

Needs Assessment of Bolnisi Municipality Population

1. Research Methodology

Institute of Social Studies and Analysis with the order of Georgian Samaritan Association conducted qualitative sociological research in Bolnisi municipality.

Aim of the survey was identification of local population needs and studying possible ways of future cooperation between non-governmental organization and local governmental bodies.

In-depth interviews with local population, non-governmental organizations and local governmental bodies have been conducted on the basis of preliminary drawn up guidelines.

Herein we are presenting analytical report of the conducted survey, which primarily depicts main tendencies existing in Bolnisi municipality. These tendencies preferably should be checked through quantitative research, which will be based on representative sampling.

In the framework of concerned survey, in-depth interviews have been conducted with the following respondents:

1. Representative of Bolnisi municipality;
2. Representative of Social Service Agency Bolnisi branch;
3. Representative of Association ‘Mothers’;
4. Two residents of village Disveli;
5. Resident of village Kazreti;
6. Resident of village Kvemo Bolnisi.

Special guidelines have been drawn up for each target group represented by local population, members of non-governmental organizations and local governmental bodies. These guidelines encompassed the following topics:

- Which issue is the most problematic for local population that needs to be immediately solved;

- What are the ways of solving problems local population are facing with;
- What are the problems and barriers in regard to different types of social services, which are provided by Social Service Agency and local municipality to local population;
- To what extent is local population involved in public social life; (if they are then how are they involved in public life; if they are not, what is the reason); what are the barriers hindering this process;
- Which type of problems existing in working of Bolnisi municipality are indicated by local non-governmental organizations;
- To what extent are the initiatives of local population met and encouraged by local municipality.

2. General Social and Demographic Description of Qvemo Kartli Population

According to data of 1 January 2012, number of population in Qvemo Kartli equaled 511 300. There are 119 400 persons living in the city whereas 311 900 persons are residing in the country side. Kvemo Kartli is an ethnically diverse region, mainly populated with the Georgians (56.3%), Azeri (36.8%) and Armenians (5.6%). There are also Greeks, Russians and Poles, but they are represented in small numbers. Ethnic affiliation is linked with two demographic characteristics: religious affiliation and mother language. Consequently, these two characteristics are distributed in the same way as ethnicity. In ethnically diverse districts, the knowledge of the state language (language mastery level) is one of the most important problems. In line with the data provided by national statistical office of Georgia, number of socially vulnerable families from Qvemo Kartli region registered at Social Service Agency (SSA) database amounted to 45 859 in 2012. As for families receiving subsistence allowance, their number amounted to 9841.¹

In 2011 Institute of Social Studies and Analysis (ISSA) with the order of Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) conducted survey on socio-economic conditions and attitudes of population living in Kvemo Kartli. According to survey results, two thirds of non-Georgian population (71.5%) do not speak Georgian. This mainly applies to the Azeri population, 78.3% of which cannot speak Georgian. The corresponding number in the Armenian population is relatively low and slightly exceeds one third (36.3%). Additionally, the survey showed that in the above municipalities, level of employment is lower than in other local territorial units. Condition of employment has been measured in line with standards set by International Labor Organization (ILO). Number of employed in the region equaled 34.7%.²

¹ www.geostat.ge

² see www.issa-georgia.com

3. Summary of the study

3.1. Social Problems of Local Population

The **most important problems** local population is facing with are the following: **unemployment, improper infrastructure, lack of public transport and sufficient land, ecological problems and language barrier.** (Majority of these problems have been also revealed by above mentioned survey, conducted by ISSA in 2011 in Kvemo Kartli region)

The main activity of Bolnisi district (municipality) population is working on their plot of land. Natural economy is developed in the region. Agriculture and stock-raising are the only ways of survival. Local residents have problems related to realization of agricultural production due to lack of so called cooling infrastructure (to store the agricultural products) and product processing/manufacturing factories. Due to lack of lands, population is possessing lands on lease.

There is a high level of inactivity in terms of finding paid jobs. The main reason happens to be the residents' pessimistic mood, as they think they will not be able to find a job anyway. In rural areas there is actually no potential of employment as there are fewer paid jobs in agricultural sector. Consequently, the perspective for rural population is the migration to urban areas or abroad. Thus, those citizens staying in villages rarely seek jobs.

