NEEDS ASSESSMENT OF POPULATION IN 8 MUNICIPALITIES OF WESTERN GEORGIA IN THE PROCESS OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORM (PAR) IMPLEMENTATION

CONSOLIDATED

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NEEDS ASSESSMENT OF POPULATION IN THE PROCESS OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORM (PAR) IMPLEMENTATION CONSOLIDATED REPORT

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INTRODUCTION

Successful implementation of the **Public Administration Reform** (PAR) plays a fundamental role on the way to integrating Georgia into the EU and serves as the main precondition of progressive development and raising the welfare of the population. According to the "Georgia-EU Association Agreement"[1], the country carried out the obligation of PAR implementation foreseeing the establishment of responsible, effective, inclusive, transparent, and professional public service. Civil society organizations and citizens' participation in decision-making processes while PAR implementation is a guarantee of a success, which will contribute not only to the country's democratic, open and good governance but also will increase the trust of the population towards the political system and encourage working out a policy tailored to the needs of community representatives and will strengthen the legitimacy of gained resolution.

The **PAR roadmap 2020** was performed for the successful execution of the reform. The document implies the formation of comprehensive conceptual structure and mechanism till 2020, "That will be addressed to transparent, predictable, responsive and effective state management, will satisfy the needs of the population and will be relevant to European standards"[2].

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1 Association Agreement between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community and their Member States, of the one part, and Georgia, of the other part "EU – Georgia Association Agreement" Article 4 available at :
http://www.parliament.ge/ge/ajax/downloadFile/34753/AA

2 Guideline on Public Administration Reform of Georgia 2020, p. 6, available at: http://gov.ge/files/423 _49307_925454_%E1%83%A1%E1%83%90%E1%83%AF%E1%83%90%E1%83%A0%E1%83%9D%E1% 83%9B%E1%83%9B%E1%83%90%E1%83%A0%E1%83%97%E1%83%95%E1%83%94%E1%83%9A%E1 %83%9D%E1%83%91%E1%83%98%E1%83%A1%E1%83%A0%E1%83%94%E1%83%A4%E1%83%9D% E1%83%A0%E1%83%9B%E1%83%98%E1%83%A1%E1%83%92%E1%83%96%E1%83%90%E1%83%9B %E1%83%99%E1%83%95%E1%83%9A%E1%83%94%E1%83%95%E1%83%982020.pdf

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The government of Georgia within the years of 2015-2020 approved several action plans and a strategic document for competent implementation of the components of the guideline, among them, were 3 action plans of PAR[3]: Open Administration Action Plan of Georgia, 2018-2019[4], Agenda of Association Agreement 2017-2020[5] as well as 17 goals of UN sustainable development were defined as national priorities[6].

The **reform of local self-government** is one of the most important components of PAR, that is aimed at improving the process of decentralization and achieving better governance at a local level. The Action Plan of PAR 2019-2020 foresees two main purposes focused on: a) expanding the authorities of local government to strengthen self-government institutions; b) electronic service gradual development in municipalities for improving the accessability and availability of good standards of electronic services.

Nowadays, electronic **service accessibility at the municipal level is very weak together with the practice of accountability and inclusiveness of the population in the ongoing processes.** According to unified national ratings of the municipalities of Georgia (2019)[7], the general indicator of electronic service capability at municipalities was 32%, while 20% of municipality websites have active public electronic services. According to the OECD and SIGMA assessment, Georgia from 5 points gained 0 in the process of public policy performance[8]. According to the SIGMA report, there are no systemic and structured consultation services with the population and the needs of locals are not foreseen (vulnerable groups with special needs). Operating regulations are common and not obligatory.

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3 To implement the guideline, an action plan 2015-2016 was elaborated followed by the action plan of 2017-2018 and 2019-2020. PAR action plan for 2019-2020, available at:
http://gov.ge/files/72422_72422_512614_%E1%83%A1%E1%83%90%E1%83%9B%E1%83%9D%E1%83%A5%E1%83%9B%E1%83%94%E1%83%93%E1%83%9D%E1%83%92%E1%83%94%E1%83%92%E1%83%9B%E1%83%902019-2020_%E1%83%90%E1%83%A6%E1%83%AC%E1%83%94%E1%83%A0%E1%83%98%E1%83%9A%E1%83%9D%E1%83%91%E1%83%90.pdf

4 Open Administration Action Plan of Georgia , 2018-2019, Challenge 1, obligation 2, available at:
http://procurement.gov.ge/getattachment/International-Cooperation/Action-Plans/(OGP)/OGP-2018-2019-AP.pdf.aspx

5 Agenda of Association Agreement of 2017-2020, Priority 2.2, available at: http://infocenter.gov.ge/uploads/files/2017-11/1511272286_annex_ii_-_eu-georgia_association_agenda_text.pdf

6 17 goals of UN sustainable development were identified as priorities
see at: http://gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=-&sec_id=198&info_id=62670.

7 Index of the local self-government, "Unified National Ratings of the Municipalities of Georgia", 2019

8 The Principles of Public Administration Policy Development and Co-ordination - Georgia, SIGMA Programme, 2018, p. 40, see at: http://www.sigmaweb.org/publications/Baseline-Measurement-Report-2018-Georgia.pdf.

The most important activities that could be established in regions for PAR successful implementation are as follows: ensuring the political dialogue with the representatives of civil society organizations, monitoring the reform and identifying problems locally, advocate and direct participation in the decision-making processes.

Cultural-Humanitarian Fund "Sukhumi", together with the Fund of Women Entrepreneurs and The Imereti Scientists' Union "Spectri" is implementing the project "A common forum for CSOs from Guria, Imereti and Racha-Lechkhumi for PAR Roadmap monitoring" supported by the EU for PAR effective implementation.

Citizens needs assessment was studied for evaluating **efficiency, transparency, and inclusiveness** quality of the services within the frames of the project in 8 municipalities of Imereti, Guria, Racha-Lechkhumi, and Kvemo Svaneti regions[9] by 16 operating civil organizations. The results gained and elaborated recommendations will be used to carry on further activities and advocate a strategy - describing the prioritized needs of the population to avoid existing barries both at the local and national levels.

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1. THE AIM AND METHODOLOGY
NEEDS ASSESSMENT OF POPULATION

The needs assessment of the population is **aimed** to study and evaluate the **efficiency, transparency and inclusiveness** of services provided by the local government institutions and elaborate recommendations based on research evidence to improve local services.

Research Objectives:

1. To advocate issues at target departments (local and a national level) about the challenges revealed while the needs assessment (including vulnerable groups with special needs) of the population;

2. To integrate the citizens` priority issues into the municipality action plan.

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9 CSOs: "Equality Now", "Civil Spectrum Equality" (Bagdati), Centre of Education and Development "Edelweiss", Khoni Initiative Group of IDPs (Khoni), "Tanadgoma-2020", "Citizens` Activity for Effective Governance and Justice" (Vani), Union for Protection of Children`s Rights and Civil Education "Children -Future of Georgia", "Women for Future of Georgia" (Terjola), Resource Centre of Racha-Lechkhumi and Kvemo Svaneti Self-Government, Racha-Lechkumi and Kvemo Svaneti Regional Hub -"Abkhazintercont" (Ambrolauri), "Active Citizen-Accountable Government", "Tsageri Women`s Rights and Equality Centre" (Tsageri), Information Centre, Georgian Rural Council (Lanchkhuti),  Education and Equality Centre "Young Teachers` Union" (Ozurgeti)

Raising Awareness of Population about PAR

The methodology of Needs Assessment of Population: needs assessment was carried out by using quantitative and qualitative research methods. Initially, the research tool was identified, the indicators were agreed with the project partners. Quantitative and qualitative research questionnaires were worked out. A structured questionnaire was developed for *quantitative research* which consisted of closed questions, though the respondents were able to express their opinions or choose multiple-choice questions. A Focus group discussion technique (in-depth interview) was used in the frames of *qualitative research*. Findings in the report cover the general analysis of the gained data from 8 municipalities[10].

Location and Target groups – the target respondents were the representatives of 8 municipalities from 3 regions of Georgia - Imereti, Guria, Racha-Lechkhumi, and Kvemo Svaneti. The study is representative and allows generalization. The respondents were selected according to different socio-demographic characteristics. The study covered 1425 beneficiaries from target municipalities among them 882 women and 543 men.

Timeframe – April-May 2020.

Research Limitations - the study was conducted in the period of the COVID-19 pandemic. Most interviews were held online or through the telephone conversations.

2. KEY FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH

TRANSPARENCY ═══════════════════

The quality of transparency in self-government institutions was assessed on the bases of Public Administration Reform, the level of delivery of information among the population about electronic services, and its publicity and availability.

Informing the population on PAR

➢ ***Awareness of the population about PAR is still low***. According to the results of quantitative and qualitative data analysis, the majority of the population *partially possesses information* about the reform, which is more apparent in Bagdati (73%), Vani (55%), and Khoni (52%) municipalities. The statistics show that the local population has heard about the reform, but they do not have sufficient information about the essence and concept of PAR. The big is the number of citizens who *do not pos-*

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10 Imereti - Khoni, Bagdati -Terjola, Vani; Guria -Ozurgeti, Lanchkhuti; Racha -Lechkhumi and Kvemo Svaneti -Ambrolauri, Tsageri.

sess any information about the reform (mostly Lanchkhuti (50%) and Ambrolauri (43%) municipalities). The number of the population who have information about the reform fluctuates from 10% to 28%. The highest indicator of having information about PAR was observed in Tsageri municipality (39%).

➤ One of the **sources of disseminating information** about PAR is **TV** (21% - 65%) in municipalities. _Government officials rarely hold public meetings_ just for information dissemination. The statistics are as follows: 3% Bagdati, 6% Ozuregti, 8% Ambrolauri, and 11% Vani municipalities, but much more different prognosis has Terjola (47%) municipality. The respondents from target municipalities (2% to 30%) state that they get information from _NGOs_. The population of Terjola (0%), Bagdati (2%), and   Vani (10%) municipalities receives information from civil society organizations, and 30% in Lanchkhuti Municipality. According to the research data, the popularization of PAR by civil society organizations is still low that on the one hand is caused by their small number in municipalities, and on the other hand, the low awareness of NGOs on PAR.

➤ **_The benefits of PAR is well-realized by the majority of respondents_**. They believe that PAR can improve the quality of services of self-government institutions and could be beneficial for the population (35% - 67%). Greater is the expectation and trust towards PAR and service improvement perspectives from the respondents of Bagdati (67%), Vani (57%), and Ozurgeti (52%) municipalities.

The most of respondents explicitly recognize the importance of PAR and its positive outcomes. Electronic services have simplified the information exchange process, the feedback is gained on time (receiving applications, providing prompt responses, checking information) and the circulation of information is quite intensive. Target beneficiaries of the research employed in governmental structures express positive attitudes towards the reform. Some respondents find it difficult to evaluate the reform process and refrain from providing comments (35% - 46%). The trust, the interests, and the support of the population are prerequisites for PAR future success, therefore it is urgent to enhance the level of delivery of information about the role and concept of PAR and encouraging maximum involvement and engagement of the local population in ongoing activities.

Awareness of Population and Access Availability about Electronic service Opportunities of the Municipality

➤ The majority of population _have some information_ on electronic services (42% - 62%), they have heard about possible services but never tested them in prac-

tice or the above-mentioned services were not available for them. 22% - 37% of respondents *have no information* about electronic services, but about 20% *are aware of them*. The statistics about information delivery about electronic services are higher only inTsageri (30%) and Terjola (25%) municipalities. More valid measures or tools for disseminating information about electronic services among the population must be well conceptualized.

➢ Facebook and web pages of municipalities (29% - 39%), media, and non-governmental organizations are **the main resources for information dissemination**. Face-to-face meetings or public regular meetings of local governmental structure representatives with the local population is about 8% - 17%. It indicates that information is actively shared through the social network and web pages by the self-government and the population has a better access to them as well.

➢ The general **indicator of self-government institutions' transparency** is comparatively improved by sharing information via Facebook and official websites. Mostly, population tracks the announcements about online vacancy opportunities, gets information about the local budget, or search contact information about the municipality employees. According to the study data, the main resource is a social network (Facebook) and websites, though there are 38% - 71% of respondents who stated that they *don't use any e-platforms*, for instance, Vani (71%), Ozurgeti (53%), Ambrolauri, and Terjola (50%) municipalities.

➢ The respondents express different opinions while evaluating accountability of the local government before the population regarding municipal services and their activities. The local government institutions *provide information only partially* (25% - 57%).Statistics according to the municipalities are as follows: Bagdati 57%, Lanchkhuti (49%), Tsageri (39%), but some respondents (25% - 40%) state that they are *provided with the sufficient information*, the highest indicator is observed in Ambrolauri 40%, Tsageri 39%, and Terjola 39% municipalities.

➢ One of the barriers to use Electronic service is the problem of e-system availability, low access of internet, or no internet (mainly in villages), the monthly cost of internet service and lack of technical resources (computer, smartphones, etc), the problem of accessibility mainly caused by difficult economic situation. The lack of skills necessary to use technologies is mostly observed among the elderly and middle-aged population.

According to the study outcomes, the young generation is very active as they do not face the same challenges. Though middle-aged andelderly respondents realize the benefits of electronic services, most of them have no necessary skills to use the existing services. Consequently, a face-to-face meeting with local officials is still a relevant form to settle hot issues and problems for a big part of population.

So, the population needs to be more informed on the local electronic systems through the differentiated methods, considering the target population location, age and skills for using e-platform.

EFFICIENCY

The evaluation of the efficiency of self-governing institutions was performed in the context of offering special services and responding to the needs of the population through municipal programs. The intensity/frequency of the use of electronic system by population and the level of satisfaction towards related issues were investigated as well.

- ➢ The practice of ***needs assessment of vulnerable groups and gender analysis*** (gender and age segments: e.g., women, men, children/schoolchildren, students, old generation, people with disabilities, women victims, large families, etc.) ***is weak or does not exist*** at municipalities that are affected by the lack of human and material resources at a local level. This practice mostly is proceeded by civic organizations and the process is active only while program implementation with no sustainability. There is a need for a training program to prepare qualified personnel and provide the systemic performance of needs assessment and gender analysis at the municipal level. The role of audit service (Terjola Municipality) in evaluating the municipal programs and services was positively approved in some municipalities. It was also mentioned that self-government institutions provided monitoring and controlling stages. The first attempt of ***implementing the practice of monitoring and evaluation procedures*** provided by self-government took place in Ozurgeti and Bagdati municipalities. However, this practice is not mandatory and it requires more efforts to raise awareness and qualification of the representatives of municipalities. Nowadays the feedback gained by the population is analyzed via media and meeting results.

- ➢ ***The needs of vulnerable groups are improperly reflected in the municipal programs.*** According to the majority of population the municipal programs

mostly are focused on satisfying the general needs of the population (26% - 46%) and special needs of the vulnerable groups are not implied. For example, according to respondents, the needs of the following groups are less reflected in the budget: women, female victims of violence, large families, children/youth, persons with disabilities. This is because there doesn't exist any system of needs assessment or gender analysis in municipalities or vulnerable groups are less motivated to raise issued before the local government representatives properly.

➢ Nowadays*, it is difficult to estimate the effectiveness of electronic services* as the majority of the local population do not use e-services of self-government institutions. Though according to the research data, the level of response to problems by municipality can be assessed generally.

➢ The majority of the interviewed (12% - 25%) in the municipality note that problems raised by them have been resolved, but some still face the challenges (32% - 46%). The local population positively speaks about the quality of services offered by the City Hall and Sakrebulo but still, 37% - 55% of respondents declare that they have never addressed any entity for any kind of services. Generally, it might be caused by distrust to these institutions. The list of applications(local issues) prioritized by population is as follows: petition for social/financial support; health issues,medicine provision, expenses for operation/surgery; water supply; application procedure, land issues, roof repair; construction materials; accessibility of public information, etc.

➢ According to the opinion of the majority of the respondents from target municipalities, to improve the local services, vulnerable groups must be provided with customized and simple services focused on needs. Besides, raising qualification and competence of the local civil servants is a precondition for improving the local services.

➢ As respondents state, the service efficiency can be raised by **the acceleration of decentralization policy**, the growth of authority of municipalities regarding specific issues, and the differentiation of duties and responsibilities between sectoral ministries and local government. The role of the municipality is big in decision-making processes concerning the following issues: granting a status of socially vulnerable, status pending or restoration, administration of natural resources, road rehabilitation, the designation of municipal objects. Municipality resources and needs are not proportionate that hampers the provision of customized service.

PARTICIPATION OF POPULATION/INCLUSIVENESS ▬▬▬▬

The changes in the code of Local Self-Government introduced in July 2015, has significantly improved the regular law framework of population involvement in processes, that encourages the municipal public institutions not only to ensure the inclusiveness of the population in self-government activities but also, offers different tools and forms. The participation of the local population in the self-governmental institutions was evaluated on the bases of the use forms of inclusion, the intensity of sharing private proposals to local authority representatives, and the influence of local politics. As the research results show, informing population on the existing forms of participation is a challenge. People show low interest and lack of skills to participate in the self-government activities. Besides, the opportunity of being included in decision-making process and making some impact is a problem as well.

➢ The study has revealed a **low level of citizen inclusiveness**. The half of respondents stated that they never used any form of citizen involvement in the process 41% - 57%. Statistics are poor in Tsageri, Ozurgeti, and Lanchkhuti (56%) municipalities. One of the reasons for the population less interaction is the motivation factor and passive attitude. 45% - 61% of the respondents stated that they even didn't try to address any entity and speak about their problems.

➢ **Public meeting with community** representatives is one of the active forms of communication. 31% - 51% of respondents took participation in such meetings, Low indicator of inclusiveness is observed in Ozurgeti (16%) and Lanchkhuti (22%) municipalities and but it is higher in Vani (51%). Population inclusiveness by other forms does not exceed 11%. The local community representatives do not attend municipality meetings (2% - 8%) or Civil Advisory Council meetings (1% - 7%) and don't participate in the submission of the petition (2%) or report hearings (2% -11%).

➢ Some of the respondents emphasize that despite attending regular meetings and stating the opinions they get no results as the issues represented by them are not properly discussed or have a formal character that on the other hand awakes mistrust and demotivation in being active in decision-making processes.

➢ **Citizens' participation** in the processes is also hampered by the **lack of information**, the reasons that are stated by the respondents are fewer efforts from governmental structures. The majority of the population consider that local government representatives partially conceptualize the essence of local population inclusiveness in processes, (30% - 47%), though 16% - 38% public

figures state that it is essential. To provide more active participation of the citizens, the respondents also consider that (35% - 58%) authority representatives should initiate meetings and consultations with them (citizens). The quality of constructive dialogue and participation of citizens will be raised if they are not only involved in elaboration of municipal programs and budget discussions, but their needs are reflected in municipal programs and budgets. It will increase the motivation of citizens and trust towards processes and will ensure the legitimization of gained decisions. The respondents consider that the number of qualified personnel must increase at the local level.

➢ Non-adaptive environment (Infrastructure) for disabled individuals is one of the factors preventing them from taking part in municipal activities.

➢ ***Civil society organizations*** were mentioned as prioritized in increasing the role of population and involvement of municipal activities, the human, technical and material resources of the civic originations are very important in conducting the needs assessment of citizens in problem identification and advocacy issues. It is also important to note that the role of the third sector organizations is big not only in information provision or population active involvement in the municipal activities but also in the promotion of PAR, raising qualification and professionalism of public figures. The initiatives of the 3rd sector are fully supported by the self-government institutions and the local population.

➢ It is noteworthy that the most of population speak about **the low number of public organizations** operating in municipalities which are actively involved in political dialogue, the majority of respondents (32% - 64%) name just one organization at the local level. The number of NGOs at municipalities is as follows: Ambrolauri (64%), Bagdati (55%), Vani, Lanchkhuti, and Ozurgeti (40%) municipalities. According to 31% - 54% of the respondents, more than 2 organizations are operating in Vani - 54%, Lanchkhuti - 46%, Baghdati - 44%. More than three organizations are known to 5% -18% of respondents,Ozurgeti (18%), and Lanchkhuti (13%) municipalities.

The results of the research show that, despite the big role of civic organizations in public reform implementation, monitoring and advocacy their efforts still require measures for future productive activities. Local civil organizations at the municipal level must be supported and they must be procured with adequate material, technical and human resources.

➢ Local authorities and private sectors must be in close collaboration as the study results show. The practice of private sector collaboration with government structures is rather weak and there are no precedents of local business social responsibilities According to the opinions of respondents, the cooperation with

the self-government structures can foster Innovative Business Initiatives to facilitate the economic development and creating job opportunities. The role of local business in the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic was positively evaluated (Ozurgeti, Terjola) regarding services provided to population in separate municipalities. Efforts of local authorities were understood as the best practice to support entrepreneurs and the local population to be involved in various state-owned economic programs, provide information and raise awareness about possibilities, and offer consultations in business plan elaboration processes (e.g. Khoni Municipality).

CONCLUSION

The results of the study have revealed that the population conceptualizes the role and means of PAR at the local level for a better service approach and improved living standards of locals, though the content of PAR is less promoted among the population, they are not thoroughly involved in the processes to put it in practice.

The majority of the population is less aware of electronic service affordability, this is mostly conditioned by some reasons, either the informational vacuum or availability of the e-system. Weak internet coverage in the municipality, high costs, access to technical equipment (computers, smartphones), insufficient skills (technologies) significantly hinder the processes.

There are no statistics about the needs assessment of population or any practice of gender analysis, that create barrages for more efficiency and customized services tailored to specific requirements. The slow pace of decentralization, limited authorities of municipalities, not balanced financial resources at a local level are a significant barriers for offering effective services.

Population involvement in municipality activities and decision-making processes is rather weak, they do not possess sufficient information about the forms envisaged by the law. Factually there does not exist any active mechanism having an impact on local politics.

Though the population recognizes the role of civil society in PAR successful implementation and emphasizes its importance in providing information, raising awareness about the reform process, control, problem identification, and advocacy, nowadays there are less institutionally strong 3rd sector organizations in municipalities.

In response to the challenges highlighted in the research, the following actions are recommended.

RECOMMENDATIONS
TO LOCAL AUTHORITIES

TRANSPARENCY ═══════════════════════════════════

- To elaborate a communication strategy for disseminating information about PAR and e-services among locals via civil society organizations and media involvement. To use diverse tools to share information among the population implying the location of the target beneficiaries, age profile, and e-platform skills;

- To increase the role of the City Hall representatives for delivering information publicly about electronic service availability;

- To simplify electronic services so that citizens can easily search information, aks questions and receive feedback;

- To provide instructions about electronic service availability on municipality websites and social networks. People who do not have internet due to a coverage area or lack of skills to use modern technologies must have access, printed materials must be distributed in public places (schools,drug-stores, streets, shops, municipalities, etc.);

- To create special service centers or technical mobile groups which will provide prompt service for interested individuals and will give instructions about electronic service procedures;

- To carry on active negotiations (self-governmental institutions) with internet providers to enhance networking or strengthen internet supply for procuring electronic service availability.

EFFICIENCY ═══════════════════════════════════

- To implement the practice of gender analysis and needs assessment of vulnerable groups in self-government institutions, to provide statistics according to age and gender profile, to elaborate the municipal programs based on data evidence, to ensure the raise of qualification and skills of employees in municipalities;

- To investigate the challenges of professional development in local self-governmental institutions and to develop a strategy of vocational education with a thorough action plan;

- To strengthen inter-municipal collaboration that will guarantee the solution of challenges of locals effectively and promptly;

- To encourage online services like construction permission, registration of agricultural and non-agricultural land, one-time payments, registration for one-time assistance and other municipal services which ensure the transparency of the process and simplification of electronic services;

- To create an interactive e-platform for reports' transparency, that will enable to receive feedback from the population and proceed active communication;

- To advance standards for electronic services at municipalities for evaluating the influence and efficiency of existing services. Tools for electronic service evaluation forms must be elaborated for getting feedback from beneficiaries easily, with fewer expenses.

PARTICIPATION/INCLUSIVENESS

- The local population must be timely informed about the availability of participation forms to increase the involvement of citizens in political processes at a local level. The local population must be concerned about the details of public meetings and hearings via mass-media. News must be uploaded and shared trough social networks and websites (at least one week earlier);

- The schedule of appointments (time and factual activity plan) of municipality authority (City Hall) representatives with population must be determined and disseminated publicly;

- The registration of the settlement meetings is obligatory, which will increase the level of accountability of local public institutions and encourage the inclusiveness of the population;

- The rule of invitation of the members of the Advisory Council, Gender Equality Council, and the Council of Persons with Disabilities must be revised. It is vital to increase the intensity of the mentioned mechanisms and the sharing of information about meetings on time;

- To implement "Civil Budget" programs together with the additional forms of local population involved in the activities of self-government institutions;

- The decree of representative and executive bodies of a municipality must be based on arguments of population made at the settlement meetings and the members of Civil Advisory Council via adopting adequate legislative changes.

TO CENTRAL AUTHORITIES

- To strengthen the autonomy of the municipality and pursue the pro-active policy of decentralization, to grant more authority to a local government, to distribute financial resources, and mark boundaries between central and local duties and responsibilities;

- To research the needs of self-government institutions and existing resources is advisable to be in progress by central authorities for risk analysis of decentralization;

- To increase the quality of social protection of families with special needs, it is necessary to review the centralized system of social assessment to make the existing criteria more transparent and equitable;

- It is desirable to define the role of self-governance entities in the evaluation system, as they possess the most accurate information about the socio-demographic situation and are in constant contact with citizens who need state care and support;

- It is important to foresee the recommendations of social services of local self-governance entities while decision-making processes: to grant, stop, or restore the status of a socially vulnerable person. To intensify the restatement deadlines of cases to avoid the aggravation of the situation of families with extreme vulnerability;

- It is desirable to increase the authority of the municipality in decision-making regarding such issues as designation of municipal objects, management of natural resources and municipal roads;

- Central authorities must provide methodological assistance to self-governing entities for developing new modules of electronic administration systems.

TO CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

- To consolidate civil society organizations operating in separate municipalities and address their human/technical resources and actual approaches to the needs of vulnerable groups and advocate their interests and necessities;

- The information about PAR is favorable to be disseminated by operating civil society organizations(the use of technical/human resources) and facilitate supportive actions for the population to have an access to electronic services (giving instructions, skills development, provision of information, etc.);

- To increase the role of civil society organizations: they must be able to give consultations, to develop gender equality principles and standards at a local level, conduct needs assessment and gender analysis, to elaborate a gender budget, a participatory budget, and offer services to protect individuals from domestic violence, etc.;

- To advocate and strengthen the activities of civil society organizations in municipalities for the attention of both, national authorities and international organizations.

IMERETI REGION

THE REPORT ON NEEDS ASSESSMENT OF POPULATION IN THE PROCESS OF PAR IMPLEMENTATION IN VANI MUNICIPALITY

www.fsokhumi.ge

INTRODUCTION

On its way to EU integration, Georgia has been carrying out fundamental changes in various fields of public and political life. After the signing of the "Georgia-EU Association Agreement", the in-depth Public Administration Reform started in Georgia. As a result, significant achievements have been made concerning open, transparent, accountable administration and better citizen service.

Expanding the local government authority with the view of strengthening self-government serves as the most significant part of the reform; as well as gradual development and improvement of the electronic services in self-government instuttions with the view of improving the availability of electronic services in local municipalities (PAR action plan 2019-2020).

The discussion is in progress in the country onexpanding the authority of self-government (decentralization of social work, differentiating authority with several central structures, supporting using the existing authority) and the risks accompanying it (the lack of competence of local government, weak mechanisms of already existing authority, etc.).

Nowadays, modules of electronic service are already functioning at the local level (It is planned to introduce other models from 2021). On the one hand, the advantages of e-service are not disputable – simplification of bureaucratic processes, comfort, and transparency. Though, on the other hand,the problems regarding accessibility make it inefficient. This prevents citizens from obtaining the service and leads to low involvement in local administration.

THE AIM AND METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH

Cultural-Humanitarian Fund "Sukumi" in partnership with the Fund of Women Entrepreneurs and The Imereti Scientists' Union "Spectri" is implementing the project "A Common Forum for CSOs from Guria, Imereti, and Racha-Lechkhumi PAR Roadmap monitoring" (the project is supported by the EU). The project aims to support the public administration reform at the local level.

The present research aims to study the needs of citizens of Vani Municipality concerning efficiency, transparency, and inclusiveness of the services rendered by the local government, obtain evidence-based information, and develop recommendations to improve the local services. The research was implemented by two civil society organizations of Vani municipality – "Tanadgoma - 2020" and "Citizens` Activity for Effective Governance and Justice".

The Research methodology: the research was conducted using qualitative and quantitative methods. The research tool was developed and its indicators were agreed with the project partners. The triangulation methods were used for data interpretation, as a

result of which, by merging the qualitative and quantitative information, the main findings of the research have been identified.

Respondents were selected based on the cluster and quota principle, a different demographic profile of citizens. The general population of the research – Vani Municipality citizens. Overall, 181 people were involved in it. The research is representative and gives the possibility to generalize the data. The timeframe of the research – March-April-May 2020.

There were certain limitations to research due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords: Vani municipality. Electronic service. Public administration reform. Local needs. Citizens' Inclusiveness/Involvement.

BASIC INFORMATION

Overall, 181 respondents were polled within the scope of the study. 150 ones (81 women and 69 men) were included in the quantitative study. 4 in-depth interviews were conducted with local experts and 4 focus group discussions organized with local social groups. The qualitative research included 31 respondents (27 women and 4 men).

The study identified the attitudes of the respondents to the process of public administration reform and towards its primary outcomes; what outcomes and challenges are in improving the local governance; how the transparency, efficiency, and inclusiveness of the activities of local government are assessed; to what extent e-services were acquired and what is necessary to ensure its efficient use; which issues they require more protection, strengthening and new approaches. What their initiatives are and which direction they consider necessary to direct the self-government resources.

The selection of participants in the **quantitative research** was made based on the quota principle. Special status, age, place of work, education, and other socio-demographic indicators were taken into account. The socially vulnerable people, people with disabilities, small entrepreneurs, internally displaced, youth, single parents, and those with many children, representatives of budget organizations are the target segments of the research.

54% of respondents involved in the survey were women and 46% - men. Age category is as follows: 18 - 34 – 40%, 35 - 64 – 43%, 65 and above – 17%. 53% married, 31% – not married, 11% – widowed, 5% – divorced.

The educational qualifications of the respondents are as follows: 42% have a complete secondary education, 26% have a complete higher education, 18% – a secondary special one. It is worth noting that 14% of those polled have incomplete secondary education, whichcan be regarded as the preventing factor to obtain full local services and taking an active part in the local administration.

32% of those involved in the research are socially vulnerable, 27% internally displaced, and 13% parents of many children.

SPECIAL STATUS

48	41		42
32%	27%	19 / 13%	28%
a) Socially vulnerable	b) Internally displaced	c) Parents with many children	d) other (with no special status)
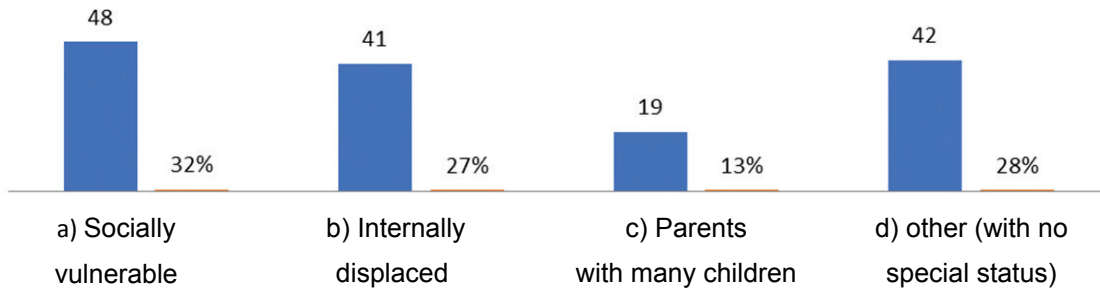
36% of respondents are unemployed, 33% - self-employed, 9% - public servant, 14% - pensioner. 4% are employed in budget organizations, 4% - students.

5% of respondents refused to disclose the average family income. 63% has income from 101 to 500 GEL. 17% - up to 900 GEL whereas 6% - more than 901 GEL.

The local civil groups represent qualitative research target groups, including women, representatives of socially vulnerable families, and those with many children, house-wives, parents of children with disabilities, youth, pensioners, entrepreneurs, school teachers and those of pre-school institutions, medical staff; local experts in self-government issues.

TRANSPARENCY

Activities of the self-government regarding transparency of provided services to citizens were assessed in both components of the research (qualitative and quantitative). According to the **quantitative** study, citizens have a certain type of impression about public administration reform. The total amount of citizens fully and partially informed about it comprise 83%, whereas 17% have no information about the reform.

DO YOU HAVE ANY INFORMATION ABOUT PAR?

	82	
42		26
28%	55%	17%
a) Yes	b) Partially	c) No
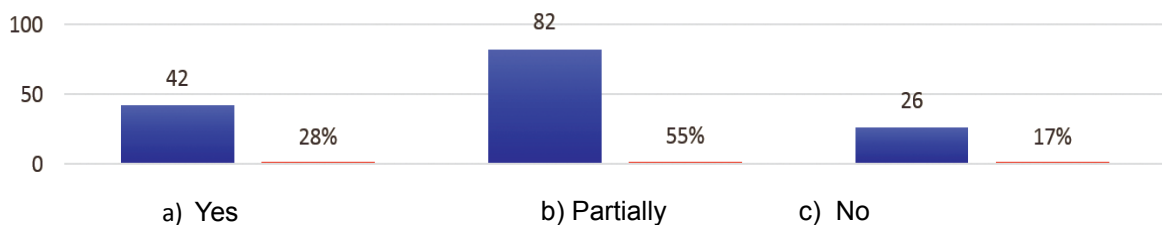
TV was named as the source of information by 65%, government structures - 11%; municipality Facebook page and the website - 7%; NGOs - 10% (17% gave no reply).

Interestingly, 57% of respondents consider that public administration reform is directly linked with improving the service provided to citizens. 35% of the interviewed find it difficult to answer the question. 7% consider that it will improve less and 1% think that it will not improve at all. 35% can not answer the question.

Based on the qualitative research it is clear that representatives of the local government give the highest score to the process of the public administration reform and consider that this is one step forward in country governance. They consider that the reform will gradually improve the service provided to the population:

> *"PAR was vitally important. It has extremely simplified and organized management issues. All sorts of significant information about local political processes are transparent and available"* – a **responsible person at the City Hall.**

One of the achievements of the reform - introducing e-administration, was noted by participants. The respondents agree that as a result, the following significant aspects of the local administration have been refined: clerical work is done electronically (receiving applications, replying to them, and checking documents). Information is intensively circulated. A general view was identified that in respect to transparency of the self-government activities, the situation is significantly improved, there are more control mechanisms, expenses are more transparent, they are placed in the electronic data base. This, in the opinion of participants, is one of the key problems to eliminate corruption. It was underlined that:

> *"Legislation in the public sector has especially been refined. Public servants have become more protected in the name of the law, which was conditioned by close cooperation with the EU"* – **a member of Sakrebulo.**

Focus groups have revealed that the citizens taking part in the discussion more or less possess the information about the public reform. TV, public meetings, social network, the internet means also served as the source of information for them.

The respondents underline the importance of informing the citizens for the maximum success of the reform:

> *"Informing the public will further enhance the successful implementation of this reform. The more the society is informed about the essence of the reform, the better"* – **a nursery school teacher.**

It has been identified that citizens more or less use electronic services and get familiarized with the issues interesting for them. According to the evaluation of municipality leaders, citizens frequently have certain types of questions (concerning property, procurement, etc.), which indicates that they get acquainted with the information provided by the electronic resources. It is proved by the statement of the respondents:

> *"Certainly, I have used electronic administration service, I depend on it"* – **a small business entrepreneur**

The number of the informed and more or less informed regarding municipal electronic services among the quantitative study respondents significantly prevails. Only 3% of citizens stated that they are not interested in this service:

TO WHAT EXTENT ARE YOU INFORMED ABOUT MUNICIPAL ELECTRONIC SERVICES

	88		
35		22	
23%	59%	15%	4 3%
a) Not informed	b) More or less informed	c) Informed	d) Not interested
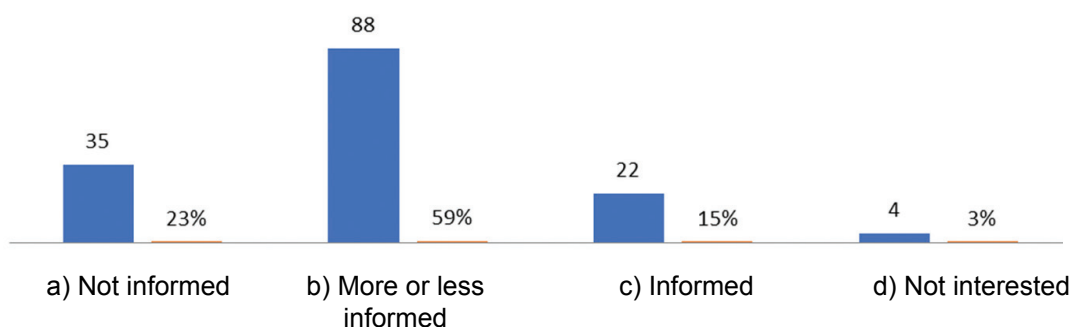
The quantitative research participants (excluding those who ticked the reply "Not Interested") note that information about e-services was received from TV – 39%; municipality FB or website – 15%; from the NGO sector – 11 %, at the local government meetings – 15%. 19% of respondents circled the reply "Other" (implying family member, friends, neighbor, public servant).

According to the representatives of the local government, not everyone has the access to the internet and, therefore, citizens are not able to communicate electronically with the self-government:

> *"To a certain extent, an awkward situation is created because not everyone has access to the internet and can submit the electronic application or raise other issues before the local authorities"* – **a City Hall responsible person.**

Information is proved by the citizens as well. Since villages of Vani municipality are mountainous, the internet is not accessible to the population (sometimes they can not even use the TV):

> *"The socially vulnerable individuals cannot apply electronically, since we do not have the internet"* – **a mother of a disabled person.**

Besides, both, in qualitative and quantitative research materials it was noted that young people use the internet more:

> *"We, the young people, use the internet. Elderly ones prefer to get information through TV"* – **a young woman.**

Focus group discussions were about the benefit of the methods of electronic services and necessary measures to improve them:

> *"We get information through messages"* – **a small entrepreneur.**

> *"Text messages are not always comfortable since, in case of no internet, one is not willing to move to the given link"* – **a school teacher.**

> *"It would have been good to involve young volunteers in informing about e-services. For instance, handing out booklets"* – **a student**

> *"It is possible to place the banners in villages"* – **a young woman.**

According to the assessment, e-resources have made the local processes much more transparent. The respondents state that citizens can track the announcements on the

vacancies in the municipalities, which are uploaded on websites of both municipalities and the public bureau. They are available for any individual throughout the country:
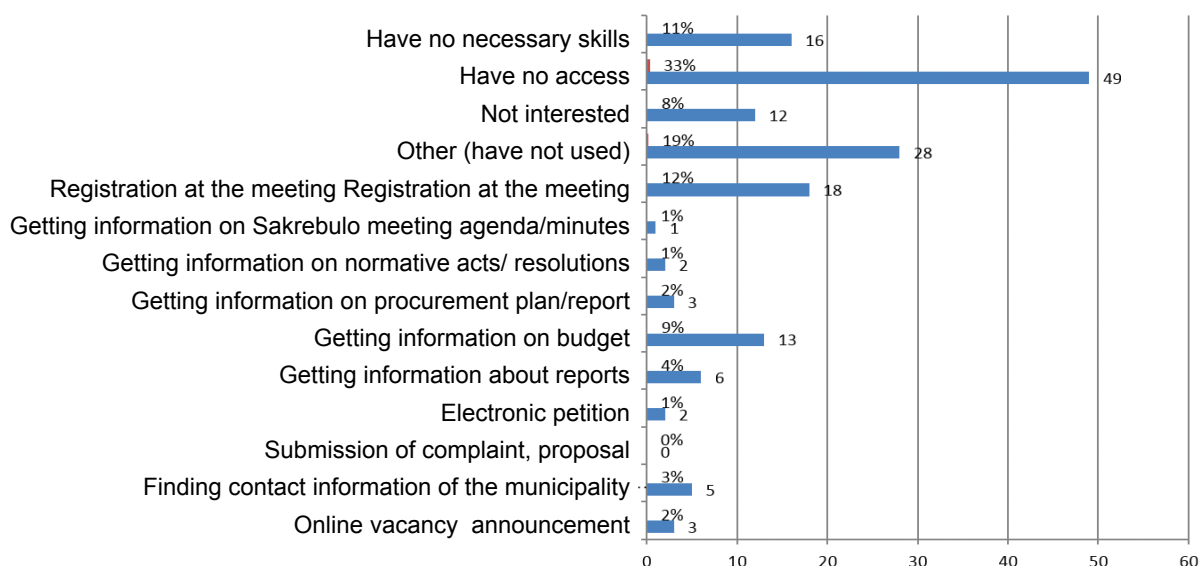
*"They can take part in the competitions announced in Vani. Therefore, there are no problems in this respect" – **a responsible person from the municipality.***

Citizens note:

*"Information about vacancies and the budget is actively shared through the local-government social networks" – **a nursery school teacher.***

Only 2% of the interviewed were interested in the information about vacancies according to the quantitative data analysis. Overall, 71% of respondents were left beyond electronic services (not used; not interested; having no access; not respective skills). Those who used it got registered at the meeting.

WHICH E-SERVICES DID YOU USE DURING THE LAST YEAR?

E-service	%	Value
Have no necessary skills	11%	16
Have no access	33%	49
Not interested	8%	12
Other (have not used)	19%	28
Registration at the meeting Registration at the meeting	12%	18
Getting information on Sakrebulo meeting agenda/minutes	1%	1
Getting information on normative acts/ resolutions	1%	2
Getting information on procurement plan/report	2%	3
Getting information on budget	9%	13
Getting information about reports	4%	6
Electronic petition	1%	2
Submission of complaint, proposal	0%	0
Finding contact information of the municipality	3%	5
Online vacancy announcement	2%	3

In the opinion of local servants, e-service is efficient but it may appear to be ineffective based on the results since the awareness about it and accessibility are low. Discussing the ways of informing the citizens about the ongoing processes in the municipality and the most optimal means, it was said that:

*"There are various ways of informing but I consider mass media as the best, especially local television. In this case, all segments of the society and age groups will be informed about the projects, changes, and novelties in the region, including, the specific nature of electronic services" – **a member of Sakrebulo.***

In the citizens' opinion, local cooperation is extremely significant in this respect:

*"There is a Mayor's representative but s/he will not be able to handle all this. There have to be other alternative means and information sources" – **a male teacher.***

In respect to existing challenges it was also noted that besides the internet, there is a lack of access to the technical means:

"To make sure online ads are seen by the population, it is necessary to have internet and technical equipment (computer, telephone) and a very limited number of people have access to technical means" – **a school teacher.**

"My family is socially vulnerable. I am not able to cover internet expenses. I cannot go to meetings because of my child. Therefore, I have no access to information" – **a mother of the child with disabilities.**
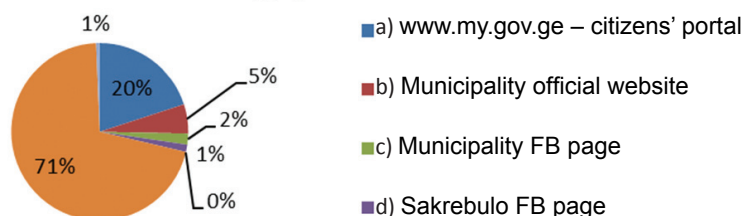
In these circumstances, a part of the respondents considers the local print media to be one of the significant means, which will provide the population of such categories with information necessary to make e-services popular:

"It is a pity that there is no printing body within the municipality, which, to a certain extent makes the population living in high mountain regions stay in an information vacuum" – **a member of Sakrebulo.**

In the opinion of the participants, timely and high-quality information should be provided about state electronic services (TV, information flyers, FB, website) – 36%; 24% of the interviewed consider that it is necessary to simplify the service provision process; in the opinion of citizens, the municipality should offer the services adjusted to the needs and priorities of vulnerable groups to improve electronic services (7%); 2% named increase of the remuneration of public servants as the significant component; increasing the number of services and territorial coverage to ensure accessibility was named by only 1%, which is thought-provoking in the circumstances where in the replies to previous questions their 33% state that respective resources are accessible. 26% had no reply to the question.

To receive the local services, citizens mostly use the portal www.my.gov.ge – 20%. A small part of citizens states that they use the FB of the municipality (2%), of Sakrebulo (1%), and the municipality website (5%). 26% found it hard to answer the question. The website of the regional administration looks non-functional in the opinion of 26% given the fact that the state invested significant resources into making it functional. 71% use none of the listed means, which signfiicantly undermines the issue of efficiency of e-services in the municipality.

WHICH ELECTRONIC SERVICES DO YOU USE TO RECEIVE LOCAL SERVICES?

- 1%
- 20%
- 5%
- 2%
- 1%
- 0%
- 71%

a) www.my.gov.ge – citizens' portal

b) Municipality official website

c) Municipality FB page

d) Sakrebulo FB page

While assessing the transparency and accountability, the positive practice of village supporting programs was identified. These programs are implemented based on the

active dialogue between the citizens and the local government (the same opinion is given in the quantitative research):

> *"Actual decisions are made at the village meetings. Projects to be implemented in specific villages are agreed based on their opinions"* – **a responsible person from the municipality.**

According to the experts' opinions, fewer initiatives come from youth to take part in these processes:

> *"There is less activity on behalf of certain categories to being involved in these processes. This especially applies to the young generation, which is less active at the village sessions, etc."* – **a member of Sakrebulo.**

EFFICIENCY

The main indicator of the success of PAR is the efficiency of local services (i.e.to what extent the existing programs and projects fit the needs of various groups of citizens). The information obtained as a result of the quantitative study enables to assess the efficiency of the work of self-government by citizens. This is especially interesting in the context of e-service, since its purpose is to provide more efficient services to the population and offer forms of service tailored to them.

Only 3% of the interviewed consider that the information provided to citizens about the rendered work is insufficient, whereas 19% have no reply to the question (for a full picture, see the diagram).

DOES THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT FULLY PROVIDE POPULATION WITH INFORMATION ON THE WORK RENDERED/SERVICE PROVIDED BY IT?

	a) Yes	b) No	c) Partly	d) Have no reply
Count	47	5	68	28
Percent	32%	3%	46%	19%
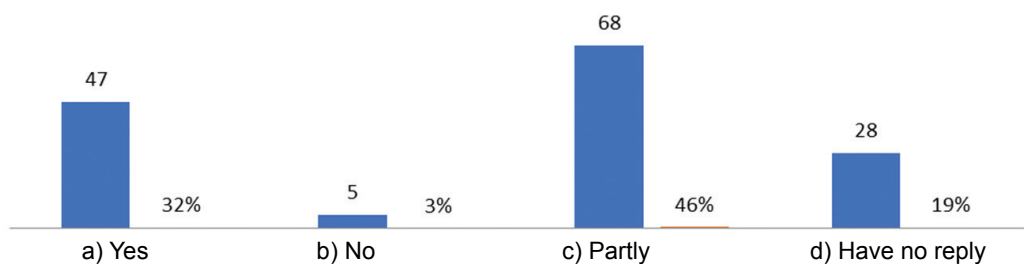
The research has revealed the level of trust of citizens towards the local government, the purposefulness of the existing programs, and other issues.The majority of citizens find it difficult to identify whether it is easy to apply through the e-form to get the service (57%). Their 37% consider that procedures are simple; whereas 7% think that respective procedures are difficult. Only 10% used the program of electronic registration during the last year. 22% had no information about it,while 68% have not used it at all.

Assessments of the efficiency of municipal programs in qualitative research are mainly positive. In the opinion of the representatives of the authorities:

"The services provided by the self-government are fully adapted to the target groups and are only based on the needs of the population" – **a responsible person at the City Hall.**

The representatives of the vulnerable groups confirmed that they had received specific services necessary for them:

"We are asked what kind of services we need and they help us as much as possible. I was given the wheelchair" – **a mother of the child with disabilities.**

"The hearing equipment was bought for my child" - **a mother of the child with disabilities.**

"I applied for medical services and was allocated the amount" – **a woman on pension.**

"I was helped by giving me some wood" – **a socially vulnerable woman.**

Despite the effort of the municipality to assist thevulnerable groups, the services of municipality, cordial support of the local delegates, representatives of the given groups mention those hard conditions which they experience.
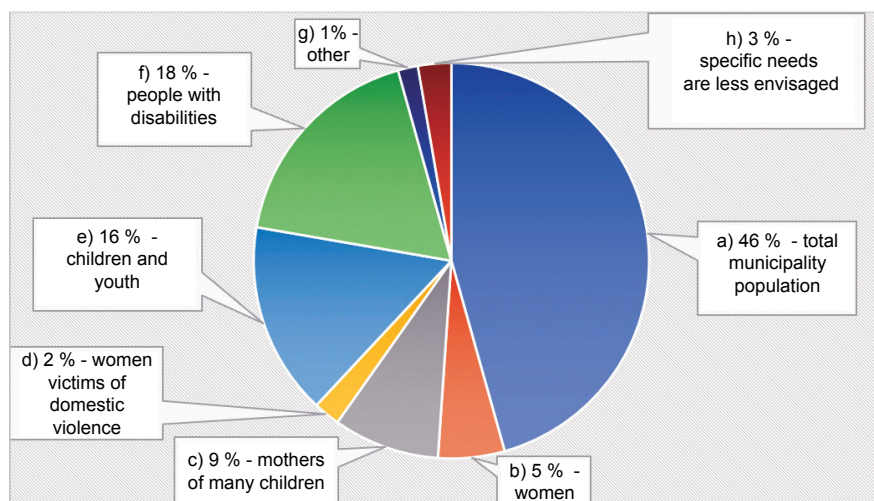
18 target programs are envisaged by the local budget in the social package. However, the respondents state that, unfortunately, there are far more vulnerable groups in the municipality. The most severe condition of the children with disabilities and their families have been identified as well. As the respondents note, their life will not be relieved in the longer-term perspective by the existing social services. They need expensive medicines, systematic physiotherapy, specific food. Apart from providing the social assistance measures, there is another way out in the form of strengthening programs adjusted to their condition. For instance, entrepreneurial or economic activity which they can carry out in the households:

"Yes, I have been provided with help on numerous occasions but my child requires expensive medicines. Given the fact that we are unemployed, we find ourselves in the most critical state. I am extremely desperate. I can physically walk but I am empty from the inside" – **a parent of the disabled child.**

Based on the quantitative data, respondents applied to the municipalities during the last year for the following issues to be solved: healthcare, providing medicines, funding operations (26%). Social assistance (which mainly encompasses financial aid) – 19%, issuing the certificate – 15%; getting timber – 4%; legalization of the construction permit/space - 3%; land registration - 2%. Data analysis enables us to conclude that the most significant social issues for the citizens are – healthcare and social assistance, which require a significant part of the self-government resources (14% of respondents did not reply to the question).

90% of the population is satisfied with the City Hall, 88% show gratitude to Sakrebulo, whereas 88% expresse satisfaction with the services provided by the municipality. 23% of them state that all problems for which they had applied to the municipality have been solved. 46% state that the problems were partially solved and 18% refused to reply.

NEEDS OF WHICH GROUPS LISTED BELOW ARE CONSIDERED BY THE MUNICIPALITY?

g) 1% - other

h) 3 % - specific needs are less envisaged

f) 18 % - people with disabilities

e) 16 % - children and youth

d) 2 % - women victims of domestic violence

c) 9 % - mothers of many children

b) 5 % - women

a) 46 % - total municipality population

Special attention was paid to the needs of youth in the study. It was stated that without respective assistance, they would leave the municipality and this process would become irreversible. In the opinion of citizens, more attention should be paid to the problems of the young part of the community. However, they also need to get involved in this process.

Unfortunately, **the service efficiency assessment** system is not introduced at the municipality. The self-government representatives see the significant role of NGOs in this respect since there is a lack of practice of conducting respective research within the municipalities.

While talking about the efficiency of services, special attention was paid to the **issue of decentralization**.The experts, as well as the ordinary citizens, expressed their personal opinions about it. Based on the general opinion, the local resources and local needs do not coincide with one another and the local government needs to have more authority and resources:

*"There are some gaps, especially, limited financial resources. We depend on the grants and assistance from the central budget, which serve as the main means of income for implementing various infrastructural projects. It is necessary to find more local resources. Although income, natural resources, and property tax are accumulated locally and VAT flows in, this is not enough. I think more decentralization is required. Several issues need to be solved locally rather than centrally" – **a member of Sakrebulo.**

The respondents have the same opinions about the areas and issues where rights and responsibilities need to be separated:

"For example, the issue of water supply or environmental issues, which the local population is worried about. Frequently, the needs of the population are not envisaged by those from "above". Implementation of these issues locally will be even more effective".

"In most cases, when the issue needs a quick solution, there are certain impediments. I do not mean to say that ministries create barriers. But, timing does not coincide. In this case, less efficiency is observed. The issue gets solved but prolonged time sometimes leads to population dissatisfaction" – **a responsible person at City Hall.**

The problems connected with identifying the families beyond the poverty margin, in the area of so-called "granting of scores" have been emphasized. "Falling out" of the self-government from the assessment process of the families seeking social aid is reported. Citizens trust the local government and consider that it can better preserve the principle of social justice, compared with the program which sometimes grants extremely high scores to a vulnerable family:

"We made a focus especially on the area which is critical for the local government. This is "the issue of social status" and the rule of granting scores which still exists. This fact leads to dissatisfaction among the population. Unfortunately, the role of the local government in this regard is very limited. I consider that this is one of the spheres which should be improved. At the local level – in villages, districts – people better know who are in need" – **a member of Sakrebulo.**

Citizens are quite critical about the program criteria:

"There are many families (which belong to the socially vulnerable strata) that can not get enough scores. It is affected by several vague reasons. This process should be more transparent. It leads to great dissatisfaction among the ordinary people" – **socially vulnerable women.**

"I was deprived of social assistance. Then, the local government got interfered and the issue was speeded up to be reviewed. As a result, I was added back to the system. The authorized representative and the delegates are better aware at the local level who is really in need" – **a parent of the disabled child.**
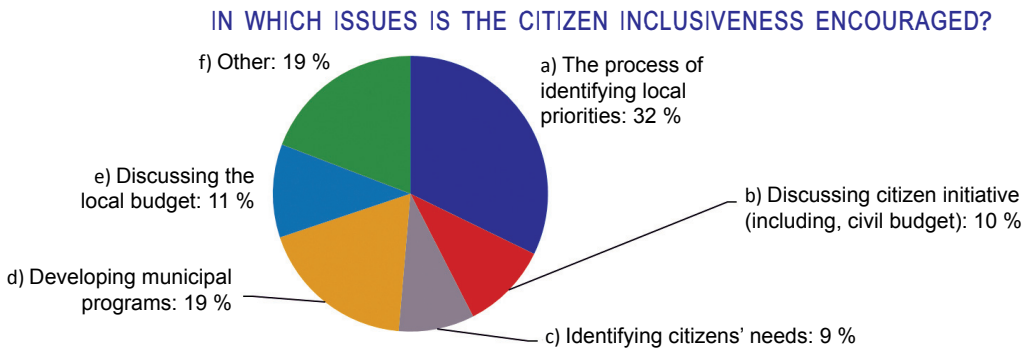
INCLUSIVENESS

The inclusiveness of civil society in the process of policy planning and implementation is regarded as one of the most significant elements of democratic governance. Society involvement increases the trust and legitimacy of the self-government. In this respect, no high citizen activity is reported in Vani Municipality. In the opinion of the municipality leaders:

"Participation of the citizens in sessions is not very active. However, there are cases when they attend and express their views and opinions" – **a member of Sakrebulo.**

"There is indeed enough inclusiveness in the municipality. Village meetings are being conducted and needs discussed. Frequently, project initiatives come from the population regarding what needs to be done in this or that administrative unit" – a **responsible person at the municipality.**

The position of citizens regarding whether the local public servants are aware of the importance of citizen involvement was identified within the scope of the quantitative research. Replies were distributed as follows: yes – 30% and partially – 40%; no – 8%, no reply – 28%.

Many citizens think (32%) that mainly their participation is encouraged in the process of identifying local priorities. As for the replies of other segments, they are given in the diagram.

IN WHICH ISSUES IS THE CITIZEN INCLUSIVENESS ENCOURAGED?

f) Other: 19 %

a) The process of identifying local priorities: 32 %

e) Discussing the local budget: 11 %

b) Discussing citizen initiative (including, civil budget): 10 %

d) Developing municipal programs: 19 %

c) Identifying citizens' needs: 9 %

The research has revealed the forms of participation used by the respondents. Citizens mostly took part in the settlement meetings (51%), while other forms of participation are not actual for the citizens (2% on average). The share of those citizens who do not use any form of involvement is large – 41%.

Population meetings also were considered a significant achievement in terms of inclusiveness at focus group discussions:

> *"Meetings are significant in the sense that we can state our views and needs"* – ***a socially vulnerable woman.***

While talking about the issue of involvement of citizens in the local processes, the issues of transparency of the activity and informing the citizens was once again identified. To ensure better local governance, it was considered extremely significant to provide mutual communication between citizens and the local government; initiatives of citizen groups, bringing their own needs to the local government:

> *"For this reason, they should possess updated information regarding everyday processes, the date of Sakrebulo sessions, and issues on the local agenda. The issue of the existence of electronic information and availability is becoming even more actual"* – ***a school teacher.***

> *"We do place information on the website electronically but it is not available for everyone. Sometimes, the population is not informed about the sessions, meetings and citizens can not take part. This can be improved by providing everyone with the internet"* –***a member of Sakrebulo.***

A certain part of citizens considers that the local government should show more motivation to the population and convince it that they expect initiative and are ready for the dialogue. In their opinion, it is necessary to make sure that the essence of inclusiveness is much more understood among the population:
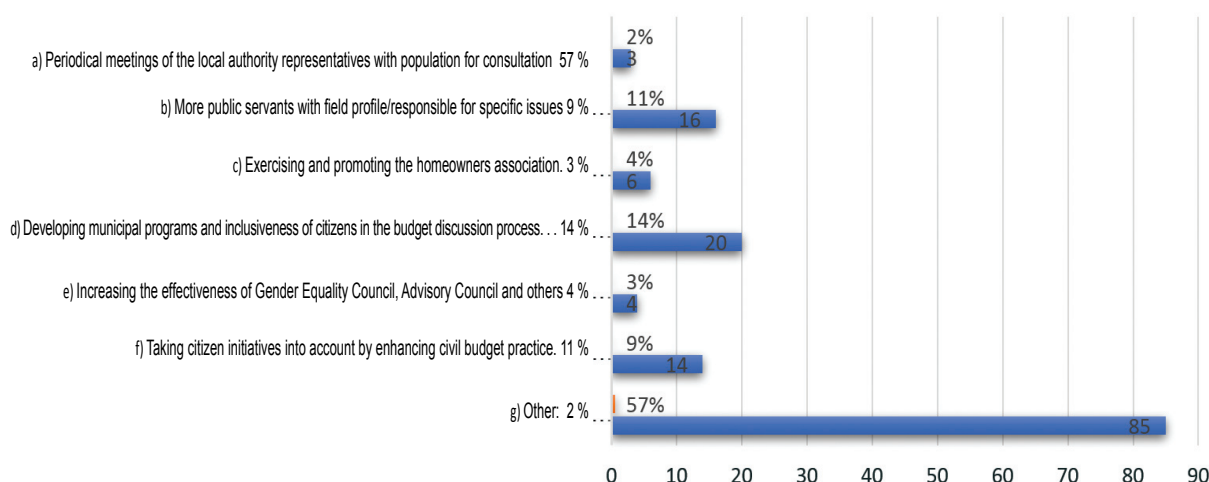
According to the information of the survey participants, 55% of them did not have any attempt to provide their comments regarding services. 38% did not have this opportunity, whereas only 7% established communication and this was totally at the expense of the face-to-face meeting with the representative of the respective agency.

The question "What is your main need to ensure a constructive dialogue with self-government and better participation?" was answered in the following way:

WHAT IS YOUR MAIN NEED TO ENSURE A CONSTRUCTIVE DIALOGUE WITH SELF-GOVERNMENT AND BETTER PARTICIPATION?

a) Periodical meetings of the local authority representatives with population for consultation 57 % — 2%, 3
b) More public servants with field profile/responsible for specific issues 9 % — 11%, 16
c) Exercising and promoting the homeowners association. 3 % — 4%, 6
d) Developing municipal programs and inclusiveness of citizens in the budget discussion process… 14 % — 14%, 20
e) Increasing the effectiveness of Gender Equality Council, Advisory Council and others 4 % — 3%, 4
f) Taking citizen initiatives into account by enhancing civil budget practice. 11 % — 9%, 14
g) Other: 2 % — 57%, 85

32

The interviewed express their position on the role of civil organizations in supporting citizen welfare. 50% of them can name one, 48% - two, and only 2% - more than three organizations in this regard. In the opinion of respondents, the role of CSOs is most significant in providing information and education (21%), bringing the needs of citizens to the authorities (20%), protection of citizens' rights (17%), control of the implementation of the public administration reform (13%).

In the opinion of the research participants, the process of strengthening the civil society in municipality proceeds at high speed. The fact that representatives of the civil society organizations study the needs of the community and social issues, and are aware of the ongoing processes at the municipality, is regarded as the process indicator. They have more resources to support citizen involvement in local processes:

The respondents had interesting views on the directions which require more human and financial resources of the local government. Social protection was considered to be mostly in need of such resources (20%), whereas 19% identify healthcare. Supporting economic development was regarded as the third point as well as creating the respective environment on the spot (11%). Afterward, priority was given to infrastructure (8%) and water supply (7%).

Supporting agriculture, as well as providing those with family economies with arable land vouchers were regarded as actual problems. The respondents also listed the following issues: repairing internal roads of villages, installing outside illumination (9%), supporting families with many kids with construction materials; organizing sports squares for youth in villages, and providing with respective equipment; organizing medical check-up for the population once a year; cleaning irrigation and floodwater channels. The interviewed also mentioned the following long-term development services: creating more job opportunities (the possibility to find employment on the spot); supporting tourism; decreasing migration.

Getting population needs to the authorities, as well as becoming more proactive against violence; repairing the roads, yards, and children's playgrounds in the places densely populated by IDPs; the significance of specific gender needs was also mentioned: supporting single fathers, assisting orphan children, increasing assistance to persons with disabilities and creating the adapted environment for them; increasing the amount of pension for orphan children (to central authority); opening the 24/7 chemist's shop at the municipality. Some respondents still see the need for "internet provision to improve the life of the population and provide it with e-services". They think that it will promote the use of e-services by citizens.

It must be noted that an interesting practice of linkage between the private and state sectors was identified at Vani Municipality. According to the municipality leaders, this is the link that implements many significant projects at the municipality. It was stated that the hotel was being constructed at the municipality at the initiative of the private sector, the polyethylene factory was built, confectionery production was made fully operational, timber processing enterprise is being built. As a result of these processes, job opportunities have been created and prospects for the improvement of social conditions of the population have been identified.

It is known that in the circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, numerous charity actions were implemented upon the initiative of the private sector. Up to 2000 households have been provided with assistance and social packages.

There are areas in which cooperation is not productive. However, the existing best practice allows making it more efficient:

> *"There is a Civil Advisory Council at our place with several representatives of the private sector in it, but this is of more formal nature and will be more efficient if the private and public sectors make joint steps to improve the cooperation" - **a responsible person at the municipality.***

According to the respondents, the local economic initiatives should be stimulated and inter-sectoral cooperation should be directed to use the state programs more efficiently.

"State programs are implemented to encourage and develop various entrepreneurs, namely, the private sector. However, this is not enough. Other mechanisms need to be found to include them and make sure they actively get involved in the local governance" – **a member of Sakrebulo.**

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The research outcomes have demonstrated that the significance of public administration reform in Vani Municipality is recognized and the local government has made significant steps for the success of the reform. The majority of the municipality population has more or less information about PAR. One of the most significant aspects of the reform, the electronic service form, is considered to be a significant achievement in local governance. It has extremely simplified and organized the issue of administration, made all kinds of significant information regarding local political processes, local agenda transparent. The carried out work is obvious and there is a chance to make the interaction between the citizens and the authorities.

However, although citizens recognize the effectiveness of e-services, there are serious challenges regarding its efficiency since, practically, a very limited amount of citizens are using these services. This applies to both maintaining the communication with the municipality and obtaining information about local processes (website, FB). The lack of internet provision of the municipality, the lack of awareness about the benefits of e-services, insufficient skills, and the respective technical resources to receive services (internet, smartphone) were mentioned among the factors affecting it. Ensuring citizens' vision, creating special information spaces, and providing internet services will lead to situation improvement. The issue of self-government accountability was defined by the respondents as well.

It was underlined that young people are better aware of modern digital technologies but they are less interested in self-government programs, local participation, and, in general, there is a negative tendency of youth community migration.

The research has revealed that there are vulnerable citizen groups in the municipality which require a wiser approach on behalf of the community. This especially applies to the people and children with disabilities, whose parents state that they have severe psycho-emotional state, economic condition, and specific needs.

The topics of special discussion were decentralization and demarcation of the authority between the local and central authorities in different fields. The most acute issue for the citizens was the minimal role of the self-government in the system of granting the status of a vulnerable person. They say that it decreases the level of social justice. They demonstrate more trust towards the local public servants than to the "program" operating according to the criteria unknown to them.

TO LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The issue of supporting electronic service: to ensure the success of public reform it is essential to disseminate relevant information at the municipality and make electronic service popular.

❖ To activate the institution of the City Hall representative, use the resource of local NGOs, active community groups, the system of a social partnership (schools, medical sphere);

❖ To use alternative information resources in spreading information about e-services and their use (information leaflets, banners, TV, meetings with the population);

❖ To support the development of the respective skills in citizens to use electronic services. For this purpose, it is essential to promote internet service provision to municipalities; create the proper territorial spaces to provide the citizens with prompt service;

❖ To increase the awareness of the website and FB pages and introduce the format of interactive dialogue. For this purpose, electronic resources have to be modernized and qualifications of respective specialists raised.

The issue of improving service efficiency: the needs of the most vulnerable groups should be considered while choosing the local priorities in the municipalities and planning social programs. Long-term programs should be developed to support entrepreneurial activities in households for the parents of children with disabilities; measures to support single parents (including single fathers) and agricultural programs should be carried out as well.

❖ A local strategy to stop internal migration and support the return of young people to the municipality should be created. To reach this aim, the resource of local businesses, as well as the strategy of corporate cooperation should be exercised. Existing examples should be popularized and business encouraged;

❖ To introduce the standards of service efficiency assessment. To do so, it is possible to use the tested electronic forms to get feedback from the beneficiaries. Therefore, the positive experience of other municipalities should be studied.

The issue of local participation: more citizen participation should be encouraged to ensure the efficiency of the self-government. That is why it is significant to encourage their initiatives and support constant dialogue. For this purpose, electronic communication, an interactive dialogue in social networks are the most efficient resources, since this is the time when citizens can have closer contact and communication with self-government.

TO CENTRAL AUTHORITY

❖ To speed up the policy of decentralization to improve the quality of citizen service and ensure welfare; differentiate the authority of the central and local authorities in several fields;

❖ To increase the level of social protection of families in need of state care, it is essential to review the existing centralized system of social assessment to make the existing criterion more transparent and fair;

❖ To define the role of self-government in the assessment system since it frequently gets hold of most precise information about the socio-demographic picture existing at the municipality and has an immediate touch with the citizens who are in urgent need of state care;

❖ While terminating the social aid for the families, in case of the self-government recommendations, the terms of studying the cases should be speeded up not to aggravate the condition of the vulnerable families.

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PARTICIPATION IN THE SOCIAL PARTNERSHIP SYSTEM OF NGOS

❖ Civil society organizations which function at the local level or have chosen Vani Municipality as their ground for operation must ensure the provision of e-services without any barries (spreading information, methods to develop IT skills, etc)

❖ The local groups that will cooperate with local government to advocate the needs of various groups of citizens (including, persons with disabilities and their families, children, and elderly without care, single fathers, etc.) should be created.

IMERETI REGION

THE REPORT OF NEEDS

ASSESSMENT OF POPULATION

IN THE PROCESS OF PAR IMPLEMENTATION

IN TERJOLA MUNICIPALITY

www.fsokhumi.ge

INTRODUCTION

Successful implementation of the Public Administration Reform (PAR) plays a fundamental role on the way to integrating Georgia into the EU and serves as the main precondition of the welfare and prosperous development of the population. The participation of citizens in the decision-making process while reform implementation is a guarantee for PAR to achieve a success, which not only ensures the introduction of democratic, open, and good governance of the country but also increases the trust of the population towards political systems and strengthens the legitimacy of gained decisions. The COVID-19 pandemic even more vividly identified the necessity of implementing the Public Administration Reform, especially, in respect to introducing electronic governance, which will enable citizens, simply and in an operative manner, with no additional bureaucratic procedures let the local government know about their problems and needs and find their solutions.

Cultural-Humanitarian Fund "Sukumi" in cooperation with the Fund of Women Entrepreneurs and Imereti Scientists' Union "Spectri" is implementing the project "A Common Forum for CSOs from Guria, Imereti and Racha-Lechkhumi for PAR Roadmap monitoring", with the purpose of efficient implementation of the public administration reform at a local level (the project is supported by the EU).

Within the framework of the project, two organizations in Terjola municipality - "Union for Protection of Children`s Rights" and Civil Education "Children - Future of Georgia" conducted the study of the needs assessment of citizens in order to identifty the efficiency, transparency, and quality of inclusiveness of services provided by the local government. Findings identified as a result of the study and elaborated recommendations will be used as the basis for reflecting the priority needs of citizens in the action plan of the municipality.

1. THE AIM AND METHODOLOGY OF NEEDS RESEARCH

Citizens' needs assessment aims to study the efficiency, transparency, and inclusiveness of services rendered by Terjola local authorities and develop specific recommendations according to evidence-based information to improve local services. **Research objectives** are to advocate identified problems and challenges as a result of studying the needs of citizens at local and national levels and integrate priority issues of citizens in the action plan of the municipality.

The research methodology: needs assessment was conducted in March-May, 2020. To achieve the aim, a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods was used. At the first stage, the research tool was developed and its indicators were agreed with the project partners. A structured questionnaire/application form was elaborated for the _quantitative research_ which mainly consisted of closed questions. However, respondents were given the possibility to state their opinion regarding the issue or select one answer among multiple choices. 150 people were questioned using a quantitative method. The _qualitative compo-_

nent involved the method of focus group discussion and the in-depth individual interview using the preliminarily developed structured questionnaire. 30 people were interviewed using a focus group discussion method, whereas the in-depth interview method was used for 4 experts of local government. Detailed transcripts of the discussion were prepared on the bases of audio-records of group decisions and extracts were used for further data analysis and illustration of survey results. Respondents were selected from Terjola municipality, implying the different social-demographic characteristics. The survey involved 180 people: 129 women and 51 men.

2. SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC SPECIFICATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

The target respondents of the needs` assessment are the citizens of Georgia, living in Terjola Municipality under the age18 and 65+, including vulnerable groups, parents with many children, single ones, parents with children of disabilities, teachers, entrepreneurs, community leaders, pensioners, youngsters, local experts in the issues of self-government, etc.

69% of women and 31% of men are target respondents of the research. According to the age component, the majority are middle-aged - 18 - 34 (32%), 35 - 64 (57%), 65 and 65+ (11%). According to marital status, 68% are married, 21% not married, 8% widowed, and 3% - divorced. According to the education received, 59% of respondents have higher education. 21% secondary education(college/vocational school), 19 % complete secondary and only 1% has no high education. According to the social status, some of the respondents hold special status, including 9% - mothers with many children, 6% - socially vulnerable, 1% - internally displaced people, whereas 85% of respondents have no special social status.

According to the employment status, the majority of the respondents are recruited in departments funded by the state budget: 28% are public figures, and 17% are employed in local (Budget) organizations. 23% are unemployed, self-employed - 16%, retired - 11% and students - 4%. The average monthly income for the majority varies between 501 - 900 GEL (35%), for 28% income is 101 - 500 GEL and the income of 25% of respondents is more than 901 GEL. 5% have income below 100 GEL, whereas 7% of participants were not eager to answer.

3. KEY FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH

3.1. TRANSPARENCY

3.1.1. INFORMING POPULATION ABOUT PAR

The level of being informed about the public administration reform among the **population** is quite low, which is proved by quantitative research results. Although 31% of

respondents stated that they have heard about the reform, the part of respondents has not ever heard about it (19%) or are partially informed, some heard about it (34%), or/ and did not even circle any option - 15% (Diagram1).

DO YOU POSSESS ANY INFORMATION ABOUT THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORM?

47	51	29	23
31%	34%	19%	15%
a) Yes	b) Partially	c) No	d) Did not answer
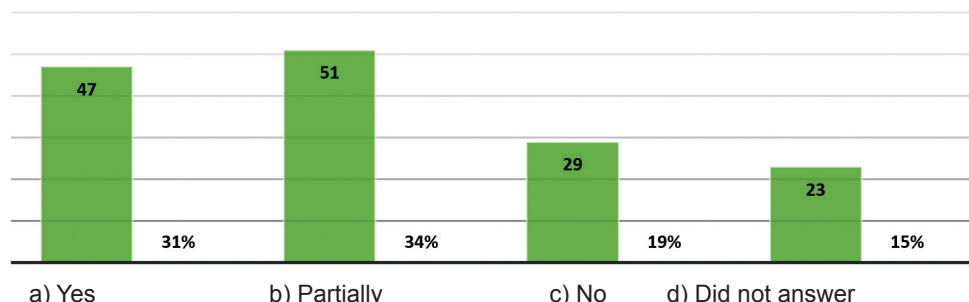
According to the qualitative data, the majority of the population have not sufficient information about the mentioned reform, the role of mass media and local government in sharing the information is rather weak.The respondents who more or less posses the information about the PAR mostly are public figures:

"Even two people out of one hundred might not be informed about this issue. Furthermore, when I worked at public service, I was familiar with the laws. But since 2014, when I left, to be honest, I am not informed as the press and TV give very limited information. There is no service to deliver information to the population, more precisely, the info at first must be provided at a local level and then among the population" - a head of the agriculture club, Youth House.

"The reform is aimed at improving citizen services so that citizens feel comfortable in public. Programs that are developed for the public administration reform promote transparent and open democracy governance development. However, certain drawbacks remain which need to be revised and certain directions for further work should be selected. For example, informing the population" - an employee of Sakrebulo.

It was identified through quantitative research that nowadays government structures serve as **the main source of information** since 98 out of 150 respondents are informed or have some information about the public governance reform and underline the fact that received information from meeting with government structure – 47% or municipality facebook or official website – 19%. All this proves that the intensity of meetings with the population by authorities is more or less improved as well as the functioning of the municipality's Facebook page and the website. 34% of the interviewed noted that they got familiarized with the information from TV. It is worth noting that no one named NGOs as information sources. On the one hand, this is explained by the existence of insufficient public organizations in Terjola whereas, on the other, no priority of the mentioned issue, which also is conditioned by the lack of information.

It is interesting that despite quite a low degree of being informed, *the majority of the population has realized how beneficial public administration reform* is and relates its proper implementation to improving the quality of services for the population which is proved by the quantitative research results. 43% of the interviewed believe in the improvement of the quality of services for citizens, 21% are sceptical, whereas 37% found it hard to reply or left it unanswered. This directly indicates that the population believes in the potential of the reform and has certain hopes concerning the prospects of service improvement. However, quite a large number of those being skeptical and having no detailed information proves that it is necessary to direct more effort and work hard towards informing the population about the essence of the reform and further enhance and improve work. According to qualitative data, population trust, interest, and support services as the pre-condition of reform success, which is again related to increasing the degree of knowledge and being informed about the reform :

> *"Any reform will remain as the reform if there is no support from the society and if the society does not have trust, interest, knowledge; if communication is not improved. The reform is the best means but people should implement it, have an interest, which is low at this point" - a head of the agriculture consultation center.*

3.1.2. INFORMING POPULATION ABOUT E-SERVICES OF THE MUNICIPALITY

Needs` research has clearly illustrated that nowadays implementation of electronic services at the local level is carried out slowly, that is affected by the following factors: the majority of the population either have no sufficient information about electronic services, or existing services are not available, or citizens have not enough skills or competences to use modern technologies.

According to quantitative research, only 25% of respondents are informed about the electronic services of the municipality. The majority of respondents more or less possesses information (42%) and about 23% of respondents are not informed about e-services and 8% are not interested at all (Diagram 2).

TO WHAT EXTENT ARE YOU INFORMED ABOUT MUNICIPAL ELECTRONIC SERVICES?

34	63	38	12	3
23%	42%	25%	8%	2%
a) Not at all	b) More or less	c) Informed	d) Not interested	e) Did not answer
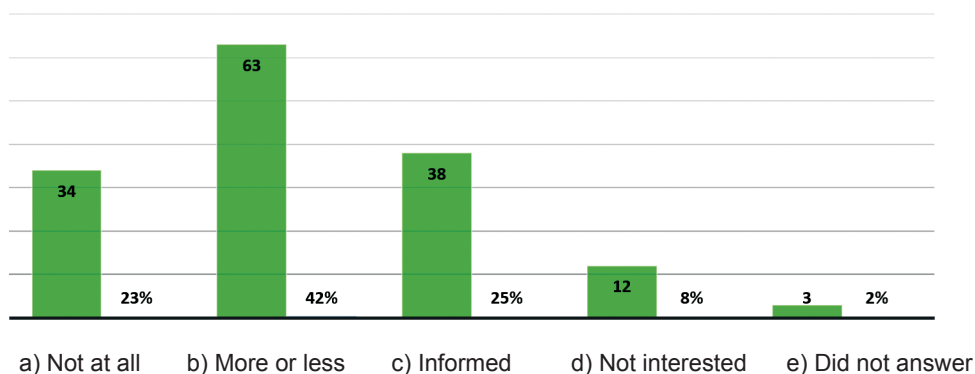
36% of respondents name municipality Facebook pages *as the main source of information*, thus the municipalities actively use social pages (uploading and sharing

information for more transparency) and the majority of the population has access to a more available and familiar e-platform:

"I mainly obtain information from the Facebook pages of the municipality and Sakrebulo - a mother of many children, a parent of the person with disabilities; "We all have access to Facebook and get news from" - a school teacher.

27% of respondents state that they got information from TV, about 9% were informed while public meetings with the representatives of the authorities. 29% did not provide any source of getting information about e-service.

The information obtained as a result of qualitative research proves **insufficient communication of public figures with the population** and limited information provision about electronic services. The majority states that representatives of the local government have to work more in this direction:

"Citizens are not well informed indeed. I do not mean one-time meetings. More intensive work is necessary with citizens" - a head of N(N)LE Public Healtcare Service.

"It is very hard to find a person in Terjola Municipality who knows about the ways and forms of electronic service. I have never heard of any meetings, telephone messages, etc. in this direction" - a Sakrebulo delegate.

According to assessment data, the general indicator of the transparency is improved by the following criteria: uploading and sharing public information on the official webpage and Facebook of local government. According to qualitative research, the question about most frequently used services during the last year, the majority of respondents (29%) mentioned online announcement about vacancies, but 25% got information about the local budget and about 12% about Sakrebulo normative acts.

According to qualitative data, some of the respondents noted that all useful pubic information, news, or decisions are shared on the official pages:

"There is transparency. All kinds of significant information, decision, novelty, the document is placed on the website and is available for me. In case of being interested, I can get access to the desired information easily" - a head of the agriculture consultation center.

"hr.gov.ge is especially transparent. Everyone can get familiarized with and use it. I did the same several times" - a small entrepreneur.

"Public information is placed on the website. I could also see online vacancy ads. However, there is less activity on behalf of the citizens" - a community activist woman.

Some of the respondents (teachers, doctors, representatives of the municipality and Sakrebulo)state that they actively use electronic services:
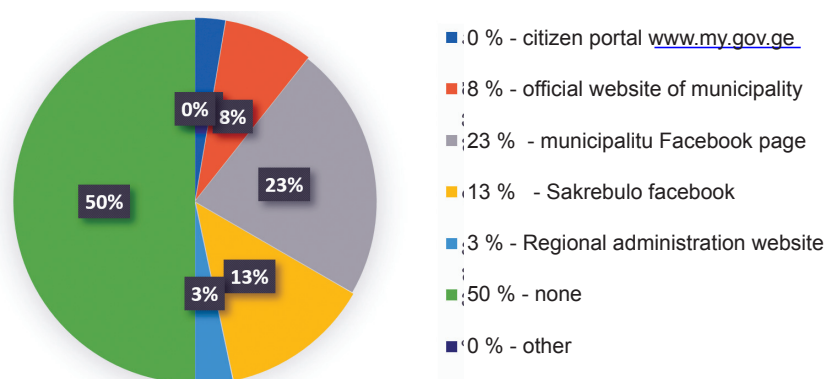
The majority of respondents underline that the population has a problem regarding access to the existing services. According to quantitative data, 47% of respondents noted that during the last year they did not use electronic service due unavailability, 31% stated that they have no interest in the mentioned services, whereas 15% underlined having not enough skills to use the existing electronic system.

According quantitative data, 50% of the respondents indicated that they do not use any electronic platform at the local level, the most widespread tool among the population are FB pages of the municipality (23%) and Sakrebulo.

WHICH ELECTRONIC SERVICES DO YOU UDE TO RECEIVE LOCAL SERVICES?

- 0 % - citizen portal www.my.gov.ge
- 8 % - official website of municipality
- 23 % - municipalitu Facebook page
- 13 % - Sakrebulo facebook
- 3 % - Regional administration website
- 50 % - none
- 0 % - other

The main barriers to using electronic services together with the low indicator of providing information to the population are the quality of internet service, expensiveness, and population accessibility to technical resources (computer, smartphone, etc.), which is significantly affected by hard socio-economic conditions at a local level. Insufficient skills to use technologies is also named as the main obstacle, especially, among the elderly and middle-aged population:

"The economic condition is one of the preventing factors. Many families have no access to the internet or even the financial means to pay for it. Many may not even have a TV set" - a municipality employee.

"One of the reasons is that most of the locals are not able to cover internet fee. They do not even have 20 GEL to pay for the internet" - a teacher.

Access to the electronic services and active use of it by population is prevented by the existing complicated **form of electronic systems and application**:

"The website is complicated for citizens. People get public information more at meetings. I know the case of how the head of financial services introduced social problems in villages and about budget parameters. I find it difficult to state to what extent the same information is available for the population" - a head of the agriculture consultation center.

"E-services have to be simplified, and at the same time all villages should have internet access" - a municipality employee.

However, it is interesting that when doing quantitative research, only 8% of respondents indicated that it is difficult for them to apply electronically, 39% stated that procedures are quite simple whereas 53% found it difficult to reply to this question. The above-stated directly indicates that the majority of respondents do not use the electronic service system and, respectively, are not able to assess whether using it, is simple or difficult.

IS IT EASY TO APPLY ELECTRONICALLY TO THE SELF-GOVERNMENT AGENCIES TO GET SERVICES?
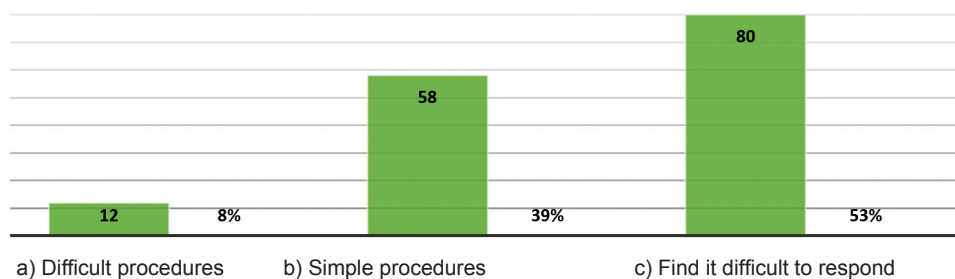
12	58	80
8%	39%	53%
a) Difficult procedures	b) Simple procedures	c) Find it difficult to respond

3.1.3. THE WAY TO IMPROVE INFORMING POPULATION ABOUT LOCAL ELECTRONIC SERVICES

The respondents (participants of needs assessment) of the research state that citizens must have information about e-services, that will ensure not only the provision of information via e-services but also enhance their skills and knowledge to use the opportunities for better living conditions:

"For this purpose, the municipality should use all its resources. For example, prepare information brochures, disseminate information in villages through municipality representatives and delegates, use a social network for information dissemination. Self-governing institutions in the municipality must promote volunteer services, cooperate with non-government sector representatives, and create a certain type of the network for information dissemination" - a Sakrebulo delegate.

On the other hand, the need of expressing more interest towards population activity and involvement and existing opportunities was identified :

> *"We get to the same problem that the population does not get involved into these processes. The more civil society is active, the more active the governing link is" - an employee of Sakrebulo.*

> *"Undoubtedly, more has to be done for informing the population. However, it must be mentioned that the citizen should also get interested in his/her rights and responsibilities. If you do not show interest, you will never find out what your right is" - a municipality employee.*

Respondents also identified the ***essentiality of a differentiated approach while dissemination of information***. The needs of target groups must be defined, foreseeing age, skills, and location. For instance, spreading information electronically is less efficient for the elderly people. Public meetings must be organized in villages which have no internet access, the target beneficiaries must be provided with brief information leaflets. Those who do not have necessary skills or competence in e-services the local government institutions must create special groups that will give instructions about e-service procedures:

> *"There is no young generation in villages, locals don't know how to use the internet, old ones have no adequate skills and competences, the information provided must be simple and brief" - a doctor, antirabic service.*

> *"More contact is necessary with the population . . . face-to-face meetings are important. Citizens nowadays require more initiatives and they are right. The majority has no skills and competencies on how to search information or use new technologies or to whom to address, "Communication Group" must created in the municipality to solve the mentioned challenges" - a woman entrepreneur.*

3.2. EFFICIENCY

Local government activities were assessed within the framework of the given research in the context of offering the service forms tailored to citizens' needs and purposefulness of municipal programs within self-government. The intensity of using existing electronic systems, as well as the intensity of communication about the issues and problems raised by them and the quality of feedback was also studied.

