



Participatory Budget
in Georgia

PARTICIPATORY BUDGET STANDARDS IN GEORGIA



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This publication is a result of multiple-year efforts undertaken by municipalities and activists to introduce the Participatory Budget (PB) mechanism in Georgia. The main principles of the tool have been developed by a group of Georgian activists under the umbrella of “Participatory Budget, instrument for promoting self-governance in Georgia”, a Polish-Georgian project, jointly implemented by Solidarity Fund PL and Polish experts. According to the authors, these principles are necessary for successful PB process.

An appendix to this publication, with the self-explanatory name of Manual, provides more detailed information and practical recommendations for PB standards implementation.

PARTICIPATORY BUDGET (PB) – WHAT IS IT?

Participatory budget (PB) is a tool of direct democracy and one of the most developed forms of civic participation. It contributes to the process of engaging citizens in resolving local issues through the former's active participation in the shaping of the local budget.

Numerous PB models exist around the world, all of which aim at increasing community engagement in the distribution of public funds. PB may involve the budget of an institution (a school or a cultural centre), of a district, a city, a region, a municipality, or even, as in Portugal, of a state budget. PB is a continuous long-term process in the course of which citizens identify the most pressing issues in order to suggest projects capable of addressing such key matters. At the next stage, local communities choose projects that to be implemented by the local authorities.

However, PB is not just a mechanical process of implementing projects submitted by citizens. It should also be regarded as a tool of improving the functionality of self-government, the latter based on mutual understanding and cooperation between the authorities and communities.

PB OBJECTIVES AND CHARACTERISTICS

The main objective of PB is to involve community in the governance processes of a city, a municipality or a region. It allows citizens to actually decide on how to use and distribute funds allocated from the local budget, and helps communities identify the most important problems. In discussions, residents act as “experts on their own problems”, articulate their needs and discuss community priorities from the perspective of public good. Hence, the PB process contributes to the development of a society as a whole on a number of dimensions, including:

SOCIETY WELL-BEING: projects carried out within the framework of PB aim at advancing the interests of not only the authors of the project, but also the majority of the population of a specific territorial unit. The goal of PB is, above all, to create an atmosphere of trust and mutual understanding in the society.

SOLVING LOCAL PROBLEMS: PB allows stakeholders to tackle local ailments as identified by the population. Very often, projects implemented within the framework of the PB process focus on developing small infrastructure, which creates more accommodating conditions for everyday life and leisure, such as street lighting or paved roads, playgrounds or leisure facilities. The longer PB process is applied in a specific community, the more so-called soft projects – related to education and cultural issues – tend to be put forward by the stakeholders.

EQUITABLE DISTRIBUTION OF MONEY: every citizen has the right to participate in the PB process and submit a project; citizens themselves decide what such funds, allocated from the local budget and distributed across a host of villages and towns, should be spent on. Compared with the decision-making process based on political clout, PB allows for a significantly more equitable distribution of funding.

IMPROVING RELATIONS IN SOCIETY: PB creates conditions for integration of community members, as well as promotes trust between the community and the authorities; the parties need to collaborate in the process of working on projects, striving to attract like-minded people, and arrive at actionable decisions. Joint information and consultation meetings positively influence the relationships between community members and government officials, because they start to better understand each other: community learns more about the capacities and limitations of the work of local authorities, and the authorities learn more about the needs and problems the community faces.

INCLUSION OF DIFFERENT POPULATION GROUPS: PB is a tool that allows different social groups to get involved in the process of decision-making about local community issues; especially those cohorts who are often marginalized – internally displaced persons, families with three or more children, the elderly, people with disabilities, etc.

COMMUNITY BUILDING: working together during the PB process fosters the development of local communities at street, residence, district, city or village level. Collaboration on projects and the ensuing monitoring of their implementation bring people together around a common goal.

KNOWLEDGE BOOST: stakeholder project participation at all PB stages results in increased levels of knowledge and awareness of all the groups involved. The representatives of the municipality learn how to establish effective communication with citizens, gain the experience and skills of managing difficult situations and making decisions. The citizens, in turn, begin to better understand the professional remit of the municipality officials, and the nuances of democratic governance at the local level.

INCREASED CITIZEN RESPONSIBILITY: along with raised awareness and knowledge, one of the achievements of PB is an increased sense of responsibility among community members. The PB process informs an understanding that the state of the immediate environment largely depends on the entire community, and not only on the local authorities.

საზოგადოების კეთილდღეობა
ადგილობრივი პრობლემების გადაჭრა
ფულადი სახსრების სამართლიანი განაწილება
ურთიერთობების გაუმჯობესება
სხვადასხვა სოციალური ჯგუფის ჩართვა
თემების შექმნა
ცოდნის ამაღლება
მოსახლეობის პასუხისმგებლობის გაზრდა

ESSENTIAL PB PRINCIPLES

The PB process must comply with the basic principles which mediate the potential will of citizens to engage in such decision-making which could foster community and municipality development.

