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# Assessing the Value of Development Assistance According to the Recipients:

A Case Study of Georgian Organisations' Perspectives on  
Estonian Development Assistance

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# Abstract

Factors contributing to valuable development assistance are often perceived as a "black box," due to heterogeneity of development aid motives. This research brings out that too often, the value of aid is assessed from the perspectives of the donors rather than from its recipients. Therefore, this thesis takes a focus to study the recipient's perspectives for valuable development assistance.

First, the study draws a theoretical framework based on the OECD-DAC criteria of relevance, effectiveness and sustainability and combines it with previous studies on valuable aid factors identified by the recipients of development assistance.

To further understand and learn from the recipients' perspectives and voice their suggestions, a case study of Estonian aid towards its development cooperation priority country Georgia has been chosen. A three-week field study was undertaken and the perceptions of Georgian organisations that have received development assistance from Estonian partners were gathered.

Through interviews with 17 individuals covering the managing staff of eight local organisations and 12 projects, this study concludes that Estonian development assistance is most appreciated due to its knowledge and consideration of the local context. However, interviews highlighted the need for further ownership and meaningful participation of the local organisations, providing long-term and strategic support on which the recipients can count, and increasing the organisational capacities for the recipients to sustain the project results further.

**Key words:** *Development assistance value; Recipients' perspectives; Field-study; Donor evaluation; Estonia-Georgia development cooperation*

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# List of Abbreviations

AVNG	Anti-Violence Network Georgia
BA	Beneficiary Assessment Approach
CSB	Civil Service Bureau Georgia
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DCU	Donor Coordination Unit
DEA	Data Exchange Agency Georgia
DI	Levan Mikeladze Diplomatic Training and Research Institute
EPRC	Economic Policy Research Centre
GFSIS	Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
GNI	Gross National Income
IDFI	Institution for Development of Freedom of Information
LMIC	Low and Lower Middle-Income countries
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
ODI	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PM	Prime-Minister
ToT	Training of Trainers

# 1 Introduction

My interest in the development cooperation field emerged during a volunteering experience in Armenia, an Eastern Neighbourhood country bordering Georgia. I started working as a volunteer in a local youth centre and remember thinking that I would change the youth's world by showing them all the things that I know better. Fast forward to the end of my volunteering in seven months and I recall myself wondering about the actual purpose of my trip. Did I improve the lives of the youth or was I just another volunteer coming to their community with big ideas, which end immediately when my project is over? Probably my actions had some impact, but it was clear that the intervention was not sustainable, and it could have been more beneficial for the youth and the local organisation. This realisation made me wonder about the effectiveness of development cooperation projects in general and the factors improving it. Seeking answers to this question has been the key motivation throughout my master's degree in Development Studies and the purpose of writing this master's thesis.

Therefore, the first focus of this research is to identify the theoretical factors contributing to valuable development assistance. It is established that the success of development efforts cannot be given a universal assessment, as development is defined in a multiplicity of ways dependent on the "developers" (Cowen and Shenton, 1996). Research also shows that the value of development assistance is often assessed from the perspectives of the donors rather than from its recipients (Ridell, 2008, Anderson, Brown and Jean, 2012; Bhattacharya and Khan, 2020). To avoid assessing the value of development assistance according to the intentions of those giving the aid, the donors, and rather understand the perspective of those using it, the recipients, this thesis will take a focus on the recipient's perspectives for valuable development assistance.

The second aim of this study is to learn from the perspectives of the receiving end of development assistance, investigate how valuable do they perceive the development assistance received and give voice to their suggestions. For this, a case study of Estonia's development assistance towards its development cooperation priority country Georgia has been chosen and a three-week field study to Georgia was undertaken. The aim of the field study was to understand the perceptions of Georgian organisations that have received development assistance from Estonian partners in the thematic area of good governance. Through interviews with 17 individuals covering the managing staff of eight local organisations and 12 projects, this study aims to assess the value of Estonian development assistance, bring out its perceived strengths and weakness from the recipients' perspectives and provide suggestions for future aid provisions.

