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# ***Impact of the Georgian Non-Governmental Sector on Social Capital in the Process of Policy Advocacy***

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**Abstract:** *Since the 1990s, the donor-supported non-governmental sector in Georgia has become the synonym of civil society. As a result, it has been tasked with all rights and responsibilities that are characteristic to the western-type civil society. This study reviews policy advocacy campaigns conducted by Georgian non-governmental organizations (NGOs), based on the original research. Advocacy campaigns are defined as complex mechanisms of civic engagement that impact public policy and social changes, but also use leverages aimed at changing the social norms and develop social capital. The study concludes that in the process of policy advocacy, NGOs that have emerged in the post-Soviet environment are more oriented at political or social changes than at social capital development. The sector makes important positive contributions to public policy and social change. However, it is supposed that strategies utilized do not, or have a weak impact on social capital development in the short-term perspective.*

**Key Words:** *Civil Society, NGOs, Advocacy, Social Capital, Impact*

## **Introduction**

The study of the post-Soviet historical experience shows that parts of the civil society and its institutional and behavioral practices stem from national traditions and civic culture, while the other part has emerged and developed in a post-Soviet context, more in the process of development of western liberal model. In Georgia, similar to many post-Soviet countries, communism wiped out traditional civil societies leaving no room for the development of private initiatives for common good. Beginning in the late 1980s, in line with weakening of the Soviet Union, Georgia's civil society became a platform for dissidents' rallies. Civic activism, social movements, and other oppositional campaigns emerged in the society. The idea of a new civil society attracted huge interest after declaring the country's independence in 1991. Many international donors, such as the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), United Nations Development Program (UNDP), governments of Germany and Sweden and many others stepped in to "organize individuals who were incapable of organizing themselves" in order to contribute to country's democratic development (Fukuyama, 1999). This was done through the establishment and support of the local non-governmental sector, NGOs, which has been continued up to the present time.

These organizations have been assigned the rights, responsibilities, roles, and characteristics typical of western NGOs, that is, well-institutionalized associations to make change in a mode that has been accepted by the westernized neo-Tocquevillian actors (Seligman, 1995). The standard practice is that NGOs are driving forces of development policy. The sector should resist becoming a power monopoly, balance state institutions, and complete and correct the gaps of public policy. Moreover, it should disseminate liberal values throughout society, revitalize communities, foster effective citizenship, establish the practice of trust and cooperation, revive public life, etc. (Seligman, 1995). In sum, it means that it should develop social capital of the country.

From the date of its establishment, the priorities of the programs implemented by the non-governmental sector have ranged from poverty reduction and protection of human rights to establishment of effective governance. Despite certain successes in these spheres, for many years, analysts of the Georgian non-governmental sector have indicated that regardless of continued financial and intuitional support of international donors, the sector has not fulfilled its responsibilities or satisfy demands. According to initial evaluations, the sector was characterized as weak and fragmented, lacking cooperation, and poorly known by the beneficiary communities. Today, in line with institutional strengthening and improved awareness of NGOs, the sector has become labeled as “elite-type” and criticized of being alienated from people’s needs, which has led to low public trust (USAID 1998-2014; World Values Survey (WVS), 2005-2014).

From the beginning the 21<sup>st</sup> century, policy advocacy aimed at addressing the country’s acute problems has been added to the agenda of donor-supported programs. Policy advocacy has become a priority as the process, which combines development and proposal of political alternatives with equipping the population with knowledge and skills to participate in political and public lives. In addition, special attention has been attached to encouragement of collective action, and it is assumed that policy advocacy should provide a platform for large-scale participation and contribute to development of country’s social capital.

This study reviews Georgian NGOs and their correlation with the country’s existing social capital, where the complex concept of the latter differentiates its structural elements, i.e., networks of collective action, and cognitive elements, i.e., trust and values (Ramos-Pinto, 2004). Furthermore, the study presents the nature of policy advocacy campaigns conducted in Georgia and outlines the leverages that NGOs use in the process of advocacy. Because advocacy, as a form of civic engagement aims at affecting public policy, social change, and shift in social norms, the leverages used by the NGOs will be analyzed in these three dimensions. The study does not intend to define the state of social capital in the society or its transformation, but rather evaluates Georgian NGOs’ efforts to ensure public participation and therefore contribute to the development of social capital in the process of policy advocacy.