The following are the principles which are paramount to the success of PB and, if not observed, could derail the entire process.

FINAL DECISIONS ARE MADE BY THE COMMUNITY

The essence of PB is that the populace determine their own needs or priorities, and decide which projects are to be implemented. The authorities must take ownership of outlining the process and comprehensively oblige with technical assistance and support with regard to any decisions to be made.

THE AUTHORITIES BOUND TO ENACT THE RESULTS OF THE PROCESS

The results of the selection of projects arrived at through the PB process must be included in the local budget. According to the Georgian legislation, the draft budget of the municipality is submitted by the executive body (the Mayor) and voted on by the legislative body (sakrebulo). For PB to be a real tool for engaging citizens in budgeting, it should include projects selected in the PB process, in a format appropriate to what the community has chosen.

PROCESS TRANSPARENCY

The PB process should be carried out in accordance with a set of transparent and unequivocal rules which should be made available to the community in advance and should not change during the process (within the annual cycle). Process organisers should ensure unimpeded access to information about the stages and conditions of a given PB by all potentially interested parties.

OPENNESS AND ACCESSIBILITY FOR EVERYONE

PB should be based on procedures favored by citizens, and its organizers must provide ample opportunity to join the process for everyone interested, at any stage. It is paramount that a wide variety of community groups are informed about the possibility of participation in the process.

FACILITATING PUBLIC DISCUSSIONS

PB should not be limited to project presentations or votes between competing projects. The process of selecting projects for implementation should be based on discussions about the local needs and priorities carried out at various stages among the community members.

PROMOTING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

PB should be based on community engagement and should provide actors with ample opportunity and space for cooperation, also when discussing the local needs and determining priorities, preparing projects and supporting certain projects at the stage of selection for implementation.

LONG-TERM PLANNING AND SUSTAINABILITY OF THE PROCESS

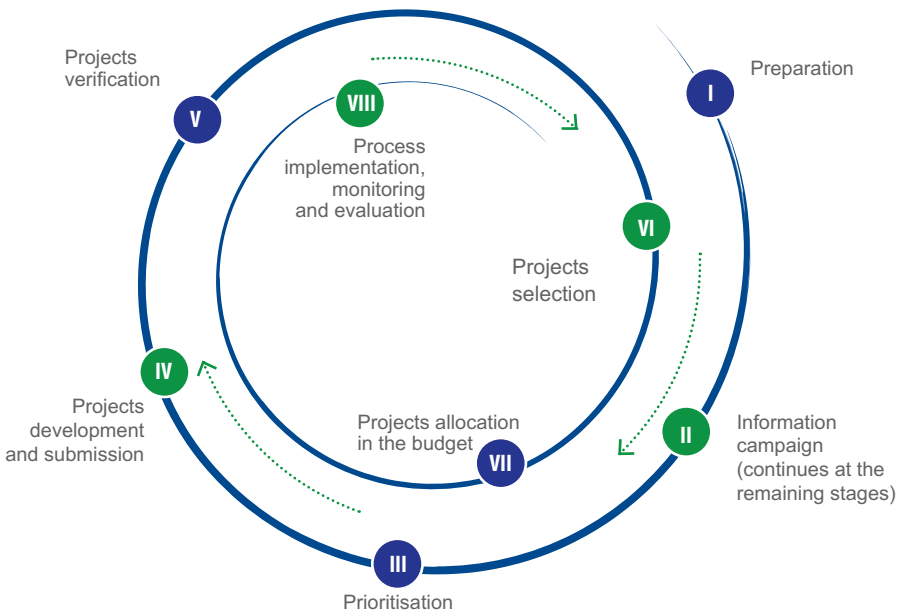
The decision on introducing the PB process should be subject to prior thorough consideration and based on long-term ambition for PB to become a regular mechanism for citizen participation in decisions hoped to tackle local community issues. The implementation of this mechanism should be linked to strategic thinking about sustainable development of a municipality.

ENGAGING DIVERSE GROUPS AND INSTITUTIONS – INCLUSIVITY

The PB process should ensure participation from across diverse groups of the population in a specific community. It is necessary to create such conditions and ensure access to such resources that everyone feels empowered to engage in the process. From the very beginning, and throughout the entire process, of PB best practice promotes partnering up those institutions and organizations that will have say on regulatory development, and engage in conducting the ensuing information campaigns and/or process monitoring.

