

ACTIVITY REPORT

Reporting period: February 2002 – April 2003

In the reporting period (February 2002-April 2003) the research project set the following priorities: (1) To establish contacts with relevant experts in order to get evaluation and feedback on the project design and activities; (2) To make appropriate changes to the approved project proposal and timetable in response to the changing institutional context for local governments; (3) To develop a model for the comparative measurement of the institutional performance of local governments before and after the local government reform; (4) To identify and analyze policy networks and to track the connections of powerful actors in the pilot municipalities; (5) To write research and policy papers with the recommendations for participatory governance; (6) To publish a monograph in Georgian.

The research was divided into the three parts: preparatory, field research and implementation phases. Each phase is described in detail below.

1. PREPARATORY STAGE: FEEDBACK AND AMENDMENTS

1.1. Implementation of the project started from February 2002 by establishing contacts with different experts to receive the feedback and comments on the project proposal. A few professionals contributed to further development of the project by making useful comments on the research question, research methodology and practical applications. These experts are: project mentors: Mr. Zsolt Enyedi - Assistant Professor of the Political Science Department at Central European University, Budapest, Hungary, and Mr. David Losaberidze - Member of Board of the Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development, Tbilisi, Georgia. Other experts: Mr. Noah Friedkin, University of California, Santa Barbara; Mr. John Watson, University of Birmingham; Mr. Gabor Soos, Tocquville Research Center, Budapest; Mr Varlam Tchkuaseli, Georgian Institute of Public Affairs, Tbilisi.

1.2. Prior to the submission of the project proposal to IPF local elections were scheduled for the Autumn 2001. Therefore, the submitted proposal envisaged constant institutional arrangements. But local elections were delayed until June 2002, which changed the institutional design for local government by introducing elected Mayors, changing election systems of representative bodies on both upper and lower tiers, etc. The changing institutional environment for local governance required changes to the research proposal.

1.3. Based on the useful comments and criticism by the individuals listed above the proposal was amended and more realistic objectives were put forward. The research questions and research stages were finalized as follows: The main research question: explore the possibility of participatory governance in Georgian local governments given the structure of policy networks at the localities. The main research question led to analysis of the following areas: (1) measurement and comparison of local governments' institutional performance before and after the reform (2) structure of policy networks at the municipal level; (3) impact of the institutional change on the structure of policy networks; (4) impact of the structure of policy networks on the institutional performance.

1.4. The extraordinary elections of June 2002 imposed a time constraint on the research process, as it happened in the middle of the research period and thus increased the number of individuals to be interviewed. This was resulted in changes in research management: After the consultation with the project mentors and IPF staff an assistant has been selected and hired to help me in data collection. I am grateful to my assistant, Mr. Vasil Guleury – a journalist from

Gori, who has continued to display excellent knowledge of local processes and dedication to the his responsibilities through the research phases.

2. FIELD RESEARCH

2.1. Selection of municipalities

Three pilot municipalities were selected for research purposes based on the following criteria: (1) presence of ethnic or party/political divisions/cleavages; (2) diversification of interests, i.e. developed business, civic and media sectors; (3) urban settlements – administrative centers of districts with developed infrastructure. Two of the selected pilot municipalities (Gori and Khashuri) display strong party cleavages. The third municipality (Akhaltzikhe) is populated by the two ethnic groups of approximately same size (Armenian and Georgian).

2.2. Design of a model for measurement of the institutional performance

The decisions of the municipal representative and executive bodies were collected and analyzed. The analysis helped to produce relevant questions for semi-structured in depth interviews. In addition, on the basis of decision analysis a model for the measurement of institutional performance was developed consisting of categories, components and indicators. The model is summarized in the table below:

Category	Component	Indicator
Policy process	Bargaining	Receiving more competences
	Coordination	Involvement of internal customers
Policy output	Administrative competence	Stability of LG structures
	Regulative competence	Stability of regulations
Policy Implementation	Own revenue planning	Collection of local fees
	Expenditure planning	Balance of budget
Responsiveness	Service competence	Adapting services to wants and needs
	Inclusiveness	Involving of community groups

2.3. Monitoring of electoral alliances

The extraordinary elections of June 2002 created a good opportunity for observing alliances and networks during the pre-electoral campaign and during the first meetings of the newly elected councils. These networks would have stayed less visible if there were no elections at the time of the research.

2.4. Exploratory interviews

In each of the three pilot municipalities 30 semi structured in-depth interviews were conducted with the key stakeholders: NGO leaders, local business and media representatives, leaders of the local party chapters, key officials of the former and newly elected local governments. The structure of the interview questions was built around the four main issues: (1) Evaluation of local governments' performance before and after the reform. (2) The impact of the institutional change of 2002; (3) Participation in decision-making by the different groups of local community; (4) Connections and networks relevant to the decision-making.

2.5. Further interviews and Research on the reputation networks

In the selected municipalities second series of interviews were conducted with 75 individuals. The interviews covered the same issues as above but more emphasis was given to the alliances, ties and connections relevant to the policy/decision-making process. The second series of interviews was followed by the study of reputational networks. Reputational networks were analyzed into the two stages: on the first staged actors were chosen according to their leadership positions in the key organizations. On the first stage these actors were asked to nominate other actors who were regarded as powerful and influential in the communities. On the second stage further search for the connections were pursued using the snowball method: started with the focal actors identified on the first stage and continued until no new actors would be identified or until there would be no more actors willing to participate.

3. IDEAS IN PRACTICE: DISSEMINATION AND APPLICATION

In June 2002 the process and progress of the research have been disseminating through the Local Government Information Center website both in Georgian and in English languages (see <http://www.lgic.info>). In February 2003 another interview was published in a newsletter "Embazi" issued in Gori outlining the main outcomes of the research. Further dissemination was provided through a public lecture for local government officials, experts and students delivered at the Georgian Institute of Public Affairs on 23 February 2003.

In addition, a course (Foundations of Local Governance) has been prepared for the Georgian Institute of Public Affairs, School of Public Administration, Undergraduate Program on Local Government. The main results of the research are included in the course as a case study of formal and informal power relations in the Georgian municipalities. Majority of the students are those elected or appointed officials of local governments who wish to complement the practical experience with the theoretical knowledge.

On the practical application side I have been working to feed with my research some of the activities of Georgian Governance and Civil Society Project where I work as a team leader since October 2002. The Building Democracy Component of the project promotes cooperation and coordination among the different sectors including local governments, NGOs and businesses. The project organizes a partnership conference in Gori (end of June) where I will present and disseminate a concise guide for partnerships prepared as part of my research project. The guide covers several issues of public-private partnerships such as objectives, composition, internal rules, strategy and case studies.

The final activity of the project – publishing a book in Georgian language - is still ongoing and will be completed in August 2003.