



THE ROLE AND PRACTICES OF LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT IN COMBATING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

(MONITORING OF PRACTICAL
IMPLEMENTATION OF LEGISLATIVE CHANGES
FOR COMBATING VIOLENCE AGAINST
WOMEN AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE)



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SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Domestic violence against women is one of the most pressing problems in Georgia as well as in the whole world. According to the national study of violence against women, one out of seven women in our country experiences violence. Unfortunately, many cases of violence remain undisclosed. Although in recent years public awareness on the topics of violence against women and domestic violence has increased considerably, the situation still remains unsatisfactory, especially in the regions. According to the statistical data from 2017 the number of the cases of violence per 100 thousand people in the regions is higher than in Tbilisi, especially in Adjara, Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli.¹ Therefore, for combating violence against women and domestic violence effectively it is crucially important to ensure **active involvement of municipal structures** in awareness raising of the local society and in providing victims with services tailored to their needs.

Gender equality and promotion of women's rights are among the priorities for Fund "Sukhumi". The organization works actively on **prevention of domestic violence against women and on supporting the victims** and for these purposes closely cooperates with local self-government bodies. The organization was one of the pioneers in **creating a gender equality mechanism in local self-government**. During 2013-2016 Fund "Sukhumi" established **gender advisory councils** as a pilot project in four towns of western Georgia (Kutaisi, Senaki, Ozurgeti and Batumi) for the first time **and still actively supports their empowerment**. The organization works with municipalities in the following fields:

- Institutional capacity building of the target municipalities and increasing effectiveness of existing gender equality mechanisms;
- Awareness raising of municipality personnel on the issues of gender equality through conducting systematic informational meetings, trainings, conferences;
- Offering professional and advisory services to municipalities through research, preparing strategic documents, analyzing gender needs of the population;
- Developing and implementing joint projects;
- Establishing and strengthening a coordination mechanism at the local level by

1 Effectiveness Audit Report - The mechanisms of prevention and protection from domestic violence conducted by the State Audit Office of Georgia, p.46 https://sao.ge/files/auditi/auditis-angarishebi/2019/ojaxshi_dzaladobis_dacvis_efeqtianobis_auditis_angarishi.pdf

organizing joint meetings with all actors of the national referral mechanism and exchanging information between the personnel of the institutions involved in the process;

- Providing information to the local population about municipal programs and available services for supporting the victims of domestic violence.

In June-August, 2019 Fund “Sukhumi” conducted small scale monitoring in target municipalities in order to estimate the level of implementation of legislative innovations related to violence against women and perception of reality by the local municipality personnel. The monitoring has identified achievements in the work of the municipalities which include: varying degree of awareness in the municipalities of the problem of domestic violence; increased number of gender sensitive personnel, which is reflected in implementing victim support services. As of today, **municipal programs for supporting the female victims of domestic violence** are in operation in several municipalities, for example, practice of covering cost of their accommodation or providing one-time allowances to the women who have the status of a victim, etc.

However, the monitoring has exposed a number of problems that significantly hamper progress in this area. Therefore, it is important that the central and local governments should give timely response to the following challenges:

➤ **High degree of centralization** – centralized way of governing by the State; concentration of power and resources at the top level; overdependence of self-governing units on the central government;

Recommended: promoting decentralization, empowerment of local self-government; transferring the local property to them; fiscal decentralization;

➤ **Weakness and passivity of local self-governing units** – Lack of assertiveness in the representatives of local government and expectation of instructions from the central government which makes it impossible to deal with the problems that can be solved locally;

Recommended: promoting active and responsible local personnel; taking responsibility for solving issues independently from the central government (it may be recommended to get support from NGOs at the initial stage in order to acquire needed skills and knowledge)

- **Lack of advocacy at the central level for gender related challenges existing in local self-government** – the communication with national mechanisms for protecting and supporting the victims of domestic violence is limited or non-existent; (for example, with Inter-Agency Commission on the Issues of Gender Equality, Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, Gender Equality Council of the Parliament of Georgia); local self-government bodies fail to bring to the attention of the central government the needs and challenges of the local population related to domestic violence against women; the degree of cooperation from the central government structures is also insufficient;

Recommended: Municipality personnel should actively advocate for solving the problems by all means and formats of communication with the central government, including through State Representatives-Governors, Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure, institutional mechanisms for gender equality at the national level;

- **Insufficient level of cooperation with the referral system actors** – the lack of information exchange and coordination mechanism with the actors of the referral system at the local level, as a result the actors of the system are not aware about the services available for the victims in different institutions, about the achievements, problems and practices of other actors. For example, the local self-government cannot provide information about municipal support programs to the police and social services which would allow them to give relevant information to uninformed victims. Moreover, due to insufficient cooperation and coordination they themselves do not have the information about the services offered by other actors of the referral system;

Recommended: establishing the mechanism of coordination between the actors of the referral system at the local level and through this mechanism exchanging the information about their activities, achievements, obstacles, available services; organizing regular meetings, etc.

- **Insufficient transparency and openness** – local civil society and active individuals are not encouraged to be involved in the activities of the local self-government;

Recommended: revising and improving the public relations strategy, inviting active citizens to participate in the meetings and activities, taking their opinions into consideration;

- **Lack of joint efforts of local self-government units** – lack or absence of programs for inter-municipality cooperation and joint initiatives; failure to apply existing legislative mechanisms;

Recommended: agreeing on the format of cooperation between the municipalities and planning and implementing joint activities (Inter-Municipal cooperation); consolidating resources for responding to common challenges, which gives the opportunity to overcome the problem with joint efforts;

- **Insufficient coverage of municipality territory** – uneven coverage of municipality geographical area, especially less attention to remote villages and high mountainous settlements; ineffectiveness of the work of the representatives of Mayor's offices against domestic violence; lack of attention to the specific needs of rural women and girls;

Recommended: paying more attention to the peripheral settlements and remote villages; considering women's needs in every stage self-government's work (setting the priorities, planning, budgeting, implementing); more active involvement of the representatives of mayors' offices in order to contribute to close collaboration of self-governing bodies with the local population and exchange of information;

- **'Armchair' administration – lack of meetings with local population, absence of needs assessment and gender analysis**—lack of interaction with the local population; lack of information about their needs, especially gender specific needs, even though the main idea of self-government implies governing in close contact with population.

Recommended: more active and close communication with the population; increasing the number of visits and meetings in villages; organizing open door meetings for local population; assessing the needs of local population and its analysis from gender perspective; preparing the plan of these activities and monitoring of their implementation;

- **Formality in work, lack of enthusiasm and zeal for changes and innovations** – the conditions of support programs are not adjusted to the needs of victims; the criteria are inflexible, often they do not correspond to the interests of different victims and they create bureaucratic barriers to receiving support;

Recommended: implementing the government style adjusted to the needs of the population; it is important to realize that the criteria should be adapted to the needs

of the people and not the other way round; if a person is not applying to the right institution, he/she should not be turned down but rather assisted in submitting the request with proper wording, provided with necessary information and redirected to the relevant institution; More initiative and courage should be demonstrated;

- **Uncoordinated work of local self-government bodies** – in some cases activities of Sakrebulo (representative councils) and Mayor's offices are uncoordinated and often contradict, oppose each other, which hampers the problem solving process;

Recommended: supporting the coordination of the work of municipality bodies, respecting the ideas and priorities of each other, overcoming political and personal interests;

- **Weakness of Gender Equality Councils at the local level** – there is a danger of turning the Councils into formal bureaucratic institutions; the lack or absence of result-oriented, topical and needed activities; absence of practices of gender assessment of the work of local authorities;

Recommended: activating the work of Gender Equality Councils, involving more civil activists and local leaders in its work, increasing the frequency of meetings; it is desirable to make the reports about the work of the Councils public; Councils elaborating and publishing the assessment reports and recommendations on the work of local self-government bodies;

- **Absence or superficiality of policy documents on gender equality issues** – strategic policy documents and properly funded gender equality action plans which can be implemented in practice are non-existent or superficial;

Recommended: intensifying the work in this direction; it is desirable to use the experience and competences of NGOs and to involve them in this process;

- **Municipality personnel are not adequately informed and trained in gender equality issues** – lack of gender sensitivity, scarcity or absence of information about the roles and obligations of local self-government. The level of qualification of local self-government representatives is especially crucial in the fields of gender equality, violence against women and gender mainstreaming.

Recommended: organizing more trainings for municipality personnel; supporting and encouraging active staff; partnership with qualified NGOs, outsourcing organization of trainings, consultancies, needs assessment; the central government, in particular the Gender Equality Council of the Parliament of Georgia should demonstrate more attention, methodological support and cooperation with Gender Councils at the local level;

- **Gender insensitive local budget** – scarce financial resources for combating violence against women and domestic violence and for supporting the victims in many cases are caused not only by limited resources, but also by lack of gender sensitivity of local authorities and failure to understand the importance and scale of the problem;

Recommended: Spreading information on gender budgeting and improving the qualification of local authorities; allocating more budget resources for women's needs;

- **Problem of providing information to the population about municipal programs for supporting the victims of domestic violence and other support services** – the internet, which is the main source of dissemination of information, is not accessible for the majority of the population; informational meetings are rare; as people are uninformed, they fail to receive the support which is vitally important for them;

Recommended: finding effective ways of disseminating the information; in case of inaccessibility of the internet, non-electronic means of communications should be used, such as human, social and organizational networks; spreading information through the personnel of schools, kindergartens, self-government bodies, mayor's offices, active individuals and local media would be much more effective;

- **Scarcity of long-term support programs for victims** – the available support activities and services are one time and/or short term; the victims need support and assistance not only to avoid violence but in longer term as well – to acquire skills needed for independent life, to achieve economic sustainability and to acquire vocational skills. In the regions there is no access to social services or to the services for receiving psychological assistance;

Recommended: allocating more resources to long-term assistance; concentrating on fundraising, including preparing grant projects to attract the

resources at national or international level; funding the work of at least one psychologist, which can be covered easily by the local budget; it is also important to train the women and consult them for inclusion in national economic programs; the local self-government can play an essential role in informing the interested individuals and assisting them in preparing business plans.





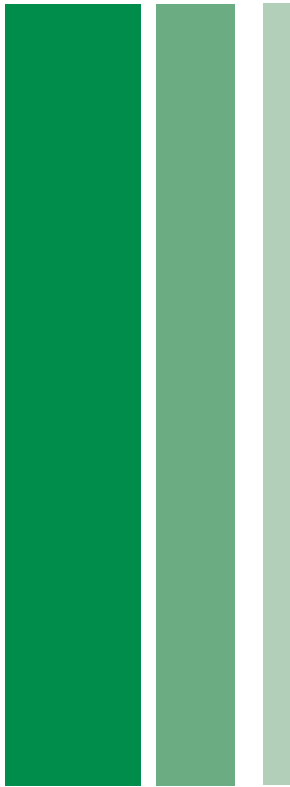
CHAPTER I.



INTRODUCTION



1.1. TOPICALITY AND NATURE OF THE PROBLEM OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE



The problem of violence against women and domestic violence is one of the most topical issues in Georgia. According to a recent national study on violence against women published in 2018, **one out of seven women is subject to domestic violence in our country**, and if we look at all forms of violence, **one out of four women has been subject to gender based violence during her life²**. Unfortunately, many cases remain undisclosed.

