

The Analysis of the Local Government Questionnaires Results

II Round

Introduction

This questionnaire and its analysis are part of the International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy's (ISFED) "Active Citizens – Accountable Government" project. The purpose of this project is to promote active citizenship by enhancing citizen participation in decision-making process and increasing the accountability and transparency of the parliament and the government in general.

The goal of the questionnaire is to evaluate the activities and working conditions of local government officials and their constituency outreach. In addition, the questionnaire will provide citizens with the contact information and reception hours for their local government officials, and will introduce them to the problems local governments face during the performance of their duties.

ISFED will administer and publish the results of the questionnaire on a quarterly basis so that citizens have the opportunity to evaluate the work of local governments during the given time period based on concrete information.

In addition, this questionnaire will be available for the benefit of other organizations that work or plan to work on local governance issues to identify their working priorities. This will allow for additional recommendations and will help the identification of viable solutions to problems faced by local governments in Georgia.

Methodology

The questionnaire was created by the International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED) and the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI). The 2nd round of the questionnaire covered the January 15, 2005 to April 15, 2005 period. ISFED rayon coordinators delivered the questionnaires to local government representatives and each questionnaire was personally completed by each rayon Gamgebeli (executive administrator) and Mayors of the towns that are not subordinate to rayons.

ISFED coordinators collected sixty-five completed questionnaires from sixty-nine rayon or town governments. All percentages are calculated based on a total of 65. questionnaires from Oni, Mestia, Lanchkhuti and Kutaisi were not completed for different reasons. ISFED did not have coordinators in Oni and Mestia rayons at the time. The Lanchkhuti Gamgebeli rarely appeared at the workplace, and thus did not fill out the questionnaire. The Kutaisi Mayor has been appointed only recently.

ISFED has already conducted the 1st round of the questionnaire. The 2nd round allows us to assess change and estimate the deterioration or improvement of working conditions and the performance of local governments in the last three months. The results are posted and presented to the public on a quarterly basis.

Summary of findings

Local government, here rayon Gamgebelis and town Mayors, is directly responsible for solving social, economic and other local problems of citizens. Thus, the relationship between citizens and local government, and the soliciting of input from citizens in local government decision making are crucially important.

The questionnaires show that local government representatives face problems that prevent them from effectively executing these core responsibilities. The primary problems as identified by the questionnaire can be divided into 3 categories:

- a) Relationships with citizens;
- b) Rayon Gamgebelis/town Mayors' working conditions;
- c) Work of rayon Gamgebelis/town Mayors.

a) Private meetings continue to be the most widespread way of communication between local government officials and citizens. The majority of Gamgebelis/town Mayors dedicate more than 10 days per month to this activity. Every Gamgebeli/town Mayor has a specified time for the reception of citizens. In the 1st round, only one Gamgebeli reported using electronic mail, whereas in the 2nd round, two Gamgebelis did. However, this is not a significant improvement. The low level of modern technology usage in rayons hinders the effective work of Gamgebelis/town Mayors.

According to the responses, Gamgebelis/town Mayors receive large amounts of appeals and letters from citizens and contact relevant state institutions when necessary. Unfortunately, there is no positive improvement in relations with state institutions. Very often local government representatives still face problems and receive late responses or are totally ignored. This indicates that state institutions do not work efficiently.

b) Majority of the Gamgebelis/town Mayors state that their working conditions need to be improved. Gamgebelis/town Mayors still consider more qualified staff and better technical equipment as the best ways of improving their working conditions. Generally, compared to the 1st round assessments, slight improvement in the working conditions is noted.

c) The questionnaire analysis shows that Gamgebelis/town Mayors participate in town hall meetings. The number of those who participate in draft law discussions on the local level was increased by 9%. Unfortunately, public opinion and initiatives from citizens

still are not taken into account; although there is slight improvement on this issue since the first round of questionnaires.

It is clear from the analysis that local government officials communicate their decisions to citizens. The means of communication remain the same, and include the local press, Gamgeoba information boards and local televisions. Unlike the 1st round, none of the Gamgeobelis/town Mayors avoided answering this question.

The absolute majority of the Gamgeobelis/town Mayors provide information on local budget expenditures to citizens. Citizens can access the information on local budget through local newspapers, the Gamgeoba secretariat, and through local televisions. The information is published on a quarterly basis and there is no significant improvement in this direction.

Analysis

1. General Information

The questionnaires were filled out by 94.2% of local government representatives (65 Gamgeobelis/town Mayors out of 69). ISFED recorded small improvement, as the 1st round of the questionnaire was completed by 63 Gamgeobelis/town Mayors. This shows that local government representatives are interested in the questionnaire.

2. Relations with citizens

98.46 % of local government representatives stated that they have a specified time for citizen reception. According to their responses, 55.38 % of rayon Gamgeobelis/town Mayors devote more than 10 days a month to citizen reception, 32.31% - 5-10 days, and 10.77% - less than 5 days. 92.31% of Gamgeobelis/town Mayors receive more than 50 citizens per month, and 4.62% receive less than 50.

All Gamgeobelis/town Mayors receive letters and complaints from citizens and react to these letters by demanding responses from relevant state organs. 44.62% of local government representatives face problems when demanding responses, and 52.31% - do not. The majority of those who face problems reported that state departments respond late; 16.92% said that sometimes it is vague which department is responsible for a specific issue.

93.85% of rayon Gamgeobelis/town Mayors inform citizens of the responses from relevant state departments: 69.23 % do this using the post, 16.92% - by telephone, 63.08% - at meetings; only two Gamgeobelis inform citizens through electronic mail.

