



# Georgia Field Study

Mercy Corps Georgia

*Understanding the Legacy of  
Community Mobilization*



July 2004

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# I. Foreword

The *Georgia Field Study* provides a deeper understanding of the legacy created by community mobilization programs. It is the third in a series of studies produced by Mercy Corps, which forms part of an institutional commitment to organizational learning. It serves as a mechanism to disseminate lessons learned and stimulate discussions on best practices both within Mercy Corps as well as with colleague agencies and donors. This study analyzes the factors that contribute toward empowered communities focusing on the sustainability of the mobilization process. It is targeted toward development professionals working in the field of community mobilization.

The findings of the study are based on the results of a three-week field visit to Georgia in April 2004 to complete an analysis of the four-year, USAID-funded East Georgia Community Mobilization Initiative (E-GCMI), which ends in August 2004.

Numerous acknowledgements and thanks are due to the many individuals who have shared their experiences, ideas and insights into mobilization programs, particularly Mercy Corps' staff and partners in Georgia, the USAID mission in Georgia, colleague agencies and Mercy Corps' headquarters staff. A special mention and thanks goes to the community group members who offered us their hospitality and informed us with their experiences.

These findings will be translated into Georgian and Russian for dissemination within Georgia, as well as other countries in the Newly Independent States (NIS). This study is intended to be a living document and we invite and welcome comments and reflections. Further information on this field study or on other Mercy Corps programs can be obtained by writing to us at: [civilsociety@mercy Corps.org](mailto:civilsociety@mercy Corps.org).

Najia Hyder and Anna Young

## II. Executive Summary

Mercy Corps is working with community mobilization methodologies in more than ten countries around the world. Critical to the success of these programs is an understanding of the key factors that contribute to lasting behavior change in successful, active communities. As part of a continuing commitment to improving its ability to support successful community mobilization, Mercy Corps examined the results of the USAID-funded East Georgia Community Mobilization Initiative (E-GCMI).

Over the course of four years, the E-GCMI has engaged over 230 rural and urban communities across eastern Georgia. Program staff closely monitor the degree to which communities remain mobilized and their ability to sustain independent activities after E-GCMI funding has ended. By March 2004, at least 45 of the 50 Community Initiative Groups (CIGs) that completed all aspects of their three-phase project cycle had subsequently undertaken some form of independent initiative.<sup>1</sup> This indicates that many of the E-GCMI communities have changed their attitudes and behaviors by mobilizing around common concerns after E-GCMI engagement and funding ends.

The *Georgia Field Study* researched the following two questions:

- 1) What, if any, community characteristics contribute towards successful mobilization?
- 2) What are the critical inputs and technical approaches that Mercy Corps has provided to strengthen the probability of sustained mobilization?

In addition, the study was able to clearly articulate the different levels of mobilization attained by communities under E-GCMI and to set realistic expectations of what can be achieved during future mobilization programs.

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During the course of the field study, the team surveyed 24 communities (CIG members and citizens), program staff, local Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs), USAID and colleague agencies using semi-structured interviews. Communities selected for the study encompass a wide range of projects across five regions. Selected communities varied widely and included urban and rural locations, ethnic minority and majority populations, those with strong active engagement and those where E-GCMI-funded projects had been terminated because of weak participation.

### Long-Term Impact

In many of the communities where Mercy Corps had finished working, the research team was able to identify continued behavior and attitude change. Almost all communities visited articulated increased feelings of hope and trust in themselves and each other subsequent to the mobilization process.

Successful communities were able to:

- Continue to identify issues of common concern using participatory methodologies for problem analysis and consensus building.
- Successfully advocate for their interests to government, private business and civic sector actors.
- Use networks and coalitions of other CIGs and NGOs to share experiences and resources, and address district or regional level issues.

### Key Ingredients for Successful Mobilization

The findings indicate that at the end of the E-GCMI interventions and funding, communities fell within one of five levels of mobilization. These levels range from no understanding of mobilization

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<sup>1</sup> Communities that were still in the process of completing projects were not counted for this data.

principles and inability of the community to implement projects (Level One), to cohesive mobilization and innovation of independent initiatives that reach beyond the expectations laid out in the original program design (Level Five). These levels are discussed in detail later in the study.

Within these five categories, communities that can be defined as reaching Levels Four and Five (referred to as stronger communities), are the most likely to continue to sustain behavioral change and thus be able to mobilize to respond to evolving needs. An analysis of stronger communities found that certain pre-existing factors strongly influence the probability of sustained mobilization. A comparative analysis of stronger and weaker communities found that these factors were absent or undeveloped in the weaker communities. Factors included: leadership, ability to conceptually understand the principles of mobilization, access to resources and information, and previous experience of being active, and are discussed in more depth in the study.

Although not all of these characteristics need to be present at the outset in each community, it appears that their presence significantly strengthens a community's ability to remain empowered. By consciously assessing the presence or absence of these factors during site selection and the initial phases of program implementation, mobilization teams will be able to provide additional resources and skills when these factors are weak. When none of these characteristics are present, Mercy Corps should seriously question whether it will be able to facilitate a sustained change in community behavior (necessary to reach Levels Four or Five) or whether other types of program intervention would be more appropriate.

In addition, strong communities articulated and the study confirmed, the importance of specific inputs and processes provided by Mercy Corps. These included:

- Establishing standards for promoting transparency throughout all stages of the mobilization process.
- Fostering community unity and cohesion.
- Combining training in advocacy skills with the opportunity to apply these in project activities.
- Providing problem solving tools and tangible opportunities to apply them.
- Enabling communities to directly manage their own resources.

By understanding the factors that are valued by the community and contribute to their successful and sustained mobilization, Mercy Corps will be able to explicitly build them into future program design.

The study concludes with the recommendation that, as E-GCMI ends, Mercy Corps should revisit these communities in one to two years, after regular contact with Mercy Corps has ended, to reassess the conclusions found in the study and to understand what additional factors may be needed to further ensure attitudes and behaviors are sustained. Although some of the findings may be specific to the Georgian context, observations of other mobilization programs led the team to believe that they may be universally important factors. Mercy Corps welcomes observations and experiences from other programs and other agencies to contribute to the discussion on how to improve the long-term impact of mobilization programs.

### III. Introduction

Mercy Corps currently implements ten community mobilization programs worldwide,<sup>2</sup> and uses mobilization methodologies in at least five other countries. Mobilization programs engage communities through participatory methodologies and give them the confidence to take responsibility for collective problem solving. While the objectives of most programs focus on what can be achieved during funding cycles, successful community mobilization programs aim to leave behind a legacy of empowered communities. These communities are able to continue to search for solutions to community-based problems and identify the necessary resources within and outside their communities when direct funding ends. This may take place through the formally established community groups or through individuals within the communities. However, while this sustained level of empowerment is the goal, its long-term impact is rarely defined nor explicitly detailed in proposals or reports. Organizations implementing programs with finite funding find it difficult to hold themselves accountable to donors for the longer term effects of these programs – effects that are measurable only after funding ends.<sup>3</sup> This study aims to create an initial understanding of the longer term impact of mobilization programs.

**Community Mobilization:** the process of engaging communities to identify community priorities, resources, needs and solutions in such a way as to promote representative participation, good governance, accountability and peaceful change. Mercy Corps defines **sustained mobilization** as taking place when communities remain active and empowered after the program ends.

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As one of Mercy Corps' original community mobilization programs draws to a close, the agency committed to funding a three-week study to probe the distinct factors that affect the level of empowerment within communities and their ability to remain active beyond Mercy Corps' funding. Understanding that not all communities will succeed in sustaining activities after the end of the program, the study undertook to identify and assess those factors associated with sustained mobilization within the communities of the East Georgia Community Mobilization Initiative (E-GCMI) in order to answer the following two questions:

- 1) What, if any, community characteristics contribute towards successful mobilization?
- 2) What are the critical inputs and technical approaches that Mercy Corps has provided to strengthen the probability of sustained mobilization?

The findings of this study are divided into four principle sections:

- I. Analysis of the different degrees of community mobilization that exist within communities at the end of the program.
- II. Presentation of common characteristics in communities that remain active.
- III. Analysis of the investments made by E-GCMI in these communities and the contribution of these investments toward sustained mobilization.
- IV. Presentation of key lessons learned and recommendations for future mobilization programs.

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<sup>2</sup> As of July 2004, Mercy Corps has USAID-funded mobilization programs in Georgia, Liberia, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Kosovo, Serbia, and Iraq, an European Commission mobilization program in Afghanistan, and a British Petroleum-funded program in Georgia along the pipeline.

<sup>3</sup> For the purpose of this study Mercy Corps uses *program* to define the overall mobilization programs and *project* to refer to USAID-funded activities implemented by the communities.

By understanding the essential traits to foster and develop within a community, as well as program methodologies that appear to reinforce the long-term impacts of mobilization, organizations will be able to develop stronger mobilization programs in the future.