It is very hard for the victims of violence against women and domestic violence to overcome fear, shame, obstacles created by the abuser and other possible barriers (including economic, geographical), to confront the stereotypes which are deeply rooted in the society and to reveal the case of violence. Therefore, it is vital to receive support and empathy from the state and assistance from the qualified personnel competent in dealing with the problem of violence against women at both national and local levels.

According to the national study³ although during recent years the public awareness

2 “According to a recent national study, one out of seven women is subject to domestic violence in our country”

http://www.ungeorgia.ge/geo/პრესსამსახური/ახალი_აშბები?info_id=571#.Xbq7yklR271

3 UNWomen, Geostat, National Study on Violence against Women, 2009, UNWomen, Geostat, National Study on Violence against Women, 2017

on the topics of violence against women and domestic violence has increased considerably, the situation still remains unsatisfactory, especially in the regions. According to the statistical data from 2017 the number of the cases of violence per 100 thousand people in the regions is higher than in Tbilisi, especially in Adjara, Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli.⁴ Therefore, for combating the violence against women and domestic violence effectively it is crucially important to ensure **active involvement of municipal structures** in awareness raising of the local society and in providing the victims with the services tailored to their needs.

According to the State Audit Office of Georgia, as a result of interviewing 21 beneficiaries of shelters and crisis center it was found that before going to the shelters/ crisis centres only 10% of the beneficiaries were informed about the means of protection from violence and 52% had no information at all. 38% had some information through video-clips and other means (NGOs, friends, work). The beneficiaries stated that they would have taken steps to put an end to violence earlier had they been aware of the mechanisms of protection. Therefore, it was lack of information that was the reason for the fact that twelve beneficiaries out of twenty had taken more than three years to take adequate measures.⁵

In the monitoring report of the action plan of combating domestic violence the public defender stated that the awareness-raising activities implemented according to the plan for combating violence are clearly insufficient and do not respond adequately to prejudices existing in the society⁶. The role and efforts of the local self-government in informing the society including victims/potential victims are clearly insufficient.

The role of municipalities is also essential in developing and implementing support programs and services for victims/potential victims. At present, the local self-government supports the victims financially by paying for their accommodation for a certain period; there is also practice of one-time allowances. In this respect municipalities face certain challenges: on the one hand, existing programs are insufficient, while on the other hand it is hard to make this information known to the population. Therefore, it is necessary to increase the role of self-government in developing and offering services adjusted to the needs of victims and disseminating information about them.

4 Effectiveness Audit Report - The Mechanisms of prevention and protection from domestic violence conducted by the State Audit Office of Georgia p.46

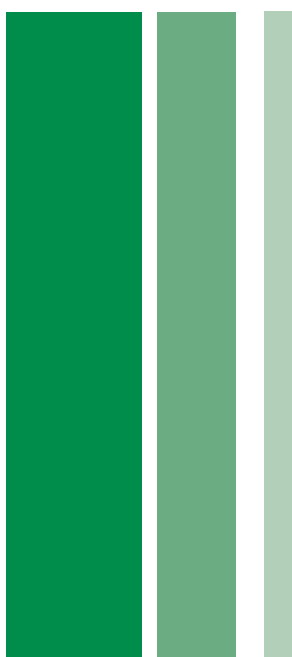
https://sao.ge/files/auditi/auditis-angarishebi/2019/ojaxshi_dzaladobis_dacvis_efeqtianobis_auditis_angarishi.pdf

5 Effectiveness Audit Report - The Mechanisms of prevention and protection from domestic violence conducted by the State Audit Office of Georgia, pp.42-43

6 The report of the public defender of Georgia- on the monitoring of action plan for 2016-2017 for the activities for combating the violence against women and domestic violence and for protecting the victims, 2017, p. 5

It is interesting to find out how the local self-government handles the challenges accompanying the daily struggle against violence, what their successes are, what obstacles they face and how they handle them.

1.2. THE AIM AND METHODOLOGY OF THE MONITORING IMPLEMENTED BY FUND “SUKHUMI”



In June-August 2019, under the project “Strengthening Women’s Rights in Western Georgia” supported by the German international organization “Brot für die Welt”, Fund “Sukhumi” conducted a small-scale monitoring of local self-government bodies that aimed to assess and study the implementation of legislative innovations and the personnel’s perception of the new reality.

The monitoring process was carried out by using qualitative research method and desk research. The qualitative research was conducted by Fund “Sukhumi” using focus group and in-depth interview methods in target regions with local self-government representatives from Kutaisi, Tskaltubo, Baghdati, Terjola, Khoni, Vani, Samtredia, Senaki, Zugdidi, Ozurgeti, Lanchkhuti. In total 8 focus group discussions and 4 in-depth interviews were conducted. The number of respondents totaled 71 (mixed gender group). The participants were from the personnel of local self-government bodies who are responsible for gender policy making and implementing in the municipalities and they included: Gender Council members, Sakrebulo chairpersons, Deputy Mayors, different authorities and civil servants from Sakrebulos and Mayor’s office (working in the fields of finance, budget, law, social services, culture and youth), Mayor’s


Representatives, gender focal points, also representatives of NNLE of preschool education institutions.

Existing legislative framework, international as well as legislative acts adopted by the Parliament of Georgia, also studies, reports and policy documents of different organizations on the topic of violence against women and domestic violence were analyzed during desk research.






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**ადგილობრივი
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**GENDER
MAINSTREAMING
IN LOCAL
SELF-GOVERNMENT**

**გენდერული
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დანერგვა
მუნიციპალიტეტებში**
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**ქალთა მიმართ და
თავისუფლების
პრობლემების
სტიმულიანი ანალიზი
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პრობლემების**
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 ანგარიში



CHAPTER II.

EXPERIENCE OF FUND “SUKHUMI” IN IMPLEMENTING GENDER POLICIES IN LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT

Gender equality and strengthening women's rights are among the top priorities of Fund "Sukhumi". The organization works actively against the discrimination of women, for prevention of domestic violence and supporting the victims. The activities of the Fund cover West Georgia. In accordance with its mission and in fulfillment of its goals Fund "Sukhumi" cooperates closely and effectively with local self-government bodies in many fields, including: strengthening the institutional capabilities of the municipalities, awareness raising of their personnel in gender equality issues, expert support of self-government and offering consultancy services, implementing joint projects, developing strategic documents and conducting research for self-government, informing local population and offering services to them, supporting the creation of the coordination mechanism at the local level and improvement of the referral mechanism.

2.1. CREATION OF GENDER EQUALITY COUNCILS

The Cultural-Humanitarian Fund "Sukhumi" has played an important part in **creating gender mechanisms in local self-governments**, in particular, in creation of a Gender Equality Council and its empowerment. The organization was among the pioneers in this field.

The project of Gender Equality Councils⁷ which was implemented by Fund "Sukhumi" in 2013-2016⁸ in 4 pilot districts (Kutaisi, Senaki, Ozurgeti and Batumi) was quite an innovative and ambitious idea at the time. Creation of gender mainstreaming mechanisms in pilot municipality Sakrebulo by establishing Gender Advisory Councils made it possible to highlight gender issues and to include them in the local agenda. As a result the local policies became more gender-sensitive than before⁹.

In order to ensure the effectiveness, involvement and the balance of interests, the

7 For the details of Gender Council project see: <http://gac.at.ua/index/0-2>

8 The project was implemented from 1 October 2013 to 30 September, 2015. See: Gender Councils – new institutional model for gender changes in regions <http://gac.at.ua/index/0-2>

9 Experience and Perspectives – Gender Advisory Councils <http://gac.fsokhumi.ge/index.php/ka/ge/34-2015-03-31-16-53-26/928-2016-10-14-15-16-39>

Councils combined a wide spectrum of different stakeholders (including: local Sakrebulo members, men and women civil activists, local and IDP population, representatives of ethnic minorities, media and NGOs).

Fund “Sukhumi” and “Gender Advisory Councils”¹⁰ conducted **gender analysis of local self-government policies and budgets** on an annual basis, developed specific recommendations for gender responsiveness of the local budgets and carried out advocacy campaigns for their implementation. The councils studied **the gender needs of the population** in target regions, which became the basis for number of important projects¹¹ co-funded by local Sakrebulos. The organization also implemented the gender needs assessment of the local population in Kutaisi, Ozurgeti, Senaki and Batumi.¹²

Through regular meetings, information campaigns (magazines, web-pages, Facebook pages, TV and radio programs) and round table discussions the project contributed to awareness-raising of the local self-government and society on the importance of representation of women at decision-making level and increasing its role.

Gender Advisory councils closely collaborated with the Gender Equality Council of the Parliament of Georgia. The network of Gender Advisory Councils created by Fund “Sukhumi” actively advocated for institutionalization of gender equality mechanism at the local level and making relevant changes in the national action plan for gender equality and local self-government code.

It has to be mentioned also that with the efforts of NGO “Women’s Information Centre” the institution of an ‘Advisor on Gender Issues’ was introduced in the executive branch of the local self-government which contributed to appointing advisors in gender issues in 49 municipalities of Georgia. As a result of active advocacy campaigns carried out by women’s NGOs that aimed to institutionalize both mechanisms through legislative changes, it became possible to institutionalize Gender Equality Councils in town Sakrebulos and the positions of an Advisor on Gender Issues in Mayor’s offices by legislation in 2017.

Fund “Sukhumi” still actively cooperates with a number of local self-governments of West Georgia for further strengthening of Gender Equality Councils, for developing

10 During the project piloting this mechanism was named “Gender Advisory Council”

11 Study “On integration of gender needs of Kutaisi, Senaki, Ozurgeti civil groups in local budgets“

<http://fsokhumi.ge/images/2016/28.01-28.02/Publik/Down/GE.PDF>

12 Needs assessment of local gender groups

<http://fsokhumi.ge/index.php/ka/newska/kvleva/3123-ადგილობრივი-გენდერული-ჯგუფების-საჭიროებების-შეფასება>

and implementing gender-responsive local policies and municipal programs adjusted to the gender needs of the population.

Municipalities of Tskaltubo, Kutaisi, Lanchkhuti, Ozirgeti, Terjola, Senaki, Poti, Zugdigi and Khoni are in close cooperation with Fund “Sukhumi” under the Gender Equality Councils format and the representatives of the Fund are the members of Gender Equality Councils in these municipalities.

