

# WORKING WITH COMMUNITIES AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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## Introduction

On 12-13 May 2010, a workshop for ten Georgian non-governmental organisations working on community development projects was held in Signaghi. The workshop participants discussed almost all fundamental issues, which arise during implementation of development projects, such as criteria for selecting communities (regions); basic approaches to working with communities; definition of a developed community and criteria used to measure community development; culture of collaboration and trust as a social capital in regions of Georgia.

Apart from theoretical and methodological expertise, the participating organisations have a long experience of work in the field of community development. The present publication has been prepared with a view to generalising and consolidating the existing experience.

The publication contains nine articles prepared by practitioners. Each of them includes methodology of working with communities, specific approaches, and successful and unsuccessful cases of community development. While giving a general definition of community and a developed community, authors of articles refer to a concept, mutually agreed at the Signaghi workshop. However, each organisation specifies its own general interpretation on the basis of own strategies and specific objectives.

*Community is a group of people living in a defined geographical area, sharing the same socio-economic and cultural conditions, having similar interests, problems and needs.*

Basic indicators of a developed community are:

- *existence of a civil group within a community;*
- *community has a vision oriented to development and innovation; community has a clear direction;*
- *community realises its own rights and needs and advocates them;*
- *community is able to define problems and to respond to them.*

Articles given in the publication will allow the interested readers to find out more about history of community development projects implemented in Georgia, diverse methodology used in this field, standard mistakes and negative outcomes, and above all about positive results of development.

By common agreement of authors of articles, names of villages, where the projects have been implemented, are not given in this publication. Letter “N” will be used instead.

#### 1. Preface

Adult Education Association of Georgia (AEAG) was founded in 2004, based on the lifelong learning idea, joining together organisations and experts working in the field of adult education. The Association believes that **lifelong learning** is a phenomenon, bringing a new degree of goodness not only into the life and progress of a specific person or community but one big community, i.e. the entire society.

AEAG's mission is to contribute to creation and development of relevant adult education system in Georgia, which corresponds to the Georgian reality and local challenges and creates equal access for all irrespective of their age, gender, domicile, occupation, ethnicity and religion.

For that end, AEAG works in the following strategic directions:

- intensive propaganda campaign and lobbying of principles and concepts of lifelong learning (LLL);
- supporting the development of all types of adult education institutions aiming at improvement of adult education infrastructure;
- building a strong civil network of adult education providers and professionals, capable of meeting the challenges facing LLL system in Georgia; support and capacity development of organisations and their members.

The Association has been working for seven years as a civic union of organisations and experts working in the field of adult education. Currently AEAG has more than 50 members, including organisations and legal persons. The Association has its member organisation in almost every region of Georgia. It also cooperates with community organisations operating in the country, offering adult education programmes to the population. It has to be noted that AEAG is regarded as the only professional association in Georgia, providing services to its members.

As for the Association's member community organisations, they facilitate accessibility of education for everyone through their activities and development of various skills and capabilities, which serves to community development. Learning takes place in a comfortable and non-formal environment. Special attention is paid to those, whose education is not prioritised by schools, vocational or higher education institutions.

Ever since the founding, the Association's aim was to build a **network of community organisations**, combining the great majority of community adult education centres of Georgia. AEAG is still working according to this principle: it strives to promote and support the idea of community adult education and LLL strategy. In this regard, it has to be highlighted that an important document, entitled **Adult Education Strategy in the Context of Lifelong Learning** was elaborated in 2009 on basis of memorandum of cooperation signed between AEAG and the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia. According to this strategy, providing the possibility of lifelong learning to citizens is one of the most important pre-conditions for the successful development of the country. It is obvious that in the 21st century success without the knowledge-based economy is unimaginable.

For development of the idea and encouragement of professionals working in the field, the Association established the Anastasia Tumanishvili (Georgian female adult educator) Memorial Award in 2010. The “Anastasia” prize is given annually to an individual and an organisation for developing the Lifelong Learning idea and for outstanding contribution to adult education. Anastasia Tumanishvili (1849-1932), a noble Georgian lady believed that “**development of a fundamental educational system is one of the pre-conditions for the nation’s progress, which requires making the education accessible for everyone**”. The first awards went to Lexo Khubulava and TASO Foundation.

Lexo Khubulava is well known as a founder and director of Jobs.GE LLC, offering vacancy, training, exchange programme, grant and tender announcements. Jobs.GE integrates the largest opt-in mailing list in Georgia, making the entire service the most efficient and functional distribution channel on the local market, serving job-seekers and persons willing to acquire additional knowledge.

TASO Foundation supports action groups and organisations, established by women, and facilitates the improvement of their status, bearing in mind the need for development of female movements and current processes taking place in the country. The foundation provides assistance to persons in their self-actualisation, who need the public support regardless their age.

## **2. Approach. Vision. Target group**

According to the Association’s mission, aim, structure and priority of activities, community has two distinct meanings in the present article.

Firstly, community is a group of people, living within a shared geographical location. However, at the same time, body of certain organisational units and individuals working in the field of adult education is regarded as community. While in the first case community refers to the city/village population, in the second instance community is a union of groups with shared goals and problems.

The approach recognised by AEAG suggests that **non-formal education** shall provide learning experience for adults so that they may be able to fully participate in society. We also share the notion that the important education needs largely flow from adults’ personal, family, economic, political and social needs. In a broad sense it means that an educational need is a learning deficiency that must be remedied in order to fill the gap between an individual’s present status and a higher status that is desired or required.

In our view, educational needs stress learning and behavioural changes in people. These learning and behavioural changes may include cognitive growth, the upgrading or acquisition of skills, and the changing of attitudes and values.

In community development, we support the idea that the focus of educational needs is on learning related to social change, since we believe that adult education efforts are directed towards community development.

AEAG shares the **vision** that the adult educator can help the homeless person, but he/she cannot provide housing for the homeless. A homeless person has a need for housing but also it is essential to learn how to access housing provided by public and private agencies. The adult educator may work in connection with other professionals and make referrals, but the adult educator’s role is to impact the educational needs of clients, not to serve immediate survival needs, since it is a well-known fact that a hungry man does not so much need a fish but a fishing pole. In our case, adult education is the very fishing pole.

While selecting adults as a target group, it is necessary to give a definition: the person reaching the age of 15, who is considered by the state as the economically active member of population is regarded as an adult. In the system of formal education in Georgia, the citizen at this age finishes compulsory basic education (9th grade of the secondary school).

### 3. Experience

Experience of work with both types of community described above is based on our vision and approach. AEAG is implementing projects both for the community comprised of the Association members, and communities located in specific geographical areas.

#### 3.1. Development of the Association's activities

In Georgia, it is necessary to strengthen **professional capabilities** in order to achieve adult education for community development, improvement of its infrastructure and efficient provision of education. In this regard, the Association seeks to elaborate various types of documents. In 2010, a policy paper on Employment and Adult Education Municipal Programmes in Georgia was prepared. This document shall serve as an instrument to strengthen professional capabilities of AEAG members.

Aim of the present article is to promote non-formal education in Georgia and to highlight the role and responsibilities of local self-governments. It is targeted at high ranking officials of local government's legislative and executive bodies, as well as governmental/non-governmental organisations and experts working on the issues related to development of self-governments, and in the field of adult and other types of education.

The document consists of three parts. The first part is dedicated to the role of self-governments in the field of adult education and the analysis of policy, legislation and practice. It discusses adult education related issues mentioned in various policy and strategy papers of Georgia; legal base for self-government competences regarding adult education; experience of self-government bodies in supporting adult education. The second part reviews experiences of Germany and Finland in the field of adult education. The third part provides recommendations.

The small-scale grant programme (EUR 10,000) entitled "**Innovation in Adult Education**", initiated for the Association members, serves to professional capability development on the challenging way to building and development of adult education system.

The programme has been implementing for tow years now, which prioritises regional NGOs.

In 2010, within the grant programme framework, four projects were funded by the Association and 5 projects in 2011. The experience gained during the programme implementation has shown that it is extremely important to fund small-scale projects, directed towards development and lobbying of adult education in the country and, on the other hand, to strengthening the Association as a community.

Within the 2010 grant programme, a project was implemented in town N, aiming at attraction of the self-government's interest in local adult education, at awareness-raising and lobbying.

The project envisaged a vigorous awareness-raising campaign, targeted at legislative and executive bodies of a local municipality, on community adult education at national and regional levels. In this regard, meetings were held with staff of the municipality's educational resource centre and representatives of public school administrations; students (11th and 12th graders) of public schools located within the municipality; representatives of local municipality's legislative and executive bodies. An informative meeting was also organised, attended by youth (aged 17-24

years) left beyond formal education living on the territory of the municipality - potential project beneficiaries.

The municipality's legislative and executive bodies were informed about adult community education for the first time. Accordingly, it became topical to discuss the role and responsibilities of the self-government in providing accessibility of education on the municipality's territory.

The municipality's interest in problems of adults left beyond formal education has been increased. It was decided to become more active in this direction by providing various training courses to beneficiaries, in cooperation with the project implementing organisation.

Local educational institutions, educational resource centres, private and public school administrations have been informed about the community adult education programme for the first time. Their responsibility towards the school leavers and adults left beyond formal education has been increased to help them develop personal key competencies.

Majority of schools expressed readiness to cooperate with the project implementing organisation in order to plan further meetings with school leavers and offer them additional training courses, especially for those unable to continue learning at the next education level.

Municipality was willing to take responsibility for support of community adult education more efficiently by actively involving specific individuals or appropriate agencies in the process.

Young people living in the municipality learned for the first time about: community adult non-formal education; availability of non-formal education locally; possibility of being an active member of society, competitive in using new technologies, facilitating social relationships, creating equal opportunities and improving the quality of life without receiving formal education.

Within the same grant programme framework, another project was funded, which we would like to discuss as a **negative experience**. The project implemented in the region M, envisaged restoration of an old Georgian traditional activity. The basic project product should be a visual material prepared using modern technologies. This material would facilitate adult education and consultancy. Photo and video materials have been prepared, demonstrating the use of latest technologies in farming. Electronic version of virtual lessons have been developed and recorded to disks. The project result was a one-time product, without its practical use. In our view, resources allocated by the programme do not correspond to the resources required for restoration of this tradition in Georgia. In this case, ambitious goal remained unachieved.

### **3.2. Development of “geographical” community**

The Association had a chance to participate in the process related to implementation of the **lifelong learning** idea, advocated and lobbied by our organisation.

In 2006-2008, AEAG in cooperation with *dvv international* had been involved in establishment of Akhalkalaki and Akhaltsikhe Adult Education Centres through the EU-funded project **“Adult Education Centres in Samtskhe-Javakheti - Chance of Integration of Ethnic Minorities”**.

Multiprofile adult education centres primarily served to civil integration of ethnic minorities. Disadvantaged groups of population were prioritised target groups as well.

Interested local population had been attending Georgian language, vocational training and civil integration programme courses during 2 years.

It has to be noted that buildings, where the adult education centres were located, had been purchased, which ensured their sustainability.

After completion of the EU-funded project, ownership and management of adult education centres of Samtskhe-Javakheti were transferred to AEAG.

The Association's aim remains the same: to develop personal and professional skills among adolescents and adults, which would help them in self-actualisation in social, political and economic environments.

Akhaltsikhe and Akhalkalaki adult education centres have been announcing a contest for 3 years now to participate in the individual programme for personal development.

Preliminarily registered persons willing to participate in the personal development programme are interviewed. Priority is given to the unemployed, persons with low income, persons ready to start up their own business or obtain new profession and necessary personal skills. On the basis of the programme participants' skills and inclinations, individual training syllabi are developed.

Participants are able to choose the following training courses on: small business, marketing, financial management, office management, business/functional writing skills (Georgian), tourism management (tour guide), and various computer courses. The following handicraft courses are available as well: felt making, carpet knitting, sewing, and artistic woodworking. Training on project management, job-seeking techniques, effective communication and leadership are part of the personal development programme.

After choosing the desired training course, participants are interviewed. Only 10% of training fees are paid by participants and 90% is covered by the grant.

Participation in personal development programme and acquisition of new skills and key competencies, meeting the market requirements, enables the youth and adults living in the region to become more competitive in the local labour market.

AEAG believes that teaching a person how to adjust to changes is a task, determining the future. In order to achieve the development goals in a country like Georgia, it is crucial to invest in the social capital (human resources). Taking into account the aforementioned factor and the fact that about 20-25,000 school leavers do not or cannot continue education annually, services provided by Akhaltsikhe and Akhalkalaki centres can be considered as AEAG's success.

#### 4. Conclusion

One of the directions of the Association's work is to find and translate, as far as possible, into the Georgian language foreign literature, which would enrich our practice with experience. In this regard, by the end of 2010, the Association published a book **“Adult Education for Community Development”** by an American author Dr. Edwin Hamilton.

For the Association, this publication is a justification why we choose adult education for community development. As Dr. Hamilton notes, community development depends on effective social action; while effective social action requires acquisition of appropriate knowledge and skills. Other publications/researches dedicated to community development underline the role of political and economic factors. However, Dr. Hamilton creates an **educational model** for achieving changes in communities. His book focuses on the role of **non-formal education**, instead of formal. In his view, citizens have more chance for community betterment through effective adult education. Argument, which we share in this case, is based on a theoretical model, recognising motivation of many adults to change their environment; and accepting that *motivation should correspond to the information*.

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## The Power is in Unity

### Biological Farming Association “Elkana”

One of the praiseworthy properties of the human mind is  
that it strives to fathom the reasons of things  
*Vazha-Pshavela*

#### 1. Preface

Biological Farming Association “Elkana” was established in 1994 as a Georgian non-governmental organisation of farmers, whose aim is to support a sustainable improvement of socio-economic situation of Georgian population and environmental protection through promotion of active participation of parties involved in this sector.

The association membership is open to any citizen of Georgia interested in the development of organic farming in the country, as well as the environmental protection. Fundamental principles of the organisation are: modern thinking based on traditions of the country, active involvement of rural population in the everyday life and development of the country, morality, environmental ethics and professionalism, and participatory learning and action.

#### *Background*

In the 1990's, when the organisation began functioning, rural areas of Georgia were in rather bad condition owing to non-existence of production facilities and devastated infrastructure (roads, irrigation schemes, bridges, etc.). Furthermore, there was a complete lack of information and knowledge among rural population, as there were no state or civic institutions providing qualified advices on agricultural issues, modern technologies and promoting active participation of rural population in the country's life.

To provide optimal assistance to farmers, “Elkana” decided to establish the extension service, which has been delivering qualified consultancy to farmers in various regions of Georgia on the issues organic farming. During a close cooperation with farmers, the organisation has been researching shared problems in rural areas and, as a result, the following tendency has been identified: there were a lot of problems facing the rural areas, which could be resolved with joint efforts (group action), however without an appropriate knowledge and skills, population was unaware of its capacity and motivation, seeking outside assistance and thus feeling helpless and unprotected.

Progress and development of society is determined by the level of knowledge and skills of its members. Poverty reduction and improvement of economic situation cannot be achieved only through outside assistance. It is necessary to ensure active and conscious participation of population itself. Each person must be enabled to contribute to improvement of his/her living conditions. Promotion of active participation of population requires a task-oriented and methodic work. Reconstruction begins with understanding the problem, goal setting and capability assessment. Certainly, this process cannot be implemented by one person. It is crucial to form a group of like-minded associates, sharing a common vision and belief.

All the above-mentioned require community mobilisation and, to this effect, in 1995, “Elkana” began working towards community development, along with providing individual consultations to farmers. Two years on, department of community mobilisation and rural development was

established in the association. Later in 2002, community mobilisation became one of the strategic goals of the organisation. After many years of utilising proven approaches and methodologies, a newly established department (2010) of economic development continues the traditions of community mobilisation and rural development, whose aim is to mobilise farmers interested in entrepreneurship to assess their business capabilities, to prepare and implement the participatory projects/business plans.

## 2. Approaches, Vision and Target Groups

### *Development of approaches to working with communities*

Until the 1980's, virtually in all developing states, projects prioritising the external experts working temporarily in rural areas were considered as a momentum for the rural development. The concept of such theory was the following: ***“We, the experts, possess the knowledge while local population is quite incompetent”***. Accordingly, the local population was ignored and ***identification of problems, decision-making and planning/implementation of specific activities had been undertaken “outside” the communities.***

Over the years, it was revealed that efforts of “outsiders” were directed to meet the needs “identified” by external experts only and the real needs faced by communities were absolutely ignored. Selected villages had been offered a package of assistance. Such an approach puts a community into the position of a beneficiary and in this case population tends to think: “if you are willing to do something for our village, fine, do it and we’ll wait and see what happens”.

This tendency can partially be observed even today and in many cases it is the reason for inefficiency of certain models of economic development. Changes fastened on the population cannot ensure improvement of economic situation and are often directed to meet the economic needs of “outside” sources.

Majority of projects implemented using this approach had been unsuccessful. From the 1980's, as a result of post-mortem, the approaches were gradually changed and the old theory was replaced with a new one: ***local population possesses comprehensive information about its village and region. It makes decisions, plans and implements activities. Only receiving support and assistance (facilitation) is recommended from the “outside”.***

Accordingly, the structure of participation of local population in development projects has been changed as well: information gathering was replaced with participatory research/analysis and planning, which became a basis for a new methodology, called **participatory learning and planning (PLA)**.

### *Vision of “Elkana”*

**Participatory approach** served as a basis for “Elkana” in developing its visions and approaches to working with communities.

