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Preconditions for Sustainable Development of Rural Areas

What is the village sustainable development depended on?

About two-thirds of Georgia's population lives in rural areas. It should be mentioned that the majority of the population is employed on the land plots that are in their ownership or usage. Such employment is considered to be more self-employment than employment. Therefore it is easy to imagine how important it is for Georgia to achieve sustainable village development and to have viable villages as a basis for the country's administrative arrangement.

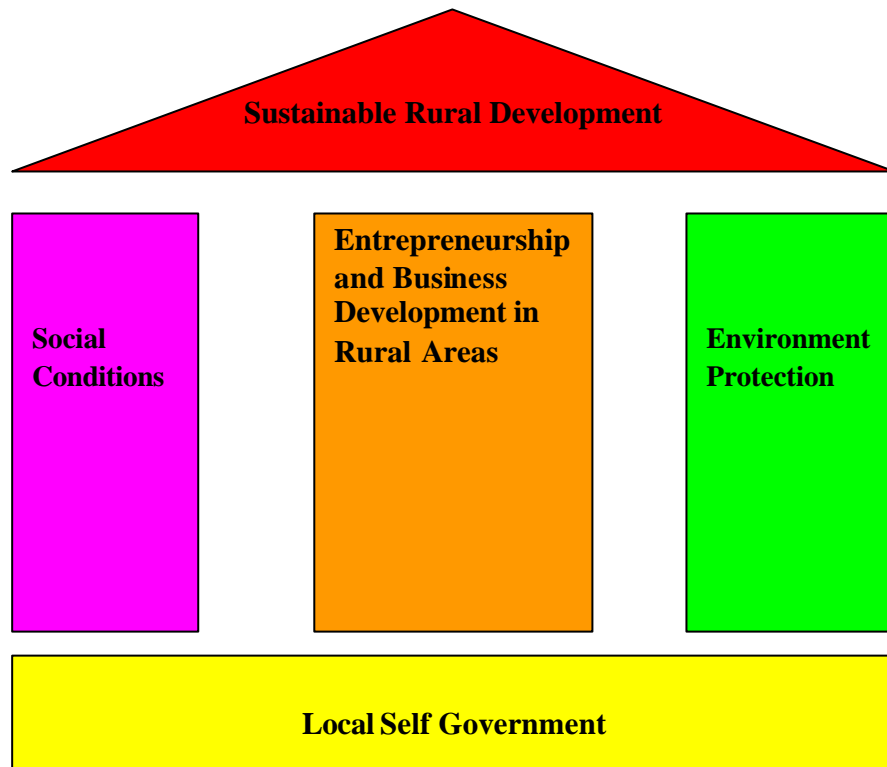
Georgian villages were always attached great importance with a view of the political and economic well-being of the country. It is true that currently Georgian villages are in an extremely difficult situation (the situation worsened during 70-year period of the soviet rule), but the rural areas have not lost their functions and importance and sooner or later villages will restore their political and economic importance that were always attributed to them.

There is much discussion in Georgia about the ways of strengthening of rural areas and their importance. It is really very important to overcome difficulties in villages, but at the moment there is no systemic approach and no policy exists to improve this situation. Certain actions are being carried out and efforts made to overcome the problems that exist in the villages, but these actions are of non-permanent character and quite often they are not oriented towards long-term, sustainable results and stable development.

It is necessary to work out a uniform policy for sustainable development of rural areas in Georgia, such policy will unite all the issues that are important and of viable interest for rural areas and well-being of their inhabitants. All the actions of the Georgian government and specific public agencies, local governments and self-governments or external international organizations should be guided by this uniform policy. Only such overall systemic vision and approach will make it possible to achieve really sustainable rural development.

What is the necessary precondition for the sustainable rural development? What issues should be paid special attention and what should become the basis for the overall policy aimed at sustainable rural development?

When we speak about the village, welfare of rural population and about the tendencies of rural sustainable development, attention should be paid to the following key components: (1) social condition, (2) entrepreneurial activity and the development of business in rural areas, and (3) environment protection. Sustainable rural development is based on these three general and basic foundations, which can be graphically represented in the following form:



Social Issues

It is very important to have sound social conditions in the village. Health care, primary and secondary education should be available for the rural population, and some social benefits and social programs should also exist there. The families who reside in the villages should have normal conditions for living and activity. They should have land plots sufficient for maintenance of a family and family economies. Without proper resolution of these issues, it is impossible to live in the village and to guarantee its further development.