## 1.1 Research Questions

My research questions are as follows:

- **Research question 1:** What factors contribute to valuable development assistance according to aid recipients?
- **Research question 2:** How do Georgian organisations, receiving funding from Estonia, assess the relevance, effectiveness and sustainability of the development assistance?



## 1.2 Disposition

This research is structured into seven parts: After the introduction, part 2 will provide a literature review of previous studies on development aid effectiveness and previous assessments on Estonian development assistance. Part 3 presents the theoretical indicators for effective development assistance provision. In this part, the theoretical framework for analysing the level of relevance, effectiveness and sustainability from the perspectives of the recipients will be outlined. In part 4, I will outline the methodology used to answer the research questions as well as the limitations and ethical considerations regarding the study. Part 5 will elaborate on the Estonian development assistance context and Georgian development field and priorities. Part 6 presents the analysis by combining the interview data gathered from the field study with the theoretical framework established in part 3. Based on the analysis, strengths, weaknesses and suggestions for future aid provisions are provided. Finally, part 7 concludes the research and outlines the directions for necessary future research.

## 2 Literature review

### 2.1 Previous studies on aid effectiveness

Since the 21st century, aid effectiveness has become a widely researched topic. For example, Riddell (2008) has conducted extensive research on the impact of aid, which investigates the factors for aid effectiveness and ineffectiveness. More specifically, aid effectiveness regarding donor countries' performance is also extensively researched. Usually, these studies are commissioned by external evaluators or conducted by the government committee mandated to evaluate the results and effectiveness of implemented assistance. For example, the Evaluation Department at Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad) requested an "Evaluation of Norway's Engagement in Somalia 2012–2018," conducted by external consultants from Tana Copenhagen (Tana Copenhagen, 2020). Studies like these are undertaken to evaluate and draw lessons from donor countries' involvement in the developing countries.

Nevertheless, these studies often base the assessment of aid effectiveness on donors' priorities instead of the recipient country's priorities. For example, the research by Tana Copenhagen (2020, pp.11) is based on "what did work and what did not work, in terms of achieving Norway's strategic goals in Somalia." This observation was also noticed in other country evaluations reviewed (. For example, a study by Carlsson and Wohlgemuth (2000) argues that assessments are often said to be "donor-centric" and too frequently used to advance the donor's view on how things should be done.

Finding a more recipient centred country-evaluation proved to be quite challenging. Nevertheless, a program evaluation study conducted by the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Ole et al., 2016) was applicable. This study evaluated programme-based

support through Finnish Civil Society Organisations from the perspectives of various stakeholders, such as Finnish MFA, Finnish CSOs programme staff and most importantly, from the local recipient CSOs and beneficiaries. The study also utilised all Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)- Development Assistance Committee (DAC) evaluation criteria for systematically assessing recipient organisations and beneficiary perspectives. Although the study was more comprehensive and large-scale, it was still used as an inspiration for this master thesis. Therefore, especially the theoretical framework and method of the Finnish MFA conducted study were found useful and inspired how this study investigated local organisation's perspective on development assistance effectiveness.

To focus the study on the recipient perspectives, the author also reviewed studies explaining the importance and indicators for capturing valuable development assistance according to the recipient views (Minasyan, 2015; Mawdsley, 2018; Lundin, 2019; Bhattacharya and Khan, 2020). For example, a study titled "Rethinking Development Effectiveness: Perspectives from the Global South" by Debapriya Bhattacharya and Sarah Sabin Khan provided insightful information by elaborating on context-specific, and locally-driven evaluation approaches (Bhattacharya and Khan, 2020). In addition, the study emphasised the importance of local ownership, aid coherence and predictability for factors increasing aid effectiveness. These indicators were also highlighted in a comprehensive study conducted by Anderson, Brown and Jean, "Time to Listen: Hearing People on the Receiving End of International Aid," which was also an insightful resource for this research. The study collected indicators for effective development assistance provision from the perspectives of 6000 people on the receiving end of the development aid (Anderson, Brown and Jean, 2012). The identified indicators are highly relevant for this research and contribute to the theoretical framework of this study, which is further elaborated in the theory part of this study.