### **The Non-Governmental Sector and Social Capital in Georgia**

Unlike western countries, Georgia was relatively late to start using the term civil society to define a behavioral and institutional entity separate from state and markets. In 1991, after declaring Georgia’s independence, European and American partners of the country set a goal of establishing or developing the western-type civil society that would resist power monopoly, balance state institutions, complete and correct the gaps of public policy. Even though up to 1991 civil organizations mainly took the form of dissident movements and no clear distinction was made between civic and political movements, after 1991 this distinction became obvious. Association life, in the form of so-called non-profit organizations, started to revive in the country. The availability of new foreign resources stimulated active citizens and in a very short period of time the number of non-profit organizations reached several thousands (Nodia, 2005). The growth among the non-profit sector continues up to the present time.

Legislative procedures regulating the registration of new civil society organizations (so called NGOs or, more specifically, CSOs) is an easy and non-bureaucratic process, and there no direct administrative impediments to NGO operations. Other studies show that overall the political and institutional framework for enhancing the role for NGOs in the public policy dialog is generally

supportive. No controversial cases of state harassment, including tax authorities, were reported until now, irrespective of activities implemented or views expressed by the civil society organizations (Centre of Strategic Research and Development of Georgia (CSRDC), 2012; Civil Society Institute, Open Society Georgia Foundation (CSI OSGF), 2009; Asian Development Bank (ADB), 2010; USAID, 2013).

Unity of these organizations—the third sector—has become synonymous with civil society in Georgia and de facto monopolized the civil society discourse, leaving wider society and other non-institutional forms of citizens' engagement behind (Lutsevych, 2013). The entities included in the classic concept of civil society, such as religious organizations, professional unions, political parties, etc., have been attributed to the sector by academics or civil society experts at most. Non-institutional forms of civic activism and participation, such as initiative groups, active citizens protesting in streets or social movements, are also left beyond the framework.

According to the June 2015 data of the Public Registry, 21,097 non-commercial, nonprofit organizations are registered in Georgia<sup>1</sup>. However, according to various studies only 10% of them are operational. In addition, around 150 organizations are easily identifiable and accessible, out of which around 50 organizations have continuous activities and are known by the public. The number of such organizations based in Tbilisi is twice that found in Georgia's rural regions (Nodia, 2005). The overall majority of CSOs claim to have a broad scope of democracy-related activities and sectors, as they have been identified by their charters.

State grants or charitable contributions from business are very scarce and sporadic; therefore, grants from foreign foundations remain the main source of funding for Georgian civil society organization. Priorities of these organizations, starting from their very establishment up to present, are western liberal values. Therefore, NGOs implement activities targeting country-specific critical issues, such as democratization, human rights protection, civic education, community development, poverty reduction, environmental protection, civil monitoring, good governance, civic advocacy, etc. While in the 1990s the donor-supported programs were essentially implemented within the sector (donor-civil society-community beneficiaries), during the last 15 years the priority has shifted towards policy advocacy, aimed at addressing acute (national or regional) problems of the country at the state level. Support for advocacy programs broadened the scope of development assistance and upgraded it to the public policy influence level (donor-civil society-government-people).

The exact list of donor organizations that fund the Georgian non-governmental sector is unavailable. This lack of availability of donors' detailed budgets and multi-level distribution of direct and indirect costs make it difficult to get accurate information on the amount of funding that directly goes to local NGOs for implementation of various democratization activities, including the activities affecting public policies. One can make only approximate calculations. For example, according to statistics published by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), aid allocated for Georgia in 2015 through Country Programmable Aid (CPA), earmarked for developing countries from various donors, totaled USD 480.23 million (OECD, 2016).

For more clarity, if we look into the aid statistics of USAID, which is the leading donor in Georgia, the total amount spent for "Democracy and Governance" and "Investing in People" components in 2002-

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<sup>1</sup> Official Legal Status of Non-Governmental Organizations in Georgia.

