

A short report on the Advisory Service for the local self-government of Imereti and Guria conducted by the Fund "Sukhumi" in frames of the project "Experience of the Visegrad countries to advocate the equal, inclusive and democratic governance"

From February to July 2018, the consultative group of the Fund "Sukhumi", consisting of 5 staff members, worked with 15 municipalities (12 municipalities of Imereti 3 municipalities of Guria) on the issues of gender policy of self-government, organization of work of local gender equality councils. The "Guide" of the Fund "Sukhumi" - "Introduction of Gender Mainstreaming in Local Authorities" was actively used in the work.

A short review of the current situation: local governments gradually master the essence of gender policy and issues related to them. This is facilitated by the instructions of higher authorities, especially the Ministry of Regional Management and Infrastructure, on the recommendation of which, since January 2018, all the municipalities of Imereti and Guria have created gender equality councils, approved the provision of the councils (the remaining municipality – Sakrebulo of Vani, plans to approve the provision of the Gender Council within the next few days).

Part of the Municipalities of Imereti and Guria, with the help of partner NGOs, began to work on local action plans for gender equality. In spite of the fact that the instructions indicated that this is not a plan of gender council, but of a municipality, several municipalities developed and approved an action plan of Gender Council (Kutaisi, Tskaltubo). At this stage development of an action plan for Gender Equality of the municipality is carried out.

The municipalities of Kharagauli, Samtredia, Kutaisi, Tskaltubo, Ozurgeti, Chiatura, Khoni, Chokhatauri received consultation from the Fund "Sukhumi" regarding already available drafts of action plans, the work on which was carried out with the help of qualified NGOs, and the municipalities of Vani, Terjola, Lanchkhuti, Zestaponi, Bagdadi, Sachkhere, Tkibuli started working on a gender equality plan through close contacts with the Fund "Sukhumi". It was decided to create working groups that will work on improving the plan.

The characteristics of gender councils: The gender councils differ from each other as with number of council members (from 7 people in the council to 30), so with its composition (there are councils where there are several qualified NGOs, there are councils where there is no NGO and representative of the society and after the recommendation of the fund the work is done on the inclusion of experienced public organizations in the council). Basically, they include both members of Sakrebulo and representatives of the responsible services of the Municipality, in two municipalities the council included representatives of local social welfare centers (Tkibuli, Khoni). This decision is the result of the positive experience gained after cooperation of structures, responsible for providing services to the most vulnerable groups of citizens, which is consonant with gender-sensitive approaches. Information on the results of such cooperation was provided to the entire Gender Councils.

The work showed that the large number of councils hinders its mobility. In addition, challenges have been identified - the need for gender education and the realization of the benefits of gender policy as a policy of social balance. There was observed Nihilism from individual members of the council: how effective can be the work of the council, what can it influence on? There was also a misunderstanding of the relevance of gender-sensitive approaches, gender budgeting, and its specifics.

There is an urgent need for institutional strengthening of gender councils and ensuring gender education of its members. Different starting positions are observed here: if in some municipalities there is a discussion on: how to better create a gender statistical base, what type of information should be collected; who will be responsible for collecting information and ensuring its accessibility; or - how to

implement the methodology of needs' research and gender monitoring and evaluation, how to use the results to implement gender budgeting and specific gender programs, then other municipalities still need to work to introduce an understanding of the listed components of gender policy.

Gradually, there is an increasing awareness of the need to include Gender Council staff responsible for operational processes, in self-government such as: financiers, lawyers. Their participation in the meetings added more clarity to specific areas in the budgeting process, the need for harmonization of local political documents.

Institute of gender adviser / responsible workers for gender policy of the municipality:

Another mechanism for gender equality, in addition to the Gender Council, is the institution of the gender adviser, which is an independent mechanism and, in coordination with the gender councils, it is at the forefront of the processes of introducing gender-sensitive policies and studying the issue of gender needs at the local level. At this stage - only in two municipalities - Chiatura and Lanchkhuti there are no gender advisers. (There is a vacancy in Chiatura. In Lanchkhuti, during Sakrebulo meeting the gender Council raised the issue, of the approval of the position of the gender adviser). As for the others – some of them has a separate position of an "adviser", or there is a member of City Hall, who combines these responsibilities (municipalities of Khoni, Kutaisi, Ozurgeti, Sachkhere, Samtredia, Vani, Zestaponi, Chokhatauri). Practice shows that existence of separate position is directly proportional to their more intensive activities, initiatives and specific activities. Municipalities which have separate gender adviser position succeed in this, in comparison with other municipalities. (Tskaltubo, Kharagauli, Bagdati, Terjola, Tkibuli).

