

The Analysis of the Local Government Questionnaires Results 3rd and 4th Round

Introduction

From November 2004 until November 2005 the International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED) implemented the project “Active Citizens – Accountable Government” throughout the whole territory of Georgia.

The project aimed at promoting active citizenship by enhancing citizen participation in decision-making processes and increasing the accountability and transparency of government.

Within the framework of this project, among other activities, ISFED administered a quarterly questionnaire on the activities of local governments’ officials. The questionnaire intends to familiarize the public with the work of local government officials, study the existing situation and identify the main problems that need to be solved to make local governments’ work more effective.

The above mentioned questionnaire helps us to evaluate the activities of the representatives of local government, their working conditions and their relations with citizens. In addition, by means of the questionnaire, citizens can find out when the local government officials have the reception hours, how the local government works and what kind of problems local government faces during the implementation of its duties. This will help us to develop adequate recommendations and to find ways of resolving mentioned problems.

The above mentioned analyses will also help different organizations that work or plan to work on local governance issues to identify their working priorities.

During the project, ISFED administered and published the results of the questionnaire on a quarterly basis. ISFED has already conducted first and second rounds of the questionnaire. This analysis is based on the results of the third and fourth round of local government questionnaire.

Sincerely,

Tamar Zhvania
ISFED Executive Director

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 third round of the questionnaire covered the April 15, 2005 to July 15, 2005 period and the fourth round – the July 15, 2005 to October, 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 55 completed questionnaires from 69 acting representatives of local government in the third round, and 64 questionnaires - in the fourth round. This analysis is based on the answers of the representatives of the local government in the third and fourth rounds of questionnaire. Percentage data of the third round questionnaire is calculated on the basis of 55 completed questionnaires. Percentage data of the fourth round questionnaire is calculated on the basis of 64 completed questionnaires.

In the third round, questionnaires were not filled out by Gamgebelis of Dmanisi, Vake-Saburtalo, Tianeti, Adigeni, Akhaltsikhe, Khashuri, Oni, Baghdati, Ambrolauri, Lentekhi, Mestia, Ninotsminda, Khelvachauri and Chokhatauri for different reasons. It must be mentioned that Tianeti and Vake-Saburtalo rayons did not have Gamgebelis during the third round questionnaire period; ISFED rayon coordinators could not meet Oni and Lentekhi Gamgebelis as they were on vacations.

As regards to the fourth round questionnaire, from the above mentioned rayon gamgebelis, only Mestia Gamgebeli did not fill it out. Besides Mestia, questionnaires were not filled out by Martvili, Lanchkhuti, Kutaisi and Gori rayon Gamgebelis. During the fourth round questionnaire period, questionnaire could not be filled out in Kutaisi because of the uncertain situation and frequent changes in the local government..

The third and fourth round allow us to assess changes in the local government's activities and working conditions, estimate improvement or deterioration of working conditions and to compare it with results from two previous rounds.

Summary of findings

Local government, here rayon Gamgebelis and town Mayors that are not subordinate to rayons, is directly responsible for solving social, economic and other local problems of citizens. Thus, it is very important how effective is the relationship between local government representatives and citizens and how effectively are citizens interests represented in their activities.

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. Gamgebelis/town Mayors have a specified time for the reception of citizens and this is welcomed. The number of Gamgebelis that use electronic mail for communication with citizens still remain 2, that means there is no improvement in the level of modern technology usage which clearly 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 very little improvement in relations with state institutions. Very often local government representatives still face problems and receive late responses or state institutions are confused whose responsibility it is to deal with the issue. 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 better technical equipment and more qualified staff as the best ways of improving their working conditions. Generally, compared to the previous two rounds' assessments, slight improvement in the working conditions is noted.

c) The questionnaire analysis shows that majority of Gamgebelis/town Mayors participate in town hall meetings with a variable frequency. For instance, in comparison to the two previous rounds, the number of those Gamgebelis/town Mayors who participated in draft law discussions on the local level has decreased by 10% in the third round, but has increased by 13 % in the fourth round. In most of the cases, public opinion and initiatives from citizens still are not taken into account in draft laws.