In our view, community development is a process, ensuring the unification and mobilisation of village population for the purpose of improving the economic, social and cultural conditions. In order to involve local population in the development process, it is necessary to let them identify their own needs and capabilities, set the goals and elaborate plans for achieving them, and

actively participate in problem solving. All the above-mentioned can be obtained by using self-help approach, implying participatory learning and action.

Community development does not include only solving a specific problem. It is crucial that people be able to unite, to start a dialogue, to learn ways of identifying the shared problems, to make conclusions and to act jointly. During this process, new relationships arise among people; their personal properties are being changed, new skills acquired and goals shaped.

On the other hand, a motivation is needed to mobilise communities for joint actions: if community members believe that resolution of a specific task is a result of their unification and new relationships, motivation for continuing the participatory activities can be observed.

“Elkana” sees its role only to support and facilitate the community development process. Although our organisation provides financial support (50/50 funding model) to villages for solving specific problems, within the framework of small-scale projects, “Elkana’s” aim is not to provide a one-time assistance only. It is very important for us to support formation of active and sustainable groups in villages, gaining appropriate knowledge and skills in order to continue a self-reliant functioning.

### ***Target group***

The entire village population was identified as a target group at the initial stage of working on the community development issues. Accordingly, while discussing a community we refer to a village population, having shared interests, problems and perspectives. Thus, in many cases *community development* is a synonym of *rural development* and, therefore, the division established under our association dealing with these issues is called the department of Community Mobilisation and Rural Development.

### ***“Elkana’s” approach - participatory learning and action (PLA)***

At the initial stage, the approach used by the department of community mobilisation and rural development was elaborated for working with communities and the first projects had been implemented in this direction. However, currently this methodology is widely applied in absolutely different fields of human activities. Furthermore, a geographical range has been expanded as well. Nowadays, this approach is used in more than 100 countries.

Detailed description of the methodology will not be introduced in the present article. What follows below is only a list of basic principles.

**Participatory learning and action (PLA)** implies participatory learning, analysis and planning performed through rapid rural appraisal (RRA) and participatory rural appraisal (PRA) techniques.

**Rapid rural appraisal (RRA)** can be viewed as a set of methods, enabling the rural population to obtain and analyse accurate and reliable information over a short period of time.

**Participatory rural appraisal (PRA)** as a process is based on the information obtained during the RRA and enables us to have a clear understanding of a village’s condition. It also implies involvement of local population in information analysis and decision-making processes.

Ultimately, participatory learning and action (PLA=RRA+PRA) can be explained as follows: it is a set of “continuously updated methods and approaches, which, on the one hand, is used to assess the level of readiness of communities to participate in solving their own problems, and, on the other hand, enables the communities to analyse their own experience and real situation, assess own capabilities, determine priorities, make decisions independently, and elaborate/implement action plans”.

**Participatory learning and action** is a flexible process, i.e. it does not imply the strict rules and guidelines. It includes a wide range of visual methods and techniques, ensuring community relations and analysis. It is possible to adjust these methods and approaches to specific situations. They can be referred to as “three fundamentals of participation”:

- + **behaviour and attitude** - basically meaning a professional attitude and individual approach of a facilitator (mobiliser);
- + **knowledge (information and experience) sharing** - it is essential to ensure the exchange of knowledge, ideas and experience, which means a bilateral process as opposed to a unilateral flow of information (from population to a facilitator);
- + **methods** - special methods used between communities and facilitators, as well as among community members themselves for sharing knowledge and experience; and for analysis.

### *“Elkana’s” workflow*

For working with communities, “Elkana” elaborated its own workflow, including all stages of work in rural areas:



### ➤ **Selection of a village**

Selection of a new village, where “Elkana’s” team of mobilisers is planning to start their work is performed according to special criteria: the village must be inhabited by a maximum of 550 households, 50% of which must be permanent residents and at least 7 of them have to be members of “Elkana”; there must be no serious conflict or disagreement between neighbours. The criteria have been developed in view of practical experience and resources of “Elkana”: while working with large villages, existing human resources and finances allocated from a “small-scale project fund” for specific problem solving appeared to be insufficient. Therefore, for optimal efficiency it was decided to select villages of 550 households. With regard to 50% limit, in reality this figure is lower at times, since the permanent residents include elderly people and children, who represent beneficiaries but are unable to be engaged in project implementation. Experience has also shown that non-permanent residents are less motivated and are reluctant to be involved in project activities.

On the basis of the programme interests, “Elkana” also takes into consideration the following circumstances: there must be objective conditions for shifting to organic farming; capability to cultivate old Georgian traditional crops; and potential for rural tourism development.

### ➤ **Planning of field work**

After selecting a village, formation of a team of mobilisers and methods training begins. It is recommended to keep the gender balance in the team. Owing to mentality and customs of villages, in some cases male mobilisers face problems during interviews with women residents and thus female mobilisers make the communication easier.

Prior to visiting a village, team of mobilisers collects information about a region/village. Almost in all cases the information is available, however it is often dubious and outdated. Results based on the collected data are carefully double-checked locally.

### ➤ **Working in villages**

Team of mobilisers is not always welcomed and regarded with favour. There are many instances of mistrust and alienation. Therefore, communication skills of mobilisers are of great importance. In order to establish a favourable communication with local population, it is crucial to select right contact persons. Almost in all cases, “Elkana” had its member farmers as contact persons, guaranteeing success of the first contact with village population.

Team of mobilisers stays in a village for 3-7 days. The work begins with collection of information. Initially, mobilisers hold interviews with local residents and select volunteers, willing to participate in information gathering. Afterwards, collection of information is started, using a method of semi-structured interviews (meetings with population and local government representatives; village survey involving the volunteers, recording the results).

### ➤ **Situation analysis**

Obtained information needs to be summed up and analysed in order to introduce them to local population in an understandable manner. For this purpose, a diagram method is used, since a diagrammatic representation easily demonstrates basic aspects of information, problem dynamics, interactions, etc.

### ➤ **Village meeting**

Obtained information and results from a preliminary analysis are introduced to population at the village meeting. Group of facilitators in cooperation with local volunteers prepares a meeting scenario, describing roles of all participants (who? when? what? how?). It is important to fix the date of the meeting properly, taking into consideration availability of village residents, local traditions, religious customs, and other factors.

Conducting the meeting properly and its results are one of the most important stages, since the meeting shall reveal if it is reasonable to continue working with this particular community. The number of persons attending the meeting is essential as well. Experience has shown that if the number of attendees is less than 40-50%, the meeting shall be postponed and work with the population must be continued, investigating reasons for inactivity. Only after this stage it can be decided whether to hold a meeting once again or to discontinue the work in the village.

During the meeting, the role of mobilisers is significant. Experience suggests that the mobilisers should act only as moderators and facilitators, and obtrusion of their own opinions and assumptions on population is strictly unacceptable.

When it comes to the issues under discussion at the meeting, team of mobilisers, first of all, shall introduce a situation analysis of the village. Considering the remarks and comments of the meeting participants, the information shall be verified and revised.

Afterwards, a moderator asks the participants to analyse the introduced information and to assess the village's capabilities, which would enable them to achieve some progress. Consequently, moderator assists to identify problems, preventing the village from unlocking its potential. At the next stage, on the basis of ranking, the population highlights the main problem and measures capabilities for its solving. In this regard, the population answers the questions: What shall be done? What resources are needed? What can implement the village independently and in which aspects does it need external assistance? After answering these questions, the village residents decide themselves which project shall be implemented.

It must be noted that a team of mobilisers provides comprehensive information to population at the meeting regarding our organisation and the scheme of assistance (small-scale project funds) being offered.

At the end of the meeting, local population selects the village committee members (community leaders), who will act as authorised representatives cooperating with mobilisers. This is a crucial stage for future success of the project. For this purpose, team of mobilisers, in cooperation with volunteers, defines criteria for potential committee members.

### ➤ **Working with the village committee**

Following the meeting, the mobilisers begin to work with the village committee. Certain knowledge and skills are required for the committee members in order to become community leaders and support community development process. For that reason, at the first meeting with the committee, the mobilisers elaborate a syllabus of training (goal statement, assessment of human resources, community development strategy, etc.). The village committee, at the same time, starts working on a business plan of the project identified at the meeting. Along with training, team of mobilisers assists the committee members in preparation of the business plan, providing information on needed technologies, material, potential donor organisations, etc.

When necessary, mobilisers help them collaborate with required specialists and provide accessibility of qualified consultations.

### ➤ **Project implementation**

After preparation of the business plan and review/approval of it by “Elkana”, the project implementation stage begins. As mentioned above, projects are co-financed (50/50 funding model) by “Elkana’s” small-scale project fund. Disbursal occurs after the community started the project implementation using its own resources. At this stage, the committee members’ commitment and skills are essential, since they plan a working schedule, procure necessary materials, work towards the mobilisation of local population, etc. In some cases, it is necessary for the committee to convene the village meeting independently. At this stage, role of mobilisers is to provide active monitoring of all project activities.

### ➤ **Project evaluation**

Evaluation is carried out at the final stage of the project. The process involves all the participants, including the village population, committee and team of mobilisers. Evaluation takes place at the village meeting, according to special criteria.

The following success criteria are used for project evaluation:

- *Relevance*: project goals are relevant to a problem identified by the community and to the community development course;
- *Productivity*: quality of outcomes is relevant to expenditures made for the project implementation;
- *Cost effectiveness*: share of project outcomes affecting the achievement of the project goal; cost of the project share and quality level (efficient distribution of human and material resources)
- *Change/influence*: influence on community development level and on improvement of socio-economic condition caused by the project implementation; skills acquired by the community (initiative, creative thinking, experience, education, etc.)
- *Number of beneficiaries*: number of persons benefited from the project (men and women)
- *Viability/sustainability*: project outcome continues to be beneficial and often contributes to other goals of community development strategy, elaborated by the village committee

With project evaluation, work on the specific project is completed. The entire process, from selection of villages to the project evaluation, takes approximately 12-18 months. However, it does not mean that relationship with villages is ended. “Elkana’s” team of mobilisers continues to observe further development of communities and, when necessary, assists the village committees by providing consultations and advices during implementation of new projects.

## **3. Experience**

“Elkana” has been working on the issues of community development for 16 years and its team of mobilisers have worked with 23 villages up to now. Certainly, not all the projects have been equally successful, nevertheless we learn from own mistakes, taking into consideration strengths and weaknesses of projects, success and failure analysis, which enable us to constantly develop

approaches and criteria, adjust methodologies to Georgian reality, upgrade skills of mobilisers, etc.

It has to be noted that a pilot project implemented in 1995 proved to be completely unsuccessful, however it had revealed our weaknesses: intervention in the village was absolutely spontaneous, without any particular approach or methodology; tasks had not been defined; local population had not been informed about the project; working group had not possessed accurate and comprehensive information; etc. Following this failing attempt, mistakes were analysed in cooperation with foreign experts and the department of community mobilisation and rural development was established; approaches of participatory work with communities and a methodology were developed; etc.

For sharing successful and unsuccessful experience of our organisation, projects implemented in two villages during the same period (2003-2005) are introduced below. Both villages had similar problems - non-existence of irrigation scheme. However, the results turned out to be totally different.

### **3.1. Positive experience - irrigation scheme in village M**

Village M is located about 100 km. from Tbilisi, in a region basically inhabited by ethnic minorities. The village is populated by Georgians. It meets all the criteria of our organisation: there are 270 households, 90% of which are permanent residents; according to preliminary data, there were no serious conflicts observed; and a group of “Elkana’s” member bio-farmers (20 persons) have been working there since 1999. Department of Community Mobilisation and Rural Development launched its work in the village M in 2003.

Beautiful nature, fertile soil and hard-working people are the village assets. However, population survey revealed that due to non-existence of an irrigation scheme, about 65-70% of local population were unable to use their resources fully and, accordingly, poorly irrigated agricultural lands provided low yielding capacity.

The village meeting was attended by 40% of population and based on the views expressed it became clear that the community understood the importance of the irrigation scheme and challenges facing the project implementation.

Action group (committee) was elected at the general meeting, who would collaborate with “Elkana’s” team of mobilisers. The first training provided to leaders proved that the decision had been made correctly: the committee engaged very actively in the learning process and, at the same time, it had been working on the irrigation scheme project. It has to be highlighted that along with the committee members, 17-20 local activists had been involved in the process as well. Such a high level of activity, in our view, has to be attributed to a distinguished leader, being the man who personally contacted “Elkana” back in 1999, believing that his village would definitely benefit from shifting to organic farming. Owing to his effort, 20 fellow villagers had become “Elkana’s” members.

The project’s business plan was prepared in a short period, including a planning of water intake structure and a 4.5 km. irrigation scheme. It was decided that the project would be co-financed by “Elkana” and local population. The project appeared to be quite expensive and it was rather problematic for the community to raise GEL 42,000. However, this fact did not prevent the committee from acting and they applied for local government assistance.

Regional administration provided (on a usufruct basis) water pipes (total of 4.5 km. in length) to the village. Local population contributed to the project by manual labour and GEL 2,000. The community had been actively involved in the project implementation. On a daily basis, according to the schedule prepared by the committee, local residents offered their manual labour (digging the ground, welding, operating an excavator, etc.). After the water intake structure had been constructed, a problem arose during installation of pipes, as the route should cross the land inhabited by neighbouring Azeris, which was not envisaged by the project. This fact caused a disputed situation. Following the consultations held with mobilisers, the village meeting was convened and it was decided to include two additional elements in the irrigation scheme for Azeris. The project was completed in December 2004. Currently, the village has the up-and-running irrigation system, serving 250 ha. of agricultural lands cultivated by 150 residents. Implementation of the project with own resources greatly encourages the local population. After the project completion, the action group established a water supply association, who elaborated the irrigation scheduling, ensuring the scheme's uninterrupted operation. At a later stage, with the support of "Elkana's" Department of Community Mobilisation and Rural Development, new projects were implemented, aimed at installation of additional 1 km. water pipeline and rehabilitation/equipment of the water supply association's office.

Following the project completion, the CHF International began its work in the region. In the village M they found a mobilised and motivated community with active committee. This fact served as a basis for selecting the village for implementing three projects: installation of a new electric transformer, rehabilitation of the potable water pipeline, and basic works in the vegetable collection-sorting facility.

In 2007, by the initiative of the village committee, a farmers' union was established, comprised of 72 members. Later, the union became a member of "Elkana". Afterwards, the farmers began growing broccoli and with the support of "Elkana's" marketing department, in August-September 2007, the village became an exclusive supplier of this vegetable for the hypermarket Goodwill, located in Tbilisi.

As for the leader of the village committee, currently he is quite busy with fruitful activities: he works in the local government, is the head of a local farmers' union, the local programme coordinator of the UN programme in local municipality, and is involved in almost all projects and activities being carried out in the district.

### **Reasons for success**

There were a lot of reasons for successful implementation of the project and formation of a motivated community in the village M. First of all, importance of a good leader has to be underlined. The village must take a right decision while selecting inspired, motivated, active and well-respected members of the committee.

The second point deals with education. The village had its leaders before the intervention, however their personal growth and further activity was greatly affected by training courses provided by mobilisers. As the leaders themselves admitted, they learned not only preparation of a specific project, but also acquired skills for capability assessment, holding dialogues with population and government, communication with donor organisations, and, most importantly, they learned how to make decisions independently. These factors had an immense influence on success of post-project activities.

Awareness of population and the project transparency played a critical role: the committee had been regularly providing information to local population on the project expenditures. The project description with a detailed budget was displayed publicly in the village centre.

Lastly, the project had actually articulated the village's need; the problem was identified by the population itself and the community was motivated to participate in its solving.

### **3.2. Negative experience** - rehabilitation of irrigation scheme and pumping station in village N

In the summer of 2003, "Elkana's" team of mobilisers began its work in the village N, located about 50 km. from Tbilisi. Several households were the members of our organisation, who requested us to assist their community.

Based on the information gained and analysed, the following facts had been revealed: the village was population with 150 households; majority of residents were over 65; the village lived in economic hardship with high rate of unemployment; large portion of agricultural lands were not cultivated (about 110 ha. had not been irrigated). Owing to these and other factors, local population had been selling their own lands and migrating to the city for earning a livelihood.

Against this background, team of mobilisers realised that it would be very difficult to work with the community, however the village desperately needed our support and it was decided to hold a meeting. The meeting was attended by 20 persons (representing 8 households only out of 150), basically including "Elkana" members and their supporters. As a result of discussions, the main problem - non-existence of irrigation system - had been identified. Five members of the committee had been elected and the work began. A project including cost breakdown and action plan was elaborated jointly, aiming at rehabilitation of the irrigation scheme and pumping station. Total project cost amounted to GEL 6,000, 50% of which should be financed by "Elkana's" small-scale project fund. According to the committee, the village population was unable to contribute the entire sum of their budget share. Community's action group together with the committee met with the representatives of a regional administration, and owing to their support, the project implementation began.

Problems arose at the initial stage: majority of local population, not attending the village meeting, was not well informed and considered that the project served the interests of only several persons (committee members). Accordingly, they refused to participate. Part of the population supported the village committee, while the rest expressed mistrust. Committee members failed to hold a dialogue with the community, ensure their mobilisation and involvement in the project activities. Later, problems arose within the committee itself and ultimately there was only one leader left out of five. As a result, the project had been suspended. At that stage, team of mobilisers conducted an additional survey, revealing serious conflicts and disagreement among the local population, as well as between the community and committee. Reasons for conflict were identified, which included different political views, mistrust towards the local government, various types of neighbour disputes, etc. Team of mobilisers began searching for a solution. The second meeting had been convened to select new members of the committee. "Elkana" offered further support of the project in case the village managed to mobilise the community. Initially, work of a new committee seemed somewhat successful, though it failed to resolve the existing conflicts and promote active participation of local population. Finally, in the summer of 2005, the project was discontinued and the team of mobilisers left the village.