## IV. Background



**Map of Georgia**

Georgia gained independence from the Soviet Union in 1991 and since then has struggled with issues similar to many other countries in the Newly Independent States (NIS). Since independence, the country has had to cope with armed conflict, the disintegration of social services and public infrastructure, high unemployment and corruption. Stability is critical to the whole region as Georgia is strategically located between Russia and Turkey. Also, the companies Baku-Tbilisi Ceyhan and South Caucasus Pipeline are constructing new oil and gas pipelines that will traverse the country. High levels of international assistance are primarily targeted at maintaining stability, promoting economic growth, advancing structural reform and developing civil society actors.<sup>4</sup>

### **Mercy Corps in Georgia**

Mercy Corps has worked in Georgia since September 2000 with the launch of a four-year, USAID-funded mobilization program, the East Georgia Community Mobilization Initiative (E-GCMI).<sup>5</sup> The program is implemented in partnership with U.S.-based Management Systems International (MSI) and a local Georgian NGO, Horizonti. The E-GCMI is designed to respond to the evolving needs of vulnerable communities and to strengthen the capacity of those communities to identify, prioritize and effectively address their needs. The program contributes toward USAID's

<sup>4</sup> For further reading on Georgia background refer to the *Georgian National Development Report* (UNDP), and discussion papers from the Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance at [www.idea.int](http://www.idea.int).

<sup>5</sup> CARE implements a parallel program in West Georgia (W-GCMI), which is similar although has characteristics of its own. The two programs coordinate closely together and have had shared training, cross-visits and close collaboration. This study looks only at the E-GCMI program.

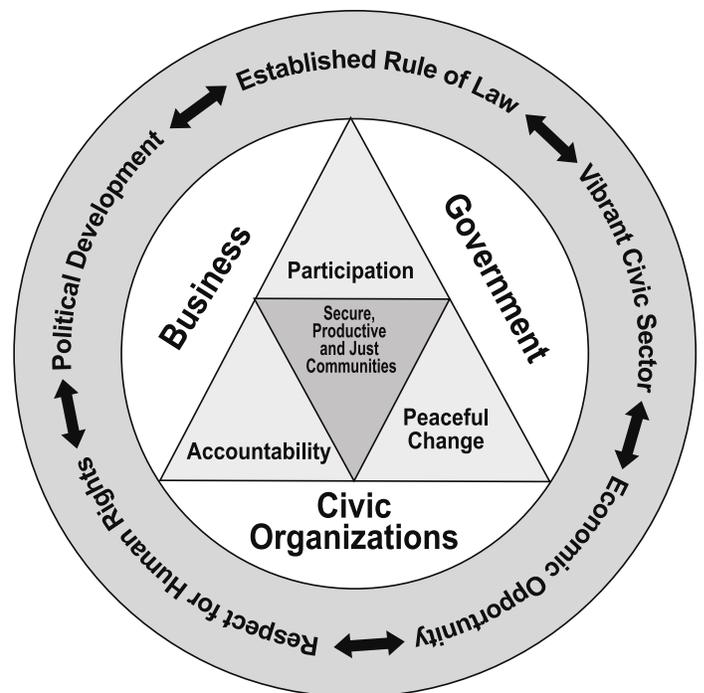
Strategic Objective 3.4.1 to improve social and health services.<sup>6</sup> Work is conducted at the village level, or in a defined neighborhood, if in an urban area. This is achieved through three program components:

- **Community mobilization.** E-GCMI has formed and strengthened 238 Community Initiative Groups (CIGs) to date through community mobilization activities.<sup>7</sup> Formal and informal leaders in each community have been trained and mentored in multiple skills including: project development, leadership to promote sustainability, advocacy, conflict management, proposal writing, and financial reporting (procurement and accountability). Over 440 micro-grants, each averaging \$6,000, have been provided to the communities; community contributions have averaged 46 percent of the total value. Communities are supported and encouraged to use their skills to implement independent activities, which have ranged from road repair to lobbying the government to stop illegal logging.
- **Complementary grants to local NGOs.** This component of the grant primarily funds local NGOs to provide services to rural and urban populations. Sub-grants are awarded through a competitive Request for Application (RFA) process, and address concerns of social welfare including support for particularly vulnerable groups, the environment and voter education. Over 226 grants have been awarded to more than 160 local partners.
- **Social Policy Unit.** Managed by Horizonti, and supported by Management Systems International (MSI), the social policy component works with CIG members and local NGOs to engage them in advocacy efforts and promote Georgian policy reform at regional and national levels.

This study focuses primarily on the first component of E-GCMI to understand the legacy of mobilization.

E-GCMI operationalizes Mercy Corps' civil society theory of change. The program integrates Mercy Corps' civil society principles of community participation, accountability between community leaders, governments and community members, and mechanisms for peaceful change. Program implementation promotes cooperation between civic organizations, government and the private sector. The three components of E-GCMI, presented above, are collectively building the capacity of a nascent civic sector, encouraging advocacy and linkages between the grassroots and policymakers and paving the way for economic development.

**Mercy Corps' Civil Society Framework**



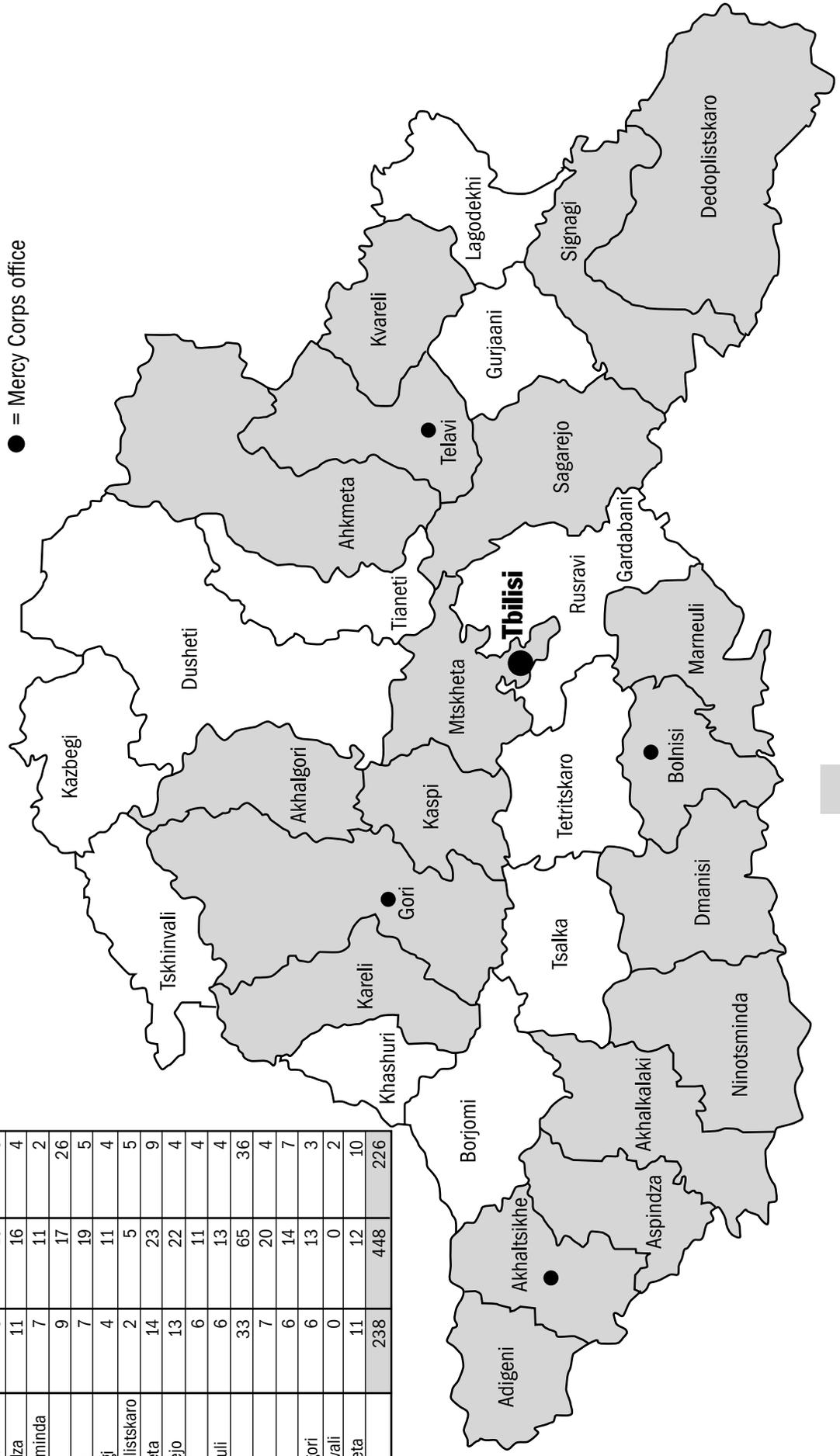
<sup>6</sup> USAID/Caucus Strategy 2004-2008.

<sup>7</sup> *E-GCMI Bi-Annual Report*, March 2004. Note: All figures are taken from this report. For further information on the community mobilization process see Appendix 1.