It is clear from the analysis of the questionnaire that local government officials communicate their decisions to citizens. The means of communication remain the same, and include the local press, Gamgeoba information boards, posting information in public places and local televisions.

Every Gamgebeli/town Mayor provides 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

In the third round questionnaires were filled out by 79.71% of local government representatives (55 Gamgebelis/town Mayors out of 69). In comparison to the first and second rounds, low level of participation in the third round can be explained by the vacation period during the summer. In comparison to the previous rounds, more local government officials filled out questionnaires – 92.75 % (64 Gamgebeli/town Mayor out of 69) in the fourth round.

2. Relations with citizens

98.18% of local government representatives in the third round and 98.46% - in the fourth round stated that they have a specified time for citizen reception. According to the responses in the third round, 60% of rayon Gamgebelis/town Mayors devote more than 10 days a month to citizen reception, 16.36% -5-10 days and 23.64% - less than 5 days. 85.45% of Gamgebelis/town Mayors receive more than 50 citizens per month, and 14.54% receive less than 50.

According to the responses in the fourth round 53.84% of rayon Gamgebelis/town Mayors devote more than 10 days a month to citizen reception, 24.61% - 5-10 days, and 21.53% - less than 5 days. 86.15% of rayon Gamgebelis/ town Mayors receive more than 50 citizens and 13.84 % - less than 50.

According to the responses from the third and fourth round of questionnaire, all Gamgebelis/town Mayors receive letters and complaints from citizens and react to these letters by demanding responses from relevant state institutions. 40% of Gamgebelis/town Mayors in the third round and 38.46 % in the fourth round face problems when demanding responses, and 58.18% in the third round and 61.53% in the fourth round - do not. 21.82% of Gamgebelis/town Mayors in the third round and 36.92% in the fourth round who face this kind of problems reported that state departments respond late; 16.36% In the third round and 15.38% in the fourth round said that sometimes it is vague which department is responsible for a specific issue. It has to be mentioned that 53.12% of Gamgebelis/ town Mayors did not answer this question in the fourth round. (34 Gamgebeli/ Town Mayor out of 64).

All rayon Gamgebelis/town Mayors inform citizens of the responses from relevant state departments: 74.55% in the third round and 80% in the fourth round do this using the post, 21.82% in the third round and 18.46% in the fourth round - by telephone, 58.18% in the third round and 64.61% in the fourth round - at meetings; only two Gamgebelis inform citizens through electronic mail.

Other ways of soliciting citizens' inputs are: telephone for 47.27% of Gamgebelis/town Mayors in the third round and 43.07% in the fourth round;

public surveys – 18.18% in the third round and 15.38% in the fourth round; private meetings – 80% in the third round and 86.15% in the fourth round; town hall meetings – for 70.91% in the third round and 56.92 % in the fourth round.

Results: *We have found that private meetings are still 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 and this is welcomed. Like the second round, the number of Gamgebelis using electronic mail to communicate with citizens remains 2 in the third and fourth rounds. 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 it is unclear which state institution should hold the issue. This indicates that state institutions do not function effectively.

3. Working conditions

90.90% of Gamgebelis/town Mayors in the third round and 90.76% in the fourth round reported that their working conditions are acceptable; 5.45% in the third round and 4.61% in the fourth round stated that their working conditions are bad; 3.63% in the third round and 3.07% in the fourth round believe working conditions are good. In the fourth round only one person stated that his working conditions are very good. 90.90% of Gamgebelis/town Mayors in the third round and 95.38% in the fourth round stated that working conditions need to be improved.

67.27% of rayon Gamgebelis/town Mayors in the third round and 67.69% in the fourth round consider that working conditions can be improved through better technical equipment; 41.82% in the third round and 41.53% in the fourth round think that the best way to improve working condition is through a more qualified staff; 9.09% in the third round and 3.07% in the fourth mentioned increasing salaries of the staff. Besides these answers, repairing the administrative building was also mentioned (respondents could mark several answers) in the third round and in the fourth round only one respondent mentioned that the development of economy and local industry is necessary for this purpose.