## **Reasons for failure**

After the withdrawal, team of mobilisers evaluated and analysed the reasons for the project failure in the village N. The village had not been selected correctly, as the aging factor was ignored (majority of the village population were over 65); local population is neophobic, unwilling to accept novelties; it underestimates own capabilities, considering that all problems should be solved by local government. Against the background of existing conflicts (different political views, neighbour disputes, different priorities and wishes), unification and mobilisation of the community was almost impossible.

A real, independent leader could not be identified in the village. The committee members were selected by 20 persons. Furthermore, the candidates were nominated by reference to their positions held, instead of personal characteristics and reputation. However, even the leaders selected at the second meeting appeared unable to earn the confidence of population. One of the reasons for the community's mistrust was non-transparency of the project budget.

Moreover, leaders were not enthusiastic about acquiring new knowledge and skills (they frequently missed training courses), were unable to envision village perspectives and make decisions independently.

Finally, the main reason for the population's inactivity was the fact that the project did not articulate real needs of the entire community.

Analysis of reasons for failure enabled us to update the organisation's approaches:

- village selection criteria have been refined; in case a village does not meet them, the project is not implemented there;
- in case the village meeting is not attended by 35-50% of population, the meeting is postponed;
- a problem articulated in the project must be shared by at least 70% of population;
- candidates for the village committee should represent the population and must be nominated by the community, instead of a local government;
- under our guidance, community should elaborate criteria for selecting the committee members;
- project can not be implemented, unless there is no common vision developed (even if the process requires a long period).

## **4. Conclusion**

As one of the characters of Jonathan Swift's novel states, "whoever could make two ears of corn, or two blades of grass, to grow upon a spot of ground where only one grew before, would deserve better of mankind". Any kind of progress and development depends on commitment of human beings and their participation in various processes, which cannot be achieved without raising awareness of population on the following issues.

How to become more self-confident? How to participate in decision-making? How to overcome the existing nihilism? What does it mean to be a full-fledged member of society? "Elkana's"

activities are directed towards answering all the aforementioned questions. It is difficult to gain experience and assess own capabilities by being inactive and observing others; it is impossible to achieve common goals and solve the shared problems without unification, having no common vision and belief.

As a result of a long experience of working on the community development issues, “Elkana” has made the following conclusions:

- community members are more interested in solving their problems than outsiders; local population is capable of solving their own problems;
- local population has high potentials, which have to be unlocked and developed;
- mobilisers must work together with communities and not instead of them; by facilitating and encouraging the communities, mobilisers earn more confidence of population than by teaching/instructing them (top-down approach);
- working on a specific problem is not enough; it necessary to hold a dialogue with population in order to conduct a root cause problem analysis and identify possible methods of its solving;
- visible success must be achieved in the shortest possible time in order to strengthen population’s motivation, belief and hope;
- in every village there are distinguished persons, who, in case of proper mobilisation, can act as leaders.

Finally, our organisation’s approach - participatory learning and action - suggests: **“make people before making products”**. However, this approach needs to be used carefully, as a process carried out rapidly by non-professionals with a wrong vision cannot give a positive result. Therefore, instead of acquiring shallow knowledge of particular methods, it is necessary to thoroughly explore and clearly understand those visions and approaches, which underlie the process of participatory learning and action.

*Prepared by:*  
David Dolidze and Manana Gigauri  
Organic Farming Association “Elkana”

#### 1. Preface

Caucasian House is a cultural-educational and peacekeeping organisation, whose mission is to create ideological and intellectual background for multiethnic and peaceful development of Georgia; promote liberal and civic education; encourage intercultural dialogue between different ethnic and religious groups.

Caucasian House pays a special attention to integration of Caucasian peoples and projects, supporting regional development of the Caucasus.

Currently, the organisation works in three basic programme directions:

- Cultural-educational programme;
- Caucasus research programme;
- Peacekeeping policy and integration of ethnic minorities.

Caucasian House has been implementing its projects for more than 10 years now, on the basis of the organisation's general vision and values - community capacity development in rural areas through educational and cultural activities.

Since 1999, the organisation has been actively working with one of the municipalities of Kakheti region, implementing some segments of the project in neighbouring municipalities as well.

In 2008, several projects implemented in the region were combined into one programme, which, in the strategic development document, was entitled "Civic Education and Community Development in the Regions of Georgia".

In 2010, Caucasian House critically analysed its 10-year work experience and decided to establish the programme (Civic Education and Community Development in the Regions of Georgia) as an independent organisation. The board considered that registration of the programme as an individual organisation would facilitate further success and a self-sustained development of its own policy. It can be said that Caucasian House played a role of the so-called incubator and an independent organisation - Community Development Centre - has been established on the programme's base.

Accordingly, the present article describes a 10-year experience of Caucasian House's regional programme, currently represented by Community Development Centre, as its successor. Since the article deals with a post-event analysis, only Caucasian House will be mentioned in the text. All the interested persons shall bear in mind that a methodology introduced below is currently used by Community Development Centre, a regional organisation established by Caucasian House.

## **Background**

In the second half of the 1990's, when the political situation in Georgia was relatively stable, basic portion of the country's economic and political life was concentrated in Tbilisi. Activities of non-governmental organisations were focused mainly on Tbilisi. Hyper-urbanisation and asymmetric development of the country began<sup>1</sup>. Rural areas had been massively depopulated (mostly, youth had been leaving their villages). Caucasian House was one of the first organisations, realising the severity of the problem and decided to implement part of its projects in regions.

Generally, one of the hard challenges of management is to expand activities. At the initial stage, Caucasian House had no distinct plan (concept) for regional intervention and expansion of activities. The situation was aggravated by the fact that local communities were unable to identify their problems and properly articulate them. It can be said that this is a common problem, faced by any organisation willing to launch its activities in regions. Such situation "facilitated" the work paradoxically and created fertile ground for innovations. Virtually all activities had been selected/determined intuitively and based on Caucasian House's general vision and values: culture (art) and education are not luxurious parts of life nor exclusive right of the chosen ones. By providing cultural services to rural population and developing their educational competencies, we strived to create the sense of full life among local population and, on the other hand, to help them acquire enough knowledge to solve their problems independently.

Community mobilisation or establishment of local community organisations were not a primary goal of Caucasian House. We wanted to create services relevant to basic needs of hopeless population suffering from trivial problems, such as power outage. However, activities carried out in rural areas resulted in community development, examples of which are given below.

### **Important factors of development process:**

#### **a) Infrastructure related projects**

As a result of communication with rural population we found out that, along with cultural-educational services, there was a need in carrying out infrastructure related activities as well, specifically rehabilitation of a village's damaged school building; rehabilitation of potable water supply system; installation of gas service.

In 2003-2004, with the financial support of a European foundation, the village's public school three-storey building was fully rehabilitated in compliance with international standards. Afterwards, Caucasian House with the foundation's support carried out several useful activities for the village.

In 2005, Caucasian House, with the financial support of its associates, arranged the installation of gas service in the village.

In 2006-2007, with participation of community members, a water intake facility was rehabilitated.

From the initial stage, Caucasian House tried to involve as much stakeholders as possible, meeting local problems by their profile and competences. Effectiveness of such approach was proved during implementation of infrastructure related projects, as well as at a later stage. Apart from effectiveness, this type of corporate work is a precondition for sustainable results. As

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<sup>1</sup> massive outflow of rural populaiton to the capital city

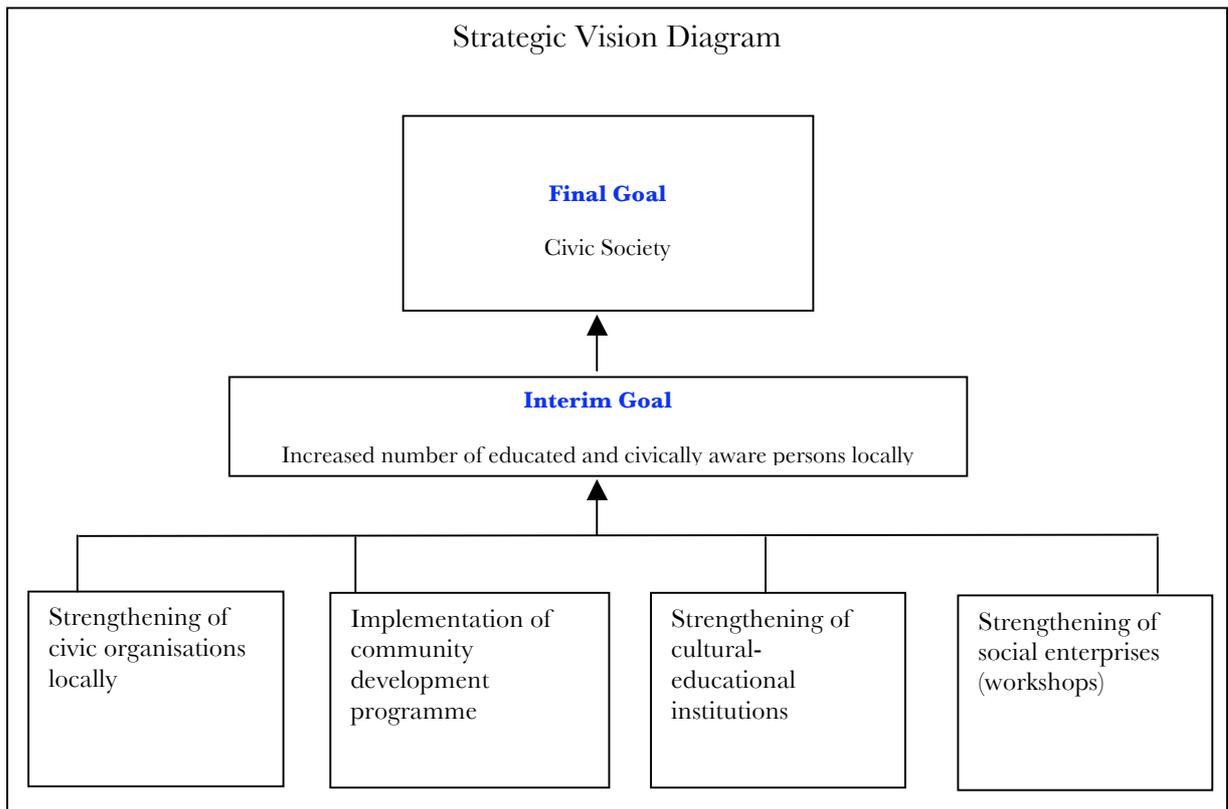
mentioned above, Caucasian House has basically been implementing cultural-educational projects, however there were other types of problems in the community as well. Infrastructure related projects cannot be implemented without involving many actors. Cultural projects are closely related to tourism, which is interlinked with agriculture and so on. Obviously, a single organisation cannot encompass all types of activities successfully. When our efforts resulted in establishment of a local community organisation (described below), the success was definitely conditioned by partnership with other agencies. Caucasian House had been purposefully working towards the organisation's capacity development. In this regard, other organisations from the capital were involved periodically in the process as well. Currently, the organisation continues to cooperate with them, which is a determinant of success to a considerable degree.

#### **b) Community school model - public school as a target group**

After rehabilitation of a school building, Caucasian House started implementation of a community school model. In many cases, school is the only living organism in villages, encompassing a major part of community: school children, parents and teachers. It is a unified social mechanism, not requiring additional effort for its self-organisation. The process coincided with the national reform for democratisation of schools. Indeed, school has to be the first cell of democracy, where education and development of citizens should take place. Our mission was to facilitate and contribute to the process. Community school model implies participation of children, after completion of educational process, in various activities, that would promote their intellectual development, increasing civic responsibility, humanisation of thinking, etc. Parents are engaged in the process as well. This is a model of the so-called safe schools, which is based on freedom and responsibility, instead of fear and control. However, working with schools contains a serious challenge. In a stressful and polarised political environment, schools often become objects of wicked manipulation. Representatives of political circles regard teachers, parents and pupils as a large electorate and meet any different initiative within schools with suspicion. At a later stage, the government itself changed the course of decentralisation launched in the education system, choosing the way of strict administration. In this connection, Caucasian House reviewed its priorities and decided to put more emphasis on encouragement of local community initiatives.

Taking into consideration the aforementioned experience, Caucasian House (Community Development Centre) works in the following **strategic directions** in regions:

- **Local capacity development programme** - promoting development of local civic organisations in municipalities of Kakheti region: community organisations, NGOs operating at municipal level and other types of community initiatives.
- **Community development programme** - implementation of community development programmes in target communities, in cooperation with local partner organisations;
- **Social entrepreneurship programme** - promoting the idea of small-scale social entrepreneurship in target communities for the purpose of income generation, and supporting their development locally; encouraging the establishment of workshops and their development;
- **Strengthening of cultural-educational institutions** - supporting the development of local cultural-educational organisations (e.g. house museums, culture centres, etc.) in Kakheti region.



## 2. Methodology, principles and workflow for working with communities

### Culture and education

Methodology used by our organisation is a paradigmatic example and belongs to the model of community mobilisation through culture and education. Cultural events, such as small-scale village festivals, educational activities, chess, foreign language and drama classes enable us to encompass as many community (village) members as possible and earn their positive attitude. It is of great importance for socialisation of children and youth. Involving a large portion of local population in a mutual process, such as local village festivals or chess championships, makes it possible to revive the extinguished cultural life of inert community for at least a short period. Participation of population in a joint event contributes to reanimation of “public affair” (*res publica*) - the sense, which became obsolete a long ago. This is a primary basis of formation of citizenship, in general, and civil society. Therefore, social value of such events is unquestionable.

Civic education is a precondition for formation of active and solidary society based on personal responsibility; therefore, any activity - including meetings held within the culture calendar framework, festival of documentaries, eco-campaigns and establishment of social enterprises - is a part of lobbying the idea of active citizenship.

### Strengthening of participatory groups

The experience has shown that the role of local partners is crucial. Existence of active groups or local organisations is a precondition for the community development programme and, accordingly, is one of the indicators of community development.

According to our approach, local participatory group’s capacity development is one of the determinants. It has two basic aspects - philosophical (vision) and operational (management).

Philosophy denotes that local problems are better be solved by local groups. It is the basics of decentralisation and regionalism, and without it the advanced democracies are simply unimaginable. In Georgia, local self-governments are still far from ideal. However, we have to move in this direction. Until then, existence of strong local community groups and organisations is essential.

As for the operational aspects, in our consideration, the management model used by Caucasian House during 10 years is successful in terms of coordination. Accordingly, our approach implies:

- with the purpose of increasing effectiveness of intervention, selecting a community with already identified civic group (registered or unregistered);
- putting emphasis on strengthening of these groups (the so-called superstructure). Strengthening of their human resources and providing contemporary standards of management; in some cases, creation of material and technical resources and supporting the development of income generating activities. Our aim is to ensure institutional development of these groups until are able to protect their community interests independently.

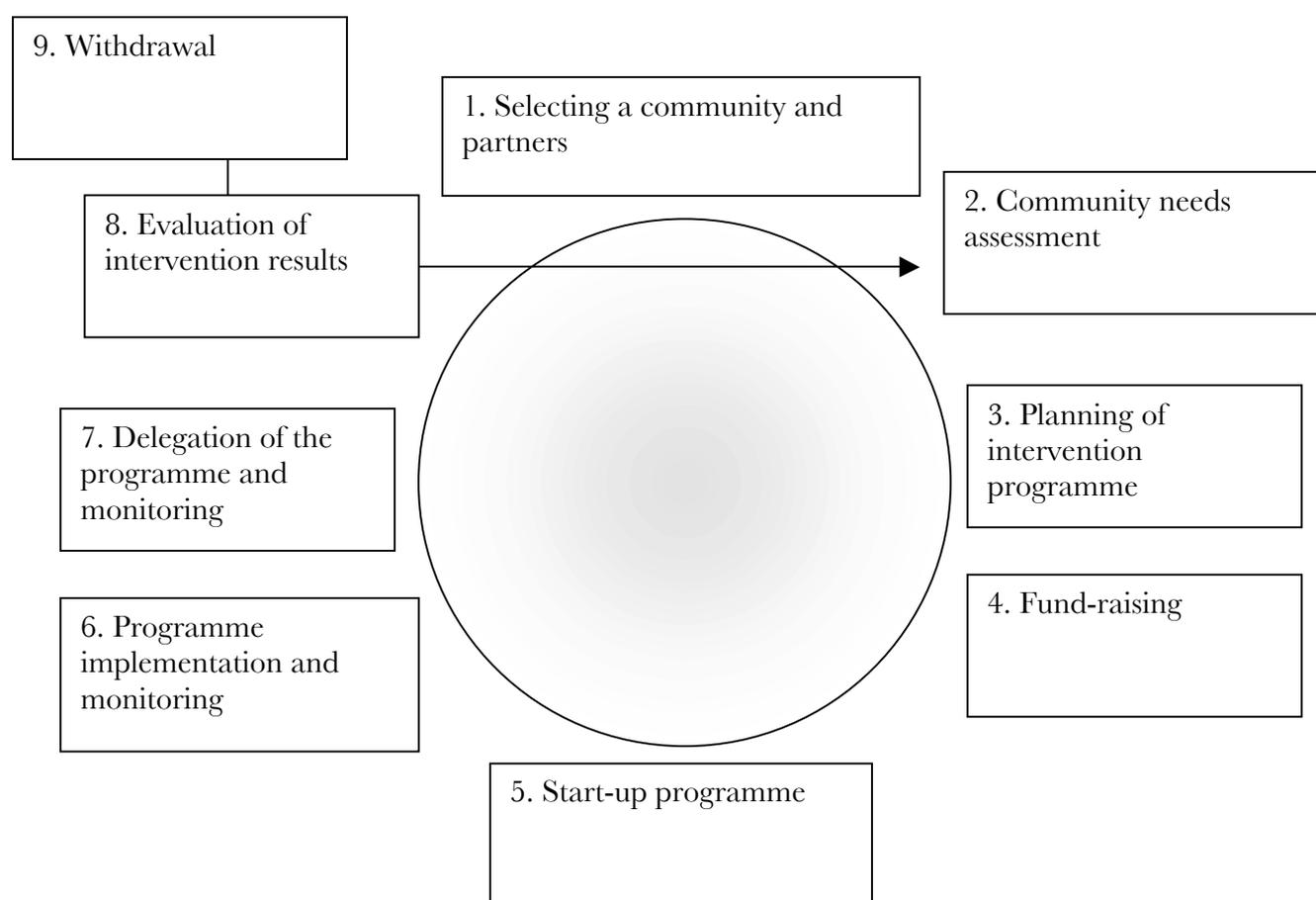
### **Basic principles of working with communities**

- Special focus on youth<sup>2</sup>
- Distinct focus on civic education;
- Taking into consideration the local context during the programme planning;
- Local capacity development;
- Small-scale grants as an instrument for encouraging adult education and initiatives;
- Cooperation with local self-governments;
- Transparency and awareness-raising in communities;
- Participation of communities in programme elaboration and taking their interests into consideration;
- Local partner organisations are regarded as implementing partners and not only as target groups;
- Keeping the gender balance;
- Purposeful introduction of volunteering.