3.2.1. STUDYING THE NEEDS OF POPULATION BY THE SELF-GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS AND THE QUALITY OF RESPONSES

The research has revealed that ***there is no practice of studying the needs of a specific group of the population*** at a local level, which, to a certain extent is affected

by the lack of financial and human resources of the municipality. The implementation of various researches at municipalities is mainly fulfilled by the initiative of separate public organizations. However, it was noted that the audit service is functioning excellently at a local level. It studies the activities carried out by all municipality services as well as the quality of services provided to the population. Respondents noted that the population opinion and satisfaction is systematically monitored by studying the social media comments, letters published in the press, and publicly stated opinions, which gives basis to the representatives of self-government to conclude that the municipal programs are fit to priority needs of the population:

> *"Our municipality has no practice of needs assessment of citizens. This issue requires the involvement of more difficult processes (i.e. human and material resources). But I still consider that social problem existing in our municipality to a certain extent promotes the improvement of the social condition of the population. This includes both one-time as well as monthly (throughout the year) assistance" - a municipality employee.*

> *"The audit system (service) studies the information about all services of municipalities and non-legal entities as well as the quality of their work. Public satisfaction expressed while serving the citizens, positive feedback letters published in the press, comments written in the social network give us the possibility to think that municipality self-government manages to fulfill the imposed responsibility" - a municipality employee.*

The **opinion of respondents** is **not homogeneous** regarding the level of efficiency of municipal programs. Part of it considers that municipal **programs were more or less responsive to their needs** – *"Important progress is made in regard to the needs of people, such as reparing roads and infrastructure improvement, used by all the citizens" - a community activist woman.* Though some assess the **efficiency and purposefulness of programs** quite critically and consider that the existing programs inadequately respond to the existing challenge or in the majority of cases are extremely selective or unjust towards target groups:

> *"I know about 30 - 40% of the population of Terjola region. I can also see and realize that assistance is given to a person who does not need it. The manager decides on an individual basis. Therefore, I consider that involvement of the population in these processes is essential" - a head of the club of agronomists of the Youth House.*

> *"Social programs are essential and necessary, they are indeed good. But, it is interesting to find out to what extent they assist the citizen in solving the problem – this is a separate issue. The amount is so limited and irrelevant to the cost of the medicine that would trouble you. For example, the price of medicines for the Parkinson disease or epilepsy exceed a minimum of 150 GEL per month, whereas the person having this disease receives 150 GEL per month" - "Imedi L" doctor.*

According to the quantitative survey data, citizens most frequently apply to local government regarding the issues related to healthcare: medicines/funding operation - 24%, water supply (including, quality water) and the issue of making the floodwater channels properly functioning – 14%, social/monetary assistance – 11%; land registration - 7% and various certificates - 5%.

While assessing the quality of responding to the problem on behalf of the municipality, it was identified that 16% of the interviewed completely settled the problem, 32% considers that the problem was settled partially and 25% state that there was an attempt to settle the problem. However, the desirable results have not been achieved due to objective reasons for which they received an argument letter. Only 7% of respondents noted that they received a refusal without any written justification.

While assessing the population satisfaction regarding the quality of responding to the problem or the services provided by the local government representatives, it is definite that the citizens are generally satisfied with received services, which is distributed as follows – 37% of respondents expressed satisfaction towards services of the municipality and only 7% are dissatisfied; 41% of respondents emphasize satisfaction towards the Sakrebulo, 11% are dissatisfied, 35% expressed satisfaction towards the representative of municipality and only 5% showed dissatisfaction. Satisfaction towards City Hall representatives was expressed by 35% and only 5% expressed dissatisfaction. Some respondents (37% - 55%) refused to respond which presumably indicates that the population did not apply to the local government and has no experience of having relations with the mentioned representatives or have nihilistic attitudes towards the activities of the mentioned institution.

3.2.2. LOCAL PRIORITIES AND NEEDS AND 3EFFECTIVE MEASURES FOR SOLUTION

Answers of the responses about the *needs of the groups mostly considered by local authorities in municipal programs* were distributed as follows: a majority of respondents consider that local government fully envisages the needs of the population living in the municipality – 41%. 17% state that the needs of children and youth are vital. In the opinion of 12%, attention is given to the problems of children with disabilities. According to the research data, special needs of some groups are not satisfied. these groups include women (3%), women victims of violence (4%), families with many children (8%).On the one hand, the above-mentioned is determined by the fact that there is no practice of needs analysis of specific groups in municipal programs of self-government institutions, on the other hand, there is not enough level of activity on behalf of these vulnerable groups and inability to present one's priorities and needs at the right level to the representatives of the local government.

30% of respondents consider that local government fully ensures the provision of the information to the population. 18% consider that this is happening partially, whereas in the opinion of 5%, they are not provided with sufficient information. 47% of them

have no reply to the question. It might be affected by several citcumstances.Either the population has no access to electronic platforms, or they have never attended any public meetings where they could receive information about ongoing processes in the municipality, or communication with the population is poor and the accountability of the local government is quite weak.

In the opinion of the population involved in qualitative research, more attention has to be paid to **needs and problems of specific groups** such as people with disabilities and those with autism specter. It is reasonable to establish specialized centers, shelters, and support centers for old and lonely ones; to introduce municipal programs for socially vulnerable groups to create employment opportunities; to offer medical service for people with special diseases or investigate the problem. For example, the funding source for the people with cardiovascular problems; improving social programs for families who have many children and, etc.

Respondents form Terjola municipality consider that prioritized spheres such as healthcare, agriculture, infrastructure, education must be developed and supported. A library should be opened to promote literacy of the young generation and create more job opportunities for the locals. The need for introducing municipal programs of economic enhancement, supporting social enterprises, and informing the population about state programs of economic strengthening was also identified:

> *"Pandemic showed that it is essential to strengthening agriculture and healthcare, since there is a lack of field specialists" - a head of the agriculture consultation center.*

According to quantitative data, the response to the question which directions need more human and financial resources of the local government, 73% of 150 respondents considered it to be healthcare; for 67% high-quality drinking water supply is important, for 54% of respondents it is social programs; 42% - supporting economic development and creating a respectful environment at a local level; 36% - infrastructure (roads, bridges, etc.); 21% - 24% of respondents consider the cultural and educational sphere, environment and waste management, support services for old people (providing them with food and living services), food safety.

According to qualitative data, some of the respondents consider that to increase the efficiency of the local government operation, it is essential to enhance the quality of decentralization and increase the budget of the municipality, differentiate authorities between sectoral ministries and local government:

> *"Some issues require differentiation. All municipalities have an individual geographic area, location, resource, and, respectively, different requirements and referrals. Local government is well aware of all the problems of the municipality and has plans for a better solution. Therefore, municipalities should be given more authority to solve and settle certain issues independently" - a City Hall employee.*

Special attention was given to the issue of the assessment system granting the status of socially vulnerable. Distrust of respondents towards the existing calculation system

of scores was identified and the opinion was expressed to increase the role of self-government in the process of both assessment and granting the status of socially vulnerable:

"In the process of granting the status of socially vulnerable, when the citizen is identified with a problem, s/he applies to the municipality and asks for help but it is less unlikely to change the result . . . Granting of the given status is made based on certain criteria and standards" - a City Hall employee.

"Local government is better aware of problems of those in need and the scores calculated by the formula will not solve the issue. There will not be so much discrepancy" - a doctor of the antirabial service.

"The more rights self-government has the better, but it is necessary to train the staff" - a small entrepreneur.

3.3. INCLUSIVENESS /PARTICIPATION

3.3.1. ENCOURAGING POPULATION PARTICIPATION AND THE LEVEL OF INVOLVEMENT

The opinion of the population regarding the fact of to what extent local public figures realize the significance of population involvement and participation is pretty sceptical. The majority of respondents 47% had no reply to the question. 30% replied positively, 5% gave a negative answer, whereas 18% consider that public figures have only partially realized the essence of citizen involvement. 20% of the respondents consider that **citizens are encouraged to take part** in the process of priority definition. Some respondents consider that their participation is encouraged in the process of developing municipal programs (15%) or identifying citizens' needs (12%). Discussing citizens' initiatives (7%) and local budget (5%) report about quite a low indicator. The majority of respondents, namely, 42% abstain from replying to the question, which presumably indicates that the population feels having no attempt on behalf of the local authority to encourage its participation.

It is worth mentioning that the **population is not well aware of the forms of citizen involvement** and does not use in practice the opportunities granted by law to the right extent. According to quantitative data, the most widespread form of participation is participation in the settlement meetings exercised by 40% of the interviewed. The index of participation in Sakrebulo meetings (5%) and listening to reports (4%) is minimal. As such, none of the respondents took part in the activities of the Civil Advisory Council (1%) and have never applied to the authorities with a petition (0%). 37% confirm that they have never used any form of involvement whereas 9% refused to give a reply, which means that this part of those polled has never used the named forms of involvement granted by law.

This is confirmed by qualitative data too, where citizens, including, representatives of the local government report a low level of citizens` participation. On the one hand,it is conditioned by the **lack of information among the population**, on the other hand, it is affected by **passivity of the existing mechanisms of participation:**

"In general, the population almost does not take part in local governance and this is bad for the authorities too" - a Sakrebulo employee.

"I did not know if I had the right to take part in the Sakrebulo session, I have attended the settlement meeting" - a socially vulnerable woman.

"I have not even heard about the settlement meeting being held. I would have participated with a great pleasure. We have to voice our problem and if we have this right, we have to use it"- a mother of many children, parents of the child with disabilities.

"By the way, some time ago the Council of Persons with Disabilities was created and I am its member. However, I do not know anything about its functioning and no one has tried to contact me" - a director of the day center of the children with disabilities.

Only the part of the population, representing Gender Equality of and Civil Advisory Councils has heard about the operation of such mechanisms. Respectively, they are better aware and actively involved in the self-government activities - *"I am a member of the Civil Advisory Council. We have listened to reports of almost all services of the municipality and, respectively, cooperate with them" - "Imedi L" doctor.*

"We cooperate with the Gender Equality Council and Nino Dolakidze, the person responsible for gender, we submitted the report to the Civil Advisory Council" - a head of the N(N)LE.

Based on qualitative research, it was identified that citizens are more actively involved in the issues actual for the whole settlement and require joint effort of population:

"Let me use the example of my village - Gogni. When the nursery school was being built, population involvement was high. The issue of providing the population with gas required a lot of effort and it was supported. Population signatures are being collected, individual people may not be able to come but joint applications are effective" - a school teacher.

Passive participation of respondents to share with local government their views or **comments about the services rendered** also indicates the limited amount of population participation. Majority of respondents, namely, 75%, state that they have not even attempted to do so and never applied to any respective local government institution whereas 13% shared personal views regarding the existing services. The majority of the population (75%) shared their own opinion with the representatives of the respective institution of local government, 15% did so in the written form, whereas 10% stated their position on Facebook.

3.3.2. SOLUTIONS FOR ENCOURAGING COOPERATION AMONG SELF-GOVERNMENTAL INSTITUTIONS AND POPULATION

According to the quantitative data, the majority of respondents (35%) consider that the dialogue and active involvement of the population in the processes must be initiated and proceeded by local self-government institutions via appointing public meetings and giving consultations. 29% of target respondents think that qualified and profes-

sional staff members familiar with sector specifics will improve and increase collaboration processes at a local level, 13% of respondents declare that population opinions and initiatives must be foreseen while budget formation.

According to qualitative data, the big role is given to *civil society organizations* in population inclusion in decision-making processes: 3rd sector organizations are eager to share innovative approaches, increase participation, raise awareness, and qualification of public figures in PAR issues:

> *"NGOs try to develop professional (public figures) development programs, they provide locals with a free of charge training sessions foreseeing international standards" - a Sakrebulo representative.*

> *"NGOs made me become what/who I am, I had an opportunity to participate in on-going projects of the Fund "Sukhumi", they provided me with lots of info, made me think of many things"- a vulerbale woman.*

The above stated is confirmed according to the data gained while quantitative research of respondents, 21% of bnfs consider that *the role of local civil society organizations is big in raising awareness of citizens about PAR*. 22% think that 3rd sector organizations can address the needs of citizens to the government departments and they can monitor and control on-going processes at a local level (11%) and will act to defend the rights and interests of citizens (19%) Table #1

What is the role of local civil society organizations during PAR implementation?		
# Activity	Quantity	%
1 Providing information/Raising awareness	71	21%
2 Control of the reform implementation/ Monitoring	37	11%
3 Advocacy of the solution of problems at the local level	12	4%
4 Lobbying for adopting local Legal Acts, and Changes	0	0%
5 Raising awareness about the needs of the population among central authorities	72	22%
6 Encouraging dialogue among local authorities and population	27	8%
7 Establishing socio -economic development activities	46	14%
8 Defending the rights of citizens	62	19%
9 Other	3	1%
10 Don't know, have no answer	3	1%

It is interesting that while research the respondents spoke about the importance and a big role of cooperation among governmental and private sectors. The private sector can establish good initiatives for Terjola Municipality, namely: creating job opportunities, encouraging economic development activities, as for the self-governance it tries its best under its competences to support every initiative of the private sector:

"Cooperation between the public and private sectors is important. We used to organize flash mobs in the frames of the youth project, we needed resources and financial support that we got from the private sector" - a City Hall member.

"The private sector is more important for the municipality. This is the sector that provides employment opportunities and offers different programs. The municipality approves new initiatives and supports their implementation, For example, if someone wants to construct a living or a commercial space, the City Hall finds solutions to create more employment opportunities and strengthen the local economy" - a City Hall member.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of the study revealed that the population realizes the importance of PAR at a local level that can have a positive impact on improving the living conditions of the community, though, it is vivid that the majority of the population is not aware of the concept of PAR.

The study also revealed that e-service opportunities are not well performed at a local level that is conditioned by 2 reasons: 1. informational vacuum about e-service tools or 2. e-service accessibility (technics, internet, etc)

According to the research results, local governmental institutions are not able or their effort is not sufficient to inform the majority of the population about the activities or programs in the municipality constantly or there are cases of no availability or any tools for e-services. Weak internet coverage in the municipality, high cost, access to technics (computers, smartphones), insufficient skills (technologies) significantly hinders the processes.

The majority of respondents, among them the representatives of self-governance institutions and other locals realize that 3rd sector organizations have a big role in raising the awareness of the population about the reform, and bringing their attitudes nad interest, needs to the target audience.

The respondents also stated the function of the 3rd sector in raising the qualification of public figures. Active involvement of civil society organizations and direct participation in monitoring will guarantee nad the successful implementing of the reform

The speeding of the decentralization process, the increasing authority of the municipality, dissociates the responsibilities among sectoral ministries and local government for procuring the effective working process of local self-governance institutions.

For overcoming the problems presented in the research the fowling recommendations must be taken into consideration:

TO LOCAL AUTHORITY

To Improve Informing Population about E-Service

➢ The municipality needs to disseminate information on the public administration and use all the resources of the self-government (FB and websites, media, face-to-face meetings with the population);

➢ It is important to share the information on the local electronic systems with the population using different methods, considering the age of the target auditory, skills for using the electronic platforms and location;

➢ To share detailed instructions and information about e-service availability on municipality websites and social networks. The delivery of printed materials in public places must be procured (schools, pharmacy, streets, shops, municipalities, etc.) for those who have no internet access due to the lack of coverage area or not having appropriate skills of getting information;

➢ For developing the skills of the local population to apply e-services there is the need of creating special service centers or technical mobile groups which serve promptly and give instructions about the issues of e-services tools;

➢ To carry active negotiations (self-government) with internet providers to enhance the process of internalization or strengthen internet provision and to procure the availability of the access of e-services in Terjola Municipality.

Improving the Efficiency of E-Services

➢ Priority needs of vulnerable groups of the municipality must be foreseen while elaborating programs and services at a local level. Therefore, it is reasonable to raise awareness and competence of municipality employees;

➢ To conduct needs assessment with the purpose of professional development in self-governmental units and develop a vocational education strategy for municipality staff members where the detailed plan will be represented;

➢ It is important to strengthen the impact of citizen service efficiency monitoring and assessment mechanisms. It will allow the municipality to evaluate the level of population satisfaction with the provided services, efficiency and purposefulness of the budget.

Strengthening the Inclusiveness/Participation of Population

➢ The local population must be timely informed about the availability of participation forms to increase its inclusiveness in political processes at a local level. Also, they must be informed about the details of public meetings and hearings via mass-media, information uploaded and shared on social networks and websites (at least one week earlier);

- The mechanism of participation of the population, the rule of calling Civil Advisory Council, Gender Equality Council and Council of Persons with Disabilities should be revised; the intensity of these mechanisms should be raised and inclusiveness of the citizens provided;

- To implement "Civil Budget" programs together with the additional forms of local population involved in the activities of self-government institutions;

- It is preferable that the resolution of representative and executive bodies of a municipality to be based on arguments of the Sakrebulo and opinions of Civil Advisory Council members and participants via implementing legislative changes.

TO CENTRAL AUTHORITY

- To strengthen the autonomy of the municipality and pursue the pro-active policy of decentralization, to grant more authority to a local government, to distribute financial resources, and mark boundaries between central and local authorities, to increase the possibilities for local citizens to receive rigid and flexible supportive action and effective appeal to the existing problems;

- It is desirable to foresee the recommendations of the social department while decision-making processes to grant, stop, or restore the status of socially vulnerable people;

- To raise the authority of the municipality in settling the issues such as administration of municipal roads and natural resources, naming municipal units.

TO CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

- To consolidate civil society organizations in Terjola Municipality and address their human and technical resources to a group of people with special needs and advocating their interests and necessities;

- The active dissemination of the information about PAR must be ensured by civil society organizations in Terjola Municipality via existing technical and human resources and facilitating supportive actions for the population to have an access to e-services (giving instructions, strengthening skills, providing information, etc.);

- To implement advocacy activities for strengthening further development of civil society organizations at the local level for the attention of both, national authorities and international actors.

IMERETI REGION

THE REPORT OF NEEDS

ASSESSMENT OF POPULATION

IN THE PROCESS OF PAR IMPLEMENTATION

IN BAGDATI MUNICIPALITY

www.fsokhumi.ge

INTRODUCTION

The Public Administration Reform (PAR) successful implementation plays a fundamental role in the integration of Georgia into the European Union. It is the main prerequisite of successful development and population welfare. The citizens` participation in the decision-making process during the reform promotes the success of the reform. It provides not only the introduction of open and good governance of the country but increases the trust of the population towards the political systems and strengthens the legitimacy of the taken decisions. The pandemic caused by COVID-19 has clearly shown the necessity of PAR proper implementation and especially the electronic administration. It will provide citizens with a chance to introduce their problems and needs to the local authorities online, easily, operatively and without any additional bureaucratic procedures, and settle them.

To carry out PAR efficiently at the local level, Cultural-Humanitarian Fund "Sukhumi" with Fund of Women Entrepreneurs and The Imereti Scientists` Union "Spectri" is implementing the project "A Common forum for CSOs from Guria, Imereti and Racha-Lechkhumi for PAR Roadmap monitoring" supported by the European Union. To assess the level of efficiency, transparency and inclusiveness of the services provided by the local authorities, within the framework of the project, Civil-Spectrum-Equality and "Equality Now" conducted the study of citizens` needs in Bagdati Municipality. The findings identified and recommendations elaborated through the study will become a basis for the introduction of citizens priority needs in the municipality action plan.

1. THE AIM AND METHODOLOGY OF NEEDS` RESEARCH

The aim of the citizens` needs research is to study and assess efficiency, transparency and inclusiveness of the services provided to the citizens by the local government of Bagdati, and elaborate specific recommendations based on the evident information to improve the local services. **Research objectives** are to advocate the problems and challenges identified by the research of the citizens` needs at the relevant institutions at the local, as well as at national level and integrate priority issues of the citizens into the municipality action plan.

The research methodology: the study of the needs was conducted in March-May, 2020. Quantitative and qualitative methods were used to reach the aim. At the initial stage, the study tool was elaborated and its indicators were agreed with the project partners. A structured questionnaire/form was elaborated for _quantitative research_. It mainly consisted of closed questions, though the respondents could express their opinion on the issues or choose several options. 150 people were interviewed through the quantitative method. Within the framework of the _qualitative research_, a technique of focus group discussion and in-depth individual interview elaborated according to the pre-designed structured questionnaire were used. 30 people were interviewed through the focus discussion method and 4 local experts of the local self-government were enquired using the technique of the in-depth interview. Based on the group discussion audio recordings, detailed transcripts of the dis-

cussion were prepared and their extracts were used for the data analysis and illustration of the research outcomes. The respondents were selected among the population of Bagdati municipality based on different sociodemographic specifications. The study covered 187 people, including 122 women and 65 men.

2. SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC SPECIFICATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

The research of the citizens` needs covered the citizens of Georgia between the age of 18 - 65, living in Bagdati municipality, including socially vulnerable people, parents with many children and single parents, parents of disabled children, teachers, entrepreneurs, community leaders, pensioners, youth, local experts on the issues of self-government, etc.

60% of the respondents included in the quantitative research are women and 40% men. *The age* of the majority of the respondents ranges between 18 - 34 - 40%, 31% are between 35 - 64, 25% are above 65. According to *the marital status*, 39% of the interviewed are not married, 35% are married, 12% divorced and 14% widow/ers. Based on *education*, only 41% of the respondents have a higher education, 27% have a secondary education, secondary special education (college) - 23% and 9% are with an incomplete education. According to *the social status*, 21% of the respondents are socially vulnerable people, 17% - internally displaced, 7% - parents with many children, and 5% do not have a special social status.

According to the employment status, 32% of the interviewed are on pension, 9% - student/pupil, 22% are unemployed, 23% are self-employed and only 6,7% represent a private-sector. Only a small part of the interviewed people are financed by the state. 6% are civil servants and 5% are employed in budget organizations. *Average monthly income* of the respondents ranges between 101 - 500 GEL (57%), only the income of 17% exceeds 901 GEL, for 11%, the income ranges between 501-900 GEL and 14% refused to answer the question.

3. THE KEY FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH
3.1. TRANSPARENCY
3.1.1. INFORMING POPULATION ABOUT PAR

The level of awareness of the population on PAR in Bagdati municipality *is not high*. Based on the quantitative study, the part of the interviewed who have been partly aware of the reform prevails (73%). 17% of the respondents have not heard anything about it and only 10% of the respondents are aware of the reform. 27% of the interviewed whose awareness of the reform is high, say that they have been informed through TV. The circle of people who have been informed either at the meetings with governmental structures (3%), on the official webpage of the municipality, FB page (2%) or through the representatives of NGOs, is very small.

The qualitative study has shown that only those who are employed at the local government are aware of the reform and are more competent to assess its benefits:

"Provision of the population with the service has become easier and has been improved. The Public Administration Reform has changed the approach to the issues a lot. It has neglected the bureaucratic elements and has made public processes available and transparent. The services have been improved and optimally adjusted to the needs of the population. We should work to improve the sustainability of the reform achievements and maintain the trust of society" - a head of the Sakrebulo financial-budget Commission.

Though, it is significant that the majority of the population either have only scant information on the reform or have not heard anything about it. The lack of information about the population raises the level of distrust in some respondents. Though, some of them have pointed out that despite the steps forward, much should be done regarding raising awareness of the population:

"Frankly speaking, I do not have the information...I would get it from you with pleasure. If anyone has told me, I would have remembered it. The government should be concerned with spreading the information as many people as possible. Nobody cares whether people read or not" - a father of many children.

"I have no information about it. Be frank, I have a little interest and hope in the local self-government" - a single mother.

"A reform means that we should have a better version of what we have now. Many things have been improved. It is evident that the local government actively operates. The level of our life has been raised. There have been some steps forward and it is very good" - a male pensioner.

"The questionnaire you sent me a few weeks ago was very helpful [Study of the Citizens` Needs Questionnaire]. It was the questionnaire which has given me the information on PAR" - an unemployed woman.

The majority of the interviewed are not very well informed on PAR, though they **believe that the reform can improve the service provided by the self-government and give them some benefit**. According to the majority (67%) of the quantitative study, the reform will improve the local service. Only a small part of the interviewed (13%) have a sceptical attitude, do not trust the reform and consider it to be less possible. 17% cannot answer the question and 2% of the respondents reject the possibility.

It should be noted that during the study the reform was most positively evaluated by the youth. They emphasized that see the self-government attempt regarding the participation and activeness of the citizens:

"Based on the example of our municipality, we can say that the Public Administration Reform is being carried out very well. The citizens have become more active and Sakrebulo tries to include them in the administration process. I would emphasize the fact that last year, the self-government granted the best idea by 1000 GEL. Anybody could write and represent the idea. It is a good example of inclusiveness of citizens" - an entrant.

Though, a part of the interviewed has noted that improper implementation of the reform is caused by the passivity and the lack of interest of the citizens. It demonstrates the necessity to inform not only the population but to work hard to develop civic engagement and strengthen inclusiveness:
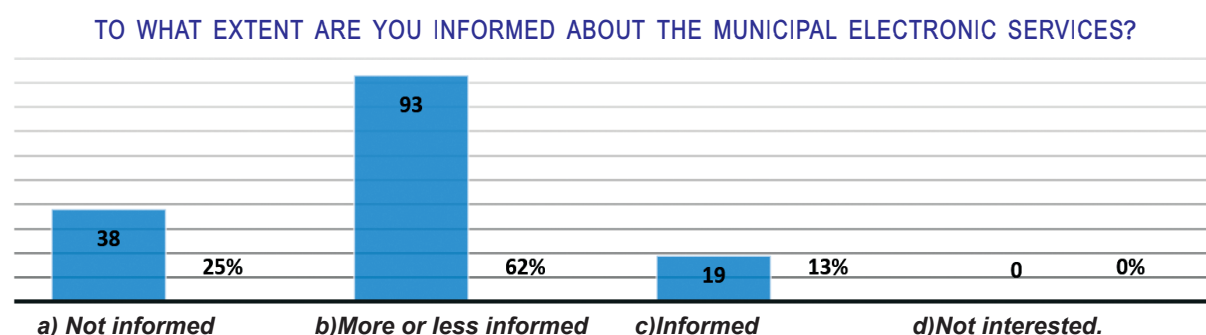
3.1.2. INFORMING POPULATION ABOUT ELECTRONIC SERVICE OF THE MUNICIPALITY

The research of needs has shown the difficulties concerning the implementation of the electronic services at the local level. They are mainly affected by the lack of awareness of the population on the types of e-service, lack of internet on certain locations and lack of skills necessary for using it.

According to quantitative research, only 13% of the interviewed are informed about the electronic services of the municipality. Their majority has only some information (52%), whereas 25% are not informed about the services at all (see Diagram 1).

For the majority of respondents, the main sources of information are NGOs (30%), FB and webpages of the municipality (29%), television (23%), and meetings with the authority representatives (18%).

TO WHAT EXTENT ARE YOU INFORMED ABOUT THE MUNICIPAL ELECTRONIC SERVICES?

38	93	19	0
25%	62%	13%	0%
a) Not informed	b)More or less informed	c)Informed	d)Not interested.

The lack of information on the e-services affects their low usage by population. It is demonstrated by the results of the quantitative study. Based on them, the majority of the interviewed (40%) emphasize that have **used none of the e-systems** to get the municipal service. Very often, citizens use the official website of the self-government and its FB page (17%). On the one hand, it indicates that self-government actively shares the information through the websites and social network. On the other hand, it shows better access of the population to the electronic platforms and their active usage:

"I am informed through the social network and by my family members who are users of these networks. Not everybody has a person like this. It would be better if the information was available to elderly people" -a female pensioner.

"The municipality webpage covers the information on the municipality activities. It has made access of the citizens to the public information easier. Though, the activity of the population should be raised in this regard" -a City Hall lawyer.

Like quantitative research, qualitative data shows that population *passivity to use the electronic services* is very high. It is affected not only by the *lack of information* but by the *scepticism* of the population as well. They think that their demand will not be met and it indicates the distrust towards the local authority representatives :

"I have used none of the electronic administration services. I have never thought to e-mail. I always think that nobody will reply to it. When you meet a person face to face it is impossible to get the answer and that is why I have not written, and consequently, have not received the reply" - a female pensioner.

The respondents named the lack of access to the e-systems as **a barrier to use the e-services**. In some families, it is reasoned by the lack of internet, relevant technical means and skills. The problem is especially actual for elderly ones:

"Everybody agrees that electronic service is a technical novelty. But it is very difficult to get aware of it. Though this technique exists, our society is not ready for it. It is especially difficult for people on pension. Besides, a pensioner can not afford buying a technical appliance like a computer, since it is very expensive" - a male pensioner.

Based on the evaluation of the interviewed, a general indicator of **transparency** in self-government has improved due to the criteria like sharing the public information on the official page or FB page. According to the quantitative research, the question "Which electronic services did you use during last year?" was answered in the following way: 21% say that track announcements about vacancies, 23% got interested and received the information on the local budget, 14% searched for the information on the members of municipality staff and 13% used electronic systems to submit complaint or proposal.

The above mentioned is proved by the qualitative data as well. According to it, the part of the population can easily find relevant public information on the official pages of the self-government. Though, the study data shows that young people more actively use the e-services. A part of the middle-aged and elderly interviewed point out, that though they realize the benefit of the electronic services, their majority does not have a necessary knowledge and skills to use them. Consequently, for a big part of the population, face to face meeting with local officials is a relevant form to settle hot issues and problems :

"I have requested public information from the municipality and I have been provided with...I have even seen the information about the budget. I have some delegates in my friend list and actively track meetings and news. In case of necessity, I have even searched for the necessary document on the website" - a student.

"I am very active in the social network and look for information. If not my activeness, nobody would care to inform people like me. Sharing information would greatly contribute to it. I think information is available only for specific groups" - an unemployed young person.

"Most of the people neither have information and nor are aware of using the internet if there is no young family member...Though I have subscribed all the pages, I do not get the information...People have a lack of information and if we provide them with more information, they will be satisfied" - a student.

"People prefer to get information through communication with the local municipality. They consider electronic service to be inefficient. Consequently, it is necessary to raise their awareness in this regard and raise their trust in the electronic services" - a City Hall lawyer.

Most of the interviewed (57%) think that level of transparency and accountability is not sufficient and the local authorities only partly provide the population with information on services and activities. Whereas for 25%, this information is complete and 9% state that they are not provided with. 9% of the respondents do not have the answer.

The fact that the lack of information on the existing services **prevents people from using the e-services** is proved by the answers of the respondents. The question "Is it easy to apply to the self-government units electronically to get the services?" was difficult to answer for the majority (42%). It indicates that the population has never used the electronic services. The part of the interviewed (40%) having used the electronic services emphasizes that it was quite easy to apply through the electronic form. Only for 18% of the respondents, the procedures are difficult (see diagram #2).

IS IT EASY TO APPLY TO THE SELF-GOVERNMENT UNITS ELECTRONICALLY TO GET THE SERVICES?

a) Difficult procedures — 27 — 18%
b) Simple procedures — 60 — 40%
c) Find it difficult to respond — 63 — 42%
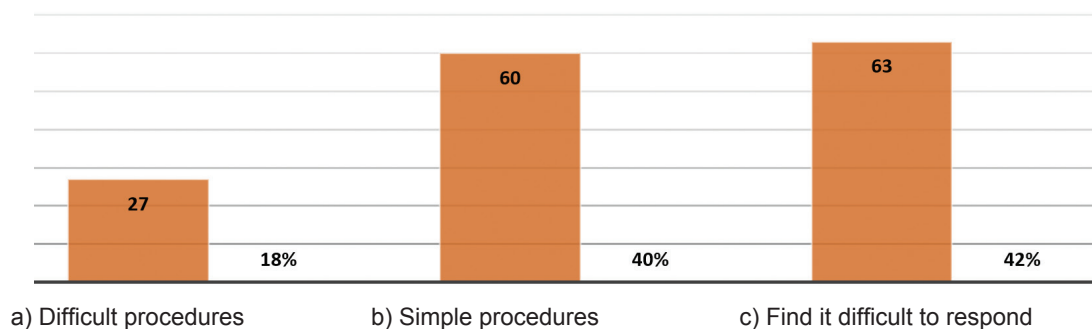
It should be noted that according to the quantitative data, 14% of the interviewed have not used the e-services, since are not interested in them. 9% do not have access to electronic services and 8% do not have the necessary skills to use the electronic system.

3.1.3. THE WAY TO IMPROVE INFORMING POPULATION ABOUT LOCAL ELECTRONIC SERVICES

The study has demonstrated that **using differentiated approaches is important while informing the population**. It will provide those groups with more information which have no access to the internet, are not aware of the appropriate technique and/or do not have the necessary skills to use the electronic services. Consequently, more **face-to-face meetings should be held, messages sent, information shared via press or at public places**. It is especially important for elderly people and those

who have no access to the internet. Besides, the interviewed have emphasized the necessity to share information among the population according to their interest:

"Only one method to share the information cannot be efficient, there must be some alternative ways. Internet is available only in some places. Information sharing should be aimed at specific groups. For instance, information on agriculture might not be interesting for doctors and teachers. It is important what kind of information we share and with whom we share it" - a lawyer.

"Everything needs to be learned, explained and used in practice only after it... though, we have neither a computer nor internet. We can do nothing without it" - a family member of a disabled person.

"It should be considered that not everybody has access to the internet. Posters can be placed in pharmacies and other places to have communication with society" - a lawyer.

"When the City Hall is implementing a program, it should try to share the information. It can spread the information by sending messages" - a single mother.

The respondents have pointed out that it is better **to provide villages with internet** and raise the awareness of the population on the electronic services, to use them more actively -

"One of the barrier to get information is the lack of internet in the municipality. Not everybody has the access to it. There is also a social segment and its representatives are not aware of modern technologies. They prefer to get information in a different way. It would be better if free Wi-Fi was installed in crowded places of the villages and people were provided with the municipal press. It would disseminate the information on the municipal services" -a head of Sakrebulo commission.

It has been mentioned that people who are employed at the self-government should be more actively included in different activities. For instance**, to make a group of people with special knowledge and competence.** They will be responsible to disseminate the information, raise the awareness of the population on the e-services and provide them with the necessary skills. An opinion expressed about the **professional groups** (e.g. using the resource of teachers and doctors) was interesting as well. They have an intensive communication with the population and can contribute to sharing the information:

"First of all, teachers and doctors should be informed and only after it, we can use them as a source of information" - a student girl.

"I will say what should be done. The staff of the City Hall is too big and they have much free time. There are 13 villages in the region and one specialist can be sent to each village. S/he can teach people how to write and send a letter. It can be taught very easily and can be done by everyone" - a male pensioner.

Based on the quantitative research data, the majority of the interviewed (36%) think that it is necessary to offer the service adjusted to the needs and priorities of the vulnerable groups to improve the local services. According to the opinion of 19% of the respondents, the process related to the service should be simplified. Some

respondents (16%) think that the service will be improved when the professionalism and competence of the civil servants are improved. Whereas 14% emphasize the necessity of timely provision of the society with the information on the government e-services via all possible means (e.g. TV, information flyers, FB, website, etc.)

3.2. EFFICIENCY

Within the framework of the study, the efficiency of the local government activities has been assessed in the context of the relevance of the municipal programs and suggestion of the service forms tailored to the citizens` needs. The intensity of usage of the electronic systems by the population, the level of communication on the issues and problems submitted by the people and respond to them have been studied.

3.2.1. STUDYING THE NEEDS OF POPULATION`
BY THE SELF-GOVERNMENT AND THE QUALITY OF RESPONSES

The population asses the issue of ***investigating the needs of specific groups of citizens, their analysis*** and elaboration of the municipal programs by the local government in different ways. The respondents representing the local government, point out that the municipality has a practice of the assessment of needs and municipal programs and action plans are adopted based on it. Though, it has been identified that the study of the population`s needs is conducted with the help and inclusiveness of the CSOs:

> *"In 2019, the research of the population`s needs regarding social factors was conducted. The problems identified were introduced in the budget of 2020"* - a head of Sakrebulo commission.

> *"Practice of the research of the citizens` needs is being gradually improved and implemented. NGOs are also involved in the process. For instance, based on such studies, an amendment has been made to the local budget. Funds for the home care program and the Program for Elimination of Down Syndrome have been involved in the budget"* - a member of Sakrebulo.

Although some citizens do not neglect it and give some cases when the local government gets interested in the needs of the population. According to the majority, the municipal programs only partly reflect the needs of the population and do not always adequately respond to the challenges:

> *"For instance, I can speak about the programs for villages. Every village had funds and the population managed them according to their attitude and necessity. The local authorities went to the population and asked for their needs. I have not participated in it, though I know that the process was transparent and within the framework of this program a stadium named after Mamuka Gorgodze (a rugby player) is being constructed in my village Persati"* -a trainer of the women`s basketball team, teacher.

> *"Families with many children have different kinds of needs and the City Hall can not provide all of them. Though, some priorities are met"* - a father of many children.

"Unfortunately, the infrastructure is in a bad condition... I may say that the river is flooding our street and dams are necessary to be constructed. They say that the funds are aimed at different needs" - an unemployed young man.

"I have not used local programs. The City Hall does not have programs for the victims of violence. It means that they do not meet the demands" - a single mother.

Based on the study data, **the practice of monitoring and assessment of the provided services** is being introduced in Bagdati Municipality. Though it has been pointed out that the representatives of the local authorities need methodological support and professional training to strengthen and activate the existing directions:

"To monitor the implementation of the Economic Development Plan, a group is created of civil servants, as well as the representatives of the private and civil sectors. They meet once every 6 months to monitor the rendered work. Though these first steps forward are not sufficient and I think that it would be better if the municipality is assisted to study the methodology of research conducting. It will help us to continue our activities more efficiently" - a City Hall economist.

"In 2020, the municipality switched to the program budget implying assessment of the obtained results. At the given stage, monitoring and evaluation of the results are done by the sectoral units. To include the population into the evaluation process, it should be interviewed by the qualified organization" - a member of the Sakrebulo commission.

Based on the quantitative study data, most often, citizens apply to the local self-government regarding healthcare issues, such as assistance for medicines or request for covering the operation costs (23%). 19% of the interviewed have applied for social/monetary assistance, 14% applied for the certificate and 12% for the issue of land registration.

While evaluating the level of **response of the self-government to the problems**, the citizens mainly show a positive attitude. The problems of 25% of the interviewed have been settled. 45% of them think that the problems have been partly solved and 13% claim that the self-government had promised to settle the problem, though the process has not been accomplished yet. Only some of them (1%) say that they have been rejected to solve the problems.

The qualitative data has demonstrated that the issues raised by the citizens before the government are partly solved. Though the majority of the interviewed point out that the **local government does not consider the opinion of the population on the quality of the provided services:**

"I have applied to the municipality about the issues on Youth Council and all of them have been positively settled...except 1000 GEL grant which unfortunately was not awarded. It was a very negative fact. If the City Hall does the same, it will be very good" - a student.

"Electric illumination has been installed based on the application and one application is being considered now. It refers to my disabled neighbour who moves in a wheelchair and a road is necessary for him to go outside. Let`s see what we get" - an unemployed young man.

"City Hall has very good programs and services for families with many children, though it would be better to have some other programs as well. When you have so many children, assistance is never sufficient. The children have so many needs. As for my opinion on specific services, nobody has ever asked me about it" - a mother of many children.

While evaluating the quality of the provided services and **response to the problems** of the population by the self-government representatives, the qualitative study data has revealed that the citizens are generally satisfied with the received service. 78% of the interviewed are satisfied with the service provided by the **City Hall**, only 22% are dissatisfied; 81% expressed their gratitude to **Sakrebulo**, while 20% are dissatisfied. 76% of the village population show a positive attitude to the **CityHall representative** and 24% expressed dissatisfaction.

3.2.2. LOCAL PRIORITIES AND NEEDS AND EFFECTIVE MEASURES FOR THEIR SOLUTION

The question "**The needs of which groups are introduced by the local government** in the municipal programs?" was answered in the following way: the majority of the interviewed (46%) have emphasized that the local authorities consider the needs of the whole population of the municipality, whereas 21% think that more attention is paid to the problems of the disabled people. Based on the given answers, the specific needs of some groups (women-3%, women victims of violence - 4%, families with many children - 7%, children and young people - 7%) are not considered. 8% of the interviewed have pointed out that the municipality does not take the specific needs of the population into account. We may assume that the necessities of the vulnerable groups are less considered. It might be partly affected by the passivity of the population and lack of raising their needs and priorities before the local authorities.

According to the quantitative data, the question **"Which directions require more human and financial resources of the local government?"** was answered in the following way: for 56% of the 150 respondents it is healthcare system and social assistance; 47% consider it to be infrastructure, 43% - contribution to economic development and creation of the appropriate environment; 36% - infrastructure (roads, bridges, etc.); 37% - provision of quality drinking water; 28% - creation of the environment adapted to the disabled people, 25% - the creation of support services for the elderly people without care (provision with food and accommodation). 23% think that it is important to settle the sewage problem and reconstruct damaged houses.

21% of the interviewed have emphasized the creation of the services adjusted to the needs of the women victims of violence, as well as food safety and education.

According to the respondents of the qualitative research, more attention should be paid to the **needs and problems of such specific groups** as disabled people, single mothers, families with many children, elderly people, socially vulnerable, internally displaces people, youth, etc.

A special accent was made on ***the necessity of long-term and sustainable programs*** since the respondents think that one-time assistance will not settle the problem and strengthen the vulnerable groups:

> *"One-time financial assistance should be provided in extreme and urgent cases. An accent should be made on the long-term programs"* - a City Hall economist.

The parents of children with disabilities have spoken about ***the necessity of the municipal supporting programs for people with disabilities.*** Due to the lack of specialized services, they have to take children to Tbilisi for procedures and special massages. It is a hard economic burden for the families. Funding and including these services into the municipal programs is of vital importance. The respondents have also emphasized the necessity to provide the children with disabilities with special books, computers and special equipment:

> *"The programs of assistance for disabled people should be increased. Children are especially in need of help. They need some special food to provide their physical development. They require special physical exercise and massage. I have to take my child to Tbilisi for the special procedures. It is not reimbursed...Reimbursement of such expenses should be increased"* - a family member of a disabled person.

Surprisingly, though disabled people need more help and should be provided with different services, the families are often deprived of the package of social assistance, since they try to provide their children with necessary services and rehabilitation:

> *"Since we have two disabled children in the family, we bought a car. They need rehabilitation and as I have to take them to different places, I cannot use means of ordinary transport. They have stopped giving social assistance to us. We bought the car by the credit"* -a family member of a disabled person.

The need to ***develop agriculture, strengthen economics and create employment programs for population***, has been also identified. It would contribute to the solution of many social problems and prevent massive youth migration from the villages :

> *"Our citizens should not go abroad. The necessary environment can be created here. There should be some employment programs in the municipality for young people or small entrepreneurs"*- a female pensioner.

> *"Employment is a priority to prevent the young workforce flow from the municipality. I also think that the municipality should be able to stimulate some business ideas"*- an unemployed young man.

The solution of the infrastructure and sewage problems has been identified as a priority-

> *"All the directions are important but the infrastructure must be the most important one. There is also a problem with sewage. When you are considered to be the European country, it is embarrassing that 70% of people have problems with the sewage system in the 21st century"* - an unemployed teenager.

Young respondents have pointed out that it is necessary to provide youth with ***non-formal education***, raise their awareness and ***open different circles*** to promote their development and raise the level of the education:

"If we arrange priorities, unemployment will take the first place. Besides, the awareness of young people should be raised. There is a lack of nonformal education in Bagdati. There is Youth Council and Sky Club but it is insufficient" - a student.