Problems related to infrastructure are crucial for the Bolnisi municipality. Under a bad - functioning infrastructure the population cannot use its components more frequently and also cannot improve economic activities. Following unemployment, the other severe problems have been named: the lack of educational centers as well as entertainment and leisure facilities (cinema, sport clubs, etc.), malfunctioning of educational establishments and irrigation water supply. These problems are especially sharp in the villages. For instance, resident of the village Qvemo Bolnisi stated that rehabilitation of school is needed in their village since pupils have to study in difficult material-technical conditions. There is no sufficient number of kindergartens in the villages of Bolnisi Municipality. In 2008 refugees from Kodori were given kindergarten of Qvemo Bolnisi to live. Even though indicated issue is not discussed out loud, this problem remains the most important issue to be solved in place. In line with the survey conducted in 2011 involvement of pre-school age children (under 7 years old) in education provided by kindergarten is significantly low. This is mostly due to improperly of kindergarten system as well as financial barriers families have.

Problems in relation to arrangements of roads were indicated as well. Additionally, such infrastructural issues as pharmacies and vulcanization are not arranged either. In case of needing medication, residents of the village Kvemo Bolnisi have to go to the centre. Bus going to the city centre has only one round trip per day. Furthermore, youth indicate to lack of entertaining centers in the district. For example, despite sport club existing in place, it is not equipped with necessary inventory.

The knowledge of the state language is one of the important factors in terms of population's involvement in social-economic life of the region. Lack of ability to speak the official language causes estrangement in non-Georgian citizens and evokes aggression. Low level of language mastery results also in ethnic groups' exclusion from social processes, education system and labor market. One of the important problems Azeri (and partially, Armenian) families in Bolnisi district face are language barriers. Due to lack of knowledge of official language, Azeri residents do not have proper communication with local government.

'Majority does not know the language. Language barriers are significantly high. They provide translator. Sometimes we do -' said social worker from Social Service Agency

Resident of Qyemo Bolnisi stated that due to lack of knowledge of state language among non-Georgians involvement process in social public life is hindered. This is particularly important when it comes to cooperation with local municipality. Representative of Association 'Mothers' confirmed significance of language barriers in cooperation process between Azeri people and local municipality:

Older generation does know neither Russian nor Georgian. The same can be said about their children. They do not have motivation and interest.'

Despite language barriers, local population is still partially involved in social public life of town Bolnisi. As for level of involvement in public life in villages, it is very low. The latter is basically due to lack of information, language barriers, lack transportation and cultural characteristics.

Gender inequality is also very important issue in Bolnisi municipality. In Azeri families girls leave schools at younger age. Eventually they get married. Member of association 'Mothers' state the following:

‘Girls get married when they are 11-12. It is very rare to see girls in 7-8 classes. We could not make these girls to come back to schools in Qvemo Bolnisi village. Girls act as they are told in their families. When girls attend trainings, they are mostly assisted by fathers. Whatever girls were saying at the training they were looking at their fathers.’

The dominance of the man’s gender role is especially striking in relation to the issues like community and social activities, management of money, sexual behavior, business and economic activity. Women’s activity is mainly limited to family and making decisions on household issues. The division of man’ and woman’s functions is not based on inter-gender physical differences, since the study demonstrates that women also do quite a hard physical job (like carrying heavy containers with water, physical agricultural work, supplying the family with food products). Participants of in-depth interviews mainly discussed gender inequality from the ethnic perspective and attributed this type of inequality mainly to non-Georgian communities, and especially, to the families of Azeri origin. Gender inequality causes side social effects. In particular, cases of divorce and breaking families are quite high. According to social worker of the social service agency (SSA):

‘Majority of court proceedings are mostly due to family dysfunction. It is hard to maintain family that has been made at younger age. Families are destroyed. Children are negatively affected. Most of the cases are found in Azeri families.’

There are ecological problems in Bolnisi municipality. For instance, pollution of water (irrigation and drinking water) and radiation are most important problems. Resident of village Ratevani says:

‘Radiation is quite high. Water is polluted. We are not normally provided with drinking water. Neither do we have irrigation water. We do not have possibility to irrigate. If we do, we do it with polluted water.’