2010 is USD 442.78 million (Nichol, 2013). According to *theguardian* (2014) that evaluated international assistance of OECD member states, one fifth of the amount allocated for aid stays in the donor country. Taking into account the fact that around 20% of the allocated amount is used for program administration in the beneficiary country, budgets for programs implementation during the eight years reached USD 28.5 million, or around USD 3.5 million per year.

Since its inception, the third sector, together with its international partners, seeks to support civil society development by facilitating an enabling environment<sup>2</sup>. The experts state that, despite certain shortfalls, the environment remained traditionally favorable for years (CSRDC, 2012; CSI OSGF, 2009; ADB, 2010; USAID, 2013). For many years, legal and regulatory frameworks aimed at supporting civil society have been developed and improved, and are still being revisited for further improvements. Therefore, over the years, the donor-initiated and -supported civil sector has achieved significant growth both professionally and institutionally. The number of organizations having sound institutional systems, independent boards, and elected executive directors publishing annual reports and holding conventions is gradually growing. Researchers often note certain successes of the civil sector in terms of its affect on public policies. In this regard, USAID's recent USD 13 million Policy Advocacy, and Civil Society Development in Georgia (2010-2014) project<sup>3</sup> is worthy of mention. The project provided technical and financial assistance to advocacy organizations and think tanks that should have contributed to both the improvement of public policy and development of social capital in the country.

Interdependence of the civil society and social capital is a widely acknowledged fact. It is recognized that "an abundant stock of social capital is presumably what produces a dense civil society, which in turn has been almost universally seen as a necessary condition for modern liberal democracy" (Fykuyama, 1999). According to Putman, as cited in the International Encyclopedia of Civil Society (2010), "historical analyses suggested that...networks of organized reciprocity and civic solidarity, far from being epiphenomenon of socioeconomic modernization, were a precondition for it." Moreover, international financial institutions and donors often refer to social capital as a public resource. For example, according to the World Bank definition:

"Social capital refers to the institutions, relationships, and norms that shape the quality and quantity of a society's social interactions. Increasing evidence shows that social cohesion is critical for societies to prosper economically and for development to be sustainable" (cited in Caucasus Research Resource Center (CRRC), 2011).

If civil society "is a platform for voluntary collective actions around common interests, reasons and values" (The London School of Economics and Political Sciences (LSE), 2005) and consists of associations and groups that are "formally established, legally protected, autonomously run, and voluntarily joined by ordinary citizens" (Howard, 2003, p. 34), functioning of these type of institutions is directly linked with cooperation with foreigners in order to create common good, i.e., to develop social capital.

The above ascertains that the civil society is a product of social capital. Elaborating on that, modern development theories also widely discuss the importance and impact of civil society on social

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<sup>2</sup> Legal, regulatory and policy environment for civil society.

<sup>3</sup> Successor of the initiative is USAID's ACCESS project (2014-2019), with a total cost of USD 5 million.

capital. It is believed that the existence and functioning of voluntary organizations, groups, and associations develops cooperation skills and create positive examples. Given the fact that in Georgia all of the above categories are identified with non-governmental sector, the NGOs are hence held liable for the development of social capital by facilitating civic engagement and creating examples of trust and collaboration, cooperation, and reciprocity. It is also envisaged that the non-governmental sector should support information sharing and, therefore, improve information accessibility that will strengthen and widen social networks.

Since social capital is not a distinct, but rather diffuse phenomenon, its measurement is associated with certain difficulties. According to Elinor Ostrom's theory as cited by the CRRC (2011), there is no single compelling measure of the level of social capital. It can only be measured indirectly, through various measures, and one of those is the extent to which citizens associate. Club membership, dedication and confidence are widely accepted measurements of social capital that are used separately or in correlation. Some scholars also add reciprocity, effects of close networks, and other variables. Depending on the needs of research, in order to identify cause and effect relationship, scholars use other indicators, such as unemployment, level of crime, suicide rates, number of illegal children, etc. that are operationalized in various combinations (*International Encyclopedia of Civil Society*, 2010).

The study of social capital in Georgia started relatively late, in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. According to these early studies, social trust, community engagement, and confidence in social and political institutions is very low. Overall, country's social capital is assessed as bonding. For example, according to 2011 data of the Caucasus Research Resource Center, only 9% of Georgia's population confirms membership of any club or association and only 5% says that has conducted voluntary activities. According to 2013 data, only 22% of Georgia's population trusts NGOs (Caucasus Barometer, 2013). Moreover, according to the CRRC (2011), the country exhibits strong in-group social networks, which, however, rarely formalize and institutionalize their collaboration.

At the same time, the assessment highlights Georgians' generosity in their solidarity between each other, which often put the needs of others before their own. For example, according to survey of 2011, the CRRC found that only 27 % of Georgians trust their neighborhood completely, while a further 65% trust it a little, and a mere 1% have no trust in their local community. At the same time, the 2008 World Values Survey found that only 18% of Georgian said that most people can be trusted (in Norway and Sweden positive response on the same question was 65%). The assessment stated, however, that there was a clear sign that some formal or informal associations, such as business lobbying groups or professional unions, were beginning to collaborate effectively. Also, the Caucasus Barometer of 2013 shows that 50% of the total population helped a neighbor or friend with household chores during the last six months.

Based on the above, in order to evaluate collective action, particularly the relations between civil society and social capital, it is important to agree on the concepts. If civil society is a non-governmental sector, that is, a western-promoted behavioral and institutional phenomena, which is independent from the state and markets, then social capital is a combination of structural (collective action networks) and cognitive (trust and values) elements. Therefore, NGOs are tasked to use respective leverages to stimulate sources of social capital that include developing and activating collective action networks as well as supporting the development of trust and liberal values within those groups.

### Policy Advocacy and the Impact on Social Capital

Taking into account the history of the establishment and development of the non-governmental sector in Georgia, obviously, raising the acute public policy issues (through announcement of grant programs) and addressing them (by NGOs) is conducted through donors' initiative and support. Despite of the fact that this practice is gradually changing and in line with strengthening and developing of the sector organizations have more say in suggesting themes to both donors and Georgian government, in most cases programmatic expenditures are still dependent on the goodwill of donors. In the conditions where westernized non-governmental sector is tasked to make positive interventions at every level of the society to make change, policy advocacy has become a duty of this sector. Donors' support, in turn, requires utilization of mechanisms relevant to policy advocacy in order to have positive influence in three main directions: a) improvement of public policy, b) support to social welfare, and c) shift in social norms.

Obviously, advocacy mechanisms comply with and stem from analytical discussions and practical evaluations of policy advocacy. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century this form of civic engagement was defined as social and political action, where individuals "are actively engaged in social and political action such as lobbying" directed at governments (Hancock, Labonte, & Edwards as cited in DeSantis), "any attempt to influence the decisions of an institutional elites on behalf of a collective interest" (Jenkins as cited in Kimberlin, 2010), or "the act of speaking or of disseminating information intended to influence individual behavior or opinion, corporate conduct, or public policy and law" (Rektor as cited by DeSantis), etc. Methodologies of the 21<sup>st</sup> century have summarized the multiple theories and combined them into a single theory of change. Therefore, it is considered that advocacy, as a political process, may include a wide range of civic engagement activities and does not exclude any activity that aims at influencing the decisions within political, economic, and social systems.

Contemporary views of civic advocacy imply that the major goal should be to change public attitudes on certain issues, creating a shift in cultural and social norms that results in activation of society's structural (collective action networks) and cognitive (trust and values) elements, thus developing social capital. As a result of targeted actions, such a shift in social norms will in the long run entail political or social changes. However, this does not exclude the approaches which claim that political or social change can also progressively affect social norms in the society.

The tools suggested by donors through training and providing instructions for application forms for policy advocacy campaigns include many activities and mechanisms. These activities include but are not limited to identification of critical issues and their scope, policy analysis, development of advocacy strategy, conducting surveys, mapping of decision-makers and cooperation with them, developing policy options, identification and assistance to beneficiaries, lawsuits, lobbying, etc. All of these tools are aimed at improving public policy issues or social conditions. Due to the professional nature of these mechanisms, their application does not explicitly require qualified involvement of beneficiaries, thus organizations can act unilaterally on behalf of the population.