To provide effective work of the local self-government, promptly meet the local needs, and loosen difficult bureaucratic mechanism, some respondents think that the **policy of decentralization should be speeded up**, the **authority of the municipality should be increased regarding some issues** and the **authority** between sectoral ministries and the local government **should be differentiated**. Some of them think that it is very important to increase the role of the municipality concerning the following issues: granting the status of a vulnerable person, its suspension or reinstatement, administration of natural resources, administration of roads, the denomination of the municipal units, etc.:

"In specific issues, it is necessary to differentiate the competence of munici-palities and ministries. For instance, it may refer to the issues of environmental protection and water supply. If it is under the control of a municipality, better and more efficient measures might be planned" - a City Hall lawyer.

"These issues cause misunderstanding and discontent very often. People complain that the centralized system does not depict the real picture and it would be better if such issues are solved by people who are better aware of the situation on a specific place" - a member of Sakrebulo.

"One of the sensitive issues in this regard is granting or stopping the status of the socially vulnerable person. I think it would be better if the role of the munici-pality is strengthened in this regard"- a City Hall economist.

3.3. INCLUSIVENESS/PARTICIPATION

3.3.1. ENCOURAGING POPULATION PARTICIPATION AND THE LEVEL OF INVOLVEMENT

The citizens show different attitude to the question "Do the local civil servants realize the importance of the citizens` inclusiveness and participation?". The majority of the interviewed (47%) think that they (civil servants) only partly realize the necessity of population participation. For 31%, the local officials realize its importance, 11% give a negative answer and 9% cannot answer the question.

The 30% of the interviewed think that the local government *stimulates/provides the citizens` inclusiveness* while identifying the local priorities. 27% think that their participation is encouraged in the process of the local budget discussion, 17% - in the discussion of the citizens` initiatives and municipal programs (11%). 11% of the respondents think that their participation in the identification of the citizens` needs is provided.

The quantitative study has revealed that *the population is not well aware of the forms of the citizens` involvement*. Consequently, it is followed by the low level of participation of the population. Based on the quantitative data, the most common form of participation is inclusion in the settlement meetings (31%). It is also proved by the
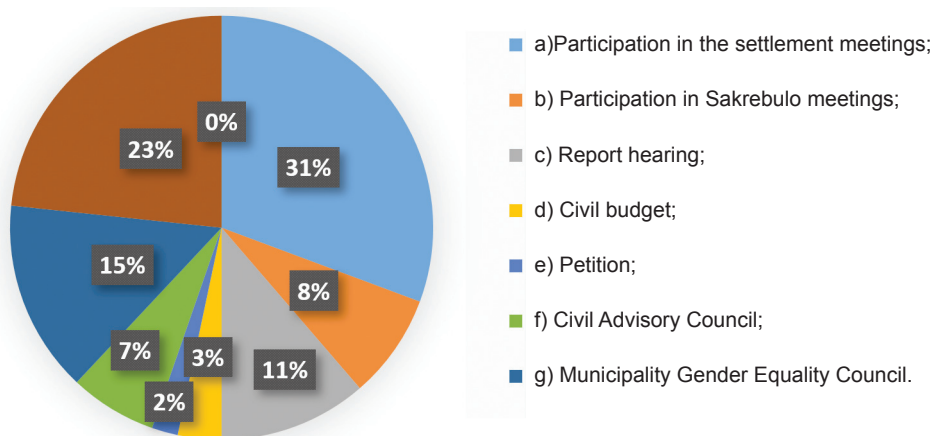
qualitative data. The majority of the respondents point out with satisfaction that the level of citizens` participation has greatly increased compared to the previous years, demonstrated not only by the legislation but the interest of population as well:

"Inclusiveness of the citizens is higher than it was in the previous period. Since it is necessary to conduct a general meeting in the settlement for the implementation of certain projects, in the process of planning of certain activities, we (as municipal representatives) invite people to conduct studies, etc. If it used to take longer to make the citizens come to the municipality and involve in different activities, it is much easier now. The practice of public reports was introduced a few years ago and citizens actively participate in them" - a City Hall economist.

"The settlement meetings are most efficient since the citizens identify and choose the proposals appropriate for them. They are dominant during the meetings and the level of inclusiveness and trust is higher than usual"- a head of Sakrebulo Commission.

According to the quantitative study data, the level of the population participation in Sakrebulo meetings (8%) and report hearings (11%), is quite low. Only some respondents (7%) have participated in the working process of the Civil Advisory Council and some of them (2%) have appealed to the government. 23% of the interviewed point out that have used none of the participation forms (see Diagram #3).

WCHICH FORMS OF THE CIVIL PARTICIPATION HAVE YOU USED?

- a) Participation in the settlement meetings;
- b) Participation in Sakrebulo meetings;
- c) Report hearing;
- d) Civil budget;
- e) Petition;
- f) Civil Advisory Council;
- g) Municipality Gender Equality Council.

The passivity of the interviewed **to share the remarks on the rendered service** with self-government indicates the lack of inclusiveness of population. The majority of the respondents (57%) point out that they have not even tried to share their remarks with the local structures and only some of them (27%) have tried this practice. Most of the respondents (56%) have shared the remarks on the provided services with the self-government via letters, 34% have chosen the form of face-to-face meetings and only 10% of the respondents have expressed their opinion on the FB page.

Based on the qualitative data, only some part of the population is active and tries to get involved in the meetings organized by the self-government, though the level of inclusiveness of certain groups is not high to introduce their needs in the local programs:

"There are many people of special needs who are unaware of the processes at local self-government. For instance, women or children are not included in the process and I think that decisions should be taken from their perspective" - a lawyer.

Everyday problems and concerns are named as **causes of the passivity of the population.** *They prevent them from participation:*

"Population is busy with its problems and is less eager to be included in the administration process" – a female pensioner.

Besides, specific problems hindering the participation of the people with special needs, have been identified. The environment and infrastructure which are not adapted for disabled people, problem to move, lack of computers to express their opinions on the issues interesting and actual for them, have been listed among the causes -

"My family member is a disabled person and if he has a computer, he will be actively involved in the life of the municipality. It is better for him" - a family member of a disabled person.

"I think that some people are included, though a disabled person has a problem to move. It means that s/he cannot participate and is left beyond the process" - a lawyer.

3.3.2. SOLUTIONS FOR ENCOURAGING COOPERATION AMONG SELF-GOVERNMENT AND POPULATION

To ensure the inclusiveness of citizens, the majority of the interviewed (43%) think that conducting meetings and consultations with the population by the authorized representatives is very important. For 30%, to provide participation, it is important to consider the initiatives of citizens through the introduction of civil budget practice. 11% think that it is important to involve citizens in the process of municipal program elaboration and budget discussion process.

To increase the inclusiveness and participation of citizens, some respondents emphasize that ***civil society organizations play an important role***. Besides, the interviewers make a special accent on using human, intellectual and material resources of the NGOs to raise the awareness of the population, study their needs and identify the problems:

"The role of civic organizations is of vital importance to raise awareness and introduce the existing legal mechanisms to the citizens. I think that they have not only intellectual but the material resource as well" - a member of Sakrebulo.

"Civil Society Organizations always look for the target groups in society and try to put the interests of these groups first at municipalities. Consequently, they manage to implement their initiatives. More civic organizations we have, more people they cover" - a mother of many children.

The above mentioned is proved by the opinion of the quantitative study respondents. Some of them (19%) think that ***civil organizations play a very important***

role in education and raising the awareness of citizens on *PAR.* Besides, they (NGOs) actively control and monitor the implementation of the reform (14%). 16% consider that NGOs can advocate issues at the local level and submit the needs of the population to the local government (15%). Though, the majority of the population point out that the number of local civic organizations who are actively involved in local political dialogues is very small. 55% of the respondents know only one organization operating in this direction, 44% - more than two. Only some of them (1%) can name more than three organizations.

Based on the study outcomes, it is evident that in spite of the fact that the population emphasized the role and importance of civil organizations in the proper implementation of the public reform, informing the population and advocating their needs, their activity and work at the local level needs strengthening. To reach this aim, the local civil organizations should be supported.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The research outcomes have shown that the population have realized and believe that proper implementation of PAR at the local level will greatly contribute to the improvement of the citizens` life and welfare. Though, on the other hand, it is clear that the essence of the reform is not familiar to the majority of the population.

Problems regarding the implementation of the electronic services at the local level have been identified as well. Very often, they are affected by the lack of awareness of the population on the types of electronic services, lack of knowledge, skills and internet in different locations.

Though a big part of the population participating in the study admits the transparency of the work rendered by the self-government, improvement of the communication with citizens, the progress regarding responses to the citizens` needs and problems, the issue of informing the vast majority of the population on the Public Administration Reform, as well as types of the local services, remain challenges. The level of inclusiveness of the population in the activities of municipality, decision-making process and advocacy of their priorities in the municipal programs is very low.

The majority of the interviewed express their solidarity and say that civil society organizations play an important role in raising the awareness of the population, studying the needs of specific groups, identifying the problems and advocacy of the local priorities.

To ensure the efficiency of the local self-government, a part of the interviewed think that the policy of decentralization should be accelerated, the authority of the municipality should be increased regarding some issues and the authorities of the ministries and local governments should be differentiated.

To overcome the problems identified by the study, it is better to consider the following recommendations:

TO LOCAL AUTHORITIES

TO IMPROVE INFORMING POPULATION ABOUT ELECTRONIC SERVICES

➢ The municipality needs to disseminate information on the public administration and use all the resources of the self-government (FB and websites, media, face-to-face meetings with the population);

➢ It is important to share the information on the local electronic systems with the population using different methods, considering the age of the target auditory, skills for using the electronic platforms and location;

➢ To share detailed instructions and information about e-service availability on municipality websites and social networks. The delivery of printed materials in public places must be procured (schools, pharmacy, streets, shops, municipalities, etc.) for those who have no internet access due to the lack of coverage area or not having appropriate skills of getting information;

➢ To develop the skills necessary for using e-services in population, special service centers or technical mobile groups should be created. They will provide the population with practical assistance;

➢ To use the resources of the local professional groups (doctors and teachers) for spreading the information on e-systems and services among the population;

➢ To carry active negotiations (self-government) with internet providers to enhance the process of internalization or strengthen internet provision and to procure the availability of the access of e-services in Bagdati Municipality.

IMPROVING THE EFFICIENCY OF ELECTRONIC SERVICES

➢ Priority needs of vulnerable groups of the municipality must be foreseen while elaborating programs and services at a local level. Therefore, it is reasonable to raise awareness and competence of municipality employees;

➢ To conduct needs assessment with the purpose of professional development in self-governmental units and develop a vocational education strategy for municipality staff members where the detailed plan will be represented;

➢ It is important to strengthen the impact of citizen service efficiency monitoring and assessment mechanisms. It will allow the municipality to evaluate the level of population satisfaction with the provided services, efficiency and purposefulness of the budget.

STRENGTHENING THE INCLUSIVENESS/PARTICIPATION OF CITIZENS

➢ The local population must be timely informed about the availability of participation forms to increase its inclusiveness in political processes at a local level. Also, they must be informed about the details of public meetings and hearings via mass-media, information uploaded and shared on social networks and websites (at least one week earlier);

➢ The mechanism of participation of the population, the rule of calling Civil Advisory Council, Gender Equality Council and Council of Persons with Disabilities should be revised; the intensity of these mechanisms should be raised and inclusiveness of the citizens provided;

➢ To implement "Civil Budget" programs together with the additional forms of local population involved in the activities of self-government institutions;

➢ It is preferable that the resolution of representative and executive bodies of a municipality to be based on arguments of the Sakrebulo and opinions of Civil Advisory Council members and participants via implementing legislative changes.

TO CENTRAL AUTHORITIES

➢ To strengthen the autonomy of the municipality and pursue the pro-active policy of decentralization, to grant more authority to a local government, to distribute financial resources, and mark boundaries between central and local authorities, to increase the possibilities for local citizens to receive rigid and flexible supportive action and effective appeal to the existing problems;

➢ It is desirable to foresee the recommendations of the social department while decision-making processes to grant, stop, or restore the status of socially vulnerable people;

➢ To raise the authority of the municipality in settling the issues such as administration of municipal roads and natural resources, naming municipal units.

TO CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

➢ To consolidate civil society organizations in Bagdati Municipality and address their human and technical resources to a group of people with special needs and advocating their interests and necessities;

➢ The active dissemination of the information about PAR must be ensured by civil society organizations in Bagdati Municipality via existing technical and human resources and facilitating supportive actions for the population to have an access to e-services (giving instructions, strengthening skills, providing information, etc.);

➢ To implement advocacy activities for strengthening further development of civil society organizations at the local level for the attention of both, national authorities and international actors.

IMERETI REGION

THE REPORT OF NEEDS

ASSESSMENT OF POPULATION

IN THE PROCESS OF PAR IMPLEMENTATION

IN KHONI MUNICIPALITY
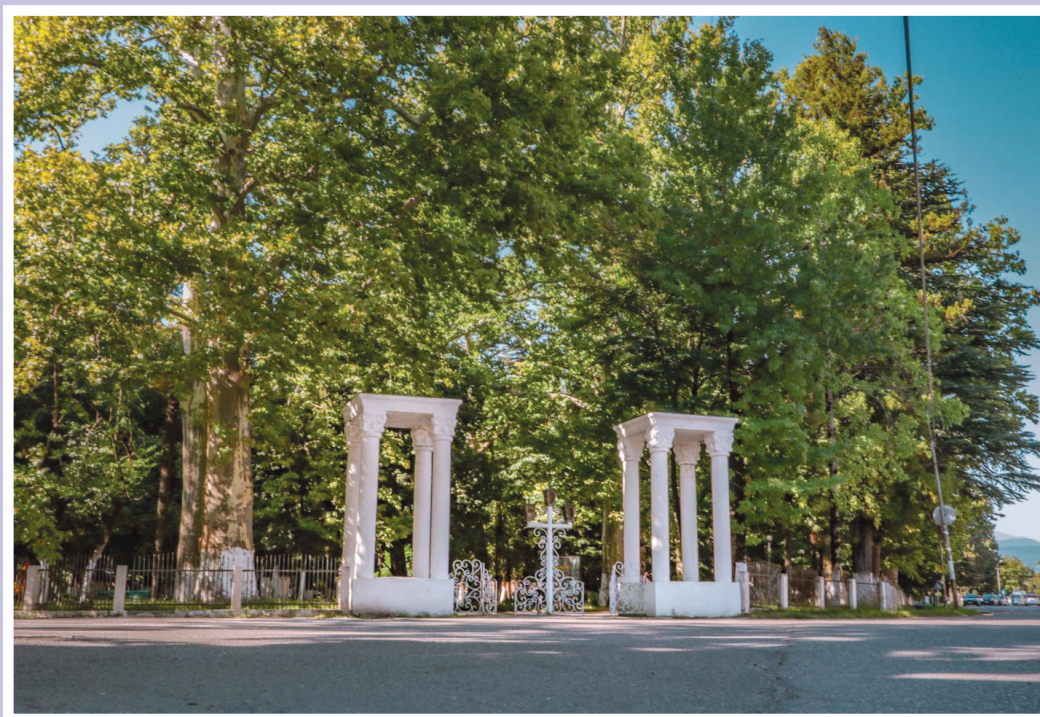
www.fsokhumi.ge

INTRODUCTION

Georgia is making fundamental changes on the way of integration into the European Union. Since signing "EU-Georgia Association Agreement", the in-depth Public Administration Reform has started. Based on it, serious outcomes have been reached in regard to open, transparent, accountable administration and better service of citizens.

The work related to the local self-government is a very important part of the reform. Two main tasks were identified in the action plan of PAR of 2019-2020 regarding the self-government: a) extension of the power of the local government for the strengthening of self-government; b) gradual development and improvement of the electronic services of municipalities with the view of improving availability of electronic services in local governments.

A discussion is in progress in the country regarding expanding the power of self-government (decentralization of social work, differentiating authority with several central structures, supporting fulfilling the already existing authority) and the risks (lack of competence of local authorities, weak mechanisms of already existing authority, etc.) following it.

Nowadays, modules of electronic service have been implemented at the local level (It is planned to introduce other models from 2021). The advantages of the electronic service are clear on the one hand. For instance, it makes the bureaucratic processes simple, comfortable and transparent. Though, on the other hand, the lack of its efficiency is evident which is affected by the problems regarding the access to the service. It will prevent citizens from easy access to the services and affect the lack of their inclusiveness in the local governance.

THE AIM AND METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH

Cultural-Humanitarian Fund "Sukhumi" with Fund of Women Entrepreneurs and The Imereti Scientists` Union "Spectri" is implementing the project "A Common forum for CSOs from Guria, Imereti and Racha-Lechkhumi for PAR Roadmap monitoring" (the project is supported by the European Union). The project is aimed to contribute to the PAR implementation at the local level.

The aim of the research is to study the needs of Khoni municipality population in regard to efficiency, transparency and inclusiveness of the services provided by the local authorities, get evidence-based information and elaborate recommendations to improve the local services. The study has been conducted by two CSOs of Khoni municipality - Centre of Education and Development "Edelweiss" and the IDPs' initiative group of Khoni.

The research methodology: quantitative and qualitative methods were used in the study. The study tool was elaborated on the initial stage and its indicators were agreed with the project partners.

A triangulation approach was used for the data interpretation and through using it, complying the quantitative and qualitative data, the main findings of the study have been identified.

The respondents have been selected according to the cluster and quota selection principle, and different demographic profile of the citizens. The total population of the study consisted

of Khoni municipality citizens. 180 people were included in the study. The research is representable and the data can be generalized. The study was conducted in March-April-May, 2020. There were some restrictions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Keywords: Khoni municipality. Electronic service. Public Administration Reform. Local needs. Inclusiveness/Participation of citizens.

BASIC INFORMATION

150 people were interviewed within the framework of the quantitative study, including 94 women (63%) and 69 men (37%). 30 respondents participated in the qualitative study (17 women and 13 men). The total number of study respondents comprised 180 people (111 women and 69 men).

150 respondents were interviewed through face-to-face interview method; 4 in-depth interviews with local experts and 4 focus group discussions with local social groups have been conducted.

The respondents of the quantitative study included the citizens of special status: socially vulnerable **-** 24%; internally displaced people -19%; parents of many children - 5%; people with disabilities -11%; single mothers - 8%; (the rest 34%- without any special status). The age of the respondents ranges between 18-77; 18-34 - 37%; 35-64 - 46%.

The target groups of the qualitative study were single mothers and mothers with many children, socially vulnerable women, small entrepreneurs, budget organization representatives, teenagers, people with disabilities or their family members, IDPs and members of the Women`s Club of Khoni.

The employment status (main activity) of the quantitative study respondents was as follows: unemployed - 40%; civil servant/employed by the state - 8%; pensioner - 11%; self-employed (entrepreneur, economic executive) - 32%; budget organization - 4%; student/pupil - 4%. Based on the quantitative study data, the income of 17% of the respondents is less than 100 GEL. The average income of 50% of the respondents ranges between 101 - 500 GEL.

TRANSPARENCY OF LOCAL ADMINISTRATION

The activity of the self-government regarding transparency of the service provided to the citizens has been assessed in both (quantitative and qualitative) components. Through the questions of the study tools, the respondents expressed their opinion on the progress of PAR. According to the local experts of the study, self-government is a very complex institutional mechanism and reform or changes should be always carried out to meet challenges:

> *"The reform of the self-government is a response to the needs of a specific territorial unit population. Reform always follows development. Ongoing processes are very positive" -* ***a chairman of N(N)LE "The Youth Centre".***

*"In respect of transparency, it is important to improve the internal e-systems. We know that the City Hall units of Khoni Municipality have switched to the e-systems, like united treasury system connected to finances; united electronic clerical work system, etc. It is very good. When the principles of the efficient work are implemented in the executive structures, it makes a positive impact on population"- **a member of Sakrebulo.***

*"It is a very positive fact since any reform means renovation and change of the existing system for the better. The future will show whether and when it makes an impact on the self-government" - **a chairman of N(N)LE "Step Khoni".***

Despite the positive comments, the respondents have pointed out that much should be done. New modules need be to implemented, and competent specialists are necessary to be included in the process. All this will contribute to the improvement of the service provided to citizens by the municipality:

*"As for the service provision, I think that it is gradually improving in regard to accountability and transparency. The information on the challenges and activities of the municipality becomes efficient. So, I think that we have important achievements regarding the PAR" - **public sector, a lawyer.***

The respondents answered the question about the service availability:

*"Electronic services are not available for the citizens due to the following reasons - they are not informed, or have the information and do not have the necessary skills, or computers. Consequently, the system created for the population is not available for them" - **a chairman of N(N)LE "Step Khoni".***

*"There is no better system now. The information is being spread and it is available for the population as well, though, whether it is used by them, that is another question" - **a member of Sakrebulo.***

The target groups of the focus-group discussion spoke about the awareness on PAR, the sources of information and expressed their evaluations. It turned out that the majority is less informed on the reform. Mainly, they get information from TV and public meetings. The awareness of the members of the Women`s Club is a bit higher. They have partly dealt with the issue:

*"I am informed, people speak about it and it is often heard on TV"; "On the basis of our meetings, I am more or less informed on the reform" -**members of the Women`s Club.***

*"I am less informed and it would be good if more information was spread. I am for the changes...I have heard about it on TV" - **a female teacher.***

*"I know that the authority of a local government should be extended by the central government" - **a housewife.***

*"I have heard about it from TV and (municipality) FB page, though I have not gone into details" - **a social worker.***

The respondents expressed their opinions on the ways of popularization of the issue and think that *it is good to disseminate the information through the direct communication; it would be better if more information was spread via TV; it is better to share the information through the internet.*

The level of awareness of the citizens on PAR was demonstrated by the quantitative study as well:

DO YOU HAVE ANY INFORMATION ABOUT PAR?

35	77	36
24%	52%	24%
a) Yes	b) Partly	c) No
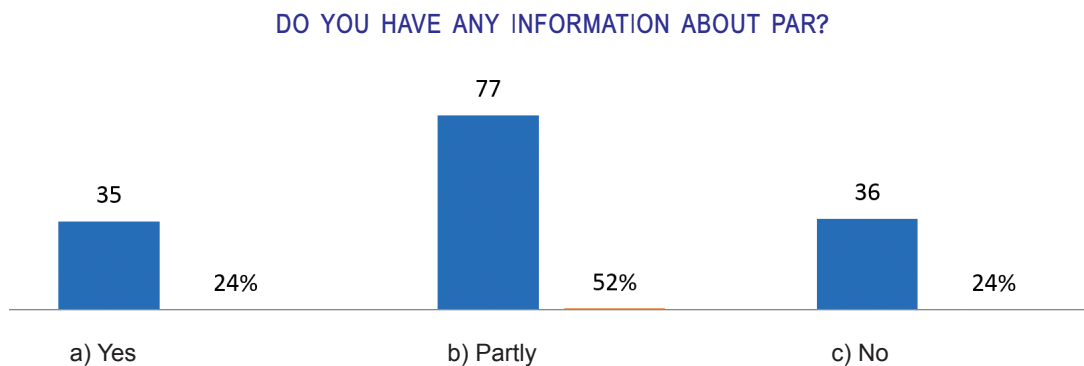
37% of the respondents have been informed on the reform through TV; 17% - by the NGO representatives; 20% of the participants received the information at the meetings with the representatives of governmental structures; 17% of them got the information from the municipality FB/website (9% could not cite the source). 47% of the quantitative study respondents think that the reform will improve the quality of citizens` service; 33% think that is will less improve and according to the 9%, it will not improve the quality of the service. 11% could not answer the question.

The study questions have identified whether online announcements about vacancies or other public information (e.g. information on the municipality budget/property, administrative costs or procurements) are available for the citizens. According to the local experts of the study, there is access to the vacancies, though a better form could have been suggested to the population:

> *"Though the vacancies are shared on the webpage, it would be better if they were shared through the City Hall and municipality and FB pages. The local population would have more access to them" - **a member of Sakrebulo.***

> *"The information on specific vacancies is announced via https://www.hr.ge/ in the municipality and anybody can receive detailed information including the phone number of the responsible person. There will be no problem regarding the access" -**public sector, a lawyer.***

It turned out that the information on the budget formation is available only for a small part. It refers to such active groups of citizens as Civil Advisory Council and its members at the City Hall, members of the Women`s Club:

> *"The municipality does not know the complete list of its property. A relevant commission is created and in 2016, some works were done (i.e. inventarization of the whole property). The work should be duly accomplished" - **a member of Sakrebulo.***

"Quite diversified and detailed information on the activities of the units and NNLEs is shared. Communication through e-mail khonismeria@yahoo.com is a very effective form. It is convenient for the population since they can apply to the self-government and get the answer online" - a chairman of N(N)LE "The Youth Centre".

"The main information and news are shared through the City Hall FB page. But there is less information on budget and property" - a male entrepreneur.

"Mainly the information uploaded on the FB pages of the City Hall and Sakrebulo covers social and infrastructural programs" - a community activist.

"Less information is shared through such means. We mainly receive the information on the current activities via the FB page" - a female teacher.

A part of citizens thinks that provided information is general:

"We get aware of the information, though not in details We hardly ever have access to the information on vacancies" - a young IDP.

The local experts of the study answered the questions regarding the level of informing the population on the ways and forms of e-service use; the means of informing population; availability of these forms. According to the study experts` positions, electronic administration is more efficient for the regulation of the self-government internal activities. Citizens do not use them actively and some additional events are necessary to conduct in this regard. It is necessary to do the gap analysis and elaborate on the challenge-response strategy:

"From my point of view, the self-government uses the electronic forms of administration effectively for internal structural usage, since it has human and technical resources for it. The population does not use it efficiently and it is not affected only by one factor. It cannot be said that population is not informed on the electronic service forms of the municipality" - a chairman of N(N)LE "The Youth Centre".

Based on the quantitative research data, the majority of the citizens are partly informed (59%) on the municipal electronic services, while 25% are not informed.

TO WHAT EXTENT ARE YOU INFORMED ABOUT MUNICIPAL ELECTRONIC SERVICES?

a) Not informed	b) More or less informed	c) Informed	d) Not interested.
37 — 25%	86 — 59%	20 — 14%	3 — 2%
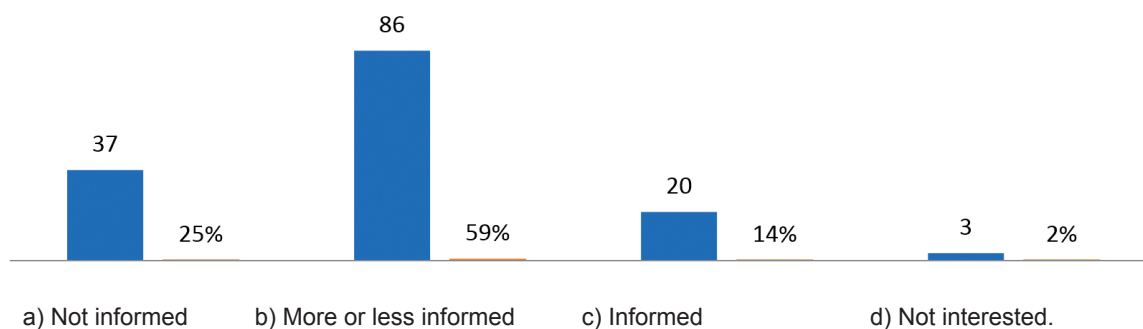
The informed respondents have received the information on the electronic services from the municipality webpage/FB page (37%); from the representatives of NGOs (25%); at the meetings with the authority representatives (10%); from TV (10%) and other ways (e.g. neighbour, family member, press -17%).

The study outcomes` analysis indicates the level of success of the electronic administration systems implemented in the self-government units. The majority of the focus-group participants cannot answer the question. It is affected either by the lack of awareness on the systems or the lack of access to them.

Those, who use the electronic service admit that implementation of the electronic services has made the relationship between population and governmental structures very flexible. According to their evaluation, it was much easier to receive the service and characterize the service as comfortable and convenient:

> *"I have used this service and applied through the City Hall social network. I needed some consultation on documents. It was convenient and comfortable"- a female community activist.*

> *"It is convenient of course. You save more time and energy. I am informed and actively use it"- a female employee of the budget organization.*

The focus-groups have revealed that the citizens are not mainly aware of the electronic service types.

> *"I do not actively use electronic services to receive information. I read the newspaper "Khoni" and find out the news of the week" - a female pensioner.*

According to the information of focus-group discussion participants, most often, they use social networks:

> *"I actively track the FB page and use e-mail"- a member of the women`s club.*

> *"I constantly track the work of FB and webpage, get aware of the news" - a social worker.*

The qualitative study has demonstrated the types of electronic service received during the last year:

WHICH ELECTRONIC SERVICES DID YOU USE DURING THE LAST YEAR?

Service	%	Value
k) Other (have not used);	7%	10
n) Have no necessary skills	23%	35
m) Have no access;	4%	6
l) Not interested;	14%	21
j) Registration for the meeting;	0%	
i) Getting information on Sakrebulo meeting agenda/minutes;	1%	2
h) Getting information on normative acts/ resolutions;	4%	6
g) Getting information on procurement plan/report;	2%	3
f) Getting information on budget;	11%	16
e) Getting information about reports;	13%	19
d)Electronic petition;	0%	
c)Submission of the complaint, proposal;	2%	3
b) Searching for the municipality contact information;	22%	33
a) Online announcement about vacancy.	27%	40

As the diagram shows, the total number of interviewed who did not use the service (are not interested, have no access, have no special skills) comprises 48%. The most requested is the information on the announced vacancies (27%) and information on contact details (22%).

The respondents of the quantitative study have also answered the question about the most used electronic services. According to the answers, 26% use the Facebook page of the City Hall, 21% use the municipality official webpage and only 6% use the Facebook page of Sakrebulo. www.my.gov.ge-civil portal was mentioned by the 6% of the interviewed. For some respondents (1%) the webpage of the regional administration is not popular. It should be noted that the number of people using none of the pages was quite big (38%).

The study experts shared their vision, whether the population is well informed about the forms and ways of using the electronic service and if there are any preventing factors. They think that the citizens are being informed, though the work in this regard should become more active and all branches of the government should be included in the process. Besides, the lack of internet prevents population from using the service. There are some villages with no access to the internet. The social status of the citizens should also be considered: their majority do not have an appropriate technical basis, cannot buy an internet package and have no necessary skills.

People are concerned that there is "an ageing" tendency of the municipality:

"The usage, administration and access to the electronic forms depend on minimal knowledge of our population. They do not have these skills. If we look through the age structure of municipality population, we will see that its bigger part consists of elderly people who do not have access to the internet" - **a chairman of N(N)LE "The Youth Centre".**

"The interest of population is low. There is no access to the internet in villages. I think that face-to-face meetings will better provide the population with information than via FB posts. Comments on the internet services may be made at the meetings" - **a public sector, lawyer.**

"Information boards should be hung in crowded places. All kinds of information about the municipality will be placed on them and it will be transparent as well as available for the population. They will get more information in this way" - **a member of Sakrebulo.**

"It is necessary to raise awareness. It would be good if meetings were held in every village and district" **- a young IDP.**

"Information should be shared through different means. For instance, some people do not even know how to use the internet and to get access to the information it should be disseminated through TV" - **a female teacher.**

"We are partly informed, but it would be better if this information would reach the rural population" - **a Women`s Club member.**

To contribute to the PAR success, 43% of the interviewed think that it is necessary to inform citizens on electronic services through different methods:

WHICH ASPECTS NEED TO BE FOCUSED ON DURING THE REFORM TO IMPROVE THE SERVICE PROVIDED TO CITIZENS?

Aspect	Percentage	Value
g) Do not know/ cannot answer	8%	12
f) Simplifying the process of receiving the service	6%	9
e)Extension of the service and coverage area (to provide access)	3%	5
d) Increase the public setrvants` salary	2%	3
c)Offering the service adjusted to the needs and priorities of especially vulnerable groups	21%	34
b)Raising the competence of public servants	17%	27
a)Timely and complete provision of the society with information on the governmental e-services (via TV, information)	43%	69

While talking about the level of transparency in the municipality, it was mentioned that the Sakrebulo has approved a strategic document to raise the level of municipality transparency and conscience. The document involves all the challenges of the self-government in this regard and the plan of filling the gaps.

The representatives of the self-government point out that there are forms of accountability. For instance, the Mayor of municipality holds an annual meeting and submits the report to the population. The members of Sakrebulo submit their annual report to voters as well, though it is not sufficient. The respondents are concerned that as a rule, such meetings are attended by the same people and consequently, it does not have the necessary effect:

"The members of Sakrebulo, municipality, Mayor and Deputy Mayors, heads of the departments should meet population more often and citizens should be actively involved in the process as well. The level of accountability will be raised by sincere meetings and not formal ones. Besides, it will be promoted by different people attending meetings as well. Attendants should not be made to come. It would be good if people interested in the issues come and use the information in their activity and daily life" - **a member of Sakrebulo.**

"I have attended the Mayor`s presentations in the public or in an open space where a report is represented to the population. I can say the same about members of Sakrebulo. They hold such meetings, invite specific groups and submit reports on the rendered work. As for the improvement of accountability, I think that work should continue in this regard" - **public sector, a lawyer.**

According to the opinion of the experts, the meetings for report submission can be planned in villages. Besides, representatives of the specific sectors like teachers or private industry should be invited to them. They should cover all the segments and municipality should manage the processes: "If they are not interested, we should suggest and make them interested in the municipality projects".

The majority of the qualitative study participants have never attended the presentations on the activities held by the local authorities. Some of them remind the Mayor`s report and very rare examples of accountability of Sakrebulo:

> *"Reports are submitted but there is less feedback or citizens` opinions are not later introduced in the local policy"* - **a young IDP.**

The members of the Women`s Club have a better practice of the dialogue with the government. They have periodical meetings with the Mayor and express their opinions on the problems of women, IDPs and other vulnerable groups and the ways of solutions. They emphasize the indifference of society:

> *"There have been cases when a Mayor wanted to meet us"; "We cannot say that it is not transparent, though the local population does not show interest and consequently, the local authorities do not do their best in this regard"* - **a member of the Women`s Club.**

THE EFFICIENCY OF LOCAL SERVICES

One of the expressions of the success of PAR is an efficient local service. The most important in this regard is whether the existing programs and projects are tailored to the needs of different groups of citizens.

According to the study experts` position, despite the people in municipality try to distribute the local resources equally, it is difficult to speak about rational local policy without the study of needs, identification of problems and the study of the effect of the implemented programs.

The service for the vulnerable groups is mainly identified on the basis of the received applications and information provided by the Mayor`s representatives. Separate studies have not been conduct. Though the elaborated programs are targeted ones, there are still some challenges:

> *"They are adjusted to needs, though there are more vulnerable groups left beyond the programs and they need to be helped"* - **a chairman of N(N)LE "The Youth Centre".**

According to the experts, the main gap of the programs is their short-term effect and

> *"It would be better if accents were made on the long-term services"* - a **chairman of N(N)LE "Step Khoni".**

> *"It is hard to say whether they are tailored to the needs, since the issue has not been studied by the municipality and unfortunately is neither to be done in future. There is not research practice and it needs to be implemented. Only after it, we can speak about the level of its adjustment to the population`s needs. However, the studies should be conducted by the competent people of the field. It may not be the City Hall specialist. It may be an invited specialist"* - **a member of Sakrebulo.**

Some recent examples from the positive practice have been mentioned. A study of social needs has been conducted with the collaboration of the NGOs (PIN, Fund "Sukhumi"). As a result of the study, a social strategy and action plan have been elaborated, specific innovative programs to assist different vulnerable groups have been involved in the budget.

The respondents expressed their negative attitude to the one-time assistance programs. When vulnerable groups are provided with financial assistance, nobody is interested in the changes caused by it and nobody cares whether their conditions have been changed for better or not:

"Any issue needs research. Especially when it refers to budget administration. More had to be done in this regard. The municipality has a lack of practice in this direction" - **public sector, a lawyer.**

According to the study experts, the research and monitoring are conducted by the qualified NGOs and the process is active during the project implementation. Though after the project completion, the dynamics become low. The local groups of citizens are very rarely included in the monitoring:

"I am very worried that population is not actively involved in the process and monitoring is not conducted, though NGOs and Fund "Sukhumi" do monitoring" - **public sector, a lawyer.**

"Civil society should be included in the process, though these groups should not be affected by politics. As for the hindering conditions, I think that it is prevented by the will of the municipality. There are no other barriers for me" - **a member of Sakrebulo.**

The research participants expressed their opinion on how the local programs meet the citizens' needs and whose interests should more be introduced in new budget measures. The experts named the specific groups and their needs. According to them, they need to be advocated and relevant events should be held in regard to their social protection and strengthening. The interviewed unanimously emphasize the necessity of caring and responsible policy against disabled people. It implies the protection of their interests and provides the adoption of stricter policy against their family members:

"We revealed the cases when the existence of a disabled person was hidden by the family. The issue needs a special approach. A comprehensive work should be done in this regard to raise their awareness. Besides, an adapted environment should be created. New buildings are being adapted now, though, first of all, executive and representative organs should be adapted " - **public sector, a lawyer.**

"These groups include disabled people and victims of violence. But unfortunately, the number of victims of violence is much bigger than officially registered and cover many categories. If these groups are assisted and their problems advocated, it will be possible to protect them. It will promote their strengthening and socialization into the society" - **a member of Sakrebulo.**

People are disappointed with the gaps in home care service. They have pointed out that the issue is politically seasoned and there have been discussions on it for a long time. Though, the lack of resources prevent its realization: *"There is no home care service and the situation caused by the pandemic has raised this issue".*

The list of the most vulnerable categories included the segment of unemployed people who are not in the base of socially vulnerable people and do not benefit from any programs:

"To my opinion, the local authorities should make an accent on the unemployed segment of the society. The segment which includes middle-aged unemployed people with no pension or other kind of income" - a **chairman of N(N)LE "Step Khoni".**

According to the citizens:

"More effort is necessary to assist people with disabilities, socially vulnerable and lonely elderly ones. These categories need the support most of all" **-a socially vulnerable man.**

"I think that very often, the families who are especially in need of social assistance, are left beyond them" - **a single mother.**
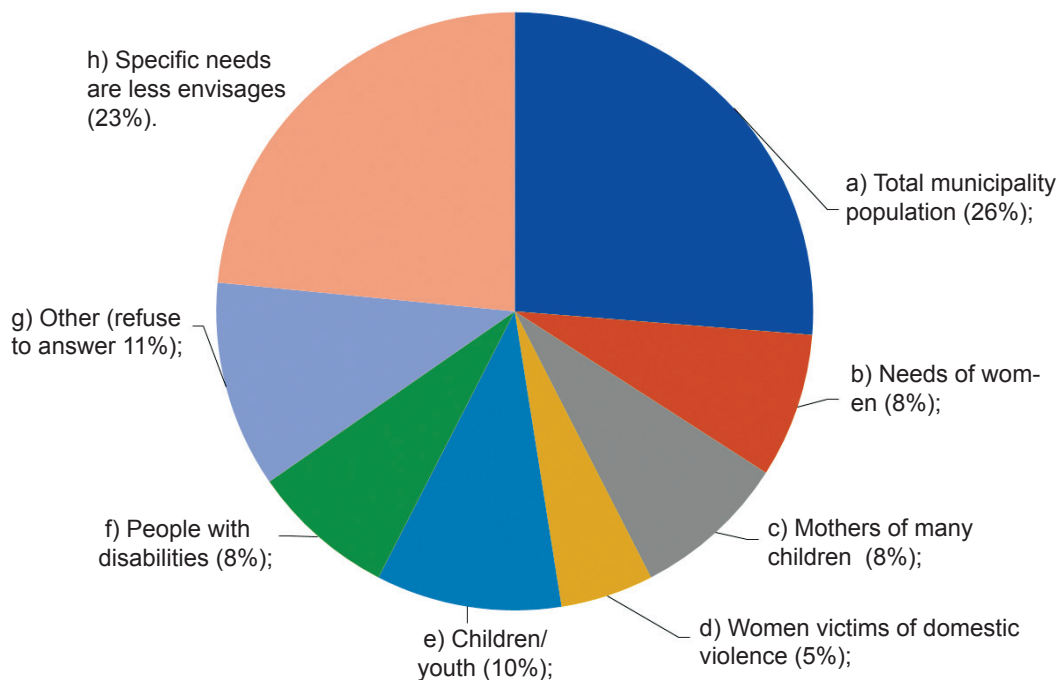
"IDPs need more assistance" - **a young IDP.**

"Economical strengthening of socially vulnerable families is very important" - **a member of the Women`s Club.**

"We should work in regard to the protection of socially vulnerable and lonely elderly people. These categories are in need of support most of all" - **a male entrepreneur.**

The participants of quantitative research applied to the self-government units (City Hall/Sakrebulo) during the last year on healthcare issues (assistance for drugs/funding the operation) - 32%, social assistance/financial assistance - 14%, regarding certificate - 15%.
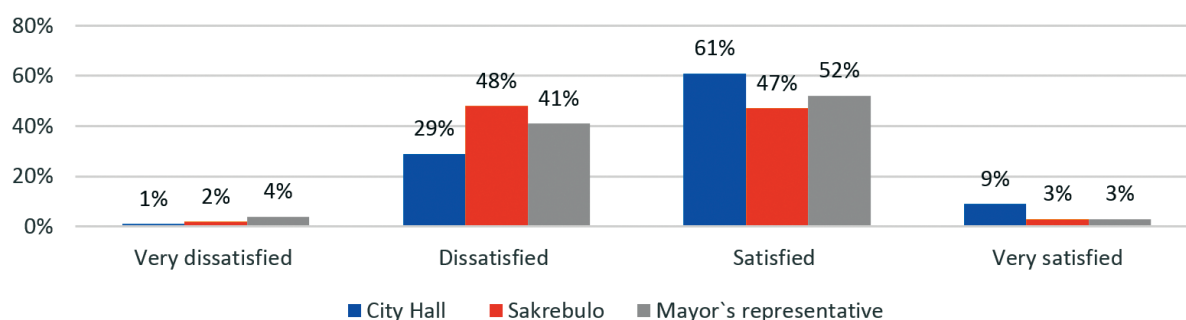
NEEDS OF WHICH GROUPS LISTED BELOW ARE CONSIDERED BY THE MUNICIPALITY?

h) Specific needs are less envisages (23%).

a) Total municipality population (26%);

g) Other (refuse to answer 11%);

b) Needs of women (8%);

f) People with disabilities (8%);

c) Mothers of many children (8%);

e) Children/youth (10%);

d) Women victims of domestic violence (5%);

As the diagram shows, for 23% of the citizens, specific needs are less considered, whereas, for 26%, budget is neutral to all groups.

To assess service efficiency, it is important to identify the citizens` satisfaction with it. The data analysis enables us to determine the level of satisfaction and generalize it:

THE LEVEL OF SATISFACTION WITH THE SERVICE OF LOCAL STRUCTURES

Chart showing satisfaction levels:

- **Very dissatisfied**: City Hall 1%, Sakrebulo 2%, Mayor's representative 4%
- **Dissatisfied**: City Hall 29%, Sakrebulo 48%, Mayor's representative 41%
- **Satisfied**: City Hall 61%, Sakrebulo 47%, Mayor's representative 52%
- **Very satisfied**: City Hall 9%, Sakrebulo 3%, Mayor's representative 3%

Legend: ■ City Hall ■ Sakrebulo ■ Mayor`s representative

As we have found out, the citizens are satisfied with the service and they are more satisfied with the City Hall service rather than with Sakrebulo one.