3.2. Correspondence between demand of local population and services provided by Social Service Agency (SSA)

According to representative of Social Service Agency, the SSA is working in several directions:

- Provision of subsistence allowance which is designated for socially vulnerable families. State allowance program includes both financial assistance and medical insurance. In some cases, on the municipality's initiative, they are also entitled to privileged payments for utility services.
- Working with children and older persons deprived of care, providing and guaranteeing guardianship. However, SSA is also working with other groups, such as homeless, disabled persons, etc.

'We are not only providing people services but also with legal assistance i.e. we are connecting them with those services that are provided not only in our district but also outside it.' states social worker of Bolnisi municipality.

- Implementation of nutrition program that is provision of state assistance of socially vulnerable families in feeding children less than one year.
- Functioning state professional educational programs for socially vulnerable persons.
- Functioning rehabilitation day center for disabled persons.

In regard to compliance between demand of social services and their provision to population it should be mentioned that according to SSA representative, there are no sufficient services for residents. One of the important problems for socially vulnerable families is nutrition of their children. Despite including those families in so called nutrition program, they still have problems with feeding children above one year. There are no professional educational (vocational) institutions in place. Those families that are involved in professional trainings do not have transportation money to get to institutions and attend trainings.

'There is no educational institution in Bolnisi. There were vocational institutions (so called, collages) in past but they have been closed. State provides programs that enable socially vulnerable families to get involved in educational institutions. However, these people encounter problems with transportation. How can one get to the Bolnisi centre without having money for public transportation?!' - states social worker of SSA Bolnisi branch.

Moreover, there is no sufficient number of day centers for street children and disabled persons. Such types of centres are only located in the center of Bolnisi. Residents of villages do not have access to transportation.

‘Street children face problem related to day centres. We have rehabilitation day centre for disabled children. However, only residents of Bolnisi use it. Due to lack of transport, children cannot access these facilities’ - states social worker of SSA Bolnisi branch.

3.3. Cooperation of local population with municipal government and non-governmental organizations

Bolnisi municipality population is highly indifferent to politics and governance issues. Distancing from the local governance is partly determined by the linguistic barrier and a low showing for receiving information from the Georgian and local mass media. Cooperation between local population and municipal government is hindered also by lack of trust of the residents in governmental officials. Ethnic minorities are not involved in the current developments taking place in the municipality, which manifests in low awareness of different social issues, low level of involvement in the programs and low level of cooperation with government structures. The highest level of passivity is observed with Azeri population.

Local NGOs are more trusted than representatives of local municipality. However, local NGO sector is not sufficiently developed. Among the problems existing in this sector, representatives of non-governmental organizations named the lack of finances and indifference of the representatives of local authorities in terms of cooperation. A lot of is done on volunteer basis. As representative of association ‘mothers’ said, she is voluntarily providing women and girls with various trainings. Respondents mentioned that most of the population has difficulty in the assessment of the impact of non-governmental sector on local processes. This is in the first place due to the lack of information about non-governmental organizations.

As for involvement of population in social public activities, there is a skeptical attitude towards taking responsibility and initiative from “below level”. This could be due to either negative experience or low expectance towards efficiency of some kind of activity. The representative of “Mothers” association, for instance, claims:

‘Local population is involved in public life in such a level that is relevant to their information and readiness. We cannot say that they are inactive due to taking local government officials reaction into account. That people need initiative, ideas. They do not know where and to whom they should go. We have taught lots of women to which instances they should apply, where they should go first, etc. They are

following the instructions.’

Respondents are not talking about concrete ways of cooperation between local population, government and NGOs. However, they indicate willingness to cooperate. On the other hand, local population state that some kind of initiatives should be coming from local government. In case of local government showing initiative, residents of the district will get actively involved:

‘Solution of existing acute problems is only possible with initiatives coming from local government as well as financial assistance provided by the latter. Local residents show readiness to assist the government and get directly involved, for instance, in rehabilitation process of schools. They can also contribute to development of village, etc.’

In resolution of various problems responsibility of local government is indicated rather than responsibility of population or NGOs. According to representative of SSA, various prevention services should be financed by local government. In particular, nutrition programs should be extended and provided to children under two years old too. Representative of Bolnisi Sakrebulo states that local government can independently, from its own budget found food processing factory or at least, cooling infrastructure. Realization of various projects on improvement of skills of ethnic minority women as well as in terms of their inclusion in social life is also possible with cooperation between local government and NGOs.