## 2.2 Previous studies on Estonian Development Cooperation

Multiple studies have been evaluating Estonian Development Assistance Effectiveness. For example, Nõu (2012) researched the learning systems of Estonian development cooperation, where the success of Estonian technical assistance provision was analysed. The perspectives were gathered through the interviews with Estonian development aid implementing organisations, the Estonian government and individual Estonian experts.

Moreover, Keit Speigel (2013) gathered perceptions of Estonian development cooperation effectiveness in Georgia from various perspectives. The study collected data through interviews with local organisations in Georgia, project directors in Estonia, and Estonian and Georgian development cooperation specialists. The findings were analysed through all OECD-DAC evaluation criteria points (sustainability, relevance, impact, effectiveness and sustainability).

In addition, a study by Toomingas (2012) evaluated Estonian Development Cooperation Effectiveness, according to the aid effectiveness diamond. The study investigated the perspectives of an Estonian NGO and Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs staff, which incorporated indicators of donor's transparency, effectiveness, relief of recipient country burden, and support to institutional development (Toomingas, 2012, pp. 74–75). Although these three studies provided minimal insight into the perspectives of local organisations, these were still valuable for understanding the background and context of Estonian development cooperation. More importantly, these studies enabled to understand Estonian development actors' own perceptions regarding the relevance, effectiveness and sustainability of the development assistance they have been providing.

For example, regarding the relevance of Estonian development assistance, the Estonian experts and project managers evaluated the assistance as being highly relevant

(Spiegel, 2012, pp.46). The relevance was justified by Estonians' understanding of Georgian mentality, which is a mixture of former Soviet Union times. *"Estonian's advantage is that we have common ground from this time period and therefore we understand Georgians"* (ibid, pp. 46). These findings were also confirmed by the statements from Estonian development cooperation experts gathered in Nõu's (2012) study. For example: *"I find that I understand the local conditions better than colleagues from Sweden who have grown up in a welfare state. It is easier for me to communicate the knowledge to eastern countries."* Another interviewee from Nõu's (2012) study mentioned: *"We do have better cognition about the situation in which our recipient states are in, compared to older donor states. We know where they started from"* (Nõu, 2012, pp. 46). Moreover, Estonian development aid organisation's representatives brought out that Estonian assistance stands out in relevance due to its approach of supporting local initiative and local ownership. *"We have tried to avoid the usual model of development cooperation project – that our experts go to the other country to teach them. Our partners are very educated themselves and know the local system and problem-solving opportunities much better than we do. We have tried to hire recipient country consultants to do the actual work in the field, and our project manager will be there to make sure that all the tasks are fulfilled as agreed"* Nõu (2012, pp. 46).

Previous research (Spiegel, 2012) has shown that Estonian actors perceive development assistance provision in Georgia as effective. Also, Nõu's (2012) study found that Estonians' knowledge of Russian is considered an advantage in providing effective development assistance to the countries in the Eastern Neighbourhood region: *"Language issue is very important. When Danes or Swedes came here, they talked in English, and it was translated to Estonian. First of all, this was very expensive and second, we never had any personal contact with those consultants. Many topics were not discussed because everything had to be said via a translator. We are in a better situation because we know the local language (Russian)"* (Nõu, 2012, pp. 47). Moreover, the study found that Estonian experts also consider their recent reform experience as an advantage for providing effective development assistance. *"I think*

*that Italian companies use me as one of their experts in Georgia because I can still remember the times in Estonia that were similar to those these countries are going through now. I can talk about my own experiences in building up the system – Italians could only talk about how the systems are today”* (Nõu, 2012, pp. 47). Nevertheless, a study by Spiegel (2013) showed that Estonian development field actors could not measure the actual level of effectiveness as there is no monitoring system: *“We don’t know what is the effectiveness of our projects, as we have never studied it”* (Spiegel, 2013, pp. 46). This is considered a significant disadvantage of Estonian development assistance from the perspectives of Estonian experts.