The memorandum with Baghdati municipality has already been signed and the memoranda with Tkibuli, Terjola and Chokhatauri municipalities are under development.¹³

2.2 COOPERATION WITH LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT AND POPULATION IN COMBATING THE PROBLEM OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Fund “Sukhumi” actively cooperates with local self-governments in combating violence against women through institutional capacity building of municipalities, training of civil servants, their awareness raising on gender violence issues and helping them to realize their roles in combating gender violence. The Fund actively works with the population of target regions in order to identify the specific needs of women and girls and advocates these needs with local self-governments. We can say that the organization serves as a bridge between the local population and municipality bodies and contributes to their close cooperation and involvement of population in decision-making process. Fund “Sukhumi” also actively supports **introduction and improvement of a coordination mechanism between the actors of referral system** against violence within the municipalities by including the actors of the referral system in the work of Sakrebulo, organizing round-table discussions, presentations and discussions. For years the organization has **actively studied the problems of women and girls** in the target municipalities. Its work is based on the needs and challenges identified together with the municipalities and is directed at implementing

¹³ Short summary of consultancy services provided to local self-governments, p. 3
<http://fsokhumi.ge/images/2018/7/shexvedrebi/19/geo.pdf>

the prevention mechanism against violence against women and offering services for effective response to violence.¹⁴

Cooperation with self-governing units in the fields of prevention and responding to violence against women and domestic violence is one of the main directions in the work of Fund “Sukhumi”. Lack of information about domestic violence and about available services for the victims is a serious problem in regions. The mobilizers from the organization get acquainted with national and local programs and disseminate this information; they also help beneficiaries to receive the needed services;

Fund “Sukhumi” studies the needs of potential victims among women and girls, provides information to the population on existing mechanisms of combating violence and advocates solution to local problems with the local self-governments through **women support centers** that operate in 9 municipalities of West Georgia. Interestingly, in order to deal with the lack of information in remote areas the geographic coverage of women’s support centers has increased considerably and now they include not only towns but also villages.¹⁵ In women’s support centers women can receive free psychological and legal consultations.¹⁶

In recent years women support centers have started to develop and implement projects independently. The projects are diversified and they include trainings for local self-government units (Kutaisi, Tskaltubo, Khoni, Senaki and Ozurgeti). On the initiative of women support centers once a year, in March, during Women’s Solidarity Week round table discussions are organized in Sakrebulo are attended not only by local self-government representatives, but also by local activists, the youth and the media. This is a kind of a report on activities carried out during the year.¹⁷

Fund “Sukhumi” actively cooperates with municipalities in providing **education, expertise, research, and consultancy services.**

The organization conducts annual trainings for local self-government representatives

14 “The Voice of Women“, information bulletin #7
<http://fsokhumi.ge/images/2017/8/pub/1/qartuli%207.pdf>

15 Fund “Sukhumi” summary publication for the project “Strengthening Women’s Rights in Western Georgia”, p. 5
<http://fsokhumi.ge/images/2017/12/public/1/Pdf.pdf>

16 “The Voice of Women“, information bulletin #7, p. 8
<http://fsokhumi.ge/images/2017/8/pub/1/qartuli%207.pdf>

17 Fund “Sukhumi” summary publication for the project “Strengthening Women’s Rights in Western Georgia”, p. 10
<http://fsokhumi.ge/images/2017/12/public/1/Pdf.pdf>

on the issues of domestic violence; also it organizes round table discussions involving local self-government bodies and local community¹⁸. On the initiative of Fund “Sukhumi” an agreement was signed with Senaki municipality Mayor’s office for conducting trainings on the issues of gender and gender violence for the representatives of Senaki municipality and youth groups.¹⁹ The Representatives of Mayor’s offices are the main carriers of the information about domestic violence against women for the villages located far from the municipality center. Fund “Sukhumi” has worked in this direction in Tskaltubo, Senaki, Ozurgeti, Terjola and Zugdidi and trained the Representatives of Mayor’s offices in respective administrative units.

As a result of cooperation between Fund “Sukhumi” and municipalities the practice of training the personnel of pre-school institutions (teachers, caregivers, methodologists and heads) on the issues of gender and domestic violence was introduced. The series of trainings were conducted with the personnel of pre-school institutions in Tskaltubo, Poti, Senaki municipalities.

Fund “Sukhumi” also implements joint research projects with local municipalities. For instance, under the joint project with Senaki municipality “Cooperation with Local Self-Government – for Gender Equality and Prevention of Domestic Violence”, a study was conducted in 14 communities of the municipality aiming at situational analysis of violence against women²⁰ and based on this research the report “Situational analysis of the problem of violence against women/domestic violence in Senaki municipality” was published.²¹

The organization has conducted research on the needs of self-governments - assessing the existing situation and work of municipality bodies, for example a study commissioned by Zugdidi municipality.²² The project involved the representatives of 48 communities, it included trainings for the representatives of self-governments

18 Fund “Sukhumi” summary publication for the project ”Strengthening Women’s Rights in Western”, pp.5 9-10
<http://fsokhumi.ge/images/2017/12/public/1/Pdf.pdf>

19 One more joint project
http://gac.at.ua/news/kidev_erti_ertoblivi_proekti/2015-02-24-280

20 “Situational analysis of the problem of violence against women/domestic violence in Senaki municipality”
<http://fsokhumi.ge/index.php/ka/newska/publicatia/5248-2018-12-13-17-17-23>

21 For the report of the study see:
<http://fsokhumi.ge/images/2018/12/pub/1/zigni-A5-elversia-1-st.pdf>

22 The report of the study: “Situational analysis of the problem of domestic violence in Zugi didi municipality”
<http://fsokhumi.ge/index.php/ka/newska/publicatia/6118-2019-12-02-18-16-27>

and community activists and it contributed to the involvement of self-governments in the issues of prevention of domestic violence, identification and management of the cases of violence and also to realizing and implementing the powers and obligations assigned to them by the legislative changes, also to better coordination between the stakeholders.

Fund “Sukhumi” provided consultancy services to Kharagauli, Samtredia, Kutaisi, Tskaltubo, Ozurgeti, Chiatura, Tsalenjikha, Khoni and Chokhatauri municipalities on improvement of gender equality action plan. The municipalities of Vani, Terjola, Lanchkhuti, Baghdati, Sachkhere and Tkibuli started the work on action plans following the close cooperation with Fund “Sukhumi”.²³ Also, the advisory group of Fund “Sukhumi” conducted activities in 15 municipalities for developing gender policies and organizing the work of local Gender Equality Councils.²⁴

As a result of consultations and support of Fund “Sukhumi” and other qualified NGOs we can talk about realization of gender policies locally. Some municipalities started implementation of support programs for victims of violence. For example, Khoni municipality introduced a relevant change into the 2018 budget; Kutaisi, Ozurgeti, Chokhatauri and Zestaponi municipalities also started work in this direction. Efforts for maintaining gender statistics have also started. Some municipalities have not only determined in their action plans procedures for integrating gender-sensitive approaches in staff selection, but have already begun to implement them (Tkibuli and Kutaisi municipalities).

Fund “Sukhumi” together with other partner organizations was involved in **the process of localization/ implementation of the national action plan for realization** of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security at the **local level**. The project aimed at popularization of the national action plan for implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 in 10 municipalities in 2018-2020, its harmonization with municipal action plans and implementing local policies taking into account the needs of conflict-affected women and girls.²⁵ As a result

23 Summary of consultancy services provided to local self-governments, p. 1
<http://fsokhumi.ge/images/2018/7/shexvedrebi/19/geo.pdf>

24 Summary of consultancy services provided to local self-governments, p. 1
<http://fsokhumi.ge/images/2018/7/shexvedrebi/19/geo.pdf>

25 Summary of the project “Georgia moves forward with localization of National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security“, UN Women, 13 February, 2019
<https://georgia.unwomen.org/ka/news/stories/2019/02/georgia-moves-forward-with-localization-of-national-action-plan>

of active partnership of Fund “Sukhumi” with Gender Equality Councils of **Zugdidi, Tsalenjikha and Tskaltubo** municipalities, local civil society, conflict-affected and IDP women and girls, a number of changes were made to municipal action plans of self-governing units and activities were planned for improving the living conditions of conflict-affected and IDP women and girls, for increasing their involvement in the decision making process at the municipal level and creating favorable conditions for implementation of peace initiatives.²⁶

While implementing the localization project, an interesting precedent was created in Tsalenjikha municipality²⁷ where the budget line for a gender equality project was included in 2019 budget and GEL 10,000 was allocated for implementation of four sub-projects: gender council empowerment; protection from domestic violence and prevention of violence; gender education in pre-school institutions and awareness raising on domestic violence; empowerment of vulnerable women groups and supporting economic activities. With the purpose of realizing these projects specific activities were included in Tsalenjikha gender equality action plan.

Moreover, Fund “Sukhumi” has produced a number of **policy documents, studies, manuals** that are oriented to implementation of gender equality mechanisms and empowerment of local self-governments in this direction. This includes publication of the **methodological guide** for assisting all the stakeholders in **monitoring and gender analysis of the local budget**.²⁸ The organization has conducted the research/analysis of municipality budgets and local gender policies of Kutaisi, Senaki and Ozurgeti with respect to gender parameters.²⁹ Fund “Sukhumi” has conducted activities for promotion of gender budgets and gender approaches in the process of budget planning. With the support of the organization the **practice of participatory budgeting** was implemented in Tskaltubo. In order to support gender mainstreaming and balanced social policies

26 Zugdidi, Road Map to National Action Plan 1325 (2018-2020)

<http://www.zugdidi.gov.ge/sites/default/files/okmi-4.pdf>;

On national action plan for implementation of UN resolution 1325

Tskaltubo, “On national action plan for implementation of UN resolution 1325”

<http://tskaltubo.gov.ge/post?id=399>;

27 Tsalenjikha municipality budget for 2019

<https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/4441130?publication=0>

28 A guide for monitoring and gender analysis of the local budget

<http://fsokhumi.ge/images/2016/28.01-28.02/Publik/2/Ge.pdf>

29 Gender analysis of the local budget

<http://fsokhumi.ge/index.php/ka/newska/kvleva/3121-ადგილობრივი-ბიუჯეტის-გენდერული-ანალიზი>

at the local level the Fund has advocated the ways of overcoming challenges with relevant institutions.³⁰

Fund “Sukhumi” has developed a **strategic guide for local self-government – “Implementing gender mainstreaming in municipalities”**.³¹ The document combines expert opinions and recommendations based on the experiences of Georgia (including Abkhazia) and four Visegrad countries (Hungary, Poland, Czech Republic and Slovakia). The guide is a methodological manual for assisting local self-governments in implementing gender oriented policies. It provides the list of important issues that should be taken into account in order to implement gender mainstreaming in local policies.³²

“**Gender mainstreaming in local self-government**” is another important publication of Fund “Sukhumi”. This is a collection of works of different experts from various countries based on the experience of Georgia and Visegrad countries aiming at advocating gender policies with local self-governments.³³

Moreover, Fund “Sukhumi” has developed and published a number of methodological manuals, including **draft action plan for gender equality for municipalities**, which is a pattern, a model for designing action plans adjusted to the needs of local groups.³⁴

As a result of cooperation with local self-government, public organizations and NGOs the reputation of Fund “Sukhumi” has grown considerably. The problems resolved in target municipalities are a clear evidence for this. The work performed by the organization is duly appreciated by the partners: “I admire the work you do. It is truly impressive and effective. You cooperate successfully with the local self-government. It is desirable that you expand your activities from local to the central level; you have all the necessary resources for that.”³⁵

Fund “Sukhumi” still continues its work against domestic violence against women in target municipalities with local self-government structures, as well as directly with the population.

30 pp. 3-4 <http://fsokhumi.ge/images/2018/7/shexvedrebi/19/geo.pdf>

31 Consultancy services for local self-government <http://fsv4.ge/index.php/ka/>

32 Strategic guide for local self-government – new publication of Fund “Sukhumi” <http://fsokhumi.ge/index.php/ka/newska/publicatia/4727-2018-06-30-08-14-47>

33 “Gender mainstreaming in local self-government” <http://fsokhumi.ge/index.php/ka/newska/publicatia/4493-2018-04-27-06-28-26>

34 Draft action plan for gender equality for municipalities <http://fsokhumi.ge/images/2018/7/public/2/samoqmedoge.pdf>

35 Evaluation from Karsta Neunroff - the representative of the donor organization, see Fund “Sukhumi” summary publication for the project “Strengthening Women’s Rights in Western Georgia” p. 12. <http://fsokhumi.ge/images/2017/12/public/1/Pdf.pdf>



CHAPTER III.