# East Georgia – Mercy Corps Area of Operation

E-GCMI Activities			
District	Total number of CIGs in district	Total number of community projects in district	Total number of NGO grants in district
Tbilisi	58	96	66
Akhaltse	21	47	16
Akhalkalaki	9	18	7
Adigeni	8	15	8
Aspinda	11	16	4
Ninotsminda	7	11	2
Telavi	9	17	26
Kvareli	7	19	5
Signagi	4	11	4
Deoplistskaro	2	5	5
Akhmeta	14	23	9
Sagarejo	13	22	4
Bolnisi	6	11	4
Marneuli	6	13	4
Gori	33	65	36
Kaspi	7	20	4
Kareli	6	14	7
Akhalgori	6	13	3
Tskhinvali	0	0	2
Mtskheta	11	12	10
	238	448	226

Areas of operation are shaded  
● = Mercy Corps office



## V. The Community Mobilization Process

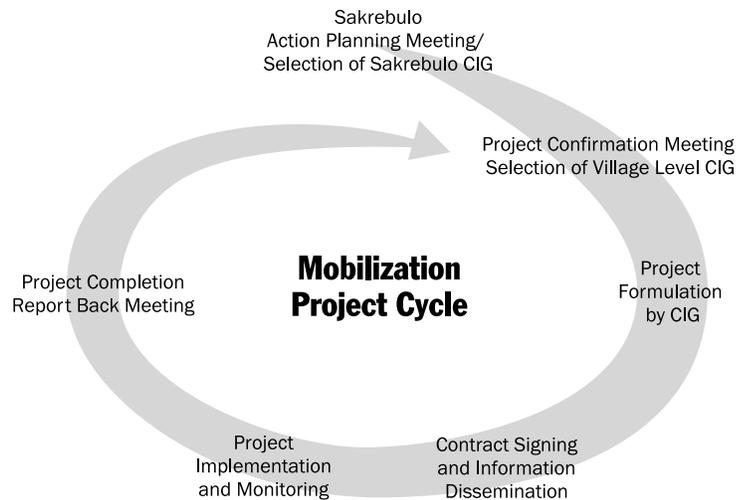
E-GCMI defines community mobilization as a process that will empower communities to take collective responsibility for solving community problems. Projects addressing priority needs are used as a mechanism to bring together the community – providing community members an opportunity to acquire and practice skills in participatory decision-making, advocacy, community action, accountability, negotiation, and leadership. The actual infrastructure or social needs addressed through the project are an important secondary benefit. The following summary provides an overview of the mobilization process. For more detail see Appendix 1.<sup>8</sup>

**Community Selection:** E-GCMI initially identifies communities at the Sakrebulo (sub-district) level.<sup>9</sup> Sakrebulo are selected based on specific criteria including lack of basic social infrastructure, low socio-economic status, little or no previous engagement by other development organizations and ethnic diversity.

**Implementation:** Community consensus is built through action planning meetings and the formation of CIGs.<sup>10</sup> Projects are then selected by each village or neighborhood

(for urban areas) within the Sakrebulo. Usually, the program will work with a specific community to implement a total of three projects. Mercy Corps invests an average of \$6,000 per project, with a maximum of \$18,000 per community during the life of the program. Each community is expected to provide matching contribution through labor, material resources, finances or technical skills. The guidelines for community contribution increase incrementally for each of the three projects, beginning at 25 percent and increasing to 50 percent and 75 percent respectively.<sup>11</sup>

**Independent Activities:** Communities are required to independently engage in problem solving activities between the second and third projects, using the mobilization skills and methodologies they have acquired through the project. These activities range broadly in scale and scope, and have included: provision of free health care to vulnerable individuals, road rehabilitation, development of education materials and advocating to the government to install phone lines.



<sup>8</sup> Throughout this study the *mobilization process* is used to refer to the complete package of activities (action planning, CIG formation, skill building and project implementation) that aim to empower communities. Each of the components are viewed as integral to achieving the overall objective, and not seen as an end in itself.

<sup>9</sup> The *Sakrebulo* is an administrative term for sub-district and is usually made up of several villages, one large village or a neighborhood within an urban setting.

<sup>10</sup> *Community* is used to refer to the village or neighborhood level, the smallest unit of population targeted by E-GCMI.

<sup>11</sup> For a more detailed description of the mobilization process see Appendix 1.

**Program Monitoring and Evaluation:** E-GCMI uses a variety of monitoring tools to measure outputs and impact, both at the program level and within each community. Community-level impact is measured against seven indicators of empowerment, which were identified in an independent report, *Empowerment Impacts of GCMI-E*.<sup>12</sup> E-GCMI has assessed communities that have finished their three-phase project cycle against these indicators and have scored communities as to whether they are highly, moderately or not very mobilized. Of the 43 communities that have been assessed to date, 27 were regarded as highly mobilized and 16 as moderately mobilized.<sup>13</sup>

## Understanding Community Mobilization

While E-GCMI aims for sustained mobilization, it is not realistic to expect all communities to become sustainably mobilized within a relatively short (one to two-year) life-span of working with mobilization methodologies. Assessing communities that have already completed all three projects, it is clear that there is a range in levels of success. Success depends on a number of factors, some of which are beyond the direct control of an international organization, such as political upheaval or the seasonal demands on agricultural communities that conflict with the program cycle. By interviewing communities and staff within E-GCMI, the research team observed five levels of mobilization based on certain characteristics. These five levels of mobilization are outlined in the following chart.

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<sup>12</sup> The indicators are defined as: moods and attitudes; human capital; institutional capacities; community cohesion; political agency; shared material assets; and information flow. For more details of these indicators and how they have been used to measure E-GCMI refer to Kate Hamilton's *The Empowerment Impacts of GCMI-E*, 2002.

<sup>13</sup> Note: these results may be skewed given that communities that have succeeded in rapidly completing the mobilization process are de facto likely to be the stronger communities.

**Levels of Mobilization** 

		<b>Level 1</b>	<b>Level 2</b>	<b>Level 3</b>	<b>Level 4</b>	<b>Level 5</b>
		External factors and/or poor site selection prevent good project implementation and community mobilization.	Community focuses on project implementation rather than overall goal. Community has little or no comprehension of mobilization principles.	Community implements strong projects, understands and appreciates mobilization principles, but may not have sufficient skills to continue. Community needs continued external support to stay mobilized.  (knowledge/attitude change)	Community is mobilized.  (behavior change)	Community moves beyond the expectations of the program.  (behavior change)
		 <b>Successful Community Mobilization</b> 				
<b>Elements of Mobilization</b>	<b>Project</b>	No appropriate priorities are identified or consensus reached.  If implemented, infrastructure project quality is poor.	Infrastructure projects may be good but with little or no participation, transparency or accountability.	Infrastructure projects may be good – CIGs promote participation, transparency and accountability.	Good projects – CIGs promote participation, transparency and accountability, and often additional resources are mobilized.	Strong projects – CIGs promote participation, transparency and accountability and carry out far more than planned within project.
	<b>Process</b>	Nothing happens despite frequent meetings facilitated by Mercy Corps.	Community relies heavily on Mercy Corps to drive the process.	CIG is transparent and accountable to community, e.g. publishes budgets.	CIGs are hungry for additional information beyond what the Mercy Corps program can provide.	Community adapts and develops its own mobilization tools and processes.
	<b>Maintenance</b>	No community ownership of infrastructure. Maintenance is poor.	No maintenance plans are in place – maintenance is on an ad hoc basis.	Maintenance rests with individuals or government.	Maintenance plans are in place and acted upon.	Maintenance plans are in place and acted upon.
	<b>CIG</b>	CIG is unable to unite the community.  No natural leaders (or too many leaders) emerge within community.	Autocratic leadership prevents participation or lack of leadership prevents CIG from forming effectively.	CIG relies on one or two key leaders or government.	Multiple CIG members are active. CIG is truly representative of community (including women, ethnic minorities, etc.).	Multiple CIG members are active. Community members actively engage in the process voluntarily.
	<b>Match</b>	CIG finds it difficult to raise match.	Community completes the projects with the required contributions.	Community completes the projects meeting or exceeding match requirements.	Community gets resources from government and/or other donors, and is able to assess its own resources.	CIG uses advocacy to obtain more resources for itself and others, and to advocate for rights.
	<b>Advocacy</b>	Advocacy does not take place.	Community has limited understanding. Communities secure permissions and use of existing resources from government.	Community actively requests government for permission to use resources, assign staff, etc.	Community lobbies government and private businesses for new resources.	CIGs advocate at a district or regional level for rights and changes in budget allocations. They often form alliances and coalitions to advocate for broader needs.
	<b>Future</b>	Nothing happens without Mercy Corps driving the process.	Community probably does not implement projects on its own.	Community implements small-scale projects on its own. May or may not continue to use participatory methodologies.	CIG looks for new projects and activities and involves the community in decision-making.	Community implements independent projects using strong mobilization processes.
<b>Mercy Corps</b>	<b>Action Steps</b>	Mercy Corps will usually make a decision not to work with the community after preliminary meetings.	The current project phase is completed but Mercy Corps may not fund all three phases.	Every stage requires supervision.	First and Second stages need careful supervision.	Second and Third projects can be carried out almost independently.
				Mercy Corps supports communities as they identify priorities, implement projects and acquire new skills. Active input decreases as communities gain confidence and experience.		

**Level One: External factors and/or poor site selection prevent good project implementation and community mobilization.** These communities fail to understand the principles of mobilization and are also unable to complete quality projects. They do not fundamentally change behavior during the course of their participation in E-GCMI. They are totally dependent on Mercy Corps during their decision-making processes. There is a high likelihood that any infrastructure projects completed will not be properly maintained because they have not taken responsibility for the process.

Because site selection is at the Sakrebulo level, not all villages/communities within that particular Sakrebulo may be ready to engage with the mobilization process. Usually, these communities should be identified during the initial phases of interaction (Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), introductory meetings, etc.) and a decision taken not to move forward with project implementation.

**Level Two: Community focuses on project implementation rather than overall goal of the program, with little or no comprehension of mobilization principles.** These communities can implement successful projects, but the mobilization process does not result in empowerment. Projects are perceived by the communities as an end in themselves, and CIG members are not committed to adopting or utilizing the principles of transparency, accountability, participation, ownership and self-responsibility. It can, however, be difficult to determine whether the community will ever move beyond this phase while in the initial stages. Many staff members and community representatives mentioned that an understanding of and enthusiasm for the mobilization process often does not occur until the second or third phase, and it can be difficult to determine early on whether a community will affect behavior change.

