

---

# ***The Policy Advocacy Milieu and its Impact on Advocacy Results in Georgia***

**Tamar Koberidze**

*“Understanding advocacy impact requires more than counting policy wins and losses”.*  
Organizational Resource Service website

**Abstract:** *Evaluations of advocacy outcomes are, in most cases, limited to assessments of the capacity of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to implement advocacy; they are commonly linked to advocacy project timeframes, and are therefore of a limited nature. With this in mind, this paper focuses on the advocacy milieu that affects advocacy outcomes, to a greater or lesser extent. The impact components or conditions reviewed in this paper are: a) state and political conditions, b) the impact of wider acceptance of advocacy issues, and c) the “motivational effect” and “theory of change” of CSOs to initiate an organization and/or policy advocacy.*

*The article concludes that neither the unstable political environment of Georgia nor the wider acceptance of an issue by the public have an impact on policy advocacy. Instead, success of advocacy is related to the motivation to initiate civic organization and comprehension of the “theory of change.” In addition, the article reveals that in Georgia’s context it is not a concrete long-term and formalized strategy that is linked to the “theory of change” that matters for successful advocacy, but constantly maintaining critical issues on the agenda.*

## **Introduction**

Social scientists studying social movements, interest groups, nonprofits, and democratic politics share common intellectual questions about the causes and consequences of collective action in pursuit of social and political change (Andrews & Edwards, 2004). Theoretical debates and empirical research on advocacy organizations started in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and have gradually shifted into micro-level questions of individual participation and identity on the one hand, and to macro-level questions regarding political institutions and culture on the other. Thus, middle range analysis of group political behavior and ongoing policy dynamics is underdeveloped within contemporary political sociology (Andrews & Edwards, 2004). The same is true for Georgia. Assessments generally analyze the Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) established in the 1990s and their achievements and shortfalls; however, they almost never focus on either CSOs’ behavior or the reasons for it. This sector, supported by the West in the form of financial and technical support, with the goal of civil society development, became synonymous with civil society and de facto monopolized civil society discourse, leaving wider society and other non-institutional forms of citizens’ engagement behind (Ekiert & Kubik, 2014). CSOs’ political behavior thus heavily depends on the mode that has been “approved” by westernized neo-Tocquevillian actors (Seligman, 1995).

Despite the fact that the term “advocacy” was introduced to Georgia by international organizations as early as 2003, policy advocacy and its many forms—be it direct lobbying or indirect education and agenda setting—has become an important activity for the non-governmental sector. Donors’ support of advocacy projects has broadened the scope of development assistance and has upgraded it to the public policy influence level. When assessing their efforts, Georgian CSOs confirm that social or political change, reached through advocacy endeavors within a particular sectoral mandate, often occurs over many years of consistent effort. Despite the fact that CSOs view their work in the context of a large-scale activity oriented towards social or political change, experts evaluating advocacy outcomes often focus solely on the advocacy capacity of an organization over a concrete period of time. It is perceived that “good organization” yields “good advocacy outcomes”; yet this formula is of limited application for Georgia, where advocacy campaigns by civil society organizations are conducted amid complex and chaotic political processes (Barkhorn, Hutter & Blau, 2013).

Various advocacy implementation guides and assessment manuals focus on variables such as the *significance of an advocacy issue*, *CSO’s adherence to formalized strategy*, and the inevitability of *wide acceptance of the issue by the population* for advocacy success. In the Georgian context, the first two variables are linked to CSOs’ “motivational effect” and “theory of change” to start an organization and/or initiate an advocacy campaign, while the latter differentiates population segments, such as beneficiaries, decision makers, counterparts, wider constituents, etc. In order to address an issue, CSOs have to ensure that the organization, network, or coalition is accepted by those segments and activates leverages that widely promote the issue of concern (ICCO, 2010).

This paper is based on research conducted in 2015-2016, during which up to 30 Georgian CSOs and informal civic groups of a large spectrum were interviewed. It should be noted that informal civic groups were not the focus of this paper. The CSO part of the research focuses on organizations that have been conducting policy advocacy for at least ten years. The research considers existing evaluation methodologies to be of a limited nature. Advocacy outcomes may be dependent not only on an organization’s capacity to conduct a campaign, or on the wide public acknowledgment of the acuteness of an issue, but also on other factors that construct the milieu of advocacy to a greater or lesser extent. The impact factors reviewed in this article are: a) state and political conditions; b) the impact of wide acceptance of an advocacy issue; and c) the “motivational effect” and “theory of change” of CSOs to initiate an organization and/or policy advocacy.

## Research Methodology

### Theoretical Basis

The research conducted in 2015-2016 examines various global theoretical frameworks, which both explain and define the existence and maintenance of balance in society with regard to state-people relations. The most common theoretical analyses include, but are not limited to, the “tyranny of the majority”, “open society”, and “deliberative democracy” frameworks. The theoretical literature also elaborates on the origins of civil society, both in the West and post-Soviet environment, and on the factors that underline the dissimilar actions of contemporary civil societies in different parts of the world. Special attention is given to inter-society relations, as these are defined by Georgian social capital, and the outcomes of those relations with regard to public participation.

This research evaluates the importance of “localization” of public policies and analyzes the mechanisms and approaches used by society to influence them. The difference in behaviors of societies with different historical experience is analyzed, highlighting a wide spectrum of civil society activism, such as street actions, civic monitoring, and participatory budgeting. Special focus is devoted to civic advocacy, as an active process through which citizens try to influence public policies or implement social change.

### Technical Approach

During the research, more than 20 methodologies for the evaluation and assessment of advocacy and the political environment were examined and analyzed. As a result, taking into consideration research needs, one universal approach was developed to assess both advocacy and the political environment. The assessment of various methodologies and approaches has revealed that the process of civic advocacy and its outcomes are mainly evaluated through four main dimensions: a) the advocacy capacity of the organization; b) advocacy tactics; c) the funding sources of the campaign, and d) the advocacy campaign outcome. With regard to advocacy outcomes, in addition to a specific change in policy, contemporary sources underline a “shift in social norms” as an imperative condition for successful advocacy. The political environment that accompanied a particular campaign was also evaluated in order to consider additional factors influencing the success or failure of a particular advocacy campaign.

The main target of the research was up to 30 civil society organizations and informal civic groups, though these groups were not the focus of the research, from Tbilisi and other regions of Georgia, which were selected based on formalized criteria. Information was collected through in-depth interviews, based on the above four-component framework. For research purposes, some of the four components mentioned above were split into sub-categories, which were evaluated based on a 1-5 grading system, where 1 was the lowest and 5 the highest score. The sub-categories were later averaged in order to get a single score for each of the four categories. The final scores were also assessed using a 1-5 grading system, where 1 was the lowest and 5 the highest score.

The score for the *political environment* variable is an average of the following sub-categories: a) basic guarantees of freedom (violation of constitutional and other rights) from improper interference in an organization’s work, etc.); b) acknowledgement of the issue by decision makers; c) acceptability of decision makers during advocacy; d) change in the government’s attitude as a result of advocacy; and e) access to public information.