STANDARDS (PRINCIPLES) FOR PB PHASES

The implementation of PB principles in the hope of attaining the procedures' objectives might assume a variety of shapes and forms - there are numerous methods in which an authority may be tasked with general oversight of the processes of project submission, pitching and selection. The PB process can take place either across the entire municipality, or, for example, in its select parts or settlements. Decisions on the final form of the procedure should be aligned with local circumstances and make provisions for such factors and variables as the size of the municipality and its budget, the diversity of the population, or to what extent a given group see themselves belong with the broader community. Differences aside, there are certain universal PB process implementation stages, which have been presented on the graph below.



For each stage, it is possible to identify some fundamental principles, or standards, the observance of which is necessary (yet may still prove insufficient) to capture the essence of PB as an inclusive community engagement process.

PHASE 1

PREPARATION

- 1** Local authorities decide to implement PB and announce this to the public, including:
 - the amount of funding available for specific projects;
 - the scope for would-be projects in municipality competences;
 - PB implementation scope – the entire region, a part of it or a specific town;
 - process timeline and duration.

- 2** Based on the initial decisions, the authority forms a group, bringing together activists, NGOs, members of the Council of Advisors and members of the sakrebulo, who develop the objectives, regulations and budget program PB.

- 3** Regulations and the PB design framework should be officially approved; relevant information should be made available to the general public.

1 Information campaign should be carried out throughout the process and at all of its stages.

2 To carry out an information campaign it is necessary to mobilise all the available resources: human, financial and non-financial.

3 All information materials and updates on stages of the process should be posted in one place, (at least) on the municipality's website.

4 Public partners – NGOs, the Council of Advisors and activists should be involved in the implementation of the information campaign.

5 Information campaign should be tailored to the specific needs of the municipality and its community groups. Materials should be prepared in a simple, accessible and easy-to-understand language for all the groups in a population.

PHASE 3

PRIORITISATION

(can be included in stage four)

- 1 Main problems and priorities should be identified through a transparent process, with genuine participation of the local population.
- 2 Information about identified issues and priorities should be widely shared with the public.
- 3 The municipality uses the identify problems and priorities in participatory budget process, in the priorities' document and in the municipality Budget.

PHASE 4:

PROJECTS DEVELOPMENT AND SUBMISSION

- 1 The process and deadline for application submissions should be clearly defined and viable for the community.
- 2 The municipality facilitates discussions among the community members.
- 3 Community members receive support and advice from the municipality in the process of developing projects. Other stakeholders, such as NGOs, can also participate in this process.
- 4 At the end of this stage it is necessary to compile and release a comprehensive list of submitted projects.

1 The verification of projects should be conducted with participation of specialists from a range of fields of expertise of an authority – if necessary, in collaboration with some guest specialists – and considering the programs that already exist in the municipality.

2 Municipality officials are only responsible for formal project verification, according to criteria provided for under the applicable regulation;

3 After this, a list of successfully verified projects should be compiled and published; the projects that have failed the formal verification should be announced with ample explanations justifying the reasons for such decisions.

4 Authors, especially those of negatively verified projects, should be informed of the outcome.



- 1** The selection of projects must be made directly by the residents of the municipality - by consensus or voting.
- 2** The procedure and process for selecting projects should be clearly defined in regulations, be transparent and explained in language accessible to the population.
- 3** Before voting, residents should have opportunity and sufficient time to familiarise themselves with the projects. It is necessary for the authors to have opportunity to present, advertise and participate in the discussions about their projects.
- 4** The municipality informs project authors and community about the start of the selection procedure no later than 1 week prior to the start.
- 5** In case of selecting by consensus, it is necessary to provide residents with opportunity for discussion, with no participation of representatives of the administration and deputies. It is important to ensure facilitate holding such meetings and the reference use of the pre-outlined priorities when choosing projects.
- 6** Authors and representatives of the civil society monitor the application of the project selection procedure.
- 7** The results of the project selection should be announced publicly.

PROJECTS ALLOCATION IN THE BUDGET

PHASE 7

1 All selected projects should be included in the budget of the municipality and implemented within the timeframe defined by the regulations.

2 Municipality uses the results of PB (identified priorities, verified projects) in the process of developing local policies, including in the priorities' document and any other strategic documents.

PROCESS IMPLEMENTATION, MONITORING AND EVALUATION

PHASE 8

1 It is necessary to promptly notify the authors of any changes that need to be made to the projects and them posted about any other relevant developments.

2 The municipality informs the population about the stages of project implementation.

3 It is necessary to monitor the entire process of PB, the quality of work, as well as assess the general public's satisfaction levels with the process.

4 Public partners and local communities should be involved in the monitoring process.

5 It is necessary to evaluate the entire process of PB, which will serve as a basis for next year's preparation.

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