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## Election 2010 - Development of Social Media Space in Georgia

### Findings, Analysis and Suggestions

- ✓✓✓ *Project specificity related results*
- ✓ Countrywide picture of electoral developments furnished by the project
  - ❖ The present project was the sole one that furnished the nationwide picture of electoral process and made this information accessible and easy researchable, via thematic, toponim and regional search key, to every media compartment interested in<sup>1</sup>.
- ✓ Particular features of electoral process 2010 revealed by the project
  - ❖ The information delivered by the **citizen journalists (CJ)** points out that the local elections 2010 have been unprecedented ones regarding the positive assessment of the election results by both the Government and opposition parties and diverged attitude of the citizens towards these results; in particular, both the **Government as well as the opposition parties stated their satisfaction and/or positive attitude towards the results obtained**, but the **citizens have been critical** towards the election process and stated their criticism in their messages/information delivered to the CDI WEB portal.  
Thus, the CDI WEB proved to be the sole one that allows to prognosticate the social attitudes in the population<sup>2</sup>.
  - ❖ It has to be mentioned that the local elections 2010 have been also unprecedented ones regarding the internet shift in the objective coverage, for only the internet based media were able to immediately publish the incoming information<sup>3</sup>, because exactly this media is free of programme schedule clichés in contrast to broadcasting media and editing and printing caused delay in contrast to printed media. In all other media the schedule clichés have been strongly enabled except the cases when the outlet itself was technically denied of the possibility to establish the permanent reporting channel to the election site.

<sup>1</sup> CDI team monitored the partner and other web-sites, that's why this statement is possible. Other media outlets have been reporting on distinct events in distinct social and/or geographic compartments but the integral picture was offered at CDI website. i.e. the journal "Liberal" reported mainly on Tbilisi developments, "Netgazeti" reported on facts happened in Tbilisi and Batumi etc.

<sup>2</sup> CDI currently carries out the content analysis of the news received in terms of socio-psychologic research of civic attitudes of respondents; the results will be placed on CDI web-site and sent to IFES and USAID.

<sup>3</sup> On the election day any delay in publication of information might be critical for effectiveness of this information for media and society.



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There have been three web-sites that anticipatory announced their mobilization and preparedness to work throughout the election day :

- ❖ CDI web-portal
  - ❖ Journal “Liberal”
- and
- ❖ I-Newspaper “Netgazeti”

CDI worked during the whole election day synergistically with the websites of the newspapers “Liberal” and “Netgazeti”.

- In both newspaper outlets the news have been delivered by the journalists.
- The source for information of the CDI web site were the citizen journalists.

However, as we stated above<sup>1</sup> (p.1), CDI website furnished the text-materials as well as the video and photo resources from both capital city and the regions and contributed to establishing of a comprehensive countrywide picture allowing to find out the regular trends (please compare Diagram 1) – in contrast to other two outlets.

The CJ-delivered audiovisual materials have been a factor that contributed to growing interest and trust towards the information appearing<sup>4</sup>.

The essential source of information for other two web-sites as well as other media outlets related to printed, audiovisual and electronic media in both capital city and regions has been the CDI portal. The reverberation of citizen journalists delivered information in professional media has been followed by CDI and/or reported by the outlet/journalist themselves (34% media outreach index pp.3 &4 below).

Thus, **first time the elections have been reported in concert by the citizen journalists and the professional ones. CDI considers this to be a principal result of the project.**

- ❖ The citizen journalists’ delivered news pointed out that the opposition parties (first of all the “Alliance for Georgia”) have been strongly mobilized in the regions in contrast to the capital city; this might be a symptomatic feature while analyzing the follow-up developments to the elections, especially in long-run prospective<sup>2</sup>.

✓ Core challenge of the project and success obtained

**The core challenge of the project bears a double- feature:**

1. **promote the citizen journalism**
- and
2. **cope the professional media with the citizen journalism**

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<sup>4</sup> This trend has been followed by CDI staff in context of journalists’ reaction and further contacts of citizens observing the CDI web.



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- ❖ The project managed to motivate the citizens to become the citizen journalists, deliver the information and, in this way, establish the civic monitoring tool (Diagram 1,2 ); project awaked the interest of countrywide media in the rough news delivered by the CJs and catalyzed the CJ-based activities of the professional media outlets throughout the country (34% media outreach (please compare with second paragraph below on the next page).