The score for the *wide acknowledgment of an advocacy issue* variable derives from concrete examples, stories, or other evidence, as acknowledged/presented by individual CSOs. Response categories varied from “vague evidence” to “clear, quantitative evidence”, based on a 1-5 grading system. Factors associated with CSOs’ efforts to widely promote an advocacy issue, such as creating alliances, strengthening the base of support, messaging, media involvement, maintenance of the issue on the agenda, awareness raising and/or involvement of beneficiaries in advocacy, etc., were evaluated separately, as sub-categories, based on a 1-5 grading system.

*Motivational effects and theory of change* were evaluated separately and averaged into a single score, based on a 1-5 grading system. The motivational effects of forming a civil society organization were scored in four main categories (ascending): a) founded by donor; b) accumulated knowledge and experience gained through a donor; c) convergence in professionalism and donor support; and d) informal civic groups of active citizens as part of the oppositional culture. A CSO would score lowest for theory of change when it was unable to elaborate on political or social change planned within the frames of a particular campaign, and highest when an organization had a well-thought-out and clear vision of its long-term goals and the strategies to be used in order to achieve particular policy change.

For research purposes, *advocacy outcome* was evaluated based on the Advocacy Outcome Categories in Annie E. Casey's "Guide to Measuring Advocacy and Policy" (2008), which includes five variables: *shift in social norms*, *strengthening alliances*, *strengthening base of support*, *improved policies*, and *advocacy effect*. Each of these variables was split into sub-variables and evaluated individually based on a 1-5 grading system, and were then averaged to derive a single score for each of the five variables. The average of the *shift in social norms*, *strengthening alliances*, *strengthening base of support*, *improved policies*, and *advocacy effect* variables represents the score for "advocacy outcome" for individual organizations.

### **The Non-Governmental Sector and the State**

Identifying, evaluating, and understanding nonprofit-government relationships are "important to help meet the challenges confronting both rich and poor countries" (Brinkerhoff & Brinkerhoff, 1999, cited by Brinkerhoff, 2002). Nevertheless, these relationships are still largely unexplored, and there are no generally accepted concepts, models, theories, or paradigms for research (Gidron, Kramer, & Salmon 1992). At the same time, there is wide recognition that "political systems... are important determinants of both the character of civil society and of the uses to which whatever social capital exists might be put" (Foley & Edwards, 1996, cited in Sander, 2015).

Taking into consideration the fact that "public policy includes the laws, regulations, programs, and practices of government that meet social needs and problems and disburse public funds" (W.K. Kellogg Foundation, 2008), and that "civic advocacy is an attempt to inform or influence local, state, or federal decision making" (Weiss, 2007, cited in McCracken, 2010), taking a deeper look into the governance landscape will explain the connections and linkages between the two sectors, and emphasize their interrelationships. In addition, moving beyond stereotypes and simplified prescriptions is required to enhance understanding of how governments and nonprofits interact, and whether their interactions provide responsive, accountable and efficient solutions to societal problems that no single sector can address independently (Brinkerhoff & Brinkerhoff, 2002).

Beginning in the 1990s, since the establishment of the third sector, civil society organizations, with support of international partners, have worked for improvement of an "enabling environment" for civil society. Experts outline that despite minor shortcomings, the environment is traditionally rather attractive. Legislative and regulatory acts aimed at supporting civil society have been developed and improved for many years and this process continues.

Registration of nonprofit, non-commercial legal entities<sup>1</sup> in Georgia is an easy and non-bureaucratic process. No administrative barriers exist for their functioning. Studies show that the political and institutional conditions for the increased role of the third sector in public policy dialogue are generally supportive. Civil society organizations currently function without interference from the state (including tax authorities), irrespective of their scope of activities, declared views, or political preferences.

The principles of civil society participation<sup>2</sup> in local self-governance are quite democratic. Meetings of local councils are open, the population has a right to request public information, to get information on draft legislation and participate in their review, to request local council meetings, to file petitions, etc. Further, in order to maintain financial independence, Georgian CSOs are not prohibited from conducting commercial/economic activities. However, if gaining a profit, they are taxed in the same way as businesses.

In 2012-2015, important steps were made to diversify the funding of CSOs and to support their working relations. In 2013, changes to the tax code were enforced, making CSOs exempt from profit tax in the case of non-monetary contributions. In December 2015, the Law on Volunteering was adopted that aimed at the development of volunteerism in Georgia. It defined the status of volunteers and regulated working relations between volunteers and employers, as well as defining employers' responsibilities.

In addition, beginning in 2012, legislative changes were enacted that allowed state organizations to give grants to CSOs. To date, only the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs, and the Central Election Commission have used this opportunity. For example, in 2013 the Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs allocated GEL 300,000 (USD 160,000) for a grant program. In 2014, this figure rose to GEL 1,200,000 (USD 645,000). The law also indicates that this process needs to be localized, which means giving grant-issuing authority to local governments as well.

According to the EU Civic Engagement Guide (2014-2017), many CSOs refrain from participating in state grant programs because of a fear of losing independence in their activities and/or damaging public perception of their independence (EU 2014). Nevertheless, almost one third of the organizations interviewed within the frames of this research have received state grants or provide permanent or temporary services to the state, which means getting state funding in various forms (e.g., voucher system, grants, or direct funding).

There are many cases in which representatives of CSOs in the region have become involved in the work of local government commissions and councils. In general, these structures are established as a result of CSO's advocacy for the purpose of providing social services. In some cases, CSOs successfully participate and have a voice in those governmental bodies, but sometimes they just formally present. For example, as a result of the activities of CSOs operating in Marneuli, one representative of a CSO, Democratic Women of Marneuli, became a member of the Social Service Commission of the Municipality. However, according to the organization's representative, the commission has not yet agreed on an action plan and joint activities have not yet started. Another CSO, Young Economists

---

<sup>1</sup> Official legal status of civil society organizations in Georgia.

<sup>2</sup> Regulated by the Organic Law on Local Government and the Law on the Capital of Georgia-Tbilisi.

Association, operating in western Georgia, had a different experience in this respect. In 2007-2012, representatives of the organization actively participated in the sectoral commissions of the local municipality and gained success in both the fair distribution of social assistance and the development of the Kutaisi municipal budget.

It is clear that the Georgian legal environment provides opportunities to both individual citizens and CSOs to get involved in the policy formation process. However, experts identify several shortfalls in the legal framework that hinders better activation of civil society and the development of alternative sources of finance. In particular,

- Despite the existence of the main principles that condition civil society's involvement in decision making, detailed legal mechanisms, such as forms and procedures for civil engagement or alternative mechanisms of participation, do not exist.
- Despite certain efforts to decentralize local government (based on the new 2014 Local Government Code), more authority should still be given to the regions of Georgia and their municipalities (local governments). Experts also consider greater financial independence to be important.
- Lack of legal mechanisms encouraging philanthropy has a negative impact on cooperation between the nongovernmental sector and businesses.
- The lack of certain tax benefits on expenses of employers related to the engagement of volunteers (e.g. transportation and accommodation) has a negative financial impact on CSOs.

Beyond the attractive "enabling environment", the relationship between the state and the third sector is quite complex.