Based on the answers of the qualitative research participants, the problems have been settled with the help of self-governments (15%) or partly settled (44%). Some respondents (6%) say that "they (self-government) have not even tried" or "had promised, but the process has taken too long" (14%). 6% say that they "have received the reasoned refusal in a written form".

The research has revealed the vision of the experts, as well as the citizens about the issue of decentralization. The respondents spoke about the existing challenges and the listed a big number of the institutions beyond the authority of self-government:

> *"It is very bad that so many units operate independently in the municipality and they are no accountable before the self-government. The mutual collaboration or participation in different issues only depends on the "goodwill "of leaders" - **a chairman of N(N)LE "Step Khoni".***

The study experts have different opinions on the forms and fields of decentralization. According to some of them*:*

> *"The local government is more competent in a social direction. It is better aware of the local needs and population, and most importantly, has constant communication with locals. Consequently, its inclusiveness will make all the social programs or privileges planned for the population much efficient" - **a chairman of N(N)LE "The Youth Centre".***

> ***"***Decentralization is a sensitive issue for me. It requires detailed discussion and long preparation. Our municipality is not ready for it" - **a member of Sakrebulo.***

However, the respondent supports drawing the line of demarcation between some issues:

> *"A line of demarcation can be drawn between the issues concerning water supply system. It would contribute to better taxation, improvement of water quality and finding of new water resources. Our region is rich in water resources. Though our municipality cannot fully provide the population with water. Some people use handicraft ways to get water. There are settlements (tea farming, the settlement of*

*eco-migrants) which are not provided with drinking water. There are many settlements provided only with technical water which is unsuitable to drink. The decentralization might be followed by extension of power and it might contribute to the full provision of the municipality with water. It will contribute to better taxation and more people will be employed. Nobody tries to find new resources and build water mains. They are satisfied with the existing ones" - **a member of Sakrebulo.***

Despite the different opinions on the issue of decentralization, the study experts unanimously think that the self-government should play a more important role in regard to a number of social issues (e.g. granting or discontinuance of social assistance):

*"We all know that neither the citizens and nor the municipality representatives trust the system of scores allocated by the Social Agency to people. On the one hand, we do not trust it, but on the other hand, all the local programs are based on the scores. The municipality can be included in it, though it should be done very carefully. It is said that the gaps in the program consist of 15%. If the authority of municipality comprised 5% in such case...There was a discussion about it" - **a member of Sakrebulo.***

*"Specific people should be appointed from municipality to settle and control the issue. Everybody knows people in need in their community. When the municipality is included, I think that they will settle the issue easily" - **public sector, a lawyer.***

Members of the focus group share this opinion as well:

*"It would be better if the municipality had more authority in regard to granting the status of the socially vulnerable person" - **a young IDP.***

*"The issue of social assistance should be under the authority of the local government" - **a member of the Women`s Club.***

The research has revealed the attitude to the self-government staff competence. According to the experts, the main principle - the strengthening of self-government, is hard to imagine without professional, motivated and qualified personnel. The respondents have also emphasized the positive steps like the existence of anti-corruption strategy or events promoting personnel growth, though it has been mentioned that staff members who are really in need of the training, are not sent to them.

THE ISSUE OF LOCAL PARTICIPATION (INCLUSIVENESS)

The full participation of citizens in the self-government is the basis for accountable, open and transparent administration principles at the local level. The experts consider the citizens` inclusiveness in the municipality to be *"critically insufficient"*:

*"When programs for villages and infrastructural projects are implemented, settlement meetings are held very often. It happens once a year, though it is not sufficient. For instance, let`s take the petition. I have been a member of Sakrebulo for 6 years and there has been only one case of the petition" - a **member of Sakrebulo.***

The experts think that several factors affect the full use of citizen participation forms, activation of different social groups and participation in local governance:

"There is a need for active civil servants, as well as active citizens who will be interested in the elementary budget practice. It is crucial to introduce civil budget practice. I cannot remind the suggestion of the project useful for Khoni municipality by the citizens. Though the local self-government should not stop and help them to become active. Several people full of the initiative will appear" - **public sector, a lawyer.**

The majority of citizens participating in qualitative research have not practised participation in the self-government. Only some of them could give such examples:

"We have applied on behalf of the initiative group and submitted our initiatives before the budget discussion" - **a young IDP.**

"We have applied about infrastructural problems" - **a person with disabilities.**
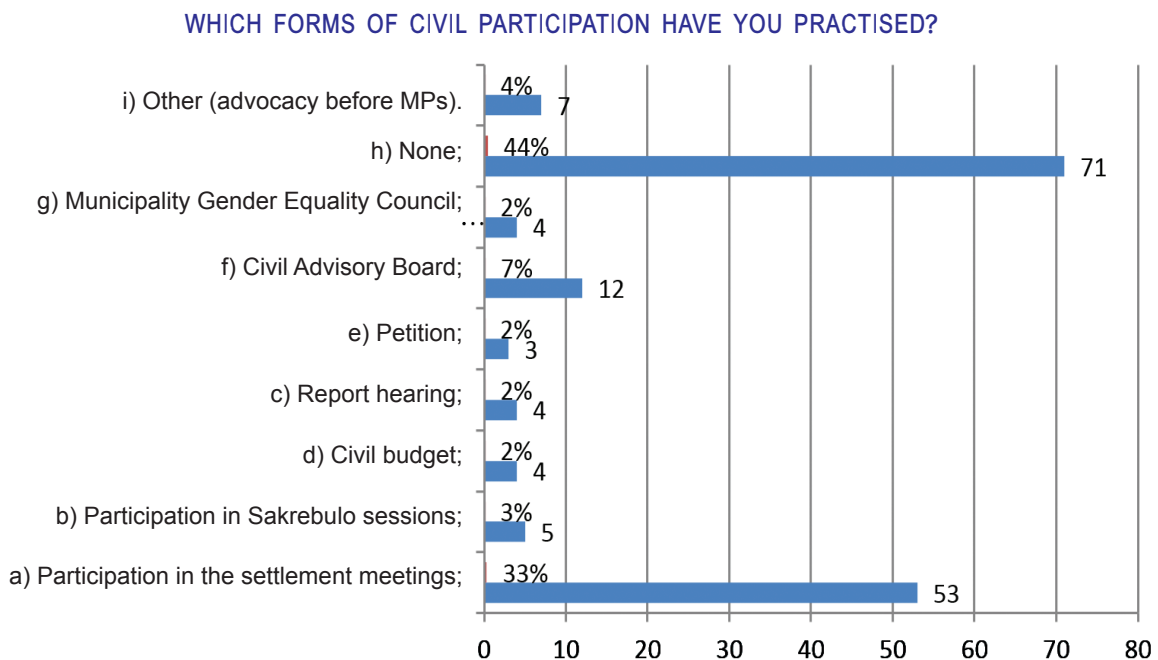
" I have participated in the budget discussion" - **a female entrepreneur.**

There have been examples of more active participation:

"I am very actively involved. I attend every meeting and Sakrebulo session to provide taking the society`s voice into account in the decision-making process".

"We had applied about the issue of street illumination and it has been partly settled" - **the members of the Women`s Club.**

"I have attended the general meeting of the settlement and young people have submitted interesting proposals" - **a social worker.**

WHICH FORMS OF CIVIL PARTICIPATION HAVE YOU PRACTISED?

Form	Percentage	Value
i) Other (advocacy before MPs).	4%	7
h) None;	44%	71
g) Municipality Gender Equality Council;	2%	4
f) Civil Advisory Board;	7%	12
e) Petition;	2%	3
c) Report hearing;	2%	4
d) Civil budget;	2%	4
b) Participation in Sakrebulo sessions;	3%	5
a) Participation in the settlement meetings;	33%	53

According to the data, 44% of the interviewed have no participation practice and 33% mostly participate in the meetings. The participants of quantitative research mentioned the main need for the provision of constructive dialogue with the self-government and

more inclusiveness. They consider it to be "Periodical meetings of the local authorities with the citizens for consultation" - 50%.

According to the information of the research participants, the following local mechanisms of citizen participation are functioning at the municipality: Advisory Council of Mayor`s Office, Civil Advisory Council, Gender Equality Council. However, despite the big potential, their activities do not affect the local political agenda and do not play a significant role in the advocacy of people`s interests.

Besides, there was a discussion on the issue of provision of citizens` participation, the role of the local CSOs and the level of their participation.

*"The local NGO sector plays a very important role in the development of the society and government is stronger when it can identify this role" - a **chairman of N(N)LE "Step Khoni".***

"There are few NGOs here, though they actively participate in different projects, plan, invite us and search for the ways of implementation of different projects. I think that the municipality supports them and contributes to the implementation of the projects".

A challenge of civil society organizations has been also emphasized by the respondents:

*"They should have some resource to implement specific projects. I mean financial resource" - **public sector, a lawyer.***

*"Their inclusiveness in a dialogue with the local government is crucial. I think that the local government actively cooperates with civil society" - **a male entrepreneur.***

*"Self-government cannot fully settle and cover the issue. It would be better if NGO sector was included in the process. As a result of their advocacy, a nursery group was added to the kindergarten for IDPs" - **a mother of many children.***

The participants of the quantitative research expressed their opinion on the role of the local CSOs in regard to PAR implementation:

What is the role of local civil society organizations during PAR implementation?	294	
a) Providing information/Raising awareness	74	25%
b) Control of the reform implementation/ Monitoring	43	15%
c) Advocacy of the solution of problems at the local level	70	24%
d) Lobbying for adopting local Legal Acts, and Changes	19	6%
e) Raising awareness about the needs of the population among central authorities	22	7%
f) Encouraging dialogue among local authorities and population	25	9%
g) Establishing socio-economic development activities	21	7%
h) Protection of the citizens` rights	18	6%
i) Other	1	0%
k) I do not know/ Have no answer	1	0%

As for one more actor of the civil society, the research participants are concerned that there is no partnership between the local government and private sector and the social responsibility of the local business is too weak. The attempt of self-government to be the mediator between the local entrepreneurs and different economic programs was positively assessed. It involves not only informing-consultation but the assistance in project writing as well.

At the end of the study, the respondents emphasized the role of local authorities in the reform successful implementation and in regard to the improvement of the service for the citizens. The identified issues were as follows: social assistance, healthcare, repair of floodwater system; waste assimilation; infrastructure (roads, bridges, etc.); promotion of economic development and creation of the relevant environment locally; long-term social programs.

It is noteworthy that 95 respondents of the quantitative research (63,3%) added administration of homeless animals (homeless dogs) to the list of important social issues. The members of focus-groups shared their opinions on the issue. It turned out that homeless animals were not collected, injected and put in the shelter for the last three years. It remains the most important problem for women, children and elderly people. There is no animal shelter in Khoni. There are many homeless animals in the centres of the city and villages. The number of citizens bitten by them has increased.

The municipality wants to take them away, though they say that taking one animal costs approximately 60-80 GEL. The municipality budget cannot cover this issue (due to it, there is a practice of "porting", when animals are secretly taken from one municipality to the other). The citizens demand the protection from homeless dogs, appropriate vaccination which will stop their reproduction.

Since the issue is raised in all municipalities, it is necessary to submit and solve at inter-municipal and central levels.

CONCLUSION

The study conducted by Fund "Sukhumi" in Khoni Municipality has demonstrated the condition of the tasks set in regard to the self-government by PAR. The achievements and challenges to be improved while providing the services to the citizens refer to the local administration transparency, service efficiency and local participation

Based on the quantitative and qualitative data analysis, it can be said that important steps to implement open, accountable and efficient administration have been made in Khoni Municipality. The e-administration modules which are mandatory for the self-government are approved and successfully used in the municipality. The social network is operative and works well. Though the citizens become the participants of the local processes through them, the efficiency of the electronic service and use by the citizens is insufficient. This is affected by low awareness, the lack of information on the benefits of this service and the lack of internet in villages. The "ageing" tendency of the

municipality causes the lack of the necessary skills. Besides, the poverty of citizens and the lack of access to the necessary technical equipment prevent them from electronic communication.

The study has demonstrated that despite small budget resources, in Khoni Municipality, there are target programs focused on the needs of citizens. However, there is a vulnerable category of citizens who are left beyond these programs. There was a successful practice of budget program initiation based on the identification of needs implemented through the collaboration with NGOs, though this experience could not have been implemented and institutionalized.

The research has revealed the necessity to increase the functions of self-government regarding several issues, however, the importance of discussions on the issue of decentralization and local readiness, the necessity to raise the appropriate competence of self-government have been emphasized.

The study has identified the gaps regarding citizen participation.

The study has revealed the gaps regarding the citizens` participation. On the one hand, they include readiness of self-government for dialogue and on the other hand, the necessity to strengthen the local civil society for real participation in the local administration. At this stage, they are mainly involved in the settlement meetings. There is no petition practice and there is no relevant feedback on the mandatory reports of local government.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study outcomes, the following recommendations have been made:

1. To increase the level of service transparency and accountability, the local authorities should provide the citizens with the necessary conditions to get electronic communication:

- ➤ It is important to raise the citizens` awareness on PAR and organize an information campaign in this regard;

- ➤ It is necessary to outreach the citizens on electronic services. Traditional information boards, local press and regional media can be included in this regard;

- ➤ Access to the internet throughout the municipality territory is very important; besides, in communities far away from the centre, a proper space should be arranged to communicate electronically with the municipality;

- ➤ An institution of the Mayor`s representative should be used to provide citizens with information; together with active local community groups, it is possible to organize volunteers` groups to assist people with lack of necessary skills;

- ➤ FB pages of the City Hall and Sakrebulo should be used more efficiently to promote the interactive dialogue between citizens and local government.

2. To increase service efficiency and provide citizens with services tailored to their needs:

- ➢ It is important to continue activities in the municipality necessary for further training of the staff and implementation of the methodology for improvement of service provision; an anti-corruption action plan should be prepared;

- ➢ It is important to introduce the practice of the study of needs and assessment of program efficiency on the basis of the relevant units of the municipalities; the existing practice should be used;

- ➢ Inclusiveness of the local civil society in advocacy of the needs and program monitoring process must be stimulated;

- ➢ The local policy of care and support should be strengthened, especially in regard to the vulnerable groups(including disabled people, victims of violence); the target segment with a high degree of vulnerability and at the same time is left beyond different state programs should be included in them;

- ➢ The inter-municipality practice needs to be introduced to settle important issues of citizens; for instance, protection from the homeless animals and their administration;

- ➢ The municipality should elaborate the strategy against the population "ageing" and motivate the youngsters to stay; the focus should be made on long-term socio-economic strengthening programs.

3. To contribute to the local participation:

- ➢ The municipality should take the responsibility to exercise the forms of citizen participation provided by law and motivate active groups of community and NGOs;

- ➢ It is important to provide the full participation of citizens in gender budget and civil budget principles and raise their awareness on these issues;

- ➢ It is necessary to practise such existing participation mechanisms as Gender Equality Council, City Hall Civil Advisory Council, Advisory Council on Social Issues, Council of Disabled Persons more effectively;

- ➢ It would be better if the budget involved resources to encourage civil and economical activities of citizens, including women, youth and people with disabilities.

4. To contribute to the decentralization process of the state and provide inclusiveness of the central government structures in the local implementation of PAR:

- ➢ The central government structures should conduct a full-scale study to analyze the self-government needs, resources and decentralization risks;

➤ Self-governments should be provided with necessary methodological assistance to introduce new modules of the electronic administration.

5. To strengthen the role of NGOs in the implementation of PAR:

➤ Partnership with the local government should become more active and the existing resources should be used to contribute to raising awareness of citizens, advocating their interests and active dialogue; the events promoting awareness of the self-government and further training, especially referring to the issues covered by PAR, should become more active;

➤ The local government should be provided with information, consultation, methodological assistance on gender budget, participatory budget, domestic violence and other issues; vulnerable groups including youth, women, IDP groups should be advocated and activities to promote their strengthening should be provided.

RACHA-LECHKHUMI AND KVEMO SVANETI REGION

THE RESEARCH OF CITIZENS' LOCAL NEEDS IN AMBROLAURI MUNICIPALITY
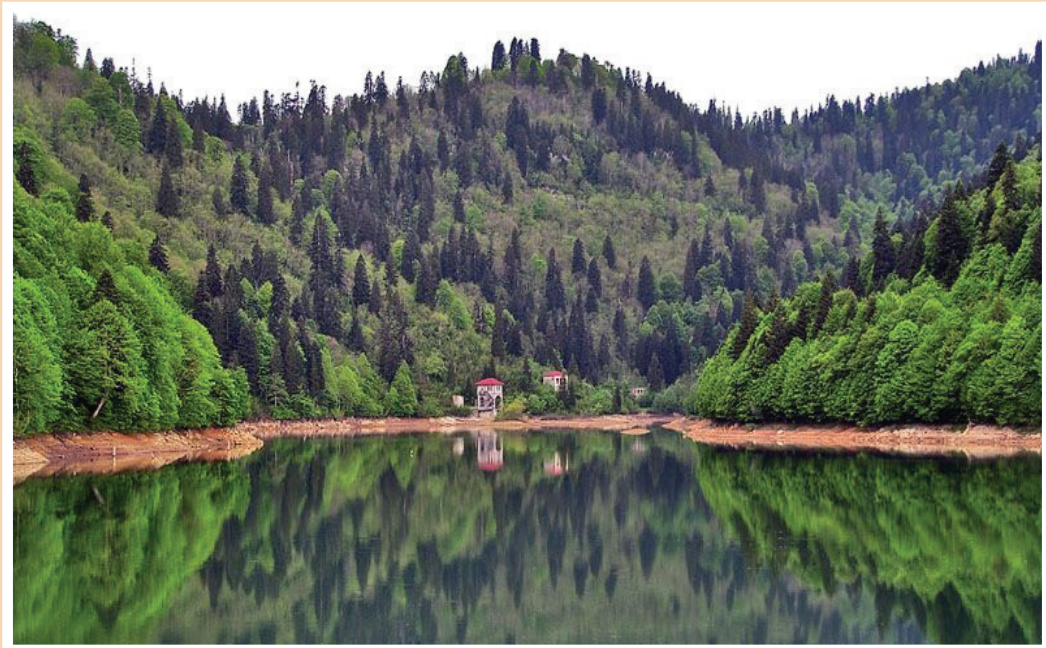
INTRODUCTION

Public Administration Reform which started in Georgia in 2015, has passed through several stages. In 2018, the government started to work on a medium-term strategy of decentralization. It is aimed to introduce a high standard of accountability and transparency to provide citizens with better service at the local level. To contribute to this process, the electronic services have been introduced.

PAR road map action plan of 2019-2020 implies two tasks regarding the self-government: extension of the power of local government for strengthening the self-government; and gradual development and improvement of the electronic services to make them better accessible at the local self-government.

To contribute to the effective implementation of PAR at the local level, civil society should be actively involved in the process to provide transparent, accountable and inclusive administration. First of all, it means identification of the local needs by the citizens and active political dialogue with self-government for their advocacy.

Cultural-Humanitarian Fund "Sukhumi" with Fund of Women Entrepreneurs and The Imereti Scientists` Union "Spectri" is implementing the project "A Common forum for CSOs from Guria, Imereti and Racha-Lechkhumi for PAR Roadmap monitoring" funded by the European Union. The monitoring of the local electronic services concerning transparency, efficiency and inclusiveness has been conducted in Ambrolauri Municipality within the framework of the project. It has identified the achievements and challenges regarding the service provided to citizens.

The study has been conducted under the supervision of "Fund of Women Entrepreneurs" by the target organizations - "Racha-Lechkhumi and Kvemo Svaneti Self-Government Resource Centre" and "Racha-Lechkhumi and Kvemo Svaneti Regional Hub -"Abkhazintercont". It implies the research of citizens needs regarding service provision. The recommendations made through the study will be submitted to the local government and other relevant structures.

The aim of the research: identification of the local needs regarding the provision of citizens with quality service - in the context of PAR tasks and the components of service transparency, efficiency and inclusiveness.

Methodology: the research has been conducted using a triangulation approach which implies quantitative and qualitative methods. The research plan had been drawn up and quantitative and qualitative questionnaires elaborated before the launching of the study.

Within the framework of the study, the local government has been assessed in the following three directions: **transparency, efficiency and inclusiveness**. 30 indicators were used to interpret and analyze the data.

Selection of population- General population of the research is represented by the citizens of Tsageri Municipality. The research is representative and gives opportunities for generalization.

Selection - the cluster, as well as quota selection principles, were used in the study and it covered citizens of various demographic profiles. Within the framework of the research 174 interviewed participated in a vox pop.

The analysis of the research data was carried out through the SPSS program.

The timeframe - April- May 2020.

Research limitations - The research was carried out in the limited circumstances and emergency caused by COVID-19 pandemic. The majority of the respondents were contacted either by telephone or online.

BASIC INFORMATION:

DEMOGRAPHIC PICTURE OF THE RESEARCH: 150 respondents were involved in the quantitative study, including 42% men and 58% women. The age of the interviewed was as follows:

1. AGE OF THE RESPONDENT
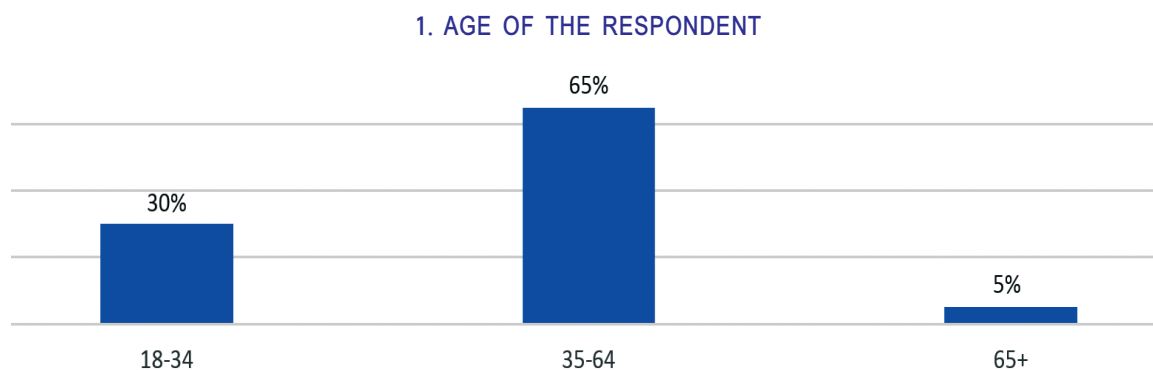
30%	65%	5%
18-34	35-64	65+

The majority (54%) of the respondents are married and with higher education (48%). 45% of them have a special status. 32% out of 45% belong to the socially vulnerable group. There are parents of many children (9%) and IDPs (4%) in the region as well.

Unfortunately, the study has identified that 34% of the interviewed are unemployed, 3% - students and 9%-pensioners. The rest 54% covers the following categories: civil servant/hired by the state - 26%, self-employed (entrepreneur, farmer) -18%, representative of the budget organization -10%.

An average monthly income of the respondents ranges between 101-500 and 501-900 GEL. 25% of the interviewed refused to answer the question.

Target groups of **the qualitative research** covered socially vulnerable people, people with disabilities/their family members, single parents, women, youth, pensioners, civil servants, representatives of the local CSOs.

Awareness of the citizens on PAR: quantitative and qualitative data have shown the attitude of the local civil servants and citizens to the implementation of PAR, its outcomes and existing challenges.

The study respondents who are representatives of the local government consider the reform to be successful and its outcomes obvious. As a result, the bureaucratic procedures have been decreased. They assume that:

"Public information is open and available to all the classes of the society"
- a City Hall responsible person.

A representative of the local NGO has the same opinion:

"The information on the e-resources is actively posted in the social network of the City Hall. It has made access to the activities of the municipality easier. Consequently, the number of users is growing".

However, some government representatives had more critical attitudes and pointed out that the reform implementation should be speeded up:

"The rate of the reform implementation is slow and the outcomes are not obvious" - a female member of Sakrebulo.

43% of the respondents of Ambrolauri quantitative research are not aware of public administration/service reform. Only 25% of the interviewed are aware and 32% partly aware of the reform. For 43%, the main source of information is TV, while 23% consider it to be the representatives of NGOs. Besides, the population gets information through the municipality FB/webpage (15%) and at the meetings with the representatives of the governmental structures (8%).

The participants of the qualitative research also point out that they are only partly informed on PAR. Besides, this information is fragmented and needs systematization and interpretation:

"I have heard some information through TV and NGOs, though I want to find out the essence and role of this reform, and the level of population participation in it" - a male teacher.

It is interesting that according to the diagram, the majority of the respondents cannot answer the question "Will PAR improve the quality of services provided to citizens?". Though the majority having answered it, have a positive attitude to the reform outcomes (35% think that it will improve).

WILL IMPROVE	WILL LESS IMPROVE	WILL NOT IMPROVE	CANNOT ANSWER
35%	12%	7%	46%
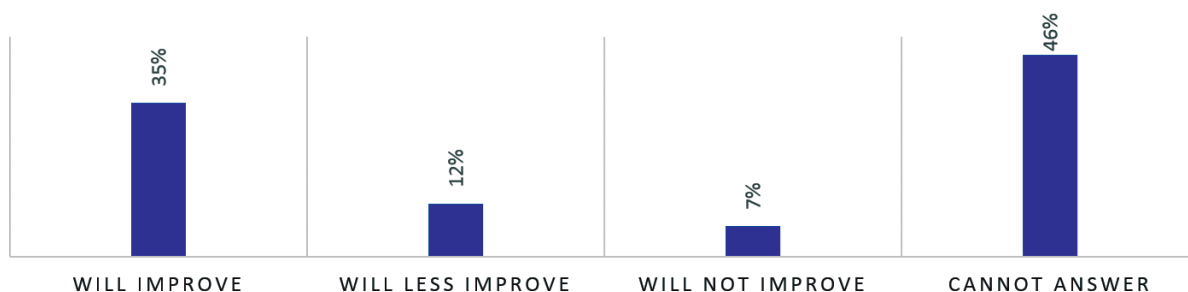
According to some participants of the qualitative study, they realize the prospect of the reform very well:

"I approve it since it will bring self-government and population closer to each other. They will be able to communicate on the needs, problems and identify priorities" - a parent of a disabled child.

 Though, some respondents point out that:

"I have very poor information on PAR and I have received it from TV. However, I am not aware of its essence. The representatives of the local self-government and City Hall should have more communication with the population about the reform or different laws" - a housewife.

The quantitative study has shown the awareness of citizens on the specifics of electronic service and the number of its beneficiaries:

37% of the respondents are not aware of the municipal e-services, 18% are fully aware and 42% are less aware. 37% are not interested in the issue:
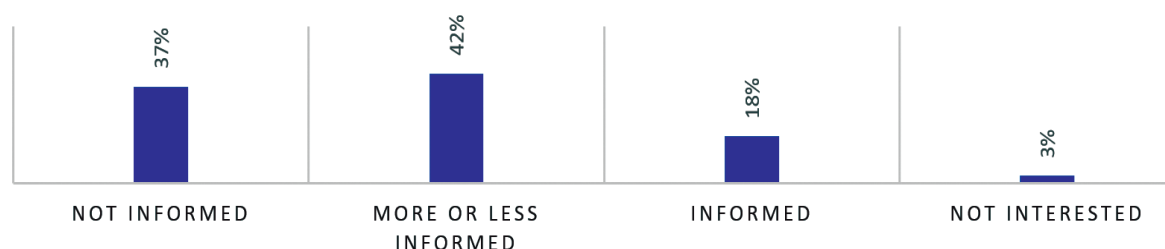
The focus-groups have also demonstrated the level of awareness of some citizens and their attitude to the issue of the electronic services. Mainly, the respondents are less informed on the details of the electronic service at the local level. The participants of the qualitative study have shown different opinions. Some of them think that citizens are informed of the local electronic services by the local government. While others assume that citizens are not provided with information and they have to get it independently.

"I cannot say that I am a passive citizen as the information has not reached me. It means that is is not properly disseminated" - a pensioner.

"It is not surprising that people in villages are not aware of it. Even we are insufficiently informed about it. When we tackle such issues, it is necessary to inform people thoroughly and allow them to know their role. Besides, it would be better to provide them with courses to get the necessary skills for using internet services" - a small business male entrepreneur.

The opinions of respondents on the efficiency of the e-services at the local level differ:

"I think that they are not successful since the majority of the population cannot use the electronic services" - a representative of the local NGO.

"It saves time and eliminates inconvenience connected to transport. It is very convenient for those who are aware of it and have access to the internet" - a parent of a disabled child.

"The majority of the population cannot use it, since they neither have information and nor are aware of using it. Public servants should be trained in this regard and inform the population. Some mechanisms and funds should be found to develop the necessary skills of the population" - a local farmer.

For the interviewed of the quantitative research, the main source of information is a municipality FB/webpage - 29%, NGO representatives -16% or meetings with government representatives -11%.

The respondents have emphasized the municipal electronic services used during the last year. Most of them named online announcements on vacancies (19%), searching the contact information on the municipality staff members (9%); some of them mentioned electronic petition (8%); budget information (7%); information on reports (4%); normative acts/resolutions of Sakrebulo (4%); submission of complaints/proposals (3%); procurement plan (1%); minutes/agenda of Sakrebulo sessions (1%); registration on meeting(1%). It is noteworthy that 21% of the respondents are not interested in such service, 12% have no access to it and 3% do not have the necessary skills.

WHICH ELECTRONIC SERVICES DID YOU USE DURING THE LAST YEAR?

The respondents assume that the main accent should be made on the timely provision of population with the information on the governmental electronic services via different means (TV, information meetings, information flyers, FB or webpage -27%). Furthermore, the competence of civil servants should be raised (21%). Whereas 19% of the respondents think that special attention should be paid to the needs of vulnerable groups (e.g. single mothers and mothers of many children, women victims of violence, children, disabled people,etc.) and suggestion of the services adjusted to the priorities. 5% of the interviewed see the necessity of payrise of the civil servants. For 4%, it is important to increase the population and extend the territorial coverage (to provide access). Only 2% of the interviewed think that the process of the service provider is too complicated and should be simplified.

The respondents of the qualitative study have the following opinion on this issue:

"First of all, people should have more interest and it would be better if the local self-government spread the information through face-to-face meetings, social network and internet" - a family member of a disabled person.

According to the general opinion, to use internet resources, it is necessary to provide full internetization of the municipality and build the necessary skills in citizens:

"Villages should be provided with the internet. Even in case of having information, people living in rural areas have no chance to use the e-services" - a school teacher.

"A "Day Centre" or some space for socialization is necessary to be in every village. It will enable the population to meet, share the information and use the electronic services" - a female civic activist.

The respondents pointed out that except the local government resources, active citizens should be included to popularize the issue:

"Training sessions should be held for teachers. It will allow us to get detailed information on the reform. We will be able to inform the society around us" - a male teacher.

Members of the vulnerable families point out that the benefits of the service should be properly explained to the citizens:

"Awareness should be raised through any means. It will enable the representatives of all the social circles to feel important regarding the implementation of this reform" - a parent of a disabled child.

It is noteworthy that 50% of the interviewed do not use electronic services to receive local services. And those who use them, mainly apply to the municipality webpage (13%), regional administration webpage (12%) and civil portal www.gov.ge (7%).
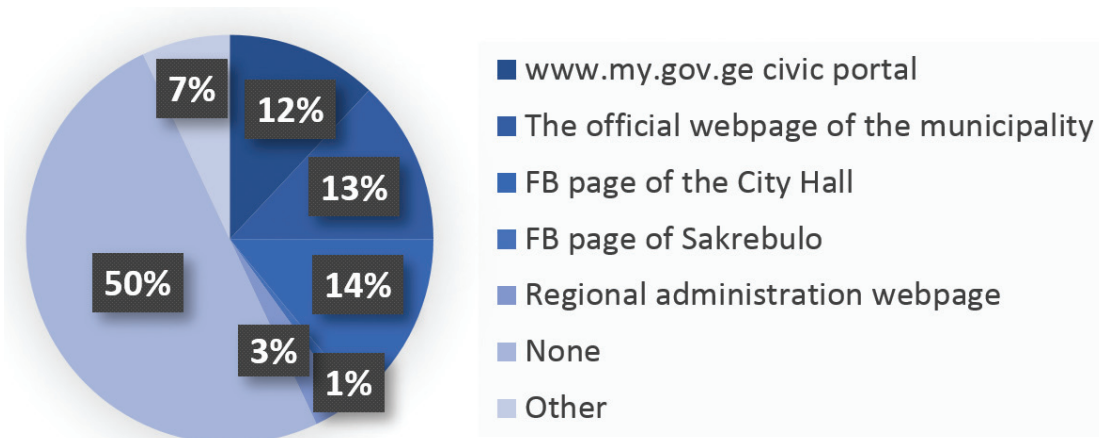
The respondents have emphasized the factor affecting the inertness of the citizens regarding this service (the same results have been shown by the qualitative data. 50% of the interviewed do not use the electronic service). The low-quality internet makes a negative impact not only on the local services but threatens the condition of the total e-services. For instance, the Public Service Hall services are affected by bad internet as well.

The participants have also expressed their opinion on the gaps of the webpage. Based on the general opinion, competent people should improve the webpage and social network:

"The citizens should be enabled to be involved in the working process of the webpage. There might be a separate window to let the citizens express their views" - a young female leader of the community.

EFFICIENCY

According to the research outcomes, the self-government representatives positively assess the accountability of the local authorities. They think that:

"Public hearings are held according to law and information on the project is disseminated" - a City Hall responsible person.

Some representatives of the local authorities think that:

"To fully inform the population, it is necessary to have qualified and educated local staff, as well as the will of the government to have informed population".

"The local authorities need a sense of accountability and courage. In case it is done, it means that there is no fear of objective assessment and transparency" - a member of Sakrebulo.

It turned out that some respondents have a critical attitude to the accountability of the local processes:

"There is a problem with accountability since sometimes, citizens get information on projects after they are accomplished. Furthermore, the announced auctions are formally held. Often, information on the objects is announced since they are sold". "I do not see a high level of accountability and transparency. The citizens formally participate in the processes" - a small female entrepreneur.

The study has revealed that the representatives of the local self-government mainly meet population within the framework of the village assistance program. People should choose the village priority based on the allocated funds. It cannot be considered as a high level of inclusiveness, since the majority of the population is not informed on these projects.

However, it should be pointed out that there is some progress regarding accountability:

"The Mayor submits the report to the population. For instance, hearing of the last year report in Sakrebulo was broadcasted by the initiative of radio "Voice of Ambrolauri". It was very important for the population" - a female civil activist.
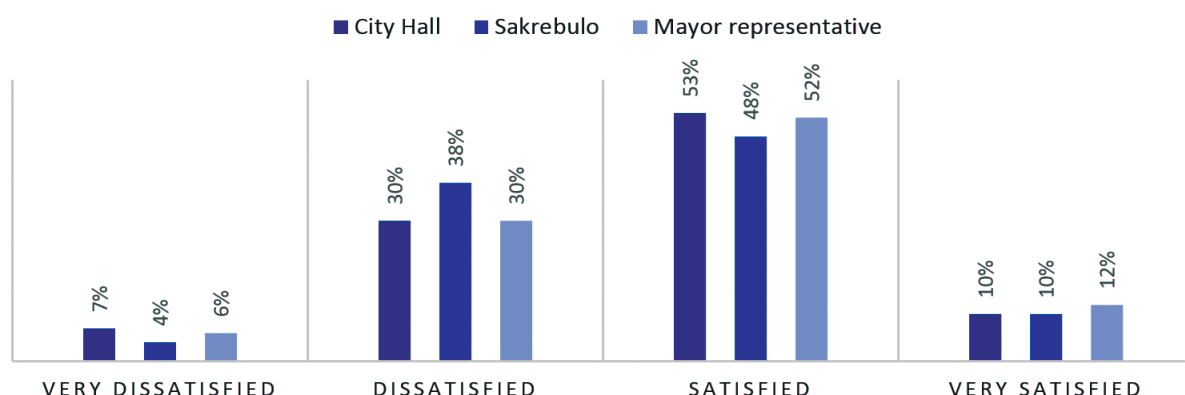
To assess the efficiency of the service provided by self-government, it is very important to identify its level of simplicity and convenience. Half of the respondents cannot answer whether it is easy to use the electronic application form to receive the service from self-government units or not. 20% assume that the procedures are complicated and 30% consider them to be simple. The citizens mention the documents like certificate about mountain status and plot legalization certificate received through the electronic services:

During the last year, 81% of the respondents did not use the electronic registration principle to meet the representative of the desired unit and 7% had no information on it.

It is interesting to find out the level of satisfaction of respondents with the service received from the self-government. Within the framework of the study, the interviewed expressed their opinion on the representatives of City Hall, Sakrebulo and Mayor:

ARE YOU SATISFIED WITH THE RECEIVED SERVICE?

■ City Hall   ■ Sakrebulo   ■ Mayor representative

	VERY DISSATISFIED	DISSATISFIED	SATISFIED	VERY SATISFIED
City Hall	7%	30%	53%	10%
Sakrebulo	4%	38%	48%	10%
Mayor representative	6%	30%	52%	12%

37% of the respondents point out in case of applying to the self-government, the problems have been solved.

Most of the respondents think that the needs of the municipality population are equally considered (34%), while 27% think that the specific needs are less considered. The research participants have identified the following groups whose needs are mostly considered by the municipality: families of many children -16%; people with disabilities - 4%; children/youngsters - 4%; women - 3%.

It turned out that the majority of the citizens have not heard about the events on studying needs and identifying the most important issues of citizens (except the village assistance programs, though many people are dissatisfied with their level of transparency and inclusiveness). The respondents are only informed on programs directly referring to them (assistance to the families with many children and disabled people, one-time assistance).

40% of the respondents think that the local government fully provides the population with information on the work rendered by them. According to 33%, the information is partly disseminated and 12% think that the local government does not inform the population on the provided service.

The majority of the qualitative research participants point out that citizens are less included in the identification of priorities:

"There were cases when the priorities of the village population were less considered at the local level. It referred to water and gasification" -a community young leader. "The City Hall staff members conduct surveys to identify priorities" - a small male entrepreneur.

"There is a lack of such mechanisms and regulated system at the local self-government. It is very important" - a female representative of the local NGO.

While talking about the program implementation or need of an extension, different opinions were expressed. Some think that activities regarding social protection are very important and suggest an extension of short-term programs:

"The amount of monthly financial assistance for socially vulnerable people should increase" - a female pensioner.

However, others think that a focus should be made on long-term programs which might not have an immediate effect but will later improve conditions of citizens.

The respondents assume that the village infrastructure should be repaired to enable the locals to reach their houses and plots:

"Special technical equipment should be allocated to the village to repair roads, to clean them in winter, during a heavy snowfall" - a housewife.

Some other needs have also been identified:

"Special programs should be elaborated for agro-entrepreneurs" - a parent of many children, small entrepreneur.

"Local enterprises should be established and locals should be employed" - a school teacher.

"Youth programs should be created to prevent youth migration from villages" - a socially vulnerable mother of many children.

"It would be better if business ideas to improve the economical situation were promoted" - a local farmer.

The respondents had different approached to the issue of decentralization, though they have emphasized that it is important to have more independence in several fields. It will contribute to better protection of citizens interests:

"This is the classical essence of decentralization. It is impossible to depend on the ministry in everything".

Though the respondents are doubtful whether the local resources are necessary for wide-scale decentralization or not:

"It will be very difficult to do it with our competence" - a Sakrebulo female member.

According to the focus-group discussion participants, the self-government should raise its competence concerning the local population employment, though they cannot go into the details of the issue. They think that self-government should have more capacity and authority to support long-term programs of economical development and local employment:

"Employment programs are very important for the families of many children" - a mother of many children.

"It will be good if job opportunities are created and supported" - a small entrepreneur.

The respondents point out that the municipality should be more involved in granting social status:

"It would be better if a status of a socially vulnerable person was granted locally, by the municipality or was based on the municipality recommendations" - a young person, civil sector.

INCLUSIVENESS

45% of the interviewed think that the local civil servants only partly realize the importance of the citizens` inclusiveness, whereas 16% assume that they do not realize this need. 25% assume that the importance of citizens participation is fully realized. The issues in which the inclusiveness of citizens is encouraged are as follows: identification of the local priorities - 40%, discussion of the citizens' initiatives (e.g. civil budget) - 7%, identification of the citizens needs -15%, elaboration of the municipal programs - 9%, discussion of the local budget -5%.

48% of the interviewed use none of the participation forms and those who exercise them, only participate in the settlement meetings - 32%. As it has been identified, 61% of the respondents have not even tried to submit the remarks on the service to the relevant unit. 25% assume that have not had the opportunity. 14% see the chance like this and use private meetings with the relevant representatives (46%).

The qualitative research has shown that the citizens only participate in the village meetings, however, their majority has never attended them. The majority of the respondents have heard about the existence of different councils, though have not participated in them. Some participants have pointed out that had listened to the Sakrebulo meeting broadcasted through the radion "Voice of Ambrolauri".

The main needs have been identified to provide a constructive dialogue with the self-government and more inclusiveness. The most relevant ones are as follows: periodical meetings of the local government representatives with citizens - 58%; participation of citizens in the elaboration of the municipal programs and budget discussion -11%; an increase of the number of civil servants responsible for specific issues/ field profile -10%; taking the citizens initiatives into account though the civil budget practice strengthening -10%; increase the effectiveness of the gender equality, civil advisory and other councils -4%; use and stimulate homeowners` association - 2%.

The research tool contained the question on the role and function of civil organizations. The citizens (64%) know only one local CSO included in the local political dialogue. 31% of the population know more than one organization, while only 5% know more than 3 organizations.

The respondents of the quantitative study assess the collaboration of CSOs with the local authorities to promote the citizens` welfare as follows:

VERY EFFECTIVE	EFFECTIVE	NOT VERY EFFECTIVE	INEFFECTIVE
9%	53%	35%	3%
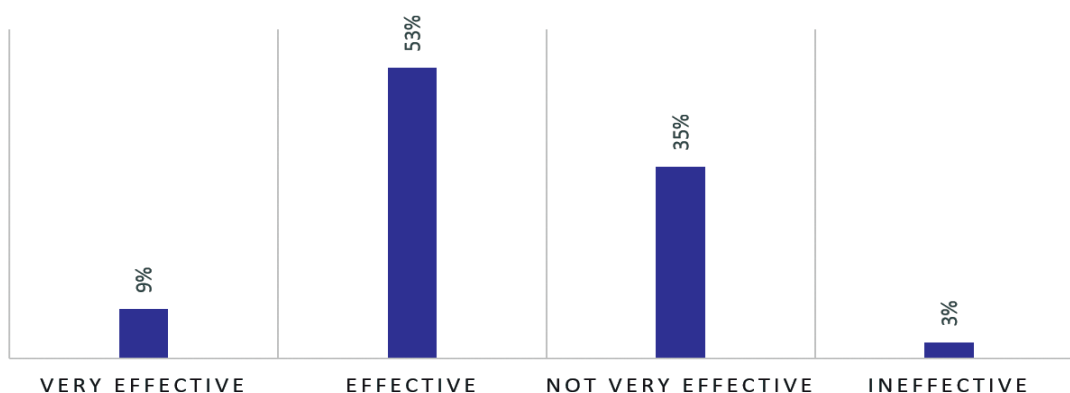
According to the qualitative data, the local NGOs have a more active role regarding civil inclusiveness. Their activity has been positively assessed by the respondents, though there are some doubts concerning the CSO activity efficiency, which is affected by the lack of mutual communication with citizens:

> *"The activity of the civil society is important, though, in case of the lack of citizens will and readiness, it loses the sense" - a small female entrepreneur.*

The role of CSOs was seen in the popularization of the electronic service and building the necessary skills to use it: *"It will be very good if CSOs disseminate the information on the electronic services".* The respondents have also emphasized the necessity of their financial strengthening. The participants think that

> *"They should be more included in the monitoring processes of the self-government" - a CSO young representative.*

Besides, according to the opinions of some respondents, they should inform the citizens of the local social programs and promote their dialogue with the local authorities:

> *"They should bring the citizens` needs to the government in the right way". "They should be more active". "Small projects should be announced for the CSOs which will introduce their rights to the local population. I think that it will make the citizens more active and their role in settling the local issues will increase. Consequently, it will increase the accountability of the local self-government" - a community young leader.*

As for the quantitative data, the interviewed mainly to see the role of CSOs in the local PAR in the following directions: raising awareness/education - 21%; introducing the citizens` needs to the government - 20%; control/monitoring of the reform implementation -15%; advocacy of the solution of local problems - 12%; promoting the dialogue between population and local government/local inclusiveness - 11%; implementation of the events supporting the socio-economic development of the citizens - 9%; lobbying the adoption of local legal acts, changes and ammendments - 4%; protection of the citizens rights - 4%.