Despite the fact that shifts in cultural or social norms aimed at social capital development are not explicitly required by donors, a whole set of advocacy activities, such as involvement of beneficiaries and opinion leaders into advocacy, development of coalitions and networks, media campaigns, public

speeches, filing petitions and collecting signatures, awareness raising, community mobilization, capacity building of community organizations, street actions, etc., is targeted at changing the attitudes of the members of society, both people and government, towards certain issues and, therefore, at development of social capital.

## **Research Methodology**

### **Theoretical Basis**

This research examines various global theoretical frameworks, which explain and define an existence and maintenance of balance in the society, with regard to the relationship between the state and the people. Theoretical analysis includes, but is not limited to tyranny of majority, open society, deliberative democracy, and other frameworks for assessing the relationship between the people and the state. The literature also elaborates on the origins of civil society, both in the West and post-Soviet environment and on the differences which underline dissimilar actions of contemporary civil societies in different parts of the world. Special attention is given to inter-society relations, as it is defined by Georgian social capital and the outcomes of those relations with regard to public participation.

This research also evaluates the importance of localization of public policies and analyzes the mechanisms and approaches used by the society to influence them. The difference in behaviors of societies having a different historical experience is analyzed, highlighting a wide spectrum of civil society activism, such as street action, civic monitoring, participatory budgeting, etc. 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 phase of this project, more than 20 international methodologies for the evaluation and assessment of advocacy and political environment are examined and analyzed. As a result, one universal approach has been developed to assess both, taking into consideration research needs. The assessment of various methodologies and approaches has revealed that the process of civic advocacy and its outcome are mainly evaluated through the four main dimensions: a) advocacy capacity of the organization; b) advocacy tactics; c) funding sources of the campaign, and d) advocacy campaign outcome. With regard to the advocacy outcomes, in addition to the specific change in policy, the contemporary sources underline the shift in social norms that is considered to be an imperative condition for a successful advocacy.

The main target of the research is more than 20 civil society organizations and initiative groups from Tbilisi and Georgia regions, selected based on formalized criteria. The research focuses on the CSOs operating within a defined mandate/public policy category. Information was collected through in-depth interviews, based on the above, four-component framework.

### **Study: Common Practice**

All surveyed organizations confirm that in 2000-2015 they have conducted from 3 to 50 advocacy campaigns per organization. All of them state that at every stage they had to cooperate with local or national governments even in early 1990s, when the concept of advocacy was unknown for them. It is worth mentioning that if an organization's work entails any link with local or national government (meeting, negotiation, dispute, etc.), this kind of work has referred to as advocacy. Any addressed case of an individual citizen is believed being an advocacy case. Therefore, the organizations explicitly confirm that they have many successful advocacy cases in their history of activities.

Despite the above, more than one third of surveyed organizations state that their main mission is not policy advocacy, and their activities are targeted towards addressing the issues of human rights protection, including rights of people with special needs, children, youth and women; development of local self-governance; development of rural areas and agriculture, including biodiversity; eliminating poverty; affecting social injustice, etc. The main activities of these organizations are mainly limited to working with beneficiaries, identifying their individual needs and protection of their rights, their education and awareness raising, as well as connecting beneficiaries with decision makers. Direct work with beneficiaries, studying individual problems and gained experience showed them the need for better evaluation of the issues and changes to be requested on the public policy level. Therefore, the majority of the organizations have outsourced qualified studies or conducted small-scale needs assessments to identify the acuteness of the problem and/or its scale for demanding policy changes. However, the organizations that work on individual problems will hardly develop policy proposals and their requests are limited to verbal demands and/or advice.

On the other hand, another two thirds of the organizations confirm that they target their efforts on evidence-based, monitored and knowledge-shared policy changes. Mission statements of these organizations include such phrases as promotion of socio-economic rights, informed changes, and protection of rights, recognizing that positive changes can be facilitated only through balancing of these components. The majority of these organizations work on democratization, including elections; strengthening of democratic institutions; environmental protection; economic welfare, etc. They consider themselves to be quasi-analytical organizations and state that, according to contemporary trends, pure analytical organizations have lost their relevance, as it is, and organizations that work with beneficiaries and state should have ability and capacity to conduct qualified studies. The organizations use attitudes of and information received from beneficiaries through the studies for lobbying with the representatives of both executive and legislative governments. These organizations elaborate new legislative initiatives or alternative policy documents and actively lobby them with relevant decision makers.