Established in the 1990s, the so-called non-governmental sector was "alien" for the state and thus posed many questions. In the initial stages, the state did not pay attention to these organizations, but at the beginning of the 2000s, several attempts were made to control money coming into the country through development assistance. These attempts were opposed by civil society itself and, with donors' support, CSOs successfully advocated and lobbied against them.

One of the examples of such a success is the campaign against efforts to limit the civil sector that was conducted in 2001-2004. In this period, the government made several attempts to limit the civil sector's activities via legislative mechanisms. Among those was a 2001 draft law of the Ministry of Finance that proposed that donor grants aimed at civil society development should be disbursed through the state treasury, a move which would have given the government the possibility of having full control over donor money. Even more alarming was the draft law of the Ministry of Security dated 18 February 2003 on "Termination, Liquidation and Abolishment of Extremist Organizations' Activities Controlled from Abroad," according to which the list of "activities controlled from abroad" included organizations that received funding from foreign donors or international organizations. Therefore, in the wording of that draft legislation, any type of CSO could be considered a terrorist organization.

Despite this, the vast majority of surveyed organizations acknowledged they have never experienced pressure or illegal interference in their work from the government, including tax authorities. Certain cases are mentioned when “interference” was made not institutionally but through individual and verbal communication with organizations’ founders. One such case occurred in the Autonomous Republic of Adjara, under the leadership of Aslan Abashidze in 2003. At that time, the establishment of a CSO required a court decision and the founder of a CSO First Step operating in Batumi (in Adjara) recalls the skepticism of a judge who suspected that the organization was being founded for the purpose of espionage on the territory of Georgia. The Ozurgeti case is also noteworthy (1990-2002), when, after open disclosure of corruption by students of the Ozurgeti “Leaders School”, the local government directly confronted the youth and the CSO had to get involved to settle the issue.

According to the surveyed organizations, the state’s attitude towards the sector has certain dynamics, in particular,

- In the 1990s, the state’s attitude was neutral or positive, supposedly because of the fact that, on the one hand, the state was busy with post-independence activities and, on the other, the sector was involved in humanitarian assistance, or filled an economic niche that could not be filled by the state.
- At the post-development stage (at the beginning of the 2000s) the sector was purposefully referred to as “grant-eaters.” Although CSO representatives acknowledged certain mistakes of the sector, they unambiguously state that labeling them “grant-eaters” was caused by the state’s lack of awareness about the sector’s activities, on the one hand, and their intention to discredit an “oppositional sector” on the other.
- In 2003-2012, during the United National Movement’s governance, the government did not pressure the sector. However, it almost fully suppressed the sector’s voice through media control. According to the Executive Director of a CSO working on elections and human rights issues, 2003-2004 were years of silence. Any kind of constructive criticism from CSOs was a problem, because they could not reach out to people. A representative of another CSO, that usually lobbies for improvement of the legislative environment for the third sector, described the United National Movement as “monolithic”, where if the issue was politically acceptable, the issue was promptly addressed. The government of that period openly acknowledged the importance of the sector, but would discredit its critical representatives. This was not done in public, but with donors and international organizations, attempting to assure them that the third sector was not impartial. In 2004-2007, the policy of donors in relation to the sector also changed; an outflow of the CSOs cadre to the public sector and a decrease of donor funding had an impact on the government’s attitude towards the sector. According to organizations working on policy advocacy, the government did not respond to any CSO initiatives during 2007-2012.
- The government that came into power in 2012 actively cooperated with the sector in the initial stages. However, after some time the “open door” was closed. Respondents characterize the government of 2012-2016 as “reactive and afraid of new initiatives.” Currently, the term “grant-eaters” is no longer used, nor has the practice of discrediting the sector with international organizations continued. The media is also open for the civil sector. However, with an aim of

discrediting the sector, the government attempts to label them as “against religion” or “the sector protecting the rights solely of sexual minorities.”<sup>3</sup>

The majority of CSOs state that in recent years the sector, intentionally or unintentionally, has gained the image of a political actor. This in itself is linked with increased public recognition of the sector through the media. Despite the fact that the majority of government officials publicly acknowledge the importance of the civil sector, its active representatives and leaders are often criticized and blamed for only supporting oppositional views (and oppositional political parties). Therefore, the government’s rhetoric has today replaced “opposition” with the “civil sector”. Gross interference is not observed. However, the sector perceives public criticism as attack and pressure. This is reflected in both the general dissatisfaction towards the sector observed in the speeches of former Prime Minister Ivanishvili, who openly tried to discredit active leaders of the sector, and the periodic campaigns of the ruling party’s active supporters, who try to accuse the sector of unfounded financial manipulations. This has a negative impact on citizens, irrespective of their loyalty to or distrust in the government.

In terms of relations with the state, the organizations mention the following important conditions that support or hinder policy advocacy.

- In general, there has been noncompliance with policy objectives and a lack of statesmanship among government officials. Both the existence and the non-existence of a clear political agenda pose problems for the process of policy advocacy.
- There has been a constant changing of the political environment making it necessary for CSOs to make political choices during political processes or changes. This poses special problems for organizations working on social issues that do not want to either take sides in the case of opposing forces or to make political choices. In this case, organizations have to modify their work and spend energy on issues that lie beyond addressing social problems.
- There have been instances of inflexible “monolithic teams,” a general lack of teams, and an inability to make decisions pose problems for the process of policy advocacy.
- There have been issues related to the competence of the government. According to CSOs, the process of policy advocacy requires explanation and justification of basic thematic issues. Therefore, more time is often spent on the education of government officials than on solving the issue at hand or satisfying beneficiaries. This is true for a wide spectrum of issues ranging from human rights to the concepts of volunteering and environmental protection. In situations of insufficient competence, the government chooses either a defensive position or is confrontational and aggressive towards the CSO in order to mask its incompetence.
- There have been problems associated with institutional cooperation. In policy advocacy there is a necessity for personal contacts to facilitate access to both resources and government representatives. In addition, cooperation with the government is often directly linked to the

---

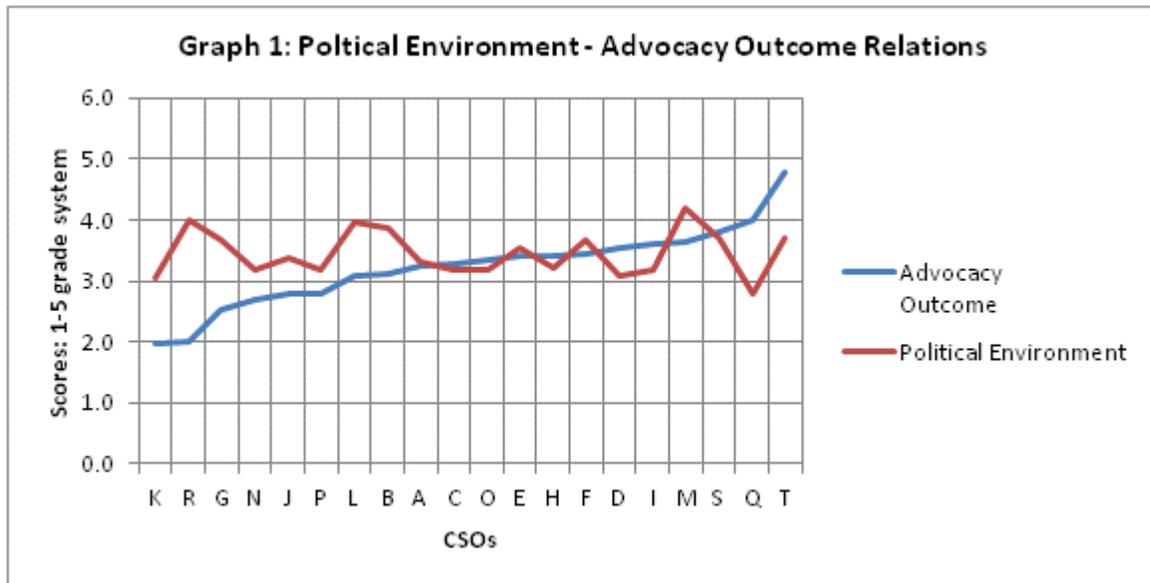
<sup>3</sup> From an interview with CSO International Foundation for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED), February 2016.

reputation of an organization’s leader. The higher the level of confidence in a CSO’s leadership (especially on a local level), the greater are the chances for successful cooperation.