**The CDI WEB-site became the space where the citizen journalists and the professional journalists meet each other** (please visit [www.cdi.org.ge](http://www.cdi.org.ge)).

**Both the journalists working in the regions as well as in the capital city used the information delivered by the CJ for the professional reporting.** While processing the rough information delivered by the citizens the professional journalists verified and/or examined the first hand information (p.3&3 below); the professionally processed news have been delivered to CDI by some media outlets, despite of CDI's request; that's why the media outreach has been followed by CDI itself too; there are the additional explanatory tools to be introduced in order to thoroughly monitor the media outreach the citizen journalism portal induces. However the outreach index is high enough for a short run pilot project and amounts to 34% (please compare with second paragraph below on the next page).

- ❖ The total amount of news delivered to CDI portal in the frame of this project exceeds 400; once launched, the citizen journalism portal continues to function and accumulate the CJ's delivered information in the post-election phase too (please visit [www.cdi.org.ge](http://www.cdi.org.ge)).
- ❖ The number of citizens directly touched by the project (870) ca. twice exceeds the number of news received (400); we are explaining this fact with the novelty of Citizen Journalism's experience and too short time for mental acceptance/adoption of this new technology<sup>5</sup>. That's why the secondary effect of the project that has been estimated to 15fold magnification haven't been as effective as planned.  
The lesson learned indicates towards necessity for longer work with the live audience and applying the audiovisual exercises as well as simplifying the hot line institutional provisions<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> The human behaviour based technologies are time consuming ones

<sup>6</sup> Many technical and content-related questions came later during the work of info-system; i.e. great many of respondents post factum admitted to find out on own initiative the CDI mobile phone with an absolute different number (877 278877) instead of magtifix number (890 88 99 00) bound to the info system and have been impeding each other and investigative journalists operating with CDI mobile during their mobility activities; the investigative journalists' advise to call to magtifix number wasn't always accepted and the confusion led to decline of enthusiasm. Also the separate calls have been received on the hot line phone numbers , also different from magtifix. All these aberrations have been awaked by the computer literate respondents who received the automatically generated delivery confirmation from CDI mail where the signature indicates the other phone numbers too. This experience makes us to change our institutional signature settings and simplifying them to only one – magtifix number.



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In general, the comparison of repercussion effects (Diagram 4 ) shows that on the project sites, where CDI regularly worked with the audience the civic activity builds a plateau (Diagram 4 ) in contrast to regions where only the resonance effect was done.

In addition, there are three serious impeding factors to be taken into account<sup>7</sup>:

1. the fear to be personally identified/disclosed while delivering the information as the citizen journalist ( this concern has been communicated to CDI several times);
2. persisting indifference of the society;
3. poor command of computer literacy and limited possibility to follow up the information delivered in the internet - in later task the dependence on other person with better computer skills lowers the confidentiality factor and awakes the factor 1 (fear) and/or the factor 2 (fear caused indifference).

However, the project's dynamics proved to be sustainable (please compare the diagrams below – pp. 6,7,9) and the main success factor has been the activity of citizen journalists. Apart from the direct data, the interest of media on voting and post-election phase towards the CDI web-portal and the citizens interactive are the additional sustainability indicators.

❖ **The media-outreach index 34 %** (followed by us through CDI citation in reporting, the real number might be higher) **proves the project to be successful.**

**91 news have been re-checked (24 out of this pool were examined by the investigative journalists group under the project).**

The subject to re-examination have been the news incoming in all electoral stages the project covers: pre-election period, the election day and post-election stage.

The re-examined and professionally reported news can be found at CDI web-portal below of the source news via link inserted; the links are introduced to printed, audiovisual as well as the electronic media.

**According to the importance of information some CJ's delivered news have been re-examined and reported by several media-outlets simultaneously.**

**The high level of involvement has been observed in**

- a. regional media (local TVs and radio broadcasters, local newspapers) ,
- b. internet TV "ITV",
- c. journal " Liberal"
- d. Maestro and Kavkasia TVs
- e. broadcasters of national coverage<sup>8, 9</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> The data have been obtained in post-election interactive monitoring

<sup>8</sup> Some times the national broadcasters requested the exclusivity right from CDI, but the project provides for the universal accessibility of information to all media compartments, that's why such requests have been denied by CDI.