LEGAL ASPECTS OF MUNICIPAL INVOLVEMENT IN GENDER VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND RESPONSE

Domestic violence is a very common form of gender discrimination. Protection of women from discrimination and ensuring equal rights and opportunities with men is guaranteed by the Constitution of Georgia. Moreover, the state accepts the positive obligation to take special measures to ensure the essential equality of men and women and eliminate inequality³⁶. Also, the rights of mothers and children are protected by law.³⁷ The state supports and ensures equal rights for women and men in political, economic, social and cultural life.³⁸ These obligations apply to state as well as local self-government bodies.

Combating domestic violence is one of the priorities for the country as reflected in a number of reforms and legislative changes that deal with this issue.³⁹ Local self-government is involved in implementing policies against domestic violence and violence against women.

Ratification of the Istanbul Convention marked a new stage in the country's struggle against domestic violence and violence against women as its entry into force⁴⁰ led to harmonization of Georgian legislation with this international legislative act.

Istanbul Convention is the first European legally binding document that ensures protection of victims of violence including domestic violence and calls for the member states to take all the necessary measures in order to prevent all types of violent actions against women.

The convention envisages **implementation of measures at regional and local**

36 Constitution of Georgia, Art. 11.1, 11.3
<https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/30346?publication=35>

37 Ibid, Art. 30.2

38 Law of Georgia on Gender Equality, Art.4.1.
<https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/download/91624/8/ge/pdf>

39 Fund "Sukhumi" monitoring report: The Role of Law Enforcement Agencies and Existing Practices - Monitoring of Implementation of Legislation Changes against Domestic Violence and Violence against Women
<http://fsokhumi.ge/images/2019/7/pub/1/policia-el.pdf>

40 The Council of Europe 2011 Convention "On Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence" (Istanbul convention)
<https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/3789678?publication=0>

levels that would facilitate full realization of the purposes of the Convention. Namely, according to the Convention, the parties are obliged to take the necessary legislative and other measures to ensure that there are appropriate mechanisms to provide for effective co-operation between all relevant state agencies and regional authorities. Measures taken to protect and support victims and witnesses of all forms of violence covered by the scope of the Convention should aim at preventing secondary violence, the empowerment and economic independence of women victims of violence. The state should promote and conduct, on a regular basis and at all levels, awareness-raising campaigns or programs to increase awareness and understanding among the general public of the different manifestations of all forms of violence covered by the scope of this Convention and the need to prevent such violence. Importantly, the Convention obligates the signatories to take the necessary legislative or other measures to provide or arrange for, in an adequate geographical distribution, immediate, short- and long-term specialist support services to any victim subjected to any of the acts of violence covered by the scope of this Convention.⁴¹ With the purpose of harmonizing Georgian legislation with the Convention a change was introduced into the “Local Self-Government Code” of Georgia which now states that a **municipality may carry out activities promoting gender equality, prevention of violence against women and/or domestic violence, protection and support of victims of violence against women and/or domestic violence.**⁴²

According to the Law of Georgia on Gender Equality, municipality bodies, in accordance with legislative acts and also the normative administrative legal acts of the municipal Sakrebulo, develop and carry out activities to ensure detection and elimination of discrimination locally. A Mayor designates a focal point responsible for gender-related issues in the relevant Mayor’s office to study gender-related issues, plan activities to be performed and to coordinate appropriate measures within the municipality. Also, the budget of local self-government units, priorities of social and economic development, municipal programs and plans should be developed in such a way that any form of discrimination is excluded. State bodies, within the scope of their authority, provide organizational, informational and other kinds of assistance to local self-government bodies in order to prevent discrimination in their activities and protect universally recognized human rights.⁴³

41 The Council of Europe 2011 Convention “On Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence” (Istanbul convention), Art. 5, 7, 13, 18.2-3, 22

42 Local Self-Government Code, Art. 16.4
<https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/2244429?publication=41>

43 Law of Georgia on Gender Equality, Art. 13.1,1², 3

Self-government units in Georgia cover larger areas than in Europe. Inhabitants of remote and/or mountainous areas have difficulty accessing municipal services that are mainly located in the administrative center of the municipality. For this reason, there are **Mayor's Representatives in the administrative units of the municipality** to facilitate communication with the population. They act as intermediaries between the local government and the community and help improve communication and information exchange. They are appointed by the Mayor and their powers are determined by relevant regulations. These include providing the Mayor with information on the existing problems and possible solutions for the relevant area; collecting statistical and other data on Mayor's demand; ensuring that the local community is informed about the legal acts of the local self-government.⁴⁴

Effective and responsible actions of **Mayor's representatives** are crucial in disseminating information on programs, services and projects of local self-government bodies and reaching individual citizens, especially as majority of village population have no access to sources such as the internet. The present study has shown that there is a serious lack of information on the possibilities of victim support from the self-government. Thus, the efforts in this direction need to be intensified.

Georgian self-government bodies have very limited resources. Their budgets are rather modest. To overcome this challenge, Local Self-Government Code envisages the possibility for municipalities to implement **joint activities** on Mayor's decision and with Sakrebulo's approval. For the purpose of efficient exercise of the powers and for the delivery of quality services to population, municipalities may jointly establish a non-entrepreneurial (non-commercial) legal entity of private law or become members of a non-entrepreneurial (non-commercial) legal entity. Municipalities are authorized to set up a joint service. For the purpose of undertaking joint projects, they also have the right to enter into an agreement with another municipality merging budgetary funds.⁴⁵

Moreover, municipalities have the **right of transfrontier cooperation** – a self-government body may cooperate with foreign self-government authorities in accordance with the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Cooperation between Territorial Communities or Authorities and the legislation of Georgia.⁴⁶

Local self-governments have a special mechanism, a Municipal Gender Equality

44 The powers of the Mayor's Representative are generally standard, see, for instance, art.19 of "City of Kutaisi Municipality Mayor's Office Regulation" #9 of December 27, approved by the municipality Sakrebulo of the City of Kutaisi.
<https://www.matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/3959788?publication=0>

45 Local Self-Government Code, art. 21

46 Ibid, art. 22

Council (below - Gender Council) to ensure systematic work on gender-related issues and coordinated collaboration with the Gender Equality Council established by the Parliament of Georgia. This body is established by the municipal Sakrebulo and its composition, status, functions and authorities are defined by the Rules of Procedure of the municipal Sakrebulo and the regulations of the Municipal Gender Equality Council, which is approved by the relevant Sakrebulo.⁴⁷

On the basis of the Law of Georgia on Gender Equality, municipality Sakrebulos have established Gender Equality Councils and approved their regulations. These documents mainly follow the same sample and are very similar in different municipalities. Authorities, procedures of establishment and functioning of this body can be viewed on the example of Kutaisi Municipality Gender Equality Council.⁴⁸

Due to the complexity of the issue of violence against women and domestic violence, a number of state bodies are involved in combating this problem. The effectiveness of this fight is fully determined by the level of each party's awareness of their own role and proper fulfillment of their duties.

In order to **ensure systemic and coordinated work**, an Inter-Agency Commission on the Issues of Gender Equality, Violence against Women and Domestic Violence was created within the executive branch of the government⁴⁹. Its main aim is to coordinate, monitor and evaluate all the activities directed at prevention and elimination of all forms of violence covered by the scope of the Istanbul Convention.⁵⁰ The advisor to the Prime Minister of Georgia on Regional Issues is a member of the Inter-Agency Commission⁵¹ and his/her main role is to coordinate communication between state

47 Law of Georgia on Gender Equality, art. 13.1¹

48 Resolution #8 of December 27, 2017 of Kutaisi Municipality Sakrebulo on "Formation of Kutaisi Municipality Gender Equality Council and Adoption of its Regulations"
<https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/3959768?publication=0>

49 Law of Georgia on Gender Equality, art. 12.6
<https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/91624?publication=8>

50 Art. 4.L of Regulations of Inter-Agency Commission on the Issues of Gender Equality, Violence against Women and Domestic Violence adopted by the Resolution #286 of June 12, 2017 of the Government of Georgia
<https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/3698004?publication=0>

51 Resolution #155 of March 25, 2019 of the Government of Georgia on "Changes to Resolution #286 of June 12, 2017 of the Government of Georgia on Formation of Inter-Agency Commission on the Issues of Gender Equality, Violence against Women and Domestic Violence and Adoption of the Regulations"
<https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/4517992?publication=0>

government bodies and municipalities.⁵² In order to promote the principles of gender equality and develop mechanisms of eliminating violence against women and domestic violence Inter-Agency Commission has the right to request necessary information from state government bodies and relevant institutions in accordance with the procedure established by law.⁵³

2016-2017 Action Plan for combatting domestic violence envisaged awareness-raising activities to be carried out by municipalities which included trainings for the personnel of pre-school institutions and municipality bodies; organizing informational meetings in regions in particular for vulnerable groups of population, ethnic minorities; involving religious leaders in selected locations. Municipality bodies were tasked with the responsibility for implementing these activities.

The information requested by the Inter-Agency Commission from the State Audit Office on the activities implemented under the Action Plan indicate that due to the lack of a mechanism for requesting information from municipalities and breakdowns in communication, the Commission had no data on municipal involvement. The Inter-Agency Commission determined the duties of municipality bodies under the Action Plan but no specific body or focal points were identified, informed and involved in the process of planning. In order to overcome this deficiency, 2018-2019 Action Plan included development of mechanisms for cooperation with municipalities as a separate activity. Awareness-raising activities included in 2016-2017 National Action Plan are no longer envisaged in the new 2018-2020 plan.⁵⁴

The Government of Georgia adopted the **Action Plan for 2018-2020**⁵⁵ on Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence and the Measures to be Implemented for Protection of Victims (survivors), which sees as one of its objectives that the

52 Resolution #340 of June 26, 2018 of the Government of Georgia on “Adoption of the Regulations for the Administration of the Government of Georgia”, Art 2.0¹
<https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/4234622?publication=0>

53 Regulations of Inter-Agency Commission on the Issues of Gender Equality, Violence against Women and Domestic Violence Art. 5.A

54 Effectiveness Audit Report, p. 47

55 Resolution #175 of April 11, 2018 of the Government of Georgia on “Adopting the Action Plan for 2018-2020 on Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence and the Measures to be Implemented for Protection of Victims (survivors)”. On February 12, 2019 changes were introduced in the Resolution, but they did not affect the articles concerning local self-government.
<https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/4144947?publication=0>

legislation and national policies are in line with international standards. In order to achieve this goal several activities were planned in relation to local self-governments including

1. develop a mechanism for cooperation with municipalities with the participation of the existing gender equality councils and gender equality focal points (1.2.1);
2. develop guidelines on the existing legislation, policies and programs on violence against women and domestic violence issues and present them to municipalities (1.2.2);
3. support municipalities to mainstream violence against women and domestic violence issues in local policies and programs (1.2.3).

According to the Action Plan, the timeframe for the first two of the above-mentioned tasks were third and fourth quarters of 2018, while timeframe for supporting municipalities to mainstream violence against women and domestic violence issues in local policies and programs encompassed 2018-2020.

The Inter-agency Commission on Gender Equality, Violence against Women and Domestic Violence was identified as the lead responsible agency for implementation of the activities envisaged by the Action Plan. Partner organizations included: Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure of Georgia together with the Ministry of Justice of Georgia. The source of funding for these activities is the State Budget – administrative expenses under budget allocations.

