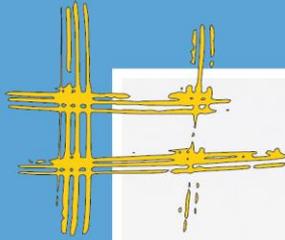




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Social Impact of Community Groups and Projects

Study





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Summary and Recommendations

The history of community-based organizations (CBOs) in modern Georgia is short and still somewhat alien to society. Despite community activism being widespread in Georgia before 1921, the Soviet imperial system leveled this experience. It's not surprising, therefore, that the existence of community-based organizations both in the country as a whole and rural communities is associated with so many challenges. Nevertheless, the present survey has shown that the existing community-based organizations have a significant impact on the individuals living in the community and contribute to the overall development of the community and municipality.

Despite operating with minimal financial and human resources, and sometimes in extremely difficult or hostile environments, CBOs manage to address the most critical challenges faced by communities. Because of this, surveyed respondents recognize and highly value the presence of these organizations, perceiving their role as indispensable and important.

The hostile environment is particularly highlighted by ethnic minority community groups who face significantly greater challenges locally due to pervasive stereotypes and frequent unwelcoming attitudes they encounter. Furthermore, there is a hostile attitude towards civil society organizations in general; various studies indicate a significant lack of public trust in CSOs, which can be attributed to various factors including the tendency of certain governments to frequently attack CSOs as well as the entire civil sector during their power struggles. And while it is true that such verbal attacks are mainly targeting the larger civil society organizations, they could still deteriorate the operating environment of local community groups and undermine their effectiveness.

A few years ago, the distrust of the villagers towards the leaders of community groups was identified by experts as one of the main obstacles to effective community work. In this regard, there have been significant improvements over the past 10 years, largely due to the efforts of community groups operating within specific target communities. However, start-up organizations still face challenges when it comes to establishing trust during the initial stages of operation. Issues of public trust in community groups and other institutions operating in rural areas (village government, etc.) could be addressed in a separate study.

Community-based organizations, at the same time, act as pioneers and innovators within their respective communities, leading to an improvement in the overall well-being of these communities. Through active engagement in various networks, CBOs acquire early access to recently announced competitions and grant opportunities that cover a wide range of areas including agricultural development, community initiatives, and non-formal education programs.

Interviewed CBO representatives rarely acknowledge their current ability or potential to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of their activities using their available resources, be it financial or human capital; this trend suggests a general scarcity of resources at the local level. Moreover, the recent history of community self-organization proves that the majority of

community groups have emerged, and continue to emerge, as part of the projects and programs initiated by donor organizations; consequently, their existence and sustainability are closely tied to the duration of these programs and there's a high probability that organizations will cease or temporarily halt their activities whenever their funding is discontinued.

According to the majority of experts, to enhance the resilience and capacity of community-based organizations or groups, facilitate their engagement with diverse donors, and empower them to generate at least a very modest income (such as through social entrepreneurship), it is crucial to work with them for a minimum of several years. Even with such long-term support, not all community organizations or groups can sustain themselves. Successful community organizations, on the other hand, typically progress to the next stage of development and expand their activities beyond their immediate community; however, such cases are limited to a few organizations.

Experts suggest that one effective strategy for ensuring organizational stability is to simultaneously empower multiple leaders within a community-based organization; this approach helps prevent the risk of organizational collapse in the event of the departure of one of the leaders.

Another important aspect to consider is that the surveyed community-based organizations have different profiles in terms of their institutional and organizational strength, ranging from advanced organizations to relatively weak beginners; their access to beneficiaries also differs. That is why donor organizations should tailor their approach and keep in mind that community organizations are not one homogeneous group but rather have varying capacities and needs.