<sup>9</sup> Especially actively collaborates the Imedi TV.



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**Such diversified spectrum shows that the CJ's delivered information was important to the media in general<sup>10</sup>.**

❖ **The information flow the CJ's delivered news awakened has been followed by the various bodies<sup>3</sup>, including the governmental ones.**

One of obvious examples for this could be the pre-election reporting on the malfeasance of the Khulo school director and his dismissal (please comp. with the p. 6<sup>14</sup>).

The same concerns the reporting on the teachers' mass scale retiring immediately after the election was over that has been followed by the immediate press-conference of Minister of Education Shashkin who denied the fact the Ministry of Education to have sanction teachers' retiring<sup>11</sup>.

**The CJ's delivered information became subject to 8 journalistic investigation studies.**

❖ **Citizen journalists' activities important features have been:**

- 1. geographical dispersion throughout the country;**
- 2. participation of citizens with diverse political taste and views.**

*Specific Justification to (1) : **Citizen journalists' activities geographical dispersion throughout the country***

The project was focused on capital city (Tbilisi) and four regions, but the cross-regional repercussion of the project allowed to receive the information from all parts of Georgia including the breakaway regions (Abkhazia, Gali district) and Georgian Diaspora abroad.

The cross-regional information flow has been ensured by the regional media outlets working in the focus regions but having the cross-regional impact<sup>12</sup>, national media outlets and people-to-people information transfer.

*Specific Justification to (2) : **participation of citizens with diverse political taste and views***

The claims and complaints have been lodged with by both the ruling as well as opposition parties' supporters; in such contingency CDI collaborated with the offices of all parties concerned, including the ruling party, and opposition parties.

✓✓✓ *Project's specific results at glance*

✓ ***The rough news incoming from the citizen journalists on the election day and the next days reproduced both the specific local peculiarities but also the features that have been observed***

<sup>10</sup> In addition, several observer institutions stated that they took the information from the CDI web-site.

<sup>11</sup> This fact reveals the school-bound electoral chain, for many teachers, as they are admitting now under retiring threat, have been involved into pre-election info campaign in favour of ruling party.

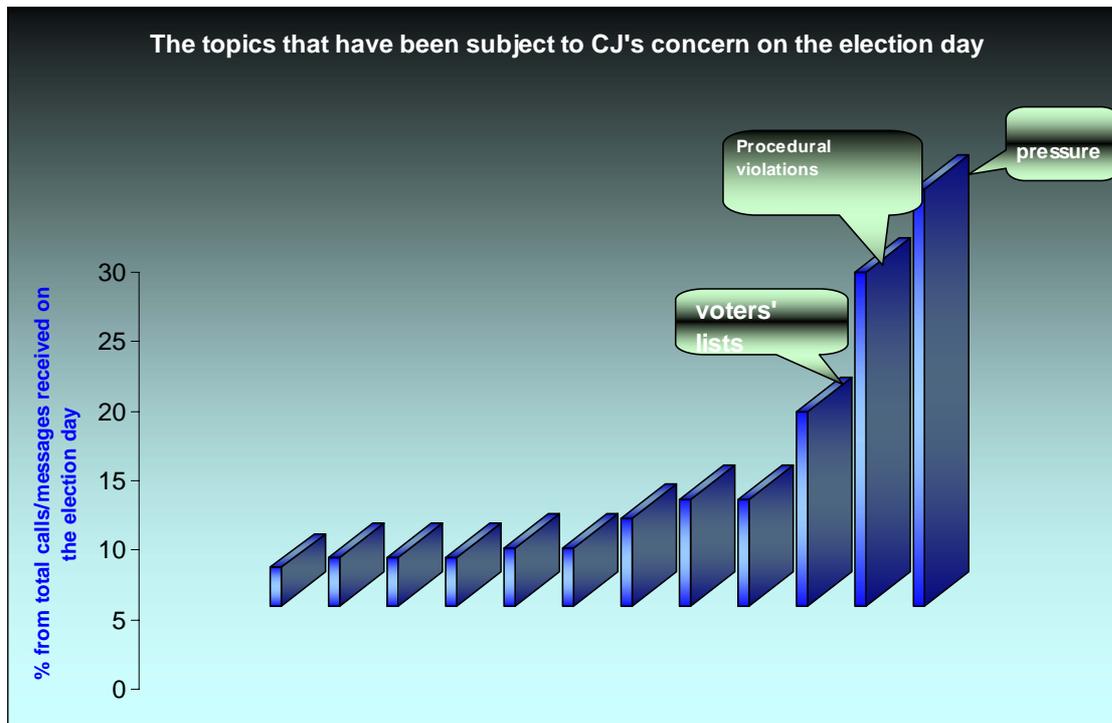
<sup>12</sup> Cross-regional broadcasters, newspapers with cross-regional circulation

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- ✓ *in other parts of the country. The current report refers to the dynamics of incoming information and the trends that have been identified as regular countrywide ones<sup>13</sup>.*
- ✓ *The three top problems stated by the citizen journalists throughout the country have been (please compare with the Diagram 1 (p. 6) :*

1. **Exertion of the psychological pressure for the part of the ruling party supporters**
2. **Violations of the electoral procedure**
3. **False voting due to the manipulations with the voters' lists**

**Diagram 1. Top problems stated by the Citizen Journalists**



The other countrywide problems the citizen journalists reported refer to:

4. **mass scale vote forgery while manipulating with the transportable boxes**
5. **personal menaces**
6. **impeding the observers and/or monitors**
7. **involvement of the school staff into the electoral process<sup>14</sup>**

<sup>13</sup> All information received is compartmented through CDI databank, so the specific local trends are also researchable.

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## 8. polling stations' staff

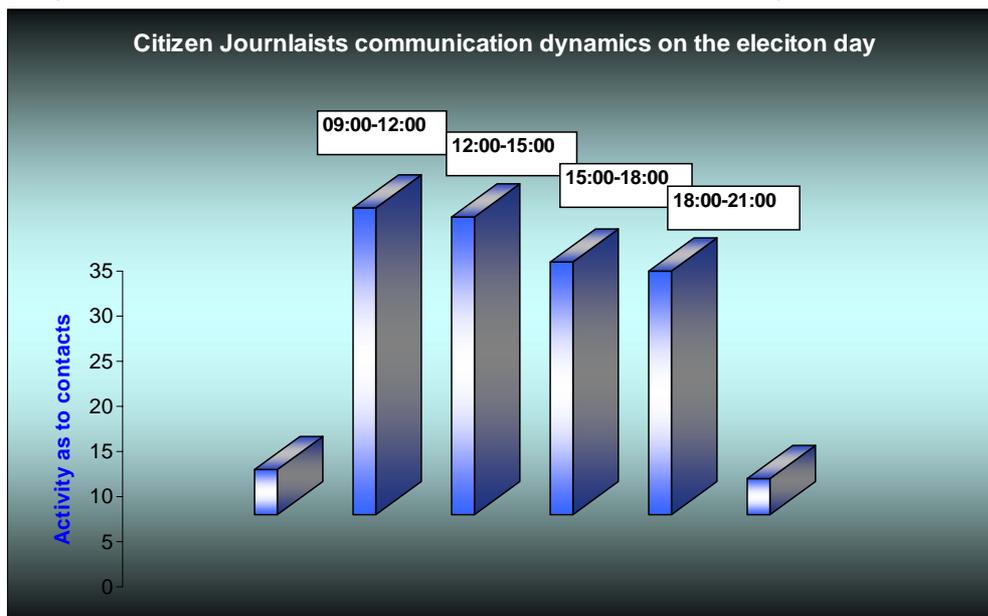
### Specific justification to 8 (polling stations' staff)

Citizen journalists throughout the country are reporting that in almost every place of citizen journalists' activity the members of local commission affiliated with the polling station, actively contributed to falsifying the voting in favour of the ruling party. The citizen journalists reported that the membership of the local commissions wasn't a multipartial one and indicated the discrete polling stations with such problems.

The first information to CDI website has been delivered by citizen journalist on April 30. The center of gravity of information flow comes on election and post-election days, for the project implemented is election-focused.

The dynamics of the CJ's activity on election day renders the general dynamics of voters activity (Diagram 2).

**Diagram 2. Informational flow to CDI website on election day**



### ✓ Appraisal of project's success and pre-requisites for it

The main pre-conditions for the project success have been:

1. Comprehensive information coverage established through involvement of media outlets working in the regions and capital city;

<sup>14</sup> The citizen journalist's risen alarm on the pre-election day became a reason to dismissal of the school director in one of the Khulo schools; however the juridical site of this discharging is a subject to thorough investigation; CDI follows this process.



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2. Multicompartmented informational flow ensured through involvement of printed, audiovisual and electronic media, including the social networks;
3. Work with the communities and NSA<sup>15</sup>s, including NGOs, Universities, local activists and initiative groups.

The informational coverage in both capital city and the regions was an important pre-requisite for project's success<sup>16</sup>, but the very tool was the "in vivo" workshopping with the initiative groups in the villages, the NGOs, libraries and Universities (please comp. with pp.12,16,17).

Very important is to take into account that in no meeting the audience was critical towards the idea of this project; The involvement of citizens into finding out and dissemination of the information was acknowledged as an important and actual idea.

However there have been the comments regarding how to make the web site to function more effectively and other technical issues.

FAQs also referred to extent and guarantees of confidentiality for citizen journalists (please compare with p.4).

The main indicator for project's success are:

- ❖ activity and sharing of worthwhile information<sup>17</sup> by the information by the citizen journalists
- ❖ the activity of media in terms of applying, re-examining and reporting the information taken from the CDI web site
- ❖ the demand for comments of CDI staff and interpretation of the information accumulated at CDI website
- ❖ integral countrywide picture established

In this regard, CDI appears among top three/four NGOs requested to assess the election process together with "Fair Elections", "Young Lawyers Association" and journal "Liberal"<sup>18</sup>.

The project is over but CDI continues to further develop the Citizen-Journalism based new media platform and support the further activities of CJs, for the incoming news flow isn't ceasing (please visit [www.cdi.org.ge](http://www.cdi.org.ge)).

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<sup>15</sup> NonStateActor

<sup>16</sup> CDI expresses its high esteem and deep gratitude for colleagues for intensive journalistic and media support

<sup>17</sup> There we have to bring forward the overestimation of phone hooliganism risk by application procedure, for with exception of a couple of call in the pre-election phase there has been delivered the true information that also has been approved by the re-checkings.

<sup>18</sup> The chairmanship and experts of these three/four organizations have been invited and/or addressed by most media outlets - Maestro TV, TV Kavkasia,

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To our success stories further refer the advocacy for protection of natural resources (please visit the Georgian directory at our web site and learn the Acquri story August 7-10, 2010 ) and advocacy against Child Poverty (please visit the Georgian directory at our web site and learn the Ruispiri story August 25, up to date). All these activities have been brought forward and promoted by the citizen journalists.

✓ Citizen Journalists activity on election day

The absolute data indicate that the highest CJ activity was observed in Tbilisi (Diagram 3, p. 9). But while relating data to population density we got a different picture and in particular the Guria CJs were leading (Diagram 4, p.9 ). Diagram 4 also demonstrates that the capital city data are an optimal indicator for civic activity profile, for they reflect a statistical average with standard deviation ca. 7%. These data show an exceptional activity in Guria (that has been project resonance area from two project sites- Samegrelo and Imereti), whereas the data from project sites where the project worked on regular basis compose the stable activity plateau (Diagram 4, col. 5-9), that is an additional argument for project’s stable impact.

