

MEDIA DEVELOPMENT

Evaluation Report

Executive summary Georgia

Improving the media market: Professionalization of local and community media in Georgia

Background

Georgia's political leadership is currently composed of Prime Minister Mamuka Bachtadze (since June 2018) and President Salome Zurbashvili (since December 2018). Georgia's political transformation has been rated relatively positive in international indices for 2017/18 (Nations in Transit, BTI, Freedom in the World, etc.). These positive values are not really reflected in the country's social development. Georgia ranks 64th out of 180 states in the freedom of the press index of Reporters Without Borders 2017, far ahead of Russia, Azerbaijan and other CIS states. Print and radio media are owned by private owners, who are often associated with a political party and determine the direction of reporting.

In the South Caucasus, Georgia is the country with the highest proportion of ethnic minorities in the total population. Armenians and Azerbaijanis make up the two largest ethnic minority groups with 6.5 percent and 5.7 percent, respectively. To date, all ethnic minorities in Georgia are under-represented in state and administrative bodies, both at the national, and regional and local levels. Participation in the country's political, social and cultural life and the media is restricted.

The project focuses on strengthening selected local broadcasters in the areas of professionalization, economic sustainability and the development of balanced and target group-oriented information services. In order to better integrate particularly rural areas and disadvantaged groups into the media landscape and information flows, civil society is promoted by training citizen journalists. Qualification and professionalization measures should help journalists to provide balanced, qualitative and target group-oriented reporting that counterbalances the often manipulative content of foreign broadcasters. Within the framework of the participatory approach, the possibility was also developed for media users to assess local media on the basis of previously defined criteria of a new evaluation system. This data also provides editors and managers of the media houses with important information on possibilities for optimizing their programs.

In order to sustainably improve the quality of local media in Georgia, young journalists—especially from rural areas—will also be qualified and better prepared for their entry into working life. The format of the Media Viability Forum was developed to promote networking beyond national borders. This approach enables the exchange and networking of local and online media, media NGOs and activists from the South Caucasus, Moldova and Ukraine with each other as well as with international experts from the entire Eastern European region. At the outcome level, the project pursues the following objective: "Professionalized local and citizen media offer relevant content for disadvantaged groups in the Georgian media market."

The project partners were originally: Georgian Association of Regional Broadcasters (GARB), Multimedia Education Center (MEC), Media and Communication Educational and Research Center (MCERC), Network of Information Centers (NIC) and Media Development Foundation (MDF). Now, only the latter two organizations still act as project partners. The project's funding period is three years from 2017 to 2019. The project is financed from BMZ funds.

The aim of the present external evaluation is to give a constructive assessment of the impact achieved by the project after two years of the first funding phase and to make recommendations that can be incorporated into the design of a future project phase. The evaluation is based on the OECD/DAC criteria and is based on a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods, including the analysis of internal data and project documents and interviews with target groups, project partners and cooperation partners in Georgia.

Conclusions of the project evaluation

Relevance: A key developmental problem in Georgia is the large gap between the urban and rural populations and the failings of local administrations in addressing the needs and problems of the rural population and especially of marginalized groups and minorities. In this context, the project objective has a high level of relevance, being aimed at 1) reducing isolation by strengthening selected local broadcasters in the area of professionalization and development of balanced and target group-oriented information services, and 2) promoting the participation of civil society and particularly marginalized groups in social processes. The training of citizen journalists creates potential for networking population groups and integrating them into the information mainstream; this also makes it easier for them to resist propaganda and extremism. At the regional level, the project is highly relevant to networking efforts and the exchange of experience and know-how, which leads to better understanding in a region marked by tension and conflict. With the selected strategy field of professionalization and economic sustainability and the associated approaches, the measures implemented by DW Akademie meet the identified needs and potentials of the target groups. The project captures and takes into account the digital challenges of the target groups to a high degree. The developmental objective of the project is in line with the objectives and guidelines of the BMZ and DW Akademie. It is also in line with Georgia's development goals. The Relevance criterion is therefore rated as "comprehensively fulfilled".

Effectiveness: In order to assess the DAC criterion Effectiveness, the impact logic of the project was examined on the basis of the existing strategy and the impact matrix with target-oriented indicators. The level of ambition of the target formulations is appropriate and the target indicators listed in the application are suitable for assessing effectiveness. With regard to the indicators, the project is within the target corridor and will be able to achieve the target figures for some indicators before the end of the project phase. Due to its high learning ability, flexibility and the ability to use learning experiences to adapt the strategy and to slightly redirect it, the project will very probably achieve the objective agreed in the contract according to the indicators. The existence of the local office has a very positive effect on learning and steering processes, the close exchange with project partners and their advice. The Effectiveness criterion is therefore rated as "comprehensively fulfilled".