From a gender perspective, it seems that women are more involved in community-based organizations, which, in conditions of limited employment opportunities in rural areas, can contribute to the inclusion of women in social activities, their self-realization and socialization (even when this social activity entails additional volunteer work for them). Based on the respondents' answers, it is evident that involvement in community-based organizations increases their level of self-realization and self-esteem, as well as improves the attitude of community members towards them.

Although the survey specifically targeted CBOs that have been actively operating for the past five years, it revealed that these organizations still encounter serious challenges, primarily related to funding issues and a scarcity of human capital.

The assessment of the relevance, efficacy, impact, and sustainability of the *projects* implemented by CBOs is highly positive; respondents believe that CBO projects are considerably efficient and viable, and therefore generate a positive impact on communities. Community-based organizations carry out projects in several key domains, which, on the one hand, allows them to develop quite specific areas of expertise. On the other hand, this could be due to the fact that organizations prioritize the preference of donors while overlooking the needs of communities. It would therefore be beneficial if donor organizations developed their

program priorities based on the examination of community needs and consultations with community-based organizations.

Quantitative and qualitative evaluations of the impact of community groups' activities have revealed the importance of the so-called "*build upon projects*". One of the strategies for achieving project sustainability could be the approach when the new projects are built upon the existing ones; not only will this increase the viability of the projects, but it will also amplify their impact on the community.¹ **The assessment revealed a distinct pattern indicating that communities are to a greater extent affected by a series of activities and projects implemented by an organization, rather than by one specific/individual project. However, some projects have individually brought positive and sustainable results to the community, and these were mostly small-scale local programs aimed at the economic empowerment of community members.**

Final Conclusions:

The work of community-based organizations in local communities has an extremely positive impact at the individual, community and municipal levels. The role of CBOs in solving the urgent problems of communities is important and tangible. It is therefore essential that donor organizations continue to support community organizations while keeping in mind the complex environment in which CBOs operate, as well as the resources that are available for them. It is important for donor support to be long-term and systematic; this will allow community-based organizations to implement projects with longer-term and sustainable outcomes, resulting in greater impact for their target groups.

Below, we present an overview of the key challenges identified through the survey and offer recommendations for donor organizations and local government entities to support the development of resilient and sustainable community-based organizations.

¹ Expert interviews

Challenges and Recommendations²

Donor Organizations

Challenges	Recommendations
<p>Challenge 1. Refining the needs assessment methodology</p> <p>The question of how (and by what methodology) the needs of the community are identified, revealed that CBO leaders lack a uniform needs assessment approach or, at least, a properly structured needs assessment tool.</p>	<p>To improve the credibility and quality of the needs assessment, community-based organizations are encouraged to (1) develop a single (unified) needs assessment tool tailored both to CBO capacities and community features; and (2) provide training to community leaders and CBO volunteers on utilization of the needs assessment tool throughout the stages of fieldwork, data processing and analysis. This recommendation aligns with the recommendations of the survey carried out in 2020-2021.</p>
<p>Challenge 2. Lack of Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Systems</p> <p>Any organization requires an effective M&E system to ensure proper and successful performance. This survey found that community-based organizations do not have such systems in place and as a result, they can't collect data on the number of beneficiaries served, funding obtained, or the number and scope of projects implemented in the long-term and short-term perspective. This prevents in-depth analysis, identification of problems and elimination of shortcomings. Part of the problem is that CBOs are usually small organizations with relatively few resources, while monitoring and evaluation require significant resources (both time and human). However, minimum M&E standards can still be implemented.</p>	<p>It is recommended that CBOs, with the help of donor organizations, implement systems of regular monitoring and evaluation as a step forward in their transformation into learning organizations. These systems will also help donor organizations collect data on the activities and projects of community-based organizations operating in the country, and evaluate the effectiveness of their implementation, which will ultimately contribute to the planning and realization of evidence-based programs.</p>
<p>Challenge 3. Organizational weakness and lack of institutionalization of community-based organizations</p>	<p>It is recommended to design and implement programs for the organizational development and</p>

² Challenges and recommendations are not ranked in priority order.