Diagram 3 Absolute data of CJ activity on election day

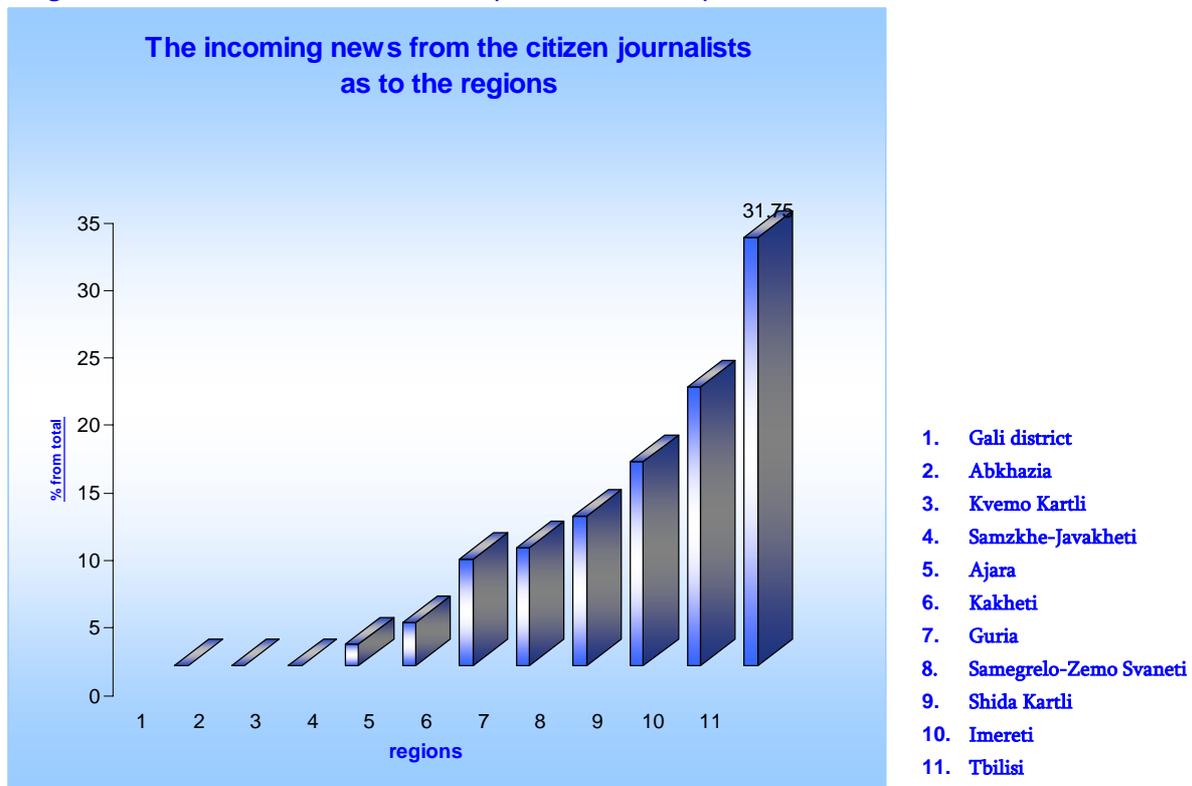


Diagram 4. Extrapolated data of CJ activity on election day

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✓✓✓ *Technical frame established in the project:*

1. The special cell phone based system has been established in order to enable the efficient delivery of citizen journalists transferred information to the processing WEB-portal ([www.cdi.org.ge](http://www.cdi.org.ge)). The contact phone number has been chosen 890 88 99 00.
2. The CDI WEB-portal has been adapted and the service crew to the project has been established.
3. The citizens are delivering the information they would like to share with journalists via sms messages and phone calls<sup>19</sup>; the incoming information is simultaneously recorded and transferred to the WEB-portal ([www.cdi.org.ge](http://www.cdi.org.ge)). The main page at CDI web-portal opens with the "News from Georgia" page with inscript "information delivered by the citizens" - bearing two functions:
  - a. Enabling the citizens to easy identify the information delivered by themselves and community compatriots;
  - b. Warning journalists that they deal with rough information requiring the professional processing.  
(please visit the [www.cdi.org.ge](http://www.cdi.org.ge) –WEB in order to observe the citizen-delivered information incoming to).

<sup>19</sup> The CJs are still delivering the information, though the information profile in the late post-election phase drastically changes towards the social one



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4. **CDI-web-portal ([www.cdi.org.ge](http://www.cdi.org.ge)) -bound large capacity e-mail address : [info@cdi.org.ge](mailto:info@cdi.org.ge) has been promoted in terms of delivery the information by citizens; the e-mail –delivered information is automatically transferred to the “News from Georgia” page.**
5. **The processing WEB site ([www.cdi.org.ge](http://www.cdi.org.ge)) accumulates the citizens-delivered incoming information;**
6. **34% Media-outreach of the citizens-delivered information is done.  
The citizen-delivered information became subject to 101 professional journalism processing;  
8 journalistic investigation has been carried out**

## Background

The project sized the pre-election period preceding the local elections 2010, the election day and the post-election development.