Support of Business Development in Rural Areas

The rural population should have a chance to be entitled not only to self-employment on their own land plots but to some entrepreneurial activity that should also be developed there. It will lead to the creation of work places and increase of their number. As a result of developing some kind of entrepreneurial activity in villages, the budget of self-government bodies will be supplemented by a certain amount of income through local taxes that will be paid by the people engaged and employed in the business. This income will afterwards be spent on rural area development and improvement of infrastructure-motorways, communication, supply of electric energy and other local needs. The interests

of private businesses are one of the potential means for the solution of abovementioned problems.

Environment Protection

The issues of environmental protection are playing one of the most important roles in the sustainable development of rural areas. For creation of normal living conditions for rural area inhabitants it is important to protect existing flora and fauna, certain actions should be carried out for preservation of the forests, clean air, natural springs and rivers, good environment for non-poaching hunting and fishing activities, clean soil and other facilities for production of ecologically clean products. Without all these efforts it is impossible to imagine creation of normal living conditions for population.

Interrelation of three Core Issues

All three core issues should be given appropriate attention from the Central Government as well as local regional and self-government organs. They should treat all these issues with proper attention and address social issues, improvement of business environment and environmental protection as three directions having equal importance and supplementing each other and in no way contradicting and excluding each other.

If we have a look over the activity of our former government over the last ten years, and the activities that are currently being carried out, we shall see that formerly it was usual to focus attention on one of the issues and ignore all the others. Such approach gave no tangible results for rural areas. For example, when the government addressed social issues in order to improve them and certain actions were carried out, the issues of development of business environment and environment protection were totally ignored.

One of the good examples of such approach is an agricultural land reform. During this reform the population of rural areas were allocated the land plots, it was a very positive side of the reform, but during allocation of the land plots the issues of entrepreneurship and ecology were totally ignored. The land plots were allocated spontaneously and fragmented. Many families in the villages got the land plots that were too big in size for the needs of their personal economies but too small for farming activities.

Such reform hindered development of serious farming activities, the issues of environment protection were ignored and as a result of such negligence the land plots that were of great environmental importance were given in private ownership. It might become necessary in future for government to buy them back from the population. No attention was given to the lands of common use – pastures and cattle routes – that were of primary importance for the social needs and welfare of the local population.

No actions have been taken for reserving territories for future development of the rural areas that were necessary for creation of infrastructure around villages as corresponding to the interests of village population. Even today, the approach of village people towards entrepreneurs, business people and generally active and rich people is quite negative. The

principle of social equality and as a result of this ignoring all other issues is not correct and it has devastating effect.

There were cases when different representatives of the government artificially created good conditions for separate individuals for their activities in rural areas. Though it seems to be a positive factor but due to it that most of the social and environment issues were ignored during such activities it did not yield positive results. There were cases when the entrepreneurs did not employ local population, they monopolized the local activities and the population lost the chance to even grow their own vegetables and fruit on their small land plots.

Quite often there are many agricultural processing industries in the villages, big and small wine factories, but local population gets no profit from such enterprises, partly due to the irrelevant policy and dumping prices. The state should support development of such businesses from which the local population will get certain profit, their production will be sold, no harmful impact will be made on the environment, employment will increase, infrastructure will improve, and other progress can be made.

There were many cases when during carrying out environment protection measures the social interests of local population were forgotten. After the rehabilitation of Kharagauli forest-reserve, the local population could not any more use pastures and other natural resources existing on the forest territory which was traditionally used by them and without which it is impossible to imagine the existence of local population.

A number of villages adjacent to Kharagauli Park encountered with the problem with respect to pastures. The pasture is very important as a social phenomenon. Maintenance of at least one or two horned cattle is means for self-sustainability of rural families and cattle needs pasture; however it is being diminished gradually due to some wrong actions, from the central government as well as local governors and self-governors.

Finally, government bodies should pay attention to the development of all these three directions maintaining due proportion, protect all three of them, namely, social interests, interests of business people, environment protection responsibilities and take care of the sustainable development of rural areas. Visually, this proportion can be presented in the following manner:

