Developing the provision on anti-corruption policy in the municipality with the local self-government”</i>
6	<b>N (N) LE “Equality Now”</b>	Bagdati	<i>“Reflecting the specific needs of women living in the municipality in action plans and relevant strategies”</i>
7	<b>N (N) LE Union for Protection of Children’s Rights and Civic Education “Children - the Future of Georgia</b>	Terjola	<i>“Business word”</i>
8	<b>N (N) LE “Women for the Future of Georgia”</b>	Terjola	<i>“We are together”</i>
9	<b>Georgian Rural Council</b>	Lanchkhuti	<i>“Accountability and transparency electronic communicator for lanchkhuti municipality”</i>
10	<b>Lanchkhuti Information Center</b>	Lanchkhuti	<i>“Developing Lanchkhuti Municipality City Hall anti-corruption strategy through participatory principles”</i>
11	<b>Education and Equality Center</b>	Ozurgeti	<i>“Small Survey on the Public Administration Reform Effectiveness in Ozurgeti Municipality”</i>
12	<b>Young Teachers Union</b>	Ozurgeti	<i>“Participatory Budgeting and Digital Communications”</i>
13	<b>N (N) LE Tsageri Women’s Rights and Equality Center</b>	Tsageri	<i>“Raising the public servants` qualification working in communities that will facilitate the citizens` access to e-services”</i>
14	<b>N (N) LE Active Citizen-Accountable Government</b>	Tsageri	<i>“Population`s participation in solving the local issues-propose an idea and take care of your city/village development”</i>
15	<b>Racha - Lechkhumi and Kvemo Svaneti Self-Government Resource Center</b>	Ambrolauri	<i>“Increasing Ambrolauri municipality City Hall and City Council accountability and transparency through modern technologies”</i>
16	<b>Regional hub of Racha-Lechkhumi and Kvemo Svaneti - “Abkhazintercont”</b>	Ambrolauri	<i>“Developing and introducing documents of self-government additional regulations in Ambrolauri municipality(phase-2)”</i>

## PROJECTS FUNDED BY THE III GRANT COMPETITION (2021):

#	Name of the organization	Municipality	Project name
1	Youth Inclusiveness Center	Khoni	<i>"Receive information and inform others"</i>
2	Organization of Persons with Disabilities "Phoenix"	Khoni	<i>"Raising awareness of people with disabilities"</i>
3	People and Freedom	Vani	<i>"Informed youth"</i>
4	Ltd. "Vani - XII century"	Vani	<i>"Informed rural population"</i>
5	Solidarity - XXI	Bagdati	<i>"Know your rights for a better future"</i>
6	Youth from Terjola	Terjola	<i>"Power in unity"</i>
7	N (N) LE "Alao"	Terjola	<i>"Power in unity"</i>
8	"Amridi"	Terjola	<i>"Women are starting"</i>
9	N (N) LE "Ruduni"	Lanchkuti	<i>"Raising public awareness about the role and importance of municipal e-services"</i>
10	N (N) LE "Lanchkhuti Youth Movement"	Lanchkuti	<i>"Raising youth awareness about the role and importance of municipal e-services"</i>
11	N (N) LE "We create the future"	Ambrolauri	<i>"Informing Ambrolauri Municipality local population to increase efficiency through municipal electronic services"</i>
12	Center for Humanitarian Initiatives and Development	Ambrolauri	<i>"Informing citizens about the importance of e-services"</i>
13	"Center for Local Self-Government Promotion and Citizens' Inclusiveness Organizations in Tsageri Municipality"	<b>Tsageri</b>	<i>"Informing and involving teachers in tsageri municipality in the Public Administration Reform process"</i>
14	"Democracy, Support, Trust"	<b>Tsageri</b>	<i>"Awareness-Accessibility-Inclusiveness - Increasing Accountability and Credibility"</i>

## LOCAL NEEDS AND SMALL GRANTS' IMPACT ON CHANGES

All submitted projects were developed locally based on the Public Administration Reform (PAR) Roadmap Monitoring and the local population's needs study, which reinforced the results.

Common problems in the PAR process and special needs due to the situation on grounds were highlighted in all regional municipalities.

All submitted and funded projects are developed based on the same methodology. Projects for funding are accepted by a specially created "Competition Commission" and through "Assessment Criteria".

46 projects have been implemented. 14 of them are projects of start-up organizations established within the project.

Judging by the project directions, it can be noted that some of them are aimed at increasing the availability of e-services at the local level, and others at the gradual development and improvement of e-services in local municipalities. In addition, the projects aimed at improving the qualifications and skills of the local executors should be highlighted as well. It is essential because it is a prerequisite for Public Administration Reform (PAR) successful implementation.

Each project implemented at the local level shows that when we plan any changes in the region, it should be based on the needs and problems identified in a particular target municipality.

Although problems and needs may be identical, in many cases, the ways of their solution are different. It refers to the local population's opportunities to use the offered electronic services and the qualifications and skills of the performers. Therefore, the Public Administration Reform (PAR) Roadmap Monitoring at the local level and the local population's needs study preceded the development of the projects.

All the developed and implemented projects were relevant to the target municipalities' and met the citizens' needs.

The project proposals developed and implemented envisaged improving transparent, accountable, efficient and inclusive governance in the target municipalities by promoting an e-administration, accelerating e-administration reform, developing electronic platforms, and ensuring accessibility.



## PROGRESS BEST EXAMPLES

One of the progress best examples is joint and coordinated work of the project implementing organizations (Fund “Sukhumi”, “Spectri”, Fund of Women Entrepreneurs), partner regional NGOs, civil society, mass media and representatives of local government agencies (Khoni, Vani, Terjola, Bagdati Lanchkhuti, Ozurgeti, Tsageri, Ambrolauri municipalities).

The grant projects were aimed at informing local officials and the population about Public Administration Reform, local e-services and improving their access; strengthening local civil society and government by sharing knowledge and experience, introducing new technologies on the ground that will make the benefits of electronic information services more accessible and understandable to the general public, etc.

The set goals and their implementation in all target regions have contributed to relevant progress compared to the beginning of the project.

Project: **“Electronic Communicator of Accountability and Transparency for Lanchkhuti Municipality”** (April-June, 2021) is one of the best practices’ example within the implemented projects. It was implemented by **Georgian Rural Council (Lanchkhuti)**.

The project aimed to increase Lanchkhuti Municipality local government accountability and transparency through modern digital technologies.

The project implementation included the following activities: an educational program involving representatives of local civil society and government agencies; development of the web application in ASP.NET and C ++ programming language and using MS SQL server; upgrade of the windows hosting and moving to a new application server; raising public awareness on the use of electronic communication. By introducing administration regulations of an e-communication web application, the following results have been achieved. On the one hand, the Lanchkhuti Municipality population knows and has the opportunity to easily access any public information at any time and from any place and ask relevant questions. On the one hand, the e-communicator website is administered by the municipality relevant service.

Project: **“Gender Policy – Inclusiveness Tool”**(April-May, 2021), implemented by **Education and Development Center “Edelweiss”**(Khoni).

Based on the previous period monitoring and the population's needs study, the project representatives considered the need to intensify the local gender council activities to increase their inclusiveness, transparency and awareness in the decision-making process.

Although the Gender Council is established in the municipality and its statute is approved, it cannot be found on the municipality website (khoni.gov.ge). Furthermore, no information is published about its activities, and no gender budget has been developed. Therefore, most of the Khoni Municipality population does not have information about the Gender Council functioning. Consequently, it became the project basis and is aimed to: Raise awareness of the Khoni Municipality Gender Council activities; develop an action plan based on logical and adapted needs.

As a result of the taken measures:

- ✓ 22 people have been trained in gender-related issues, including 17 Gender Council members and 5 civil society representatives;
- ✓ Based on the identified needs, a new action plan has been developed and approved by the City Council;
- ✓ A new "Gender Window" has been added to the information website and video has been prepared to increase the awareness of the Gender Council;
- ✓ An information calendar has been printed and distributed.

Therefore, the region's civil society has raised its awareness of the Gender Council, and referrals on various issues have been increased.

Project: "Population's **participation in solving the local issues-propose an idea and take care of your city/village development**" (April - June 2021)

Implemented by "Active Citizen - Accountable Government" (Tsageri).

The project aimed to increase public trust in local government by optimizing the municipality's performance, considering the improved system of priorities and the suggestions provided by the public.

The project's innovative idea was to improve the transparency and accountability of public financial management processes, to involve citizens in the budgeting process, to install "mailboxes" at pre-selected locations with the information banner: "Propose an idea and contribute to your city (village) development".

Based on the analysis of the requests collected through the “mailboxes”, recommendations were developed on introducing a “participatory” budget in the municipality.

**Project: “Increasing the citizens’ inclusiveness in the decision-making process in the municipality” (April-May 2021)**

It was implemented by **the Khoni IDP Initiative Group**.

The project aims to involve more citizens in the decision-making process by strengthening local self-government employees and increasing their competence.

The public reform’s one of main tasks was to strengthen the practice of e-governance on the ground and its access, which requires relevant qualifications from the provider and the user.

Therefore, on the one hand, within the project, the municipality relevant service specialists raised their qualifications and acquired the necessary skills for smooth website operation. On the other hand, through using the updated website, the populations’ awareness was increased. As a result, the website functional load has increased, and new information has been posted. In the municipality, six employees were trained, and 24 people acquired the necessary knowledge to use the website.

**Project: “Small Survey on the Public Administration Reform Effectiveness in Ozurgeti Municipality” (April-June 2021)**

**The project was implemented Education and Equality Center (Ozurgeti).** The project aimed to inform the population of Ozurgeti, especially the rural population living far from the district center, about the progress of public administration reform, taking into account their needs.

Within the project, 4 researcher-volunteers gained relevant knowledge and experience. They further conducted a voluntary study in Ozurgeti and ten villages of Ozurgeti municipality: Jumati, Silauri, Baileti, Nolobilevi, Shroma, Laituri, Naruka, Chanieti, Bakhvi, Mshvidobauri, and Nagomari. The research aimed to find internet access problems in the mentioned villages and find ways to eliminate them.

Through the study (600 people have been surveyed following gender balance), the population’s needs and satisfaction index toward the process of Public Administration Reform were identified. Then, with the organization’s experts (Education and Equality Center), recommendations were developed and submitted to local government agencies, all stakeholders and published in local media.

Project: **“Ambrolauri Municipality, Development and Implementation of Additional Self-Government Regulations”** (2021)

The project was implemented by **Racha-Lechkhumi and Kvemo Svaneti Regional Hub-Fund “Abkhazintercont” (AIC) (Ambrolauri)**.

The project is aimed to develop anti-corruption policy implementation mechanisms in Ambrolauri Municipality and be approved by the municipality. Under the Association Agreement, the country is committed to creating and strengthening anti-corruption mechanisms in public service throughout the country and increasing the municipality inclusiveness.

Therefore, the importance of this document is very high internationally and within the country as well, especially since the situation in this regard is unsatisfactory. But, unfortunately, this document has not yet been developed and adopted in most municipalities.

An anti-corruption document, adopting a municipal anti-corruption policy provision, aims to minimize corruption risks and improve access to municipal services. It is one of the opportunities to avoid conflicts of interest within the organization and implement other municipal, statutory goals.

Within the project, the Ambrolauri Municipality primary internal public documents were studied. And based on them, the Ambrolauri Municipal Policy Regulation was developed.

The development and submission of the statute for approval in the municipality was preceded by: the creation of a thematic working group, which included nine people (5 women): representatives of a non-governmental organization - 4; expert-lawyer - 1; the municipality employees - 3; facilitator - 1. The regulation draft version developed by the Working Group was discussed in a roundtable format with the cooperation of the target audience and stakeholders: Ambrolauri Municipality, civil society organizations, community leaders - 25 people (including 12 women).

After reviewing the regulation with the general public and making the necessary amendment, it was submitted to the municipality relevant services for approval. As a result, the statute increases the population’s inclusiveness in preventing corruption, which will reduce its risks to a minimum.

Project: **“Participatory Budgeting and Digital Communication”** (2021)

The project was implemented by **Young Teachers Union (Ozurgeti)**.

The project priority topic was participatory budgeting and improving the municipality’s electronic services and website.

The project's target group was young people, informing them about the local self-government essence and principles, good governance system, local self-government budget, participatory budgeting, citizens' participation in self-governance through digital platforms.

The results of the monitoring and population's needs study revealed the lack of young people's inclusiveness in municipal projects and decision-making processes in the target region (municipality), which is due to their low level of awareness and lack of appropriate skills.

Due to this situation, a project was developed, and its implementation has contributed to tangible changes. Thirty young people (including IDPs, religious minorities) received information on public administration implementation ways and online inclusiveness mechanisms; received the knowledge and opportunity to engage in "participatory budgeting"; have access to the platform.

**Project: "Reflecting the specific needs of women living in the municipality in action plans and relevant strategies"(2021). The project was implemented by N (N) LE "Equality Now" (Bagdati).**

It is aimed to study, identify and advocate for the social and economic needs of rural women and girls in Bagdati Municipality.

The needs of 448 women in 14 villages of Bagdati municipality have been identified within the project.

Different methods such as questionnaire and focus group work were used during the study. Most of the identified problems are addressed in the Gender Council Action Plan, which is likely to be implemented.

The project aims to inform local persons with disabilities about the Public Administration Reform Roadmap (PAR) and their benefits as active users of electronic media.

The project objective was achieved through implementing the following activities:

Information meetings were held in which persons with disabilities and their family members took part. A total of 4 meetings were held, and the number of participants was 200 people, including 98 women, 102 men;

A Facebook page was used where information was posted about the project and Public Administration Reform as well.

The activities carried out within the project covered the part of the local population that most needs to contact local government services online. They belong to the category whose environment is not adapted to their specific needs.

46 grant projects were implemented in all three regions (Imereti, Guria, Racha-Lechkhumi). They all meet the project requirements and are relevant to the needs identified through the monitoring and needs study.

In the implemented projects, we can highlight the most successful practices in the following directions:

Introduction of electronic, modern digital technologies;

Activating different groups of citizens and the gender council;

Population's participation and inclusiveness in solving issues of local importance;

Introduction of additional regulations in the self-government (anti-corruption regulation);

Participatory budgeting and digital communicator;

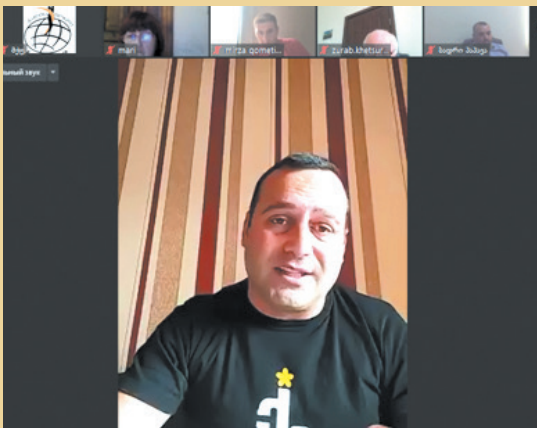
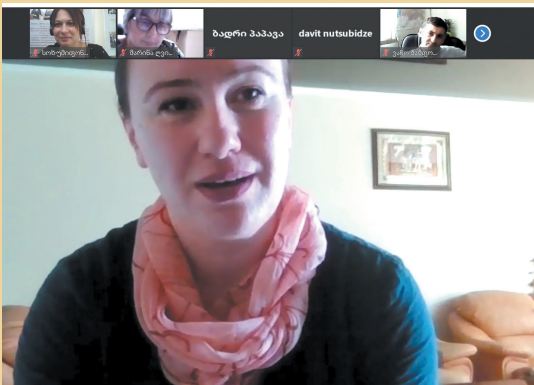
Identifying women's specific needs and developing an action plan;

Studying and responding to the specific needs of people with disabilities and their families;

Informing civil society about the effectiveness of the reform at the local level.

# CHAPTER VII

## E-PETITION INTRODUCTION IN KHONI MUNICIPALITY

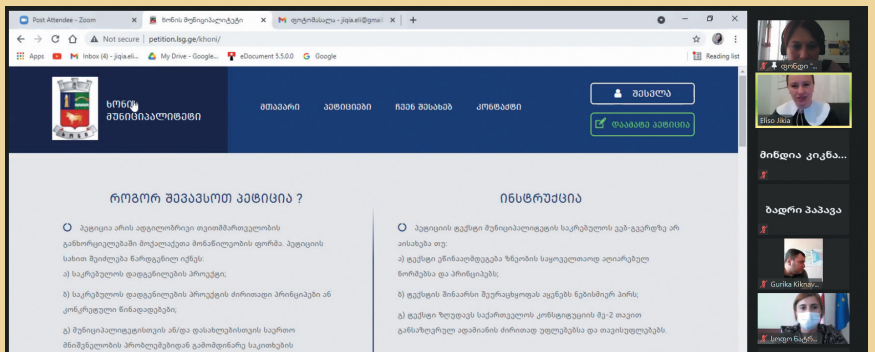
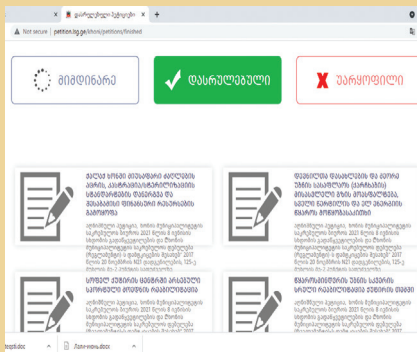
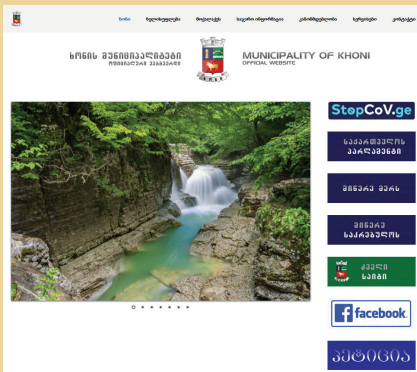


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**სიონის მუნიციპალიტეტის ელექტრონული პეტიციის სისტემა დანერგვა**

- 1** შევსდა სიონის მუნიციპალიტეტის ოფიციალური ვებ-გვერდი <http://khoni.gov.ge>
- 2** შევსდა ფორმის განხილვა <http://petition.gov.ge/khoni/>
- 3** შევსდა მარჯვენა კოლონა - შევსდა და ინფორმაცია
- 4** ავტომატურად დამატდა ფაილი კულტურის, სოფლის მეურნეობის და ინფრასტრუქტურის განვითარების განყოფილების საიტზე
- 5** ავტომატურად შექმნილი პეტიცია მისულია უნდა განიხილოს და აღიაროს საჭირო დოკუმენტები

დამატებითი ინფორმაცია - ინტერნეტზე განთავსებული ვებ-გვერდი <http://petition.gov.ge/khoni/>





# E-PETITION INTRODUCTION IN KHONI MUNICIPALITY

**Eliso Jikia**  
**Head of Education and**  
**Development Center “Edelweiss”**

## E-PETITION

Ensuring citizens' inclusiveness in the decision-making process is one of the essential features of a democratic society. The development of innovation and technology has equated this component with the improvement of electronic communications, especially during a pandemic, when the situation caused by Covid-19 has highlighted the need for electronic delivery of public services.

Given the lack of citizens' inclusiveness in the governance process and the lack of existing accountability mechanisms, the e-petition is a unique opportunity for citizens. By mobilizing around society's relevant issues, the citizens are directly involved in identifying the priorities of the local and central government. On the one hand, the existence of petitions helps the population's initiatives guide decision-makers. On the other hand, citizens have the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process actively.

## LEGISLATIVE FRAME AND PRACTICE FOR SUBMITTING PETITIONS AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

According to the Local Self-Government Code, the following mechanisms have been put in place to ensure citizens' participation in the self-governing units' activities: the settlement assembly, the petition, the Civil Advisory Council, the opportunity to participate in the City Council sessions and hear reports on the mayor and City Council members' work. In addition, the municipal authorities must create appropriate conditions to provide the citizens' reception and public meetings.

One of the main mechanisms mentioned above is the ability to initiate a petition. It should be noted that the opportunity to file a petition was provided at the local level much earlier than at the central level. According to the Code, no less than 1% of registered voters in the municipality have the right to submit a petition. The Code explains the possible content of the petition as follows:

- Draft of a normative administrative-legal act;
- Basic principles or specific proposals of the draft normative administrative-legal act;
- Request to study, discuss and resolve the municipality and/or the settlement common problems at the municipal council meeting.

The following circumstance should be emphasized here: the Code does not define the procedure for submitting petitions electronically. However, the municipal council is authorized to identify the rules for submitting a petition electronically within the resolution, considering the norms established around the petition. Thus, for example, the Khoni Municipality City Council has adopted a resolution that, in case of submitting a draft normative act electronically, determines the number of signatories by 0.5% of the total number of registered voters in the municipality”.<sup>9</sup>

## **PRACTICE OF LAUNCHING AN ELECTRONIC PETITION MECHANISM IN KHONI MUNICIPALITY**

Despite the provision of petitions as an engagement mechanism at the legislative level in recent years, the practice has shown that in Khoni Municipality, citizens do not actively use it to provide their views and suggestions to the government. Only one petition has been registered in the municipality since 2012. It should be noted that the petition was responded to observing all rules, and the issue has been resolved positively. However, despite this successful example, the practice failed to lay the groundwork for other precedents. It was reasoned by several circumstances:

First, the minimum threshold for collecting petitions was set at 1% by law, which was quite a big concern for rural people. In Khoni municipality, this minimum threshold was about 240 registered voters, or 240 adult citizens registered there. Collecting this number of signatories, for example, in a mountainous area, in small villages, was quite problematic. Second important circumstance: there was no mechanism for filing a petition electronically in the municipality. The procedure was quite complicated by the practice of handing the petition. The initiator had to apply to the City Hall administrative service, take a specially drawn up protocol form, then fill in and register the document as an application at the City Hall. Along with a few visits to the administrative body, it included walking door-to-door, hard work and tedious procedures.

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<sup>9</sup> Legislative Herald of Georgia (February 5, 2014), Code of Local Self-Government, Tbilisi

The third significant circumstance is the population's awareness. Unfortunately, it is not enough for the administrative body to explain that there are citizens' inclusiveness mechanisms in the legislation, including the "petition". Large-scale information campaigns are needed to exercise the right and use the petition. Also, it is necessary to involve decision-makers in the information campaign, which was not introduced in practice to increase trust.

The fourth circumstance and the most crucial factor is the accountability and transparency of public institutions, which means proactive access to information on submitted and satisfied petitions, openness of the successful petition review process and substantiation of the final decision, as well as predictability of the petition review process and its thorough follow-up by the relevant agencies. All this involves local government administration, specific events, activities, and campaigns, primarily related to human and financial resources. In this process, the recommendations of partners, professional organizations, acquaintance-sharing-introduction of best practices, finding-attracting grants are essential.

The best practice can be discussed on Khoni municipality example:

At the beginning of 2020, representatives of the Fund "Sukhumi" presented the project "A common forum for CSOs from Guria, Imereti and Racha-Lechkhumi for PAR Roadmap monitoring" in the Khoni Municipality City Council Assembly Hall. The municipality officials also attended the presentation and immediately expressed their readiness for cooperation.

One of the project components was to increase the citizens' inclusiveness in the decision-making process. Due to the local government's positive and relevant attitude towards the project, Khoni was selected as a pilot municipality to ensure citizens' inclusiveness. As a result, a memorandum of cooperation was signed with the City Council and the City Hall. Consequently, in a crucial process, Khoni Municipality became a partner of the Fund "Sukhumi", Fund of Women Entrepreneurs and Imereti Scientists' Union "Spectri", and the European Union.

In addition, the government strengthened cooperation with the Fund "Sukhumi" with another memorandum (01.04.2021- 30.09.2021). Furthermore, regarding the e-petition, the parties undertook to fulfil the terms of the memorandum conscientiously and create an appropriate environment for the successful working process and, if necessary, plan joint activities to achieve the goal.

In cooperation with the non-governmental sector, the local government has taken responsibility for ensuring that the citizens' inclusiveness mechanism - the "petition"- is implemented in Khoni.

The Forum members, local CSOs - the IDP Initiative Group and Education and Devel-

opment Center “Edelweiss”, and organizations established within the project, the Youth Inclusiveness Center and the Organization for Persons with Disabilities “Phoenix” got involved in the petition implementation as a valuable mechanism.

The first practical step in this direction in Khoni was to halve the minimum threshold (1%) for signatories to a petition set by law. The municipality mayor was addressed with an initiative to halve the existing limit. City Council unanimously supported the initiative in compliance with the rules, and the minimum threshold for signatories to the petition was set at 0.5% in Khoni Municipality.

The procedural simplification of the petition mechanism was on the agenda: the introduction of an electronic petition to simplify the process of collecting citizens votes to increase their access to this mechanism. The City Hall Administrative Service expressed its readiness to update the website and take the necessary technical measures. With the financial support of partner organizations, an electronic petition application was launched on the official municipality website (see <http://khoni.gov.ge/>), City Hall and City Council IT and public relations specialists, heads of administrative services, were trained.

## **FOR EXAMPLE:**

### **How to fill out an electronic petition?**

*A petition is a form of citizens' participation in the local self-governance. The following can be submitted as a petition:*

- a) *City Council draft resolution;*
- b) *Basic principles or specific proposals of the City Council draft resolution;*
- c) *Request to study, discuss and resolve the municipality and/or the settlement common problems at the municipal council meeting*

### **Who can file an electronic petition?**

*No less than 0.5% (120 voters) of registered voters in Khoni Municipality has the right to submit an electronic petition.*

### **What is necessary to file an e-petition?**

- *An electronic petition can be submitted to the City Council electronically through special software of the Municipality Council website. The petition author must register electronically as the application user, for which he/she indicates his/her name, surname, date of birth, personal number, e-mail address and uploads a scanned copy of the ID card (passport) of the citizen of Georgia in the application.*

- *The petition author is automatically sent code word/symbols by e-mail, after which the author confirms the registration with a code word/symbols.*
- *After registration, the author must place the petition text in Georgian Sylfaen font in the application and attach it by uploading the document:*
  1. *Information on at least one and not more than three persons submitting the petition: name, surname, address, contact telephone number, e-mail address and a copy (s) of Georgian identity;*
  2. *Basic principles or specific proposals of the draft normative-administrative legal act or - draft normative administrative-legal act; or - a specifically formulated and substantiated request;*
  3. *Documents and materials that the petitioner deems necessary to substantiate the petition.*

*The posted text and attached documents will appear on the Municipal Council website before 12 p.m. of the next working day of the upload.*

*The confirmation on uploading the text and attached documents on the Municipal Council website will be sent to the entity submitting the petition via e-mail.*

## **INSTRUCTION**

The petition text is not displayed on the municipal council website if:

1. The text contradicts the universally accepted moral norms and principles;
2. The content of the text offends any person;
3. The content of the text restricts the fundamental human rights and freedoms set by Chapter 2 of the Constitution of Georgia.

## **HOW TO SIGN A PETITION?**

- *To sign the petition, the municipal voter must enter his/her first name, surname, personal number, place of residence address in Georgian Sylfaen font in the application.*
- *To sign the petition, the voter is obliged to confirm that he/she has read the content of the petition and agrees with it by marking the relevant window of the application.*
- *If the voter does not agree to make his/her name public when signing, the application will protect him/her from disclosing personal data. To do this, the voter only needs to select the appropriate window.*

- *Voter`s data will be available only to the entity submitting the petition and the authorized person of the Khoni Municipality City Council.*
- *After the publication of the petition text, the application publishes the number of voters signing the petition, the minimum number of signatories required for the petition and the name(s) of the author(s) of the petition.*

## **PETITION REGISTRATION**

- *After making the required number of signatures electronically within 30 days after the petition publication on the Municipality City Council website, through the “Submit to registration” function, the application sends the petition text and the attached documents, including the complete list of voters who signed the petition, to the municipality e-mail. The application automatically marks the date of petition submission and asks the City Council staff to confirm the receipt.*
- *After the confirmation by the City Council staff, the application automatically notifies the entity filing the petition electronically, indicating the date and time.*
- *After receiving the petition by e-mail, the City Council office starts registering the petition within three working days.*
- *After the petition registration, the City Council staff sends the petition registration certificate or the petition registration to the entity submitting the petition and posts it on the municipality City Council website.*
- *The petition is written and addressed to Khoni Municipality Sakrebulo Chairman.*

Also, within the project and cooperation, the partner organizations provided targeted and specific information campaigns in all twelve administrative units of the municipality. As a result, an initiative group was set up in the municipality, and six actors were selected. After their training (specific training on e-petition management was conducted), specific information meetings were planned in rural and urban areas. The information campaign involved local government officials, including leaders, who convinced the public of the need and importance of their inclusiveness in the decision-making process.

At the information meetings, the population was informed about the petition essence and its significance and forms of use. Problems were identified on the ground, and practical lessons in submission, voting and forwarding were demonstrated.

## FOR EXAMPLE:

During the information meeting, the population in Gordi and Kinchkha administrative units identified and gave priority to the following problems:

1. Covering internal roads in Kopi and Machkaeti districts with gravel
2. Construction of a children's attraction in the village of Gordi
3. Rehabilitation of the square in the center of village Kinchkha
4. Rehabilitation of the square in village Kveda Kinchkha

The petition texts were prepared and uploaded in the relevant "window" <http://petition.lsg.ge/khoni/> of the municipality official website <http://khoni.gov.ge/>.

See form and content of petition texts.

### **REHABILITATION OF THE SQUARE IN THE CENTRE OF THE VILLAGE KINCHKHA**

The village Kinchkha is one of the most beautiful villages in Khoni municipality. Kinchkha, rich in natural monuments, is a beautiful tourist village in the country, and it has thousands of visitors every year.

A square needs to be rehabilitated and renovated in the village centre near the main tourist road. The square is functionally loaded and is a favourite place for young people or visitors. Although almost abandoned. The square needs fencing, the installation of chairs and electric lights.

Please, publicly discuss this issue at the City Council session and make a relevant decision.

### **REHABILITATION OF THE SQUARE IN VILLAGE KVEDA KINCHKHA**

The village Kinchkha is one of the most beautiful villages in Khoni municipality. Kinchkha, rich in natural monuments, is a beautiful tourist village in the country, and it is visited by thousands of people every year.

The village consists of several districts. Among them is Kveda Kinchkha, a district quite far from the village centre. Unlike other neigh-

bourhoods, Kveda Kinchkha has no place where local or young people are visiting it gather for fun and relaxation. Therefore, the locals ask that the square in the centre of the district be fenced and landscaped.

Please, publicly discuss this issue at the City Council session and make a decision relevant to the request of the population.

### **REPAIRING INTERNAL ROADS IN MACHAKETI AND KOPIA**

Residents of Machaketi and Kopia districts in the village of Gordi have been suffering from faulty roads for years. As a result, it is difficult for both pedestrians and cars to move here. It becomes worse during bad weather.

The problem complicates the living conditions of the population. As a result, the socio-economic development of these settlements is hindered. The village Gordi is a tourist-attractive location, and all locals should be given equal development opportunities. And the regulation of internal road infrastructure is the first task in this direction.

Since, according to the Local Self-Government Code, the regulation of internal roads is within the self-government authority. Therefore, we ask you to publicly discuss this issue at the City Council sitting following the Local Self-Government Code to meet the population's demand as soon as possible.

### **CHILDREN'S ATTRACTION IN THE VILLAGE GORDI**

Gordi is a densely populated village. In addition, it is one of the most attractive tourist locations in the country. Many children grow up in the village, and their number doubles in the summer. Both vacationers and tourists come here. Unfortunately, there are no children's entertainment attractions in the village, which is a problem. The children living here, unlike those living in the city, are deprived of this entertainment opportunity.

According to the Local Self-Government Code, the self-government has the authority to arrange and develop the infrastructure of pre-school institutions. So, please discuss this issue publicly at the City Council meeting so that a children's attraction can be placed in the village kindergarten yard as soon as possible.



In parallel with the information campaign, the City Council and the City Hall were administered, and they were ready for receiving, reviewing and other accompanying procedures. The decision made at the City Council sitting on setting the minimum threshold for voters by 0.5% - Resolution # 4, of March 31, 2021 - was amended by Resolution # 21, of November 20, 2017 (Regulations of the City Council).

It should be noted that the Fund “Sukhumi” organized a series of training for local public servants, City Council and City Hall employees. The invited qualified lawyer spoke in detail about the petition legal and legislative aspects and the acceptance procedures.

A roundtable discussion was held within the project, attended by local teachers, public officials, journalists, civil society representatives and physicians. The topic of the roundtable discussion was the electronic petition and its importance.

Meetings in rural and urban areas, training sessions and discussions have significantly increased the awareness of the petition as an engagement mechanism. Consequently, more than 25 petitions have been uploaded to the municipality website. Procedures for registering initiators, uploading petitions, voting and forwarding were carried out without any delay. The content of the petitions mainly covered infrastructure issues. Most of the petitions received the required number of votes within the set timeframe and were sent to the City Council for review.

### **The process showed that:**

1. The civil sector (Fund “Sukhumi”, the Fund of Women Entrepreneurs, “Spectri”), as a stakeholder, with the local government and the local civil sector (IDPs Initiative Group, “Edelweiss”, Youth Inclusiveness Center, “Phoenix”) could increase citizens’ activeness and create a practice of responsible cooperation. A very effective mechanism of citizen inclusiveness, “e-petition”, was launched.
2. An electronic application has been introduced, which fully meets the requirements. It must be a simple and affordable mechanism for any interested person. It is also a step forward in the local governance process to further digitise projects, programs, and other services.
3. Hundreds of citizens living in the municipality received a lot of information about self-government issues, became involved in the decision-making process, became a co-author of decisions. Consequently, their civic responsibility, competence, etc., have increased. Young people living in the municipality were especially active.
4. During the project implementation, the City Council and the City Hall PR specialists were trained and qualified.
5. The initiative group members are competent people in the municipality who will provide qualified advice regarding the electronic petition to any interested person.

6. The petition's introduction had quite serious media support: information leaflets were printed and distributed at the meetings. Information on all activities was spread on the Fund "Sukhumi" and project trilingual websites and on those of local CSOs in Khoni. An article about this news was published in the local newspaper "Khoneli" in July 2021, "Electronic petition in Khoni municipality - a project of future". It was considered an outstanding practice, and a publication was prepared for the category "Success Story" for the Fund "Sukhumi" website.<sup>10</sup> This publication was also published on the website created within the project.<sup>11</sup>

The process of putting the "e-petition" into practice has shown us that in some cases, it can not be implemented in practical activities. The population has no information or possesses information but lacks the proper motivation or skills to be guided by the law. Nor are the resources of local government sufficient to make engagement mechanisms popular in the community so that the community and the government benefit equally from them.

In such a context, the non-governmental sector is an excellent resource, an opportunity, a partner to set examples of best practices, to stimulate further, motivate, and guide for implementing positive tasks in following the self-government reform.

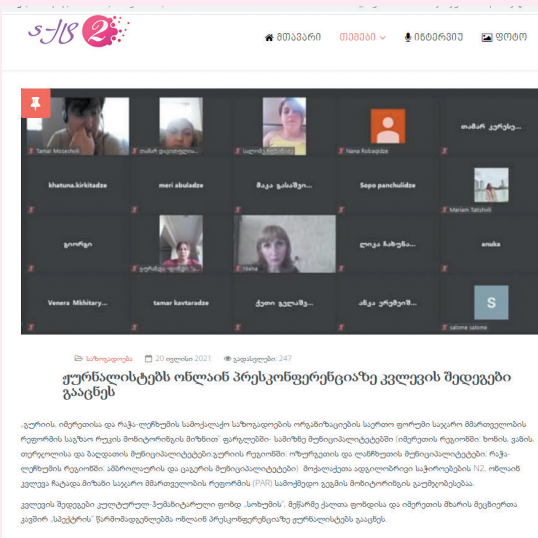
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10 <http://fsokhumi.ge/index.php/ka/saqmianoba-ka/warmatebisiistoria-ka/item/11280-2021-06-27-15-28-44>

11 <https://csoforum.ge/index.php/ka/result-ka/1011-2021-06-27-15-32-27>

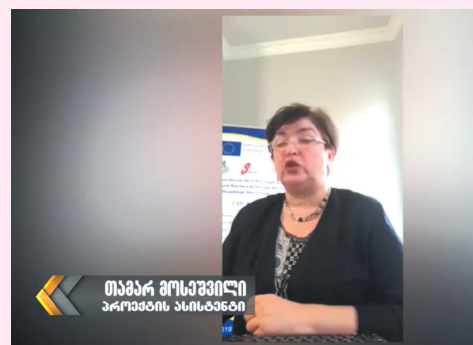
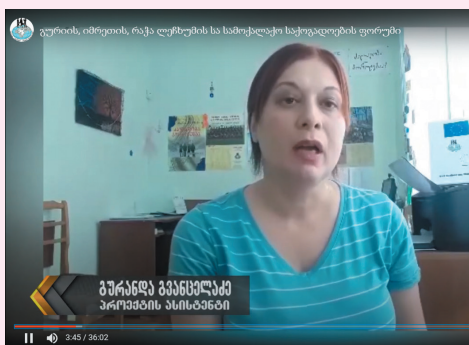
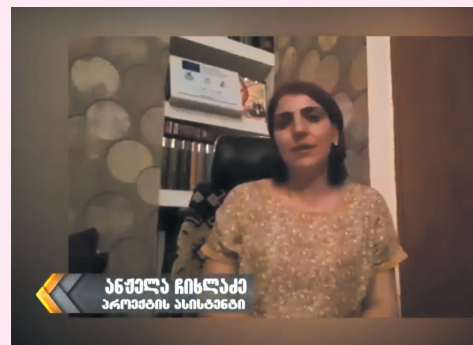
## CHAPTER VIII

# THE ROLE AND IMPORTANCE OF MEDIA IN INCREASING THE VISIBILITY OF CSOs





**სამოქალაქო  
საზოგადოების  
ორგანიზაციების  
ფორუმი • CSO Forum**



# THE ROLE AND IMPORTANCE OF MEDIA IN INCREASING THE VISIBILITY OF CSOs

**LALI SHENGELIA**

**Project website editor, PR specialist**

**Cultural-Humanitarian Fund “Sukhumi”**

Civil society organizations in Georgia almost have a 150-year-old history. However, the Society for the Spreading of Literacy among Georgians, founded in 1879, was one of the first NGOs to impact society profoundly.

Hundreds of organizations in Georgia today actively participate in public processes. Three partner organizations, the Cultural-Humanitarian Fund “Sukhumi”, the Fund for Women Entrepreneurs and the Imereti Scientists’ Union “Spectri” are among them. They implemented the project in Imereti, Racha-Lechkhumi and Guria.

The leading project implementer was the CSO Forum consolidating 16 local organizations from 8 municipalities. They promoted Public Administration Reform in municipalities, were active and created success stories. Thanks to them, thousands of people have heard about it.

The media has been influencing public opinion since its inception. Even in the information age, it is impossible to achieve popularity without mass media support.

Popularity is a conditional concept. A civil society organization needs popularity to introduce its activities to the public, find partners and supporters, and positively impact the area of action.

The Fund “Sukhumi” is well aware of the role of the mass media. Twenty years ago, in 2001, the newspaper, Women’s Voice, covering the Fund “Sukhumi” activities, was published. It increased its popularity. Since then, hundreds of magazines and newspapers have been released, in print and online as well. All of them covered the hard work rendered by the Fund for years. In addition, Fund “Sukhumi” has published reports, methodological and reference manuals, analytical articles, guides, publications on successful project experiences and successful practices.

Our organization actively used other fields of media (radio, television) as well. There

have been cycles of radio and television stories or programs in regional TV and radio companies over the years (e.g., Women and Peace, Women and Politics).

Special mention should be made of the Fund “Sukhumi” trilingual (Georgian, English, Russian) websites, Facebook pages, and a YouTube channel.

Against the background of great experience, Fund “Sukhumi” assigned a specific role to the media in this project. It was necessary to cover the project activities, learn more about local organizations in municipalities, and gain the population’s trust.

Several forms of providing or disseminating information to the public have been highlighted: TV shows, press conferences, websites, social media.

It is noteworthy that partner organizations shared these areas: the Fund of Women Entrepreneurs organized TV programs, the Imereti Scientists’ Association “Spectri” held press conferences, and the website and Facebook page were managed by fund “Sukhumi”.

## **TV PROGRAMS**

The role of TV broadcasters is unique in human life. Television remains the primary tool for disseminating information. Therefore, the project included creating video content, sharing its messages on the TV channel and introducing the project’s importance, concept, results and success to the viewer.

Information about the one-time program can be posted on several platforms: Facebook, website, YouTube. Each platform is an opportunity to promote this show.

The programs were aimed to raise public awareness about Public Administration Reform (PAR).

The employees of the partner organizations (Fund “Sukhumi”, the Imereti Scientists’ Union “Spectri” and the Fund of Women Entrepreneurs) did reviews in the programs, and representatives of 8 municipalities (Terjola, Vani, Bagdati, Khoni, Ozurgeti, Lanchkhuti, Tsageri, and Ambrolauri) participated in them.

The TV programs followed the activities. Therefore, a topic was selected in the program planning process, and a work plan was created. They communicated with a journalist and started active preparation.

The programs covered the issues essential in the project work. In addition, fruitful cooperation was established with local, regional broadcasters, and one specific time was chosen in the air for a TV program watched by tens of thousands of people. These pro-

grams have raised the population's awareness, increasing the project's scale and more resonance.

The first show aired on May 4, 2020, was unusual due to the Covid-19 pandemic. It included showing photos, no live shots, and online interaction between respondents and a journalist.<sup>12</sup>

The pandemic and quarantine conditions became a challenge and a barrier for journalists who could not prepare live shows, show impressive reportages. Nevertheless, the shows highlighted active work, outcomes and achievements in the municipalities.

Six programs were prepared on Rioni TV, and Mega TV as the project envisaged it. Their duration was 36-70 minutes. Among the regional broadcasters, both channels are distinguished by a large coverage area and a high rating.

According to the current data, the Mega TV website has an average of 40 000 unique visitors a day. In addition, the Facebook page has 97 230 subscribers, whereas the Youtube channel 18 000 ones - <https://megatv.ge/>.

The number of subscribers of Rioni TV's Facebook page is 21 727, the average daily number of visitors to the website is 4305, and the number of subscribers of YouTube is 2160 - <http://www.rionitv.com/>.

This data confirms the resonance of the programs on these channels. Every program had a lot of viewers on different platforms. In this way, thousands of people received information about the project and contributed to raising the awareness of all the organizations and their image in the municipalities.

## **PRESS CONFERENCE**

The press conference aims to introduce important news to the media. It has a question-answer format. The press conference was one of the essential formats of our project work.

The Imereti Scientists' Union "Spectri" was responsible for holding the press conference. The organization surveyed media outlets in all eight municipalities, created a database, and diligently prepared each press conference.

Database included:

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<sup>12</sup> <https://csoforum.ge/index.php/ka/news-2-ka-2/179-media-ka/470-2020-05-06-16-36-31>

Regional TV companies “Rioni”, Mega TV, TV Guria;

Radio “Dzveli Kalaki”, “Voice of Ambrolauri”;

Representatives of the Public Relations Service and Information Center of the City Halls and Governor’s Offices;

Newspapers and agencies “Tsageri”, “Khoni”, “Khoneli”, “Terjola”, Gurianus, “Yes and No”(Lanchkhuti), Ipress.ge, Topnews.com.ge, Newpress.ge, Paraleli.ge, Kutaisipost. ge, Guria Today.ge.

The media campaign involved all the publications that exist in the municipality.

The press conference was the best demonstration of media relations.

The first press conference was held on May 1, during the Covid-19 lockdown (closure, restriction of free movement due to an emergency state), online, on the Zoom platform. It expanded the opportunity for journalists to get involved. 20-30 journalists attended each press conference. The inclusiveness of so many media outlets has led to information duplication, their spread to municipalities.

Each press conference had a specific topic and was related to project activities. At the first press conference, the monitoring results of Public Administration Reform (PAR) Roadmap implementation in eight municipalities were represented to the invited journalists. A total of 4 monitoring sessions were held, and four press conferences were dedicated to getting acquainted with the outcomes, progress, and success.

In addition, a study of citizens’ local needs was conducted twice during PAR implementation. It was covered at press conferences as well. The implementation of small grant projects by CSOs in the municipalities and the project work results were discussed at the meetings with the media.

A total of 8 online press conferences were held. Responses, newsletters in the media followed them. It has increased the number of people who understood the importance of the reform, the need to introduce e-services, which became especially relevant during the pandemic.

## **WEBSITE**

Dissemination of information on the Internet has a unique effect. The website is the best form of internet communication. Since 2009, Fund “Sukhumi” has had a trilingual website <http://fsokhumi.ge>, containing multimedia information about the organization activities: news, videos, TV and radio programs, PDF files of publications.



A modern design website [www.csoforum.ge/](http://www.csoforum.ge/) has been created within the project.

The following windows are placed on the main panel:

**News** includes the following categories: meetings, roundtable, needs assessment, PAR monitoring, debates, PAR reports, trainings, mass media. In addition, as can be seen from the category names, information related to the project work is posted here.

The category **Forum** covers the essence and purpose of the CSO forum and a list of organizations operating in 8 municipalities. These are the 16 major organizations that joined the Forum from the beginning and 14 newly-established local organizations.

The website section **Project** provides detailed information about the project and its three partner organizations.

**Activities/Results** - This category reflects the project results, focusing on small grant projects implemented by local organizations in the municipalities. There are also success stories: launching a hotline in Khoni, approving an ethics code in Vani, introducing an e-manager in Lanchkhuti, creating an anti-corruption regulation in Bagdati, and a Forum - an opportunity to share experiences and best practices.

**Publications**, the most important category of the website, covers the main work rendered within the project. All publications prepared during the project are available: training modules, monitoring of the Public Administration Reform Roadmap (PAR) in 8 municipalities of Western Georgia (4 reports), "Needs assessment of the population in the process of public administration reform (PAR) implementation in 8 municipalities of Western Georgia"(2 reports); Reports by individual municipalities.

The website is informative, and the materials are published in the classic model - news in three languages, photos/videos. The first information was published on October 15, 2019. There are four pieces of news on each page, and there are already about 60 pages on the website.

The brief website excursion also shows that it is a project history. Information with photos and videos is chronologically sorted, and it also has the function of an archive. Thus, even after the project completion, it is possible to get acquainted with all the specific information that reflects the project work and results.

## FACEBOOK PAGE

Facebook is the most popular internet communication platform in Georgia. This form of social media is fast, flexible, and operative. A traditional media product (newspaper, radio

or TV story) goes through several stages before reaching the reader, listener or viewer. On the other hand, social media interacts directly with the audience; it is an easy and direct way of communication.

That is why social media has significantly contributed to disseminating information about project work and the growth of civil society organizations' popularity.

All three partner organizations implementing the project have their Facebook pages, but the Facebook page [www.facebook.com/CSOForum.FS/](http://www.facebook.com/CSOForum.FS/) has been specially created, which has become an interesting tool from the very beginning.

News about the activities, TV programs and publications have been uploaded on the Facebook page. In addition, webpage addresses (to make the website more active), information about partner organizations, and Forum member organizations' achievements have also been posted there.

The Facebook page contains more news compared to the website.

For example, printed appeals were sent to residents of a particular municipality:

“If you live in Khoni municipality, this information is vital for you. Did you know that you can communicate with the local government via the Internet and get answers to your questions without leaving home?”

Or, “What has changed after two monitoring sessions in Terjola?”

Or, “Do you live in Bagdati municipality? If so, get acquainted with this information”.

This appeal is followed by some news and a link to the publication to get acquainted with the report full version.

In the case of a specific municipality, Facebook post attracts more attention. Local organizations which conducted the monitoring are mentioned in every post. It makes an impact on their popularity since such posts have many shares. Consequently, every publication within the project is a perfect source for talking about PR, which makes CSOs famous.

We also used a “trick” regarding TV programs, which increases the image of local organizations. This tool works like this: the complete TV program is posted on the website and the Facebook page, but it is “cut” into fragments. A small, 3-5-minute video of a specific respondent is posted with a link of the specific municipality, organization and complete show.

Considering all this, the project Facebook page is the best format for interaction. It allows sharing and spreading information, uploading the photo and video material, expressing

emotion and increasing audience. Moreover, it is the most active tool that people see daily and therefore focusing on it gives quite a good effect.

It should be mentioned that the number of Facebook subscribers increased from month to month, and interest in the project work grew.

The representatives of local organizations shared the project page information via their personal or organization's Facebook pages, increasing their publicity.

The organization's strengths, the details of its activities, successes, and achievements were highlighted so well that all this attracted the attention of the municipality population, expanded the organization's influence, and motivated its members to do and achieve more.

### **Outcomes – success story**

Each activity is evaluated according to the results. Results are the best way for an organization to gain trust and to become popular in the community.

Several aspects can be considered to represent the results:

**First, the partnership** is the project's one of main results. The project was implemented under the three partner organizations' supervision and brought together 16 local civil society organizations and 14 newly-established organizations operating in 8 municipalities in the three regions towards one goal.

The best example of the partnership was felt at all stages of the project work. Still, it reached its peak in the final part, when representatives of different organizations shared their achievements, experiences, successful practices.

To illustrate it, here is one of the materials from the website:

### **FORUM - AN OPPORTUNITY TO SHARE EXPERIENCES AND BEST PRACTICES <sup>13</sup>**

**Sharing experiences is the best way to introduce novelties. It is a unique method of work for Fund "Sukhumi" and often gives this opportunity to different municipalities.**

**From the very beginning, the CSO Forum of Guria, Imereti and Racha-Lechkhumi envisaged cooperation and mutual assistance.**

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<sup>13</sup> <https://csoforum.ge/index.php/ka/news-2-ka-2/191-result/1064-2021-07-27-18-57-17>

Fund “Sukhumi”, Fund of Women Entrepreneurs, and the Imereti Scientists’ Union “Spectri” are involved in the project.

Sixteen organizations joined the CSO Forum in October 2019. It covers eight municipalities (Khoni, Vani, Terjola, Bagdati, Lanchkhuti, Ozurgeti, Tsageri, and Ambrolauri).

The forum was set up to actively involve the public in the Public Administration Reform Roadmap monitoring process.

From the beginning of the project, the organizations attended meetings, trainings, studied the criteria for public reform implementation, project writing, problem advocacy, research techniques. They also supported the creation of new organizations, and 14 new organizations were registered in the municipalities.

Of course, they shared their experience and knowledge at all the joint meetings. They became friends, learned a lot and strengthened each other. They have facilitated changes in their municipalities and are having a positive impact on other municipalities as well.

Lanchkhuti Municipality Representative Amiran Gigineishvili (Georgian Rural Council) shared his “Electronic Manager” with his colleagues from Ambrolauri, and this unique application was successfully introduced in Ambrolauri Municipality as well.

Vani Municipality first developed the Code of Ethics. Its author Marina Ghvinianidze (Tanadgoma - 2020), explained the whole procedure in detail to her colleagues, and in this way, they adopted the Code of Ethics in Khoni, Tsageri, and Bagdati.

Eliso Jikia (Education and Development Center “Edelweiss”) from Khoni Municipality participated in the debate in Terjola Municipality, spoke about the introduction of electronic petitions. She shared this successful practice with the representatives of Bagdati and Vani municipalities. Bachana Basilaia (Khoni IDP Initiative Group) spoke about the experience related to petitions at a meeting in Tsageri.

Mzevinar Liparteliani (Active Citizen - Accountable Government) from Tsageri Municipality reviewed the issues related to adopting the Code of Ethics in Khoni. Finally, Lanchkhuti Municipality Representative Amiran Gigineishvili (Georgian Rural Council) shared his experience of introducing civil budgeting in Khoni.

**The Bagdati Working Group is the first to draft an anti-corruption regulation, and this practice will soon be successfully multiplied by other municipalities.**

**Tskaltubo Municipality is not a project participant, but Fund “Sukhumi” has many years of cooperation with the self-government. That is why the City Council member Badri Papava was invited to the meetings and shared the successful practice of introducing civil budgeting with the representatives of Terjola, Bagdati, Vani and Tsageri municipalities.**

**At the end of the project work, it was proved that the CSO Forum is indeed the best opportunity for cooperation and sharing of successful practices.**

From this information, it is clear that partnership is one of the most effective ways to gain a good image.

**Media relations** is another aspect as a tool of popularity. The project aims to facilitate e-municipal services, as it is more comfortable for the locals. So, its results are essential and refer to everyone.

The media was considered an ally by the project initially, and it was evident at every stage.

In addition to the planned TV programs, several TV stories were aired on different channels. For example, after the general training sessions, the stories were aired on Rioni. The project did not envisage it, but it was organized thanks to the organization “Spectri”. Many publications were published after the press conferences. Local media outlets covered the achievements of municipal organizations. For instance, a member of the Khoni working group, journalist Guranda Tsaguria, published articles in the newspapers Khoni and Khoneli.

**Audience Perception:** The Internet and social media have made it easier to reach out to an audience. Taking care of the audience expansion was the information sector one of the essential missions. Every organization tried to attract more readers, allies, like-minded people. The logic is simple: the larger the audience, the more people are informed about the organization activities, the greater the number of supporters. Of course, potential readers/viewers/listeners are not the only beneficiaries or participants in project activities. This range is much more diverse, primarily when the project covers the entire population: local government representatives and NGOs, teachers, journalists, young people, pensioners, housewives, etc. The list shows that it is quite a large number.

Demonstrating **success and outcomes** is an essential aspect of a civil society organization's work. However, it is not as easy as it seems at first glance. The project participants underwent three trainings, where they learned many "secrets"- on PR for the organization, how to increase publicity, how to write good news, present a success story, manage Internet resources, and increase the audience, etc.

This knowledge (training modules are included in the category "Publications")<sup>14</sup> was useful not only during this project, but also as a guide for future activities.

The organizations' work is specific, and the information placement also differs. However, the news is prepared based on a traditional scheme (headline, lead, content, background).

It is essential to use the 5W & 1H rule: Who? What? Where? When? Why? How?

In these questions, special attention is paid to the last two questions: How? and Why?

Answering these two questions means demonstrating the results. It is the success, the organization's achievement, the impact on people, the changes in a particular society.

The project has brought a lot of benefits to the municipalities. Success stories include the selected ones. The real story and real hero give more credibility to the story; the reader is interested and desires to get acquainted with the information later.

What are the project success stories? Here are three stories.

### **DOCUMENTS "PREPARED" BY LITTLE DACHI IN BAGDATI <sup>15</sup>**

**Dachi is a smart and businesslike person. He was born this year, in early April. He often "works" with his mother. He helped her even before he was born. So, the residents of Bagdati should be grateful to Dachi for the preparation of serious documents. Some may think this is a joke, but I cannot agree because Dachi works with her mom. Dachi's mom is a young, beautiful and clever woman. She graduated from school in the village Dimi and then graduated from the Faculty of Law and the Master's program of Tbilisi State University. When**

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14 <https://csoforum.ge/index.php/ka/ka-public/treningis-saxelmzgvanelo>

15 <https://csoforum.ge/index.php/ka/news-2-ka-2/191-result/1059-2021-07-27-07-00-51>

the implementation of our project started in Bagdati, City Council members were invited to the working group. Guram Kiknavelidze, the commission chairman on financial - budgetary issues, was elected as the group's chairperson. The second member is Gvantsa Grdzelidze, chairman of the legal and procedural commission. In short, both are necessary people, and now the group has its own financial and legal lobbyists. That is why the Bagdati working group is distinguished by its activity and is successfully implementing the Public Administration Reform.

Gvantsa Grdzelidze was pregnant when she began to prepare the first document. Nevertheless, little Dachi was also happy with his mother, when on April 28, the City Council of Bagdati municipality approved the code of ethics and rules of conduct for public officials. Before the presentation at the City Council meeting, the document passed all the procedures. Then, it was posted on the municipality website, and everyone had the opportunity to familiarize themselves with it. Finally, as a result of the working group members' lobbying, the document was approved.

On the one hand, the code sets a common standard of ethics and conduct for public officials and, on the other hand, serves to raise trust towards local government and public service.

Now Dachi, together with his mom, is working on anti-corruption regulations. Bagdati Municipality will be the first among the partner municipalities to adopt this document and then share this practice with others.

- Our work serves to overcome nihilism - with the conviction that nothing will change, that nothing makes sense. Code of ethics, anti-corruption regulations are the first steps on this road. Other steps will follow this, local self-government will develop, improve, and all municipality residents will see it - says Gvantsa Grdzelidze, the beautiful mother of little Dachi...

## AN INTERESTING ONLINE JOURNEY <sup>16</sup>

Here is an exciting journey for you. You have never seen or heard of such a thing before.

It is an online journey as it corresponds to the Covid pandemic.

Follow us...

The first station is Lanchkhuti official website <http://lanchkhuti.gov.ge/>

Take a look to the right of the screen. Everything seems familiar in the list; however, there is one different name – electronic manager <https://lcman.ge>

We must tell you about the innovation - a unique web application with no analogue in Georgia (and not only). It was created especially for Lanchkhuti. The application author is Amiran Gigineishvili - a radio engineer, programmer, designer, researcher, economist, and PR specialist.

Mr Amiran is a Lanchkhuti City Council member and a board member of the Local Governments Association of Georgia. He has many years of working experience in civil society organizations, participated in more than 40 training sessions in the USA and various European countries. At the moment, he is the chairman of the Georgian Rural Council <http://www.darbazi.org.ge/>

It all started after the organization got involved in the project “A common forum for CSOs from Guria, Imereti and Racha-Lechkhumi for PAR Roadmap monitoring”.

The project is implemented by the Fund “Sukhumi” in partnership with Imereti Scientists’ Union “Spectri” and the Fund of Women Entrepreneurs.

This organization from Lanchkhuti was initially distinguished by its activity and initiatives.

Last summer, according to the project, a grant competition was announced, and 16 organizations from eight municipalities were involved. Interesting ideas were represented, and each of them received a small grant.

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<sup>16</sup> <https://csoforum.ge/index.php/ka/news-2-ka-2/191-result/935-2021-05-18-05-06-47>



Where did the members of the Lanchkhuti organization get this idea from?

Amiran Gigineishvili recalls: “During one of the lockdowns, I came to the administrative building of Lanchkhuti municipality for a City Council meeting (I am the City Council member) and saw that security service did not let visitors enter the building to meet the Mayor and members of the City Council. Then there was a restriction on the movement of internal municipal transport. Consequently, the citizens’ participation in the decision-making process became almost zero; it became impossible to visit the decision-makers for personal issues. It became the basis for the creation of a web application”.

The idea was pretty ambitious. As a result, the project “Electronic communicator of reporting transparency for Lanchkhuti Municipality” was developed.

An excerpt from the project proposal:

“Project objectives: formation of technical requirements and design of a web application for the electronic communicator of City Council activities, elaboration of an application and publication on the Internet, increasing knowledge of web application management and skills of the apparatus staff; informing the population about the possibilities of the application and its use, administration of the web application”.

The web application was developed using ASP.NET and C ++ program scripts and MS SQL server. Windows hosting was purchased to place it on the Internet. The web application was attached to the City Council official website. In addition, the banners were posted on the City Council website, on the websites of the Georgian Rural Council and Lanchkhuti Information Center.

All tasks have been completed. A lot has been done with small finances during three months.

Amiran Gigineishvilli: “Now, everyone, without leaving home, can personally address a City Council member, Mayor, deputy, head of the service via the Internet. We made it even more complicated and included the City Hall. One can exit from the municipality official page using the button - electronic manager. If they do not answer

promptly, the surname will turn red on this page, and this fact increases responsibility “.

Lanchkhuti official website also has a participatory budget platform, and it is also developed by Amiran Gigineishvili <https://idealanckhuti.ge>

Through the platform, one can go to the municipal website and the electronic manager as well.

The ending of an exciting journey is as follows:

Finally, the electronic manager is working!

The municipality residents have a schedule of events planned for the next 30 days, information about City Council meetings, and download important documents.

Most importantly, there is also the contact information of City Council and City Hall officials. Anyone can communicate with a local government representative: call, write a mail, go to a personal page.

According to the counter, the City Council members have received 57 letters and answered all of them...

It has been introduced only in Lanchkhuti so far.

As a good deed always has followers, this idea, as a good practice, was adopted by Ambrolauri.

<https://open-amb.ge/> - This link shows that the electronic manager is ready in Ambrolauri. Only two people have registered so far, and no letters have been sent yet, but the main thing is that there is a model, and it will gradually become active.

Therefore, within the project in October 2019, a forum for CSOs of 8 municipalities of Guria, Imereti and Racha-Lechkhumi was created. There were 16 organizations on the forum, and 14 more organizations were added.