The project has been implemented as a short-run programme and that's why the active involvement and participation of all stakeholders was a critical factor for its success. In particular the involvement of citizens in finding out and delivery of information and dissemination of this rough information in professional media have been the key features and success pre-requisites.

The main constituents resulting in double- feature project challenge (p. 1) have been:

1. deliver to as many as possible citizens the information on the aim and purpose of the project;
2. gain trust of the citizens towards the project;
3. overcome the fear syndrome reigning in the society;
4. motivate the citizens to take part in the project;
5. motivate the media outlets to check/ examine the information delivered by the citizens;
6. carry out the short-run journalistic investigations by the field journalists, whenever required.

The activities carried out serve to project purpose – allow the citizens to become the prime source of information to the professional media, disseminate the information they witnessed or took part in; each citizen can use the affordable simple technologies as sms, cell phone , e-mail or regular mails are.



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The incoming information appears and is accumulated on CDI WEB-portal ([www.cdi.org.ge](http://www.cdi.org.ge)) where Georgian media and each citizen can access it. In this way, the citizens are the source and deliverer of rough information and the professional media returns it to them after having checked and proceeded it.

Project runned in four regions and capital city. The project covered the four regions of Georgia Shida Kartli, Kakheti, Imereti and Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti - and has been carried out in order to make the citizens aware of the citizen journalism and possibility to safely disclose the information they possess in pre-election period, on election day and in post-electoral stage and make them act in capacity of Citizen Journalists (CJs) and share the information they possess with countrywide media.

Synergistically project crew worked with regional media and especially with the media managers in order to secure the support to citizens journalism idea in the area of their coverage and made them aware of the benefits the citizen journalism offers to media.

It has to be mentioned that the objective coverage of election 2010 moved in internet-space (please comp. with p. 1). During the whole day the website of the newspaper "Liberal" and "Netgazeti" were working ( in both outlets the news have been delivered by the journalists). The third source for information we qualify to be objective was the CDI web site, where the news have been delivered by the citizen journalists. CDI website furnished the text-materials as well as the video and photo resources from both capital city and the regions – the audiovisual materials have been a factor that contributed to growing trust towards the information appearing (please comp. with p. 2 ).

**CDI staff maintained the regular coordination with the regional media outlets; this was an effective tool for rapid examination and re-checking of incoming information.**

**The special cell phone based system has been established in order to enable the efficient delivery of citizen journalists transferred information to the processing WEB-portal ([www.cdi.org.ge](http://www.cdi.org.ge)).**

The rules and schedule have been established in order to secure the permanent receiving of incoming alerts and information.

**The contact phone number has been chosen 890 88 99 00** in compliance with following criteria:

- a. Digits consecutive and regular repetitiveness- easy memorial reproduction
- b. Magtifix system – dominantly used in the regions due to cost efficient and easy service :
  - sms-messaging from and to magtifix bears practically no expenses,
  - Phone call from and to magtifix costs 0, 05 GEL;
  - Phone call from magtifix to Magti GSM served phones costs 0.05 GEL,
  - Connection to landline phones is much cheaper than from other providers;



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**The CDI WEB-portal has been adapted and the service crew to the project has been established in terms of :**

- a) getting and e-proceeding of the information on violations during the elections and any information related to elections that citizens would like to communicate to the public and report in e-mail, sms, phone call or regular mail format;
- b) make the incoming information appear on CDI WEB-portal under core directory “NEWS FROM GEORGIA”;
- c) enable the search system running through search criteria related to :
  1. Region
  2. Toponim (the list has been accomplished in compliance with the incoming messages/calls)
  3. Thematic topic

The information campaign on Citizen Journalism has been carried out in four regions of Georgia – Kakheti and Shida Kartli (Eastern Georgia) and Imereti and Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti (Western Georgia); the knowledge on WEB-directory (so, the CDI WEB-portal), where the rough information from citizen journalists appears and serves to country-wide broadcasting , has been disseminated and activated.

The basic information on how and where to deliver the information that could be valuable for the professional journalists and what should be the information to be transferred profile has been disseminated through the workshops audience s and information cards disclosing the e-mail address, magtifix phone number, and the technical tools (sms, phone call, e-mail).

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The expertise has been done by Dr. I. Antadze

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