**Level Three: Community implements strong projects, understands and appreciates mobilization principles, but may not have sufficient skills to continue.** These communities need continued external support to stay mobilized. They are still reliant on Mercy Corps and doubt their ability to solve problems on their own. These communities may go on to undertake independent activities and maintain existing structures, but they are likely to flounder without continued external support at the end of the three project phases.

**Levels Four and Five: Communities are highly mobilized and likely to continue to remain active in the future.** These communities are mobilized and have incorporated the principles of mobilization into further problem solving activities on their own. They are able to adopt new strategies and practices, advocate to government for rights and resources, and build linkages and networks with other like-minded organizations to achieve maximum impact.

Although many communities may implement high quality projects, mobilization programs have achieved their objectives only if participant communities are assessed to be within the upper three Levels by the end of the program. It is important, though, to consider that it may take more than one project phase for a community to reach this stage. Many communities focus on projects and tangible outputs during the first phase (Level Two) and make the transition to the higher levels later on. Similarly, communities often build on their skills and become stronger moving from Levels Three to Four or Five as they develop and see the results of their efforts. Communities exhibiting the characteristics described in Levels Four and Five are the most likely to maintain the degree of activity and empowerment beyond the life of the project. In order to enable the maximum number of

communities to become mobilized in a manner that makes sustained empowerment more probable (Levels Four and Five), it is essential that mobilizers understand the characteristics of each individual community.<sup>14</sup>

Weaker, less active communities (Level Two and below) tended to value the projects more than the process, whereas stronger communities (Level Three and above) understood the importance of the mobilization process and skills. The stronger communities saw E-GCMI as a springboard for future activities, whereas weaker communities perceived it to be a one-off input into their community.

## Differences between Urban and Rural Communities

Approximately two-thirds of E-GCMI communities are located in urban areas. While there are clear differences between the two types of communities, this did not appear to effect their ability to remain active after Mercy Corps stopped providing resources. Of the communities that continued to be active after completing three project phases, there was no significant difference in levels of mobilization between rural and urban communities, although the scope of the independent activities differed.<sup>15</sup> Overall, it appears that whether a community is urban or rural does not in and of itself predict sustained mobilization – each type has its own challenges and opportunities regarding mobilization and behavior change.

**Characteristics:** Rural communities tend to mobilize a representation of different professions and backgrounds from across the village and address a range of different sector issues during the three-phase project cycle. Urban communities tend to mobilize around an institution, such as a school or a water user's association.

**Access to resources:** Urban communities tend to have greater access to cash, while rural communities have greater access to materials and skilled labor. Urban populations are usually more easily able to advocate and press both business and government to release resources for particular needs. However, overall, rural communities are able to mobilize a greater total contribution, including labor (on average approximately 54 percent compared to 42 percent match in urban areas), possibly because of greater feelings of solidarity between community members.

**Ease of mobilization:** Village populations often consider themselves to have been mobilized to some degree prior to program interventions. The sense of village unity and solidarity is often strong because of the remote location and lack of attention from government. However, concepts of participation and inclusion or the introduction of new processes often take more time to communicate and absorb. Urban communities, on the other hand, are often more educated and more easily able to grasp new ideas, but lack identity as a collective unit.

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<sup>14</sup> No formal ranking process was used for the study, however staff and the research team concurred that the “Levels” of the communities visited were divided in the following manner: **Level One** – two communities, **Level Two** – three communities, **Level Three** – five communities, **Level Four** – seven communities, **Level Five** – seven communities. This indicates that a range of communities were analyzed.

<sup>15</sup> For example, rural communities often focus on advocacy for resources whereas urban advocacy projects often focused on policy or regulation change.

## VI. Common Characteristics Inherent in Sustainably Mobilized Communities

In order to understand how to increase the probability of sustainably mobilizing communities, it is necessary to understand if there are factors within a community that facilitate the mobilization process.<sup>16</sup> The research team identified recurrent characteristics across the stronger communities. These characteristics included: leadership, conceptual understanding, access to resources, access to information and previous experience of being active. They are outlined in more detail in the following section.

It would seem that if several of these characteristics exist within any selected community, then the chances are stronger that the community will remain empowered.<sup>17</sup> By capitalizing upon these characteristics and focusing on capacity-building activities when they are weak, Mercy Corps can increase its probability of success.

This study has focused awareness and identification of those critical ingredients for success. The challenge therefore is to:

- Increase the organization's ability to recognize these factors during the initial site selection.
- Focus on capacity-building activities in areas that are still weak.
- Identify programmatic approaches that move weaker communities into a stronger position.

### 1. Leadership

Mobilization programs aim to engage the majority of a community in decision-making and problem solving activities. However, the presence of strong leadership in the community and the community's ability to organize under this leadership is vital to a community's continued mobilization. Leadership helps create consensus on prioritizing common issues and resolves potential divisions within the community. Strong leaders also understand and endorse the importance of participatory decision-making within the community. Leadership skills can be developed through mobilization programs, but individuals who are prepared to assume such roles (whether or not they were previously doing so) have to exist within the communities, if they do not, the mobilization process is almost impossible. This is critical for sustained empowerment. Leadership does not only have to rest with a few individuals but should be flexible and allow new leaders to emerge. Mobilization programs need to focus on developing leadership skills within communities through formal training, mentoring and cross-visits.

It is also important to make the distinction between representative leadership, and leaders who control the agenda. Two of the E-GCMI communities in Shida Kartli and Kakheti had successfully completed all three projects and had good tangible outputs to show for their participation in the process. They had successfully raised the incremental community match required for each project and were conducting maintenance. However, leadership in both communities was centered on an autocratic personality, who

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<sup>16</sup> Since the start of E-GCMI, Mercy Corps has supported the development of 238 CIGs. In addition, Mercy Corps began operations in six communities where it was unable to form a CIG. Of the 238, 108 have or will have completed three projects by the end of the program; 28 were stopped after the first project; and 29 were stopped after the second project either because of problems with the CIG or they were unable to complete their projects on time. The rest of the CIGs were only given the opportunity to complete one phase for programmatic reasons.

<sup>17</sup> These theories should be tested again, substantially after the end of the program, to see if predicted communities remain empowered.

acted as the driving force for raising community match and project implementation and did not support participation. Another community was crippled during project implementation when the head of the CIG died unexpectedly and others in the community were not used to assuming leadership roles.

Bob Newell/Mercy Corps



*Before GCMI, if funds or resources came to the community we would divide them between the inhabitants. Now we look to use them for the common benefit and do something bigger.*

– Community Member in Mirashkhani

**Elders often play a key leadership role in rallying community members and resources to address a common problem.**

Although an agency cannot necessarily predict which communities will have difficult or autocratic leaders, it is essential to create the space and opportunity for multiple leaders within the community to emerge as the mobilization process evolves. Communities will often elect the “regular” leaders out of habit when the initial community group (CIG) is formed. However, the three-phase project cycle, along with regular transparency and confirmation meetings, provide opportunities for new leaders to emerge and for communities to become more confident in choosing leaders who represent their interests. Of the communities visited, 60 percent had experienced a change of CIG members as the projects evolved. Community members explained that the level of commitment and leadership required by E-GCMI soon became bothersome to those who were interested in the positions for reasons of status or prestige. These individuals were willing to step down, especially after realizing there was no personal gain for them in these projects.

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## 2. Conceptual understanding of the principles of mobilization

Stronger communities (Levels Four and Five) rapidly make the conceptual shift to understanding that the E-GCMI program is primarily about acquiring new skill sets rather than just direct resources, indicating that this understanding is an important factor in sustained mobilization. Of the strong communities visited, 80 percent prioritized the importance of the skills learned above the actual material inputs into the project.<sup>18</sup> When asked about the value of the money provided through USAID, one community in Kakheti region explained that the resources, “provide us with the opportunity to put the skills we have learned into action.” Strong CIG members can also articulate the importance of being able to advocate for resources and policy change to government. Weaker communities place more value on the material outputs of the projects, such as roads, school roofs and water systems. Mobilization staff frequently mentioned the difficulty in explaining concepts to more rural, less educated communities, and how this took considerably more time than in the towns. However, interestingly (and positively) by the time of the research, there was no recognizable difference in community comprehension of mobilization principles between rural and urban communities. Although the research team was not able to gather enough data to understand exactly why some communities were able to grasp the principles while others

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<sup>18</sup> Strong communities are those communities that meet Level Four and Level Five criteria. Of the project sites visited, 14 qualify.

were not, this appears to play an important part in the process. It is important for mobilizers to dedicate time to communicating the principles of mobilization.

## **Taking Mobilization to New Levels**

The Tusheti people are sheep herders who spend the summer months in the highland areas bordering Chechnya and the winter months in the pasture lands in the south of Kakheti region. During the mobilization process at their permanent base in Akhmeta region, they decided to improve their access to the highland areas. As a result, a multi-Sakrebulo CIG was formed to repair the roads and then later to bring water to more than 30 villages and construct communal showers and bakeries. The leader of one of the clans mentioned that the project not only united the population to develop the Tusheti area, but it was the first time that he had sat down with other clan leaders to look at the development of the communities. The projects spurred a wave of community action. The group has precisely located the transit route and is monitoring illegal use of this land through unauthorized “privatization.” They have also persuaded the Ministry of Agriculture to provide free veterinary services for the sheep during the winter pasturing.