<p>The majority of surveyed CBOs are characterized by organizational weakness and limited institutionalization. This frequently results in the establishment of a “one leader” structure, where the departure of the leader due to various circumstances, leads to the closure of the organization as no competent staff members are remaining. This challenge also hampers the awareness/visibility and trust in organizations: people know and trust a particular leader but do not know or trust the organization.</p>	<p>institutional strengthening of CBOs. An organization needs to have a clear structure, organizational chart, working practices, strategic and action plans, accountability, as well as sound visibility and communication strategies. It may seem idealistic and unrealistic to achieve this in organizations consisting of 1-3 people; however, for a successful and sustainable organization it is necessary to go through these steps of organizational development.</p>
<p>Challenge 4. Alternative income/funding opportunities</p> <p>According to the survey, community-based organizations are almost entirely dependent on donor funding (private, international or local), with rare exceptions when funding is received through social enterprise or private donations. Therefore, the financial sustainability of CBOs remains an unsolved issue. While this problem is common throughout the civil sector of the country, CBOs are particularly vulnerable because of initially limited access to diversified funding due to language barriers, poor organizational experience, and smaller scale of activities.</p>	<p>Therefore, it is recommended to evaluate the potential alternative funding options for community-based organizations (via a feasibility study), and then, based on study results, develop, and implement a strategy for income diversification.</p> <p>To this end, it is important to use such sources of potential income as donations from immigrants, in particular the HTA (Hometown Associations) model, which is working successfully in many Latin American countries, and it’s quite realistic to use it within small-scale community projects.</p> <p>It is also recommended to consider the issue of expanding the access of community groups to municipal programs (mechanisms) of technical and financial support. Given the current political polarization and lack of cooperation culture between the sectors in present-day Georgia, the question is to what extent is it possible to establish municipal support programs for community groups and make sure that they will be free from any interference, nepotism and personal likes or dislikes.</p>
<p>Challenge 5. Lack of focus on economic empowerment programs in CBO activities</p> <p>The majority of CBOs that took part in this survey, focus on significant issues like</p>	<p>It is recommended to thoroughly study the possibility of strengthening the economic</p>

<p>informal education, women’s rights, and rights of persons with disabilities; however, employment and economic well-being remain the biggest challenges both in rural areas and throughout the country. Obviously, due to the specifics of their structure and activities, community-based organizations alone can’t solve these problems, despite their great efforts. And still, as a result of the survey we identified some interesting examples, when community-based organizations are engaged almost exclusively in economic empowerment programs, such as encouraging and supporting community members’ participation in business grant competitions, providing targeted training and awareness-raising activities on income growth, launching social enterprises or teaching the entrepreneurship skills. Activities of these CBOs directly impact the economic well-being of the people, which increases their trust and engagement with the organization (and here <i>engagement</i> also implies the financial participation in CBO through individual donations or in-kind contributions).</p>	<p>empowerment component in CBO activities and emphasize it as a priority direction within their scope of work, which could help to improve the economic well-being of the local population, and ultimately create an alternative source of income for CBOs, such as membership fees, donations, and other forms of contributions.</p>
<p>Challenge 6. Lack/absence of institutionalized cooperation between CBOs and local self-government bodies</p> <p>The solution to this problem is particularly difficult because, apart from the efforts of community-based organizations, it also requires sufficient commitment from local governments. Unfortunately, this survey proves that this commitment is not always the case. Nevertheless, it is important that CBOs, as well as donor organizations, continue to work in this direction.</p>	<p>It is recommended to strengthen cooperation with local governments by actively engaging them in various CBO projects; in this way, local government representatives will also feel the ownership of implemented projects.</p> <p>One of the possibilities could also be the collaboration of CBOs and local governments on the implementation of priorities set according to municipal development plans (e.g., in the process of arranging infrastructure for disabled people or while implementing other types of infrastructure projects).</p>
<p>Challenge 7. Insufficient number of small-scale community projects</p>	<p>Through consultations with stakeholders, it is advisable to develop a financing mechanism for</p>

