



# DEVELOPING LOCAL COMMUNITIES: HOW EFFECTIVE IS EXTERNAL AID?

*LESSONS OF A PROJECT*

**Brot**  
für die Welt



Caucasus Institute for Peace,  
Democracy and Development



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for Peace, Democracy and Development**

# **Developing Local Communities: How Effective is External Aid?**

*Lessons of a project*

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## Community development projects in Georgia: Past experience and achieved results

Development aid is a relatively new phenomenon that has emerged not that long ago. It is a process whereby developed and rich countries come to the aid of less successful and poor nations to help them out of poverty and stagnation. Some quarter of century ago, after regaining independence, Georgia became one of the recipient countries.

As a rule, most of the development aid funds are appropriated by a recipient country's government. In Georgia, for instance, international donors provide funding for the ongoing Tbilisi-Sarpi highway project, the country's central transport artery. How can one assess the efficiency of such aid? One should look at specific indicators. One of them is about correct choice of priorities: Are new roads what the country really needs right now or are there other, more pressing needs to spend the money on? On the other hand, a recipient country will hardly benefit from foreign assistance, if it is ruled by a corrupt and inefficient government that will misuse foreign funds.

It is noteworthy, however, that part of the development aid is channeled directly to the society, bypassing the government. It includes grants for relatively professional civil society organizations (the so-called NGOs), as well as for "community development" or "community mobilization" projects, i.e. efforts to empower local groups so that they can identify and successfully deal with the problems of their communities (villages, districts, residential compounds, etc).

This paper is an attempt to analyze the second component of the development aid, i.e. it tries to find out what factors determine the efficiency and effectiveness of the community development projects: Are these projects really capable – and, if yes, when and how – to improve livelihoods of communities, and, moreover, increase their capacities to address their own problems in the future?

In order to answer these questions, we use the experience of a single program of the Caucasus

What do local communities deem as their most urgent concerns?

- access to drinking and irrigation water systems
- bad roads
- lack of sport and recreational facilities
- few opportunities for youth development
- inadequate access to pre-school facilities

*Source: the CIPDD project Local Initiatives for Development, 2014-16*

Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development, Local Initiatives for Local Development, which was carried out in 2014-2016 in 69 target communities across four regions of Georgia: Adjara, Samtskhe-Javakheti, Kvemo Kartli and Shida Kartli. The overall objective of the project was to help these communities solve their own problems. First, CIPDD facilitated processes within which each of 69 local communities defined their most urgent problems and discussed strategies to solve them. Where local communities successfully created groups of enthusiasts and other local stakeholders (citizens, government, business community) were drawn in, effective strategies to deal with the problems were developed and specific benefits for local communities actually achieved. It is important to note that CIPDD allocate only limited financial resources to support community initiatives – as a rule, the success was achieved due to community mobilization and direct participation of the people.

The project helped the local communities to identify and address a wide array of problems, namely improvement of local infrastructure and access to public services, creating more opportunities for youth development, etc. Different approaches were used to deal with different problems, depending on specifics of a beneficiary community

and the identified problems. In some cases, problems were solved solely through advocacy and communication with the local government; community mobilization appeared sufficient in other situations; joint efforts by communities, local governments and private businesses proved to be the key to achieving success in other cases. Each successful case demonstrated that problems can be solved even with limited financial resources, provided a local community is able to mobilize and work jointly towards a common goal.

Another significant aspect is that successful initiatives turned out to be contagious within and across neighboring communities. Besides, success in solving one problem motivates a community to build on its problem-solving experience to address other issues, simultaneously encouraging other communities to follow suit. That is why one particular focus of the project was on awareness raising and experience/knowledge sharing across the target communities.

Hopefully, the project findings and recommendations will prove useful for local governments, donor organizations, civil sector groups dealing with community development issues, community leaders, and experts dealing with local development issues.