- Some CSOs have had difficulties in identifying the target, timing, situation, and issue in the right way and have not always found the ability to communicate this in order to assure decision makers of the benefits of an issue, in both general and political terms.

The vast majority of surveyed organizations acknowledged that despite uneven support/acceptance by the government, they have never encountered problems on political grounds and that it was possible to find common interests with every government and achieve success in policy advocacy. The research thus emphasized that, despite the complex and chaotic political processes over the last 20 years, the indicator of political environment in Georgia’s context has a lesser impact on overall advocacy outcomes.

Figure 1, Political Environment – Advocacy Outcome Relations, below shows the relationship of political environment to advocacy outcomes for 20 individual CSOs. The horizontal axis represents notation keys for the organizations’ titles (capital letters), while the vertical axis shows the scores for a) advocacy outcome and b) political environment during a particular advocacy campaign, as assessed by individual CSOs.



### Wide Public Acknowledgement of Advocacy Issues

The evaluation criteria of international experts and researchers attach significant importance to the acknowledgement of an issue of concern by the wider public. This is generally related to building relationships, which is intrinsic to any successful advocacy effort and should commence at an early stage. On the other hand, the credibility of the organization, partnership, or coalition that is advocating change is likely to be a key factor in its success (Buckley, 2014). It is generally considered that if an

organization does not put significant effort into this, positive changes of public policy do not occur. In order to achieve this, CSOs are expected to form and *strengthen alliances* for presenting common messages and pursuing common goals, as well as *strengthening their base of support* (Organizational Research Service, 2008).

In order to strengthen alliances, CSOs need to increase the number of partners supporting an issue and enhance the level of collaboration, share priorities and goals, and create strategic alliances with important partners (including bipartisan alliances and unlikely allies). Strengthened alliances are more of a structural change in community and institutional relationships at every level of the advocacy process. It is accepted that these structural changes in community and institutional relationships and alliances are essential forces for presenting common messages, pursuing common goals, enforcing policy changes and insuring the protection of policy “wins” in the event that they are threatened (Organizational Research Service, 2008).

In order to *strengthen the base of support*, CSOs are expected to gain grassroots, leadership, and institutional support for particular policy changes to ensure cultural and societal engagement, including civic participation and activism; “allied voices” among informal and formal groups; the coalescence of dissimilar interest groups; actions of opinion-leader champions and positive media attention. It also requires policy analyses, debate and the development of policy impact statements (Organizational Research Service, 2008).

The above steps, taken either separately or concurrently to get a positive advocacy outcome, are in agreement with the Coalition theory as developed by Paul Sabatier and Hank Jenkins-Smith (cited in Stachowiak, n.d.). The theory is commonly known as the Advocacy Coalition Framework and proposes that individuals should have core beliefs about policy areas, acknowledge the critical nature of a problem, and explore its causes. In addition, society should have an ability to solve problems and find solutions for addressing them. Advocates who operate on the basis of this theory believe that policy change happens through coordinated activity among individuals with the same core policy beliefs (Sabatier & Weible, 2014).

According to various cross-national surveys, such as USAID’s NGO Sustainability Index, the World Values Survey, and other cross-European attitude polls, donor-driven CSOs and networks do not work, or are operational only within the framework of a particular project. In addition, critics emphasize the general inability of Georgian CSOs to cooperate with each other as well as with other interested parties.

The majority of surveyed organizations admit that because of the specific history of establishment- and donor-dependence, routine cooperation is rather challenging—CSOs compete over both funding and authority. All of the surveyed organizations cooperate with, or are members of, local or international thematic civic networks or platforms. This cooperation at most covers common forums and the sharing of experience, but there are also cases where local or international partners get involved in advocacy. It should also be mentioned that if in the past CSOs were often criticized for a lack of cooperation within the sector, today the majority of experienced CSOs seek advocacy partners and cooperate on an issue basis with organizations having different mandates. According to the CSOs, these are often cases when organizations unite together not to solve, but stand against or protest an issue.

Another case is those CSOs that declare that their advocacy efforts do not require cooperation, because they work to create knowledge (e.g., through surveys and information provided by the

population) and promote the issue through negotiations and lobbying. As a general rule, Georgian CSOs are successful in developing formalized advocacy strategies, holding surveys, mapping decision makers and cooperating with them, developing policy options, identifying and assisting beneficiaries, pursuing lawsuits and lobbying. CSOs raise awareness and educate their beneficiaries, and use them as a source of evidence and information; however, in advocacy they act unilaterally, on behalf of the population, and almost never involve them in advocacy in classical ways of involvement, such as forms of collective action, media campaigns, public speeches, collecting signatures and filing petitions, street actions, etc.

The survey revealed a couple of organizations who appeared to be successful in creating informal alliances with opinion leaders or political parties. Nevertheless, there are no cases among the surveyed organizations where institutions changed their attitudes as a result of CSOs' efforts, shared a social mission, or put effort into a common approach.

Media relations are also challenging. According to CSOs, the sector is less popular in terms of media attention, therefore information about CSO activities and achievements are hardly heard by the population. Leaders of CSOs working on domestic and international politics or economic issues take part in national television talk shows, but the population sees them as individual experts unassociated with a particular sector. CSOs note that due to extreme politicization of the media they are often forced to go beyond the CSOs' mandate and comment on any political topic since failure to do so places them at risk of falling out of the media's attention.

Despite uneven score results for examples and evidence of change in attitudes and wider acceptance of an issue by the community, at both the beneficiaries' and decision makers' level and at any stage of advocacy, the research revealed that in Georgia's context wide acknowledgement of an issue is a lesser factor in advocacy outcomes.