The present study revealed that by the first half of 2019, activities outlined in the Action Plan had not been implemented in the target municipalities.

The Action Plan also covers implementing educational, information-sharing, sports and/or creative measures in Tbilisi and in the regions on violence against women and domestic violence issues and existing state-run services, especially targeting ethnic minorities.⁵⁶

To ensure that the activities outlined in the Action Plan against domestic violence provide an adequate response to existing challenges, it is essential that the commission improve analytical procedures, monitoring and communication at the national and municipal levels.⁵⁷ This needs to be done through increasing institutional and legislative

56 An activity under the Action Plan for 2018-2020 on Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence and the Measures to be Implemented for Protection of Victims (survivors)” - 3.2.2

57 Effectiveness Audit Report, p. 48

powers of the Inter-Agency Commission on the Issues of Gender Equality, Violence against Women and Domestic Violence as a coordinating body.

Capacity building of municipalities in the areas of gender equality also falls under the mandate of Gender Equality Council of the Parliament of Georgia,⁵⁸ whose members organize meetings on the topic of domestic violence in various municipalities, participate in meetings focusing on strengthening gender-sensitive policies in municipalities. They were also involved in the presentation of the study “Challenges for Female Mayoral Candidates in Georgia”.⁵⁹

Parliamentary Gender Equality Council has adopted 2018-2020 Action Plan⁶⁰ that envisages developing cooperation mechanisms with municipal Gender Equality Councils and gender equality focal points as well as female members of municipal Sakrebulo.⁶¹ Responsible parties for these activities, with the technical assistance of international organizations, are the Gender Equality Council of the Parliament of Georgia, civil society and Sakrebulo.

The 2018 Report of Gender Equality Council on 2018-2020 Action Plan states that the Council cooperates with municipal Gender Equality Councils and female members of Sakrebulo.⁶² In order to meet one of the objectives of the action plan, ensuring effective and coordinated work of state mechanisms in the field of gender equality, the following activities were implemented: coordination meeting on gender

58 Gender Equality Council of the Parliament of Georgia
<http://www.parliament.ge/ge/saparlamento-saqmianoba/komisiebi-da-sabchoebi-8/genderuli-tanasworobis-sabcho>

59 Gender Equality Council Report on 2017 Action Plan, p. 18-20
http://www.parliament.ge/ge/ajax/downloadFile/100245/GEC_Report_2017

60 2018-2020 Action Plan of Gender Equality Council of the Parliament of Georgia
http://www.parliament.ge/ge/ajax/downloadFile/90951/სამოქმედო_გეგმა_2018-2020_Webpage

61 An activity included in the 2018-2020 Action Plan of the Gender Equality Council of the Parliament of Georgia - 3.1

62 2018 Report of Gender Equality Council on 2018-2020 Action Plan, p. 4
http://www.parliament.ge/ge/ajax/downloadFile/109218/ანგარიში_2018

equality mechanisms existing at the local level, training sessions on the activities of the parliamentary Gender Equality Council and the process of designing the action plan. The first national conference “Gender Equality in Local Self-Government – Challenges and Opportunities” was held involving representatives of local Gender Equality Councils. Also, a regional conference “More Women’s Voices in Local Self-Government” was organized, which aimed to provide information to representatives of all twelve municipalities as well as civil society of Imereti region on women’s needs and the principles of gender-sensitive policies at the level of local self-government. The Chair of the Council addressed the annual conference of the Women Councilor’s Forum of Georgia where she spoke about the positive outcomes of increasing women’s representation in local self-government and central government. The Council website now shows an institutional mechanism of gender equality – an interactive map that contains information about municipal Gender Equality Councils, parliamentary Gender Equality Council and the Inter-agency Commission. The Gender Equality Council obtained the information for this map from 64 Sakrebulo.⁶³

These positive efforts are clearly admirable but definitely not sufficient. More cooperation with municipalities, meetings, information sharing, methodological support of gender equality councils and more encouragement are necessary in order to ensure that they are fully aware of their role and fulfil it. Moreover, more support is needed from the central government in developing and implementing gender-sensitive programs at the local level.

63 2018 report of Gender Equality Council on 2018-2020 action plan, pp.: 13-14
http://www.parliament.ge/ge/ajax/downloadFile/109218/სტრატეგია_2018



CHAPTER IV.

ACHIEVEMENTS AND POSITIVE TRENDS IDENTIFIED IN THE PROCESS OF MONITORING

A study conducted by Fund “Sukhumi” revealed certain advances with regard to combating violence against women, domestic violence and support of victims and some increase in gender sensitivity in municipalities in general, which is definitely a welcome development.

First of all, it is important to focus on the work of **Gender Equality Councils** (below Councils) with local self-governments. They are relatively newly introduced institutions, but in spite of certain drawbacks they **facilitate inclusion of gender issues in the local political agenda**. Gender policy has become a serious topic for the local self-government.



“The issue of violence is one of the priorities for Ozurgeti municipality and it was brought to the forefront by the Gender Equality Council” (Ozurgeti, in-depth interview).



“You could say that the Gender Council is behind all the activities, we enliven things with new initiatives. We have made gender into a hot topic in our municipality” (Baghdati, focus group).

Besides, the Council lobbies for improving support for victims of violence:



“It was on the Council’s decision that support for victims of violence was planned and included in the budget” (Tskaltubo, in-depth interview).

Within their limited resources the Councils try to **contribute to awareness-raising of municipality personnel and improve their competence**. For this purpose they actively cooperate with civil society organizations. The Councils express their willingness to cooperate and develop in order to perform their duties better.




“Improving the competence of the new members of the Council was crucial and Fund “Sukhumi” did us a great service” (Senaki, focus group).




“I have done a training course offered by Fund “Sukhumi” that focused on gender equality and capacity building of the Councils” (Samtredia, focus group).

Mayor’s Representatives in villages from Vani municipality commented that they had had training on gender issues and believed such practice to be very important. Also, representatives of budgetary and financial departments were trained on the issues of gender budgeting.


Councils work with **local population** providing them with information on the **concept of violence, its forms and protection mechanisms** –

 ***“The Council will implement a number of projects and initiatives that initially will be aimed at raising public awareness, which include various activities for pre-school institutions, schools and village community” (Vani, focus group).***

In some target municipalities it was emphasized that gradually local self-government bodies come to realize more and more their role in combating domestic violence against women and try to **make their services more accessible for the local population**. For instance, a focus group participant from Samtredia mentioned that often representatives of the self-government body personally assist individuals in filling out application forms and if needed, refer them to relevant bodies or agencies. This is certainly a positive trend. Similarly, an in-depth interview in Ozurgeti revealed that

 ***“Members of self-government, Sakrebulo, village deputies, everyone is involved in the process. Cooperation within the branches is really good, deputies often come with requests, e.g. in a village in this particular family the situation is such and such, how can we help? The response starts immediately. Through the same deputies we provide information that we have a particular assistance program and they can get help” (Ozurgeti, in-depth interview).***

Under the aegis of the Council the practice of developing strategic documents is implemented, new action plans are designed that outline the activities to be carried out by the Council and local self-government bodies, performance reports are produced. This very positive practice is relatively new and is introduced step by step in all municipalities. For instance, Senaki Council has developed guidelines on the role of self-government in the referral process. Description of functions and responsibilities of the Mayor’s Representative now outline the procedure for identifying the cases of violence and responding to them. An action plan for the Gender Council has been developed in Zugdidi municipality too.

 ***“With active support from Fund “Sukhumi” we have designed our action plan. I think it is very good and I believe it is a prerequisite for active work of the Gender Council” (Zugdidi, in-depth interview).***

In several municipalities Gender Councils have started searching for information and studying the statistics of domestic violence (how many cases have been reported, how many orders have been issued). According to the participants, knowing and analyzing this data that reflect troubles of specific people is crucial in order to appreciate the scope of the problem, but also to determine adequate **response activities**, plan future programs and consequently, perform the functions of the self-government more efficiently.



“The role of self-government is to care for strengthening the families behind the statistics” (Baghdati, focus group).

The monitoring has shown that some municipalities take active steps to **improve and refine communication with the community**, so that more people have access to municipal services. They work, with NNLEs under the local self-government among others, to increase the reporting rate for victims of violence and raise awareness in this respect.



“A number of trainings and meetings have been held with teachers as well as parents. 99% of nursery schools try to bring up the children correctly to ensure prevention. Activities on these issues are organized frequently for children. Raising public awareness is a priority” (Kutaisi, focus group).

It is noteworthy that **gender balance in Sakrebulo has improved** over the last years. Moreover, **female members of staff feel more support**. There are six women in Baghdati Sakrebulo including two committee chairs and two deputy heads of fractions. In Lanchkhuti mothers with children aged under 12 months have some privileges while getting the same salary as others. Zugdidi municipality reception has a children’s area, where mothers can leave their children for some time. Ozurgeti municipality has eight women. Women are well represented in the executive branch as well. As one of the participants said:



“They are very motivated active women who can defend their own and others’ interests” (Ozurgeti, focus group).

In several cases the study has found that there are very ambitious plans in place and there is readiness to implement these plans, in particular concerning inter-municipal cooperation. Such an innovative project will surely benefit the fight against violence

against women and needs to be encouraged by the local as well as central government. At the initial stage this implies financial and intellectual support.



“A shelter for victims needs to be established and not the ordinary type. The women who come here would have fully guaranteed jobs. This would be too difficult for one municipality, but if Ozurgeti, Chokhatauri and Lanchkhuti are together, we can do it. We are thinking about it. We want to involve a Member of Parliament. We don’t simply think about it, we’ve discussed it and we are considering designing a project on this” (Ozurgeti, in-depth interview).

Ozurgeti municipality is also actively involved in supporting professional training for victims. There is a vocational college where women can take training courses, as it is rightly believed that a financially strong, independent woman is better protected from violence.

Khoni community is looking forward to opening a vocational college in the near future, which was actively supported by the Council. This college will allow women who are victims of violence to receive training with other trainees. In the focus group, the participants said that their vocational training means a job, economic independence and this will help prevent violence. Another interesting example can be found in Tskaltubo, the municipality that has the highest statistics of restraining orders in Imereti region. To deal with this challenge with the help of Fund “Sukhumi” they organized a series of training sessions for the personnel of NNLE of preschool education institutions, nursery school heads and teachers focusing on their awareness-raising in the issues of domestic violence and mechanisms for combating the problem of violence. In every nursery school in Tskaltubo violence response groups were formed comprising the school manager, a methodology expert and teacher. Groups work with parents as well and this is an excellent way of disseminating information. Special booklets on violence-related issues were also published.

It is essential that municipalities have started and/or added to the **programs of support for victims of domestic violence against women**. Although the state of affairs at present is far from desirable, the steps made in this direction give us hope that the efforts will intensify and the scale will gradually increase. The monitoring has shown that victim support is mainly limited to a one-time assistance (the amount varies in different municipalities) and covering rent. Gender Councils try to get involved in the process of budget planning so that the document provides guarantees of victim support. For instance –



“Kutaisi budget for 2019 reflects recommendations of the Gender Council. This was the result of a long period of work with various municipal services to ensure that ideas and recommendations did not remain unrealized. We wanted to have tangible outcomes and had intensive communication with social services, pre-school education agency. Deputy Mayors were also involved in the process” (Kutaisi, focus group).

Kutaisi has a one-time assistance program for victims of domestic violence and violence against women when they leave a shelter.