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.*

In comparison to the previous rounds, there is no significant improvement or deterioration in the working conditions of Gamgebelis/town Mayors

4. Work of Gamgeoba/Mayor

100% of local government representatives in the third round and 96.92% in the fourth round stated that they have participated in town hall meetings. In the third round 94.54% and in the fourth round 78.46% of local government representatives participated in more than 3 town hall meetings.

41.82% of Gamgebelis/town Mayors in the third round and 55.38% in the fourth round participated in draft law discussions in the rayon. 50.91% in the third round and 41.53% in the fourth round stated that they did not participate in this kind of discussions. 47.27% of Gamgebelis/ town Mayors in the third round and 40% in the fourth round stated that none of the citizens' initiatives were considered in the laws which were adopted by the Parliament. 29.09% of Gamgebelis/town Mayors in the third round and 38.46% in the fourth round stated that citizens' initiatives were considered by the Parliament of Georgia.

96.36% of Gamgebelis/town Mayors in the third round and 87.69% in the fourth round reported that they solved rayon problems, which include repairing roads, bridges, roofs, water supply and sewerage systems, schools, gardens, torrent canals, sport complexes and stadiums, painting facades, construction of telephone masts, providing aid and partially covering medical costs for socially vulnerable people, providing aid to the victims of natural disasters, covering salary debts, repairing night illumination and improving electricity supply. 3.64% (2) Gamgebelis in the third round and 12.5% (8) Gamgebelis in the fourth round did not answer this question.

89.09% of Gamgebelis/town Mayors in the third round and 81.53% in the fourth round stated that they inform citizens about local government decisions through the local press; 38.18% in the third round and 36.92% in the fourth round use the local television; 32.73% in the third round and 26.15% in the fourth round post the information in public places. 52.73% in the third round and 53.84% in the fourth round post the information at the Gamgeoba information board respectively.

94.55% of Gamgebelis/town Mayors in the third round and 93.84 % in the fourth round stated that the information on drawing up, implementing and spending of town/rayon budgets is accessible to citizens. 70.91% of Gamgebelis/town Mayors in the third round and 81.53% in the fourth round noted that this information is posted in local newspapers. 20% in the third round and 24.61% in the fourth round identified the local television stations as the source of this information. 30.91% in the third round stated that the information is posted in the Gamgeoba secretariat and 43.07% in the fourth round stated that the information is available at the Gamgeoba secretariat. 16.36% of local government representatives in the third round and 15.38% in the fourth round stated that this

information is posted on a monthly basis, 27.27% in the third round and 38.46% in the fourth round said that it is posted on a quarterly basis. 18.18% in the third round and 9.23% in the fourth round stated that the information is posted on yearly bases. In the fourth round only per one respondent said the information is posted on the web site and disseminated by informational bulletin.

Results: *It is clear from the analysis that all local government representatives participate in town hall meetings and ISFED welcomes their active participation. These meetings are very important for allowing citizens to voice their concerns and communicate them directly to Gamgebelis/town mayors. However, it has to be mentioned that in most of the cases citizens' initiatives are not taken into consideration in draft laws.*

It is clear that local governments communicate their decisions to citizens. The most popular means of communication remain the local press and television, Gamgeoba information boards and posting information in public places. Like the second 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 most frequently posted on quarterly bases, however decrease of 1% is recorded in number of those Gamgebelis who stated that information is posted on monthly basis.

Recommendations:

After reviewing results of the third and fourth round, we conclude that ISFED recommendations stated during the first and the second rounds of the questionnaire remain up to date. Thus ISFED presents the same recommendations in order to increase the efficiency of local government's work.

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 should be more active in arranging discussions of draft laws in rayons and in participating in them. This can be achieved through stronger cooperation with majoritarian Members of Parliament. 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 accessible to public. Information on local budgets should be posted on a regular monthly basis, not only in the rayon centers, but in all villages as well.