<https://csoforum.ge/index.php/ka/about-forum-ka-1> as noted in this field of the website: “A forum is a place for collaboration. Civil society organizations learn from each other and transfer best practices from one municipality to another”. A forum is a place for cooperation. CSOs are encouraged to learn from one another, transferring best practice approaches from one municipality to another.

Lanchkhuti Electronic manager confirms it. It is also the project

success indicator, and a high-class professional, author of exciting ideas with many years of practice - Amiran Gigineishvili is the best example for colleagues. It is a person who is always ready for cooperation and the exchange of experience...

## **KHONI CITY HALL HOTLINE ADVANTAGES <sup>17</sup>**

**Khatia Khachapuridze:** “I live in Tbilisi. I needed to register my father’s land in the village Gelaveri, and I found the Khoni City Hall hotline in Google ... I was provided with all the information I needed. I welcome the existence of a hotline because it simplifies the solution of many issues”.

**Tsisana Mushkudiani:** “The Internet and social networks made the whole world more comfortable, not only Khoni. I do not often call the Khoni hotline. However, whenever I applied, I was always answered. They competently provide the information they have”.

It is the opinion of people who are satisfied with the Khoni hotline.

The hotline was created following the recommendations of the Khoni working group: a separate telephone line was installed, the staff was retrained, the population was provided with information about launching the hotline.

The idea of a hotline belongs to Khoni civil society organization – Center for Education and Development “Edelweiss”, and this idea was implemented in cooperation with the local self-government.

The head of the organization Eliso Jikia says: “With the support of a mini-grant of the Fund “Sukhumi”, we have implemented a small project “Public Voice in Self-Government” in our municipality.

The hotline has been operating since August 2020. During the Covid pandemic, when villages were closed for months, there was no live communication between citizens and the local government, this service became particularly successful - citizens call and receive qualified answers to their questions”.

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17 <https://csoforum.ge/index.php/ka/news-2-ka-2/191-result/966-2021-06-04-05-04-05>

Khoni municipality official website <http://khoni.gov.ge> provides the hotline numbers in the category «contacts»:

+995 595 33 25 44 – City Hall

+995 595 33 84 49 – City Council

An active member of the Khoni working group - journalist Guranda Tsaguria, published an article regarding the hotline in the newspaper “Khoni” <https://www.facebook.com/khoni.gazeti.3>

It should also be mentioned that within the framework of the second mini-grant, “Increasing the accessibility of citizens for greater inclusiveness”, the municipality’s official website was updated. This idea was implemented by an active civil society organization – Khoni IDP initiative group.

It is one of the successful results of the project “A common forum for CSOs from Guria, Imereti and Racha-Lechkhumi for PAR Road-map monitoring”.

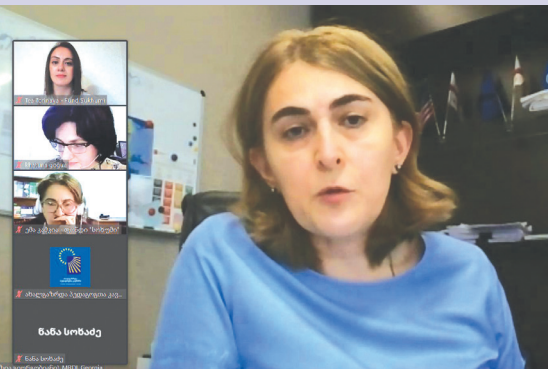
Two years of project work showed the organizations with some experience and introduced the start-ups from a new perspective to the people living in the municipality.

It was the best example of a partnership that became even more impressive and distinctive with the support of the media. The media facilitated the successful practice. Moreover, the work would not have had such a large scale resonance if the media had not played its role. The media has a special mission to increase the popularity of civil society organizations, and the project confirmed it as well ...

## CONCLUSION

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# THE PROJECT MAIN ACHIEVEMENTS AND THE LESSONS LEARNED



## CONCLUSION - THE PROJECT MAIN ACHIEVEMENTS AND THE LESSONS LEARNED

If we briefly summarize the project's contribution to the benefits and results for the target CSOs, self-governments, project implementing partners, and a community as a whole, in that case, it can be said unequivocally that the civil sector has been developed, strengthened and actively involved in decision-making processes in all eight target municipalities to promote better governance, which is the cornerstone of the PAR implementation at the local level.

**The project has had a profound impact on the civil society and government agencies, bringing them as close as possible to ensure better democratic development of the country, increased well-being of citizens, especially in terms of e-services.**

Following the emergence of CSOs supported by the project and equipped with appropriate skills, the citizens' participation in local policy in the target municipalities has been recognized as a precondition for socially important and beneficial processes.

Local authorities have realized that this cooperation is essential for greater legitimacy of government decisions and related activities, to consider the views and interests of all segments of society in the public policy process, to provide more efficient services to various citizens, including the most vulnerable groups. In addition, the public, including the government, see the role of CSOs in building partnerships with government officials, informing and educating, researching, initiating policy issues and offering alternatives to existing approaches, monitoring and evaluating programs and projects, advocating citizens' relevant issues and providing other services.

**Small grant programs, such as “point shots”, have become an essential mechanism for responding effectively to the existing challenges. They have been aimed at responding to the problems identified by the monitoring. It was an excellent example for municipalities to address gaps with relatively small resources and flexible tools. It is also an example for all actors who can support local civic groups (including local or international donors) but find building trust and allocating adequate resources challenging.**

The project highlighted the importance of using local CSOs to provide services and the benefit of the outsourcing method, the importance of its multiplication and further popularization. In a long list made by specialists and practitioners, good governance's key characteristics are co-participation; the supremacy of law; responding; focus on consensus; transparency; accountability; efficiency and effectiveness; equality and social inclusiveness.

The main stages of participation and inclusiveness involve informing, consulting and active participation.

The project implemented by Fund "Sukhumi" and partner organizations, which included monitoring of public policy and reforms by civil society - is an example of active participation.

The project unequivocally contributed to the increase of government transparency and accountability. External and internal actors were provided with more information, which helped them better understand projects, programs, or policies. It was followed by measures aimed at the specific needs of the municipalities. Comprehensive information about it is provided in our publication.

The project highlighted the practical importance of civic monitoring. It helped the various municipalities make their policies and programs more effective and efficient in many areas. They were able to use their resources and partner CSOs according to the public interest and began working with the public to respond to existing challenges.

Although the project outcome was vital, the process itself proved to be important as well. This process has contributed to raising awareness of the civil society of 8 municipalities, increased their skills, informed them, highlighted their capabilities, and increased various local groups' social capital, including the newly established CSOs. Furthermore, through the ongoing project process, we have a society that can discuss any relevant issues, join forces and have a constructive dialogue with the authorities, raise specific issues related to their daily lives, and thus ensure the project's long-term outcome.

The project helped different levels of local government to accumulate objective knowledge. It refers to a better understanding of the beneficiaries' needs, the visions of local experts and citizens on issues of local importance and long-term development prospects.

Ordinary citizens, local experts and local government representatives had interesting views on the issues of decentralization, which gave us a clear picture of existing reality. Clear messages were sent to the central government. Positive expectations, risks and steps to be taken were identified. Their delays will frustrate citizens regarding effective

local governance and cause serious delays in state-building since self-governance is the joint responsibility of citizens and government in local processes!

**Participation in the project was a springboard for inexperienced, start-up organizations regarding strengthening and fully realizing their resources. In addition, the inclusiveness of CSOs has increased the guarantees of conducting effective monitoring, needs study, advocacy process responding to identified challenges.**

Local civil society organizations, whose background (in most cases) was created at the beginning of the project, have become a highly experienced, competent, accountable force that guarantees the full implementation of PAR on the ground and continues to work to address the challenges identified through the monitoring to provide various services to citizens.

Monitoring, which was seen as a control mechanism of municipalities used by CSOs, soon became an essential tool for the effective implementation of e-governance reform, increasing the responsibility of public officials to improve e-governance access and citizens' inclusiveness.

As a result of the project, it can be unequivocally concluded that the CSO Forum turned out to be quite a successful platform and worked successfully at both levels. It was a policy evaluator and identified challenges in areas where the government could not successfully implement the reform. Besides, it was a partner in areas where the local government lacked resources horizontally and vertically, such as advocating for internet access in municipalities and positive outcomes.

**The project was a step towards strengthening the target organizations and institutional growth. As a result, they have gradually developed into civic actors with significant expertise and almost blurred the line that existed at the beginning of the project between relatively experienced and more resourceful and smaller organizations. It is the benefit of networking, sharing successes and best practices with each other.**



Local authorities have realized that this cooperation is essential for greater legitimacy of government decisions and related activities; to consider the views and interests of all segments of society in the public policy process; to provide more efficient services to a variety of citizens, including the most vulnerable ones.

In conclusion, if we summarize the project in a few words, we may say that it has contributed to building a participatory democracy, and timely and successful implementation of PAR is vital in this process. This contribution is the overall success of the project implementing organizations, all members of the CSO Forum, the working groups set up in the target municipalities, and the local authorities.



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