The share of spending on victims of violence from the local budget is still modest. Besides, **programs oriented specifically to the victims of domestic violence are very rare.** They are mostly supported through other social programs –



“We have found legal mechanisms and introduced changes into some social programs. The category ‘victim of violence’ has been added to the list of potential beneficiaries. With this change, a victim of violence can receive one-time assistance of GEL 300 ...” (Baghdati, focus group).

However, there are certain positive developments in this respect. Municipal services in **Zugdidi municipality** have been tasked with including gender component in their budget. Also, the one-time assistance has doubled in monetary value from GEL 400 in the past to GEL 800. There are other support programs for children, to provide them with food. In addition, there is a crisis centre established with the support of non-governmental organizations and co-funded by the municipality.

Tskaltubo municipality has a small-scale program of protecting victims of domestic violence and violence against women that was initiated by the Gender Equality Council. Its budget covers accommodation costs for persons having the status of a victim of violence, their visits to gynecologist, reproductologist and all necessary medical tests. They also offer assistance to single mothers. **Lanchkhuti** municipality budget has a special line on victims of violence covering one year’s accommodation costs for them. Besides, social programs are fully oriented to women’s needs. There is a screening program used mainly by women. The municipality also offers co-funding for medical examination. A program of support for victims of violence was included in the **Ozurgeti municipality** budget’s program line. Allocations for this line have increased due to rising rate of reporting. At present, a victim of violence is entitled to one-time assistance of GEL 500.

Lanchkhuti municipality budget states clearly that a victim of violence is granted the cost of accommodation. Unlike many other municipalities, a victim may be included in the program without obtaining an official status. However, limited number of beneficiaries is due to low rate of reporting –

“On completion of the program we conduct monitoring, how many applications there were, how many beneficiaries the program had. After the analysis we draw conclusions whether the program should be continued or if additional resources are required, etc. As for assistance for victims of violence, at this stage there is no need to expand this program as the number of applications is really low” (Lanchkhuti, in-depth interview).

Ozurgeti municipality has a civil budgeting program, which, consists of only infrastructural projects at the moment. With the efforts of a member of Ozurgeti Gender Council, some funds may be allocated for the victims of violence next year –

“This is my wish and citizens will be submitting their proposals/ programs for gender-oriented projects. Selection happens through electronic voting system and this rules out bias and nepotism” (Ozurgeti, in-depth interview).

Similar programs are being implemented in other target municipalities of Fund “Sukhumi”, e.g. Tskaltubo and Zugdidi.

All of the above-mentioned indicates that certain changes do take place in the desired direction, although at a greater or smaller scale and with varying success in different municipalities. On this route, local self-governments have to overcome a number of obstacles many of which will be discussed in the following chapter.





CHAPTER V.

CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED IN THE PROCESS OF MONITORING

The monitoring highlighted a number of problems and challenges faced by the municipalities. Some of them are subjective and they are related to ineffective work and general weakness of local self-government bodies, while others have objective reasons.

First of all, the main trend which can be seen in many municipalities is the lack of **assertive activities, ability to act with initiative and enthusiasm** which is also related to **low competency**. This is reflected in overdependence on the central government and expectation of instructions and directives from the top. This has a negative impact on the efficiency of work of local self-government bodies and local authorities. For the sake of fairness it should be noted that the level of independence of self-governments is limited, especially in terms of fiscal decentralization and the central government does not exhibit any willingness to allocate resources locally. As a result we observe the vicious circle.

Municipalities try to be keep up with modern trends and they succeed in this with varying success. **The study identified the difference between the target self-government units in taken efforts and competencies in combating gender violence**. Alongside with more or less successful municipalities there are weaker units. It is remarkable that the positive outcomes are mainly the results of the efforts of enthusiastic civil servants rather than of municipality policies in general. Therefore, it is critically important to raise gender awareness and gender sensitivity of local civil servants which should be reflected in implementation of gender equality issues in local policies and programs –



“In recent years we have understood what should be the general vision in terms of gender perspective; however, there are people who do not have such vision and education. That’s why we face a lots of challenges and in local self-governments there are number of officials who do not realize that gender policy is part of the national policy” (Baghdati, focus group).

Unfortunately, **the lack of gender sensitivity and knowledge of gender issues is still problematic with local civil servants**, which is often reflected in **discrimination of active women on the basis of gender** –



“You can still find people who cannot understand the scale of the problem and their own roles in prevention of this problem. At a Sakrebulo meeting when a woman member of Sakrebulo was raising a sensitive question on a burning issue she received a rude remark: “Stop squeaking you, girl! Shut up!” We protested but we did not receive support from other men. They considered it as a joke, not as discrimination. This was really unpleasant” (Ozurgeti, in-depth interview).

This specific example clearly demonstrates how important it is to train municipality personnel, otherwise it is hard to ensure protection of victims and support their interests in these conditions.

This problem is even more topical in villages that are far from the municipality center. **It is important to work with of Mayor's Representatives in those villages and to raise their awareness and competences** on the issues of equality of men and women and on domestic violence against women, which will help them to disseminate accurate information among the population and to support them if needed. For example, Mayor's Representatives in the villages of Zugdidi district had training only once - in 2015 with the help of Fund "Sukhumi" and they have not received any training since. Strong self-government at the village level means well-informed and well-protected local population and this concept is fully understood by some of the representatives of local self-government –



“The role of self-governments should be increased at the level of village heads. We should start our work from this level. Mayor's Representatives in village should take on more responsibility. They are the first to get all the necessary information and if this resource is not used, it will always be hard to identify problems. A person addresses police after going through all stages of violence which has been witnessed by the whole village but everyone probably turned a blind eye to this” (Baghdati, focus group).

Incompetence is closely linked with low reporting rate as in the atmosphere of patriarchal mentality and gender stereotypes the **risk of secondary victimization** from local authorities or at best, indifference and failure to take the information further makes it unlikely that the victim will reveal her problem and ask for support from the municipality. For example, in Khoni no cases of appeal to local self-government were registered. This was explained by the focus group in the following way:



“The village authorities do not have proper education on how they should respond to violence. They argue that in their villages there are no cases of conflicts and violence has never happened. They believe that it is not their business to interfere in family affairs. These people have never been trained and they have no idea how they should act in such circumstances. This is the reason why there are no cases of appeals” (Khoni, focus group).

Respondents correctly noted that amid the atmosphere of apathy the **victims lack confidence in the capabilities of institutions**. Unfortunately, these two factors exacerbate each other.



“There is a factor of mistrust. The role of the state in general is questionable. The victims have no confidence in the state and thus, we cannot expect from them to rely on self-government” (Baghdati, focus group).

The study found in almost all meetings that **municipality personnel lack trainings and educational programs**; they pointed out that educational resources are available only through NGOs and they are not accessible for everyone.



“We are grateful to NGOs for what they do, but we cannot rely on the NGOs only as this is the responsibility of the state. The state should undertake to train civil servants on gender issues” (Zugdidi, focus group).

In addition, the participants noted that, to their discontent, they do not receive intellectual support and training needed to fulfill the duties they are assigned –



“The state demands that the municipalities implement gender budgeting, adopt specific programs for referral of the victims of violence. Paradoxically, at the same time, the government does not care that the personnel cannot tell if something is a gender budget or not. If the state does not provide proper training, are there any other institutions where this is taught?” (Zugdidi, focus group).

At the same time municipalities try to keep up with the requirements; for example, they have focal points for gender equality. However, unfortunately quite often due to the lack of knowledge these are only formal positions –



“When a person runs quite a large department and they are given an additional responsibility, are assigned the position of gender focal point, they must receive at least one training. In our case we had a gender focal point who never took initiative. You cannot expect from such a person to have a gender perspective on programs and not surprisingly they never proposed any initiatives” (Zugdidi, focus group).

The respondents were unanimous in assessing **the challenges existing with regard to awareness- raising of local population**. In some municipalities there were no registered cases of appeals by victims which was correctly assessed not as absence of violence but as prevalence of **stereotypes** existing in the society and lack of support for victims. The respondents practically unequivocally pointed that it is **necessary to work with the population**, to intensify educational programs that will help the society to overcome the stigma and to confront abusers rather than victims and to demonstrate intolerance to violence –



“I cannot believe that we do not have victims, just the level of awareness on this topic is very low” (Vani, focus group);



“The absence of appeals from victims is related to stereotypes and it is not easy to destroy them. You need years for that. People need more education for that.” (Lanchkhuti, in-depth interview).

The study found one case of an **alternative explanation for the absence of appeals which is related to lack of awareness and failure to recognize facts of violence against women.**



“We do not have the problem of violence in our district. We have a really cultured community and there are no cases of violence against women. If there are such appeals, we will respond adequately” (Lanchkhuti, in-depth interview).

However, most members of the same focus group stressed the influence of stereotypes and stigma on the victims which forces them to hide the problem –



“Women are reserved, they are not willing to talk and to disclose their problems as they consider them shameful. Probably more work is needed to raise the awareness of the society” (Samtredia, focus group).

Lack of funding is the most acute problem that all municipalities share. This problem is equally topical for all and it has a very negative impact especially on provision and scale of services tailored to the needs of the victims of domestic violence. Municipal programs are mainly one-time and they cannot ensure long-term support. For this reason, it is impossible to fund professional training programs for victims and implementation of employment programs, etc. The lack of financing limits the work of the municipalities for prevention of violence and makes implementation of municipal programs for rehabilitation of abusers very difficult. For majority of municipalities this issue has low priority –



“We really have not included any activities for such people in our programs and I think that first of all we should work on awareness raising, as the person should have desire to be included in such programs” (Lanchkhuti, in-depth interview).

In the process of monitoring the respondents often noted that a lot of effort and lobbying are needed to increase the funding by even one Tetri. Limited resources are the main barriers to implementation of innovative projects –



“Unfortunately there are no social services available which are fully adapted to the needs of victims. Temporary residences and shelters do not ensure full rehabilitation of victims... they have problems with employment, they are not able to pay utility bills and cannot handle the problems of elementary hygiene and living conditions... it is crucial to offer the victims psychological counselling that would prevent them from returning back to the abuser” (Tskaltubo, in-depth interview).

The study participants believe that **the responsibilities of local self-government, unlike the allocated financial resources, are expanding dramatically.** In these conditions they cannot allocate adequate funding for all programs –



“It is unacceptable to give the self-government more responsibilities without increasing their budgets. Unfortunately, everything is linked with funding. If you have limited financial resources, it does not matter how you try to allocate them, it is impossible to finance everything, including the problem of violence” (Lanchkhuti, in-depth interview).

Limited resources and lack of competence have negative effect on the ability to carry out municipality-wide research, to assess fully and fairly the existing situation and needs. During the monitoring it was frequently noted that the self-government bodies did not possess full information about the topicality and scale of the problem and the existing needs. They try to fill this gap by monitoring the cases from the practice but it is not enough to get the full picture.



“Unfortunately we cannot undertake full-scale research; it would require huge funds. Therefore, we need to have some statistics and we already have introduced some innovations: we make a record of incoming letters; we keep track of the issues which women address in these letters, which are the most burning problems for them, etc.” (Terjola, focus group).