The respondents of the quantitative study have identified the following directions which need more human and financial resources of the local government: healthcare -19%; promotion of the economic development and creation of the relevant local environment - 12%; social assistance - 11%; infrastructure(roads, bridges, etc.) - 10%; drinking water (quality, provision) -10%; administration of homeless animals - 8%; supporting services for elderly people without care (food, accommodation) - 4%; adapted environment for disabled people - 3%; repair of damaged houses/yards - 3%; parks and landscaping -2%; cleaning/waste assimilation - 2%; creation of support services tailored to the needs of women victims of violence - 2%; food safety - 2%; culture-education - 2%; public transport - 2%; sewerage system - 2%; sporting events -1%; pre-school education -1%; rain-pipe system -1%; irrigation -1%.

According to the data, healthcare is considered to be the most priority issue. The necessity of economic strengthening program promotion turned out to be more important than a social assistance one. Quality of water provision is considered to be the self-government prerogative by 10% of the citizens. It responds to the other findings of the study.

At the final stage of the interview, the respondents identified the specific local events foreseen to meet their needs. They are as follows: settlement of the infrastructure problems; employment; solution of the drinking water problem; promotion of youth; improving the healthcare service; encouraging business; protection of homeless animals; public discussions and meetings with the population; training programs; an increase of the social assistance; support of farms - enterprise set up; repair of floodwater system; repair of sewerage system; solution of the transport problem; food safety (other issues had the less social chance).

The existence of positive practice regarding the collaboration with the local government and private sector has been revealed. Though they have not heard about such cooperation examples, many agree that using private sector potential, implementation of the innovative projects will have better outcomes to provide municipal services and advocate public interests.

An interesting tendency has been identified regarding the age groups. Correlation between ageing and public administration/ awareness on the reform has been revealed through the statistic data processing. It should be mentioned that the level of awareness in women is 5% higher than in men. Youngsters have appropriate skills and use internet resources more than others, however, they show less interest in the social processes.

CONCLUSION

The study conducted in Ambrolauri Municipality shows that the local government tries to start the large-scale implementation of PAR for open and transparent administration. To reach this aim, the municipality tries to introduce electronic and transparent standards of administration, protect the information proactive sharing demands, make the information on the local political processes, social policy and programs available on the webpage and in the social networks.

The study materials show that important steps have been made forward about citizen service improvement. However, it is very difficult to create a successful practice to receive information and provide the mobile format.

Citizens have quite an unclear idea of PAR and its benefits for the ordinary citizens implying the e-service format adjusted to their needs. A part of citizens says that has never used the electronic service. However, the number of citizens using it and at the same time being satisfied with the local electronic services is too small.

Such passivity in using the electronic services is affected by a low level of awareness; the lack of access to the internet and necessary technical base; the lack of necessary skills of citizens; the lack of social awareness-raising events carried out by the self-government.

The website - the most important component to provide the transparency and efficiency of municipality activity, needs a serious modernization. There are some questions regarding timely informing the citizens on vacancies and auctions.

Communication between government and citizens is not mutual (report hearings through the radio, uploading on the website, meetings where citizens` interaction and inclusiveness is very minimal).

The citizens are inert to the local social processes. Their 61% have never submitted the initiative to the self-government and do not use institutional mechanisms of inclusiveness (Gender Council, Civil Advisory Council, Council of Persons with Disabilities, etc.); do not actively cooperate with the local NGO sector.

Citizens mainly participate in the settlement meetings where priority issues of their villages are solved.

The social groups which are most in need of help at the local level involve the following segments: families with many children, lonely elderly people, citizens who are not in the pension age and receive none of the state monetary and other social benefits. It has been emphasized that youngsters should have the motivation to stay in a native municipality.

It has been revealed that there is no standard of needs` assessment and identification of the program effect. Besides, the practice of implementation of innovative programs is weak.

The respondents had no clear viewpoints on the issue of decentralization, though they think that the local government should have more authority to solve some social issues and create employment programs.

The practice of collaboration with the local private sector has not been revealed. As for the role of local NGOs, economic strengthening of citizens, raising awareness on PAR, teaching the necessary skills, the role of mediator with the government are considered to be their main fields of activity by the respondents.

The local needs identified regarding transparency, efficiency and inclusiveness of citizens, enables us to see the strengths and weaknesses of the e-services. They also help to identify the relevant events necessary for the provision of better administration in Ambrolauri Municipality and their further advocacy. All this will contribute to the successful implementation of the reform:

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Based on the conducted study, some recommendations have been elaborated for the local and central authorities, local NGOs:

AT THE LOCAL LEVEL:

1. To implement PAR successfully at the local level, it is important to raise qualification and awareness of the municipality staff (i.e. heads of territorial units);

2. It is necessary to implement the activities necessary for the motivation of citizens: raising awareness about e-services, popularization of their benefits via the local media, information booklets and social clips;

3. Advocacy of the internetization issue at different levels is of vital importance. It will make the service equally accessible for every citizen;

4. The resource of the local intellectuals and community activists should be used to build the skills in citizens necessary for using the services;

5. Special spaces need to be created and equipped with the relevant technical appliances and staff to give the citizens the opportunity of using the service without any barriers;

6. To promote full socio-economic integration, the initiatives and participation of the youth, women and people with disabilities in the local administration should be encouraged.

7. The relevant resources (material, human) should be allocated in the local budget to provide the sustainability of practical outcomes of the reform and implementation of future tasks;

8. To make the communication with citizens more active, the resource of social networks should be actively used and face-to-face dialogue between the local politicians and citizens should be encouraged;

9. The capacity of local institutional mechanisms and social cooperation resources (Gender Equality Council, Council of Persons with Disabilities, Civil Advisory Council, etc.) need to be increased and used to promote the transparency, accountability and inclusiveness of the local political processes;

10. It is very important to introduce the practice of needs` assessment in the elaboration of the local programs, identification of the citizens` social priorities and the effect of the existing programs. The resource of the qualified NGOs should be used in this regard;

11. The awareness of the public servants, as well as citizens, should be raised on participatory budgeting for implementation of the programs adjusted to the needs.

AT THE CENTRAL LEVEL:

1. Regarding the PAR local implementation, more methodological assistance should be provided to improve the e-services and make their popularization in the society; periodical monitoring should be conducted and successful practise should be multiplied. The activities raising the staff qualification need to be stimulated;

2.The process of decentralization needs to be speeded up. The increase of the role of local government regarding social issues should be considered.

TO NGOs:

1. The organizational resources need to be mobilized to strengthen the practice of collaboration with the local government and support the sustainability of PAR outcomes**;**

2. Periodical monitoring needs to be conducted by the CSOs and the problems and socially important issues identified by citizens need to be advocated at the local level with the active groups of people;

3. Concerning the study of needs and study of long-term and short-term local effects, it is important to collaborate with the self-government and suggest the initiatives adjusted to the needs of citizens to integrate them into the local strategies and action plans.

RACHA-LECHKHUMI AND KVEMO SVANETI REGION

THE RESEARCH OF CITIZENS' LOCAL NEEDS IN TSAGERI MUNICIPALITY
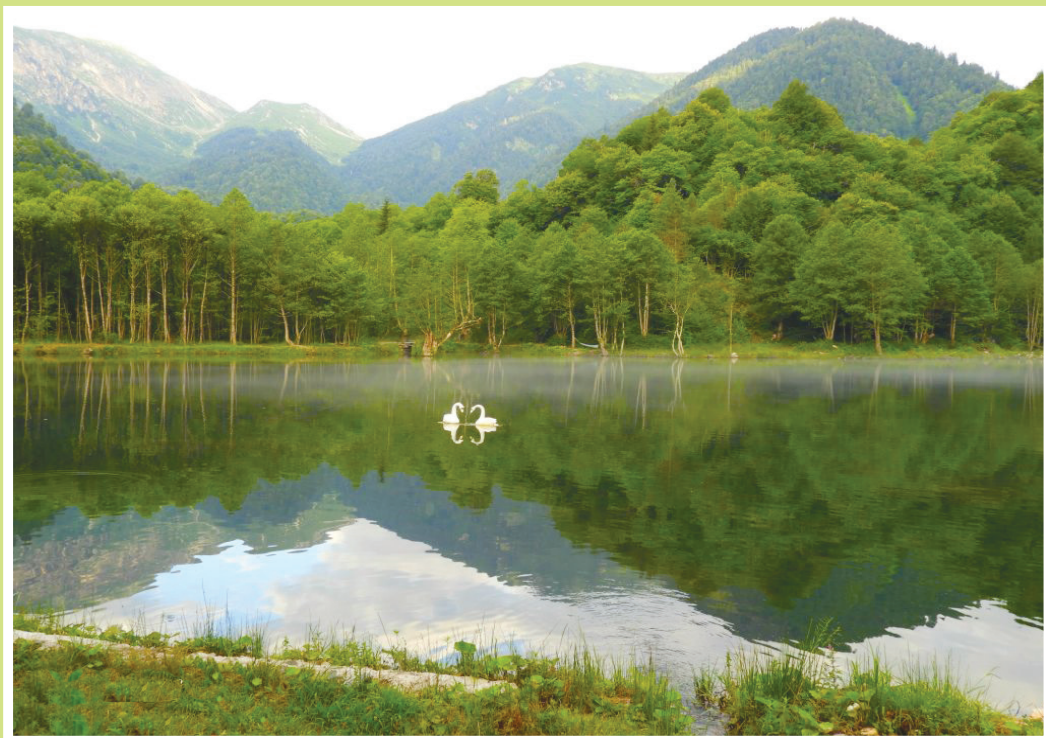
INTRODUCTION

Public Administration Reform which started in Georgia in 2015 has gone through several stages. Since 2018 the government has started executing on the medium-term strategy of decentralization which aims at observing a high standard of transparency and accountability on a local level by providing citizens with better electronic services.

According to various researches, executives of municipalities and representative bodies have made a progress since 2017 in the direction of transparency and accountability.

Based on 2019 results, Tsageri region showed a 25% increase in indicators (National Assessment of Georgian Municipalities - 2019) the sources of information is available on the link below -https://idfi.ge/public/upload/IDFI_2019/General/LSGINDEX_Report_GEO.pdf

PAR Roadmap 2019-2020 action plan of the local self-government stipulates two objectives: a) extending powers of the local government for strengthening the local self-government; b) providing a step-by-step action plan to adjust the availability of electronic services in local self-government. To carry out PAR effectively and efficiently at a local level, it's of great significance to have high levels of public involvement to provide transparent, accountable, inclusive local governance.

First and foremost, this implies the identification of local needs by citizens and active political dialogue formats for its further advocacy.

Cultural-Humanitarian Fund "Sokhumi" in partnership with Fund of Women Entrepreneurs and Imereti Scientists' Union "Spectri" is carrying out the project – "A Common forum for CSOs from Guria, Imereti and Racha-Lechkhumi for PAR Roadmap monitoring" funded by the European Union.

The above-mentioned research has been carried out under the guidance of the Fund of Women Entrepreneurs and target corporations such as:

Non-entrepreneurial (Non-commercial) Legal Entity "Active Citizen - Accountable Government" and "Women Equality Center". This involves research of local needs and assisting citizens in the context of PAR objectives. As a result of the implementation of the research, recommendations have been sent to the local government as well as other relevant bodies.

The aim of the research - the study of citizens needs regarding service provision in the context of PAR and terms of the components of transparency, efficiency and inclusiveness.

Methodology - the research has been conducted with a triangular approach which assumes applying the quantitative and qualitative methodology. The research plan had been drawn up and questionnaire for qualitative and quantitative research was prepared before launching it. Within the framework of the research the local government has been assessed in the following three directions: **transparency, efficiency and inclusiveness**. 30 indicators were used for interpretation and analysis of the data.

Selection of Population - general population of the research is represented by the citizens of Tsageri Municipality. The above-mentioned research is representative and enables opportunities for generalization.

Selection - the cluster, as well as quota selection principles, were used in the study

and it covered citizens of various demographic profiles. 174 respondents have been interviewed within the framework of the research.

The analysis of the research data was carried out through the SPSS program.

The research time - April 2020.

Research limitations- The research was carried out in the limited circumstances and emergency caused by COVID-19 pandemic. The majority of respondents were contacted either by telephone or online.

BASIC INFORMATION:

1. DEMOGRAPHIC PICTURE OF THE RESEARCH

150 citizens of Tsageri region got involved in the quantitative research study, including 37 men and 63% women. Target groups were made up of socially vulnerable people, people with disabilities / their family members, single parents, women, youth, pensioners, public servants, representatives of local CSOs.

4 in-depth interviews with local experts were conducted within the framework of the qualitative research with the participation of 4 focus groups composed of the following category of people: socially vulnerable people, intelligence, representatives of local civic organizations, young people, small entrepreneurs, families with many children. The groups were homogeneous in general. Regarding gender, 17 women and 7 men were interviewed. The research in this component has been implemented in compliance with transparency, efficiency and inclusiveness.
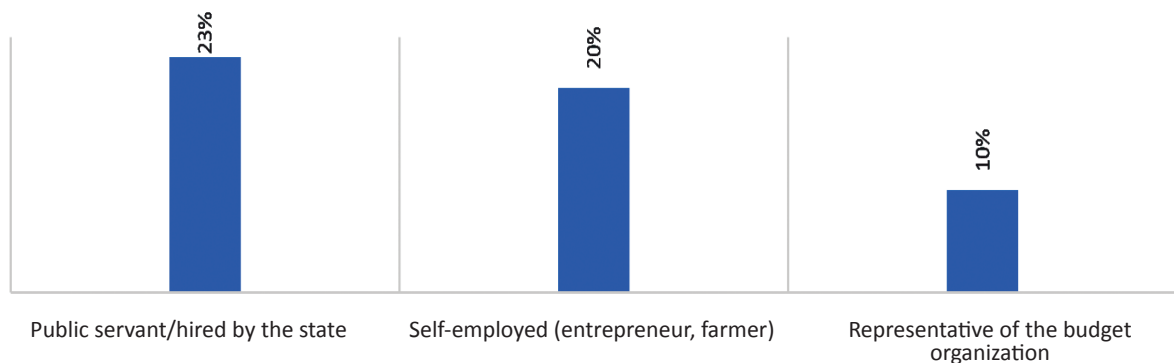
In the quantitative research, a group of young people have been interviewed and has been divided as follows:

AGE OF THE RESPONDENT

	18-34	35-64	65+
	34%	56%	10%
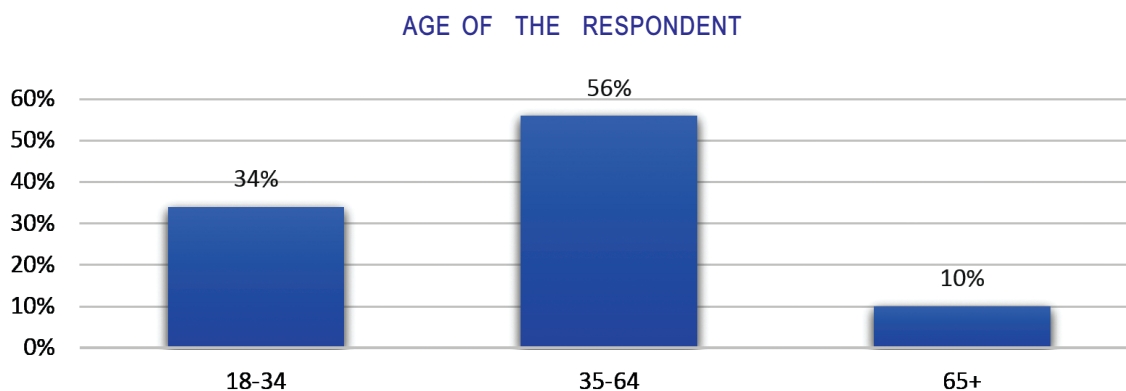
According to the marital status, the majority of respondents are married (51%), 30% of the respondents are single, 14% - widow/widower and 5% - divorced. Most respondents have higher education (42%) and the percentage rate is comparatively the same for the people with high education (26%) and special upper secondary education (23%). As for 10% of the interviewed, they have an incomplete education. 63% of respondents have a special status. For instance, the social status of a vulnerable person (29%), families with many children (20%) IDPs (internally displaced people) (14%).

According to the study, 27% of the respondents are out of work, 6 % is composed of students and 14% of interviewed are pensioners. The rest 53% compiles the following categories:

EMPLOYMENT STATUS OF RESPODENTS

Public servant/hired by the state	Self-employed (entrepreneur, farmer)	Representative of the budget organization
23%	20%	10%

It's interesting to draw attention to the average monthly income of respondents (including any kind of cash income). As it has turned out there isn't a family whose income is lower than 100 GEL. Their income varies in the range between 101 - 500 GEL.

2. TRANSPARENCY:

According to the research, the majority of Tsageri residents (39%) are completely aware of Public Administration Reform(PAR). 37% is partially informed and 24% of respondents have no information at all. TV is considered to be a very important source of information to the public (29%) and representatives of NGOs (29%). Besides, 23% of residents have access to the websites of relevant municipalities to get information and 16% also raise their awareness at the meetings with representatives of governmental structures.

The qualitative research revealed the attitudes of public servants and ordinary citizens toward the Public Administration Reform, respondents' positions, the duration of the research and evaluation of results in terms of challenges. According to the government officials, the implementation of public administration reform is a very significant thing, since, it enables the local self-government, locals and other civic organizations to keep a close linkage in the format of effective communication:

"Rural municipal meetings, program budgeting, a budget discussion is to be carried out in direct contact with the residents as envisaged by the local self-government code. It's noteworthy that residents are given opportunities to submit petitions, send letters and file an online complaint. As far as I am concerned, this nearly doubles public participation because they don't have to face bureaucratic barriers. Above mentioned action also involves the effective content of control mechanism" - a public servant.

Following a diagram, half of the respondents approve PAR to improve the quality of public services. The diagram depicts the citizens' positive disposition:

WILL PAR IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED TO CITIZENS?

48%	11%	1%	40%
Will improve	Will less improve	Will not improve	Cannot answer
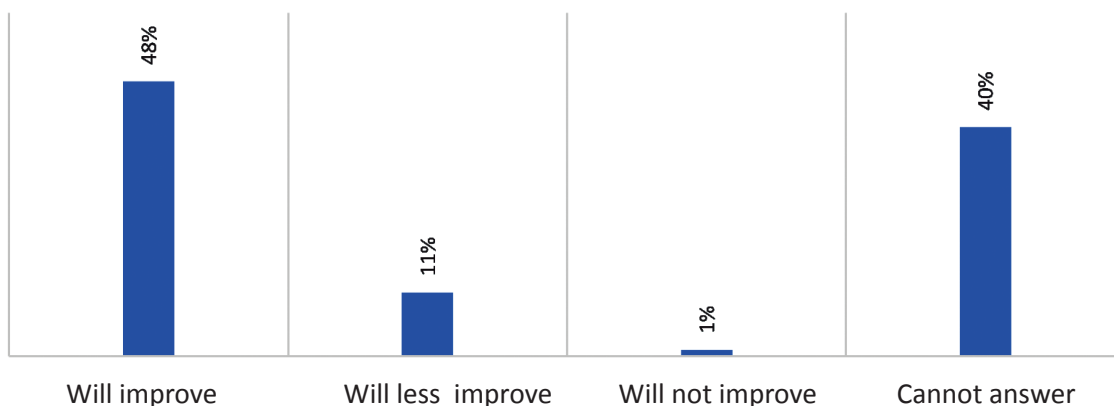
The qualitative research respondents acknowledge the topicality and positive effects of PAR. They assume that the reform is in the initial stage of development and they are going to improve the quality of public services to a certain degree in the nearest future:

"The introduction of electronic services has contributed to the fact that people no longer need to receive extra resources and commute to handle work. They don't have to be physically fit enough to do the job. Without excessive actions, they can get their messages across to self-governments to cope with any problem arising in their community. This is what I like the best about this reform" - a City Hall employee.

As a result of the quantitative research, it was revealed that 30% of respondents are fully informed about municipal electronic information services. 42% of them are partly informed and 25% of the interviewed aren't informed at all. As it has turned out, 3% of respondents aren't interested in this kind of issues.

Opinions were divided among focus groups upon the question of whether the population is fully informed about electronic municipal information services and self-government activities.

"In the centre of the municipality there is no inconvenience when accessing information, but there are some parts of rural areas where accessible information is of great concern and they have to meet officials in person and communicate with them in an old traditional way" - a CSO representative

"I do not have any information from the regional centre. My village is far away and our life is so fraught with daily problems that we don't even find time to get aware of similar issues. If this is a chance to take a turn for the better then we are in full readiness to get further information" - a parent with many children.

"It's prominent to make electronic municipal services available for everyone. That's why it's necessary to promote social activities for citizens to enable them to receive   service benefits technically" - a lawyer

Information on e-services was available on the website of the municipality and the official FB page of the Municipality (for 39%). Besides, 23% of respondents have been informed thanks to the representatives of NGOs. 17% of the interviewed raised awareness on the issue at the meetings with state officials and 10% received information from TV. There is a category of citizens who have already adjusted to a new format and fit it into their sphere of interest:

"I instantly got interested in the official website and FB page of the municipality and kept track of the allocated budget, benefits for public servants. I participated in recruiting competition which was also advertised on particular websites" - a representative of local authorities.

"I have used the service. I have applied to the City Hall through the website as I needed some consultation regarding documents. To me, that was convenient and comfortable" - a female entrepreneur.

"I certainly use the service. With the help of the official website I found it easy to get information on the state procurement and have an access to a list of vacant positions" - a self-employed woman.

Respondents have distinguished those municipal electronic services that have been applied over the past years. Most of them have mentioned announcements about vacancies - 18%; searching for contact files of a municipal employee - 15%; information on budgeting - 12%; normative acts and resolutions approved by Sakrebulo- 8%; procurement plans, reports - 7%; submitting a proposal, filing a complaint - 4%; reporting awareness - 3%; meeting registration - 2%; familiarization with the agenda / minutes of Sakrebulo meetings - 1%; electronic petition - 1%. It should be noted that 6% of respondents aren't interested in these kinds of services. 13% of them have no access to the services whereas 7% of the interviewed think they don't have relevant skills to benefit from the above-mentioned services.

The qualitative research shows that citizens remain passive in communicating with officials. They may use websites, FB page, but they aren't actively involved in mutual communication:

"Last year there was an announcement on the official website of the municipality asking the locals to work out a list of projects to be included in the budget, but I have no idea how it was accomplished as a result"- a small entrepreneur.

The study showed that people have different opinions about the changes necessary to be made to improve the services. According to 33% of respondents, the focus should be made on the state electronic services to inform residents timely and thoroughly; 15% assume that services that meet demands and needs of the most vulnerable people of the society, single parents, women victims of violence, children, people with disabilities seem to be of great significance. Another 12% found improvement of the competence of public servants. 4% of the interviewed see the necessity to ensure pay rise. 9% of the respondents assumed an increase in the number of customers and territorial coverage (provision of access) to be indispensable. The certain amount of interviewed pointed out that information on the ways of electronic services and their forms is scarce or not available at all:

"I did not know that one can only use identity card to take advantage of any services" - a father of many children

According to the residents, they are provided with socially important information by NGOs. They got the impression that electronic services can't be available for everyone. So, the municipality has to put many efforts into informing society:

"There is a hotline available in the City Hall. Also, the information bulletin of self-government is periodically issued and meetings and open sessions of Sakrebulo are applied. Information bulletin boards are available in villages as well" - a public servant.

The study participants remark that not everyone has access to the internet. That is why citizens should be provided with information via TV, messages, local newspapers. Furthermore, a representative of the City Hall with relevant competence having authority over others must maintain great contributions to informing the population.

It is said that the City Hall established special services. For example, NNLE "Women's Rights and Gender Equality Center", Research Commission for assistance and needs of people with disabilities, commission on social issues etc. which carry our research and results are introduced in the budget of the municipality.

A range of assessments has been made as a result of interviewing focus-groups and challenges which may hinder the successful implementation of the reform have been discussed as well:

> *"When it comes to the issue of challenges, I think that it's expedient to introduce a better objective examination system. In case of the accomplishment of the reform, the population will build more trust in public servants"- a music teacher.*

It is interesting to know which services are available for the respondents. Visiting the official website of the municipality is the most demanded service (34%) and civic portal www/ mygov.ge is frequently used by 16% of the respondents.

WHICH E-SERVICES DO YOU USE TO GET LOCAL SERVICES?
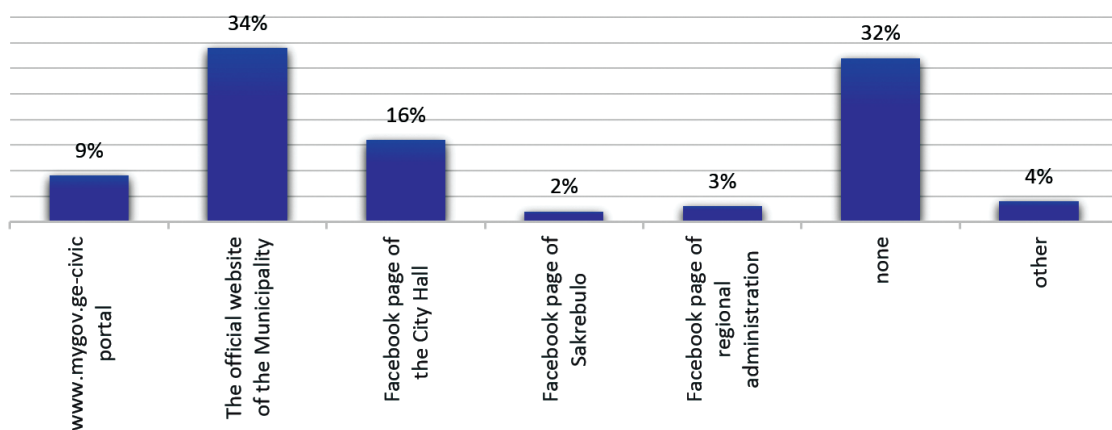
EFFICIENCY:

In the matter of local government efficiency, evaluations of public servants are in most cases positive. However, they avoided talking about problematic issues:

> *"The municipality is trying to provide electronic services to satisfy citizens' needs and priorities. There is a special service in the municipality focusing on groups of special needs" - a public servant.*

> *"Analyzing and studying groups of special needs is less likely to occur in the municipality and perhaps researching in this respect and analysis in various spheres is necessary to make self-government more efficient to help residents become more adaptable to the services" - City Hall employee.*

The opinion about this issue stipulates an increase in Sakrebulo participation to carry out the most important function of monitoring.

The quantitative research results showed that when it comes to accountability issues in the workplace, 33% of respondents assume that local government fully provides information on civil affairs including the rendered activities. 39% of them think that information is partly provided and 8% of the interviewed reckon that local government is inactive to provide information about services.

The efficiency of self-government was the main topic of discussion with focus-groups. The necessity of dialogues on a local level was highlighted and public involvement was given a significant role to bring out priorities.

Citizens have expressed themselves in the direction of efficiency of social policy. They think that it would be better if the municipality had more programs to present. It is necessary to plan activities/events to stimulate young people to settle locally instead of leaving for remote areas. It is important to hold meetings with youth, give them consultations and training. Besides, they find it important to allocate sufficient funds in the budget for start-up programs to run a small business.

That was the example of positive practice of collaboration with self-government and NGOs:

"Needs and proposals stated in the meetings with the residents are more or less envisaged in the budget when planning infrastructural facilities. In my case, the residents of my street requested for the sewer system rehabilitation which was satisfied. Priorities are mainly studied based on research results with the help of non-governmental organizations and open meetings with the representatives of the local self-government" - a Nursery school psychologist.

To evaluate efficiency, it's important to analyze how convenient, simplified and comfortable is the service offered to you. In this respect, 49% of respondents reckon that applying to self-government agencies for electronic municipal services is a simple procedure. 8% of the interviewed assume it to be complicated and 43% of them find it difficult to answer the question.
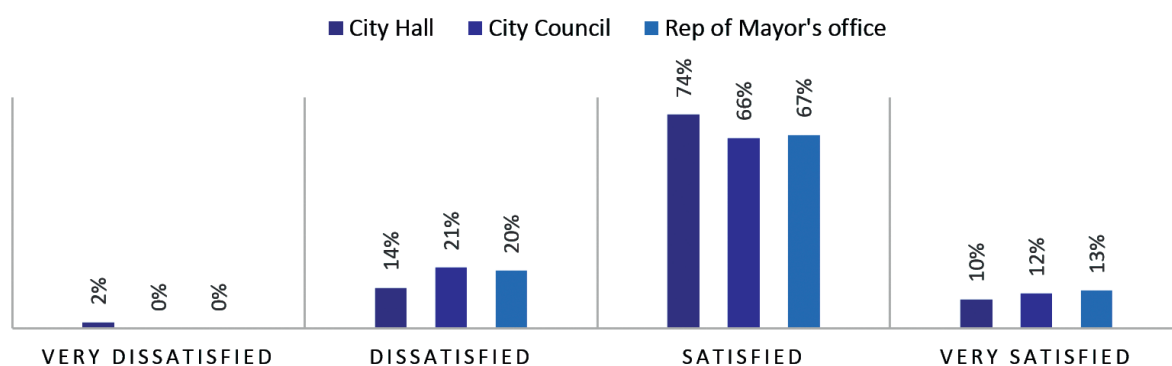
According to the studies conducted over the past year, only 16% of respondents have used the service of online appointment scheduling. 74% have not used this kind of service and 11% have no information at all.

Focus-groups also showed their preference for face-to-face communications:

"The municipality has appointed a person responsible to communicate with civil society organisations" – a Civil Society Organisation representative.

Within the framework of the research, respondents showed their satisfaction towards the services they received from the City Hall, Sakrebulo and the representatives of the Mayor's office. The majority of them expressed satisfaction towards these three units and their assessments are shown below in the diagram:
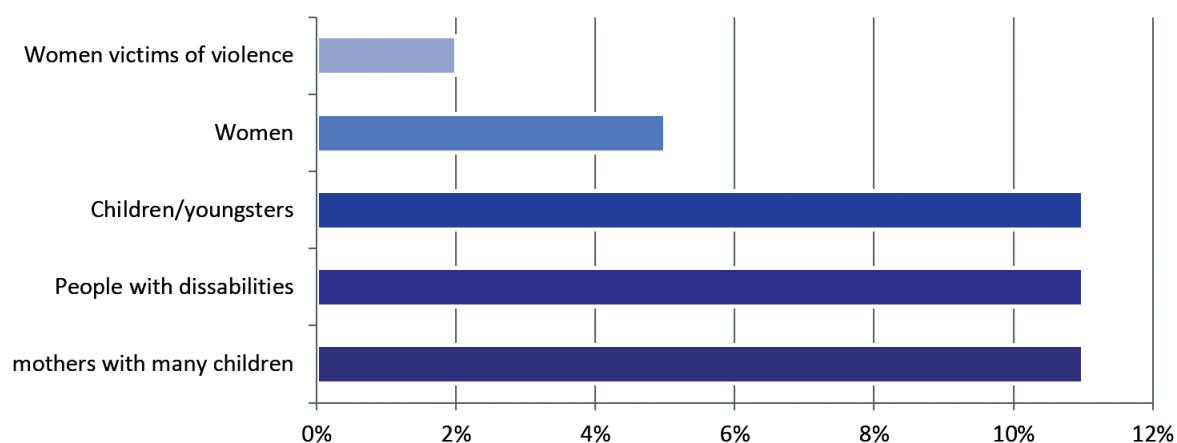
IN GENERAL, HOW WOULD YOU ASSESS
THE SATISFACTION WITH THE SERVICE RECEIVED?

■ City Hall   ■ City Council   ■ Rep of Mayor's office

	City Hall	City Council	Rep of Mayor's office
VERY DISSATISFIED	2%	0%	0%
DISSATISFIED	14%	21%	20%
SATISFIED	74%	66%	67%
VERY SATISFIED	10%	12%	13%

75% of respondents applying to self-government had either their or their family members' problems resolved.

The majority of respondents (43%) consider that citizens' needs are paid equal attention. Whereas 26% assume that groups of special needs are paid less attention. Research participants classified those groups whose needs are particularly satisfied by the municipality.

NEEDS OF WHICH GROUPS LISTED BELOW ARE MOSTLY CONSIDERED BY THE MUNICIPALITY?

Group	Percentage
Women victims of violence	2%
Women	5%
Children/youngsters	11%
People with dissabilities	11%
mothers with many children	11%

The question of the orientation of needs is also expressed in the qualitative research study:

"Addressing the needs of the elderly and the homeless in the way the municipality chooses is very effective. They get high-quality service. I mean feeding and housing of the homeless and vulnerable people of the society" - a Lawyer.

Apart from this, some issues have been put forward that require special approaches. Also, they emphasized the citizens with a particularly vulnerable degree of resilience and in tough conditions, who can't benefit from state programs and are unemployed. Socially vulnerable father with many children pointed out to pay attention to the families with many children and the elderly people as well:

"There are unemployed members of certain families and don't even get any social assistance. They only receive pension. It would be better to study and make a list of these families and help them in finding a job or provide financial assistance so that they would be able to have monthly income".

Respondents also expressed concern over the scale of migration:

"The most important thing is to implement projects that will terminate the migration of people from the regional parts of Georgia. It would be advisory to establish social enterprises and give youngsters a promising future to return to their locations" - a self-employed woman.

According to the research participants, it is very important to support rural parts and provide them with new technologies and consulting services. Besides, they find perspectives on tourism development very fascinating that would bring significant economic benefits for the residents and the whole municipality.

The qualitative research revealed the topic of decentralization when discussing these issues: Public servants and citizens both have common opinions to differentiate the competences of municipalities and sectoral ministries in the process of self-governance.

According to public officials, to exercise authority as envisaged by the law of self-governing unit, this necessarily requires financial or material resources, more independence which is unavailable at this stage. Accordingly, the main direction of decentralization must provide relevant resources in compliance with gradually increased authority of self-governing unit:

"There are some problems to be resolved within the framework of delegated authority. This would increase trust in public services. For example, self-government has no power to provide financial or employment assistance to those in need or terminate services" "The unit must be able to participate in determining the status of socially vulnerable families. They must have more competence in the education sector, agriculture and healthcare sectors" - local public servants.

The respondents are concerned that, locals address to self-government to resolve acute problems, some issues that are vital for their existence. Unfortunately, the municipality has no power to satisfy their needs in this respect:

"This is a complicated thing for people to comprehend regardless of its publicity". "Many issues put elected authority in an awkward position in terms of accountability. Local bodies must work accordingly and independently to exercise their authority. This will increase trust and reputation in a governing body" - Opinions by the representatives of the local government.

The representatives of the local government and citizens fully shared the views concerning the decentralization:

"It is not the right job to neglect important issues of great concern. For instance, the self-government has no authority concerning provision and termination of social assistance " - a civil society representative.

INCLUSIVENESS

The research participants were also interviewed to assess their involvement quality. There is no impediment from the local government and they make declarations that they approve high involvement of the citizens, but actually, this occurs at the expense of the non-governmental sector and active community groups. The resources of the local Gender Equality Council and Civil Advisory Council are not fully exercised:

> *"Citizens' involvement implies attendance and participation in the meetings. Advisory Council is functioning at the base of City Hall and reports are available, but their role in the management issues is minimal because they are less likely to participate in the implementation process" - a civil society organization representative.*
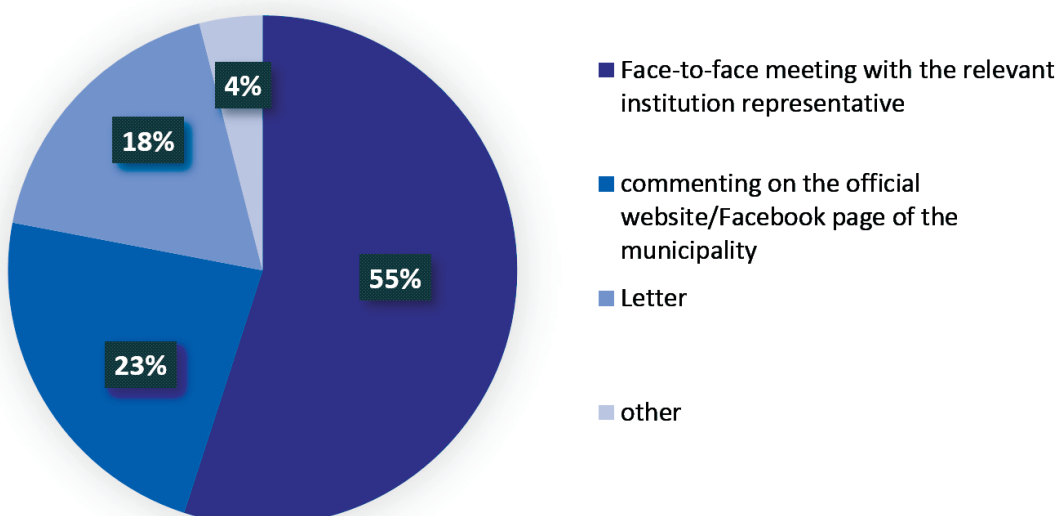
Self-government representatives realize that without citizens' involvement the power and authority of local self-government will not be exercised. However, they don't find it indispensable to discuss the results seriously. An Application of Citizens' involvements form is rare and it is performed improperly.

Quantitative research shows that 40% of respondents assume that public servants of local government partly realize the importance of citizens' involvement. Whereas 9% of the interviewed think that they do not realize the significance of this necessity. However, 27% reckon that public servants recognize the importance of citizens' participation and involvement with full awareness. They cited the cases as examples when citizens are encouraged: the process of identification of local priorities (34%), identification of Citizens' Needs (18%), reviewing citizens` initiatives (e.g. civil budget) - 13%, elaboration of municipal programs -15%, discussing the local budget/ budgeting process - 4%.

56% of the respondents mainly participated in settlement meetings.

The research showed that 45% of interviewed did not try to provide the appropriate unit with service-related remarks. Generally, 55% of citizens had private meetings with the representatives of the relevant agencies.

WHAT KIND OF COMMUNICATION FORM DID YOU APPLY?

- 4%
- 18%
- 55%
- 23%

- Face-to-face meeting with the relevant institution representative
- commenting on the official website/Facebook page of the municipality
- Letter
- other

Citizens have fragmented attempts at civic activism, which lack some proper loading:

"We had an experience of submitting a petition, but we didn't complete it thoroughly to register" - a lawyer.

"Women have become more active in presenting proposals and participating in meetings. I hope this tendency will continue" – a nursery school psychologist.

In order to promote constructive dialogues with self-government and contribute to high involvement, a range of necessities have been identified. 52% of citizens think that periodical meetings with local government seem to gain high topicality in terms of consultation; stipulating citizens' initiatives in terms of strengthening civic budgeting practice (13%); elaboration of municipal programs and citizens' involvement when discussing the budgeting - (12%); availability of more sectoral profiles and staff of public servants responsible for specific issues (8%); increase the productivity of Gender Equality and Civil Advisory and other council formats (8%); use and encouragement of Home Owners` Association (4%).

As it has been inferred it's necessary to increase the civil society role to promote effective and transparent governance and their involvement in informing the residents of the municipality, bringing about needs and working out recommendations. In the case of focus-groups, their significant role has been emphasized in social policy by informing and education:

"Undoubtedly, work performance and involvement of civil organizations are effective, since they are not obliged to "superiors" nomenclaturally and positionally. That's why they have more opportunities to work freely and openly and they are more sincere" - a representative of civil society organization.

In terms of the quantitative research, successful collaboration among civil organizations and municipality to promote the welfare of society has been assessed in the following way:

HOW EFFECTIVE IS CLLABORATION BETWEEN CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT FOR THE PURPOSE OF IMPROVING THE GENERAL WELFARE OF SOCIETY?

Very effective	Effective	Not very effective	Ineffective
11%	37%	47%	5%
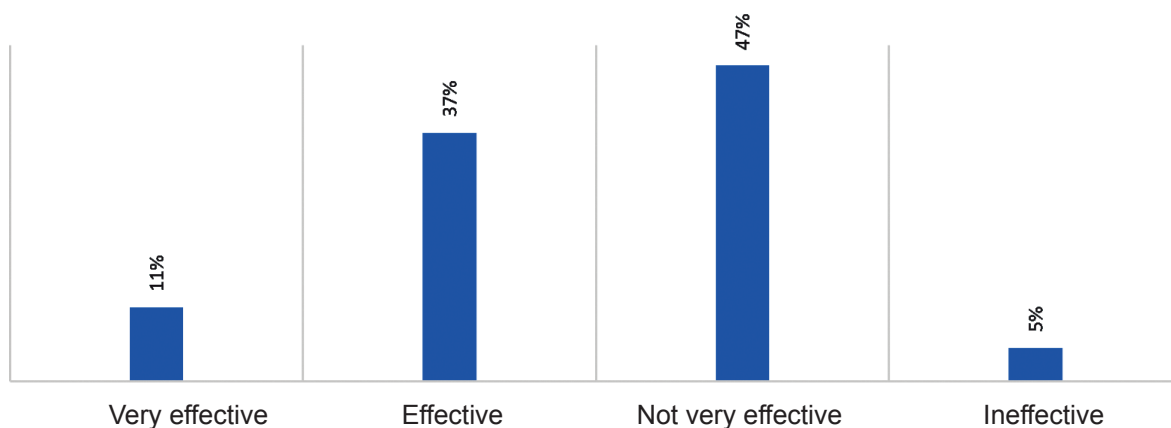
The respondents assume the role of local civic organizations in the process of implementation of the reforms significant in the following directions: Informing/educating - 23%; protecting citizens' rights -16%; informing the government about the needs of the

people -13%; advocating resolving the problems on a local level -11%; implementation of events to support social-economic development -10%; lobbying the enforcement of local legal acts, changes and amendments - 9% monitoring the duration of reform implementation - 8%; promoting dialogue formats/local participation/involvement among citizens and local government - 6%;

Respondents expressed their opinions about using financial and human resources for the following directions: social assistance seem to be most preferred and issue of high priority - 16%; healthcare -15%; promoting economic development and creating appropriate environment - 13%; infrastructure (roads, bridges, etc.) - 8%; culture-education - 7%.

