



Akademie

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EVALUATION REPORT

# Executive summary

## Georgia

Improving the media market: Professionalizing local and community media in Georgia and the South Caucasus

## Background

According to the 2020 Reporters Without Borders press freedom rankings, Georgia is ranked 60th out of 180 countries in the world. In the South Caucasus, there are persistent political, ethnic, and religious conflicts, as well as pronounced urban-rural divides. Large segments of the population are underrepresented in the media and subject to prejudice and stereotyping in news coverage, in particular on social media. Young people in particular are frequent victims of disinformation and often unable to recognize propaganda and fake news. In Georgia, the majority of media outlets are owned by entrepreneurs who determine the orientation of reporting in line with their economic and political interests. At the same time, the number and reach of small independent online media outlets that work with linguistic minority audiences is growing, as is the number of internet users, even in remote mountainous areas.

The subject of this evaluation is the three-year BMZ-funded project in Georgia with

South Caucasus, commissioned by DW Akademie (to run from 2020 to 2022). DW Akademie focuses on inhabitants in rural areas and strengthens small media outlets in providing relevant information to its audiences, especially disadvantaged and vulnerable population groups. Online media outlets are supported in the areas of marketing and target-group oriented storytelling. To increase media literacy among young Georgians, the understanding of the role of the media in democratic societies is strengthened, and capacities for critically assessing media reporting and the production of multi-media content are improved. The project also follows a regional approach, as media managers from the South Caucasus are trained through an e-school format. Key cooperation partners are the Network of Information Centers (NIC), the Media Development Foundation (MDF) and the Georgian Institute of Public Affairs (GIPA). In addition, professionals from small online media outlets—Livepress, Samkhretis Karibche and Qartli—were supported directly by DW Akademie.

The evaluation was carried out by a lead evaluator, based in Germany, and a co-evaluator, located in Georgia from November 2021 to March 2022. The developmental effectiveness of the project was examined according to the OECD/DAC evaluation criteria (relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability). Analytical questions were selected based on the expressed interests of the project team. The theory-based evaluation followed a modular methodological approach, combining elements of contribution analysis with explorative approaches. Recommendations derived from the findings of this evaluation were discussed during the strategy development process for the new application to the BMZ.

## Project evaluation results

The OECD/DAC evaluation criteria have been assessed as follows:

**Relevance:** The relevance of this DW Akademie project, which promotes freedom of expression and unhindered access to information for vulnerable population groups and ethnic and linguistic minorities in Georgia and the South Caucasus, seems undisputed. The resurgence of the military confrontation over Nagorno-Karabakh (between the armed forces of Armenia and those of Arzakh on one side, and the armed forces of Azerbaijan on the other), and the unresolved territorial conflicts between Georgia and Russia over Abkhazia and South Ossetia further underscore the ongoing importance of these project interventions. Consequently, the evaluation criterion has been assessed as “comprehensively fulfilled.”

**Coherence:** DW Akademie selected its partners according to their comparative advantages and implementation capacities. As DW Akademie's cooperation activities with its

partners were custom fit in accordance with their potential, their existing efforts, in particular beneficiary outreach, networks and expertise, and to a certain extent with their abilities to attract alternative funding, this criterion has been assessed as “comprehensively fulfilled.”

**Effectiveness:** The project achieved a wide range of results in its diverse project lines, literally against all odds, as the COVID-19 pandemic not only required flexibility in operational execution but also impacted the project's socio-economic environment. The lack of implementation of network events in the South Caucasus seemed to be due to an insufficient participatory needs assessment among media outlets. In summary, the project's effectiveness has been assessed as “overall fulfilled.”

**Efficiency:** Due to the pandemic-related suspension of travel and face-to-face events, which are typically among the costliest budget items, development

projects in general seemed to have saved on operational costs over the last two years. In these times, a more interesting question would be how the inevitable pandemic-related cost reductions, the result of shifting project activities to the virtual space, impacted on the achievement of the best possible results. For instance, the restriction to an online format seemed to have played a part in the high dropout rates of GIPA's e-school. In addition, budget calculations that would have barely covered travel costs for regional face-to-face formats should be reviewed. With partner cooperation rated satisfactory or very satisfactory on all criteria analyzed, the operational efficiency was assessed as high. However, concerns were raised regarding the demanding nature of financial administrative procedures. In summary, this evaluation criterion was assessed as “overall fulfilled.”

**Impact:** The NIC is making a broad impact by increasing the size of its audience and by initiating positive changes for

vulnerable population groups through its advocacy campaigns. Multiplier effects can also already be seen in the engagement of young people, who were trained by the MDF in media information literacy. It is more difficult, however, to improve the media viability of small media outlets through the management training offered by the GIPA alone. While economic sustainability is aided by management capacity, the political and economic conditions (which were exacerbated further due to the pandemic) have had a negative effect on the viability of small media outlets. This criterion is nevertheless given the rating “overall fulfilled,” as the broad impact and horizontal scaling-up was exceptional, and the initial effects observed in terms of the strengthening the organizational capacities of small media outlets have the potential to develop further under improved structural conditions.

**Sustainability:** The concept of media viability is defined as the ability of the media to produce high quality journalism in a sustainable way. The anchoring of sustainability components runs like a red thread through the entire project plan. The high levels of commitment and ownership among all partners, who seem to have their hearts set on the project, are supporting factors for the sustainability of the intervention. The economic sustainability and independence of both NIC, the umbrella body, and independent small online media outlets depends, however, not only on the quality of the journalism produced and the management capacities of these organization, but also on the improvement of the socio-economic and political context in which they operate. In summary, this evaluation criterion has been assessed as “partially fulfilled.”

## DW Akademie

is Deutsche Welle's center for international media development, journalism training and knowledge transfer. Our projects strengthen the human right to freedom of expression and unhindered access to information. DW Akademie empowers people worldwide to make independent decisions based on reliable facts and constructive dialogue. DW Akademie is a strategic partner of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. We also receive funding from the Federal Foreign Office and the European Union and are active in approximately 60 developing countries and emerging economies.

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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.*