Efficiency: The project and the project partners maintain an efficient handling of the funds made available. The measures are calculated precisely, the subsidies used cost-efficiently and invoiced transparently. The project achieves synergies through cooperation with other actors. With relatively small and very effectively-used

means (knowledge transfer instead of financial contributions), not only is the work and networking of the actors enabled and efficiently arranged, but innovative media projects adapted to the specific needs and possibilities are implemented. The presence of two experienced national staff members in the local office in Tbilisi has a very positive effect on the management of the individual measures, the advice of the project partners, and on the formation of local, regional and international networks. The objectives will be achieved within the envisaged timeframe. The Efficiency criterion is rated as “comprehensively fulfilled”.

Impact: The increasing degree of professionalization of local and citizen media can be seen in the short and medium term in improved organizational and planning skills and the implementation of innovative financing concepts leading to greater financial independence. The content is already judged by the target groups to be more balanced, closer to the target group and more relevant. In the long term, this will enable pluralistic and critical reporting by independent media that enjoy the trust of the population because the needs of disadvantaged groups are also taken into account. At the same time, the effect of manipulative reporting is critically reflected. The project contributes to the strengthening of civil society in the long term and improvements in the living conditions of citizens. By strengthening journalistic training institutions and qualifying young journalists (especially from ethnic, linguistic and religious minority groups), a contribution is made to critical journalism, which in the long term helps the target groups to achieve their right to freedom of information and expression. At the same time, the better integration of theory and practice facilitates career entry for prospective journalists. In the long term, this can lead to an increase in the quality of journalism and the media as mediator, which in turn will have an effect on strengthening freedom of expression. Through joint learning and sharing of experience on the subject of media viability at regional level,

the professionalization and improvement of local media in the South Caucasus will be promoted, thus achieving long-term effects at that level. The Impact criterion is assessed as “overall fulfilled”.

Sustainability: When describing the DAC Sustainability criterion, it should be noted that with a project duration of three years, only limited statements can be made as to whether approaches to sustainable project anchoring (even after the end of the project) have been created. Ownership by the partner institutions of the project is already very pronounced at the time of the evaluation. The close cooperation between the project executing agencies and the cooperation partners has resulted in a well-functioning network whose individual actors support the strategic orientation and objectives of the project. In the context of professionalizing and promoting the economic sustainability of the local and citizen media, targeted partners were selected who are interested in the further development of their organizations and staff, who attach particular priority to journalistic quality and the attainment of financial independence, and who thus fulfill important conditions for the development of sustainability. The project’s approach of imparting expertise and know-how without additional financial contributions is a good prerequisite for sustainability. Due to the short intervention time, it is not yet possible to speak of a comprehensive institutionalization of measures and financing concepts in partner institutions. But there are approaches to dissemination strategies that make the sustainability of the measures possible. In conclusion the criterion of Sustainability is assessed as “overall fulfilled”.

The project contributes to **regional networking** and media exchange in the South Caucasus. In a region characterized by political tension and mutual prejudice, it is particularly relevant to promote learning processes across borders. Participation in learning forums and discussion platforms in the regional context is desired and highly valued, on the one hand in order to learn from one





another and exchange models, but on the other to improve relations with neighboring countries and reduce tensions. In order to counteract the growing resignation, manipulation and exclusion of population groups in the South Caucasus region, the project, in cooperation with DW Akademie’s regional program, is pursuing transnational cooperation and joint approaches to solutions. The curriculum for a future Media E-School in Georgia was developed on the basis of the media management program of the Ukrainian Media E-School, which is open to media professionals from countries in the region. These additional measures contribute to the achievement of the project’s regional objective.

DW Akademie

is Deutsche Welle’s center for international media development. As a strategic partner of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), DW Akademie carries out media development projects that strengthen the human right to freedom of opinion and promote free access to information. DW Akademie also works on projects funded by the German Foreign Office and the European Union—in approximately 50 developing and emerging countries.

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The objective of the external evaluation is to provide a constructive assessment of the project results. It does not necessarily align with the perspective and planning of DW Akademie. Nevertheless, all findings were discussed in order to allow lessons learned to be incorporated into the development of future strategies.