As an exception, such research is carried out with the help of NGOs. For instance, the members of Zugdidi focus group spoke about the study conducted in cooperation with Fund “Sukhumi”. However, the majority have only a vague idea of the situation with domestic violence in their municipalities. The lack of information about the situation and needs in the municipalities often leads to **incorrect ranking of priorities, lack of programs adapted to the real needs of population and problems with goal-oriented budget planning** -



“We do not really understand well what we need more. We do not make needs assessment. For example, we have program of assisting veterans with 100 GEL. We have 600 such persons in total and can you imagine who receives such assistance? - the people who have salaries around GEL1700. It is really irrational to give 100 GEL to a person who has the salary of 1700 GEL. These funds could be allocated for the victims of violence” (Khoni, focus-group).

Also, everyone agreed that in regions it is almost impossible to receive psychological assistance. In case of proper allocation of resources the municipalities might be able to offer such services to the population. Recruiting one or two psychologists does not require expenses that cannot be met by self-governing units. Thus, it is mainly up to the willingness and priority ranking by the authorities. –



“Unfortunately we do not have psychologist, although we really need to have one. Even one psychologist would do a lot in the municipality” (Terjola, focus-group).

Besides, it was found that due to the fact that the municipalities give less priority to the issue of gender-based violence, the activities aiming at combating violence are not included in separate programs and they are only a small part of other programs. For this reason the issue of violence against women and domestic violence is overshadowed, it is not adequately prioritized and self-government is not focused on these issues to the desired degree –



“Our budget is small and we will always have such attitude... [violence against women and domestic violence] has to be included and added to some other program... such additions always become lost” (Baghdati, focus group).

The focus-group participants believe that **the problem of violence should not be scattered in other programs**. This problem needs specific programs with due financing.

The participants of the study noted that **Gender Equality Councils should be more actively involved in planning and adopting local budgets** in order to ensure that gender issues are reflected in the final documents. No finance committee or any other committee can revise the existing projects from gender perspective better than Gender Equality Councils. Therefore, municipality bodies have to give more attention to Gender Equality Councils and take their recommendations into account. “



The councils have to review the budgets in order to adopt gender-balanced programs” (Baghdati, focus-group).

There are number of challenges in the work of Gender Equality Councils. This is a relatively new institution and according to the respondents, they get used to applying this mechanism in practice little by little. The Councils are not equally strong in all self-governing units. Positive gender initiatives implemented in municipalities, as a rule, are the outcome of the activities of the Councils. However, the participants pointed to a number of challenges which include: Councils being established only for the sake of formality; infrequent meetings; problems with attendance and quorum; unnecessarily high number of members; low motivation, etc. According to one of the respondents –



“No matter how we try to embellish the work of the Council, it won’t work. We should be open and frank. Unfortunately, the Councils are not fully operational yet. We managed to meet only once thanks to the efforts of Fund “Sukhumi” and we adopted the action plan at last. But this is not effective work” (Zugdidi, focus group).

Politically unstable environment also affects the work of Councils negatively.



“Political temperature has been high in Zugdidi municipality recently – changing the Mayor, elections. All this influences our work and it hampers our activities” (Zugdidi, focus group).

The Gender Equality Council of Khoni municipality **has still not adopted the action plan. Excessive number of council members** (18) is also a problem. Respondents believe that it would be effective to reduce the number of members and to select persons who are really interested in gender issues. Ozurgeti Gender Equality Council member noted that it is a problem to gather all the members of the council for meetings. It is hard to achieve the quorum even once in every three months. It was noted that male council members are less interested and motivated –



“If you are a member of the council and you do not respect this body, how should you expect respect from others? During the last meetings the quorum was never achieved, male members never have time for the meetings. This is not a serious attitude” (Ozurgeti, in-depth interview).

Infrequent meetings also affect the effectiveness of the Councils –



“All of this is only a formality. This is not real involvement that we expect. We don’t like it at all and we should change this... You cannot cover all the issues if you meet only once in three months. Everything is changing too rapidly. We should meet at least monthly. The Council should be more dynamic and their work should be visible (Khoni, focus group).

The study participants are not well-acquainted with 2018-2020 on Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence and the Measures to be Implemented for Protection of Victims (survivors) and with recommendations of Inter-Agency Commission for municipalities. Some of them **still have not adopted gender policy documents, including gender equality strategy and/or gender equality action plan.**

Inaccessibility of services and existing bureaucratic barriers also often create problems. Despite the fact that municipalities have full discretion to be flexible in developing municipal programs and adapting them to the needs of beneficiaries, or to modify the criteria according to the real needs, it is still a challenge that the services are inaccessible to potential beneficiaries **due to inability to adjust to the criteria.** The depth of the problem is demonstrated by the fact that even with scarce financing the budgeted resources cannot be fully used as potential beneficiaries do not meet the criteria. We can say that to some extent **the criteria have turned into barriers** for municipalities in providing budgeted funds to the beneficiaries. This situation leads to disappointment in victims or potential victims, which, naturally, negatively impacts the rate of appeals –



“let’s take an example of a victim of violence who has a house and does not want to live in a shelter but requires our support. We are restricted in supporting such people as our program focuses only on the victims who left shelters. It is a problem that because of restrictions in the program the victims cannot get real support. I think that these criteria should be revised. When we fail to support victims, the information is spread that the municipality does not have the program and the number of appeals decreases. With no appeals we cannot implement the program that could offer real help to victims” (Kutaisi, focus-group).

Municipalities support the victims based on legal residence, only those **whose addresses are registered within the municipality territory** while the actual place of residence is neglected. Thus, some people who need assistance cannot receive the support in the places where they actually live, while changing the registration address is connected with additional efforts and is sometimes complicated for them. Also, **having the status of a victim is a necessary criterion for receiving assistance** in many cases –



“We support only those citizens who are registered in our municipality. The program also has other restrictions and if we register the victim we should specify that she has a status of the victim. Many of them do not have the status and they are left without assistance” (Terjola, focus-group)

However, there are some municipalities who try to adjust as much as possible to the needs of the victims of violence and do not limit the number of beneficiaries. In Lanchkhuti, for example, a victim of violence can receive the assistance without having the restraining order. She can present two witnesses, for example her neighbor, relative or co-villager to prove the fact of violence. Zugdidi also has a more flexible attitude –



“We study the appeals. We analyze cases of those beneficiaries who cannot be supported; if there are many such beneficiaries who cannot receive the assistance within the programs we revise the criteria and we disseminate information about that” (Zugdidi, focus-group).

It has to be stated that majority of the local population do not have information about the ways to combat domestic violence, their rights, services and programs for supporting the victims from which they can benefit in case of need. The majority of respondents understands and demonstrates that **awareness of the society is the main challenge** and it hampers support of the victim as well as combatting and preventing violence. It is crucial to disseminate the information about domestic violence and the ways to combat it in order to ensure that the problem awareness grows and victims receive support from the society. If the rooted mentality is a problem of the population, it is the responsibility of the state and local self-government to ensure that existing biases change and the information is disseminated –



“If people are not duly informed, the public awareness will remain on the same level and they will argue that domestic violence is the business of only their family. This is the reason why we do not have registered appeals and victims” (Khoni, focus-group).

The monitoring participants agreed that the lack of information among the population is the main cause for low number or absence of appeals on the issues of violence against women and domestic violence. Paradoxically, some representatives of self-government openly admitted that the lack of appeals comforts them because **if the number of potential beneficiaries increased, they would not have sufficient resources –**



“To be frank, it would be inconvenient if many victims asked for assistance as we have limited resources. If the victim is not sure that the support services are available, she will not come. Not knowing if she will get help or not, no one will come for that” (Baghdati, focus-group)

The study has demonstrated that the **internet is the main source of dissemination of information for municipalities**. The information about programs and news is uploaded on their web-pages and shared through the social media. As the majority of rural population do not have access to the internet, it lowers the chance that the news can reach the beneficiaries. –



“Information on all our current programs can be found on our web-page and Mayor’s Representatives systematically spread it in the community. We make periodic reports to the population. This is also another source of dissemination of information” (Terjola, focus-group).

The Mayor’s Representatives could play a role as the source of information, however, as mentioned before, they lack the knowledge and qualification on gender issues. For example, an interviewee from Lanchkhuti noted:



“Each village has its Representative and through them information reaches every point”, but later pointed out that “the number of appeals is very low due to the low awareness of population” (Lanchkhuti, in-depth interview).

Spreading information by newspapers, regional television, radio or by information boards in public places is less common. The study noted that they **meet the population** more or less frequently and they talk with them about municipality plans and programs. However, these efforts are clearly not enough. This is especially true for the villages which are far from the administrative centre –

“Last year Fund “Sukhumi” invited us to the village of Khurcha. We talked about infrastructure programs. I still remember people’s interested faces. They had no information about these programs. They talked about the problems, for example about the need to arrange drainage systems and when I informed them that the funds for this problem had already been allocated in the budget, they were quite surprised. This is our defect. Some people do not get information from the internet or from the booklets but they remember word of mouth information well” (Zugdidi, focus group).

Municipalities try to spread the information by other means also, for example, through the representatives of education resource centres, nursery schools, the police –

“We informed the police that we have the program and they can refer victims to us. It is important to improve the competencies of Mayor’s Representatives to ensure that they can correctly refer the victims. It is important to retrain nursery school teachers” (Vani, focus-group).





CHAPTER VI.

COOPERATION AMONG MUNICIPAL BODIES, COORDINATION WITH THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT AND ACTORS OF THE REFERRAL MECHANISM

Representative and executive bodies in self-governing units are closely linked and perform many of their duties jointly. Consequently, harmonious cooperation between them is an essential condition of smooth operation of municipalities. Sakrebulo and Mayor's offices are of course political bodies and this is a factor that needs to be taken into consideration. In this respect the study has identified varying patterns. For instance, the participants of Kutaisi focus group emphasized that **Gender Equality Council is one place where people of radically opposing views cooperate well**. It was also mentioned that recommendations of the Gender Council were reflected in the 2019 budget, which was the result of a long period of work with various municipal services. Kutaisi Gender Council worked with the Mayor's office and pre-school education agency and as a result an additional third nursery school remained open during summer. On the Council's initiative and with the help of an NGO, new regulations concerning sexual harassment were introduced into the statutes of Sakrebulo and the Mayor's office. The results of this successful cooperation have been really beneficial for local women. Healthy cooperation between the Council and the Mayor/Sakrebulo were discussed in Baghdati focus group too.


Unfortunately, these experiences are not universal. Gender Equality Council in Ozurgeti often turns into a ground for confrontation between the Mayor's office and Sakrebulo, which ultimately reduces the chances of implementing useful initiatives and is detrimental for the process:



“Our relationships are not bad, but they are far from ideal. We don't have a chance to bring the Council's ideas to life, because we know that someone from the Mayor's office will clip the wings. So, when the Councils were formed, it would have been better to ensure that they had a more flexible structure, that executive and representative branches had equal powers. They would have been more willing to cooperate. Now, it seems that we are fighting with our bare hands to prove that the idea of the Council is very important and its needs should be integrated in the budget. The Mayor's office thinks that the Council is part of Sakrebulo and that we are asking too much. For instance, this year we managed to present a project for the budget – women in defence of their rights. However, it was not approved and we could do nothing. It seems that we need to wait and see what the Mayor's office will plan so that we can adapt our ideas to their plans. This reduces the powers of the Council greatly and makes its work inefficient” (Ozurgeti, in-depth interview).