### **3. Access to resources**

If communities are to remain mobilized they need to be able to continue to access resources. Communities that have undertaken activities independent of E-GCMI have all had access to external resources. Independent community projects are not usually of the same scope as those completed under E-GCMI since this level of disposable income does not exist, either at a community or government level. However, the population must assess what is available to it in terms of skills and materials and tailor plans accordingly. The more isolated and poorer a community, the harder it is for them to remain active, although this is sometimes a barrier of perception rather than reality.<sup>19</sup> Communities that are closer to towns or have access to industrial band economic enterprises find it easier to mobilize people and resources to address their problems. However, there are notable exceptions. One extremely poor community in Samstkhe-Javakheti complained that their community was resource-sparse. However upon further questioning, they revealed that they had successfully lobbied the government to use materials from abandoned buildings to build an additional schoolroom and a cultural center. They had also persuaded local political groups to pay for a new satellite dish to connect them with events in other parts of Georgia.

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### **4. Access to information**

In order to continue to be active, communities need to have some way of accessing information about additional resources, events and government policies. Most rural communities acutely feel the need to be more connected to the outside world, and community projects reflect this priority. E-GCMI projects in six communities have obtained satellite dishes so they can understand what is occurring in other regions. At least 48 projects have involved roads and bridges, increasing access to information (especially with newspapers and personal contacts). In addition, 14 projects have worked on electricity systems, thereby improving the ability to view television.

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<sup>19</sup> The team met several extremely isolated communities that had nevertheless been able to access significant resources from government, largely through their own determination together with a solid grasp of the skills acquired under E-GCMI.

The importance of access to information was echoed by CIG members and E-GCMI staff members. Not surprisingly, communities that are closer to urban centers or with reliable means of communication have better access to information and are able to use this to access additional resources during and beyond project implementation. Although absence of ready access to outside information should not rule out the selection of remote communities, additional attention needs to be paid to communities with weak communication links and to look for ways of helping to create sustainable communication during the course of the program.

## 5. Prior tradition of community activism

Most strong rural communities visited during the research period spoke of a previous tradition of uniting to address their immediate needs. This is more predominant in communities that feel isolated because of their location or identify as belonging to an ethnic minority. However, when asking these communities about the difference pre- and post-participation in E-GCMI, communities were almost unanimous in saying that E-GCMI has provided them with analytical problem solving skills that they had lacked earlier. Training in problem analysis and action planning, advocacy, proposal writing, budgeting and conflict mediation has made them more proactive in addressing common issues. Prior to E-GCMI they had been more reactive toward their evolving needs. One community in Kakheti region said, “Earlier we used to come together around problems when the problem had escalated to a level where we could no longer wait for the government to intervene, but now we know that we can help ourselves the best.”



**During an action planning meeting a group of women identify possible solutions to prioritized problems and consider resources available to the community.**

## Government Involvement and Support in Community Mobilization

Government support can be broken down into four components. Government support refers to support from district level government or above:

- Capital or monetary support from the government
- Technical assistance such as architectural or engineering design
- Government permission for use of state-managed resources and bureaucratic clearance
- Acceptance on the part of the government to take over and support components of CIG projects, for example, salaries for teachers and maintenance of the school facility.

Government involvement in CIGs and their activities vary across communities. Communities distinguish between local government at the Sakrebulo level and “government.” While the head of the Sakrebulo is often elected to the CIG, communities think of him/her as a part of the community, without much authority or resources. In their opinion, government has influence only at the district level and above. From the Soviet period, this is the level of government they expect to come and take care of their needs.

There appears to be no direct correlation between the levels of government support and whether a community stays mobilized by its own initiative. However in the long-term, effective interaction between government and communities is vital to the establishment of sustainable and accountable governance. Governments derive legitimacy from representing and serving their people. Any parallel systems set up in the non-government sector hold the potential to inadvertently undermine governmental responsibilities. As the government in Georgia develops, economic opportunities increase and development assistance decreases, communities will be forced to realize that the government is and should be their primary source for both resources and policy change. Mercy Corps' civil society approach requires that all programs support democratic governance and promote accountable interaction between communities and government.

Through the mobilization process, E-GCMI staff observed successful communities progressing through the following stages in terms of government-community interaction and relating to the promotion of good governance:

- Stage 1** Communities realize the value of transparency.
- Stage 2** Communities take charge of their own affairs, lose their sense of hopelessness.
- Stage 3** Communities hold all actors and stakeholders, especially themselves and the government, accountable to their roles and responsibilities.
- Stage 4** Communities participate in decision-making and realize that they hold the power to change ineffective components of the government.<sup>20</sup>

While not every community targeted through the program will reach Level Four and above, E-GCMI places a strong emphasis on enabling accountable interaction between communities and government, focusing both on immediate and on strategic needs. Mercy Corps provides training to communities on how to engage with their government at the same time training local government in participatory methodologies. Civil society workshops with both government and communities create the opportunity for discussions on how they can work together on local problems. The *Rose Revolution* that peacefully unseated the previous government in 2003<sup>21</sup> presents unprecedented opportunities for dynamic and beneficial synergies between local/regional governments and communities in Georgia.

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<sup>20</sup> Stage 1 corresponds to Level Three in the Mobilization Table, Stages 2, 3 and 4 would be expected of stronger communities in Levels Four and Five.

<sup>21</sup> For more information on current political events in Georgia see Institute for War and Peace Reporting at [www.iwpr.net](http://www.iwpr.net).

## Akhalsikhe School #1 in Samstkhe Javakheti

In 2001, Mercy Corps launched the E-GCMI in Akhalsikhe town of Samstkhe Javakheti. The Akhalsikhe community's highest priorities were rehabilitation of schools and access to potable water. The community set up dedicated CIGs for five schools and one CIG to tackle the town's water problems. Akhalsikhe School #1 was one of the five schools prioritized by the community. The CIG, staff, parents and students of Akhalsikhe School #1 truly embraced Mercy Corps' mobilization principles, so much so that their evolution along the mobilization continuum illustrates Level Five of mobilization, as discussed previously.

Here is a snapshot of Akhalsikhe School #1's mobilization process as shared by its CIG members who continue to be vibrantly active two years after the completion of E-GCMI's third phase project with the school.

"Our school is 170 years old. Before Mercy Corps and E-GCMI we had never worked with an international or local organization. The school's condition was such that we had no drinking water available in a school with 1,080 students. Students used to knock on neighbors doors to get a drink of water. We received no support from the government.



Najia Hyder/Mercy Corps

**Girls look out from a window of their newly rehabilitated school. Infrastructure provides immediate benefit to young people while the skills that they and the CIG members learn provide the impetus to continue to make educational improvements in their lives.**

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Mercy Corps helped us solve our urgent problems but most importantly it gave us hope and trust, and shook us out of our state of paralysis. We had always been aware of our problems, yet waited for the government to provide solutions. Mercy Corps provided us with the capability and tools to breakdown and analyze our problems, and to recognize the resources we had to tackle these problems. As we continued to work with Mercy Corps, we gained confidence in our ability to solve our own problems. We learned how to deal with other NGOs, involve parents and the larger community in our initiatives and advocate to the government. We learned to pinpoint problems, map priorities, identify solutions, find appropriate resources, and present this information through proposals and budgets. We now know that working together around a shared problem will get better results faster.

After the Soviet collapse we were suspended in a vacuum – not knowing which way to go. This didn't just relate to resources but also our way of thinking. We did not have the will to effect change. We didn't know how to deal with our problems. Also we did not know what morals and values to teach our students. Mercy Corps has truly empowered us by helping us fit in the new world and new mentality.

Our last project with Mercy Corps ended in April 2002, however we are in almost daily contact with the Mercy Corps office. Mercy Corps is a source of information for us, as well as an advisor. Our CIG continues to change as new students and parents take the place of those who have graduated, yet we are just as active as we were while working with Mercy Corps. We have recently completed the school fence and raised funds to hire a full-time janitor to help maintain hygiene standards at the school; we have continued to raise funds and maintain a funding pool to buy classroom supplies and wood for heating the classrooms in winter. In addition, we have set up a subcommittee to find funds and resources for school maintenance. We are awaiting an upcoming change in the law that will allow schools to maintain

bank accounts and do private fundraising. This will greatly help to plan for contingencies and bank funds. When we saw and realized that Mercy Corps, a foreign NGO, was working hard to help our community it made us question our inability to work for our own community.

Working with Mercy Corps taught us to trust international organizations. Whereas we were wary of outsiders before, we have now come to understand the value of collaboration. Our experience with Mercy Corps motivated us to work with other NGOs and learn more. However, before we partner with any NGO, local or international, we first check its reputation with the Mercy Corps office.

We are working with the International Foundation for Election Systems to provide leadership training and opportunities to students. We have a student parliament in the school which provides students with first hand experience on how to participate in decision-making. We encourage students to undertake environment-friendly and socially responsible initiatives. In essence, we are making students civic citizens.

Two of our teachers are certified trainers under the SOROS Open Society Foundation training of teachers program. These two teachers are providing training on new teaching methodologies to schools in the entire Samtskhe-Javakheti region.

Two of our teachers are consultants to the Ministry of Education for Samtskhe-Javakheti under the World Bank education grant to the government of Georgia that advises on the education reform process. We have been able to get funds from the Red Cross to acquire better training for our sixth and seventh grade teachers. The World Wildlife Foundation is helping us deliver ecological education in the school. International Orthodox Christian Charities is funding our elementary school feeding program.