<p>As a result of this survey, it was found that small community projects have an extremely large impact on the level of individuals, communities, and municipalities. The impact of community projects is even greater when they are "built upon" existing ones. However, considering that funding for small projects is quite competitive and the number of such projects is also limited, CBOs are not always able to maintain continuity between projects, which consequently reduces the impact.</p>	<p>small community projects. The mechanism (1) should take into account the criterion of “continuity” between projects; (2) increase the overall number of funded community projects, thus allowing CBOs to implement at least one small-scale project annually.</p>
<p>Challenge 8. Modules for assessment of the economic impact of small community projects are not properly considered at the planning stage (on the one hand, there are no predetermined criteria, on the other hand, such assessment is time-bound).</p>	<p>In this context, it is recommended to add a module with an economic impact summary to the M&E methodology; in particular, together with social impact assessment, grant competitions for community-based organizations should also include the assessment of the economic impact. While economic benefits might not be a primary focus in certain grant competitions, their presence can help address social problems more effectively.</p> <p>It's also advisable to include an assessment of the project's influence on the economic situation in the project reporting template. In this way, the results of the grant project will look much more presentable. For economic impact to become obvious and measurable, a certain period has to elapse; therefore, it is recommended to assess the economic impact of grant projects 2 or 3 years after their completion. It is advisable to develop the economic effect assessment methodology before the project implementation. Depending on the project scope, the methodology may not serve as a comprehensive assessment model, however, it should allow analysis of several key issues.</p>
<p>Challenge 9. Increasing the visibility of CBO activities and promoting their success stories at local, regional, and national levels.</p>	<p>It is recommended to showcase the accomplishments and success stories of CBOs, increase their visibility, generate awareness and share the outcomes of their activities with diverse audiences, including local communities and</p>

	<p>municipalities, as well as regional and national levels. It is especially important to promote the economic effect of the projects; to increase the degree and the quality of public sector cooperation and participation, it's recommended to maintain regular outreach and communication with the public in general as well as with local and central authorities.</p>
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Local Self-Government

<p>Challenge 1. Lack of institutionalization of cooperation with local self-government</p> <p>The lack and/or absence of institutionalization is a problem that cannot be solved by donors or community-based organizations alone. Active commitment and involvement of municipalities are necessary to address this issue successfully.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It is recommended to institutionalize cooperation with community-based organizations at the level of local self-government, by organizing councils/forums of municipal/regional CBOs. Councils/forums will serve as coordination bodies and promote the better integration of CBO projects with other programs and projects implemented in the same municipality or region. 2. At the same time, to support institutionalization, it is essential for municipalities and Sakrebulo to have community development experts (or even services) who will coordinate the cooperation of CBOs with municipalities. 3. It is desirable to strengthen the cooperation of community groups with local self-government through the involvement of local government in small community projects, especially since the objectives of the small grant competitions announced by international or private donors in many ways correspond to the powers of local authorities as defined in the Code of Self-Government thus creating better opportunities and prospects for cooperation.
<p>Challenge 2. The need for outsourcing municipal services</p>	

<p>Municipalities, especially those in rural areas, need to provide certain services, including education and health care; however, they may not always have sufficient technical or human resources to do so. In such cases CBOs can take the lead in the provision of these services, which, on the one hand, will help to improve the accessibility of municipal services, and on the other hand – strengthen the connections and cooperation between the CBOs and municipalities; in addition, this will contribute to the increased financial sustainability of CBOs.</p>	<p>Municipalities and Sakrebulo, particularly in rural areas, are encouraged to consider and implement mechanisms for outsourcing relevant services (educational, early development, etc.) as well as create an appropriate institutional environment that will support CBOs to participate in the implementation of these mechanisms.</p>
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