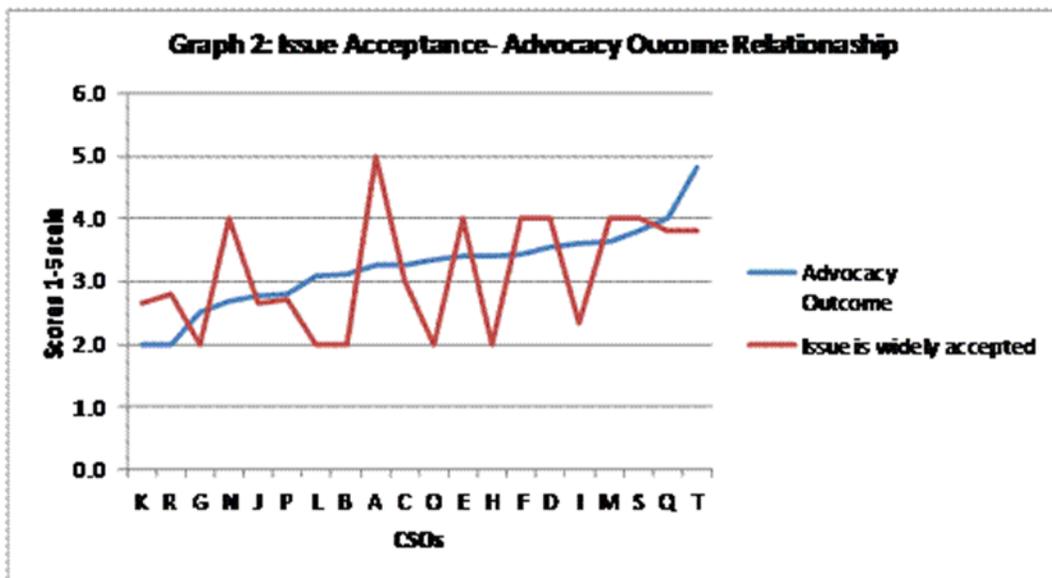


Figure 2 (Issue Acceptance – Advocacy Outcome Relationship) above shows the relationship of wide acceptance of an issue to advocacy outcomes for 20 individual CSOs. The horizontal axis represents notation keys for organizations' titles (capital letters), while the vertical axis shows scores for

a) advocacy outcomes and b) wide acceptance of an issue for a particular advocacy campaign related to an individual CSO.

### Initiation of an Organization – Theory of Change

Because Georgian society in the 1990s had no information on civil society as a phenomenon, the first NGOs were established and developed by donors through their advice, encouragement and support. There were many organizations in Georgia initiated in this way in the 1990s that implemented a couple of small projects, but which subsequently closed after the donor programs ended. Nevertheless, there are several strong organizations in the sector that remained devoted to their social mission and developed despite their donors' exit and the resulting gap in institutional or financial support. Since then, various types of civil society organizations have gradually entered the sector. As a general rule, involvement with the third sector is closely related to both the initial motivation to initiate an organization and the existence of the theory of change among organizations' founders.

The motivational effects of forming a civil society organization vary and can be categorized into three identifiable conditional groupings.

#### 1) Established by donor

The number of organizations established directly by donors is low. The establishment of such organizations was conditioned by the intention to have a prompt positive impact on a concrete sector of public policy. In 1996, for example, USAID established the International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED) for the improvement of election systems and processes in Georgia. Later, in 2006, the Open Society Georgia Foundation (OSGF) established a secretariat (headquarters) for the Harm Reduction Network aimed at pulling together all organizations working on drug policy. The motivation for the latter, according to the donor, was that competition and lack of coordination had prevented individual organizations from achieving desired results. The Eurasia Partnership Foundation<sup>4</sup> also belongs to the category of donor-established organizations. In 1996, it was initially established as the South Caucasus branch of the U.S. non-for-profit organization the Eurasia Foundation and in 2007 was localized and developed as a local CSO. The purpose of the establishment of the Eurasia Foundation in Georgia was to provide services to USAID in terms of proper distribution of grant resources for the development of civil society in the South Caucasus.

#### 2) Accumulated knowledge and gained experience through donors

There are cases in which CSOs were established as a result of grant competitions announced by a donor. Organizations included in this category were initiated to satisfy needs of donors' programs, where the founders utilized resources that became available through grants. There are instances here where the issue of public policy concern was either unknown by the founders or did not fall under their scope of interest before the donor's call. Nevertheless, after the project's completion better informed, more competent and better motivated people (i.e., organization members) continued activities in the same direction once they had become personally "involved" in the lives of their beneficiaries.

---

<sup>4</sup> In 2016, the Eurasia Partnership Foundation was renamed the Europe Foundation.

The CSO Step Forward initiative operating in Batumi falls under this category. The CSO is staffed with doctors and social workers and nowadays is one of the leading organizations in the Autonomous Republic of Adjara working on the problem of children with hearing impairments. The CSO was founded in 2003 with the advice and institutional support of a donor organization that was looking for a local partner in the region in order to implement a project supporting IDPs. This cooperation had a motivational effect not only for the establishment of an organization, but also for further extending its activities in the direction familiar to the organization's members. Supporting persons with hearing impairments is the mandate of the organization today and represents its unique, exclusive theme.

There are many instances in which members of today's organizations were, in various forms, involved with humanitarian or other donor-supported, quasi-state programs in the 1990s and who, as a group, subsequently decided to act in the format of an organization to better explore their professional expertise. One example is the CSO Biliki, the founders of which identified certain issues while working in Gori city government, through which a French donor organization had implemented a humanitarian assistance program. The department of the city government was tasked to identify homeless and orphaned children, register them, and allocate and distribute humanitarian assistance. During the program's implementation, the organization's founders realized the true nature and scale of the problem of vulnerable children. Therefore, after the humanitarian assistance program was formally over, a group of people who had participated in the program inherited the registered children. This is a case in which, despite an initial total lack of awareness of the issue, information served as a motivational effect for the establishment of a CSO and the continuation of activities in this direction. Today, in addition to funding secured through donors' calls, this organization provides services to the state in the form of operating and maintaining daycare centers and family-type houses for children from vulnerable families and those included in the state protection program in Shida Kartli.

### 3) Convergence in professionalism and donor support

There are many cases when a CSO's establishment and development was made possible through donors' financial resources, but the organizational mandate was not conditioned by the donor and was rather a result of the founder's professional experience. In such cases, the motivational effect for professionals of public or social policy to establish an organization was utilizing their individual experience and knowledge, which became possible through donor support.

An example of the above is the Union of Young Teachers, which was established in Ozurgeti in 1996 based on the common professional interest and professionalism of its founders. The organization started its activities in the form of an informal union, the Club of Young Teachers, with the aim of holding discussions and dialogues regarding the challenges facing the education system and proving an opportunity for schools to respond to them. Despite their lack of finances, the team of professionals also initiated the Club of Scientists and their open discussions got the attention of the Ozurgeti community and the media. Only later did the founders become aware that there was a donor assistance opportunity in Georgia for supporting civil society development, so they drafted their first grant proposal and received funding for the teachers' newspaper, *Step*.

Another CSO, the Economic Policy Research Center (EPRC), founded in 2002, was established with the belief that political change should have an analytical basis. The founders of the organization

had experience working on the reforms package in the Anti-Corruption Council of Georgia and in state modernization projects. Upon leaving the Anti-Corruption Council, the group of young, western-educated professionals established an organization to create evidence-based knowledge (Personal interview with Nino Evgenidze, EPRC Executive Director. February 2016).

The following examples outline successful cases of organizations that had been established in the 1990s and that managed to keep their path and maintain a social mission over the years, despite uneven availability of funding.