According to the study participants, it is advisable that municipal bodies **give more consideration to the suggestions of Gender Equality Councils** and respect their competence in the issues of gender equality. They believe that Gender Councils are better equipped to revise existing programs taking into account gender perspectives

than financial or any other commissions of Sakrebulo. Thus, neglecting the council's involvement in this respect is believed to diminish its role. –


 ***“Social programs go through several commissions in Sakrebulo and may bypass the Council. This means that you do not recognize its mandate. Cooperation would establish democratic principles within the branches and change a lot of things for the better at representative and executive levels” (Khoni, focus group).***


Some participants believe that functions should be divided among the members of the Council. This would make its operation more productive

 ***“It should be assigned who's responsible for what” (Zugdidi, focus-group).***


Municipal bodies lack competence and material resources for handling the challenge independently. So, **close cooperation with the central government**, their advice, recommendations, intellectual and financial support are crucially important for self-governing units. On the other hand, local self-government bodies are closer and much more accessible for the local population than national authorities. Consequently, efficient coordination between them is necessary for the information on state policies and implemented projects to reach the local community.

The participants of the study remarked with regret that **relationship with central government bodies is frequently too general, superficial and formal –**

 ***“We cooperate with the Inter-Agency Commission, but not very often. As the time goes we intersect less and less. You could say that they need this only for their reports and the communication revives only in the reporting period” (Baghdati, focus group).***

 ***“We have letters requesting information from Public Defender's office and various state institutions and we send relevant information. The municipality has had no experience of such cooperation with the Inter-Agency Commission in this respect” (Senaki, focus group).***

This problem comes through very clearly in a response of one of the participants from Ozurgeti:

 ***“There is no active cooperation from the government's side. Our cooperation with state authorities is limited to search for some statistics or responding to their questions and this is all mainly done as a formality. Frankly, I don't even believe that they use this information anywhere.***



I wouldn't call it cooperation that two or three times a year they send standard questions to all municipalities and collect some very general and uninformative data. This is not cooperation" (Ozurgeti, in-depth interview).

In the opinion of some of the respondents, even when they are **asked for their feedback and recommendations**, this seems more like a **simple formality**, as the time given to get acquainted with a lengthy document and provide recommendations is inadequate for this purpose.



"We only get two or three days, or even one day and that is not enough. Sometimes these are 30-40 page documents and it is physically impossible to go over them in such a short time" (Vani, focus group).

The same can be said about **interaction at the regional level**. For instance, focus group participant from Khoni remembered a case when they were asked to give recommendations concerning a lengthy document sent by the State Representative on the next day, which was impossible. As a result, this kind of cooperation is believed to be a pure formality.



"There should be meetings, discussions and recommendations will follow. This is how I understand cooperation" (Khoni, focus group).

As an example of best practice, a participant from Ozurgeti mentioned active and useful cooperation of the local Gender Council with the Majoritarian MP who provides them with information on new developments and together they discuss implementation of future projects. The participant added that unfortunately, this experience is a rare exception from the rule.

Municipality representatives do not feel they are truly involved in the processes. It must be noted that they expect the initiative to come from the national authorities and choose to wait. They prefer to receive messages with specific information and instructions rather than obtain information themselves.



"If they didn't send it, then it was not necessary. Why should I search on the parliament webpage if by any chance I have some duties, obligations, functions?!" (Zugdidi, focus-group).

Representatives of Kutaisi municipality state that they cooperate with the Gender Council of the Parliament of Georgia, but no similar claim can be made about the Inter-Agency Commission. Although some examples of interaction can be cited, they are of a completely formal nature. This is particularly true with regard to the offices of State Representatives, whose communication on gender issues is limited to online exchanges.

A participant of an in-depth interview from Lanchkhuti remarked on having had a discussion with representatives of central government on the municipality's limited resources. Even though the government official recognized the existence of the problem, no support was received afterwards. According to the study participant, issuing recommendations by one of the sides cannot be called cooperation.

Regarding these recommendations and demands issued by the state authorities, the participants accused them of **demanding too much**. Besides, no one asks them in advance whether they have resources to satisfy these demands. They suffer from **lack of methodological support** and believe that this is a one-sided process in which their capacities and their views are ignored. Some of the participants are unhappy about being excluded from the processes that take place at higher levels with decision-making being left to only a few individuals and local authorities have no sense of inclusion or ownership. –



“The way I understand cooperation, everyone should be included in planning. When you approved something up there at the higher level, why didn't you ask if I was ready to implement it” (Ozurgeti, in-depth interview).



“The state fails to provide adequate consultation, which we suffer from a lot. They teach us nothing during the whole year and at the end of the year they demand a lot of information. They do produce some recommendations, but they are all very general and it's not clear what a specific municipality has to do. All of the information exchange is still one-sided and it's not a suitable format for cooperation” (Khoni, focus group).



“They demand a lot from us, they want new results all the time” (Zugdidi, focus group).

The participants of Kutaisi focus group described an interesting experience: On the initiative of the Deputy Mayor, the Gender Council developed a package of recommendations concerning a program for single mothers to be submitted to the Parliament. The program covered the issues that municipalities come across in their practice, for instance many single mothers have no access to support programs only because the child's birth certificate indicates the father's name. Recommendations submitted to the Parliament on behalf of the Gender Council were discussed at the parliamentary committee meeting. Such activities should be encouraged and promoted.

Cooperation with NGO sector was assessed as productive and useful by the study participants. Contribution of Fund “Sukhumi” received particular approval.



“Our representatives from the Mayor’s office and Sakrebulo take part in trainings organized by Fund “Sukhumi” every year. This is the best possibility for our municipality to determine which routes to take, what could be planned in terms of gender programs” (Khoni, focus group).

Together with Fund “Sukhumi”, Zugdidi municipality carried out a study on domestic violence in 48 villages and trained the Representatives in villages –



“This was very effective work carried out with our joint efforts” (Zugdidi, in-depth interview).

Fund “Sukhumi” and Gender Equality Council of Tskaltubo municipality held a joint meeting with the staff of educational institutions and outlined the challenges facing them. Lanchkhuti municipality, also with the help of Fund “Sukhumi”, organizes training for doctors.

However, some participants of the study were critical towards civil society representatives in the Gender Council.



“When we were forming the Council, we imagined that NGOs that have vast experience in the issues of domestic violence would be a driving force pushing the whole Council. It turned out to be the opposite, NGOs have taken the role of an observer and have not offered any initiatives or proposals. I don’t know why but they are critical of everything and that slows down the processes. You could say we still haven’t banded together” (Zugdidi, focus group).

When it comes to links with **other actors in the referral mechanism**, the study participants claim to have a more or less successful cooperation with them. They describe cases when a victim contacted the municipality following a recommendation of the police. Examples of cooperation with social services, schools, nursery schools, medical institutions were also mentioned. The police was said to be the most powerful link, medical institutions – less so.



“The police and social services refer program beneficiaries directly to us. We send information about our programs to educational institutions, the police, social services, refugee services, etc.” (Zugdidi, in-depth interview).



We work very well with village doctors. There are cases when they refer people to Mayor’s Representatives in villages for one-time assistance” (Samtredia, focus group).



“We have youth programs and young people from problem families are involved. We received this information from school headteachers. We work very well with them” (Terjola, focus group).

The main challenge in the relationship between the actors in the referral mechanism is still the **lack of a coordination mechanism**, which would allow them to meet periodically with certain frequency and exchange the latest data, receive information about the others’ activities, progress and obstacles. For example, a municipality has a victim support program, but this information does not always reach the target population. If all the actors in the referral mechanism are informed, they will help spread the information and give the victims who come to them accurate direction thus assisting them in obtaining services from self-government. Municipalities already have some experience in working in this format through the involvement of Fund “Sukhumi” as it tries to improve cooperation and information exchange with the referral system in the target municipalities.



“We have had several round tables - meetings with the actors of the referral mechanism, where we discussed challenges that each of us face and how the communication can be improved” (Tskaltubo, in-depth interview).

The study participants said that the wider spread of the best practice is hampered by lack of qualification and resources, as well as fear for innovations in some municipalities.

The majority of participants believe that such a mechanism needs to be implemented under the aegis of Gender Equality Councils.



“I think Gender Equality Council should take on this function. We could invite the referral actors to Council meetings. That’s not a problem at all, they will come with pleasure” (Khoni, focus group).

In the participants’ opinion this requires **increasing the Council’s authority**. Khoni and Kutaisi focus group participants said that it would be advisable to **establish the coordination mechanism by law** and also include the representatives of the referral mechanism into the Council. As an alternative, the study participants suggest creating a **public council (friends’ council)** with a wider representation. It would meet at least once in every three months to discuss the existing problems and possible solutions. It is noteworthy that, due to the active involvement of Fund “Sukhumi”, Senaki municipality is prepared to develop a “Strategy for cooperation and improved coordination between the municipality and actors of the referral mechanism” in order to raise effectiveness of response to violence against women and domestic violence. The strategy is to be completed and approved in 2020.



CHAPTER VII.



CONCLUSION



The study has shown clearly that municipalities face a number of challenges and the progress is not rapid enough. The majority of study participants name scarcity of resources as the key reason. This is clearly a serious challenge for a country with a weak economy and its peripheral municipalities with even weaker economies. However, what has also become evident is that with better prioritization and better awareness of their own roles in combating violence against women, more can be achieved. Municipalities should be more active and determined in their fight against domestic violence. Unfortunately, quite frequently it seems that instead of working actively with the target population, taking into account their needs and priorities and introducing necessary changes, many self-governments find excuses such as lack of funding and blaming the central government as they just wait for instructions from above. However, monitoring and the experience of Fund “Sukhumi” confirm that limited resources allocated for combating domestic violence and assisting its victims are due not so much to general scarcity of resources but often to neglecting the seriousness of the problem, indifference, lack of gender-sensitivity.

It is also evident that when issuing recommendations the central government seldom takes into consideration the abilities of municipalities and often makes demands that are unattainable with their resources. No efforts are made to provide training for civil servants and this responsibility is mainly left to the non-governmental sector. In addition, cooperation, information exchange between the centre and the regions is very weak and often only a formality.

The study participants are unanimous in the opinion that Gender Equality Councils need to have more authority, their reputation and trust among the local community should grow so that people who are reluctant to address the police or fear such communication will see the Council as their helper. The Council should become the coordinating body for the activities of referral actors at the municipal level.

The study participants also agree with the opinion that more work is required to prevent violence against women/domestic violence, improve information dissemination, raise public awareness, especially in villages, with conflicting families. The harmful practice of turning a blind eye to domestic violence when the whole village including village administration is aware of it has to be eliminated.

The challenges include covering the whole area of the municipality, especially reaching the population of remote villages and mountainous regions. This is directly linked with low effectiveness of the work of Mayor’s Representatives. Needs of women and underage girls living in villages do not receive adequate attention and this is another

of the challenges. Information on the projects and services offered by municipalities is inaccessible for majority of population because they have no Internet. Local self-government bodies, with only a few exceptions, do not cooperate with the actors of the referral mechanism and fail to disseminate the information on victim support services included in municipal programs.

The study participants openly admit that municipality staff need training. Low awareness of gender issues, lack of information on the role and duties of local self-government in combating domestic violence are among the challenges here. It is also a problem that there is limited contact with the local community and low awareness of their problems and needs while the whole purpose of self-government is bringing governing bodies close to the population.

Waiting for instructions from the central government, low initiative and lack of assertiveness hamper solution of even those issues that could have been solved by municipalities independently. Municipalities fail to merge their capacities against common challenges and do not use the resource of inter-municipal cooperation, but Ozurgeti's initiative in this direction is a welcome exception.





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