This study revealed that both Tbilisi-based and regional NGOs in Georgia develop advocacy strategies. However, this is usually done in compliance with donor proposal and reporting obligations, and the process rarely follows the set milestones. Nevertheless, this does not prevent the organizations from mapping and meeting decision makers, and conducting other programmatic work. Formalized advocacy strategies of all surveyed organizations attach special importance to engagement of beneficiaries in advocacy process. The organizations confirm that support for beneficiaries' collective action requires door-to-door and awareness raising campaigns. Moreover, almost a full majority of organizations acknowledge that population activism defined as collective action can only be achieved through the delivery of a supply of accurate information, at the right time and in an appropriate form. However, only a few organizations, mainly other less-developed NGOs, confirmed that they had

educated the public before launching their advocacy campaign and only afterward engaged them into advocacy. As mentioned, such examples are very rare and mainly address environmental and election-related problems.

Only two surveyed organizations confirmed that they had used the tools of beneficiary engagement, such as collecting signatures for filing a petition, in advocating for local issues. Both organizations are based in the regions of Georgia and in both cases advocacy actions were targeting local budget allocations. In general, local organizations mainly served as mediators between the people and government and their activities were oriented at social issues, raising individual awareness, and/or capacity building. These organizations regularly advocate on behalf of their clients or beneficiaries, e.g. by helping injured workers to get disability benefits or get health insurance for a concrete group of people, where the obvious aim is at social change and does achieve certain positive results. On the other hand, the cases of community mobilization around the issues or public rallies can hardly be observed in the regions of Georgia.

The organizations that consider policy changes as their main focus of activity work more with government decision makers and try to influence their attitudes on public policy issues. With this aim, the organizations supply government both at the national and local levels with evidence-based information. More experienced organizations cooperate with international think tanks and universities in order to share the world experience. These organizations do not use public engagement strategies. Moreover, they do not see the necessity of engaging all citizens<sup>4</sup>. Representatives of these organizations state that the population is less interested in the number of critical issues, such as judicial reform, constitutional changes or other national policies. They also state that mere social issues have more potential for citizen engagement and collective action. These organizations act as technical experts, trying to affect policies at the national level through advocacy, to create better lives for each citizen. They do not involve beneficiaries in the process of advocacy, but rather use information on and collected from beneficiaries. Most organizations, however, share information on policies with the population and sometimes request their feedback.

One of the main challenges to facilitating collective action identified by the NGOs is the lack of time and organizational resources within the project timeline. According to responding organizations, in this regard they fully become dependent on media, which can support collective action, but is less interested in NGOs' work. Regional organizations are more successful in this matter, as demand for information in the Georgia regions is higher. Local media is more collaborative there, but normally highlights the organizations' events but is not oriented toward raising awareness or community mobilization.

For about five years, two of the surveyed organizations have operated electronic and radio blogs aimed at disseminating information critical for societal problems and influencing social norms. One of them is focused on human rights and another on social and economic development. In addition, leaders of NGOs, mainly those working on human rights, internal and foreign policy, and economic analysis, participate in national political TV and radio talk-shows. They admit that they are perceived both by media and people as individual experts not representing any particular group of society, but believe that this tactic still contributes to development of the system of democratic liberal values in the country.

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<sup>4</sup> Interview with NGO working on socio-economic issues, February 2016.

Generally speaking, the organizations note that despite the substantial experience of cooperation with media gained over the years, it is less familiar with the specifics of the third sector's activities. Therefore, media coverage of acute rather than purely political problems remains a challenge.

Every surveyed organization is either a member or cooperates with local or international civil society networks or platforms. This cooperation, however, is limited to taking part in general forums and sharing experiences, and is almost never used in advocacy to affect policies. The absolute majority of both Tbilisi-based and regional organizations have never collected contributions or held fundraising actions in order to secure additional resources for advocacy campaigns. The planned advocacy campaigns also rarely use such tools as social art or street actions, aimed at influencing public opinion, mobilizing support, or affecting decisions of politicians.