Finally, within the framework of quantitative research, respondents emphasized certain local events that are necessary to meet their needs. They are as follows: providing employment assistance, increase social benefits; facilitate infrastructure, providing dam's fortification works in the rivers; supporting farmers; foster entrepreneurship and promote businesses; creating adapted environment for the people with disabilities; resolving transportation problems; improving healthcare services; promoting sporting events as well as cultural and educational events; rehabilitation of cinema halls; reconstruction of central marketplaces; arranging a shelter for the women victims of violence, arranging an animal shelter for homeless animals; promoting winemaking; paying too much attention to preschooling; public discussions and meetings with residents; training programs; starting up a tourism centre; dealing with problems related to drinking water; food safety; arranging a shelter for the homeless; accessibility to the internet; elaboration of gender budget; introducing development programs to stop migration; legalization of lands; establishing welfare offices; designing and building parks and squares;

Regardless of specific needs (socially vulnerable people, IDPs, families with many children) every group assumes that periodical meetings among representatives of local government and citizens in terms of consultation will benefit and increase the participation/involvement to a great degree.

Also, there is an interesting tendency in terms of aging groups. As a result of statistical processing of data, there was a correlation between aging and public governance/ service reform, i.e. the older the people get, the more awareness they show. The level of awareness in women is 9% higher than in men.

As it has turned out respondents see the necessity of different accents to improve service delivery for citizens. The differentiation of answers should be considered from a gender perspective. 31% of women think that it is paramount to provide services tailored to the needs and priorities of the vulnerable people of the society. Majority of men (31%) assume that a thorough awareness of public services promptly is indispensable.

The study failed to demonstrate any practice of collaboration with the private sector. However, the necessity to create a proper mechanism was discussed and agreed to put this issue on the agenda.

CONCLUSION

The research held in Tsageri region to reveal citizens needs in terms of local services and service delivery, in the direction of transparency of self-government, effectiveness and inclusiveness in the context of PAR, makes it clear that the first results of the reform are available and this assures introduction of electronic services, increased quality of accountability, encouragement of active communication with various groups, strong linkage to the local self-government and usage of its resources to reveal local needs through the dialogues with citizens.

It is noteworthy that this fact is confirmed by National Assessment Research materials approved by self- government, where the Tsageri Municipality shows a 25% increase in these components.

The analysis of the data leads to the conclusion that there is a political willingness for successful implementation of the reform and a step forward to accountable, efficient government. However, there are serious challenges that might make the effectiveness doubtful: due to the geographical relief of the municipality, a large part of vulnerable people of the society, the lack of the internet and technical means of communication, or scarcity of proper computer skills, a big part of the population does not have access to the service.

There is a misbalance regarding the issue of communication among these kinds of people and active members of the community who always take advantage of the reform and emphasize their simplicity, convenience and economy of electronic services that enables them to take roles of initiators and become participants of the political processes.

There is a direction in the municipality to introduce social policy adjusted to the needs of people. The role of the NGO sector, as well as positive cooperation with self-government, seems to be of great significance in this respect. One of the examples can be revealing the needs of the people, the practice of general assessment of program effects which provided a sound basis for several social programs. It is said that the needs of vulnerable people of society are not still satisfied thoroughly. For instance, there is no proper infrastructure for the people with disabilities and accordingly, all the necessary procedures and events have been discussed to integrate it. Besides, reasonable, long-term, strategic programs designed to support the agricultural sector still retain their topicality where the local government would have a leading role. Furthermore, the tourism potential of the municipality was mentioned unanimously with its new perspectives of employment.

Some acute problems are still put on an agenda due to improper pace of decentralization. Citizens have preference for financially and politically strong local governance and they openly opposed to the dysfunctional role of the ruling elite in citizens' social assessment, i.e. in the component of the "score system".

Research has shown that there is neither a practice of collaboration with the private

sector in a self-governing society, nor examples of corporate liabilities of the private sector that demonstrates the need for a significant shift.

RECOMMENDATIONS

TO THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT

To improve e-services, the following measures should be taken:

✓ Public servants must raise awareness on electronic services in locals permanently to contribute to the successful implementation of the reform;

✓ It is important to raise the qualifications of public servants, especially representatives of the Mayor's office regarding electronic communication methods;

✓ In order to motivate citizens and acquire skills for electronic applications, it is

  better to prepare videos concerning the benefits, outcomes of the very service and its practical use;

✓ It is vital to advocate the massive "internetization" at various stages. Cooperation with the Internet providers and providing socially vulnerable people with social privileges;

✓ It would be effective to maintain initiation of social projects in order to introduce the consultation centre which will make it easier for the communities even in remote places to benefit from electronic services;

✓ It is indispensable to start the system of Social partnership with NGOs, local intellectuals to popularize public electronic services.

The needs of Social Protection and Innovative Socio-Economic Programs

✓ It is vital to create relevant and supportive conditions in the municipalities for the vulnerable people of the society: providing ramps for administrative buildings and other social facilities; promoting economic activities adapted to the specifics of either their needs or their family members' needs (for instance work-from-home jobs); stipulate and make a budget for long-term socio-economic programs to support families with many children;

✓ It is better to introduce a sustainable system to research and prioritize citizens' needs. It is expedient to integrate already existing researches to meet the needs of the vulnerable people of the society;

✓ Economic development perspective should be foreseen in compliance with the tourism potential of the municipality in pursuit of ways to make it effective;

✓ It is advisory to find ways how to promote agricultural programs in the municipality. This requires evaluating state and international resources based on the Local Context Analysis to provide relevant consultation service for the locals.

Promoting youth development - it's indispensable to pursue targeted youth policy in the municipalities, encourage their initiatives, involve them in training and meetings; recognize their needs; introduce programs aiming at motivating the young opting to settle in their local areas. It is necessary to allocate necessary means for them to start up small businesses.

To the Local and Provider NGOs - It is important to inform the local community about social issues and provide educational activities, including electronic services.

- ✓ It is important to strengthen the local government in the direction of social policy, cooperation when studying the needs of residents and support to introduce monitoring and assessment practices;

- ✓ It is paramount to find resources to strengthen local civil society organizations and enhance social responsibility in local private businesses; it is highly recommended to cooperate with the groups of people, promote dialogue formats with self-government in terms of target group needs identification and advocacy tool.

To the central government – it is significant to assist self-government in the exercise of the powers prescribed by the law.

There is a necessity to analyze existing practices of social protection and put it on an agenda to better understand the role of self-government in citizens' social protection policy.

To the Local and Regional Media - it is important to put the issue on progress in Public Administration Reform (PAR) positive practices and challenges on an agenda- to improve the welfare of the citizens. Promote positive results and benefits received by citizens and increase awareness of the importance of the publicity of Public Administration Reform.

GURIA REGION

THE ASSESSMENT REPORT
ON THE POPULATION'S NEEDS
IN LANCHKHUTI MUNICIPALITY

IMERETI SCIENTISTS UNION "SPECTRI"
IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE MONITORING,
ASSESSMENT REPORT WRITING AND
EDITING CARRIED OUT IN GURIA REGION

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INTRODUCTION

At the current stage of our country's development, it is vital to take great responsibility and provide open, accountable, efficient, inclusive, transparent and professional public services.

Under the "EU - Georgia Association agreement", the country is obliged to implement in-depth reforms in respect of public governance and public services. There are either a range of documents or action plans concerning the very issue such as Open Administration Action Plan of Georgia 2018-2019[1], EU-Georgia Association Agenda[2] 2017-2020, Sustainable Development Goal 16[3], Implementation of the obligations 2015-2020[4]. The document targets at creating versatile conceptual frameworks and mechanisms by 2020, "which will be aimed at transparent, predictable, accountable and effective public administration, satisfy citizens demands in line with European standards".

The government endorsed and approved New Action Plan 2019-2020 for Public Administration Reform (PAR)[5], which aims at the implementation of the objectives envisaged by PAR roadmap 2020. PAR roadmap involves six disciplines: policy planning, public services and human resource management, accountability, service delivery, Public Finance Management (PFM) and the local self-government. The action plan covers all these six directions.

Apart from this, according to the estimation of the joint initiative SIGMA and OECD, in the process of policy formulation, Georgia got zero points in the public consultation assessment component[6]. According to SIGMA, there are significant drawbacks in this direction of public administration in Georgia. Namely, there are no systematic and obligatory approaches involved in the process of policy formation to provide effective consultations for the general public, particularly, to identify the population of special needs. Existing regulations, mostly include only general and non-mandatory conditions. Georgia has a low rating (3 points out of 100 points) in the evaluation criteria of the International Budget Partnership (IBP) which deals citizens' involvement in the process of budget elaboration initiated by the executive power and compiles residents needs-oriented budget.

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1 Open Administration Action Plan of Georgia 2018-2019, challenge 1, Obligation 2, see link below.: http://procurement.gov.ge/getattachment/International-Cooperation/Action-Plans/(OGP)/OGP-2018-2019-AP.pdf.aspx

2 EU-Georgia Association Agenda 2017-2020, Sustainable Development Goal 16 http://infocenter.gov.ge/uploads/files/2017-11/1511272286_annex_ii_-_eu-georgia_association_agenda_text.pdf

3 The Government of Georgia has identified all 17 Sustainable Development Goals its nationalization and implementation as a national priority. see.: http://gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=-&sec_id=198&info_id=62670.

4 Public Administration Reform Guide 2020, Goal 1, Areas of Public Administration Reform, Policy Development and Coordination, see.: http://gov.ge/files/423_49307_626772_PAR_Geo_Draft(1).pdf.

5 №274 Resolution of the Government of Georgia, Dated 10 June 2019 on the Approval of the Public Administration Reform. Action Plan for 2019-2020; see.: https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/4586360?publication=0.

6 The Principles of Public Administration Policy Development and Co-ordination - Georgia, SIGMA Programme, 2018, pg. 40, see.: http://www.sigmaweb.org/publications/Baseline-Measurement-Report-2018-Georgia.pdf.

2019-2020 new action plan of PAR stipulates two main principles in the direction of **local self-government**: a) expansion of local authority powers to strengthen self-government; b) provide development and improvement of electronic services in local self-government and promote free access to them.

There are special needs peculiar to each stratum of the society in Lanchkhuti region. For this reason, to bring about those needs Lanchkhuti Information Center (LIC) and Georgia Rural Council have conducted the study through joint efforts to reveal needs of residents involved not only in quantitative component but also in in-depth interviews with experts, involving Community Members and self-government representatives.

The analysis below is based on the research results.

THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Multi-functional research was implemented in Lanchkhuti Municipality in March-May, 2020. This period also coincided with the outbreak of coronavirus pandemic, which in its part brought about changes to the preplanned methodology, and almost every kind of research was carried out online.

THE QUANTITATIVE COMPONENT OF NEEDS RESEARCH

The research was conducted on the target group - the citizens of Lanchkhuti Municipality. Thus Lanchkhuti municipality became Geographical location of the study area.

Units of Selection - the unit of selection was a family. Hence, at least one person from each family was chosen for interviews.

Under 2010 data, the municipality has a population of 10031. It was possible to interview 150 respondents who compile 1,5% of the residents. Via the right method of selection 3,5% could be mistaken in the research process.

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS WITH EXPERTS

An in-depth questionnaire was elaborated in advance which encompassed 18 different starting point criteria and indicators (see the annex "In-depth Interview Questionnaire") Due to the restrictions on face-to-face communication under the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic circumstance, four in-depth interviews were conducted online. During the selection process, the competence and workplace of the respondents were envisaged as well.

FOCUS-GROUPS

The groups were facilitated by the representatives of Lanchkhuti Information Center (LIC) and Georgia Rural Council.

There were 6 participants in the first focus-group: a foster parent, a single mother, ex-member of Lanchkhuti Sakrebulo, majoritarian MPs' Bureau representative, an entrepreneur, a pensioner.

The second focus-group was composed of 2 people with disabilities, a mother with many children, a temporarily unemployed man, 5 medical representatives.

The members of the third focus group are as follows: two representatives of budget organizations, a representative of the construction industry, a housewife, 5 vulnerable people of the society.

The fourth focus group consisted of the following members: a servant woman living in the village, ex-member of Sakrebulo, a teacher, a representative of the NGO Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and 5 parents with many children.

REPORTING NEEDS ANALYSIS

SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

A total of 150 respondents participated in the quantitative research. 71 (47,2%) men and 79 (52,7 %)women.

People were interviewed regardless of their age difference. For example, respondents aged 18-34 - compiled 40%; respondents aged 35-64 - 46,7% and retired ones - 13,3%; 3% of the respondents are married. 33,3% of them are single; 10%- widowed; 9,2% - divorced. 7,3% of those interviewed have higher education, 21,3% have **upper** secondary special education, **8%- with an incomplete** education;

91% of respondents emphasized the particular status, 59% just left out the question. That 59% who answered the question proved that they have different statuses which imply they have no special statuses at all. 25,3% represent socially vulnerable people of society, 9,9% - IDPs and 5,5% -parents with many children.

Respondents in terms of employment were categorized as follows: 20,7% unemployed, 14% are employed in budget organizations (NNLEs); 16,3 % is self employed and 11,3% represent the private sector, 10% - pensioners, 8% - students, 7,3% - housewives and 2% - NGO representatives. As for the annual income of the families, monthly family income of 37, 3% of respondents is 100-500 GEL, 24% of families have monthly income of 501-900 GEL. 16,7% of respondents' monthly salary amounts to - over 901 GEL and 18,7% of respondents left the question unanswered.

TRANSPARENCY

Regarding Public Administration Reform:

- half of the respondents are not aware of PAR

- 23,3% of respondents are aware of the reform;

- 26,7% is partly aware

Half of the respondents who either partly or fully know about the reform gained information via non-governmental sector (30,2%), meetings with the representatives of governmental structures (25%); the official and social websites of the municipality (23.7%) and television broadcasting (21,1%).

46% of the respondents assume that PAR will improve the quality of citizen services, according to 11,3% services will not be improved much. 2% of the interviewed think that it will not be improved and 40,7% of the people have not answered the question.

48% of the interviewed are more or less aware of municipal electronic services, 17,3% of the respondents are thoroughly informed and 22,7% of the interviewed aren't informed at all. 12% of respondents haven't shown any interest at all.

Those informed about the electronic services of the municipality received this information from the following sources: 35,1% - official website/ FB page of the municipality; 29,8% -other resources; 14,9% - NGOs, 11,4% - television, 8%- meetings with local authorities.

Most of the respondents received the information on budget electronically from the municipality (15,3%), applied online (15,3%), 14% of the interviewed showed no interest and 13,3% have no access to the information, and none of the requested information exceeds 10%.
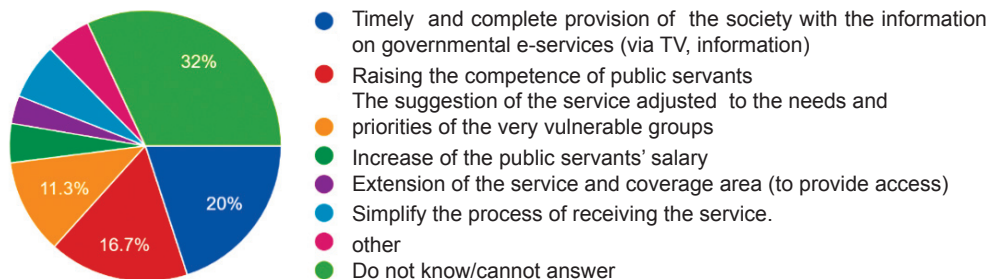
WHICH ELECTRONIC MUNICIPAL SERVICES DID YOU USE THE LAST YEAR?
(150 respondents)

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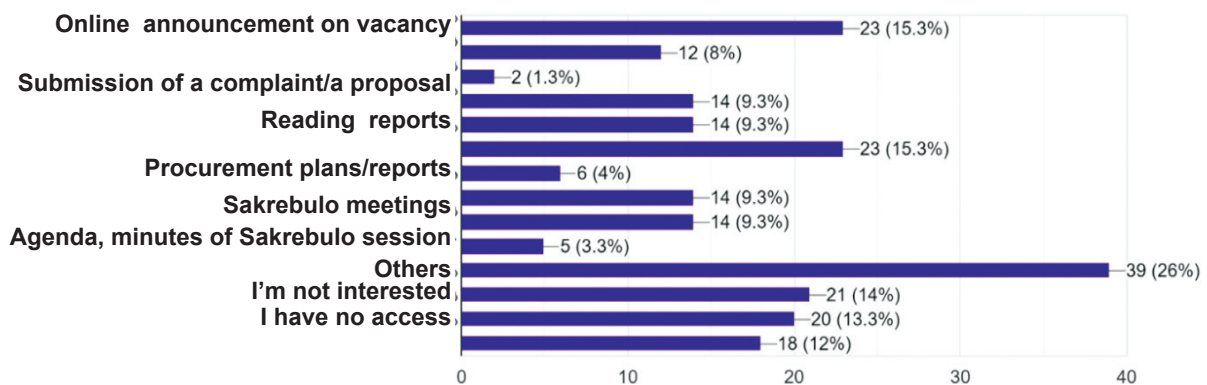
32% of the interviewed have no idea what to accentuate throughout the implementation process to improve citizen service delivery. 20% of respondents recommend informing citizens promptly, 16% reckon that it is paramount to increase the competence of public servants, 11,3% of the interviewed suggest the service be tailored to the most vulnerable people of the society to meet their demands. 10% of the interviewed call on the simplification of the service process. Other answers are less than 10%.

WHAT ASPECTS NEED TO BE FOCUSED ON DURING THE REFORM TO IMPROVE SERVICE PROVIDED TO CITIZENS?

- Timely and complete provision of the society with the information on governmental e-services (via TV, information)
- Raising the competence of public servants
- The suggestion of the service adjusted to the needs and priorities of the very vulnerable groups
- Increase of the public servants' salary
- Extension of the service and coverage area (to provide access)
- Simplify the process of receiving the service.
- other
- Do not know/cannot answer

The majority of respondents do not resort to any kind of services. 19,3% uses the official website of the municipality, 18,7%- FB page of the municipality, 12% - citizens' portal, 6,7% - FB page of Sakrebulo, 5,3% of the people gain information from different sources.

While assessing the public administration reform (PAR) during in-depth interviews

-The head of Municipal Service Development Agency (City Hall representative), thinks that implementation of the planned reform will significantly improve public service delivery;

- According to the ex-MP public service delivery has been improved for the last few years and perfection of above-mentioned reform depends on timeframe and collaboration between local authorities and civil sector;

-The financier-economist admits that PAR action plan 2019-2020 was approved by the government of Georgia only after significant delays.

According to the CSO expert, public administration reform was not only the desire of the government but also the obligation imposed under the "EU - Georgia Association Agreement". However, the pace of progress is very slow. The municipalities do not have a concrete strategy and an implementation plan or the reform is not represented in the existing strategies of the municipality.

Upon the question, whether electronic services introduced in the municipalities worked, the City Hall representative thinks that measures resorted to progress in providing public service delivery at a fast pace. According to the former MP, the above-mentioned issue requires a faster internet connection and its distribution. Public information is available but only for a certain stratum of society. The economist & financier thinks that electronic administration system has been introduced partly; whereas CSO expert considers that accessibility and quality on the use of human information sources have been significantly improved as a result of introducing electronic services.

Upon the question of whether **online vacancy announcements and other public information are available for the public,** City Hall representative states that the very information is uploaded on relevant websites, which are available for all citizens. According to the ex-MP, the already mentioned information is shared on relevant websites that are available for anyone having access to it. The economist-financier assumes that information delivery is one thing and the second one is how efficiently the residents get aware of it. CSO expert thinks that types of public information, such as vacancy and budget issues prescribed by the municipality are available for everyone as well.

Upon the question of how well informed the citizens are about electronic services and their forms, the City Hall representative remarked that in this respect people get information only through the internet. The ex-MP admits that the citizens of the municipality partly surf the net because of bad internet connection; the economist & financier emphasizes the fact that the citizens are self-informed about electronic service formats; the CSO representative is not certain about the citizens' awareness of the availability of such kind of services.

Upon the question "W**hat prevents the citizens from informing themselves in a better way?"**, the City Hall representative thinks that it is affected by a low level of participation and involvement, whereas the ex-MP suggests territorial units of the municipality be covered by the network. The economist & financier thinks that the main problem lies in the population since they lack active involvement, have no sense of power and they are formed as nihilists. On the other hand, the municipality doesn't have any willingness to have its citizens well informed because in this case, the issue on the formation of accountable and responsible authorities will be certainly put on the agenda. The CSO representative mentioned those problematic issues that inhibit information accessibility. They are as follows: 1. absence of high-speed internet in the villages; 2. lack of information retrieval skills; 3. difficulty in perceiving information for non-skilled users; 4. scarcity of information on electronic services for the majority of citizens.

According to the city hall representative, transparency of the work conducted in the city hall and Sakrebulo is rather high. The citizens attend public discussions of the activities of municipal services and benefit from information delivery, though the degree of accountability isn't sufficient. The ex-MP remarks that regular meetings are generally conducted between citizens and the representatives of the City Hall and Sakrebulo, but in most cases, the meetings are less formal. The economist-financier reckons that the municipality partially satisfies transparency standards. The civil society organization expert admits that minimal accountability exercised by the members of Sakrebulo and the mayor is manifested informal and small scale meetings and it isn't real accountability. The majority of the interviewed within focus groups weren't aware of **public administration reform**. Under the former member of the city council, information concerning the reform is made public but the citizens have no information. The participants assume that the information should be provided along with its action plan to analyze what kind of events are preplanned and what measures are taken in these directions.

Since the majority of citizens involved in dialogue formats are poorly informed about the reform, its implementation process has not been reviewed.

According to the representative of the Majoritarian MP Bureau, as a result of the successful implementation of the reform, information delivery will be improved for the citizens, the qualifications of public servants will be raised, the role of the public service bureau will be strengthened, etc. The former member of Sakrebulo states that the municipality has the right of access to public information as well as mechanisms for improvement of access to municipal services. Nevertheless, this information is not available for the citizens.

The representative of the Majoritarian MP Bureau deems that newly introduced **electronic management systems** were a success and he has integrated its mechanism in his daily work. A handful of e-petitions have also been signed. One of the participants says: "I will say directly that this is a fiction, as 75-80% of the residents can not have been informed about the electronic services. Only 10% of them must be informed and 3% out of 10% of them benefit from services. The representatives of the construction industry say that this kind of relationships is applied in all aspects of public service. In real life, they are less commonly used. A housewife accentuates that only 1-2% could have access to the information; a pensioner admits that he has not used any of the services so far.

Upon the question of how well the citizens informed are about the ways and forms to use electronic services, all those interviewed agree that most residents get informed through the internet.

Only a certain amount of citizens have access to the internet because the internet coverage is poor in the villages of the municipality. According to the participants, residents should be provided with information through public as well as private meetings before high-speed coverage is available in the villages. Furthermore, different ways of information delivery and dissemination must be integrated such as Information leaflets, booklets, etc.

Participants of the meetings admit that the main problem that hinders the process of information delivery, this is the low level of participation and involvement. It was noted that it's important to provide full internet coverage over the territories of the municipality. Apart from this, the information must be delivered simply and understandably.

The representative of the Majoritarian MP Bureau deems that there is **sufficient accountability and transparency**; report made by the representatives of the municipal services and Sakrebulo are regularly discussed, but it would be better to have more opportunities of organizing meetings with locals.

An entrepreneur, a pensioner assumes that this kind of meetings and reports discussion is formal because only the representatives of the budget organizations attend. The single mother and the foster mother think that the local government should pay more attention to the problems the women face and this should be inferred in their reports.

Generally, all the participants suggest that the representatives of the municipality organize more working meetings which aim at more active participation and involvement, promote vox pops to bring about their interests, attitudes on certain issues which will significantly increase the degree of accountability.
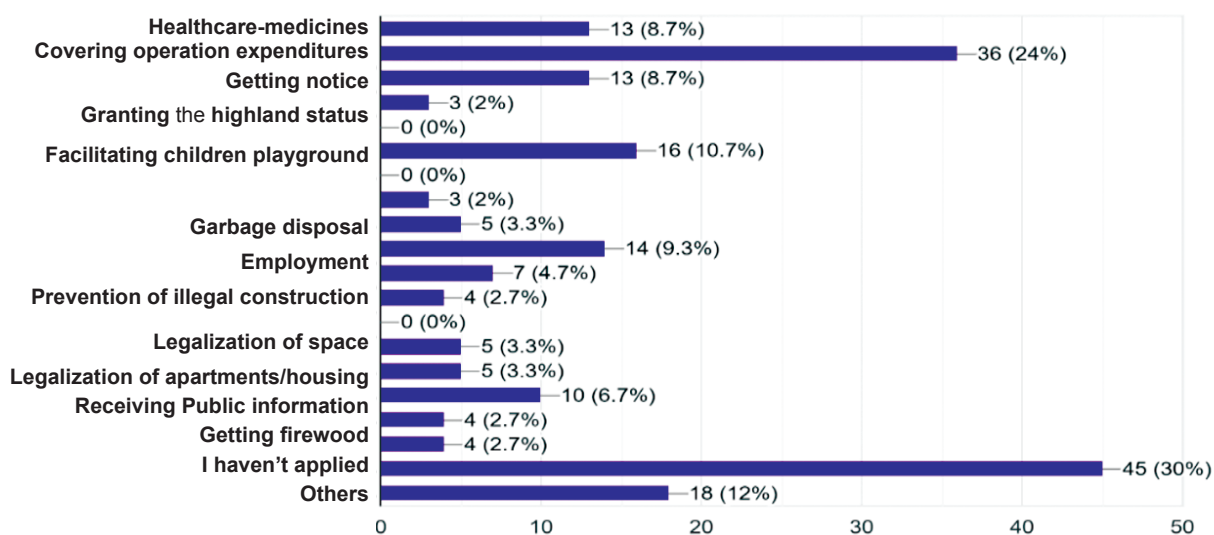
EFFICIENCY

52,7% of respondents are not aware of how to apply to the self-government agencies online for electronic services. 36,7 % of the interviewed find it easy to use these procedures. 10,7% of the respondents find it difficult.

The absolute majority of the respondents (75,3%) have not scheduled an online appointment with the representatives of relevant agencies. Approximately 20% of respondents do not have opportunities to benefit from the e-services and 5% of those interviewed consider them to be useless.

A list of main issues for which the respondents addressed to the municipality is as follows: social/ cash assistance 24%, the demand for freshwater - 9,3%, roof repair, construction material - 10,7%; access to public information - 10,7%; 30% of respondents have not shown any interest.

FOR WHAT KIND OF ISSUES HAVE YOU ADDRESSED TO SELF-GOVERNMENT UNITS (YOU CAN CHOOSE MORE THAN ONE ANSWER)

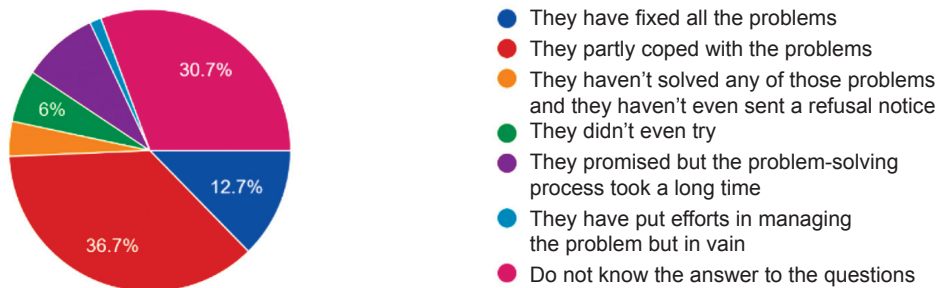| Category	Value
Healthcare-medicines	13 (8.7%)
Covering operation expenditures	36 (24%)
Getting notice	13 (8.7%)
Granting the highland status	3 (2%)
	0 (0%)
Facilitating children playground	16 (10.7%)
	0 (0%)
	3 (2%)
Garbage disposal	5 (3.3%)
Employment	14 (9.3%)
	7 (4.7%)
Prevention of illegal construction	4 (2.7%)
	0 (0%)
Legalization of space	5 (3.3%)
Legalization of apartments/housing	5 (3.3%)
Receiving Public information	10 (6.7%)
Getting firewood	4 (2.7%)
I haven't applied	4 (2.7%)
	45 (30%)
Others	18 (12%)

With the service provided by the City Hall: 54% of the respondents are satisfied, 35,3% of the interviewed are dissatisfied. 7,3% of them are very satisfied and 3,3% of them are very dissatisfied;

With the services provided by Sakrebulo: 8% of the interviewed are very satisfied, 54,7% of respondents are satisfied with the services, 34% - dissatisfied and 3,3% of them very dissatisfied.

When it comes to the services provided by the representatives of the local administrative units, 7,3% of the interviewed are very satisfied, 56,7% of the people interviewed are satisfied, 33,3% of the respondents don't express their satisfaction with the services and 2,7% of them are very dissatisfied. 36,7% of the respondents think that self-government has supported their families and partly resolved their problems. 30,7% of the interviewed have no idea whether their problems have been managed. 12,7% just wanted to try but weren't able to take advantage of the service. 8,9% think that the process has lasted for too long. 6% of the respondents admit that they haven't even tried it yet.

HAS THE SELF-GOVERNMENT RESOLVED YOUR / YOUR FAMILY MEMBER'S PROBLEM?

- They have fixed all the problems
- They partly coped with the problems
- They haven't solved any of those problems and they haven't even sent a refusal notice
- They didn't even try
- They promised but the problem-solving process took a long time
- They have put efforts in managing the problem but in vain
- Do not know the answer to the questions

According to the respondents, the leadership of the municipality considers the needs of the following population: population - 29,35%, persons with disabilities - 28,7% and other groups - 28,7%, people with special needs - 23,3%, families with many children - 18,7%, 7,3% - children and young people.

NEEDS OF WHICH GROUPS ARE MOSTLY CONSIDERED

BY THE MUNICIPALITY(CHOOSE APPROPRIATE ANSWER)
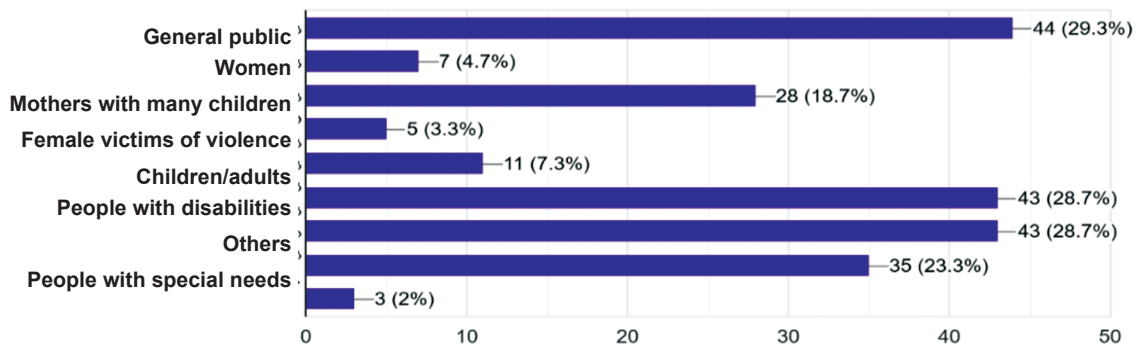
Upon the question, whether the **local government provides the citizens with thorough information about the activities/services** 49,3% of the respondents emphasized that it's partly accomplished, 20,7 % state that the information isn't provided and 14,7% of interviewed have left the question unanswered.

As the representative of the city hall confessed **in-depth interviews** showed that **research on special needs** is not sufficient. According to the MP, unfortunately, the report needs analysis is not put into practice in case of the municipality. The economist-financier assume that the resources are tailored to the people with needs, to their needs in terms of self-government resource capacity. However, to achieve efficiency in this respect, it is expedient to control a fair distribution of resources. The CSO expert reckons that services performed by the self –government are according to the Local Self-Government Code and service management seems to be obligatory. Besides,

different municipalities have various voluntary services and programs. The degree of efficiency depends on the type of these programs.

The city hall representative thinks that the municipalities are not able to study the degree of efficiency of delivered services in depth. The former MP remarks that civil society members and a small portion of people are individually involved in the monitoring process. The economist-financier emphasizes that there are no methods to integrate while studying the efficiency of the services provided, except for rare exceptions. The CSO expert admits that municipalities do not research the efficiency of private services. They neither study this issue nor do any analysis and they neither endeavour nor get the experts involved.

According to the respondents, it is necessary to take into account the needs of the following groups. The city hall representative points out that nowadays public meeting with locals organized by the City Halls and Sakrebulo are very common. It is of great significance to increase opportunities for the citizens to meet members of municipal authorities in person. The former MP thinks that meetings with representatives of the municipality are commonly held, but usually, those meetings are organized by governing units and not by the citizens themselves. The economist-financier advocates the development and promotion of informal meetings assigned by inferiors in the direction of superiors. Civil society organization expert proves that the meetings with the residents are frequently held in the municipalities and the absolute majority of the meetings serves many different purposes and is calculated to satisfy individual needs.

The city hall representative thinks that it is better to draw a line of demarcation between competencies of municipalities and sectoral ministries. This will allow us to deal with the problems arising from society more quickly and efficiently. The former MP urges to increase the power of the representatives of local administrative units.

The economist-financier suggests that the issue of water supply be stipulated. Civil society organisation expert assumes that local services must be handled by the self-government and not by the ministries of Georgia.

All the experts share the same opinion about the issues which fall within the competence of the self-government, assessment criteria, the central government should take into account opinions stated by the local representatives and relevant services.

At the meetings with the focus-groups, the former member of the city council reported that the **services provided by the self-government** are more or less responsive to the needs of the residents. Studying priorities becomes only a matter of local self-government; the citizens are involved in this process to a lesser degree. The employee of the budget organization says that the city hall cleaning service is not good enough, but there are still impediments in this respect all over the region. Unfortunately, he doesn't have a good understanding of other services. According to the representative of the construction industry, services are generally designed to perform the duties; the citizens aren't actively involved and consequently, the services aren't tailored to their specific needs. They make decisions and get their supporters familiarized with them. Those several men advocate their decisions without knowing what they have agreed on. The housewife underlined the fact that this is a handful of people who are asked questions, have discussions and make decisions. That is not the opinion of the majority of the people.

Some participants of the discussion (especially public servants) noted that **municipal service delivery** more or less respond to citizens' needs. The single mother stated that preschool institution is the best union in the municipality. The foster mother remarked that street cleaning and the collection of bulky waste is done regularly, but the entrepreneur said that there is still a problem with the rehabilitation of access roads to farm fields. It was said that residents

are less involved in the monitoring and evaluation process. The member of the budget organisation said: "This decision is made by several men, and you are obliged to agree with them. No one has ever come to me and asked which one was preferable for me - a road or a channel". The representative of the construction industry thinks that citizen participation with minimal engagement has a big influence on its performances, infrastructure. He considered the audit conclusions to be nonsense. The housewife said: "Absolutely nothing was done to me". The socially disadvantaged individual reckons that local service delivery is tailored to needs.

The participants involved in the discussion point out that it's necessary to increase municipal expenses in respect of social affairs since the majority of the residents belong to the poorest strata. They also mentioned how important it is to implement the following infrastructural programs (road maintenance, building bridges, maintenance of sewer and drainage system, etc.) Besides, in order to promote economic development, it is paramount to advocate small entrepreneurs and farmers and study their needs. The local programs must stipulate the poorest stratum of the society, people with disabilities, families with many children, single mothers as well as ecomigrants.
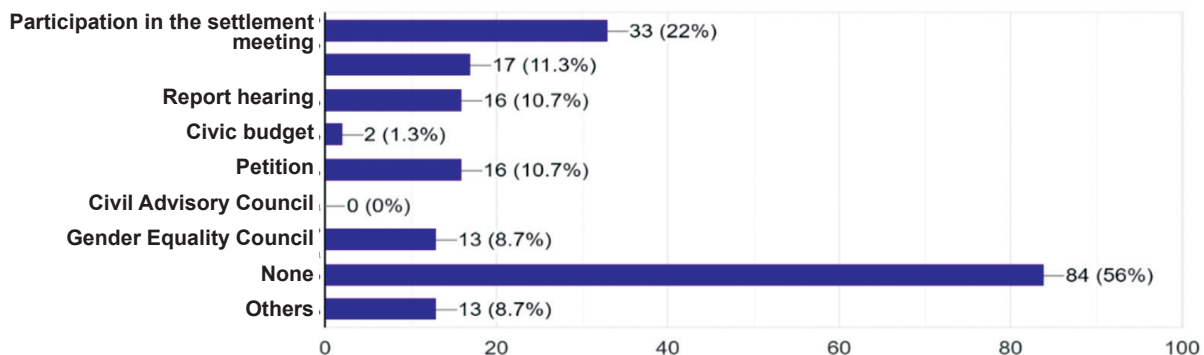
INCLUSIVENESS

Upon the question **whether public servants understand the importance of citizen participation**, 32,7% of respondents give a negative answer, 30% of the interviewed consider that they partly realize its importance, 16,7% agreed and as it has turned out 20,7% of the respondents have no answer.

13,3% of respondents think that determination of local the priorities promote the citizen participation, 12,7% of the interviewed attended budget session and budget discussions, 8,7% of them got involved in the discussion of municipal programs, more than the majority of the respondents 58,7% put forward other issues.

56% of the interviewed haven't participated in any civil affairs activities. 22% have been members of joint settlement meeting, 11,3% participated in either virtual or face-to-face meetings organized by Sakrebulo, 10,7% attended the hearing that involved a discussion of the report and signed a petition.

WHAT KIND OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES HAVE YOU EXERCISED?

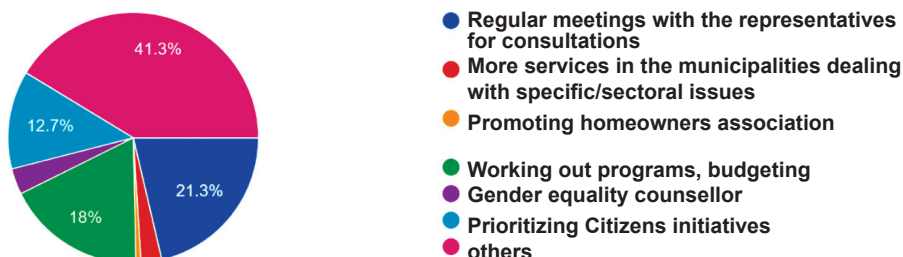| Activity	Value
Participation in the settlement meeting	33 (22%)
	17 (11.3%)
Report hearing	16 (10.7%)
Civic budget	2 (1.3%)
Petition	16 (10.7%)
Civil Advisory Council	0 (0%)
Gender Equality Council	13 (8.7%)
None	84 (56%)
Others	13 (8.7%)

34% of the interviewed were able to leave feedback comments in case of service failure to respond to the problems arisen due to dissatisfaction results. 22% weren't able to 43,3% of the interviewed have not expressed any wish or desire to apply to anyone.

41,3% of those who addressed to the self-government benefited from a face-to-face meeting, a small portion of people through correspondence, a few of them posted comments on websites; 42,4% emphasized the use of other methods.

21,3% of respondents think that the representatives of the self-government should necessarily hold regular meetings with residents to promote constructive dialogues and increase the rate of citizen engagement. 18% call for citizen participation/involvement in budgeting, 12,75% advocate citizens' initiatives to be considered. 41,3% think that other matters also seem of great importance.

WHAT IS THE MAIN NECESSITY TO PROMOTE CONSTRUCTIVE DIALOGUES WITH SELF-GOVERNMENT AND BETTER ENGAGEMENT?

- Regular meetings with the representatives for consultations
- More services in the municipalities dealing with specific/sectoral issues
- Promoting homeowners association
- Working out programs, budgeting
- Gender equality counsellor
- Prioritizing Citizens initiatives
- others

46,7% admit that there is at least one organization engaged in this direction. 40% assume that there is one for each sphere, 13,3% anticipate that there are more than three organizations. 44,7% of the interviewed assess the relationship of public and non-governmental structures to be effective,38%-less effective, 10% - very effective and 7,2% of respondents regard it as ineffective.

Upon the question **how they assessed the role of civil society organizations in the implementation process of public administration reform**, the answers were as follows: having the self-government informed about the local needs - 42,7%, facilitating dialogue formats between citizens and the different levels of government, advocating instant solutions to local problems - 27,3%, protecting humans' rights - 25,3%, promoting socio-economic development - 18%, reform implementation monitoring - 21,3%.

58% of the reviewed think that human resources and financial resources should be directed to infrastructure; social assistance (54,7%), healthcare - 47,3%; creation of the environment supporting economic development (46%), sewerage system maintenance - 44%; repairing damaged houses - 44%; management of strays - 30%

HUMAN AND FINANCIAL RESOURCES MUST BE DIRECTED TO:
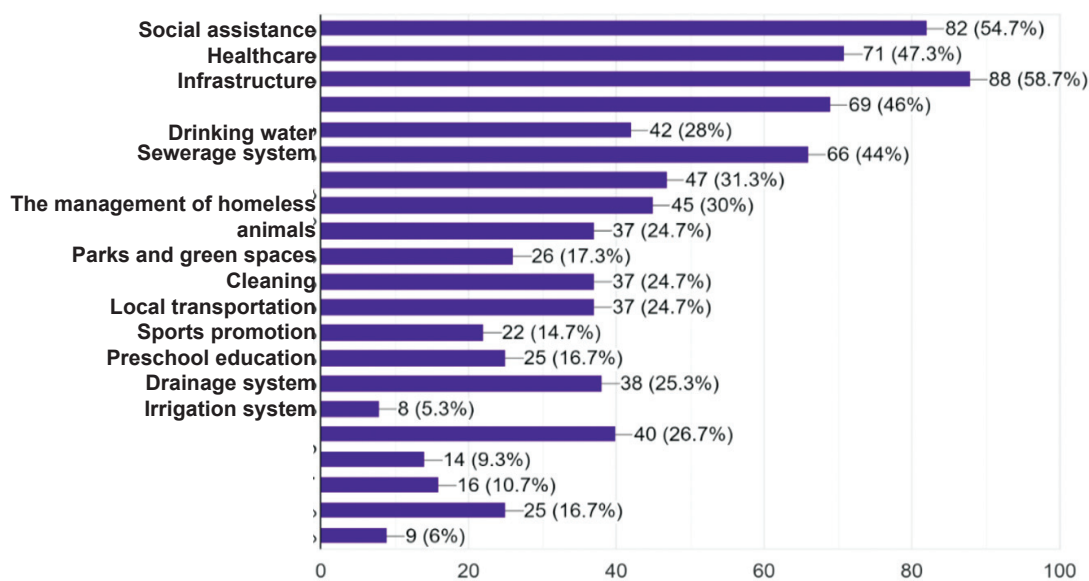
According to the City Hall representatives, there are certain **forms of participation**

such as settlement meetings, public accounts; though citizens engagement in local management is not efficient enough. According to the former Member of Parliament, the rate of citizen participation is low and formal in most cases. The economist-financier considers citizen engagement in local management as miserably low. Participation, transparency, accountability and inclusiveness can't be considered as the mainstay of the relationships between citizens and different levels of the local government. Civil society organization expert emphasizes that settlement meetings were organized only in three villages with the support of NGOs. The municipality does not have any desire to introduce this effective source of participation in another place because the degree of accountability will be increased. And this is not useful at all.