## The problem description: International assistance and community development

Assistance for community development has a different philosophy from other forms of aid. It is based on the premise that centralized management, or national government alone cannot steer the country towards growth and development. Normally, the national government should only focus on doing things that cannot be dealt with on the lower levels: The above mentioned Tbilisi-Sarpi highway project is a good case in point. There are a lot of issues and problems that can be best addressed at the local level, by local governments or even local communities (residents of a village or even a large residential building).

The main advantage of this approach is that it provides both for more democracy and more efficiency. Democratization implies better opportunities for local initiatives and citizens' political and social participation, the multiplication of centers of power. Electing president and parliament every four of five years is not sufficient: People should also take part in the process of governance. Local government is the best way to engage people in governance and promote active citizenship. It means that it is not enough to support a political party or a leader, people should get involved in their local communities and democracy at all levels, from villages to towns to nation, and do so on different stages of the process such as identifying and prioritizing the problems, devise problem-solving strategies, raise financial and other resources, and monitor/assess the implementation process and its results. This will turn them into more competent citizens and increase the quality of their participation in political processes.

This will mean that the country's democratic institutions have more robust foundation.

If we look from the viewpoint of efficiency, it is obvious that local residents know the problems of their villages, towns, districts, etc. better than anyone else. They also understand which problems are more urgent and need to be solved first. Moreover, as long as they have a vested interest in getting their problems solved, they are more prepared to contribute their money, energy, social contacts etc, to a problem-solving process. Therefore, the more involved the local community is, the greater are chances that the problems will be really addressed. This is especially true of rural communities that usually have limited access to services (healthcare, education) and outdated infrastructure (bad roads, water shortages, etc).

What can external actors (donors, international organizations, local and international NGOs) do to support the community development process? To begin with, another question should be answered first: What makes foreign assistance necessary and possible? Such assistance exists when there is a the gap between rich and poor, more and less developed nations. There are two types of resources that rich countries have and the poor ones lack: One is material resources (such as money or equipment), another – knowledge and experience. To return to example used in the very beginning, good roads are essential for the development of any country, but large road infrastructure projects usually incur huge costs that poor countries simply cannot afford. This is where foreign donors can help. On the other

hand, one of the reasons of poverty in poor countries is the lack of problem-solving expertise and experience. This is another priority area of foreign aid, when assistance is delivered through participation of competent experts and organizations.

However, these approaches seem less helpful and effective for community development projects. In such cases, it can be assumed that a local community – i.e. residents of a particular village, town, or district – has enough knowledge and expertise, and maybe even material resources, to identify and solve its problems but, for some reason, is unable, or unwilling, to make use of them. How can external actors – international or local NGOs sponsored by foreign donors – help in such situations?

The main underlying idea is that a local community is better positioned to handle its problems, as local residents have some resources for addressing them (they know the context, have appropriate skills and experience), but lack relevant social and technical competences. Under technical competence we mean the knowledge of specialized problem-solving tools and mechanisms. However, the social competence is no less important: It implies the habit of social cooperation, the capacity to mobilize and efficiently use available resources. Besides, local people may have little experience of advocacy and interaction with local or national government agencies. These are the areas where external assistance can have a positive impact.

These problems can be in part ascribed to general deficiencies of democracy. Decades of authoritarian Communist rule cultivated the culture of dependency: all problems shall be solved by the authorities, the most ordinary people can do is to inform them about their grievances and occasionally pester them to get their attention. In most extreme cases, people can revert to open protest. These attitudes have remained general-

ly unchanged over the post-independent years, not least because the Georgian local government system is still too weak and undeveloped. Despite attempts by different Georgian governments to reform and strengthen the local government system, the real political power and financial resources remain in the national government's hands. Small wonder, therefore, that people continue looking to the centre for help.

There are often similar attitudes towards donor organizations. Although donors tend to highlight that their main goal is sustainable development, i.e. empowerment of local residents to assume more active role in understanding and dealing with their problems, potential beneficiaries usually view their assistance only as a way to solve a particular immediate problem and show little interest if no such benefit is to be gained. In this case a donor organization is in fact a substitute for the government: A beneficiary community makes a complaint and then stands by, waiting for an external actor to intervene and help.