We have shared the knowledge and tools we gained through the E-GCMI program with other schools in the region. Our teachers who travel to other schools under the SOROS and World Bank programs have helped those schools write proposals to address their needs. One such proposal resulted in a school receiving \$1,000 for equipment.

We have not only advocated to the government on the needs of our school, but have been successful in getting the government to pay for janitors in 35 schools to help keep the toilets clean and the schools free of epidemic. Two of our CIG members are a part of the education sub-group of the Samtskhe-Javakheti Social Policy Working Group. Our sub-group is working with the Ministry of Education, other schools, students, teachers and parents to write a school code as well as raise awareness on why a school code is important.

In the beginning, it was hard for us to believe in Mercy Corps and in ourselves. In our hearts we didn't really believe that anything would come of these efforts, but as we started seeing results, the mood changed. The transparency process helped gain broad participation. Everyone could see the budget displayed on bulletin boards and could ask questions about where the materials were being bought and for how much. Parents, students and staff could see where the money was being spent, and everyone started contributing their time and money. For the second and third phase projects we did not even have to make an appeal for labor, people simply volunteered without even being asked. Now, when parents give money for our continued school projects they are confident that it will be utilized for the stated purpose. Trust-building took some time, but it is our biggest asset.

We are still hungry for information. We are a part of school coalitions and in regular contact with Mercy Corps; however, we want to know what's happening in the outside world. Where are other sources of information? What are the new methodologies of which we do not know yet? We want to get computers and internet access so we are able to move in step with the world.”

## VII. Program Components that Support Sustained Community Mobilization

In addition to the characteristics within a community that support sustained mobilization, it is equally important to understand the processes and activities in a mobilization program that promote long-term impact and behavior change. One of the primary objectives of this study was to understand which components of Mercy Corps programs were contributing to or undermining sustained mobilization, particularly from the community perspective.

Communities consistently mentioned several key program elements that enabled them to move beyond project implementation and into a mindset that ensured continued activity. These key elements are noted below.

### 1. Promoting transparency

Community members repeatedly mentioned transparency as one of the most valuable processes that Mercy Corps brings to the community. “Previously no one in the community trusted each other. The fact that Mercy Corps taught us to make budgets public and trusted us to manage the funds ourselves

### **Community Mobilization vs. Community-based Organization Mobilization (CBOs)**

By viewing the CIG as a vehicle for the mobilization process and not an end in itself, Mercy Corps made a conscious decision not to formalize CIGs into registered organizations at the outset of E-GCMI. Community mobilization is aimed at evoking behavior change in a larger population than just the CIG members. In addition, members initially elected to the CIG are often traditional leaders of the community (directors, heads of the Sakrebulo, etc.) rather than individuals with a real commitment to improving their communities. CIG members often change over the course of the first and second phase projects. Keeping the CIG structure fluid early on facilitates this evolution in leadership. As communities progress with the process, many CIGs start to crystallize as a group and develop a vision of for their community beyond the scope of the program. Some (but not all) CIGs decide that they need to register as a community-based organization (CBO) to improve their ability to raise funds. Mercy Corps, Horizonti or other national NGOs are able to provide advice and guidance to CIGs on the registration process. A further advantage of supporting registration at a later stage is that the crystallization of the group is built around future plans rather than the objectives of E-GCMI, thus avoiding some of the concerns laid out in a recent report on CBOs in Georgia which stated, “CBOs have been developed by external actors except of a few self-established organizations...Not surprisingly most CBOs bear features conveyed to them by their sponsors.” Community-based organizations recognize their mission as to solve acute problems with external assistance.<sup>22</sup> By only supporting CIGs who have independently decided to register as CBOs (and not making it a de facto part of the mobilization program), Mercy Corps aims to overcome some of these challenges and empower a larger section of the community.

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<sup>22</sup> Gzirishvili, David. *Situation Analysis of CBOs in Georgia*, (2003) p. 8 and 24.

started the trust-building process,” says a Ratevani CIG member. They mention the importance of the following program components: open budgets, financial sub-groups, financial accountability separate from procurement and well-managed expectations (e.g. communities understand that there will not be an endless supply of resources to their community from Mercy Corps). Community members who have worked with other organizations also mentioned how this degree of transparency has not always been present, but that they are now starting to demand it from others as well.

## 2. Fostering community unity

One-third of communities in the study stressed E-GCMI’s role in enabling the community to unite around common issues. Many of the villages mentioned having tackled projects beforehand, but explained that the skills brought to them by E-GCMI have enabled them to channel resources in a way that brings them together, rather than each person looking out for his/her self interest. Critical to this process are the skills that mobilizers build in developing consensus and participatory decision-making. Building confidence is also often an essential part of the mobilization process. Communities are often disillusioned with the erosion and lack of maintenance they have seen in social services and infrastructure over the past decade, and feel disempowered to take action themselves. CIG members explained that it was at the point when they had completed the first project that the community had started to believe it was not empty rhetoric, and understand the power of collective action.

*I didn't get involved in the first project in our village because I was suspicious that this was all talk. After I saw the results I realized how much more we could do in our community and became a member of the CIG.*

– CIG member in Tivi village

## 3. Combining training in advocacy skills with the opportunity to apply these in project activities

Advocacy skills were mentioned by many of the stronger community groups as one of the primary tools to enable the community to look for outside resources. Stronger communities use these skills to advocate not only for resources but also for policy reform. Mobilizers feel that although the skills provided during the training were useful, it is putting these skills into practice, often with the support of the Mercy Corps mobilizers in the initial phases, that really reinforced the value of advocacy skills.

Among communities visited, CIGs that have truly adopted advocacy skills display greater confidence in their ability to access resources and engage government in their communities. Often, this confidence is due to successful advocacy that has resulted in the acquisition of needed resources for the community. Communities participating in E-GCMI do not usually have sufficient resources to independently

### Successful Advocacy

The CIG in Chela-Samiri built a new school through E-GCMI, with ample classroom space enabling it to expand the age range of the pupils. The government, however, refused to cover the salary of the additional teachers required for additional levels. The community approached the Gamgebeli (head of local government) and had meetings with representatives of local and district government. When all else failed, representatives from both villages staged a peaceful demonstration outside the government offices in Akhaltsikhe, the regional center, until the government finally agreed to their terms.

complete projects that require significant material or financial contribution. For such communities, it is important to have the ability to successfully advocate for outside resources that effectively address strategic community needs.

#### **4. Mercy Corps models the values it promotes**

In a society where corruption is pervasive, individuals often have little trust in the honesty of the government, institutions or the civic sector. They feel that the rhetoric of community responsibility, accountability and transparency is not reflected by those with power and resources. Communities talked frequently about the challenge of building trust with Mercy Corps. When asked what the key factors were in developing the relationship they mentioned the fact that Mercy Corps staff members model civil society behaviors that they expect from the community.

This includes setting clear and transparent expectations at the program outset, transparent handling of finances and ensuring participatory decision-making. Mobilizers articulate the importance of following through on any commitments that they make to communities as a core program value. Without impeccable transparency in the way in which it works, an international organization cannot expect lasting behavior change within the communities.



Najia Hyder/Mercy Corps

**Transparency boards carrying information about projects, CIG members and budgets, are displayed at public locations to promote accountability. Transparency breeds trust and encourages broad-based community participation.**

#### **5. Creating high community expectations of completing activities independent from Mercy Corps**

The stronger communities visited during field research had completed independent activities during the course of the project cycle. These activities are often not of the same magnitude in terms of cost, but are substantial in terms of effort. The stronger communities were continuing to work with their CIGs to prioritize common needs and strategize for solutions. These CIGs were actively employing and further refining various skills – such as problem solving, proposal writing, budgeting and advocacy – gained during their participation in the E-GCMI mobilization process. They displayed greater confidence in their ability to help themselves. Setting this expectation clearly from the program outset, rather than making it part of an exit plan, appears to be a successful strategy in creating sustainability.

#### **6. Ensuring frequent contact between the international partner and the community**

Mercy Corps' involvement with the community is usually more hands-on for the first project than for subsequent projects in order to build trust and demonstrate new skills. As communities develop new capacities, the mobilizers take a less active approach and act more as advisers. During project implementation, staff members visit the sites approximately once a week. After the three phases are over, staff aims to visit communities on a monthly basis. One group of CIGs in Tbilisi stated that they still needed Mercy Corps' support. When pressed to be more specific, they said that they realized it was not material inputs, or even training that were necessary, but more the role of facilitators and advisers.

It appears that in assisting communities to be more self-sufficient, a gradual reduction of consultative support is an important element in the process.

## 7. Providing tools to solve problems – without waiting for outside help

At least 80 percent of the communities clearly describe an attitudinal shift during the course of the program. After the Soviet period, when the Georgian state authorities took over responsibility for operation and maintenance of community infrastructure, people became deeply disillusioned with the government. Through E-GCMI, community group members articulated how they have come to realize it is their responsibility to hold the government accountable, while at the same time taking ownership of issues they can solve themselves. The skills provided through the advocacy training have encouraged communities to constructively engage with government to bring about change.

## 8. Fostering networks of CBOs and NGOs

Most strong communities express a desire to be connected to information regarding tools, methodologies and funding resources. Many organizations specifically request to be connected to other organizations from whom they could learn and with whom they could share experiences. CIGs that have visited other CIGs within E-GCMI and/or hosted other CIG members in their communities claim that these cross-visits have been extremely helpful in getting their own CIG and community to think creatively. Seeing other similar CIGs succeed gives the community confidence in its own abilities.