Other ways of soliciting citizens' inputs are: private meetings for 81.54% of Gamgeobelis/town Mayors; town hall meetings – for 78.46%, telephone – 46.15%; public surveys – 21.54%.

Results: We have found that private meetings are again the most common way of communication with citizens and that the majority of Gamgebelis/town Mayors devote more than 10 days a month to this activity. Gamgebelis/town Mayors have specified times (days and hours) for citizen reception. The number of Gamgebelis using electronic mail to communicate with citizens remains still very low, but has increased from 1 to 2 since the last questionnaires. The low level of modern technology usage in rayons impedes the efficient work of Gamgebelis/Mayors.

It is clear from the responses that Gamgebelis/town Mayors react to citizens' letters and contact relevant state departments when necessary. Unfortunately, there are no positive changes in the relations with state institutions – they still often fail to respond in a timely fashion and sometimes even ignoring the letters. This indicates that state institutions do not function effectively.

3. Working conditions

89.23% of Gamgebelis/town Mayors reported that their working conditions are acceptable; 3.08% stated that their working conditions are bad; 4.62% believe working conditions are good and only 1 Gamgebeli marked very good. An absolute majority (89.23%) of Gamgebelis/town Mayors stated that working conditions need to be improved.

69.23% of rayon Gamgebelis/town Mayors consider that working conditions can be improved through better technical equipment; 55.38% think that the best way to improve working condition is through a more qualified staff; 3.08% believe less staff is required and 7.69% marked other, which includes repairing the building, solving electricity problems and increasing salaries (respondents could mark several answers).

Results: According to the responses, it is clear that the majority of Gamgebelis/town Mayors consider their working conditions to be acceptable, but still think that they need to be improved. Better technical equipment and more qualified staff are most commonly identified ways to enhance the working conditions of local government.

There is no significant improvement in the working conditions of Gamgebelis/town Mayors as compared to the responses from the 1st round of the questionnaire. However, there is a 7% decrease in the number of those representatives who regard their conditions to be bad. Also, there is one gamgebeli in this round, who evaluated his working conditions as very good.

4. Work of Gamgeoba/Mayor

95.38% of local government representatives stated that they have participated in town hall meetings in the rayon and 83.08% have participated in more than 3 town hall meetings.

53.85% of Gamgebelis/town Mayors have participated in draft law discussions in the rayon and 38.46% have not. 40% stated that none of the citizens' initiatives have been considered in the draft, but 36.92% stated that citizens' initiatives were considered by the Parliament of Georgia.

84.62% of Gamgebelis/town Mayors reported that they have solved rayon problems, which include repairing roads, bridges and schools, improving water and gas supply systems. Only two Gamgebelis reported that they have not solved any problems in the rayons.

87.69% of Gamgebelis/town Mayors stated that they inform citizens about local government decisions through the local press; 40% use the local television; 16.92% and 56.92% of Gamgebelis/town Mayors post the information in public places and on the Gamgeoba information board respectively.

95.38% of Gamgebelis/town Mayors stated that the information on drawing up, implementing and spending of town/rayon budgets is accessible to citizens. 87.69% of Gamgebelis/town Mayors noted that this information is posted in local newspapers and 24.62% identified the local television stations as the source of this information. 27.69% stated that the information is available at the Gamgeoba secretariat. According to 24.62% of local government representatives, this information is posted on a monthly basis, 41.54% believe it is posted on a quarterly basis and 9.23% on a yearly bases.

Results: ISFED welcomes the active participation of local government representatives in town hall meetings. These meetings are very important for allowing citizens to voice their concerns and communicating them directly to Gamgebelis/town mayors.

The number of those gamgebelis/town mayors who participate in draft discussions has increased by 9%. Unfortunately, citizens' opinions are still largely not considered, although there is a small improvement in this area from the last round of questionnaires..

It is clear that local governments communicate their decisions to citizens. The most popular means of communication are again the local press, local television and Gamgeoba information boards. Unlike the 1st round, none of the Gamgebelis/town Mayors have avoided answering this question.

An absolute majority of rayon Gamgebelis/town Mayors provides information on the local budget expenditures to the population. The information on the budgets is published in the local press and local television, also available at the Gamgeoba secretariat. This information is posted on quarterly bases, and there is no significant change in this variable.

Recommendations:

As the results of the 1st and the 2nd rounds do not vary much and the problems facing rayon Gamgebelis/town Mayors and the shortcomings in their work mainly remain the

same, our recommendations are similar to those made in the 1st round of the questionnaire.

To improve working conditions in Gamgeobas, more funds must be allocated from the rayon budget, and Gamgeobas must be equipped with modern technology. Because of the energy crisis in the country, Gamgeobas must have their own source of electricity and the offices must have computers, fax machines and access to other modern means of communication. Improving the working conditions will significantly enhance the effectiveness of the work of Gamgeoba's and their relations with citizens. At the same time, Gamgeoba staff members must be trained to increase their qualifications.

Although rayon Gamgeobas/town Mayors have specified times for citizen reception, it is necessary to use other means (local press, television, radio etc.) to inform citizens about where and when they can meet with their Gamgebeli/Mayor. This would make the information available not only to the population of rayon centers, but also to the villages.

Gamgebelis/town Mayors must be more active in arranging discussions of draft laws in rayons and in participating in them. These kinds of discussions will ensure that the opinions of citizens' concerning laws and decisions of the Parliament are considered. It will ensure the participation of citizens in the decision-making process, a key principle of democratic governance.

For the purpose of transparency, all rayon Gamgebelis/town Mayors must make the decisions taken on local level public. Information on local budgets must be posted on a regular monthly basis.