The majority of strong and experienced organizations attach special importance to several successful advocacy campaigns, such as a campaign against legal impediments to the civil sector conducted in 2001-2004<sup>5</sup>, or several phases of the "This Affects You" campaign of 2012-2015, aimed at protection of human rights<sup>6</sup>. Both large and experienced CSOs and less known small unions from Tbilisi and the regions participated in these campaigns. These were exceptional cases as, in line with raising the issue and negotiations with the government, the advocacy process entailed raising awareness of the population, and mobilizing and engaging in the advocacy process through creative events and street rallies. It is worth mentioning that according to Georgian NGOs, international organizations played an important role in successful campaign outcomes. Behind the scenes, they advised the government to respond to the concerns put on the agenda by NGOs. It is indicative of these successful cases that they were not part of preliminarily planned advocacy campaigns, but rather were reactive by their nature and served to block the issues and not solve them.

### Discussion of Findings

Obviously, while assessing the efforts of civil society to contribute to the development of social capital, the specifics of the sector in the given country shall be taken into consideration. Due to the historical experience of Georgia, the non-governmental sector established and supported by western partners is not an authentic part of Georgian social capital. In addition, the sector was established not only to control the state or solve population's problems but also to contribute to the development of social capital. It is commonly accepted that social capital is not a clear notion, but a mix of various concepts, such as existence of networks, interpersonal trust, general social solidarity, as well as recognition of legitimacy and adherence to cultural traditions and institutional norms, etc. Therefore, in order to positively affect social capital, the NGOs take responsibility to both encourage collective action and contribute to development of trust and values. These two dimensions essentially combine major internal elements of the notion.

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<sup>5</sup> During this period, the government made several attempts to introduce legal impediments to civil society operations. Among others was a draft law, which envisaged "grants flow" of donor grants for civil society development through the state budget.

<sup>6</sup> The "This Affects You" campaign of 2012 was held in response to intrusion into media affairs from the government. As a result of the campaign, all the broadcasting companies and TV-operators throughout Georgia were obliged to air all the existing Georgian television channels, in order to provide the population with pluralistic information that would enable people to make informed decisions in the 2012 Parliamentary Elections. In 2014, the same campaign was activated again in order to remedy new draft law on protection of personal information.

The concept of advocacy is considered to be relatively new in Georgia and has been given more attention over the last 15 years. Based on the assumption that the sector established in 1990s was created as a counterbalance or in opposition to the state and was mainly focused on serving the population's needs and protecting individual rights, the practice of non-violent interaction with the public policy makers was developed only in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Presumably, this contributed to the fact that even minor interaction with the representatives of national or local governments is considered to be an exercise of advocacy.

NGOs do not consider policy advocacy as their main focus of activity, although they admit that they target policy change through providing evidence, civic monitoring, and knowledge transfer. In addition, activities of service-provider and human rights protection organizations, as well as quasi-analytical organizations aim at influencing all three advocacy objects—policy change, social change, and shift in social norms—with uneven success. It is noteworthy that strategic efforts of advocacy are applied unevenly and there is a disconnect between activities aimed at policy and social change and activities stimulating collective action.

In terms of influencing public policy, the expertise accumulated in the sector has a positive impact on the favorable solution of acute problems that is reinforced by donors' direct support through funding and indirect support in the form of cooperation with government. The organizations that engage in greater cooperation with local and national governments and base their arguments on studies and analytical documents have greater influence on public policy. Nevertheless, the process is limited to dispute around the issue, as well as pressure, and is naturally closer to lobbying. This type of lobbying does not serve narrow or private interests. Instead, it greatly contributes to the improvement of a country's legal environment in terms of its democratic development and protection of human rights. Due to commitments to donors, the organizations still communicate with the people, but it is a one-way communication. When it gets to policy change, organizations lobby individually, as experts of the issue of concern and do not involve beneficiaries, other organizations, or stakeholders in their activities. In most cases, this lack of involvement is intentional. In the Georgian context it is typical that success in terms of affecting policies can be achieved solely through NGOs' lobbying and expert advice and does not require raising awareness beneficiaries, mobilization of public opinion, or encouragement of collective action. Therefore, despite positive changes on the level of policy, in the short-term perspective, it is less likely that the organizations have influence on both structural elements, i.e. networks of collective action, and cognitive elements, i.e., trust and values, of social capital.