The representative of the city hall assumes that **cooperation between the public and private sectors nowadays** is not effective enough. It's important to use the potential of the private sector in this direction. The former MP thinks that these mechanisms at this stage seem to be weak. As the economist stated, she can't remember the case of this kind of cooperation in respect of public administration reform. Civil society organization expert admits that apart from participating in tenders, there is no cooperation between the private and public sectors.

The participants involved in the discussions with focus-groups did not have any desire to present a proposal or organize a meeting. It is considered that the degree of citizen participation is very low. Therefore, it is necessary to organize and hold more meetings than the regular ones. The single mother pointed out that when the meeting was held on the local level she wasn't informed about it beforehand. .It seems that women and people with disabilities are less likely to be involved.

She had suggestions but lack of activities made her frustrated. When a person is discouraged one loses interest to participate and get involved in this or that activity. The majority of the participants took part in settlement meetings, signed several petitions, etc. The former member of Sakrebulo remarks that the practice of public budgeting and public reporting has been introduced but remain ineffective.

The absolute majority of the focus-groups have emphasized that this practice is familiar to them. However, they haven't taken part in any kind of activities under the initiative of Gender Equality Advisory Council, Civil Advisory Council and other councils.

The participants assume that the relationship between the public and private sectors isn't effective enough. It's paramount to promote better and effective communication, cooperation and use the potential role of the private sector. Special groups should be working in this direction. Thus, their eagerness and cooperation will contribute to the implementation of innovative initiatives and projects greatly.

CONCLUSIONS
TRANSPARENCY

- In terms of the minor errors encountered in the quantitative analysis, we can conclude that the majority of the interviewed do not have any awareness of public administration reform;

- NGOs and Media Organizations play a key role in disseminating information on the reform;

- More than half of the citizens have no idea whether the reform will improve municipal services because of the scarcity of information or they just don't trust the authorities;

- The majority of the people are informed about electronic municipal services;

- The main sources of information about electronic services are official website and Facebook page of the municipalities and NGOs;

- Mostly electronic services are used to search for online announcements, either for submitting applications or gaining information about budgeting;

- A third of the population doesn't know which issues must be accentuated in the implementation process of the reform to improve public service delivery;

- Four out of ten refuse to apply e-services. The reason for this can be unawareness and the inaccessibility of the relevant information;

- Local experts have information about public administration reform. However, they point out that not only the local authorities intend to implement the reform but also it's the obligation envisaged by the "Georgia - EU Association Agreement";

- The reason why the reform implementation process is moving forward in slow-motion lies in the fact that the municipalities are void of the concrete strategies and the implementation plan or otherwise the reform isn't included in the existing strategies of the municipalities.

EFFICIENCY

- Half of the population is anaware of how effectively self governmental units respond to online applicants' needs to provide electronic services;

- Mostly citizens demand social/financial assistance and water supply;

- Over than half of the citizens are quite satisfied with the services provided by the city hall, Sakrebulo, representatives, etc.;

- One out of five seems to be dissatisfied with the ineffective problem-solving process conducted by the self-government;

- The municipalities have worked out programs but the citizens are less likely to be informed about them. This kind of programs only stipulates the common problems of the residents. Some of them distinguish people with disabilities and individuals with special needs;

- Half of the respondents think of themselves as partly informed about the municipal activities/services .

INCLUSIVENESS

- Public servants mostly fail to recognize the importance of citizen engagement/participation. They don't regard it as of great importance;

- Locals don't usually take part in decision-making. The majority of them hadn't even attempted to participate in the meetings;

- More than a third of the residents put forward their proposal in the meetings and made remarks in the presence of the local self–government representatives;

- It is necessary to promote constructive dialogues with the local self-government representatives and provide a higher level of participation to work out programs and engage the public in budgeting;

- While discussing local priorities, citizens are involved in the discussions to a certain degree. This is because self-government is legally obligated to review the village program in the presence of the locals and with high levels of their involvement;

- There are some active civic organizations in Lanchkhuti. They constantly and effectively cooperate with the local authorities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

TRANSPARENCY

- It is highly recommended to develop a communication strategy to get the public thoroughly informed about the public administration reform. The main function of the communication strategy must be raising public awareness of efficient electronic service delivery. The municipality is urged to involve stakeholders, NGO sector and Media within the strategy development process;

- Since the citizens reckon that they mostly receive information from non-governmental sector, it's expedient to strengthen its role as a communicator within the framework of specific local budget projects to achieve more transparency;

- The municipality should introduce print media alongside the existing sources of information since it will play a vital role in informing citizens about public affairs;

- The municipality must activate the following online services, such as construction permit, registration of farm fields, registration for one-time assistance and other kinds of services. This will improve not only transparency but also service itself;

- Online information retrieval, questioning and responding to feedback should be facilitated. Those interested have opportunities to improve their skills and competence in gaining information through video file formats. The degree of personnel awareness of information must be increased via the existing sources of information. This activity must be carried out by the municipality in collaboration with qualified experts and NGOs;

- There are 54 settlements in the municipality and under the official statistics, 60% of them have no access to online services. Thus, the municipal authorities should necessarily facilitate advocacy with relevant structures in respect of providing the internet services.

EFFICIENCY

- The municipality is obliged to draw up a concrete action plan and provide simple and understandable e-government software solutions to increase the efficiency of electronic service delivery;

- Electronic support for publicity and accessibility of existing social programs in the municipality;

- The municipality doesn't research special needs except as required by law identify problems within the framework of rural support programmes**;**

- It is important to create an electronic online platform where it can be published reports to ensure that effective feedback between citizens and government;

- It's compulsory to register joint settlement meetings in every village. This will increase the level of accountability and involvement.

INCLUSIVENESS

- Through joint efforts of Sakrebulo and City Hall, it is necessary to work out strictly prescribed schedule of meetings with citizens which will be focused on citizen engagement, permanent accountability of the government in certain settlement;

- To understand the importance of citizen participation, analyze forthcoming results and develop skills, training should be provided for the public servants on the following topics: "communication, facilitation and presentation", "participatory programs and budgeting", "organizing meetings and methods of online communication";

- The municipality should organize a joint settlement meeting. This will fundamentally increase the level of citizen participation and accountability of municipal structures;

- Online platforms should be designed and opportunities to provide electronic services;

- Local NGOs should control citizen advocacy projects under the guidance of the local and central government;

- While budgeting local government should draw more attention to the regulation of infrastructure facilities and social programs.

GURIA REGION

THE ASSESSMENT REPORT
ON THE POPULATION'S NEEDS
IN OZURGETI MUNICIPALITY

www.spectri.org.ge

INTRODUCTION

On the way to Georgia's integration into the European Union, in accordance with the "Georgia-EU Association Agreement", the country has started in-depth reforms in the field of public administration and public service since 2015. The Public Administration Reform Roadmap 2020 has been developed for the successful implementation of the reform, and its new Action Plan for 2019-2020 stipulates two main tasks in the direction of local self-government: a) expanding the authority of local government to strengthen the self-government; b) gradual development and improvement of e-services in municipalities in order to improve access to e-services in local self-government.[1]

To support the effective implementation of public administration reform at the local level, the Cultural-Humanitarian Fund "Sukhumi", in partnership with the Fund for Women Entrepreneurs and Imereti Scientists' Union "Spectri" is implementing a project – "A common forum for CSOs from Guria, Imereti and Racha-Lechkhumi for PAR Roadmap monitoring".

The research represents the materials of the local needs assessment of Ozurgeti municipality in the context of the monitoring of the Public Administration Reform (PAR) Action Plan.

The research was conducted by the Imereti Union of Scientists "Spectri." The recommendations and suggestions obtained as a result of the research will be the basis for the advocacy strategies of the working groups created within the project and the cooperation with the self-government to meet the needs of the citizens.

The aim of the research: the research aims to analyze the public awareness of the local needs and public administration reform in the cities of Ozurgeti municipality, the quality of the use of e-services; identify the specific results and challenges of public administration reform in the municipality; demonstrate the attitudes and visions of the self-government representatives, experts, citizens in the implementation of the tasks set out in the PAR Action Plan concerning better services.

Research Methodology: the research was conducted in Ozurgeti Municipality in April 2020. The research fieldwork was conducted by the organizations - "Young Teachers` Association" and "Center for Education and Equality".

According to the project partners, the needs of the citizens were identified through the quantitative and qualitative researches, based on pre-designed questionnaires to obtain information, which combines three criteria for evaluating local government activities (transparency, efficiency, inclusiveness) and 34 different indicators. The study included a total of 178 respondents. The quantitative study covered 150 respondents, as well as 4 in-depth interviews with local experts and 4 focus group discussions with local social groups. The qualitative research included 28 respondents.

Selection of population - To achieve the objectives of the research, quota selection

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1 Public Administration Reform Action Plan 2019-2020, p.10 Available - https://bit.ly/2XbKQwB

for quantitative research was carried out on different grounds: age, gender, special status. A questionnaire was elaborated to conduct the research, which was divided into three areas: transparency, efficiency, inclusiveness, and mainly included closed questions. Both face-to-face interviews, as well as remote telephone and electronic surveys, were conducted with 150 respondents from the general and selected population of Ozurgeti Municipality. Research tool - a structured questionnaire developed by an electronic platform with **Google Forms.**

Target segment - young people, socially vulnerable people, ethnic minorities, small entrepreneurs, IDPs, people with disabilities.
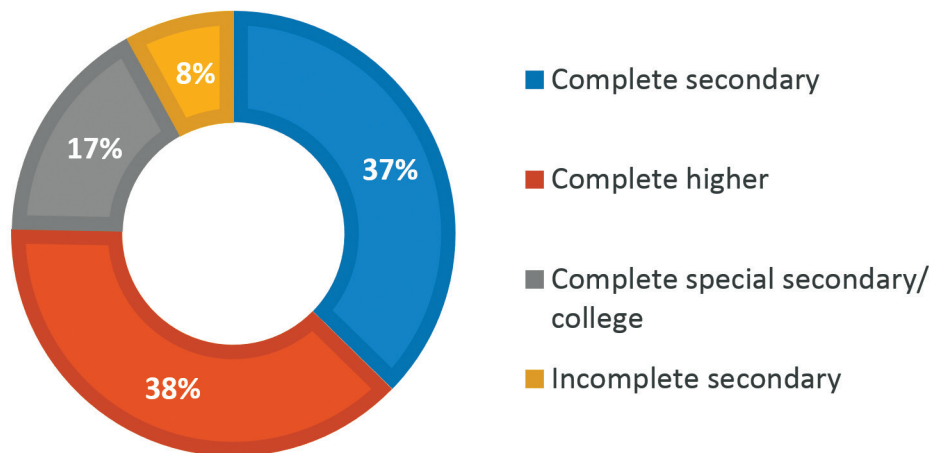
The target groups of **qualitative information** were women, parents of children with disabilities, pensioners, small entrepreneurs, medical workers, teachers, housewives. An in-depth interview was conducted with the representatives of the City Hall and Sakrebulo, a rural individual entrepreneur, the head of a non-governmental organization.

BASIC INFORMATION

56,7% of respondents **in the quantitative research** are women and 43,3% - men. The age category of the participants was distributed as follows: under 18-34 - 52,7%, under 35-64 - 42%, over 65 - 5,3%. 23,4% of the respondents are socially vulnerable;

10% - representative of an ethnic minority; 5,3% - people with disabilities; 4% - IDP. The education indicators of the respondents are given in the diagram:

EDUCATION OF THE RESPONDENT

- Complete secondary
- Complete higher
- Complete special secondary/ college
- Incomplete secondary

Percentage of the respondents employment status is as follows: unemployed - 24%; public servant/person hired by the state - 12%; pensioner - 7,3%; self-employed/-entrepreneur -16,7%; budget organization - 3,3%; NGO - 7,3%; private sector - 22%; student - 7,3%.

The average monthly income of a family, including any cash income, is in the range of 501 to 900 GEL.

TRANSPARENCY

The research conducted in Ozurgeti Municipality highlighted the awareness on public administration reform, the use of e-services and their impact on open and transparent local governance; achievements and challenges in this regard.

It turns out that 16% of respondents have information about public administration reform; whereas 45,3% reported having partial information; 38,7% do not own the information. Those who answered in the affirmative often referred to television as a source of information; Municipality FB page; NGO. Meeting with less-governmental structures (see diagram).

Where did you learn about the reform?

- Television
- Municipality FB page
- NGO
- Meeting with governmental structure
- Avoided to answer

5%
6%
31%
28%
30%
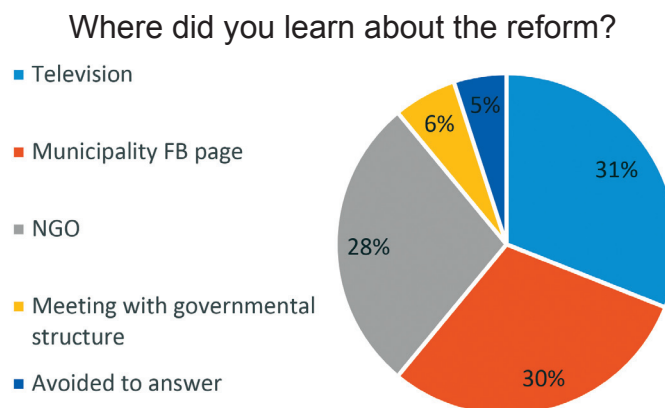
Qualitative survey data corroborated the quantitative survey information that only a small proportion of citizens were informed about the local government reform and service improvement measures.

According to the experts involved in the study, the piloting of e-services at the local level has significantly improved the delivery of services to citizens, case management, e-procurement and other internal information circulation; facilitated various procedures for citizens, resulted in relatively high standards of information and more direct communication:

> *"The unified electronic system has been introduced quite well in the self-governments. It helped to break down bureaucratic barriers and made time management effective. The website of the municipality was created and all the important information was made available to the citizens" - a Sakrebulo member.*

> *"Thanks to this system, significant time have been saved. Information is exchanged from different units of the municipality in a short period and, consequently, the needs of the citizens are met" - a representative of the City Hall.*

Will public administration reform improve the quality of citizen service?

52% of respondents believe that it will improve, while 40,7% find it difficult to answer. Only 2% think that it cannot improve. 5,3% of the interviewed think - it will improve less. Some of the citizens participating in the study have heard about the civil service reform and have an idea about the specifics of e-services. According to them, it is of great importance for the improvement of private services.

"Successful implementation of such reforms is vital for us. Moreover, more than half of the population lives in rural or rural-type settlements. It will change their standard of living, reduce bureaucracy and increase the degree of involvement in management, control" - an individual entrepreneur.

Vulnerable groups find it difficult to evaluate e-services, but their expectations are optimistic:

"To tell you the truth, I do not have the insight to evaluate whether it is going well or badly. In any case, it is clear that after this reform we will be able to communicate better with them [City Hall, Sakrebulo], the level of transparency of services, even the request for information, or even to consider our application in a more timely manner" - a parent of the child with disabilities.

According to the quantitative research, 17,3% of the respondents are informed about e-services, 31,3% are not informed, 44% are more or less informed, 7,4% are not interested in the issue.

Interestingly, 33,3% received information about e-services from the municipality FB or website, 24,7% from NGOs, and 18,7% through television. 23,3% of respondents name other sources of information. These include mobile apps as well as family members, the mayor's representative, friends.

53,3% of the respondents do not use any electronic services to get local services, 14,7% use the citizen portal www.my.gov.ge/, as well as 14,7% - the official website of the municipality, 13,3% - the FB page of the City Hall, 2,7% - the FB page of Sakrebulo. Citizens use the regional administration website the least - 1,3%.

It is interesting to analyze the responses of the study respondents by age category: young people aged 18 to 34 are more likely to use the municipal website and Sakrebulo FB page. Respondents aged 35-64 - civic portal. Both groups are less interested in the FB page of Sakrebulo. (See Diagram)

WHICH E-SERVICES DO YOU USE TO GET THE LOCAL SERVICES?
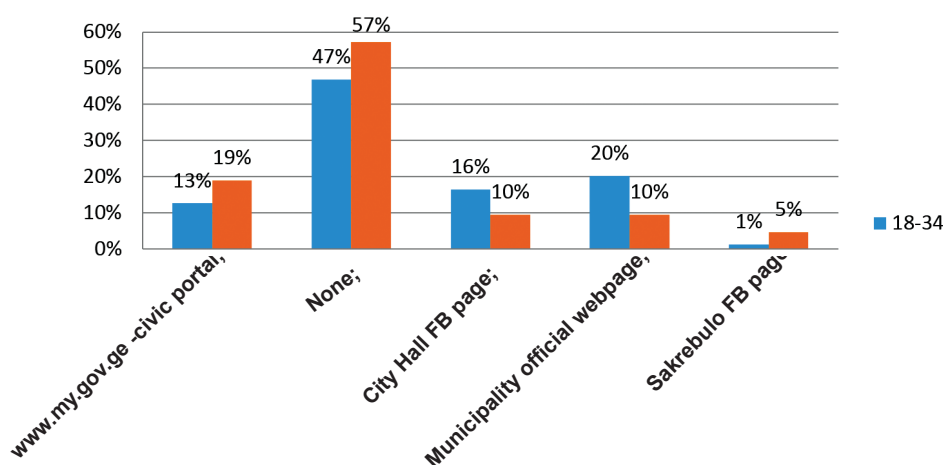
The research question - "Which municipal e-services did you use the last year?" - when receiving the information - two types of respondents were identified: people who used the services listed in the study (their total number is 43,8%) and respondents who do

not have the appropriate skills, do not have access or are not interested in e-services (66,2%).

Objective and subjective reasons hindering the use of electronic services were named. A large proportion of respondents welcome the introduction of new standards of service but say that this service is not available to them: "*What will a person do when s/he has no access to the internet?!*" *(Socially vulnerable woman). "If it improves [the service], it does not need to be talked about, it will improve, but more or less. For those who now have access, it has improved, of course, but for me - it has not improved, because I do not have access to the Internet*" - a woman living in a village.

According to the respondents, the issue can be solved through mass internetization, which is often talked about: "By the way, it was said that every family would have the internet. There was such a promise last year. If the internet is accessible to all the families, then this will not be a problem either. I cannot read the press, I do not have it, I cannot buy it "- a female pensioner.

According to the respondents of the qualitative research, the full use of electronic resources is hindered by the lack of proper skills. In addition to popularizing services among ordinary citizens, it is important to develop the habit of using these services. It is also considered necessary to raise the qualification of the self-government staff:

"People employed in the self-government, who are the direct providers of these services also need training to make these services more flexible and accessible" - a local CSO representative.

An example of the successful e-administration practice is the e-administration of participatory budgeting, which sets Ozurgeti apart from many other municipalities.

"The e-administration system is used quite successfully by Ozurgeti Municipality, a clear indicator of which is its role in the process of developing a participatory budget" - a representative of the City Hall.

In Ozurgeti, it is possible to submit budget initiatives electronically to the self-government, however, whether there is a continuation of dialogue, discussion, respondents opinions are divided: some believe that the government sometimes leaves citizens' initiatives unanswered:

"I have not noticed much activity. Moreover, there are cases when citizens living in the municipality are restricted to express their opinion on the social platform if it (their opinion) does not coincide with the tone of the disseminator, or is critical"- a rural individual entrepreneur.

It was considered important to motivate the public to receive comprehensive information about the ongoing processes and services in the municipality and, in general, the government itself should be interested in:

"Perhaps, first of all, the representatives of the municipal services and the mayor should be informed and instructed to regulate communication, information delivery to the population and feedback" - a small entrepreneur.

The quantitative research revealed the opinion of the respondents on what to focus on

in order to improve the service: 26,7% prefer timely and complete public information on public electronic services; 24,7% consider it important to offer services tailored to the needs and priorities of particularly vulnerable groups (e.g. mothers with many children and single mothers, women victims of violence, children, persons with disabilities, etc.); 16,7% find it difficult to answer, 15,3% consider simplification of the service delivery process as one of the priorities, 11,3% think that there is a need to increase the competence of public servants.

Citizens unanimously note that the events related to the Covid-19 pandemic in the country have clearly shown the importance of a well-structured e-service system:

"I think after this pandemic, online services and online resources will become much more important. A lot of people will think about it because it turned out to be so important. It will change the future " - a female teacher.

EFFICIENCY

One of the directions of the research was to identify the attitude of the citizens towards the efficiency of the local government activities and to study the needs of the citizens in this regard. The level of trust in local government, satisfaction with local programs and other services (including e-services), accountability of local authorities were discussed as well.

Applying via Electronic applications to the self-government is easy for 36,7% of respondents, difficult for 19,3%, and 44% cannot answer.

IS IT TO APPLY ELECTRONICALLY TO THE SELF-GOVERNMENT AGENCIES TO GET SERVICES?

0

44%

36,70%

19,30%

■ Simple procedures   ■ Complicated procedures   ■ Hard to answer
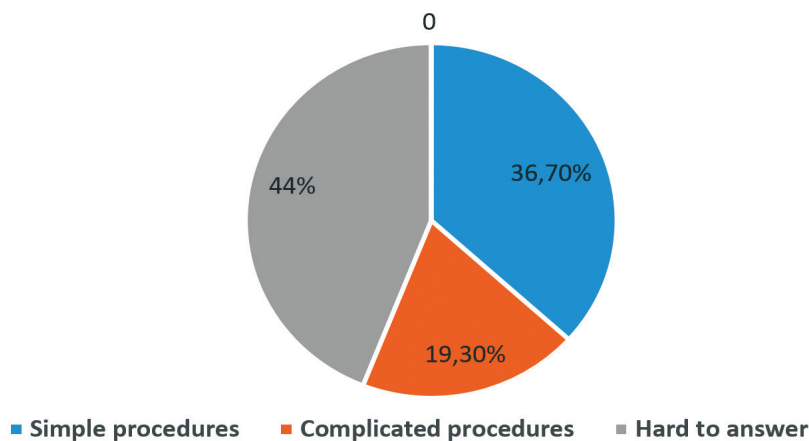
In the case of gender-disaggregated data, 21,5% of men and 17,6% of women interviewed find service procedures difficult.

It was found that only 9,3% of the respondents used electronic registration to meet with the representative of the desired agency during the last year. The majority of respondents (79,3%) did not use it; 11,4% had no information about it.

The respondents spoke about the needs of groups that need to receive some special care from the self-government. The high vulnerability of rural people with disabilities

was highlighted: they do not even enjoy the benefits available to people with disabilities living in urban areas:

"Obviously, the issue of involvement of women and people with disabilities is problematic. First of all, it should be noted that administrative buildings are not adapted in the centres, as well as in the countryside. Since most of the meetings are held in these spaces, it automatically excludes the involvement of people with disabilities" - a female teacher.

"There is no socially vulnerable family without a disabled person. The focus should be made on such families. They are mainly dependent on the state because they do not have jobs. Such people have been deprived of help, you will feel sorry for them!" - a CSO representative.

Other vulnerable groups were also identified:

"I would focus especially on women victims of domestic violence. They often have housing problems. Several programs today are gender-sensitive, but that is not enough" - a business project manager.

According to the quantitative research materials, the respondents' opinions on the issue of whether the municipal leadership takes into account the needs of specific groups of citizens, were divided. 39,3% think that the needs of the entire population of the municipality are taken into account, while 34,7% think that the specific needs are less taken into account. The categories of people with disabilities (22%) and women with many children (22%) have an equal percentage (the participants in the study had the right to mark several answers to this question). Respondents named issues they have addressed to local self-government over the past year. Most often it is social assistance (24,7%); Healthcare (22%); Land clearance (21,3%) and roof repair issues (11%).

Citizens expressed their attitude towards the services provided by Ozurgeti Municipality, Sakrebulo and the mayor's representative (see diagram)

DEGREE OF SATISFACTION WITH SERVICES

■ Very dissatisfied   ■ Unsatisfied   ■ Satisfied   ■ Very satisfied
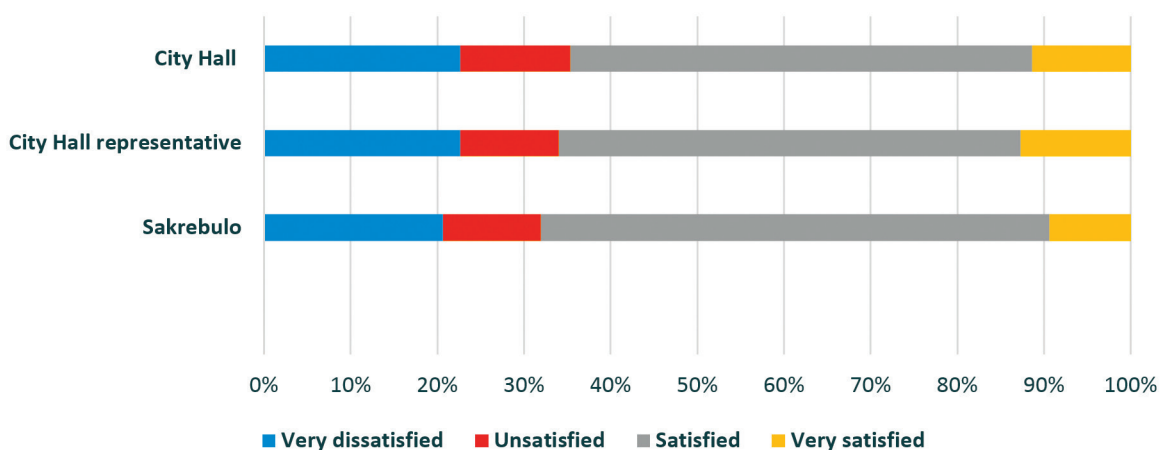
The study participants observed the extent to which the needs of their families were met by the self-government. 17,3% of respondents state that the problems they have addressed to the self-government have been fully resolved; 35,3% state that the problems have been partially solved; 28,7% have no answer to the question; 9,3% think

the settlement process has taken time. The number of those who think they have not even attempted a settlement is 4%. 3,3% indicated that the local government had not solved any of their problems.

Citizens assessed the issue of accountability of the self-government. 26% believe that the local government fully informs the public about its activities.

Overall, the lack of knowledge of monitoring and assessment methodology in the self-government was named as a serious challenge, although the attitude towards the issue was not homogenous: According to the mayor's representative - "Research and analysis practices are generally the weakest point of the municipalities and need to be developed." The representative of Sakrebulo gave specific examples of how the needs research is organized:

> *"We use focus group surveys following all the principles that allow us to see the ugly, objective reality";*
>
> *"Surveys-interviews, creation of focus groups, neighbourhood gatherings, Youth Council, etc."*
>
> *"We are actively using all the mechanisms".*

Citizens also recalled service assessment activities:

> **"They asked for the feedback on the service, once or twice, and I filled it out" - the manager of a private enterprise.**

A part of the citizens mentioned the need for a system for monitoring the effectiveness of the programs, which will take control of the issue of cost targeting and the benefits received by the beneficiary. This is especially true of short-term assistance programs, one-time assistance, which is accrued to certain categories of citizens, including children with disabilities:

> *"He is a friend of my son, he is a disabled person of the first group and after the appointment of the pension, the parent did not even take him to the doctor. There should be monitoring, if the amount is transferred to me, how much will I spend, who will check ?! Twice they have sponsored therapy courses for my child for 400 GEL. They did not even give it to me, they transferred it to the institution" - a parent of a child with disabilities.*

By analyzing the research data, there is a great deal of interest in the issue of decentralization. Local experts noted that the main precondition for real decentralization is to provide municipalities with sufficient financial resources:

> *"Municipalities should be given more funds to be able to fully address local issues effectively" - a member of Sakrebulo.*
>
> *"I believe that the state needs to take more important steps in terms of decentralization, because, in many cases, the municipality, as the epicentre of events, can make more real and timely decisions on specific issues" - a City Hall representative.*

The issue of social protection was of special interest to the citizens. According to the study participants, more delegation of social work at the local level and the emergence

of social workers in municipalities - guarantees more targeted assistance, more social protection, because the self-government should be able to provide the most urgent and targeted assistance to the most vulnerable citizens without unnecessary bureaucratic procedures:

> *"This year, as far as I know, part of the social work is being transferred to the self-government and the contingent is being added. So, it is in the idea that the self-government should work on some issues as well" - a lawyer, human rights activist.*

In terms of social work, the need to increase the role and function of self-government in granting socially vulnerable status to citizens was emphasized. In Ozurgeti, as elsewhere, local social programs are "tied" to socially vulnerable status. This is not considered a fair approach by the citizens who could not get into the base of the socially vulnerable. The degree of their vulnerability does not differ greatly from that of state beneficiary programs.

> *"There is a person who is extremely poor and receives help, but whoever we are in the middle of 65 out of 100, we have no help" - a socially vulnerable woman. "When he is sick, he needs constant treatment and does not have social benefits, I think his issue should be resolved locally" - a retired woman.*

INCLUSIVENESS

The research showed that Ozurgeti municipality exercises not only the forms of inclusiveness prescribed by the Code but the following forms as well: settlement meetings, petition, citizens' participation in Sakrebulo sessions, the practice of public discussions on budget issues, functioning of the Civil Advisory Council, introduction of civic budgeting programs, public reporting practice. However, it was said that a large proportion of citizens do not use this opportunity (this view is supported by the quantitative research data, where 56,7% of respondents say the same).

According to the respondents living in rural areas, it is true that there is a practice of meeting the responsible people with the citizens, but it has a formal character and the involvement is minimal. It was said that citizens do not have enough knowledge to properly present the problem, to have an effective dialogue with the self-government. According to the responsible person of the municipality, in some cases, the government is not ready for constructive communication:

> *"Often, the local government ignores the issues raised by the citizen. The society believes that the government representatives still make decisions without them and there is no point in getting involved" - a member of Sakrebulo.*

32,2% of respondents believe that ensuring citizen participation is mainly done in the process of setting local priorities. 18,8% marked the issue - local budget review; 16,1% - identifying the needs of citizens; also - 16,1% think that citizens are involved in the development of municipal programs.

56,7% of respondents did not use any form of civic engagement; 16,7% participated in the meetings of the settlements; the petition was marked by 8%. The rest was - participation in Sakrebulo sessions (5,3%); report hearing (4%); municipal Gender Equality Council (4%); Civil Advisory Council (2,7%); civil budget (2%). Only 0,7% were involved in all of the above activities. 8% of respondents avoided answering.

There is no much difference in the data on a gender basis. Participation in settlement meeting was more common among women (women - 18%, men - 15%). The majority of signatories to the petition are men (men - 8%, women - 6%).

WHICH FORMS OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT HAVE YOU USED?
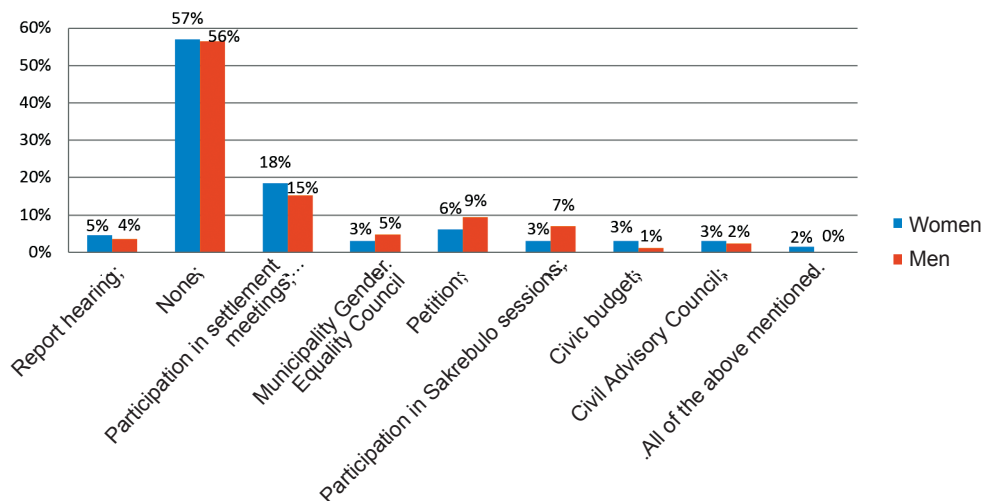
According to the qualitative research materials, there is a successful practice of petitions in the municipality (there are 2 cases of satisfying the petition request). After the start of the public reform implementation, the petition is submitted electronically and its database is also available on the website of the municipality. According to the leaders of the municipality, "this is a completely new opportunity for the citizens, which they use to solve a specific problem." For their part, the citizens positively assessed the decision to reduce the number of registered voters submitting the petition from 1% to 0,5%.

55,3% of respondents did not attempt to provide service-related comments to the relevant agency. Those who answered in the affirmative preferred the forms of "personal communication with the relevant agency", the next is - "sharing a position on the Facebook page of the municipality", the third place is to post an opinion by letter.

When asked what is the main need to ensure constructive dialogue and greater involvement with the self-government, 50% of research participants preferred periodic meetings of local government representatives with citizens for consultation; 14,7% - Consideration of citizens' initiatives by strengthening the civil budget practice (2% of the study citizens state that they participated in the civil budgeting); 14% of citizens think that it is important to involve citizens in the process of developing municipal programs and reviewing the budget; 9,3% consider it necessary to have more staff members with sectoral profile/specific issues; 6,7% increase the effectiveness of gender equality, the format of civic advisory and other councils; 4,7% consider the use of a condominium to be significant.

The participants of the study believe that NGOs have provided a lot of assistance to the self-governments in the introduction of e-mechanisms for citizen involvement, which is very important in terms of self-government transparency and accountability.

The respondents gave examples of the programs targeted to the needs of local beneficiaries implemented according to the CSO (such as the needs of people with disabilities) study results.

 54% of respondents think that the cooperation of civil society organizations with local authorities is effective to promote the welfare of citizens. 33,3% consider it as not so effective; whereas 11,3% think that this collaboration is very effective and only 1,3% consider it ineffective.

According to 18% of respondents, there are more than three civil society organizations in the municipality that play an important role in local political dialogue. There is no big difference in gender data. 55% of women and 52% of men consider the activities of civil society organizations to be effective (the rest of the data is on the chart).

HOW EFFECTIVE IS THEIR COOPERATION WITH LOCAL AUTHORITIES?

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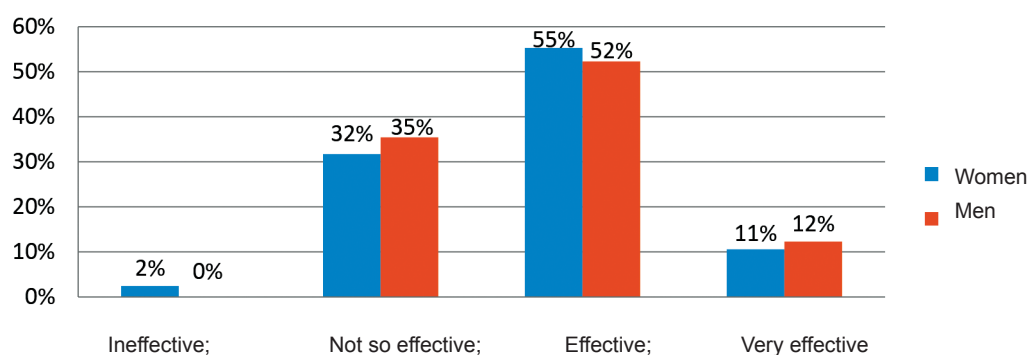
Citizens expressed their position on the importance of the role of local civil society organizations in the implementation of public administration reform (several answers could be identified). According to the answers received, 51,3% of the respondents named education and information as the first need. For 46% of respondents, it is important to address the needs of the population to the government; 42,7% consider it necessary to protect the rights of citizens; 34,7% - control over the reform process; 28,7% - solution of problems at the local level; 28% - implementation of measures to support the socio-economic development of citizens; 25,3% of respondents, in parallel with other issues, consider it important to promote dialogue between the population and local government; 9,3% attach importance to lobbying for the adoption of local legal acts, changes and amendments; 14,7% of respondents do not have the answer to this question.

An interesting discussion was held with the private sector on social corporation issues. Existing practices and separate views on the issue have become apparent. According to local experts, self-government can lay a solid foundation for economic development. It manages to offer the private sector a favourable environment for investment, to make natural resources, agriculture and tourism attractions. A good example is the industrial enterprise "Ozurgeti-Denim" opened in Ozurgeti municipality, where hundreds of locals were employed.

Also, the project focused on tourism revival, "Amazing Guria", which created a large arena for the establishment of Guria on the tourist map and increase of local revenues. Some local N (N) LEs are involved in this regard:

"In terms of social responsibility, we have about 40 offers for private companies, we have several successful examples. Various social projects were implemented: arranging a children's zone and a swing for people with special needs. We still have individual ideas for big brands, but we have not been able to present it yet" - an economist, employee of N (N) LE.

It has been revealed that corporate responsibility and support to the vulnerable groups is not uncommon for private business representatives:

"In fact, our company implements social projects simply by crossing with the state or not at the request, it is done on its own initiative, and if there is involvement from the state, something joint is done, they will not be against [the leadership]" - a manager of a private company.

One of the objectives of the study was to identify the priority needs of the citizens of Ozurgeti Municipality. Participants in the study had the opportunity to express their views on which direction they consider necessary to address the human and financial resources of local authorities.

There were several answers to the given question. The results were distributed as follows: health care, social assistance, infrastructure, promotion of economic development and creation of an appropriate environment on the ground - 2%; culture-education - 37,3%; drinking water - 36%; management of homeless animals - 29,3%; support services for the elderly people without care (food, accommodation) - 28%; adapted environment for people with disabilities - 24,7%; food safety - 24%; repair of damaged houses/yards - 22,7%; parks and landscaping - 18%; sewage - 11,3%; cleaning / waste assimilation - 22%; public transport - 22,7%; preschool education - 14%; development of support services tailored to the needs of women victims of violence - 14%; sporting events - 9,3%; drainage networks - 8%; irrigation water/irrigation - 6%.

Qualitative research revealed the problem of water, rural roads, social infrastructure:

"The village needs different kinds of assistance badly. Water is of vital importance. Summer is coming and I look at the well every minute and count every centimetre of decreased water level" - a woman living in the village.

"The government is repairing the road chunk by chunk from election to election. Road, water, electricity, outdoor lighting should be regulated. It should be all about keeping young people and not running away from the village, to engage them and make them feel that the state cares about them, their village and the country care about the rural population" a woman living in the village.

Quantitative research has revealed several main directions, which were grouped according to a common characteristic: informing the population, implementing youth employment promotion programs; preparation of a new economic develop-

ment plan of the municipality; civic budgeting; planning measures to curb internal migration, introducing a drinking water supply system in villages and improving the existing one; provision of all villages of municipality with natural gas; road rehabilitation; arrangement of squares, landscaping; irrigation; school renovation; placing garbage bins in villages; waste management; regulation of drainage canals; creating an adapted environment for people with disabilities, installing ramps; street illumination; rehabilitation of damaged houses; providing rehabilitation costs for people with special needs; providing special vehicles for the rehabilitation of persons with disabilities; assistance to large families; receiving medicines at a reduced price; low tariffs for utility bills; arranging support events for the lonely elderly people; research the needs of people with visual impairments and integrate them into society; review the monitoring system of social assistance recipients to ensure that the points are received fairly; proper definition of public transport schedules that will be tailored to the daily needs of the rural population, as well as the delivery of municipal transport to the villages; provision of housing for IDPs; management of homeless animals, vaccination;

Emphasis was placed on promoting entrepreneurship - conducting marketing training for farmers and providing information on modern technologies; informing entrepreneurs about state and private grants; meetings of local entrepreneurs with government officials to identify needs and develop a development strategy; organizing large-scale exhibition and sales; planning activities to support the functioning of cooperatives;

Cultural-cognitive needs - arranging sports and cultural centres in the villages; arranging sports championships with the participation of people with disabilities; planning entertainment sporting events.

The obtained information provides an opportunity to summarize issues with more social workload and content, as well as the specific needs of different vulnerable groups.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A research conducted in Ozurgeti Municipality has identified the issues related to the goals and objectives of PAR (local government transparency, efficiency, inclusiveness - e-standards of service) to improve the services of citizens' practices, achievements and needs in the municipality.

The study has shown that the start taken in terms of the introduction of e-services in the municipality is optimal for the initial stage, but it is necessary to continue its positive dynamics.

It was revealed that part of the citizens use electronic services, and part does not have enough information about its benefits or do not have the appropriate skills. Some do not have access to the Internet or the necessary material resources for electronic communication. People employed in self-government, who are the direct providers of these services also need the training to make the service more flexible and accessible.

The study has highlighted the need to improve the system for evaluating the effective-

ness of local programs, which will examine service satisfaction and will be the basis for continuing the budget program or initiating a new one. On the other hand, there is a need to monitor programs to identify the purposefulness of the services provided and introduce more long-term results-oriented programs.

The need for an irreversible process of decentralization has emerged in the issue of better service to citizens at the local level. This was especially interesting in the context of the decentralization of social work because in the eyes of the citizens the local government has much more confidence in the implementation of state programs on the principle of social justice.

The needs of the groups that are particularly awaiting attention from the self-government have been identified. They include the following segments: children with disabilities and their families; rural women; families left beyond by the state care program who have a high degree of vulnerability; young people who need an appropriate environment and strengthening measures to make local presence more attractive and to stop internal migration.

The cooperation between local government, CSOs and private sector have an important role in improving the citizens` service. It can become the basis for the services tailored to the needs of citizens and local employment programs.

Several measures are needed to respond to the challenges and achieve the desired results, both locally and centrally.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. TO LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT:

Increase access to e-services - it is important to take appropriate measures to ensure Internet access in Ozurgeti Municipality, especially in remote and mountainous villages;

Dissemination of information on e-services - it is desirable to conduct an information-educational campaign in the municipality to promote e-services; involve mayor's representatives, local MPs, media, CSOs and active community groups in relevant activities;

Increasing the technical resources of e-services - it is desirable to better manage the existing resources and bring them in line with modern standards; modernize the municipality website, open portal, create new applications; raise the qualification of the staff;

The efficiency of self-government activities - it is important to establish a local program monitoring system in the municipality, which will study the effectiveness and purposefulness of the programs. It is possible to use the existing proven methodology for the evaluation of self-government programs, or to create modules based on local needs; prepare a qualified staff;

It is vital to find adequate financial or cooperative resources to meet the needs identified by the citizens: to provide a drinking water supply system to the villages, improve the existing one; provide all villages of the municipality with natural gas; rehabilitate roads in villages; maintain public transport; manage homeless animals;

Introduction of the programs tailored to the needs of vulnerable groups of citizens at the local level - it is important to introduce measures to help children with disabilities, especially those with disabilities living in rural areas, to carry out economic activities at households for their family members; provide an adapted environment for people with disabilities; find opportunities to support vulnerable families left behind by state care policies;

Local cooperation for a more effective social policy - it is desirable to find ways to work with the private sector, local NGOs; procure certain services from them, for example, in the field of needs research, effective communication with citizens, public campaigns, information and education.

2. TO NGOs - a more intensive mode of cooperation between the local government and the civil sector is needed to promote local social policy and economic prosperity. Demonstrate transparency and social responsibility on the part of CSOs - to further legitimize their application for a positive impact on social policy**.**

3. TO CENTRAL GOVERNMENT - it is important to speed up **the pace of decentralization** and take consistent steps in this direction, especially in the field of social work; conduct serious research in this direction in which more self-government authority needs to be delegated - to provide better services to citizens;

Improving the Social Assistance Program - it is vital to reform the current system of social assessment so that there are no questions left about the principle of social justice in state assistance programs.

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