The main objective of the given CIPDD project was to try and break this dependency mentality. Obviously, people are concerned first of all with their immediate everyday problems. It is no wonder, therefore, that when an external actor offers assistance, a beneficiary community should expect that this is a real chance to solve a particular problem. Quite understandably, projects that involve only general discussions about problems or the need for more local initiatives are treated with a fair dose of skepticism. People must feel that their activities will bore fruit. However, achieving a specific result – to repair a road or a water supply network – should not become an end in itself. Real and much more important long-term benefits are the experience of social interaction and new knowledge and skills that can help a community to address its problems and use available resources more efficiently in future.

## Political context: Local communities and local governments

When confronted with a problem, a community quite naturally seeks assistance first of all from the local government. The project showed, however, that local residents are often skeptical about their local authorities' ability and willingness to help. Despite similar nihilistic attitudes towards the central government, people nevertheless rather expect the latter to solve their problems, being certain that it has more power and resources. As a result, communication between local communities and local governments is weak and inefficient.

The existing distribution of powers and functions between the central and local governments is one of the main reasons of the problem. Under the current law, municipal authorities are independent from the national government. Members of local councils (sakrebulos) and heads of municipal administrations (gamebelis) are elected directly by the people. Nevertheless, local authorities feel accountable not to their voters but rather to their party leaders in the capital because they are well aware that nobody can win local elections

without the ruling party's support. Before 2012, the country's former governing party, United National Movement, had a majority in all municipal councils. After the Georgian Dream (GD) coalition came to power in the 2012 parliamentary elections, a majority of sakrebulo members in almost all municipalities gradually defected to the new ruling party, while in the 2014 local elections GD candidates won in all municipalities. This shows that although local government is nominally independent from the centre, in reality it is widely seen as an extension of the national government.

Apart from the municipal authorities, the local government structure includes the institution of village gamebeli (headman). By definition, village gamebeli should keep in touch with local residents and timely communicate their needs and concerns to local authorities. The project experience showed, however, that in most cases local residents have little confidence in their village gamebeli's capacity to represent their interests and mediate solutions to their problems. On the other hand, village gamebelis have few re-

### Why are local communities passive?

- Insufficient capacities for self-mobilization and problem-solving. One-off spontaneous protest actions are the most typical form of self-organization.
- Dependency syndrome: people tend to think that their problems should be solved by external actors (the central government, donor organizations).
- Low awareness of available local resources that can be used for solving a problem.
- Even when the government or a donor starts a project in a community (for instance, to repair a water supply system), local residents tend to remain passive and fail to mobilize to protect the project results, which makes external intervention less sustainable.

sources and legal mechanisms to deal with local problems. In addition, they often lack motivation to address their communities' needs since they are appointed by the municipal administration and feel accountable to the latter rather than the former.

How can these challenges be addressed? As a rule, civil society organizations (CSOs) give priority to projects promoting institutional reforms, notably decentralization and devolution of more powers and resources from the national to local governments. In cooperation with their international partners, the CSOs have gained extensive experience and expertise in preparing and advocating such proposals and influencing policy makers. They managed to persuade different Georgian governments to listen to them and take into consideration at least some of their recommendations. A number of reforms were carried out in the country in recent years that were at least supposed to devolve more powers to the local government. Nevertheless, in effect the Georgian political system remains, as mentioned above, highly centralized, largely because of its tendency to rely on the dominance of a single political party at all levels of the government, including municipal administrations. On the other hand, it is equally important that all major Georgian parties are extremely centralized political organizations united around a single leader. Under such circumstances, formal decentralization reforms, even when they are welcome on their own terms,

are not sufficient to create an enabling environment for the development of genuine local government.

Therefore, although local government reforms remain a policy priority, it is equally essential to streamline and strengthen existing legal instruments. Institutional reforms are based on the assumption that as long as local government is elected directly by the people and remain formally independent of the national government, it will feel accountable to its voters and motivated to solve problems of local constituencies. On the formal-institutional level this is already the case in Georgia: Local government is fully formed through municipal elections. However, the practice shows that this is not sufficient. Persistent mental inertia pushes people to believe that whatever is written in the law, in effect local government remains to be accountable to the national government and the leadership of the party in power.

To get rid of this mental inertia, local governments should be under constant pressure from their constituencies and be exposed to different initiatives from below. To requires local communities to be mobilized and their leaders to have relevant skills and experience. It is only determined actions by a local community that will convince local authorities that their primary purpose is to serve the people, and that their political careers depend, first and foremost, on their ability to address concerns of local communities.

## Local communities, local governments and development organizations: Existing resources and untapped potential

Analysis and monitoring of the project activities revealed that efficiency of municipal governments, their openness to local initiatives and the level of public confidence in the local authorities vary greatly from region to region, and from community to community. Nevertheless, all target communities appeared to have one thing in common: a prevailing skeptical attitude towards the local government's capabilities.

On the other hand, the project demonstrated that whenever a community was able to mobilize, i.e. create an initiative group of activists with adequate organizational skills and sufficient support from community, properly identify and formulate a re-

alistic problem-solving strategy and action plan, and effectively lobby the local government for assistance, there were good chances that municipal authorities would positively respond to their efforts and a given problem might be successfully solved.

But such success stories were rare. Why? Firstly, as mentioned above, communities lack skills and experience for efficient mobilization and communication with local governments. This created an opening for a third actor, or a development-oriented independent organization, CIPDD in the given case, to make its mark. Such an organization should avoid being a community's proxy or even focus on being a mediator between the commu-

Why are the resources of local governments not used to solve local problems?

- Most local residents are skeptical and distrustful of local authorities
- People rarely interact with local governments and do not know how to communicate their problems
- Communities have no access to detailed information about their rights, the functions and responsibilities of local government, available state programs and services, legislative changes, and legal mechanisms of advocacy and interaction with official structures.
- Local governments feel accountable to the national government rather than the people
- The national government tends to view municipal bodies primarily as useful instruments for winning votes in elections. Respectively, its attention is usually focused on larger settlements, while remote rural communities are overlooked.
- In many cases, local governments indeed have scarce resources to solve local problems. It does not mean, however, that the available resources are used efficiently.
- In some cases, a local community's problem-solving initiative is blocked by the local government possibly on political grounds or for fear that it can expose corruption in municipal structures.

nity, the government and donor organizations. Its main role should be to facilitate the process and encourage a community to take advantage of its human, organizational and possibly material resources.

It will be hardly sufficient for a community if an outside organization focuses entirely on the awareness raising campaigns and informing people of their rights through training activities. Knowledge and skills are undoubtedly significant but they should be gained through practical problem-solving experience. Apart from a specific result (a newly built or renovated road, improved access to water, etc), such experience will increase a community's self-confidence and motivation, enhance its self-mobilization skills and create a successful precedent for further problem-solving activities.

To “awaken” a community and help it realize and release its potential, it is first necessary to identify and discuss the problems it is facing. The project showed that this is not an easy task. Most communities had no previous experience of comprehensive discussions. In many cases, a structured discussion revealed that a community was unaware that it had enough resources and capabilities to solve its problems.

Access to irrigation or drinking water – one of the most serious problems in many Georgian municipalities – is a good case in point. Community meetings and discussions revealed that

although water resources were abundant in or around some villages, available water resources were either overused or misused. In other words, the problem could be solved not by finding a new source of water, as initially suggested by the community, but through prudent water management.

As such experiences accumulate, there is greater chance that people will cease viewing the municipal government as primarily a local representative of the ruling party, and that it will really start to focus on meeting specific demands of its constituency. Unless local authorities feel constant pressure from the public, while local communities develop sufficient social competence, i.e. the ability to adequately identify their problems and mobilize themselves around the efforts to solve them, local governments are highly unlikely to break off from the dominant influence of the national government and the ruling party.

It means that the main effort should be directed to internal rather than external resources. In other words, priority should be given to empowering local communities with cooperation, self-organization and mobilization skills. However, this approach may not be quite popular among donors and beneficiaries alike, because it is not focused on achieving quick results. Rather, it aims at changes in social behavior and attitudes, which tend to take longer time. On the other hand, however, this approach is more productive for gaining sustainable results.

#### Local communities and donors: Typical problems

- Potential beneficiaries usually expect a donor to solve a particular immediate problem as soon as possible and show little interest if no such benefit is to be gained.
- Communities fail to realize that their active involvement and participation can make a donor's assistance much more efficient.
- These problems are especially noticeable in the regions where international donors have been particularly active in recent times.
- Donors often prefer short-term easy-to-achieve projects to long-term hard-to-accomplish objectives, such as social capital development.
- The value of an assistance project is considerably diminished when upon its completion, a beneficiary community does not have a sense of ownership towards the achieved result.

## Success stories and lessons learned

Most of the problems identified during the project were region-specific. Besides, beneficiary communities displayed varying levels of willingness and readiness to contribute to problem-solving activities. In every case, success was largely dependent on whether a community had a sufficient number of active and influential people with leadership skills capable of mobilizing the community

around a common goal. The presence of such people is crucial to a community's long-term development prospects, as it helps solve problems and, more importantly, improves the community's self-confidence and cohesion.

Below is a brief description and analysis of most successful cases.

### ***Olaverdi water supply problem***

The village of Olaverdi, Akhalkalaki municipality, is situated at an elevation of 2,000 meters above sea level. Part of the local homes had no water supply and the local residents had to bring water by hand, and on foot, from a water well some 500-800 meters away. Although there were other problems too (bad roads, limited access to healthcare services), the community unanimously identified the water problem as the top priority.

There is an abundance of fresh water resources in and around Olaverdi. The problem was supplying this water to local houses. It is noteworthy that the local government had attempted to solve the problem by installing an electricity-powered water supply infrastructure (electric water pump, the main supply pipe, a water reservoir and a distribution grid) but this system was later discarded because of high costs (an average monthly electricity bill per household was 20-30 GEL). Besides, the electric water pump used to break down regularly and required costly maintenance and repairs.

CIPDD project teams' most important contribution to the problem solving was informing the local

residents about the innovative IREKSON water pump, which does not require electricity or other external sources of energy to operate. Moreover, it is relatively easy and cheap to maintain and repair due to its quite simple design. To better assess the capacity of the local water resources and the village's geographic parameters and supply requirements, and provide more detailed information about IREKSON, CIPDD organized a meeting between local residents and Ioseb Narchemashvili, IREKSON inventor.

At the following stages of the project, CIPDD and the community worked together. The residents purchased water pipes (to connect to the mains) and a high-pressure water tank through crowdfunding, while CIPDD bought IREKSON pump (1500 USD) and facilitated planning.

Initially, the system was put in a test mode, which revealed some faults in the system. To correct them, CIPDD purchased additional pipes, while the local residents themselves replaced the faulty section. Although the main problem was resolved and the community received a cheap

and efficient water supply system, a new challenge came to light once the new system began to operate – misuse of water. It appeared that local residents used to irrigate their farms by drinking water. Besides, indoor plumbing was out of order in most of the houses and needed repairs. These problems were also addressed jointly by CIPDD and the community. Namely, CIPDD conducted awareness raising meetings in the community and distributed a guide to proper water usage and IREKSON manual among the local residents. CIPDD's mission in the framework of the project was thus complete and the community assumed full responsibility for the maintenance and stable operation of the new system.

The innovative water supply system attracted considerable attention from other municipalities, which is a clear indication that the Olaverdi case can be successfully extrapolated to other Georgian municipalities with similar geographic conditions and water supply problems.

### ***Lessons from the Olaverdi case***

The Olaverdi water problem has been around for many years. The community and the local government did try to solve it (in the framework of the National Rural Development Program). However, even though a functional water supply system was present in the village, the locals did not use it because of high maintenance and operational costs. Although poverty is undoubtedly a significant factor, the experience showed that its impact is sometimes exaggerated.