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<sup>2</sup> Our 10-year experience has shown that achieving certain changes and communicating in a modern language is much easier with youth than with older persons, having already established their world outlook.

## Workflow for working with communities



### 3. Experience

#### 3.1. Local community organisation and workshops for women (successful example)

Our cultural-education activities in the village involved pupils, school graduates, unemployed women, and active/motivated people, willing to achieve personal success, as well as participate in public affairs for the village wellbeing. As a result of these activities, idea of establishing a community organisation was born. Training on community mobilisation provided by our partner - Biological Farming Association “Elkana” - gave an impetus to the accumulated energy. It can be said that a key to future success of community organisations lies in works carried out before their establishment.

Simultaneously, Caucasian House began to work towards promotion of income generating activities in rural areas. Within the project framework, more than 50 women learned various handicrafts (sewing, quilting, felt making, knitting, silk paper making, dyeing, national and modern puppet making, weaving, rug knitting, etc.). All of this led to the establishment of Handicraft Workshop for Women. It has to be noted that the process took place before Sighnaghi was announced as a tourist and cultural centre and infrastructure related works were carried out by the government. As a result, after completion of Sighnaghi rehabilitation, workshops established by our organisation (which are located near Sighnaghi) contributed to attraction of tourists with local products (gifts and souvenirs).

After the project completion, Caucasian House transferred the management of workshops to the local community organisation. It can be said that it was the best decision with a view to community mobilisation. Along with economic effect, the workshops added a substantial human resource to the community organisation in the form of employed women. Moreover, taking responsibility for the workshops strengthened the community organisation's management. Our organisation contributed to the process by providing various training courses and consultancy.

Supporting a community organisation and development of its capacity is a different task with additional challenges. Introducing a certain type of service in the region is quite contrasting as compared to establishing an organisation locally, which would continue similar activities in the community, for the purpose of the service sustainability. Only three persons (basically women) were actively involved in the community organisation's activities. Incidentally, this phenomenon - the role of women in community, and generally, development projects - needs to be researched. The group tried to encourage and involve as much community members as possible in joint actions, but they were treated with mistrust and suspicion. In a society, where majority of people are unemployed and living in economic hardship, where there is no civic responsibility and the sense of common wealth, it is quite difficult to mobilise people for even a trivial activity, such as clean-up of illegal village dump or organising a festival. The situation is further aggravated by the outflow of youth. On the other hand, it has to be noted that a tendency of self-isolation and elitism was observed within the group of active community members itself. The more developed became local capacity built by Caucasian House, the deeper grew unsound attitude and conflicts within the community. The experience has shown that this risk is inevitable, facing development projects, and the risk management (but not its resolution) requires particular patience and effort.

Currently, community organisation and workshops are stably developing and perhaps the workshops will be registered as an individual organisation in the future. Average annual income of the workshops amounts to GEL 8,000. Along with the growth of income, the number of women willing to become the workshop members increases.

Despite the success of workshops and organisation, they still need support of their partners from the capital city. However, the nature of support is different than that provided 2-3 years ago. Nowadays, they do not represent direct target groups anymore and the assistance should imply partnership and joint participation in as much activities as possible.

### **3.2. Information centre (unsuccessful example)**

In Georgia, there had been numerous initiatives developed. Many of them even led to the establishment of organisations, however they ceased their existence during implementation of targeted actions. (There are cases when initial activities failed to be implemented and projects were cancelled). Viability/feasibility is the main challenge of community development projects. There are a lot of subjective and objective reasons, preventing community organisations from continuing their work independently. One of the most important obstacles is improper identification/selection of a profile. Small organisations, as a rule, aim at working on all problems of their villages (from agriculture to environmental protection). At the initial stage, our community organisation, and accordingly Caucasian House supporting its development, faced the same problem. Aspects, which may seem extremely important at the initial phase, can appear unimportant after the work begins. Community organisation members considered it necessary to establish an information centre, providing consultancy to population on topical issues (agriculture, legal assistance, communication with local self-government, etc.). Caucasian Houses decided that the community organisation would deal with this task successfully. Besides, we had no choice, since not meeting the needs of a local partner would mean that Caucasian House were imposing its own ideas upon them. One of the purposes of the information centre was to

provide computer courses to local population free of charge. Later, it appeared that none of the segments (consultancy and computer courses) succeeded. The reason for failure was bilateral mistakes committed by Caucasian House and its partners at the planning stage:

- Needs of the local population were not assessed properly and the decision was made spontaneously;
- Capability of our partner, taking on the responsibility for providing consultancy, was not assessed properly;
- Experience of our partners in carrying out similar activities was not researched;
- The purpose and function of the information centre was not properly explained and clarified to the public.

It has to be mentioned that Caucasian House understood the problem at the right time, having no fixed ideas on establishment of the information centre, thus avoiding to be in thrall to failure. There is no development without setbacks. Such mistakes provide a chance to gain experience, reconsider approaches, strategy and management style; become more consecutive and plan the future realistically.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Community development is a time-consuming process and its success or failure depends on numerous subjective and objective factors, from difficult socio-economic situation in the country to some seemingly insignificant particular characteristics of local communities. Judging from our society, development projects can be metaphorically referred to as a fight against hopelessness. Apathy and suspicion against everything is the main tragedy of disappointed people, having lost their faith in the Soviet and post-Soviet (independent Georgia) eras. A contagious success must become the main indicator of development. People must realise that a positive change can be achieved through efforts, cooperation, openness and participation of their neighbours, friends and compeers.

Caucasian House's experience of working in the region has shown that the key factor of development project management is the adequacy of specific methods used for a specific environment, rather than selection of a certain method for community capacity development. At each stage of development, various tasks emerge. Therefore, accurate identification of these tasks and consecutive work towards their implementation is of particular importance. Adjustment of approaches by Caucasian House (when the change of target groups - from school to community organisation - occurred) depended on external factors. Without this change, the project would be destined to failure. According to our experience, success is conditioned by coincidence of various factors, including state policy, interests of donor organisations, simultaneous efforts of partner organisations, etc. The problem is that organisations, using a certain method for a long period of time, can hardly realise that it is sometimes necessary to reconsider their approaches. Therefore, it is essential to observe own activities "from the outside" and be constantly oriented to changes and growth.

*Prepared by:*

Giorgi Shaishmelashvili and Anna Margvelashvili

#### **1. Preface**

CENN is a regional non-governmental organisation founded in 1998. It has been working actively in five directions: civil society development and institutional strengthening, environmental research and policy, resource management, management of compliance with international requirements and legislation, and sustainable development and communication.

CENN strives to build a strong and responsible civil society, efficient environmental governance and an accountable private sector to safeguard the environment and improve people's lives.

CENN works in the South Caucasus at local, national and regional levels. The organisation has a long experience of implementing joint projects and activities, involving all three countries of South Caucasus.

CENN considers that network-based work and collaboration with stakeholders on environmental issues is one of the most effective methods of achieving environmental goals.

#### **2. Essence and definition of community mobilisation**

According to CENN, community mobilisation is a process of skills development through community participation (a group of people having common interests, shared problems and visions), aiming at the unification of citizens around specific problems and finding ways of tackling them. At the same time, this process enables communities to independently identify and analyse their own problems and to elaborate sustainable and long-term methods for their resolution.

Community mobilisation is considered important because of the following factors:

- a mobilised community responds effectively to existing needs and problems: community is capable of defining a contextually acceptable strategy for problem solving and is able to develop an efficient, economically viable and sustainable plan for environmental protection;
- community mobilisation promotes development of a sense of belonging and responsibility (shared resources and problems of community) among community members;
- community mobilisation raises the level of successful problem solving in a community (with regards to results and sustainability);
- community mobilisation increases the need for improved services and changes among community members;
- community mobilisation encourages the introduction of changes in community's behaviour, and often becomes common practice in communities.

#### **CENN's methodology of community mobilisation**

Since 2001, CENN has been actively implementing various projects in the South Caucasus region targeted at raising public awareness, community mobilisation and capacity building.

CENN's aim of community mobilisation is to strengthen communities, support community participation in decision-making, facilitate the participatory planning process, and to increase the influence of communities (bottom-up) on initiating various types of change.

CENN's strategy/vision of community mobilisation implies strengthening of communities by constant information provision, awareness-raising, collaboration and skills development in order to enable communities to identify, analyse and solve their own problems independently.

CENN's community mobilisation skills are based on professional training and education, as well as practical experience.

### **Target groups:**

- users of natural resources;
- those at risk of / vulnerable to natural disasters and environmental degradation
- government bodies (legislative and executive) responsible for environmental protection and management of natural resources at local and national levels;
- women;
- youth (school and university students);
- marginal groups.

### **Basic stages of community mobilisation**

- identification of an issue - identification of the existing problem in a specific community by analysing problematic issues and defining priorities (through the participation of local population and consultations);
- analysis of stakeholders (identification of beneficiaries, partners and other interested parties related to the given problem) and preparation of a socio-economic profile of the community;
- on-site visit and case study in cooperation with local stakeholders;
- evidence-based analysis – a case study carried out in cooperation with stakeholders and experts, it is based on various information, reports, official data and other materials;
- preparation of related materials (reports, maps, etc.), application of modern approaches with the purpose of data visualisation;
- awareness-raising and skills development focused on community needs - preparation of educational materials and information packages and their dissemination among local population; development of training courses; conducting seminars, trainings, and workshops; formation of thematic working groups comprised of active members of community; identification of natural leaders and working towards their skills development;
- initiation of an issue-oriented dialogue: advocating and lobbying the given problem at regional and national levels; organisation of seminars, meetings and round tables with active participation of local groups; establishment of issue-oriented coalitions; publication of petitions and expert reports; etc.;

- providing information to a wide range of mass media and encouraging their active involvement in lobbying the issue - media tours, news conferences, press releases, social advertising, newspaper articles, TV coverage, etc.;
- elaboration of plans, including recommendations/activities directed towards sustainable community development (based on active consultations with local population), and sustainable/long-term problem solving, bearing in mind environmental factors;
- piloting of specific activities from community participation plans, with the purpose of developing the sense of belonging and trust (which is crucial for implementation of plans in the future) towards the project;
- working towards sustainable community development - before complete withdrawal, the organisation provides various types of assistance (expert reports, recommendations and other kind of technical assistance) over a certain period of time, with the purpose of fostering sustainable development.

### 3. Experience

#### 3.1. Successful experience

- a) Rehabilitation of water supply system. In village N, the local population was unable to use tap water for drinking for more than 10 years, this was caused by an old pipeline and damaged intake station. As a result of mobilisation works carried out by CENN, a local action group began to work actively towards solving this problem. The group held meetings with local authorities and a company responsible for water supply to the village. Methods of resolution for the problem were elaborated and responsibilities/roles were distributed amongst stakeholders. Mass media was actively involved in the campaign. All the stakeholders (local population, local government and the water supply company) agreed that rehabilitation of water supply system was one of the most important issues for the village.

As a result of the above-mentioned campaign, the water supply company rehabilitated the main water pipeline to the village and the water supply system of the village was fully repaired with financial support from the local government. Currently, the village is supplied with clean potable water.

- b) Rehabilitation of a landslide-affected road - In June of 2010, a landslide affected village N, blocking the only motor road leading to 22 villages inhabited by 360 households. The local population was isolated for 2 weeks. Food and medicines were available only by helicopter.

CENN's team of mobilisers, in close cooperation with the community representative, held community meetings. On the basis of a decision taken at the meetings, a written statement was submitted to the municipal administration, the National Agency of Environmental Protection and the Ministry of Infrastructure and Regional Development in order to study the problem locally and take appropriate measures to solve it. Simultaneously, information was disseminated by the press and television stations (several media tours were arranged).

As a result, the motor road was cleaned and the local population was given the possibility of using it again.

The government allocated funds for rehabilitation of the landslide-affected road, which is the most important factor in a long-term process of solving the problem.

### **3.2. Unsuccessful experience**

There are 11 cheese processing plants in village N. After the cheese making process is finished, used water flows, without any treatment, into ditches alongside the village roads. In the heat of summer, the organic wastes that decay in the ditches exude a foul smell and can cause a range of sicknesses. Naturally, it creates serious problems for the local population.

During recent years, the local population was contacting the authorities to solve this problem but unfortunately none of the requests were responded to.

CENN began to work in this village on its own initiative and mobilised the local community. As a result, a local population group carried out activities to attempt to solve the aforementioned problem.

The group began working in the following directions:

- installation of a wastewater treatment plant (the group contacted relevant experts, who studied the situation locally, designed the plant and calculated the budget);
- raising awareness of entrepreneurs: efforts were made to demonstrate the necessity of the plant;
- analysis of the national legislation: instruments to request observance of sanitary and hygiene norms.

Simultaneously, the group sent an official request to relevant governmental bodies (local government, the Ministry of Economic Development of Georgia, and the National Agency of Environmental Protection) and a private company to solve the problem.

It has to be noted that the territory where the wastewater treatment plant should be installed was owned by a private company. CENN sent an official request to the National Agency of Environmental Protection to advocate in the problem solving process. Negotiations were held with the private company, which consequently provided the territory for installation of the plant.

As mentioned above, intensive talks were held with the owners of 11 small enterprises, who finally agreed to allocate money for installation of the plant. Ultimately, an agreement was achieved, according to which a part of the cost of the plant would be allocated from the local government's budget, the rest would be provided by the cheese-makers. However, the municipality did not allocate the sum, as a result of pressure from above. Accordingly, the entrepreneurs refused to cover all costs and the project failed.

In conclusion, it can be stated that it was necessary to cooperate with the mass media more actively (including the local media) in order to prevent the local government from avoiding its responsibility of providing funds for installation of the plant.

#### **4. Conclusions and recommendations**

It is important to underline several aspects that determine the efficiency of community mobilisation:

- holding a dialogue with the participation of various stakeholders interested in a specific issue;
- conducting evidence-based analysis and dialogue;
- visualisation of data to allow the easy understanding of relevant materials and analysis;
- identification of natural leaders and carrying out active work with them;
- providing information to the mass media and facilitating their active involvement in the process.

## Working with Communities - The Way to Development

### The Centre for Strategic Research and Development of Georgia

Unworthy is the one who's but a mass of worthless clay,  
Who dares to shun all mortal cares, yet in this world does stay!\*

#### 1. Preface

The Centre for Strategic Research and Development of Georgia (CSRDG) is a civic organisation, functioning since 1995. Nowadays, its activities encompass the whole Georgia, however more specifically it focuses on Kakheti and Guria regions. Mission of the organisation is a formation of civic society in the country through promotion of a bilateral dialogue between the population and government. For accomplishing this mission, basic strategy of CSRDG is to strengthen civic organisations and, on the other hand, to support a good governance both on national and local levels.

Strengthening the civic organisations envisages creation of proper environment for their functioning, provision of certain training and consultation services, establishment and institutional development of civic/community groups locally (in regions and villages). The organisation's work towards community development began back in 1998, when the approach was only limited to formation of non-formal community groups and implementation of micro projects by them. Aim of the micro projects was to solve local problems by active involvement of local population. Until 2005, the organisation had been working only with two - Ozurgeti and Lagodekhi - municipalities. However, experience and achieved results, as well as positive recommendations of external evaluation of the programme had motivated us to expand geographic range and to improve approaches. Since 2006, the programme developed into the network programme of community/rural development, which is implemented in 6 municipalities of Kakheti and Guria regions by CSRDG in cooperation with regional partner organisations: Civic Development Association of Georgia (Lagodekhi) and Union of Democratic Development of Georgia (Ozurgeti).

The present article focuses on the activities carried out during 2006-2010 and will allow the readers to learn more about the programme approaches and achieved results, as well as obstacles arisen and lessons learnt during the programme implementation.