### **The Greens.**

This group was quite an active political union in the 1990s, and the Greens' Movement affiliated with it, created ground for the start of several CSOs. Experience gained in the political union and movement, as well as the desire to be distanced from politics and implement a social mission, played an important role in the establishment of the Elkana and Green Alternative organizations.

The founders of Elkana, established in 1994, state that the main motivational effect for the start of their organization was the belief that Georgia's future was in agriculture, in particular biological agriculture. However, when going into the field, the founders encountered many problems that, at that stage, made it impossible to work on biological farming. They thus temporarily postponed this direction and started to assist the rural population. They visited rural areas, studied their needs and, together with farmers, analyzed the ways and possibilities of addressing existing problems. Initially, the organization provided services to farmers and peasants, largely through legal consultations and modernization advice. At the present time, Elkana provides fee-based services and runs a pilot bio-farm. The organization also conducts policy advocacy to support the development of bio-agriculture.

The Association Green Alternative, established in 2000, was initiated by four leading campaigners of the Greens' Movement in order to avoid the political impact on the Greens' Party. After completing free organizational development courses, which were popular in Georgia in the 1990s, and winning a donor grant, their CSO was established to pursue new ideas and opportunities in the sphere of environmental protection. From the date of establishment, the organization has monitored the activities of international financial institutions in Georgia. It also works on the issues of biodiversity, energy, climate change and poverty elimination and considers that the "protection of the environment equals development, as such" (Personal interview with Ketevan Gujaraidze, Green Alternative, Executive Director, March 2016).

Very rare but important exceptions are those organizations whose founders came together because of their innovative ideas for the country and decided to start a CSO. As a result of identifying concrete needs for the country, they did not follow donors' directives, but suggested their own themes and programs. There were moments when financial crises (e.g., 1996-1998 and 2004-2007) forced the organizations to dissolve, and their founders had to find other occupations in order to survive. Nevertheless, they remained loyal to their social mission and ultimately not only "survived" but also substantially developed.

The Civil Society Institute (CSI) belongs to the above category. The organization was founded by lawyers in the period when no legislative body even existed in Georgia. The founders of the organization worked in the Department of Economic Reforms, where, because of the non-existence of parliament, laws were often developed in the form of decrees and statutes. The terms and contents related to institutions, such as limited liability company (LTD) and joint stock company were developed in that period. Based on the experience gained in that capacity, in 1994 the group of lawyers established Georgia's Economic Reforms and Development Center based of the Business Law Department. In 1995, the center separated from the department and in 1996 was registered as Georgia's Business Law Center. The organization commenced operations in an environment where an operational legal framework did not exist. In 2002, because of the substantial expansion of the scope of the organization and the need for management optimization, the CSO's Board developed a one-year plan for reorganization. As a result of this, beginning on 25 June 2003, the Business Law Center was transferred into the Civil Society Institute. Up until now, this is the only organization that works on improvement of the "enabling environment" of the civil sector and gains important outcomes.

### **Informal civic groups of active citizens.**

Unions of active people interested in a particular theme belong to this category. These unions represent the oppositional culture of Georgia. For years, such unions have been getting together to advocate certain public policy issues, and this is what caused their unification and the formation of organizations. These groups are outside the scope of this paper.

*Theory of change* is defined as a "research base or roadmap of a belief system (e.g. assumptions, "best practices", experience, etc.) and strategies to provide a clear expression of the relationship between action and desired results" (Organizational Research Services, n. d). This in itself requires comprehension of a social mission and concrete, thoughtful objectives to make positive contributions to the lives of people or communities. Various social scientists have defined and summarized different theories of change, which aids analysis and the construction of logical models for advocacy campaigns and policy change efforts.

The advocacy activities of Georgian CSOs, intentionally or unintentionally, utilize measures and leverages that have been defined by theory of change scholars. We see cases where, though random, important changes in public policy and political institutions, where this has happened given the right conditions. This coincides with the large leaps theory of Baumgartner and Jones (1983), according to which "changes can happen in sudden large bursts that represent significant departures from the past, as opposed to small incremental changes that usually do not radically change the status quo."

Most of the CSOs interviewed regularly use opportunities that arise, or policy windows, which most of the time fall on pre-election periods in Georgia. The policy window theory by John Kingdon (1985) is a classic theory of agenda setting, which states that the way problems are defined, makes a difference in whether and where they are placed on the agenda. In the case of Georgia, based on the essence of a problem, Georgian CSOs often *identify* and *raise* issues, or *get involved* with processes that have an impact on solving a relevant problem at a certain moment in time.

Most of the advocacy campaigns examined are based on a combination of theories of change, such as power politics and grassroots or community organizing. It is worth mentioning that despite the fact that donor-driven CSOs are expected to be more community organizing, they tend to better utilize power politics theory. Grassroots or community organizing theory views power as changeable and dynamic, not something held exclusively by elites. They believe groups can create power by taking mutual action to achieve social change. This approach assumes that power exists when people cooperate, it can be shifted through actions and events; it requires building the capacity of those affected and organizing efforts should reflect the wishes of the people directly affected by the problem (Alinsky, 1971, as cited in Stachowiak, n. d.). On the other hand, C. W. Mills' power politics implies that in order to achieve results, CSOs use strategies that include relationship development and communication with those who have influence. In this case, advocacy efforts are focused on the few, not the many and it is critical to identify who has influence related to the specific policy issue or area being addressed and to develop relationships with them (Mills, 1956, as cited in Stachowiak, n. d.).

On the way to achieving social objectives, theories of change frameworks are highly distinct for individual organizations. Therefore, organizations were assessed in terms of having a clear vision of what they want to achieve as result of their activities, what their long-term goals were, and what the unique needs and priorities of people or the community were. In general, while posing questions on the theory of change, the leaders of the surveyed organizations named extracts of mission statements and told stories about implemented projects, but did not elaborate on the theory of change as such. However, it should be mentioned that looking into the policy advocacy process in more detail, it becomes clear that the majority of surveyed organizations have a clear vision of what they want to achieve or change.

According to Tversky and Kahneman (1981), CSOs' advocacy messaging is also rather weak and insufficiently used for supporting the development of different preferences among the community, based on the ways in which options are presented or framed. Organizations' mission statements (similar to campaign materials) are developed as a result of donors' requirements/assistance, and cases in which a CSO is able to prove that their messaging/materials reached their audience and contributed to advocacy success are rare. The majority of these mission statements are long and general, and organizational representatives can hardly recall them, despite their being publicized through websites and print materials. Many mission statements include phrases such as democracy development, improvement of human rights conditions in Georgia, awareness raising and protection of rights, achievement of positive and sustainable changes, elimination of marginalization, poverty and injustice, to list only a few. It is noteworthy that the mission statements of organizations that focus on public policy changes tend to be vaguer than those aiming at social change. The latter are better at focusing on their specific organization's mandate, such as "assist all children, irrespective of religion and ethnicity in order to ensure their psycho-social and educational support" as in the case of Biliki, "development of rural areas" espoused by CIVITAS Georgia, and "we hear each other" stated by Step Forward, the CSO working on rehabilitation of children with hearing impairments. Normally, both mission statements and "theories of change" include people, raising awareness, development, capacity building, empowerment, engagement, mobilization, etc.