In the process of working with municipalities, it was possible to observe the situation when responsibility for gender policy is assigned to the respective persons both in the City Hall (as provided by law) and in Sakrebulo. Such municipalities are: Tskaltubo, Khoni, Kutaisi, Samtredia, Bagdati, Vani, Chokhatauri, Zestaponi. (In the Municipality of Chiatura, when filling a vacancy in City Hall, there will also be such an opportunity). With the right communication and optimal distribution of responsibilities (and this is observed in most cases), this contributes to closer coordination of local executive and legislative bodies, a wider space for dialogue.

Dissemination of information on work on gender mainstreaming - information on the work carried out to implement gender-sensitive policies is disseminated mainly through the official sites of municipalities, their Facebook pages. At the moment, only Bagdati, Kharagauli, Lanchkhuti, Tskaltubo have their own Facebook pages. It can be directly said that the existence of an own page largely determines the popularity and recognition of the Gender Councils, activities to promote gender policy. Information related to the work of gender councils often appear in the Internet agency: "Time for Self-Government", than achievements in gender policy, innovative gender programs for the budget are widely publicized.

Cooperation in the format of gender councils is closer with the Fund "Sukhumi" in the municipalities of Tskaltubo, Kutaisi, Lanchkhuti, Ozurgeti, Terjola, where the representatives of the fund are officially members of the councils. During the meetings, a memorandum was signed with the municipality of Bagdati and memorandums with the municipalities of Tkibuli, Terjola, Chokhatauri are in the process of elaboration.

Concrete results shown in the process of work: In addition to the intensive work on the gender equality action plan, which is developed by municipalities using the consultations of the Fund "Sukhumi" and other qualified NGOs, it is already possible to talk about gender policy in the field: individual municipalities started to implement programs for violence victims for the first time. For example, an

amendment to the budget of 2018 is already adopted; in Kutaisi, Chiatura, Ozurgeti, Chokhatauri, Lachkhuti, Zestaponi, Samtredia – it was introduced earlier. Work has begun on the creation of gender statistics. In some municipalities, the use of the principle of recruitment of the staff on gender sensitivity is not only included in the action plan, but it is already used in practice (in the municipality of Tkibuli). The Municipality of Kutaisi, has introduced such approach earlier. In addition, the representative of the Fund “Sukhumi” was invited to participate in the commission. As a result of cooperation with the Fund "Sukhumi" there was introduced an approach of retraining the pre-school institution staff (teachers, educators, directors) on the issue of gender and domestic violence. Trainings were held with the staff of pre-school institutions in the municipality of Tskaltubo.

It should be separately noted the activities to improve the social infrastructure for women: in Kutaisi and Chiatura, this service was introduced earlier; summer groups in pre-school institutions have recently opened in Tskaltubo. In Ozurgeti, a discussion on the promotion of this component started at least in the touristic zone of Ureki mothers who work; in the municipality of Sachkhere this would be the first issue raised by the Gender Council in Sakrebulo. Dialogue regarding this issue is in the process in other Municipalities.

The Fund “Sukhumi” has done some work to promote gender budgeting and gender approaches, citizens’ participation in planning, directing local resources to the needs of citizens. In Tskhaltubo, the practice of co-participatory budget was introduced. Local self-government received additional 150,000 GEL, and is preparing to accept applications from the population for the implementation of relevant programs. The Gender Council is currently preparing a package of recommendations for inclusion in the program of gender sensitive approaches.

After the project completion, the advisory service on gender policy will be continued in the target municipalities. This was facilitated by the fact that the work of the Fund "Sukhumi" in frames of the advisory service was demanded by municipalities and there is a request - to allow municipalities to receive advisory services according the needs.

The identified challenges for the implementation of gender policy in the field, will be advocated by the Fund in different structures to promote gender mainstreaming and balanced social policy at the local level.