E-GCMI staff members also emphasize the importance of networks of development-focused organizations. Enabling active community members to learn and draw from each other's successes is invaluable for communities that are still trying to break out of Soviet-style, government-centered mentality.

## 9. Letting communities manage their own resources

E-GCMI is one of the few programs that have instituted this practice; few other mobilization programs entrust the funds for projects to the community themselves. While there are often valid reasons not to give money directly to the community (e.g. lack of valid banking and financial systems), the Georgian communities clearly value being trusted to manage the resources themselves and develop systems for financial accountability and transparency. If mobilization programs aim to build self-responsibility in the future, then entrusting communities with direct management of funds and resources, while providing support and guidance, is an essential part of the process.



Thatcher Cook for Mercy Corps

**Frequent meetings, formal and informal, between Mercy Corps staff and community members ensure that misunderstandings are resolved immediately and that all processes are transparent.**

*The main purpose of the program has been to teach us to solve problems ourselves and not to wait for external aid.*

– CIG Member in Mtisubani

After the mobilization program had taken place in their villages, a coalition of CIGs and NGOs in the Kakheti region formed, to promote awareness of illegal logging and forest mismanagement. As a result the local forestry department has restricted tree cutting in the area.

The “Unlimited World” coalition promotes the education and social integration of disabled children into society. A coalition of CIGs and local NGOs supported the creation of a database for disabled children in one district of Tbilisi. As a result of their campaigns, the education ministry agreed to finance ten mainstream schools in Tbilisi to train teachers and adapt infrastructures so that disabled children can attend.

## 10. Requiring community contribution

The interviews gauged the level of a community’s understanding of the reasons for match. Not surprisingly, the stronger the CIG, the more value they place on community contribution. Weaker communities see match as the need to increase the value of the project. Stronger communities understand that it enables them to discover the resources within their own community, increases ownership and participation, and reinforces the value of sustainability in the longer term. In the three phases of project implementation, communities are asked to contribute 25 percent, 50 percent and 75 percent respectively to each project. Most communities understand the value of increasing community contribution as they begin to take more ownership of the mobilization process and undertake independent activities. However, there was consensus that in most cases 75 percent match was too high to expect from the community for a project of \$6,000, given that community contribution is usually made through labor.

## VIII. Lessons Learned and Recommendations

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The wealth of experience gathered from four years of working on the E-GCMI mobilization program has already been shared with programs through peer exchanges, presentations and Mercy Corps’ mobilization summit.<sup>23</sup> Below are some of the key lessons that ensure a legacy of empowerment beyond the framework of funded activities.

- 1. Sustained behavior change often does not take place during implementation of the first project.** Project phases, where communities have the opportunity to implement two to three projects, enable communities to reinforce and apply skills and approaches learned. This ensures that Mercy Corps has authority to suspend projects in communities that are not adopting practices of self-ownership, accountability, transparency and participation.
- 2. Transparency is one of the most important attributes Mercy Corps brings to the community.** This was repeatedly articulated by the communities. Transparency includes: being open about the process and number of projects that can take place in the community, giving communities management of their own budgets, and making information public at community meetings. Articulating an expectation that communities will continue to work on their own is also a key component in ensuring sustained mobilization within the community.
- 3. Strong CIGs are likely to want to formalize into CBOs and Mercy Corps should support this process.** Mercy Corps puts no pressure on CIGs to register as formalized associations, believing that the skills rather than institutions are most important for ensuring the sustainability of the mobilization process. However, experience has shown that many (but not all) of the stronger CIGs

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<sup>23</sup> Mercy Corps held a summit in 2003 to discuss lessons learned, share best practices and develop future strategies for community mobilization. For further information contact Mercy Corps headquarters.

do want help with registering. Mercy Corps needs to be able to put these groups in contact with appropriate organizations to help with this process.

- 4. Mobilization programs should focus on developing leadership skills within communities.** Mobilization programs aim to encourage broad-based citizen participation in community life. This can only be effective if they simultaneously build the skills of leaders within the community to be accountable, participatory and responsive. Fostering and mentoring a number of potential leaders throughout the mobilization process, while at the same time being inclusive of groups that may be excluded from leadership roles (e.g. women, youth and ethnic minorities) is critical to program success and sustainability.
- 5. Create expectations that the activities should continue beyond the life of the program.** E-GCMI staff clearly set the expectations that the program is about far more than three infrastructure projects. Communities are required to have implemented independent activities before Mercy Corps can fund a third phase project. In addition, the focus on training, promoting advocacy efforts and acting as advisers to the communities promotes a focus on skills and sustainability. Articulating an expectation that communities will continue to work on their own is a key component in ensuring sustained mobilization within the community.
- 6. Cross-visits between community groups are extremely important as a way to build trust in Mercy Corps and confidence in the communities.** Most communities mention the fact that building trust with Mercy Corps was one of the biggest hurdles to overcome because they had been visited by so many organizations that had not fulfilled promises. Along with the rapid demonstration of concrete results, the opportunity to visit other E-GCMI communities accelerates building trust and strong relationships.
- 7. Communities need to have a common identity to mobilize around.** In rural areas, the unit of the village is usually small enough to create a sense of common purpose. In urban areas, communities mobilize best either around discrete geographical areas (e.g. a cluster of tower blocks), or around an institution (e.g. a school or health house). When villages are large (over 2,000 residents) and the whole community may not benefit from the project, then it is important to ensure adequate information flow so that everyone is aware of the process and the projects remain transparent.
- 8. Correctly determine the amount per project per community.** Determining the correct dollar amount to invest into each community is a challenging task. If the amount is too small then communities will not be able to address their priorities. If the amount is too large then community contribution does not significantly balance Mercy Corps' contribution, and the focus of the project shifts away from the mobilization process to the size of the infrastructure.
- 9. Isolated communities will find it harder to maintain their level of mobilization.** Communities that are completely isolated from other villages or urban centers (because of location, bad roads, lack of media access, etc.) find it harder to remain active to any significant degree, even though the feelings of solidarity may be strong. During the mobilization process it is important to provide intensive support to these communities to create and develop links with regional government, local NGOs, cooperatives, etc.
- 10. It is unrealistic to expect everyone in the community to be engaged in the mobilization process.** Mobilization programs need to be realistic in their understanding of community dynamics and what percentage of the population they expect to engage in the projects. It is more important to focus on creating an environment that promotes inclusion and participation than to try to get everyone at the meetings.

Communities are strengthened and given confidence by the fact that Mercy Corps maintains contact with them after project implementation. Communities clearly value the additional technical assistance and advice that staff continues to provide beyond the project implementation phase. This also clearly reinforces the message that mobilization is about more than infrastructure projects. However, the research team was not able to investigate communities that have not had contact with Mercy Corps at all after the program ended. In order to understand fully the mobilization process, the authors recommend a follow-up investigation two years after the end of E-GCMI. This would provide an opportunity to understand what happens after all external support (both resource-based and consultative) has ceased.

## IX. Methodology

Two representatives from Mercy Corps' headquarters, with no prior relationship to E-GCMI, spent three weeks in Georgia working with the in-country E-GCMI team to develop an understanding of community mobilization programs and their potential legacy. The team visited 24 communities in the five regions of Georgia where Mercy Corps works. Communities were selected to encompass a wide range of different project sites as well as varying degrees of success in achieving their objectives.

Interviews and focus group discussions were based around a set of semi-structured questions to enable open discussion while touching on key issues pertinent to the outcomes of the study. Kate Hamilton's report, *Empowerment Indicators of GCMI-E*, was used to guide the design of the questions, however the team did not want to be constrained by pre-determined indicators.

In addition, the team held in-depth discussions with staff from each of the sub-offices, as well as with Tbilisi staff. These were usually held in the form of workshops. Meetings were held with representatives from CARE, USAID, Partnership for Social Initiatives (PSI), Horizonti and MSI. These are all organizations that are either currently implementing mobilization programs or analyzing the impact of these programs.

## X. Conclusion

The study's findings indicate that inherent characteristics do exist within communities that facilitate and reinforce sustained mobilization. As Mercy Corps' mobilization programs evolve, mobilizers and managers should become more cognizant of the presence or absence of these characteristics during site selection. Where these inherent factors are weak, either due to the dynamics within the community or external factors such as geographic location or ethnic identity, the implementation team should pay additional attention to capacity-building and creating linkages. If none of the characteristics are present, the team should question whether mobilization is the most appropriate program intervention, or if other programs are more appropriate.

Attention should also be paid to the program approaches and methodologies identified in this study as being of particular value to the communities' success. Although they may not all be pertinent in all contexts, Mercy Corps should ensure that these components are reinforced and emphasized in other mobilization programs where appropriate.

The distinct levels of mobilization outlined in this study will be of particular use to implementation teams, as they provide practitioners with a common language for understanding and monitoring levels of empowerment. The framework will need to be adapted to the context of different programs and countries, but can serve as a basis for the articulation of behavior change at the end of the program.

As E-GCMI ends, it would be valuable to commit to revisiting these communities one to two years after regular contact with Mercy Corps has ended, and verify these assumptions and hypotheses. By measuring indicators such as the number of communities that have continued to address issues of common concern using participatory methodologies, or those who have mobilized to maintain infrastructure projects needing repair, Mercy Corps will be able to probe the factors that support or undermine mobilization.