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\* *Meditations By The River Mtkvari* by Nicoloz Baratashvili (1817-1845); translated by Venera Urushadze

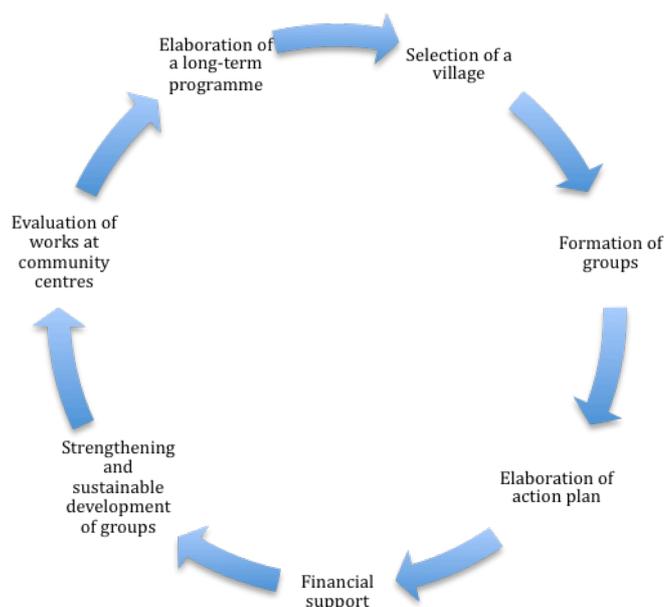
## 2. Basic Approaches and Methodology

Based on a long-term experience, we consider community development quite a difficult and complex process, where community education is the initial stage and one of its integral components. However, community development is not restricted only by this important component but it also implies the influence of community itself on the decision-making process, affecting local population.

Initially, during the years of 1998-2005, the organisation's approach was directed towards a one-time intervention for community mobilisation, which meant formation of a group of leaders (committee) for solving specific problems and implementation of projects oriented to resolving these issues. Despite the fact that population involvement (physical and financial) in problem solving process was quite important and local population benefited from the project outcomes during a long period, the group stopped functioning shortly after the project completion and thus its role of advocating the village interests and providing the required services practically vanished. Though, existence of such groups is one of the determinants of community development. Accordingly, at the first stage, leaders/committee members (basically persons of middle age) elected by the village population were the project target groups and the community members were considered as beneficiaries. The programme contained elements of education and awareness but without a particular focus. With this approach, the programme encompassed 27 villages/communities and 29 projects had been implemented to solve local problems with its financial support.

Based on analysis of outcomes of the first stage, the organisation decided to pay more attention to development and institutionalisation of non-formal groups of communities, which meant to strengthen elements of education and awareness. It was decided to attract more youth to community groups, since the interest towards innovations and new knowledge is much higher among young people. They are able to spend more time for social activities and are highly motivated to be useful for their communities. From 2006, selection of target villages/communities and formation of youth centres was initiated in municipalities. According to the programme, a community included one or more villages, whose population was provided various services by community youth centres. Aim of the centres was to promote self-actualisation (especially among young people) and mobilisation of existing resources in order to solve local problems more efficiently. During 2006-2010, community youth centres were established in 25 communities in Guria and Kakheti regions.

Workflow diagram is shown below:



#### ➤ **Selection of a village/community**

Process of selection appeared a key element of the programme. Proper selection of a community and local leaders is fundamental for the programme success, which has been proved by practice. We rely on the following criteria during the selection:

- readiness and interest of population to participate in the programme;
- extent of necessity of activities envisaged by the programme for a community.

While analysing the above listed aspects, the following were considered as additional criteria: socio-economic condition of a community, distance from an administrative centre, number of youth in the community, readiness of a government's proxy to cooperate, existence of office space for arranging a youth centre in the community. Readiness of population to participate in the programme has been evaluated as a result of numerous meetings with village youth and joint activities. Basic selection criterion was an activity carried out by youth groups on their own initiative. Among several surveyed villages, only a limited number of target groups were selected. The process took 3-4 months.

#### ➤ **Formation of youth groups**

As a result of the first phase, active groups of 10-25 persons have been identified, who arranged a meeting to define vision/future directions and needs. An implementing core group and two coordinators have been elected at the meeting as well. During the election process, gender balance was observed strictly in order to introduce an equal number of women in an action group. The programme did not require registration of the group at the initial stage, since it had to travel a long way full of obstacles before arriving at a decision.

Everyone willing to participate in the centre's projects could become a member of the community centre regardless of age. Action group consists of 5-15 persons but the number of community centre members is much higher. Majority of members are women (more than 70%). Experience has shown that groups comprised of women are more active.

### ➤ **Elaboration of an action plan by the group**

Selection of groups and consultations were followed by elaboration of an action plan for the initial stage, selection of office space for community centres and their equipment. The programme allocated grants (maximum of EUR 2,800) for office rehabilitation and equipment. For strengthening the groups and community development in general, it is crucial to have place for public events, bearing in mind that culture centres in villages are either non-operating or destroyed in many cases. Local municipalities allocated spaces for community centres free of charge in village administration buildings, old collective farm facilities and infant schools. Office spaces for centres (one or two rooms) were rehabilitated with programme funds, with the help of local youth. Later, all the necessary equipment (PC, printer, UPS, etc.) was provided.

General activities of community centres included three basic directions:

- *Public awareness and education:* free computer courses; training courses in sewing, embroidering and felt making; weekend school for pre-school children; preparation of newsletters and their dissemination among local population; Internet service; presentation of projects and activities; various seminars related to agriculture and legal issues; etc.
- *Informative and sporting events:* mind sports; sporting competitions (football, volleyball, checkers, backgammon, horse races, etc.) and marathons; concerts and poetry readings; excursions and camping; cleaning campaigns.
- *Solving local problems:* researching village problems through participatory research method; identification of leaders and active cooperation with them; collaboration with village authorities; meeting with local municipalities; preparation of projects for solving the identified problems and fund raising (including tenders within the programme framework and outside sources); implementation of micro projects.

At the initial stage, community centres were elaborating short-term (six-month) plans and later the plans became long-term (twelve-month). Such approach enabled us to carry out the programme monitoring more efficiently and it appeared to be an effective means for gaining experience among the programme participants and community centres alike.

In order to ensure fulfilment of plans, the programme covered operational costs (GEL 3,000-3,500 annually) of each community centre, which included minimal salary of coordinators, public utility charges, communication costs, stationery, banking charges, etc.

### ➤ **Financial support of community centres**

Financial support was aimed at creating working conditions at community centres, development of required skills and experience through implementation of micro projects. In addition to providing office equipment and covering the programme costs, closed tenders were announced several times a year, offering micro grants (GEL 700-2,200) to centres. Only the programme target groups were allowed to submit their proposals.

It has to be highlighted that one of the requirements for tenders was an active participation of local population in projects, which included manual labour, in-kind and financial contributions

as well. Co-financing ranged from 10% to 30% according to the amount of grant. By implementing micro projects, community centres built trust and confidence with population and they also gained planning, organisational and management skills as well as vast experience of working with communities. Total of 201 micro projects had been implemented with the programme's financial support.

### ➤ **Strengthening and sustainable development of groups**

This phase is crucial for the entire cycle of the programme, since it determines success or failure of a work with a specific community. At this phase, not only personal development of local leaders/youth is emphasised, but sustainability of groups is given a special importance as well.

For the purpose of education and skills development, the programme envisaged the following:

- arrangement of individual workshops and intensive consultations on: elaboration of programmes and projects, distribution of functions, financial management, report writing, planning/conducting of needs assessment for target groups, evaluation of works, etc.
- joint training on: team work and leadership, planning and preparation of projects, skills for working with communities, participatory research techniques, effective communication, management and motivation of volunteers, social entrepreneurship, methods of self-evaluation, indicators of an effective organisation
- arrangement of computer training courses for community centre coordinators, ensuring that they are able to train other members of community
- promotion of better communication between community centres and sharing experience with other organisations. The latter is very important for sustainable development of youth centre activities, since cooperation with stronger NGOs is a good precondition for implementing joint projects. The programme has also paid a great attention to establishment of horizontal links between community centres, i.e. formation of a common network. With this purpose, certain activities were arranged, such as regular joint meetings at regional levels; exchange visits to Guria and Kakheti regions to find out more about activities of other community centres; meetings with well-developed regional NGOs; network meetings between community centres and connecting them with other youth organisations
- arrangement of thematic seminars based on community centre interests, which dealt with: essence of community organisations, local self-governments and their responsibilities, gender equality, export of agricultural products, etc. Based on the needs identified in villages, individual seminars were held for local population on: human rights, educational reform, women's rights and problems of trafficking in Georgia, drug addiction and effective legislation, environmental protection and livestock farming issues.

### ➤ **Evaluation of works at community centres**

A combined method was employed for evaluation, using internal indicators elaborated by the programme and public survey as an external evaluation. The following criteria has been defined as internal indicators: quality of programme implementation by community centres, efficiency of implemented micro projects, the number of submitted and funded proposals, the number of action group members and its sustainability, and most importantly - the number of initiatives implemented by community centres with own funds or external sources.

As for the surveys, during the recent years they have been conducted three times in two-year intervals using questionnaires and methodology elaborated by the programme group. The key issues of the survey included public awareness of community centres and level of satisfaction among population with centres' work. General results of surveys appeared fairly good. Specifically, level of awareness equalled to 80% while the level of satisfaction reached 95%. However, it should be highlighted that in some cases these indicators were higher but in certain instances the results were not the best.

### ➤ **Elaboration and implementation of new long-term programmes**

Following the completion and evaluation of six-month and twelve-month programmes, it was reasonable to continue with new, longer-term action plans. On the basis of analysis of activities carried out at the previous stage, and considering the existing capacity, new programmes were prepared with detailed description of activities and budgets.

## **3. Experience and Lessons Learnt**

### Positive experience

Due to joint efforts of the programme team as well as active participation of community centres, apart from the planned and forecasted positive results the programme also had unpredictable, favourable effects. What follows below is a few examples of positive experience:

- Majority of community youth centres became the only place, where local population have access to the Internet, computer courses, library containing modern literature and up-to-date information; various types of services (preparation of documents, papers, etc.) and non-formal education courses (dance, foreign language and sewing classes; weekend school and hobby groups; gym; etc.) are available at the centres as well.

In one of the remote villages, there had been no kindergarten for 20 years, which was a big problem for local population. Owing to distress and lack of transportation, majority of families were unable to take their children to a neighbouring village. Community centre operating locally decided to solve this problem and launched educational courses for pre-school children, led by a local psychologist (context specialist). The courses include interactive training, recreational exercises, physically active games, drawing and writing lessons. As a result, children are better prepared intellectually and psychologically for school. Currently, education is provided to 14 preschool children and this service offered by community centre is very popular in the village.

In rural areas, especially in mountainous regions, the Internet access is quite problematic, while it is the best source of information for prospective university students,

teachers/professors, farmers and local physicians. Thanks to the Internet they can access up-to-date information without leaving their villages, at a fraction of the cost. Community centres established within the programme framework made the Internet available, which is vital for local population, as well as members of local government, medical aid station, etc.

At this stage, some community centres launched a fee-based service for local residents. A growing number of centres are willing to introduce similar services as well, since it will enable them to fulfil their mission, which means provision of needed and, at the same time, sought-after services to population, and, on the other hand, it will become an additional source of income for the centres.

Fee-based services include: computer training courses and related service (preparation of documents and copying), farm machinery service, tailor's workshop, recreation centre, enamel workshop, etc.

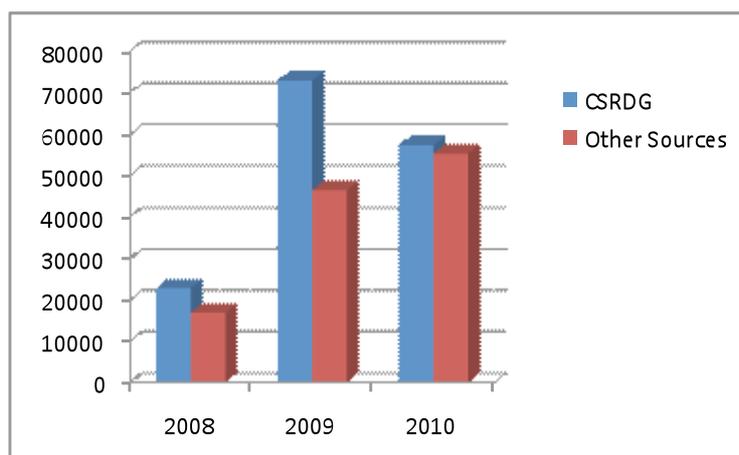
- As a result of training courses, consultations and projects implemented within the programme framework, young leaders have been identified, who acquired skills required for organisational management. They actively cooperate with local population, other community-based organisations, local self-governments and the mass media. It has to be highlighted that young leaders have earned respect and confidence among population. Local residents address them for advice and consultancy. In many cases, they discuss problems together. Leaders have partnership relations with other programmes and local government representatives. Owing to this partnership, young leaders often have influence over the local budget, which results in solving the village problems.

It can be said that on numerous occasions community centres, and specifically the reputable young leaders are protecting the interests of local population and target groups.

One of the youth organisations working towards the integration of vulnerable population (individuals with disabilities), in cooperation with well developed and qualified civic organisations operating in the region, managed to create the first database of disabled persons living in their municipality, to assess the needs of their families and to lobby for solving the identified problems:

- The municipality allocated money from the budget to provide special nutrition to 4 disabled children
  - A programme was prepared to provide high school textbooks to 20 children living in families below poverty line
  - Individual education plans were prepared for 12 children with special educational needs
  - In accordance with the effective legislation, the municipality was requested to consider building of wheelchair ramps. As a result, interests of wheelchair users have been taken into account, e.g. in the Nodar Dumbadze memorial public garden and a newly constructed clinic.
- Community centres became supporting resources for other organisations and programmes, ensuring implementation of projects in cooperation with other civic organisations. There are many examples of how civic organisations operating in a specific region are involving the community centres, established within the programme framework, in their own projects. This precedent is a good precondition for sustainability of community centres, since it enables them to acquire new knowledge and experience, as well as generate more income.
  - It is important that community centres managed to attract funds for solving local problems not only from tenders announced within the programme framework, but also from local

population, self-governments and other foundations. It has to be noted that dynamics of funding from external sources was increasing.



Moreover, community centres managed to solve many problems without the programme's financial support, using their own resources and funds attracted from other foundations. Several centres have already been registered as civic organisations and some of them are planning to do so in the near future. Registration will increase their funding opportunities.

In some cases, a gradual decrease in financial dependence on the programme can be observed, which is a good precondition for sustainability of community centres. For instance, one of the successful community youth centre managed to expand a geographic range of its activities and, at the same time, to attract funds from a local self-government, as well as from organisations such as Peace Corps, Open Society - Georgia Foundation, Institutional Development Fund, etc. In 2010, external funding of this centre equalled to 86% of its total budget. While the programme's share of funding at the initial stage amounted to 70-80% of the budget, currently it is only 14%.

### Negative Experience

As mentioned above, period of intensive work with target villages was three years. However, in certain instances, due to subjective or objective reasons, the programme was discontinued prematurely.

What follows below is a list of reasons for discontinuing the programme:

#### *- Improper selection of leaders*

As experience has shown, it is desirable that the leader's age be over 20-22 years and the person must be oriented to staying in the village. A young person can be quite motivated and active, though it might not be enough, as the responsibility for the centre management and relations with population and self-government is a rather difficult burden. However, apart from the age, the leader's personal characteristics and readiness for taking on responsibility are key determinants.

The second difficulty is related to intensive migration of youth from villages to administrative centres and the capital city. Owing to the fact that young people are unable to achieve self-actualisation locally, they often leave their native villages seeking education or employment. In some cases, we were forced to replace coordinators in many villages - after having spent resources and effort on their personal growth -, which means that new coordinators needed to be

trained again in the shortest possible time, using additional programme resources. In certain instances, multiple replacements of coordinators caused the programme setback and failure.

There is one more risk factor related to a leader's departure/replacement, which may result in partial disintegration of a group and sharp decline of work efficiency during the formation stage. Coping with such crisis requires a certain period of time.

Taking into account all the above-mentioned circumstances, selection of several leaders (coordinator and his/her assistants) is quite reasonable. Furthermore, persons determined to stay in the village shall be prioritised.

*- Superdominant leaders*

This phenomenon is more or less connected to the difficulty of selecting a leader. In some cases, this type of a leader is extremely influential as compared with other members of a group, who takes on all responsibilities and makes decisions individually. While such an approach is acceptable at the initial stage of a group formation, at the next stages of group development it may become a risk factor for self-actualisation of other members of a group, as well as making well-considered and right decisions. Such leader becomes a demotivator for other group members that may cause hidden discontent and internal conflicts. Finally, all this can develop into an uncontrollable heated conflict, which is very difficult to resolve. In such cases, it is important to identify the hidden conflicts timely in order to make it possible for the programme team to intervene and replace a community centre leader by another person. However, there is still a risk that other members would leave the group as well that can affect the work efficiency in a negative way.

*- Isolation of a community centre's action group*

After formation of a community centre's action group (basically comprised of 5-7 persons), risk of the so-called isolation arises. In other words, community centre resources may become inaccessible to "outsiders"; action groups may not be regularly recruiting new members with a view to injecting new blood. In order to reveal this syndrome, constant observation and monitoring is required and the programme team has to be very careful with this issue. From the very beginning, a greater attention should be paid to accountability mechanism of action groups and their leaders, ways of recruiting new members and methods of encouraging the volunteers.

Eventually, the so-called elite minority is experiencing difficulties with implementing joint projects and mobilising the youth and population for certain activities, which they usually blame on population's inactivity. However, analysis of such cases shows that the basic reason for this failure is the isolation.

*- Particular characteristics of local population*

Although it may seem embarrassing to discuss this issue, yet it is necessary to touch upon the subject. Unquestionably, it is possible to achieve a certain level of success while working towards community development in every village, town or city, regardless of nature and particular characteristics of local population. However, it has to be admitted that these characteristics greatly influence on the effectiveness of results. Particular characteristics may include nature of a specific region, level of commitment among population, established stereotypes, negative experience, etc.