Arguably, the government's and the community's joint problem-solving efforts proved ineffective largely because they did not take account of local conditions. But it is hard to understand – and take into consideration – the local context without engaging the community, analyzing and exploiting local skills and experience. Besides, on close inspection, some elements of the existing water supply system turned out to be faulty.

Although CIPDD's contribution (a simple yet innovative technology) played a major role, the problem would have not been solved but for the community mobilization around a common problem. Despite poverty, the community managed to crowdfund part of the project (water pipes and a water tank) and contributed their time and effort. Apart from improved water supply, the project produced some other, not less, if not more, significant results: additional social capital and the sense of ownership and responsibility for the achieved result. This raises chances that the community will be able to cope with another challenge – to keep the system up and running and avoid water misuse.

The Olaverdi experience illustrates that solving a problem is not a one-off task. In this case it was important not simply to restore water supply (a common goal that generated a true spirit of unity and enthusiasm in the community) but also to ensure long-term sustainability of the project, something that requires more solid social capital and is much harder to achieve than a one-off mobilization around a particular problem.

One of the lasting effects of the Communist legacy is that people tend to overuse or misuse public resources (water in the given case). For a poverty-stricken community to be able to get water almost for free after a one-off effort is surely a positive development. But it can fuel a perception among local residents that water is an infinitely renewable resource which can be consumed without any limitations, though reality is quite different – the more water one family gets, the less water is left for a neighbor. It means that to preserve the achieved result the community needs to develop some internal control mechanisms to ensure proper distribution and use of water. This is not an easy task and it can spark discords and tensions within the community. Will Olaverdi rise to the challenge? It is entirely up to the community to deal with the matter. External intervention will only hamper its sense of responsibility. That is why CIPDD has stopped its activities in the community except consultations and advice.

## ***Tsivadzeebi community: Road infrastructure problem***

Road deterioration was a primary concern for the Tsivadzeebi community in Shuakhevi municipality. About 1.5 kilometer section of a local road was too dangerous to drive in bad weather. Local residents were ready to take part in every problem-solving activity. The community had some previous experience of self-mobilization but never successfully interacted with the local government before. It was a crucial aspect as the problem could not be solved without the local government's involvement.

CIPDD's assistance was therefore focused on fostering cooperation between the community and local authorities. At first the community created an initiative group which developed an action plan with advice and assistance from CIPDD. At the next stage, the initiative group, the local government and CIPDD signed a memorandum of understanding. Each stakeholder contributed its share of the costs. CIPDD bought 10 tons of cement using the project funds. With the local government's mediation, a local company provided aggregate for the road repairs free of charge. For their part, the local residents crowdfunded transportation of the materials to the village. With active participation of the local residents, a 105-metre section of the road was covered by a concrete layer. Afterwards, the community lodged another request with the local government to help remove a large rock at another section of the road, as it posed a threat to traffic. The authorities forwarded the request to the roads department of Adjara, which contracted a private company to demolish the rock. However, local residents were frustrated by what they said was poor quality of the work and requested an assessment. The assessment confirmed their claim and the company had to correct the shortcomings.

Although the most vulnerable part of the road was repaired, the problem was not fully resolved as the complete solution was beyond the scope of CIPDD project budget. For this reason CIPDD forwarded the Tsivadzeebi case to another NGO specializing in local development projects.

### ***Lessons from the Tsivadzeebi case***

The Tsivadzeebi experience is a vivid illustration that communication and cooperation between a community and the local government can be the key to successful solution of a problem. As the local government's resources are stretched thin, it cannot address all local issues simultaneously. However, if a community comes up with a clear vision and realistic problem-solving action plan, chances of getting the required resources multiply. Local governments have their own reasons to be motivated by successful cases with real and visible results, as they provide a good publicity tool and an opportunity to claim credit for doing a good job. Without a community's involvement, such results will be harder to achieve.