The sector is quite successful in terms of affecting social change. There are many examples of service improvements by the government, introduction of regulative mechanisms for social and health protection systems at the local level, protection of individual property, and other fundamental rights. The organizations focusing on social change obviously maintain closer contacts with people. These organizations operate in the regions of Georgia at most. Individual service provision often entails capacity building of beneficiaries in order to teach the population how to protect its rights and facilitate the process. Despite the fact that most of the time beneficiaries are not involved in the process of advocacy, NGOs' interaction with the population presumably has a certain impact on the cognitive elements of social capital, trust and values. It is also more likely that the organizations with the youth mandate have greater impact on youth's collective action, their trust and values, as these organizations implement their activities for youth and together with youth. Any type of activity, such as the

development of value systems and skills, acknowledgment of rights and responsibilities, or even advocacy capacity-building to implement small scale advocacy campaigns, can positively influence social norms among youth and develop both segments, cognitive and structural, of social capital.

As mentioned, the concept of advocacy has been suggested to Georgian society by western partners and is based on western practices. Therefore, political, social, and cultural changes are supposed to be achieved through traditional external advocacy comprised of mobilization of public opinion and participation in protests or social movements, as well as through a wide range of street actions, where the change in social norms comes first. In addition, it is acknowledged that the suggested practice does not exclude internal advocacy which is targeted at policy decision makers.

The advocacy process conducted by the non-governmental sector is predominantly targeted at policy or social change due to specifics of the Georgian non-governmental sector, which, since its establishment, is allowed and encouraged by the donors to inform, educate, and serve people and for which cooperation with government became critical in line with the introduction of the advocacy concept. The lack of large-scale advocacy campaigns and mechanisms of collective action does not stimulate wide dissemination of information on the issues elevated by the non-governmental sector. Therefore, for many years NGOs have not gained recognition and spreading of promoted values is a protracted process. Irrespective of some positive examples of public policy and social changes, it is clear that in the conditions of new democracy, where the state's abilities to develop liberal democracy is still limited, the results gained without changing social norms are not likely to be sustainable and stable.

The increased frequency of unplanned and reactionary campaigns not oriented at solving current problems but rather blocking national political issues, as well as their relative successes in terms of both political affect and mass mobilization can be well explained by Georgia's historical legacy and opposition culture of public life. In these cases, lobbying by the NGOs takes place against the backdrop of street actions and creative events that attracts the attention of the media and the population and ensures their engagement. Here the existing social capital is not only applied but also enriched in both its structural and cognitive dimensions.

It is clear that the donor-created and -supported sector makes substantial positive contributions to public policy and social changes. Nevertheless, the strategies used by the sector apparently do not or have only a slight impact on social capital development in the short-term perspective. If the strategies oriented at social capital development in the country are less linked with classical western-type NGOs and more supportive of and connected with the units of society that are common and distinctive to Georgia, e.g., advocacy groups, informal unions, social movements, etc., shifts in social norms are more likely to happen. In addition, support and encouragement of less formal units will fill in the advocacy gaps, complementing efforts by NGOs to accelerate social capital development.

### Conclusion

Having no intentions of evaluating social capital or its transformation in Georgia, which is unfeasible due to the methodology utilized, this work evaluates efforts of NGOs contributing to the country's social capital development, differentiating both policy advocacy objects and potential advocacy results. The study considers three major focuses of civic advocacy initiatives—policy change, social change, and shift in social norms—and differentiates two elements of social capital—structural and

cognitive—within NGO efforts. Taking into consideration the fact that western-type NGOs in Georgia and not authentic part of its social capital, their advocacy activities are linked to donor-supported projects and tend to target political and social changes, without putting much efforts into mobilizing networks of collective action or developing values and trust. Therefore, the sector makes important positive contributions to public policy and social change, but strategies utilized supposedly do not, or have only a weak impact on social capital development in the short-term perspective.

Through revealing various factors standing behind success or failure of NGO efforts affecting social capital through policy advocacy, this study constructs a framework for analyzing challenges to societal change and identifies tools that can be better unitized in advocacy to facilitate the latter in the Georgian context. It also creates a basis for further quantitative research to assess the level and transformation of social capital in Georgia.

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