While it is possible to achieve success in two years within some communities, there can be absolutely no results implementing similar activities during the same period in other villages. This factor makes the work interesting and multifaceted, since it requires consideration of local particularities and adjustment of approaches to specific cultures. However, our programmes are time-constrained and have limited resources and it is quite difficult to provide justification to the donor organisations regarding the need for a ten-year investment in communities. Accordingly, there were some cases when we had to discontinue the programme, due to problems with population mobilisation (inactivity). It has to be highlighted that such facts were not determined only by local characteristics, but by the programme related restrictions as well.

The biggest challenge of working with communities is connected to overcoming mistrust, inactivity and relics of Soviet mentality. Generally, population feels comfortable being a passive player, avoiding civic responsibilities. Usually, development oriented programmes are regarded with doubt or suspicion by village residents; programme implementing organisations are being equated with political parties, pre-election campaigns or various religious groups. Overcoming the mistrust needs from one to six months within certain communities, which requires immense patience and effort of the programme team members.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Based on our long experience, we can conclude that the work towards community development is a rather difficult, time- and labour-consuming process. However, in many cases, positive outcomes produced through the work are worth of the effort.

Despite the fact that there are a number of examples - within our and other similar programmes - of attracting the funds from various local sources (local municipality, population, businesses, etc.) by communities, which may reach even up to 50% of total budget, experience suggests that working with certain community groups during 2-3 years is not enough for achieving their institutional sustainability and only a few of them are able to continue functioning without external financial support. The problem is aggravated by unfavourable environment in the country for raising funds from local sources, e.g. non-existence of local community foundations; lack of grant giving agencies and supporting programmes available to non-formal groups and regional/village organisations; low level of local philanthropy. Accordingly, the biggest challenge facing the community development in Georgia is to create the opportunities for fundraising from local sources. This process requires a lot of effort and time that, presumably, must be based on elaboration of a comprehensive and complex strategy at the initial stage. Development of such strategy is impossible only by one or even the entire third sector. It has to be a result of joint work, involving the public sector, influential international organisations, government and businesses.

*Prepared by:*

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## **Community Development**

### **Centre for Training and Consultancy**

#### **1. Preface**

It is important for community-based organisations and organisations working for community development to gain instruments, which would enable them to identify those risks and opportunities, occurring on the way towards the goals during the process of working with communities. We would be delighted if CTC's experience could be beneficial for the organisations working with communities.

The article deals with two types of activities carried out by CTC:

1. Organisations implement community development projects, aiming at local capacity development to support community mobilisation by providing re-training of community leaders. In this case, CTC acts as the service provider, assisting the implementing organisation by providing training courses.
2. CTC implements a development project in a community, containing several components, and simultaneously cooperates with partner organisations, having certain experience in community development issues.

#### **About the organisation**

Centre for Training and Consultancy (CTC) is a Georgian foundation, functioning since 1999. CTC's aim is to support local institutional, human resources and management practice development.

CTC is the first Georgian organisation working in the field of adult education, awarded the International Quality Management Certificate ISO-9001-2000 in 2004.

CTC works in two directions: on the one hand, it is an adult education institution, providing training programmes in contemporary leadership and management to the wide range of society, and on the other hand, it is a consultancy centre assisting organisations to develop their organisational systems, structures, adequate strategies and management practices.

CTC was founded with the substantial support of three European donor organisations: Cordaid (the Netherlands), EED and Misereor (Germany). CTC also cooperates closely with a number of European organisations, including a Dutch training and consultancy organisation, Management for Development Foundation (MDF, [www.mdf.nl](http://www.mdf.nl)). At the initial stage, MDF shared its 15-year experience with CTC, assisted in preparation of training syllabi and provided training to CTC's local staff.

During the last 10 years, CTC has created several training products. Currently, its package includes short (3-, 5-, 7-day) training courses on: strategic and general management; human resources management; financial management; project management; leadership skills; etc.

## 2. Approaches

For community development, CTC implemented projects independently, as well as in cooperation with other organisations.

In terms of assisting international and Georgian organisations in the field of community development, Leadership Development Programme can be highlighted as one of the important activities of CTC, which includes multistage training courses on:

- Effective communication;
- Participatory community leadership;
- Project management.

Except formal (school/university) and non-formal (seminars, training, etc.) education, there is a form of education, when the process of acquiring knowledge and skills is not structured, strictly planned or scheduled. Learning is a result of participating in daily processes. In communities, these processes are related to events, such as: arrangements made for unfortunate occasions and celebrations; agricultural activities; village meetings; and resolution of shared problems.

CTC agrees that it is essential to use small-scale and micro projects as an instrument for informal education during implementation of community development projects.

Active or even passive participation in community activities is beneficial for community members, since the gained experience will affect professional or personal competencies in the future.

**Informal education** refers to the unintentional lifelong process whereby everyone acquires attitudes, values, skills and knowledge from the educational influences and resources in his or her own environment and from daily experience (e.g. family, neighbours, library, mass media, work, play).

Source: *Compassito: Manual on Human Rights Education for Children*, edited and co-written by Nancy Flowers; contributors: Maria Emília Brederode-Santos, Jo Claeys, Rania Fazah, Annette Schneider, Zsuzsanna Szelényi; coordination and final editing: Zsuzsanna Szelényi; illustration: Diána Nagy; (translated into Georgian by Tamar Mikadze and Anna Gegechkori; edited by David Gelashvili; Tbilisi 2009).

### 3. Experience

#### Positive experience

While discussing the level of community development, it is important to focus not only on *what* has been done in the community, but also *how* has it been done. Based on the product only, it is impossible to define what has determined the achievement of the final result. The following factors should be taken into consideration: what was the role of community; who organised/carried out activities; how was the project initiated and planned; who and how made/implemented decisions, monitoring and evaluation of results.

Constructed building, laid out public garden, installed water pipeline, built embankment, arranged rubbish dump, etc. can be contained in the list of achievements made at a certain stage of community development. However, it is impossible to define only by these indicators whether the community is developed or not.

CTC participated in the workshop, attended by Georgian NGOs, where basic characteristics of the developed community had been identified:

- Existence of a civil group in the community;
- The community has the vision and is oriented to development and innovation; and has a clearly defined direction;
- The community understands its needs/rights and it strives to advocate them;
- The community is capable to identify problems and to respond to them.

CTC has been working with communities, having different characteristics. Formation of small action groups was supported in various communities. Firstly, it was necessary to motivate these groups. Several strategies were used by CTC for increasing their motivation, including financial support of small grant projects, performed in the following phases:

- Public awareness (newsletters, individual and group meetings);
- Open days;
- Training on elaborating project ideas and filling out the application forms;
- Registration of project working groups (min. 5 persons in each group);
- Contest of ideas - selection of project proposals;
- Visit of working group members (2-3 persons) of the selected project to Tbilisi and their participation in the training on financial and content management;
- Study tour;
- Revision of final project drafts and signing a contract;
- Project implementation;
- Monitoring and consultations;
- Evaluation.

After performing the aforementioned processes, the following occurs gradually:

- Action group(s) is formed in community, enjoying trust of community members;
- Human resource of community acquired appropriate knowledge and skills.

Project had been implementing with the financial support of EED in a region. A community centre established by CTC provided services to local population to earn their confidence and interest. The services included computer and English language courses. During the project implementation, the centre's staff was interviewed regarding the following issues:

- How will the training courses be managed and monitored?
- What are the criteria for selecting the participants?
- What kind of knowledge/skills will be acquired by participants?
- How and where will the participants use the gained knowledge?
- How will those displeased persons be treated, who were not selected in training groups?
- How should we act to avoid discontent among the local population?

As a result of several meetings with the community members, the resource centre staff managed to establish communication with them, which determined success of the courses.

CTC has been striving to ensure that communities have a vision and are oriented to development and innovation.

Working with communities during 3-5 years can be considered as a long period. However, experience has shown that in some cases more time is needed to achieve the above-mentioned requirement.

From the initial stage, our organisation made efforts to increase population's readiness and interest for innovations. Though, it took years for the community centre to earn a positive attitude of the community members. According to the ladder of participation, which represents levels of participation, after 5 years of CTC's work, community members show interest and attend meetings purposely. However, the number of such persons is relatively low. The community began to communicate with local government and is trying to cooperate with decision-makers.

Organisations, established with the assistance and encouragement of CTC, implement advocacy projects, supported by various donor organisations. Number of initiatives from local organisations may increase in the near future.

Sharing examples of developed communities with others positively affects problem identification. Study tours, arranged by CTC, to other regional community and non-profit education centres demonstrated the difference between conditions in developed and less developed communities. For problem identification, community members must be able to describe characteristics of the existing problems and to compare them to better conditions. Only in this case it can be concluded that the community realises and understands its problems.

After the problem analysis, several questions arise: does the community have enough resources to solve the problem? (e.g. small-scale project aiming at cleaning of private yards, which was not supported by CTC within the framework of closed tender, since the community members could clean their private yards with their own resources, without external assistance); do they need any external support? (e.g. building a concrete wall around the spring of acidulous mineral water to protect it from livestock. Funds were needed to purchase the cement. The rest of materials and manual labour were provided by local population.) Some projects required close cooperation with business and government sectors.

About thirty small and medium scale projects have been implemented in communities with the support of CTC. Full participation of community members in project cycle management ensured successful implementation of activities towards community development.

## **Negative experience**

### Example 1. Youth centre

In CTC's target community, a culture centre was built several decades ago. Construction of the centre had been partly financed. Local youth contributed to work by free manual labour. Mobilisation of youth group had been performed by a distinguished leader, who mobilised the youth from a neighbouring village as well.

The culture centre built by young people was destroyed over the years. The centre was located on the village outskirts and population visited it only on purpose.

CTC had been repeatedly requested to rehabilitate the centre. As a result of CTC's efforts, the centre was repaired and equipped. The process was supported by local municipality. Despite a written promise, it appeared difficult to allocate necessary funds from the budget, since the centre was not on the central asset register. Accordingly, the centre had been closed and non-operating for a long period. As it turned out later, the building did not belong to the village.

Only after active intervention and partial financial support, it became possible to carry out several activities in the centre by self-motivated persons. Many people are willing to use the centre for business purposes (it is an attractive place for a great number of tourists visiting the area in summer, as well as in winter), owing to the building architecture and good location. After all, centre is almost non-operating and only a few activities are carried out there per year.

CTC has raised funds for the centre. Despite negotiations held with local authorities, agreement and promises, funds allocated by a donor organisation have not been expended for youth events. Due to continuous staff turnover in the local government body, change of priorities, and numerous vague reasons the problem remains unsolved.

## Example 2.

It was difficult to find motivated persons, willing to upgrade their qualification (even by CTC's support) in order to work in local resource centre of CTC. Basic reason for it was a low income (salaries at resource centre are not high). Nevertheless, we could find several young persons, who were provided short and long term training courses in Georgia and abroad. The youth had been preparing to work in an NGO, which would continue activities after the project completion.

Following the training courses, young professionals found new jobs easily: one in the government and the other in business sector.

## **4. Conclusion**

It can be stated that implementation of the community development programme created certain challenges, along with many positive aspects.

CTC's experience has shown that constant monitoring is required during the community development project implementation. Chances of risk are higher in remote villages. In case the staff is not highly responsible and competent, problems may arise leading to the organisation's isolation, making it an elite group inaccessible for all members of community. In such instances, constant communication, on-site visits, staff re-training and skills development gave a positive result. Currently, there are numerous activities being carried out in the centre. An organisation established under the centre cooperates independently with donor organisations.

Implementation of up to 30 projects, supported by CTC, raised several issues.

Monitoring was necessary during implementation of small-scale projects. Ignorance of this procedure until the project completion might have harmful results.

For the purpose of describing the works within community and avoiding distortion of information, CTC used the means of information dissemination: public meetings, workshops, and newsletters (published once in every three months). A web-blog has been created, aimed at regular publishing of information, news and opportunities. It helped the community members to understand the centre's function, thus ensuring local participation in the processes.

Each stage of the small-scale project cycle management envisaged a multifaceted approach, which determined success of works for community development.

It enabled us and community members to assess our and community's capabilities, since, in many cases, communities have their own hidden resources/capacity, which require spending certain period of time locally (in communities) for their identification.

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CTC

#### Preface

Civil Society Institute (CSI) is a non-governmental, non-commercial organisation, supporting the formation and development of civil society and a rule-of-law state through establishment of democratic values in the country, civic education, promotion of active citizenship, and creation of effective environment for civil society actors.

CSI has been known for the civil society since 2003, though the organisation's history began back in 1994, when a department of business law was established at the International Centre for Georgia's Economic Reforms and Development, which separated from the centre at the end of 1995 to be registered as a Centre for Georgian Business Law in 1996, and it became known under this name to Georgian society and the international community. In 2002, the board elaborated a one-year plan for the purpose of widening the range of the organisation's activities and optimisation of its management structure. As a result, in 2003, the centre developed into the Civil Society Institute.

CSI implements its activities in several directions: law, civil society, public policy, economic development and effective management programmes. For CSI, all current programmes are important, however effective management programme is one of its priorities, since it envisages support of institutional reforms of national governing bodies, as well as promotion of transparency and accountability of public activities. Furthermore, the programme supports the upgrade of public servants' qualification and, most importantly, promotes participation of society in decision-making processes.

It is a universally recognised truth that participation of citizens in government activity and decision-making is an essential component of theory and practice of democracy. Particular importance is given to this component regarding local self-governments. It can be stated that participation of citizens is a cornerstone of local self-governments. Guided by international practice, there are various different mechanisms of participation and involvement at legislative, as well as traditional and societal levels. Effectiveness of local self-government activity largely depends on smooth operation of these mechanisms. Obviously, this is a topical issue for Georgia, too. Especially, after reforms carried out in 2006, envisaging establishment of expanded self-governing units, which increased the distance between the people and local authorities. This fact necessitates elaboration of mechanisms, which would ensure effective communication between the population and self-governing units; transparency and accountability of local governments; as well as active participation of the people in decision-making related to local issues.

To study the aforementioned issues, CSI conducted a survey in 2008, aiming at revealing the level of citizen participation in the activities of local self-governments. According the findings, about 42% of the population sampled is aware that sessions of local administrations are open and every citizen is allowed to attend it. Only 5.1% of population attended the sessions. The fact indicates that less than a half of those questioned are passive carriers of information. Increasing the population's knowledge and level of their participation is a cornerstone activity of numerous organisations, including CSI.

## 2. Approach, vision and target groups

On the basis of the survey results, CSI launched a project in 2009, entitled Supporting the Development of Local Self-Governments in Georgia (funded by the Delegation of the European Union to Georgia), aiming at increasing the effectiveness and transparency of local self-government activities by promoting the participation of local population. All this can be achieved by raising the public awareness, upgrading the qualification of local government employees and creating the effective legal mechanisms. The project envisages supporting the development of all three directions. The project is being implemented in 8 local self-governing units (Batumi, Kobuleti, Ozurgeti, Chokhatauri, Gori, Kaspi, Gurjaani and Kvareli municipalities) of 4 regions (Autonomous Republic of Ajara, Guria, Shida Kartli and Kakheti) of Georgia by CSI and its partner organisations (Information Centre of Gori, Civic Development Association of Georgia and Young Scientists' Club of Ozurgeti).

Before touching upon the issues related to community mobilisation, we would like to introduce activities carried out by CSI within the project framework.

For the purpose of elaborating the effective mechanisms, CSI began to work towards several directions. In 2009, a new draft law on citizens' participation in the implementation of self-governance was worked out, which gives a detailed description of principles, forms, process and procedures of participation; as well as the principles of transparency and accountability of local self-government activities. With the view of lobbying the draft law, active consultations were held with appropriate agencies. At the end of December 2009, the Parliament of Georgia adopted a new legislative initiative concerning amendments and additions to the Organic Law of Georgia on Local Self-Government. As a result of active consultations held with the legislative body, proposals made by CSI were taken into consideration. A new chapter - Citizens' Participation in the Implementation of Self-Governance - had been added to the acting law. After introducing the amendments and additions, statutes of target representative (Sakrebulo) and executive (Gangeoba/City Hall) bodies of local self-governing units were revised and developed into the relevant legislation.

For the purpose of upgrading the qualification of local government employees, training courses had been delivered to representatives of Sakrebulo, Gangeoba/City Hall and trustees of Gangeoba. Accordingly, training courses varied for the three types of officials and included issues related to their activities, as well as aspects ensuring the citizens' participation.

To ensure participation in the implementation of self-governance, along with creating the relevant legal mechanisms, it is necessary for the society to put these mechanisms into practice, which, in turn, requires the society to be adequately informed and there should be individuals or/and stakeholders (including NGOs) provided with appropriate knowledge and skills.

Activities to support public awareness-raising were carried out in several directions. Awareness campaigns were conducted for local population living on territories of target municipalities on the role and functions of local self-governments, rights of local population, and mechanisms of communication with self-governing bodies; information materials were distributed. At the same time, information campaign was conducted (talk shows arranged at local TV companies, allowing the population to directly participate).

CSI has prioritised community leaders as its strategic partners in terms of community mobilisation in target municipalities. As the experience and surveys have shown, individual members of communities are informed and motivated, though it does not change the existing

situation regarding the citizens' participation in the implementation of self-governance. The project left open the possibility that a community leader would play its role during communication between the community and local self-government; and a leader's activities would be directed towards identification of existing problems and finding ways for their resolution, in cooperation with community members. Within the project framework, leaders had been selected by local population at village meetings (total of 151 leaders had been selected in target municipalities). Selection was based on two criteria: leaders should be community residents, being reputable, motivated and active members of community.