## **XI. Acronyms and Definitions**

<b>CBO</b>	Community-based Organization
<b>CIG</b>	Community Initiative Group
<b>E-GCMI</b>	East Georgia Community Mobilization Initiative
<b>MSI</b>	Management Systems International
<b>NIS</b>	Newly Independent States
<b>PSI</b>	Partnership for Social Initiatives
<b>RFA</b>	Request for Applications
<b>Sakrebulo</b>	Sub-district administrative level, usually a collection of small villages, one large village or a neighborhood within an urban area.
<b>SPWG</b>	Social Policy Working Group
<b>USAID</b>	United States Agency for International Development

## **XII. Bibliography**

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## **XIII. Appendix 1**

### **The Community Mobilization Process<sup>24</sup>**

Target communities are identified initially at the level of local administration, meaning the Sakrebulo in rural areas (an administrative unit comprising between two and five villages), districts within Tbilisi, and whole towns elsewhere. They are selected on the basis of: low level of income, poor socio-economic infrastructure and willingness to participate. Priority is given to mixed ethnicity areas and areas where there has been little NGO involvement. The team then visits the Sakrebulo to verify the information, assess level of interest and select key informants who will identify people to participate in the Action Planning Meeting (APM).

Three key informants nominate respected individuals from different socio-economic, age, sex and ethnic minority groups within their communities. People are randomly selected from the three lists by Mercy Corps staff. The APM is held at Sakrebulo level and uses a participatory methodology to generate lists of community problems and resources, develop project ideas and prioritize them. In rural areas projects are identified for individual villages and/or for whole Sakrebulos, and in some cases projects take place simultaneously at both levels. In urban areas projects may be identified for specific institutions (commonly schools and kindergartens) or sub-districts or communities (e.g. residents of specific streets or buildings). Thus, a more specific participant community is implicitly identified for each project proposed.

Once selected, the highest priority project is then taken forward to an open meeting with the specific participant community, at which the priority is verified, and a Community Initiative Group (CIG) elected. The CIG then becomes responsible for developing a project proposal, including a detailed budget, with training and support from Mercy Corps staff. The CIG divides its responsibilities between mobilization, information, finance, technical and usually elects a chair.

Initial projects must include a contribution from the community of at least 25 percent of the overall budget, and the maximum amount available from Mercy Corps is \$6,000. (In subsequent rounds the required contribution rises to 50 percent, then 75 percent, and any community can carry out a maximum of three projects with a maximum contribution of \$18,000 total from Mercy Corps. Mercy Corps' maximum contribution remains fixed). The community contribution can take the form of money, materials, labor and services, and usually involves a combination of these. Contributions are also encouraged from the government and business sector. CIG responsibilities include mobilizing this contribution during the project's implementation, managing the implementation of the projects, providing monthly financial and end-of-project narrative reports, and ensuring maintenance plans are implemented.

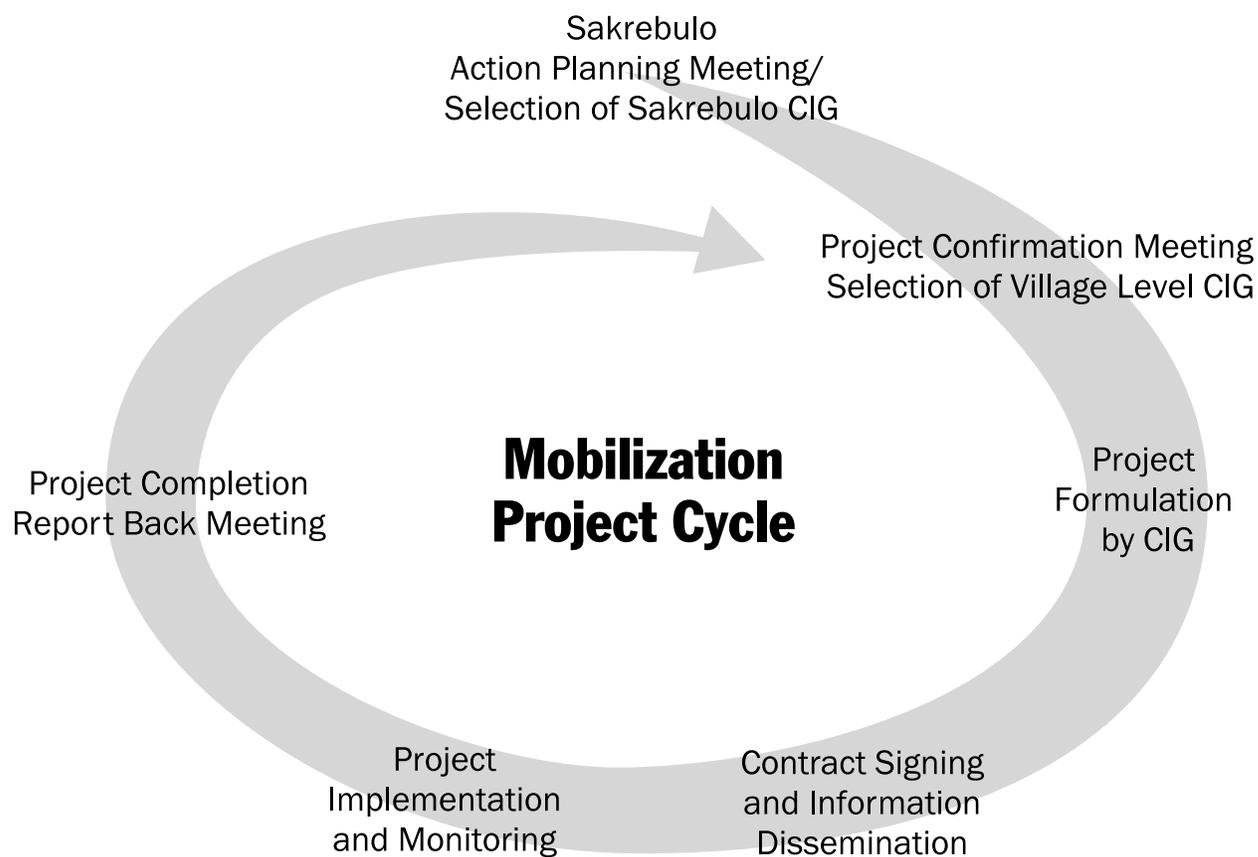
During first round projects, CIG members receive relatively intensive support and training from Mercy Corps, to enable them to develop good proposals and make realistic plans. In subsequent rounds CIGs are able to perform these tasks more independently, though CIG members continue training in wider issues and skills such as leadership, conflict resolution and advocacy. Project selection for second and third rounds often emerges naturally from the priorities established at the initial APM but at a minimum another verification meeting is held to ensure that the proposed project is still supported by the community as a priority.

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<sup>24</sup> Adapted from *E-GCMI Community Mobilization Manual*, 2003.

Throughout the process, CIGs are encouraged to ensure that vulnerable groups are involved in and will benefit from the project and to organize support for particularly vulnerable individuals. Disabled access is considered in the rehabilitation of buildings where appropriate. CIGs also receive information and have an opportunity to input into various social policy reforms and can participate in the regional level social policy working groups.

The process of the community mobilization project cycle is shown in the diagram below.



In E-GCMI, each community goes through up to three mobilization cycles. Each mobilization cycle builds on earlier success and lessons learned and have a distinct objective and emphasis. The intention is that each cycle should incrementally increase the capacity and confidence of the CIGs and the community as a whole.

## **XIV. Appendix 2**

### **Meetings and Consultations for the *Georgia Field Study***

#### **Pre-trip**

Sue Dwyer, Former Chief of Party for Mercy Corps in Georgia

Kate Hamilton, Independent Consultant

#### **Georgia**

##### **Tbilisi:**

Mercy Corps: Steve Power, Chief of Party for E-GCMI  
Vanessa Tilstone, Program Director, E-GCMI  
Community Mobilizer Coordinators, representatives from Mercy Corps’  
CIP program, Grants Manager

USAID: Kent Larson, Chief Office of Humanitarian Response, Social Transition  
Khalid Khan, Social Development Specialist

CARE: Charlie Danzoll, Chief of Party for W-GCMI

PSI: David Gzirishvili, Partnership for Social Initiatives

##### **Isani-Sangori:**

Mercy Corps mobilizers from the sub-office

Community and CIG members in: School 180  
Elia Block  
School 106

##### **Mskehta:**

Community and CIG members in: Zemo Boli  
Ikoti

##### **Shida Kartli:**

Mercy Corps mobilizers from the sub-office

Representatives from the Georgian Young Lawyers Association

Community and CIG members in: Kindergarten #3  
Kindergarten #7  
Metechi  
Nadarbazevi  
Chadreb-i-Kheoba

##### **Samtskhe-Javakheti:**

Mercy Corps mobilizers from the sub-office

Community and CIG members in: Akhaltsike School #1  
Akhaltsike Water User’s Association  
Mirashkhani  
Chela-Samri

**Kakheti:**

Mercy Corps mobilizers from the sub-office

Representatives from the Social Policy Working Group (SPWG)

Community and CIG members in:

- IDP Tourist Base
- IDP Hotel Kakheti
- Mtisubani
- Tivi
- Zemo Alvani
- Kvemo Alvani
- Khorbalo

**Kvemo Kartli:**

Mercy Corps mobilizers from the sub-office

Community and CIG members in:

- Ratevani
- Zvareti

*Mercy Corps is an international relief and development agency that exists to alleviate suffering, poverty and oppression by helping people build secure, productive and just communities. Since 1979, Mercy Corps has been assisting people afflicted by conflict or disaster by implementing programs that increase food security, economic opportunity and the development of civil society.*



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