It is important to note, however, that a community's involvement should be maintained throughout the entire problem-solving process. It means that a community should play an active role in every stage of the process: problem identification, action plan development, mobilization of local resources, communication with local government and other governmental or commercial institutions, direct participation in all activities, monitoring the progress of the work, assessing the results and correcting flaws if necessary, and sustaining the achieved results. Such extensive involvement requires quite a high level of self-organization. The Tsivadzeebi community demonstrated good self-organization skills. According to some participants of the project, the community was overwhelmed by a jubilant "we-did-it" feeling at the end of the project not only due to the successful outcome but, not less importantly, because the community was extremely satisfied by the efficiency of the entire process – from planning to implementation – and its mobilization and teamwork abilities. This experience can help the community to address their other problems with similar success, though they may need, like the Olaverdi community, advice and consultation from CIPDD or other NGOs in order to learn how to use their resources with maximum efficiency for development and innovative problem-solving.

## ***Borjomi residential building: Power supply problem***

In large urban centers community mobilization may include collaborative activities of the residents of residential buildings and apartment blocks. The case of the so-called “Borjomi college dormitory”, a municipal building in downtown Borjomi inhabited by more than 60 families, can be cited as one of the examples. The community’s main problem was the absence of legal residence status. The dwellers occupied the building unlawfully in the early 90s, quite a commonplace practice at that time, and had squatted in the building ever since without any legal residence permits or ownership documents. The local government opted to turn a blind eye and never tried to evict them. However, the squatting caused a concrete problem. As long as the dwellers had neither privatized their dwellings nor otherwise legalized their residence, the local energy company refused to install individual electricity meters in their apartments and the dwellers had to rely on a single collective metering device. Besides, the internal electrical wiring was made by amateur electricians, in fact by the dwellers themselves, and fell far short of safety standards – hence high risk of electricity-related accidents. According to the dwellers, the faulty wiring had caused several fires and two neighborhood-wide power blackouts in the past. The dwellers had repeatedly complained to the local government and the energy company about the problem and even staged a street protest but to no avail.

CIPDD’s facilitated communication and mediation between the community representatives, officials of the local government, the Ministry of Energy and the energy company’s management to analyze the problem and outline an effective problem-solving strategy and action plan. The first step was to legalize the dwellers’ residence through privatization. Once the legal hurdle was cleared, the local government sent an official letter to the energy company requesting to install individual electricity meters in the building as planned. The whole process took about one year. In the end the problem was finally over: The energy company installed the meters for free and installed proper wiring to comply with the national safety standards.

### ***Lessons from the Borjomi case***

The Borjomi experience illustrates that although some problems are quite easy to solve and do not require large material resources, they sometimes remain unresolved for years. In this case the lasting problem was caused by the community’s low self-mobilization ability, poor knowledge of laws and regulations, and the lack of initiative from the local government. It is noteworthy that CIPDD did not spend any financial resources on the case. Many problems can be solved simply by a well-conceived and persistent effort.

## ***Khtsisi community: Youth development problems***

Khtsisi community (Khashuri municipality) singled out the absence of youth centers in the village for the local youths to gather and socialize as one of the priority problems. Although many local youths were willing and ready to volunteer for welfare improvement and other social programs, they had failed to mobilize and engage in a sustained effort to address the problem before CIPDD intervened to help. Having weighed up various options, the community’s initiative group held consultations with the local government and reached an agreement to set up

a community centre in a room originally meant for a library. In this case, too, the problem was solved through a joint effort by CIPDD, the local government and the community. The local government gave permission to use the room, repaired and equipped it with PCs, and provided free access to Internet. It also promised to install winter heating devices after the village was connected to the mains gas. For its part, CIPDD purchased furniture material, stationery and other office equipment, while the local youths assembled the furniture by themselves.

The youths have since planned some community development programs but they obviously lack mobilization and organizational skills and need respective training.

### ***Lessons from the Khtsisi case***

The Khtsisi case showed that many local communities have little experience of efficient and productive cooperation with the local government. With this project the Khtsisi youth got first-hand experience of how a clear vision and a determined

joint effort of a group of people united around a common goal can help solve a concrete problem. It does not mean, to be sure, that all projects have equal chances of success and different local governments are equally prepared to support local initiatives. However, people's excessive pessimism and passivity can often lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy. If for some reason a community is pessimistic in advance about the prospects of getting help from the local government, chances are high that the help, indeed, will never come. Only time will tell whether the Khtsisi youth's enthusiasm endures in the long run.

## Conclusions and recommendations

The project provided a very valuable learning experience for the CIPDD team. The following conclusions and recommendations are intended mostly for donor organizations and NGOs specializing in local development programs. What is needed to improve the efficiency of such projects?

1. International donors prefer to focus on short-term development assistance programs aimed at results that are visible, easy to monitor and assess. And they do so for a reason, as they are accountable to their own sponsors (in most cases, they are funded by taxpayers money) and need to justify their expenses if criticized for inefficiency. However, this approach does not seem warranted – and may even prove counterproductive – for small-scale community development projects. The community development process is not just an action to achieve a specific result (a new road, a water well, etc). It also provides an experience that can empower a community with social capital, knowledge and skills and make it more self-confident and motivated to raise to future challenges and overcome the syndrome of dependency on outside players. It is important, therefore, to modify and adjust the existing project assessment criteria to reflect the long-term benefits of the community development programs.
2. Long-term partnership and cooperation between local communities and civic organizations specializing in community development programs is a vital ingredient of success, as it provides the best way to generate social capital and empower a community with mobi-

lization and problem-solving skills. It is highly recommended to avoid the following two scenarios: a community's problems are solved entirely by a partner organization without any contribution from the community itself (this will only reinforce the dependency syndrome) or a community is left to deal with its problems on its own with a donor organization providing only external assistance. Both approaches have so far proved ineffective. Long-term involvement of a partner organization remains crucial to the community development process.

3. The experience showed that close communication between a community and the local government can ensure a more efficient use of the local government's resources to address local problems. Such cooperation leaves both sides satisfied: the locals have their problem(s) solved, fully or partially, while the authorities can claim credit for doing a good job, as well as winning voters' hearts and minds. In such cases problems are often caused not by shortcomings of legislation or indifference of local authorities but rather mutual distrust and the lack of communication skills and experience.

By giving more attention and support to this bilateral communication and enhancing a community's communication skills, development organizations can significantly improve efficiency of their aid programs, as they will be able to achieve tangible results at lower costs.

4. Another lesson of the project is that problems are solved easier if a community initia-

tive group, the community meeting delegate (if elected) or the headman take an active role in the problem-solving process. But this resource is often untapped not only due to institutional problems (the headman feels accountable to the municipal administration, not the people), but also because the headmen's powers are limited, leaving them unable to mediate actively. It would be useful, therefore, to develop and carry out targeted training programs for the village headmen.

5. The project demonstrated that small communities have greater difficulties in securing the local government's support while dealing with their problems. To some extent, it is a political problem inasmuch as municipal governments tend to view the communities as potential electorate and, respectively, give preferential treatment to larger ones in the hope of winning more votes. On the other hand, small communities are easier to mobilize around a common cause and better understand that they should rely mostly on themselves, not the government, to cope with their problems. It suggests that donor organizations should give priority to small communities in their community development programs, firstly because such communities may need assistance more than others and,

secondly, because there are higher chances of successful community mobilization.

6. Innovative yet cheap and simple – and easy to adapt to local conditions – technologies can prove particularly effective, especially in very small communities. One of such technological solutions, IREKSON water pump, played a decisive role in enabling the local community to successfully resolve the water supply problem in the village of Olaverdi (Akhalkalaki municipality). Communities rarely have access to such technologies. Community development programs should therefore include an awareness-raising component to inform potential beneficiaries about such technologies.
7. Youth development is an essential part of the community development process. Many urban and rural communities lack youth education, sport and entertainment opportunities. At the same time, young people's enthusiasm and initiative is often underrated, even though it can play a crucial role in solving local problems. Many local youths are willing and ready to volunteer for welfare improvement and other social programs in their communities. It is a significant resource that can ensure efficiency and long-term sustainability of community development programs.