Selected leaders had been trained to acquire skills concerning identification of problems, finding ways for their resolution, community mobilisation, arrangement of awareness meetings, and communication with local self-governments. At the initial stage of the project, CSI staff actively assisted them regarding the issues related to communication/dialogue with local self-governments. One of the best examples is a public review of a local self-government's draft budget, organised by CSI and local self-government, attended by community leaders and local population. Participants became familiar with the draft budget and were allowed to submit initiatives and recommendations.

### **3. Experience**

#### **Positive experience**

Leaders had provided information about the budget to community members. Residents of village N proposed at the community meeting to build a playground, since the youth and children of the village had no recreation area; and at the same time the playground could be used by local public school students as well. Following the meeting, a community leader prepared an initiative, collected signatures and submitted them to local self-government body. The request had been satisfied and included in the local budget.

After cooperation, community leaders began independently to identify local problems and find ways for their resolution. Owing to joint efforts of leaders and community members, several topical issues had been solved, which can be considered as successful experience of community leaders and local population alike. What follows below is a couple of positive examples:

#### Example 1

At the community meeting (in village N), one of the problems identified by local population was connected to an open-air market located nearby a local public school. Local population believed that the market caused an obstruction, polluted the nearby territory, defaced visual appearance of the village and, most importantly, created an unhealthy educational environment for the public school students. A leader had prepared a joint statement of local population and public school representatives and submitted it to the local self-government. The leader had actively participated in decision-making process: several meetings had been held between the representatives of local community, public school, outdoor traders and local self-government bodies. Owing to the population's participation, local self-government had decided to prohibit the outdoor trading.

The village had been facing the problem related to outdoor trading (open-air market) for many years, however the community was unable to get consolidated and actively involved. The leader managed to mobilise the community, lobby the issue and solve the problem.

### Example 2

A transport related problem (non-existence of fixed route taxis) had been identified at meetings held in several communities. As a result, a public meeting attended by representatives of local self-government bodies, local population and a community leader was held. The leader provided information regarding the problem and ways of its resolution to relevant agencies and submitted a statement to the local self-government. Finally, the problem had been solved successfully.

### **Negative experience**

Success of the method used by CSI while working with communities largely depends on a community leader. As mentioned above, the organisation had devoted much time to selection and re-training of leaders. Nevertheless, some leaders appeared unable to solve community problems independently, at the initial stage. Although they were aware of their own rights, leaders wanted CSI to participate in problem solving, since they believed it would increase their chances to succeed. Joint actions, in some cases, provide more opportunity for solving certain problems but in such instances leaders would become more dependent on the Institute.

At the initial stage, CSI had been providing information about Sakrebulo sessions, reviewing local budgets and other community related issues and, certainly, the leaders attended them to inform local population consequently. At a later stage, as mentioned in the above examples, the leaders began to work independently.

## **4. Conclusion**

Each example of successful problem solving promotes the increased participation of local population in the implementation of self-governance. Intervention of CSI in civic activities could not change the existing situation and, in our consideration, community participation in problem identification/solving remains a topical issue. Negative experience has shown that a long-term and intense work with communities is required in order to make them realise their capability of addressing their own problems independently. We believe that each case of success serves as an example for other self-governing units and communities. Aim of the project is to promote creation of successful precedents, which would play a role of multipliers within and beyond the target regions.

*Prepared by:*  
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## Community Development

### IDP Women Association “Tankhmoba”

#### 1. Preface

IDP Women Association “Tankhmoba”<sup>3</sup> has been functioning since 1994 as a group, which was registered later in 1996 with the Ministry of Justice of Georgia, as a non-governmental organisation.

The Association strives to build a democratic and peaceful society, which would provide equal opportunities to IDP women in political, social and economic spheres; it supports better education, economic situation and healthcare for internally displaced persons and other minority groups, with particular emphasis on women and youth.

Basic directions of the organisation’s activities are non-formal education of women and youth; peace-building; psychological rehabilitation programmes; support of economic and educational initiatives of women; advocacy of problems faced by IDPs; protection of IDP rights; establishment of gender equality; regional cooperation; social surveys; public opinion polls; raising awareness of target groups. All these activities are planned and implemented with direct participation of target groups.

The Association has its branches in Gori (Shida Kartli region), Tskaltubo (Imereti region) and Zugdidi (Samegrelo region). Centres for community integration are open in Niqozi, Ergneti, Gardabani and Borjomi.

The Association works with IDPs from Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region, as well as victims of the August 2008 war.

The Association works in quite different contexts: with IDPs in Tskaltubo, Borjomi and Gori, where the displaced persons have been living in compact settlements (old administrative buildings, majority of which is damaged and unfit for habitation) for 17 years now; in new settlements and border villages (Niqozi, Ergneti), inhabited by victims of the August 2008 war, where human security and income generation are the main problems. Different situations require different approaches.

The present article deals with activities carried out by our organisation with the purpose of community development, including barriers we had to overcome and results achieved.

#### 2. Approach, target groups and vision.

There are various definitions of community development. The following one is the most acceptable for our organisation: community development requires that community members acquire additional skills, become more active and mobilise their internal capabilities in order to increase community participation in solving their own problems, decision-making and cooperation with various agencies for achieving positive changes within communities.

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<sup>3</sup> Consent (*in Georgian*)

Community mobilisation and active involvement was achieved only after we realised that individual problems couldn't be solved unless they correspond to the context of community needs. The Association, initially targeting at peacekeeping activities, had been putting more emphasis on certain projects and directions rather than working with communities generally.

Community development became topical for the first time when the Association launched a one-year education project in one of the communities.

The Association began its work with the community in 2003, where it proposed a plan for establishing a psycho-rehabilitation centre for children and adolescents. The project had envisaged education and psychological rehabilitation courses to persons of school age (5 compact settlements) and local children, provided by teachers from local community.

At the initial stage it appeared that, contrary to the expectations, adults had been reluctant to participate in the process. It was decided to use other methods to ensure their involvement, such as communication with community members with the view to awareness rising and promotion of active citizenship.

Currently, the Association uses community mobilisation instrument in various projects, basically while working in compact and new settlements of IDPs.

The Association uses several approaches during community mobilisation: strengthening the capability of community members (basically women) and community capacity development. By combining these approaches, the Association tried to activate internal resources of communities and thus achieve the desired goals.

In IDP communities, particular attention is paid to women and youth, as non-formal or potential leaders.

Each target group has its own peculiarity and unique problems. Victims of conflicts taken place in the 1990's suffer from problems related to accommodation and employment. Integration difficulties in this target group are conditioned by socio-economic situation and unavailability of start-up financial resources. People know one another very well in such communities and they are aware of own strengths and weaknesses, however they hardly believe in positive changes and are often hopeless and disappointed.

In case of intervention into such communities, the Association tries to use approaches, which would bring self-esteem and self-confidence back to community members.

In IDP settlements, built as a result of the August 2008 war, the Association began to work in two directions: distribution of humanitarian aid and psychological support for children and women. Basically, these settlements are inhabited by IDPs from several villages of Tskhinvali region. For instance, population of 7 villages is accommodated in one building in Gardabani, and 86 families from 14 different villages are accommodated together in Skra. In such cases, from the beginning, the main emphasis had to be put on integration (establishment of communication among IDPs, as well as with host society) and, at a later stage, on community development.

Workflow of working with communities:

- Selection of a community;
- Awareness meeting;
- Formation of an action group;
- Development of women's and youth's capabilities;
- Establishment of communication and holding regular consultations with local government bodies (regional representatives of the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Accommodation and Refugees of Georgia, local self-government, etc.);
- Strengthening of action groups (training and consultancy);
- Elaboration of action plans by action groups with direct community participation;
- Equipment and financial support (public utilities, the Internet, etc.) of community (integration) centres;
- Monitoring and evaluation (local population survey).

## **Vision**

Main goal of the Association is to ensure that communities, as a result of cooperation, are capable of analysing their own needs and problems independently, are able to work out and implement the problem solving plans.

## **3. Experience**

### **3.1. Positive experience**

#### **3.1.1. Community N (since 2002)**

This community, like the majority of IDPs living in compact settlements, has a pained reaction to ignorance of their problems by government bodies.

Our intervention into the community was aimed to support them in changing the existing negative situation. The support implied, above all, the influence over the community members, by means of our approach and capacity. Our efforts were targeted to change their attitude from “nobody needs or cares about us” to “we must achieve a desired condition”.

A meeting had been held to provide information about the Association's plans regarding the work with children. The community had welcomed our proposal, since the education of children was quite important to them.

The organisation began to work with children of pre-school (5-6 year olds) and school age, represented by IDPs accommodated in 4 different compact settlements, as well as non-IDPs from nearby residential buildings. The work is implemented in several directions: English and Russian language courses; dance, drawing, knitting and embroidery classes (currently dance and drawing classes are temporarily suspended) provided by teachers from IDP community.

During the first years, a psychologist had been visiting the community from Tbilisi to work with children.

The project envisages psychological rehabilitation of children and their integration into society.

We had expected that parents would express interest and propose their own initiatives for local problem solving. However, that did not happen, since they thought the assistance was intended for children and they were satisfied. To improve living conditions in the community, it is necessary for government bodies to realise and understand the existing problems and take action for their resolution. But the community members thought they were unable to affect the process.

We began to work with children's parents, asking them several questions, such as how did they come to the settlement? What was their occupation before becoming IDPs? What is their current occupation? How do they see the future of their children? During the interviews, we told them our stories, being IDPs ourselves, and in the end they became more open, discussing the existing problems.

The main problem of IDPs was unemployment.

Since the Association's work within the community was basically oriented to children's education, we found a way to involve mothers in the process: we offered them to hold a baking contest and the idea was welcomed with delight. A lot of women participated in the contest. Ten winners had been awarded gas ovens. The contest requirement was to provide children at courses/classes with pastry during a period of one year. Parents and teachers made a duty list, which facilitated the development of planning skills. The contest and ensuing activities increased the interest within community towards the project and served as a basis for trust-based relationships. The IDPs became gradually motivated and approached us with proposals repeatedly.

Working with children after completion of the project showed the significance of using own resources within community. Training courses/classes are provided to children on a voluntary basis. The result had an effect on children, who improved their academic performance and became actively involved in community events (concerts, exhibitions, sport competitions, etc.).

Later, the IDPs expressed the wish to start a small business. A training course on preparation of business plans and tax code of Georgia were provided to the interested persons. The best business plans were funded from the Association project. Some projects aimed at supporting the individual businesses and the others served the community interests (repair of water supply system; rehabilitation of a swimming pool on the territory of settlement; etc.).

These activities helped the community members to strengthen belief that their participation is essential to positively change the existing situation.

The community gradually began to propose various initiatives and asked us for advice in terms of planning and ways of implementation.

The main problems are related to water/power supply and renovation of buildings and the community actively participates in problem solving, sending statements to relevant agencies, communicating with local self-government bodies and regional representatives of the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Accommodation and Refugees, which results in temporary resolution to the aforementioned problems.

Initiation of works and supervision is performed by action group, which had been provided training courses to acquire skills of problem identification and advocacy. The action group works on behalf of the community and relies on local human resources.

During the August 2008 war, the IDPs were forced to leave their compact settlements. For several weeks they lived in various temporary shelters in Tbilisi. As a result, feeling of insecurity deepened among the community members. However, the action group has been working actively; they even managed to attract the interest of the World Bank project. It has to be noted that a proposal of the youth action group has been selected for the project among numerous initiatives.

The community had realised that for achieving the desired goal it is essential to ensure active community participation in problem identification, advocacy and protection of own rights.

### Community N

It is a community of internally displaced persons living in a remote area. The community had a problem related to power supply for years. The Association assisted several young members to regularly participate in sessions held by the commission for multicultural dialogue under the Association, where similar problems were discussed with government representatives.

The youth were given the opportunity to acquire appropriate knowledge and get familiarised with advocacy methods. Soon they established an action group, comprised of people of different ages, who began to meet with local administration and power company on a regular basis. It has to be noted that the community members agreed to establish a schedule for the purpose of energy-saving. Each family living in compact settlements gets 100 kW of electrical power monthly per family member free of charge. In wintertime, 100kW was not enough and, accordingly, the IDPs consumed more power, thus accumulating debts that they were unable to pay off. As a result, the IDPs had the power cut. The action group managed to establish control over power consumption in the community. Saving energy in summertime enabled them to use additional reserve in winter.

Such a result increased the community's self-confidence. The action group continued its work: computer courses and first aid were provided on a voluntary basis. By the time the community found a donor organisation (the World Bank project), the action group had an authority to choose priority, acceptable for all community members, through community mobilisation. In 2010, the action group registered as a community NGO and currently is capable of implementing the prioritised project independently.

### **3.2. Negative experience**

#### Community X (since 2008)

Following the August 2008 war, the Association had been implementing a humanitarian aid programme to provide food products and articles of daily necessity.

The organisation's volunteers had been working on psychological rehabilitation of children and women. Situation in the community was critical. Despite living in the unstable region for years, disaster of war appeared absolutely unexpected. People had been searching for lost family members, relatives and friends. Everyone was confused and shocked. The situation was

aggravated by peculiarity of environment: language spoken by local population is unfamiliar; customs and even climate are quite different.

We had an immense desire to help them and share our personal experience with the people in distress.

During conversations, we received one message: “Bring us back home! That is the reason behind all problems”.

Majority of people had information about the condition of their homes.

At the meeting held in the dwelling place of an IDP, all members expressed a wish to allocate a space for the community meetings. As a result of big efforts, a room was found and renovated in the settlement.

Community meetings, discussions and training were provided regularly in the room. It appeared that new IDPs had different problems: several households were accommodated in renovated rooms without toilets. All efforts were directed to change their accommodations. Other members of the community did not name any other priorities. The Association had less chances in this regard. Our organisation focused more on education programmes for the community, since it was necessary to increase the level of education among the IDPs.

We had expected that the community meeting room would enable the IDPs to analyse their situation, understand the reality in which they found themselves and identify their needs. However, there had been no initiatives coming from the community.

Training courses were provided to the community on the following: the essence of community and community mobilisation; team work; civil society and civil initiatives; volunteering; advocacy; leadership; rights of women and IDPs; ways to achieve self-sufficiency. The community youth participated in a special training on how to introduce oneself efficiently. Methods having successful outcomes in other communities appeared ineffective for IDPs. The community responded to certain initiatives but was basically passive. For example, the youth expressed the need for computer courses, since computer illiteracy created barriers while studying at school and higher education institutions. As a result, the Association purchased personal computers for the community room and launched computer courses, employing two computer literate community members. However, the community did not appear enthusiastic about the initiative. We found out that other computer training course programme was started in the town. The Association believed that it would be significant for the IDPs, like with other communities, to have the opportunity of acquiring computer skills in their own building. Although, they preferred courses provided at a higher professional level.

Women showed more interest regarding the knitting and sewing classes. Basically, all initiatives were connected to income generation opportunities. The Association helped women to arrange a sale of work. Later, a group of women conducted a market research and decided to establish a workshop, aimed at sewing of linen and dance uniforms for children. Currently, the group is in the process of self-organisation and it is difficult to forecast whether the initiative proves to be successful.

In our consideration, failure connected to the work with the youth is conditioned by frequent change of place of their residence (due to severe living conditions they tend to stay with their relatives for months) and disinterest in their community development. On the other hand,

national and international humanitarian aid programmes targeted at conflict victims did not meet their primary needs. There had been numerous concerns about the sameness of food products, which could not be changed because the programme complied with the life-saving standards. The experience has shown that provision of essential living conditions to IDPs caused incorrect perception of reality and excessive expectations towards programmes carried out during emergency situations, which resulted in inertness, aloofness and unsociability.

On the other hand, the Association failed to plan appropriately, not taking into consideration the availability of other resource in the town.

It has to be noted that the community comprises IDPs from 7 different villages, having a problem of communication with one another.

The Association considers that nowadays, when the aid programmes are already discontinued, the IDPs will assess their problems correctly and face the reality: children are about to graduate from schools and they need a higher level of education in order to pass the unified entry examinations. Their economic situation will depend on their ability of self-realisation and commitment. The Association believes that this fact might promote mobilisation and active involvement of the community members. Our organisation will continue working with the community and try to facilitate in acquiring new skills. We hope that reconsideration of the current situation will help the community become more active.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The Association's experience allows us to make the following conclusions:

- Community mobilisation cannot be a one-time action. Development of self-confidence and capabilities is a time-consuming process;
- In case of IDP communities, one of the emphases should be put on establishing communication with local community and local self-government. It is considered that only the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Accommodation and Refugees is responsible for IDPs, and local self-governments pay less attention to their problems. In fact, IDPs should be regarded as local residents, similar to local communities. It is necessary to eliminate this stereotype and establish communication between IDP communities and local self-governments;
- For community development, it is significant to identify and support personal growth of a non-formal leader;
- Raising level of education is a prerequisite of community development;
- Programmes targeted at children and other important groups may become an impetus to promote activities within communities;
- Role of women in community development is universally recognised. It is necessary to support their self-organisation and provide all required resources;

- Proceeding from peculiarity of IDP communities, process of their development is time-consuming, since the IDPs regard themselves as temporary residents; in many cases they are forced to live in a twofold condition: on the one hand, they hope to return to their native homes and, on the other hand, although they understand the necessity to settle down in current accommodations, the word “integration” still frightens them. Therefore, all projects should include psycho-social rehabilitation and support component.

#### 1. Preface

RHEA Union recently began to implement its regional activities aiming at support of community-based social services provided to adolescents and youth with special development needs. However, we decided to share our experience with those working on community development, since the distinguishing features of our work require slightly different approaches.