Organizations in both Tbilisi and the regions of Georgia have in place well-developed advocacy strategies in order to solve critical problems through advocacy. Nevertheless, they are generally of a

short-term nature and are developed for a particular project, due to donor requirements. Advocacy processes rarely follow the developed strategic plans, or apply acknowledged stages and norms of advocacy. However, this does not impede organizations from identifying beneficiaries and decision makers, organizing necessary meetings with them and implementing other programmatic activities. In addition, it is noteworthy that positive changes as a result of policy advocacy have been achieved through both multi-year targeted efforts and ad hoc initiatives. The research identified several cases when advocacy campaigns started and finished along with a particular donor-funded project. In such cases, because of funding or institutional challenges, organizations may have overlooked the relevant moment or people for solving the problem or having a positive impact on the advocacy outcome. Nevertheless, the majority of surveyed organizations successfully manage to keep the issue on the agenda using various methods. They apply both intellectual (constant monitoring) and financial mechanisms (inclusion of the advocacy issue as small component in various projects), which ensures the continuation of policy advocacy. The research identified that long-term advocacy success is conditioned not by the existence of a long-term strategy, which is often not present and/or followed by CSOs, but rather by constantly maintaining the issue on the agenda, meaning closely watching and following all conditions or changes taking place around the issue. This is closely related to the motivational effect to initiate an organization and the existence of theory of change, which is also related to an organization’s advocacy outcomes. Organizations that were better able to maintain the issue on the agenda have better advocacy outcomes.

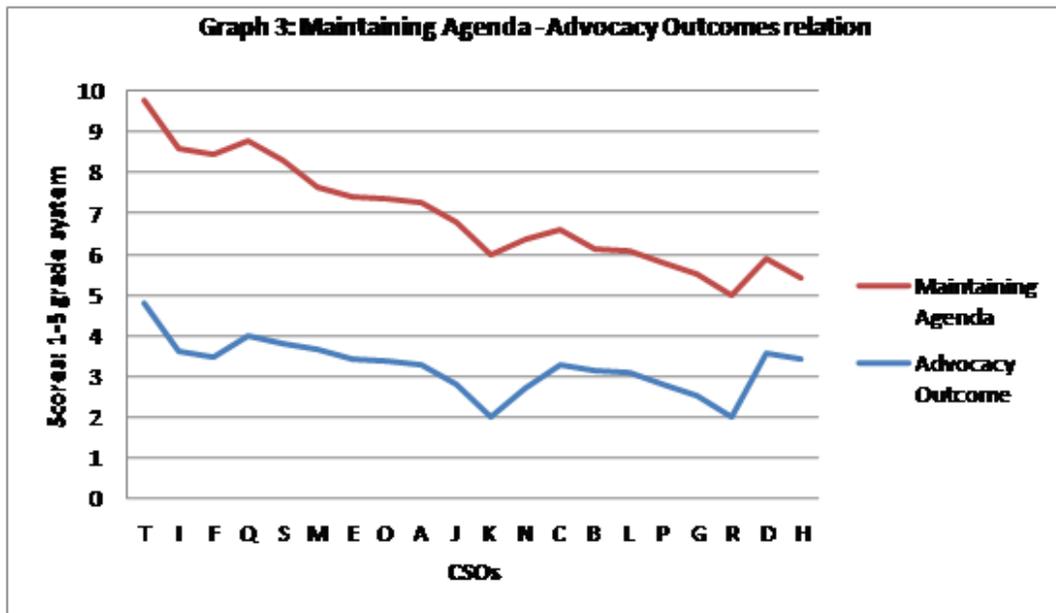
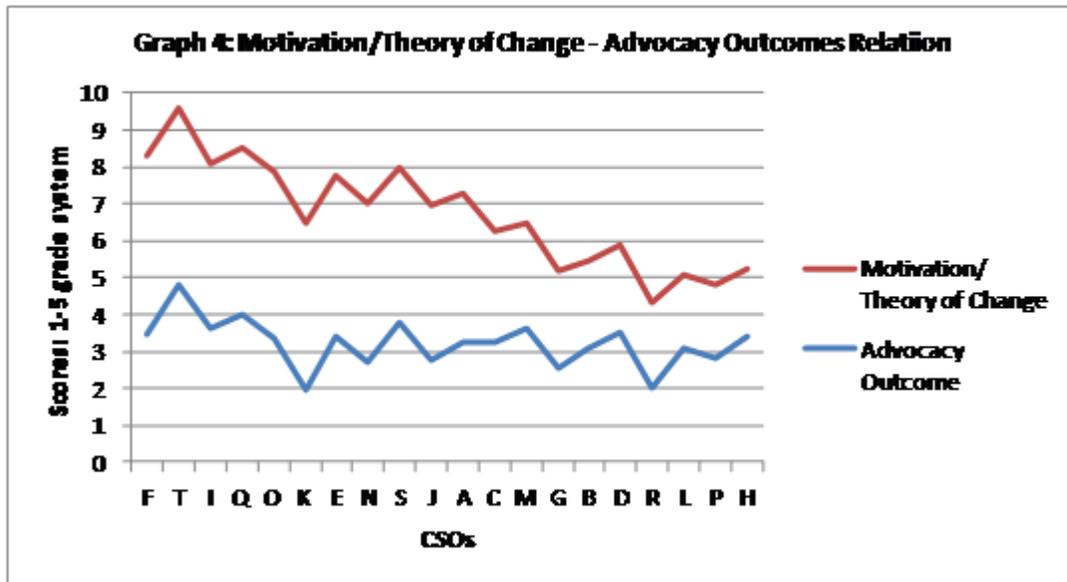


Figure 3 (Maintaining Agenda – Advocacy Outcome Relations) above shows the relationship of maintaining the agenda to advocacy outcomes for 20 individual CSOs. The horizontal axis represents notation keys for organizations’ titles (capital letters), while the vertical axis shows scores for a) advocacy outcome and b) wide acceptance of the issue for a particular advocacy campaign, related to an individual CSO. The same is true for motivational effect and theory of change: CSOs who have higher scores for motivation/theory of change have better advocacy outcomes.

Figure 4 (Motivation/Theory of Change - Advocacy Outcomes relation) below shows the relationship of motivation/theory of change to advocacy outcomes for 20 individual CSOs. The horizontal axis represents notation keys for organizations' titles (capital letters), while the vertical axis shows scores for a) advocacy outcome and b) averaged motivation/theory of change, evaluated on a 1-5 grading system, for individual CSOs.



## Conclusion

Now, after more than 20 years of effort, strong and experienced CSOs pose two questions. The first is what are the successes of the sector in terms of policy advocacy, changing social welfare and social norms? This is followed by what are the actual changes made by the sector beyond achieving short-term results and/or implementation of certain programmatic logical frameworks and indicators that, according to CSOs, are of a temporary nature?

The research conducted in 2015-2016 assumed that the traditional assessment of policy advocacy outcomes was fragmented and, therefore, did not fully define the milieu affecting the success or failure of advocacy campaigns. The research thus considered that advocacy outcomes may be dependent not only on an organization's capacity to conduct a campaign, or on wide public acknowledgment of the acuteness of an issue, but also on other factors that create a setting for, or accompany, the advocacy process. These factors include a) an "enabling environment" for civil society and political conditions; b) wide public acceptance of the advocacy issue; and c) motivational effect and theory of change to establish a CSO and/or initiate the process of advocacy.

The tools and methods used by Georgian CSOs highly depend on the context and cultural setting in which they are operating. Because the "enabling environment" of civil society is rather attractive in Georgia, the research focused on the *political environment* accompanying particular advocacy campaigns. It also focused on the problems that CSOs encounter while working with national and local

governments. The research showed that despite the fact that advocacy campaigns in Georgia are implemented in a complex and chaotic political setting, this does not have much impact on advocacy outcomes.

Similar results were drawn in relation to *wide public acceptance of an advocacy issue*, despite the fact that experts and researchers attach much importance to this condition. CSOs accept that routine cooperation is rather challenging, but the majority of them are in coalitions with local or international networks (though these are not sufficiently utilized in advocacy). Nevertheless, if in the past CSOs were often criticized for the lack of cooperation within the sector, today the majority of experienced CSOs seek advocacy partners and cooperate on an issue basis with organizations having a different mandate. Despite the fact that many CSOs are rather successful in creating informal alliances with opinion leaders, developing formalized advocacy strategies, holding surveys, mapping and orchestrating cooperation with decision makers, developing policy options, and assisting beneficiaries, there are cases when CSOs intentionally do not cooperate, never involve beneficiaries into advocacy, act as experts and promote issue through lawsuits, negotiations and lobbying. Media relations are also challenging and are rarely used for advocacy.

Such varying uneven efforts of CSOs in the promotion of an issue, so that it gains supporters and extends the base of support, resulted in uneven scores for change in attitudes and wide acceptance of an issue by the community, both at the beneficiaries' and decision makers' level at any stage of advocacy. Nevertheless, the research revealed that in the Georgian context, wide acceptance of an issue by the public is a lesser factor in advocacy outcomes.

In contrast to the abovementioned variables, *motivational effect* for initiating an organization and *theory of change* are found to be related to advocacy outcomes. In spite of the fact that during their lifetimes, the surveyed organizations encountered a number of financial or institutional challenges that caused some to stop or suspend their activities, many of them survived and have continued to implement their social mission. The component of motivation has thus naturally appeared in the survey as a decisive factor for an organization's success. This was linked with the existence of theory of change in advocacy, that includes both a clear advocacy strategy and a reasonable vision of what needs to be achieved as a result of advocacy. Interestingly, despite the commonly accepted understanding of the importance of a well-developed strategy for positive outcomes of advocacy, the research showed that it is not a formalized strategy per se, but rather the constant maintaining of the issue on the agenda that is more related to successful advocacy. This approach to maintaining the issue on the agenda is backed by motivation and existence of theory of change that ensures close observation of the issue in the long-term perspective, targeting activities, and constant communication with interested parties.

Today, after more than 20 years of development, experienced Georgian CSOs act as experts and public defenders at the national level and also individually. Conditioned by their donor-driven origins (in various ways), the sector often does not satisfy the requirements of the classical Tocquevillian theory. The sector is less affected by the political environment than expected; CSOs often advocate issues that are identified and raised by them rather than the people. On the way to achieving long-term and sustainable goals, they face a number of challenges and their advocacy strategies often show inconsistencies with commonly accepted standards. Nevertheless, in terms of achieving advocacy success, Georgian CSOs do act as active citizen units, with a self-imposed responsibility to identify and

correct gaps in public policy. CSOs with stronger motives are better at implementing various progressive changes that have a real impact on people and state structures.

---

## References

- Andrews, K. & Edwards, B. (2004). Advocacy organizations in the U.S. political process. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 479-506. Available from [www.academia.edu/1446189/Advocacy\\_organizations\\_in\\_the\\_US\\_political\\_process](http://www.academia.edu/1446189/Advocacy_organizations_in_the_US_political_process)
- Barkhorn, I., Hutter, N. & Blau, J. (2013, Spring). Assessing advocacy. *Stanford Social Innovations Review*, 60.
- Baumgartner, F. & Jones, B. (1983). *Agendas and instability in American politics*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Brinkerhoff, J. & Brinkerhoff, D. (2002). Government-nonprofit relations in comparative perspective: Evolution, themes, and new directions. *Public Administration and Development*, 22(1), 3-18. DOI: 10.1002/pad.202. Available from <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228007498>
- Buckley, S. (2014). Advocacy strategies and approaches: Overview paper. Association for Progressive Communications. Available from <https://www.apc.org/en/node/9456>
- Casey, A.E. (2008). Guide to measuring advocacy and policy. Available from [www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org) and [www.organizationalresearch.com](http://www.organizationalresearch.com)
- Ekiert, G. & Kubik, J. (2014). Myths and realities of civil society. *Journal of Democracy*, 25(1).
- EU. (2014). Georgia, EU country roadmap for engagement with civil society, 2014-2017. Approved 21 July 2014.
- Gidron, B., Kramer, R. & Salmon, L. (1992). *Government and the third sector: Emerging relationships in welfare states*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- ICCO. (2010). Guidelines on lobby and advocacy. Available at <http://www.icco.nl/Portals/1/Documenten/Lobby%20and%20advocacy%20guidelines.pdf>
- Kingdon, J. (1985, May). Agendas, alternatives, and public policies. *Journal of Public Policy*, 5(2), pp. 281-283.
- McCracken, A. L. (2010). Advocacy: it is time to be the change. *Journal of Gerontological Nursing*, 36(3), 15-17. PMID:20180496.
- Organizational Research Services. (2008). Theory of Change. Available from: <http://orsimpact.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/TOC-Primer-web-friendly-version.pdf>
- Peters, M. (1995). Swimming against the tide: Why citizen advocacy will not gain wide acceptance. The newsletter of Citizen Advocacy Eastern Suburbs, Issue 1. Available from [http://www.bmartin.cc/CAN/policies/Peters/Peters\\_Inroads01.html](http://www.bmartin.cc/CAN/policies/Peters/Peters_Inroads01.html)
-

- Sabatier, P. & Weible, M. (2014). *Theories of the Policy Process*. Boulder, CO: Westview press.
- Sander, T. (2015). About social capital. Saguaro Seminar: Civic Engagement in America, John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.
- Seligman, A. (1992). The idea of civil society”, Princeton University Press, ISBN 0-691-01081-1, pp. 110-115.
- Stachowiak, S. (n.d). Organizational Research Services (ORS), Pathways for Change: 6 Theories About How Policy Change Happens. Available from <http://www.organizationalresearch.com>
- Tversky, A. & Kahneman, D. (1981). The Framing of Decisions and Psychology of Choice. *Science*, 211(4481), 453-458. Available from <http://psych.hanover.edu/classes/cognition/papers/tversky81.pdf>
- USAID. (2014). NGO sustainability index. Available from [www.usaid.gov](http://www.usaid.gov)
- W.K. Kellogg Foundation. (2008). Effective advocacy at all levels of government. Available from <http://ww2.wkcf.org/advocacyhandbook/index.html>
- World Values Survey. (2008). Available from <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/wvs.jsp>