It is commonly known that one of the most important instruments of community development is community mobilisation, whose success largely depends on the ability of a community development oriented organisation to identify prioritised problems in a timely manner, at the initial stage of work. In this process, technique of facilitation is crucial, which completely excludes the influence on the community by any means of manipulation, imposing external ideas, even though they may be beneficial to the community. Otherwise, the failure is inevitable, which may occur at any stage of working with communities.

It is hardly conceivable that at the initial community meetings, while elaborating the action plans, out of several prioritised needs (which are difficult to be merged due to their multitude and insufficient funding), communities emphasise the necessity of creating social services targeted only at minority/marginalised groups. Introduction of services aimed at persons with special development needs is hindered, since there is no tradition of similar services in the country. On the other hand, ability to organise social services for people with special needs is an indicator of strong and healthy communities. Accordingly, activities directed towards establishment of such services are important as they support community development in general.

Therefore, our experience gained as a result of activities related to introduction of community-based social services aimed at persons with disabilities living in ethnically and religiously diverse environment may attract the interest of all stakeholders.

Women's Union RHEA was registered in 2001 as a non-governmental organisation, combining people of various professions: psychologists, physicians, pedagogues, artists, biologists, musicians, foreign language specialists, etc.

It has to be noted that part of RHEA members had an experience of working with international NGOs, including community mobilisation related projects. At a later stage, parents of children with disabilities joined the Union, and their active participation strengthened our efforts to engage more parents in the process.

Since 2002, our organisation has been providing assistance to disadvantaged children/adolescents with special development needs and their mothers. In those times, level of unemployment was extremely high and the country faced problems related to power and gas supply (creating severe living conditions to vulnerable families of children with disabilities); social security system was completely degraded; there were no state-funded social programmes, inclusive education programmes or special infrastructure to protect the interests of persons with disabilities. Only certain NGOs funded by international donor organisation implemented psycho-social rehabilitation projects targeted at disabled persons, whose majority shut themselves into their houses.

At the initial stage (2002-2005), the Union had been working entirely on a voluntary basis and its activities had been carried out according to the action plan elaborated in cooperation with German partners - action group “Menschen in Not” (People in Need) comprised of church parish of the town of Dohna. Initially, we began to provide disabled children with wheelchairs (shortage of wheelchairs created insuperable barriers to children and their parents), which were refurbished and adjusted by Dohna parish to individual needs of each adolescent. In 2002-2005, about 50 children and adolescents were provided with wheelchairs, living in Tbilisi and Lagodekhi. In that period, in cooperation with “Menschen in Not (supported by the Robert Bosch Foundation) and with participation of German experts, we began to conduct various seminars, targeted at parents of disabled children, psychologists and social workers.

It can be stated that first efficient assistance provided to children with disabilities during the period of voluntary activities came from the bosom of the German community, which served as a significant start-up support, as well as a brilliant practical example.

## **2. Approach, vision and target group**

Mission of the Women’s Union RHEA is to support broad integration of adolescents and youth with special needs into society through development of effective psycho-social rehabilitation model and institutional establishment. RHEA also aims at raising awareness of different strata of society on the issues related to integration of the disabled persons. To achieve this mission, RHEA implements its activities at different levels:

- Develops and provides services to persons with disabilities and their parents;
- Supports institutionalisation of social services through creation of relevant resources in Tbilisi and multiethnic regions;
- In cooperation with other parties, within coalitions (Intersectoral Coalition, Coalition for Independent Life), participates in lobbying and advocacy in order to ensure protection of rights and interests of disabled persons at political level and development of integration-oriented civic attitude.

While implementing activities in Tbilisi and regions, we actively cooperated with parents of disabled persons, trying to mobilise and get them involved in protection of interests of persons with disabilities. The organisation carries out educational activities as well, including seminars and workshops conducted by our specialists/trainers for parents, senior pupils, pedagogues and social workers on common problems related to disabilities, legal issues, principles of medical pedagogy and multidisciplinary approaches, which represent a basic methodology in the process of psycho-social rehabilitation.

RHEA members and its associates believe that an attitude towards persons with disabilities is an indicator of level of societal morality (social sanity).

Basic approach of our activities can be described as follows: “each person, to whom our efforts are directed, is a subject and object of development”.

It is understood that development of social services in communities entails significant improvement of living conditions of various groups of people and supports inculcation of social values and behaviour among community members.

Various types of community-based services (cultural-educational community centres, youth centres, food service for the vulnerable elderly, employment and professional orientation services,

consultancy centres, etc.) encompass a wide array of interests of beneficiaries and, accordingly, give more chances for broader participation of communities. However, all those familiar with community mobilisation, are aware that this process is rather time-consuming.

While establishing an integration centre for persons with special development needs, we do not aim at mobilisation of community at large. Our activities are rather directed towards encouragement and strengthening of individual groups. Particular attention is paid to preliminary period. First of all, lists of persons with special needs are revised (executive bodies of the self-governing units have only pension related general and, in some cases, inaccurate data). At a later stage, along with assessment of needs of disabled persons and their parents, we attempt to define the following:

- Level of motivation among parents to cooperate with us in order to acquire essential skills for helping their children and protecting their rights;
- Availability of human resource locally, interested in acquiring new knowledge in order to continue working with disabled persons on a regular basis;
- Opinion/position of potential supporters (local self-government, the clergy, school teachers, NGOs, business sector representatives, etc.) on launching community-based services.

In case a target district meets the above-listed criteria, after introduction of project goals and action plans at community meetings organised with the assistance of a local self-government, the organisation begins to implement activities in the form of the so-called pointed intervention.

Our basic target groups are: local adolescents (13-17 year olds) with special development needs and their parents, belonging to different ethnic or religious groups. We strive to motivate and strengthen the groups, for whom the similar services are of vital importance, as well as persons open to positive changes and new thinking - adolescents and youth. We support them to acquire relevant knowledge to advocate for rights and needs of disabled persons. The organisation selects and trains the centre's staff (parents of the disabled persons are prioritised). From the beginning, special attention is paid to attracting support of persons and institutions, enjoying high repatriation locally, such as representatives of local eparchies, pedagogues, businessmen, etc. Furthermore, the following circumstance shall be taken into account: since our activities are basically carried out in ethnically and religiously diverse environments, principles of openness and equality, established in the centre, should be clearly declared right from the start and constantly monitored in the future. At a later stage, involvement of community members in the life of integration centre begins. Joint events are organised in order to support social inclusion of disabled adolescents. Performances and exhibitions aim at actualisation of capabilities of disabled adolescents and their peer fellow villagers alike. Local youth organise advocacy and charity campaigns. Gradually, village residents become the centre supporters, rather than outside observers, with a deepened sense of solidarity and more actively participate in the centre's activities.

As for the cooperation with local self-governments, it has a crucial importance for feasibility of social services introduced by our organisation. Underdeveloped mountainous districts, where our organisation's activities are carried, have no big budgets, which are intended for more "traditional" costs. Therefore, chances are high that after completion of our pilot projects, local decision-makers would refuse to allocate funds for centres targeted at small, allegedly "less important" groups of beneficiaries. That is why it is essential for local parents and youth to acquire advocacy skills. Besides, in terms of cooperation with local self-governments, we have elaborated an extremely cost-efficient model for initiating a new type of community-based

service. Our integration centre is targeted at 10-15 beneficiaries, suffering from low and medium grade mental retardation, and serves several neighbouring villages. The centre's staff is assisted by parents and other volunteers, who are provided with methodological-consultancy support by RHEA specialists. Integration day centre operates as a weekend school (2 days a week), increasing the number of days at a later stage.

In a mountainous region, where the integration of adolescents with disabilities is currently at the initial phase, this method of launching social services is considered to be the most efficient and realistic, which is intended to become a regional network of community-based micro integration centres. The next important step in the development process of integration will be establishment of social enterprises targeted at income generation and employment of disabled persons, their parents and other members of local community. Such enterprises will increase well-being of community and create more favourable environment for social inclusion of disabled persons.

### **3. Experience**

Our project activities are supported by German organisations: Bread for the World and Diakonisches Werk der EKD.

Currently, a model integration day centre targeted at adolescents and youth with special development needs is functioning in Tbilisi under RHEA. Owing to regular lessons, young people develop essential communication and everyday skills, and at social therapeutic workshops they acquire basic vocational (ceramics, felt making, cooking, carpentry, gardening, typography, etc.) capabilities. Model of psycho-social rehabilitation time-tested at the centre is introduced in regions, while initiating community-based social services.

Tbilisi centre actively implements educational activities as well, aiming at support of professional training for individuals and organisations, serving disabled persons in the capital city and multiethnic regions. It has to be noted that parents (staff of the centre) of Tbilisi target group beneficiaries are actively engaged in seminars and workshops targeted at parents of disabled persons living in local communities.

RHEA works towards protection of rights and interests of disadvantaged groups of ethnic minority communities (basically ethnic Armenians) independently, as well as under intersectoral coalitions (partners: Rugby Supporters' Alliance, Akhaltsikhe Business Centre, Russian-Armenian public school #86 in Tbilisi, and World Music Theatre "Mtiebi"). During implementation of activities in multiethnic environments, RHEA actively cooperates with local self-governments and Georgian and Armenian church bodies. It should be underlined that ideas expressed by church representatives have a great influence on the consciousness of believers. Accordingly, church representatives, in many cases, play the role of mediators with local communities and local self-government representatives, at the initial stage of our activities.

While carrying out coalition (basic supporters: EU, Embassy of the United States, Bread for the World) activities in multiethnic environments, RHEA uses a self-elaborated model of multi-integration, encompassing adolescents of different physical and mental abilities, as well as disadvantaged groups of different ethnicity and religious beliefs living in Tbilisi and Samtskhe Javakheti region (Akhaltsikhe, Akhalkalaki, Aspindza and Adigeni districts). For the purpose of integration and actualisation of the youth's capabilities, we choose activities/interests, which enable us to bring people together easily: problems and social welfare of disabled persons, sport (basically rugby), healthy lifestyle, ecology, business activity of youth, intercultural relationships, etc. One of the most important goals of coalition's activities is a preparation of young leaders (15-

20 year olds), aimed at positive changes. With our support, active representatives of new generation selected in local multiethnic communities acquire theoretical knowledge related to civic and thematic (above-listed directions) issues. Practical application of the acquired knowledge is facilitated by our organisation.

While carrying out coalition activities in various multiethnic communities of Samtskhe Javakheti region, RHEA is responsible for integration of disabled adolescents, motivation/strengthening of their parents and implementation of an awareness raising/educational component of a social welfare project targeted at local community youth (including young leaders).

Georgian and Armenian young leaders conduct independently joint advocacy, charity and environmental protection campaigns; plan and organise camping (with participation of disabled adolescents); arrange diverse intercultural events; perform successfully logistics and management of sports festivals (recreational competitions and regional/district rugby championships). It has to be noted that rugby festivals and other events organised by young leaders are attended by disabled adolescents from the RHEA integration centre, who have even established their own rugby fun club.

Acquired knowledge and jointly implemented activities significantly facilitate active involvement and integration of multiethnic community youth and, most importantly, inculcation of new values and rules for communication. Existence of capable young people inclined to new ways of thinking is an essential prerequisite for further development and strengthening of communities.

### **3.1. Successful experience**

In one of the regions, before launching a community-based service (integration centre), we had examined and analysed a negative experience and lessons learnt in other region and spent a long time on preliminary works.

RHEA had held a series of meetings with local self-government, church, and school representatives. We met with parents of children with disabilities, who had already identified their needs. Part of the parents considered it necessary to establish a day centre, allowing their children to go outdoors as they spend almost all their time at home; some of them prioritised urgent operations, enabling their children to walk. Among the parents were 2 mothers, who, having no special knowledge, had been trying to develop certain skills in their children. We had believed that it was a starting position, which would definitely bring a positive result in case of its development. However, there was no distinct leader among the parents.

The village had a confessor, who had constantly been attempting to involve local youth in various activities. With their participation, he organised exhibitions and literary soirees in regional centre and the capital city. The Holy Father established an educational centre at the local church. He had a wish to form a rugby team comprised of local children. We met the confessor, invited him to the integration centre in Tbilisi and offered our assistance to mediate with our long-term partner, Rugby Supporters' Alliance.

The Holy Father visited us soon afterwards and spent a day at the centre. Observing the way he communicated with adolescents with ease, we had realised that he could play the role of a leader in the community.

Shortly after his visit, the confessor provided us with the list of disabled children living in several villages, differentiated according to their diagnoses, in contrast with the list available at

Gamgeoba. Together with the confessor, we had visited families of children with disabilities. Additional meetings had been organised, with his support, with the municipal administration and local eparchy. Following the meetings, Gamgeoba provided office premises with a garden (in local kindergarten building) for the centre and renovation costs had been covered by the eparchy. Team of young rugby players had been formed in the village as well.

First 6 months of the project was dedicated to creation of infrastructure adjusted to the needs of disabled adolescents. It has to be noted that the Holy Father managed to involve local volunteers in renovation works. During this period, local parents and teachers were trained as the new centre's staff. RHEA continues to provide methodological consultancy up to date. The centre has begun fully functioning: regular lessons and excursions are conducted for adolescents; they are provided with food and transportation. The boy, whose mother thought he needed an urgent operation, attends lessons without a wheelchair; he is highly motivated and tries his best to prove his friends that he can live and act independently.

The confessor had initiated a lot of interesting events, enabling the centre to attract attention of fellow villagers. Local businessmen provided the centre with fuel and firewood. Numerous festivals had been organised, attended by community members and representatives of local self-government and the clergy. At a later stage, a club of the centre's supporters was established, combining famous sportsmen, singers, active youth of the region and simply good people.

Establishment of the centre in the village had often attracted the media's attention (4 articles in local and national press; 2 stories broadcasted by leading TV stations).

At the end of the project, a large open-air campaign (concert) had been organised in the centre's yard, with the participation of famous Georgian artist/television presenter Duta Skhirtladze and Geostar contestants, greatly enjoyed by the village youth.

Successful project activity, well-known throughout the region, and the widely publicised final concert had their impact: after the project competition, local self-government decided to fund the integration centre. Currently, it operates independently and actively cooperates with our organisation.

### **3.2. Unsuccessful experience**

In one of the multiethnic regions, RHEA began implementation of activities in cooperation with a local NGO. Target group included 71 children and youth (6-20 year olds) of different ethnicity with special development needs (mental retardation). The NGO, having no project funding by that time, contacted us and requested to share our experience during project elaboration process. The NGO claimed that they had assessed the needs of beneficiaries and had a practical experience of working with them. Large number of target beneficiaries would be critical for a day centre and the broad age range, in turn, required a highly professional and differentiated approach. The NGO explained that they worked regularly only with 17 persons and the others were served periodically, basically on holidays. Obviously, due to unprepared meetings and language barrier it was difficult to integrate youth and their parents belonging to different ethnic groups.

We had agreed with our partner to focus on 17 persons only (of narrow age-range) and work with them at the organisation's educational centre. It was also planned to prepare a methodology enabling us to develop a common approach targeted at beneficiaries of different ethnic groups. Simultaneously, we had conducted several seminars and workshops for the centre staff on

methodology of medical pedagogy, art-therapy and performance art (*short performances are often used in our practice, which are mainly less focused on text and are aimed at “putting the disabled children in motion”. Such short plays do not require preliminary preparation and are great instruments during initial interactions in terms of communication and overcoming language barriers*).

A project had been submitted to the mayor of municipality, who expressed readiness to support it. However, after two weeks a new mayor was appointed (government reshuffles occur frequently at national and regional levels). Funding of the centre remained undecided.

The centre staff continued communication with the new mayor without our participation and after a year they submitted a revised version of our project. Unfortunately, RHEA and a head of local organisation had different views regarding the project costs: the organisation considered necessary to create a solid infrastructure (which was essential but required considerable costs for renovation), while RHEA focused more on project costs. Due to high budget of the revised project, the Gamgeoba refused to fund it. Accordingly, our cooperation with the local organisation appeared ineffectual. However, activities carried out locally left their traces.

After a year, a new day centre was established in the district with the support of an international organisation. It has to be noted that the centre’s staff includes those persons trained at our seminars and workshops, who are actively using the method of medical pedagogy.

#### **Lessons learnt:**

- Insufficient attention was paid to the preliminary period and cooperation with the local organisation was not based on thorough assessment of partner’s capacity;
- Partners had no common view regarding the problem during the cooperation;
- Parents were not actively involved in advocacy and the centre’s activities;
- Neither of the parties had elaborated effective approaches to introduce our model of psycho-social rehabilitation in a multiethnic environment.

The approaches were elaborated at a later stage, after gaining experience of working in multiethnic environments, when RHEA decided to create non-Georgian versions of its methodology and train pedagogues, who would be capable of working with disabled persons and their parents using Georgian and their native language.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Practical experience of working in the region has shown that it is necessary to plan activities in a long-term perspective, which requires a fundamental preparation during a preliminary period, clarification of ways of implementation and a vision for the project’s viability/feasibility. While working with local communities, it is essential that relationships with partners, target groups and supporters be based on cooperation, equality and common views.

During the meetings with local communities and interaction with individual groups, detailed information shall be provided to community members on the activities planned at each stage and the actions expected from local population. At each consecutive stage, approaches should be adjusted in accordance with gained experience, local customs and the new realities in order to ensure maximum development and efficiency of our activities.

During the process of community development, all community groups should be supported to get strengthened and acquire essential knowledge and skills. However, we are particularly

responsible for those persons, who, owing to our efforts, became motivated to come out from their houses for the first time and start new lives. They must feel our support and assistance constantly in order to make this process irreversible.