Regarding sustainability, the previous studies brought out contrasting arguments. On the one hand, interviewees from Nõu's (2012) study mentioned that lack of sustainability in development aid projects is not an issue in Estonia: „Our projects are always follow-up to the last project. One project grows from the other – we detect new development needs with every project. We have tried to avoid one-time projects and develop the ongoing projects further.” (Nõu, 2012, pp. 45). Nevertheless, a study by Spiegel (2013) brought out that Estonian experts argued that the most challenging part of Estonian development assistance is its sustainability. The problem mainly was brought out regarding the short-term projects and fragmented aid provision, as according to the Estonian experts, effectiveness and sustainability need larger projects. (Spiegel, 2013, pp. 46).

Nõu (2012) concludes in her study that to give a proper judgment on the value and effectiveness of Estonian development assistance, then there is a need for an evaluation from the recipient's perspective (Nõu, 2012, p. 54). However, there have not been any studies assessing Estonian development assistance with a focus on the perspectives of its recipients. This is because of the absence of a monitoring system in the Estonian development cooperation structure, which has also restricted Estonia from conducting assessments and evaluations on the value of Estonian assistance in its recipient countries. Therefore, this study is unique as it conducts an evaluation which departs from an understanding that the development effectiveness platform should

reflect the views and needs of the aid recipients. It should ideally come from and be in favour of the neediest of the beneficiaries of development cooperation (Girvan, 2007).

In conclusion the literature review of this thesis found that only limited donor program evaluations focus on the perspectives of the recipient countries and there is a need for further understanding the perspectives of the development assistance recipients. Therefore, this study aims to contribute toward a stronger emphasis on recipient perspectives and investigate the impacts and effects of donor interventions based on locally defined measures of success, as these are believed to make development assistance provisions more valuable.

# 3 Theory

In the upcoming chapter, I present the theoretical underpinnings of this thesis. I begin by defining the term development assistance and after drawing on the theoretical perspectives surrounding the central concept of this study, namely valuable development assistance. I will then focus on the factors that define valuable development assistance from the recipients' perspectives, including a brief specification about valuable development assistance factors in the good governance sector. Then, I elaborate on the OECD-DAC evaluation framework and based on it, draw a theoretical framework for measuring the value of Estonian development assistance from Georgian recipient organisations' perspectives.

## 3.1 The discourse around valuable development assistance

This study interchangeably uses the terms international development assistance, development assistance and development aid, which is understood as “the transfer of resources from donor countries to developing countries, under concessional terms, to promote social and economic development” (Riddell, 2007).

According to Cowen and Shenton (1996, pp. 4), “Development comes to be defined in a multiplicity of ways because there are a multiplicity of ‘developers’ who are entrusted with the task of development.” Therefore, theoretically, development assistance is viewed from two perspectives. First, in relation to those receiving it, hence with reference to its end-use. Second, in relation to those giving it, with reference to the purpose for which it is given. (Riddell, 2008). In practice, the value of development



assistance is almost always defined by the second perspective. Hence, by the intentions of those giving the aid, the donors, rather than those using it, the recipients. Riddle (2008, pp.18) argues that “just as it has been the donors who have always decided how much to give, and the form in which the aid is to be given, it has also been the donors who have decided how valuable development aid should be defined.” Donor-driven definitions are exemplified by the fact that global discussions on valuable development assistance have for decades revolved around the indicators, such as the volume of aid donated and its alignment with donor country priorities (Bena, 2012).

Only in the 2000s did the donor-centric view of development aid become disputed. For example, on the one hand, academic studies concluded that “aid does not increase welfare nor enhanced growth in poor countries” (Erixon, 2005). On the other hand, in the same year, other academics argued that “Aid should be increased because of compelling evidence of its undoubted success” (Sachs, 2006). These debates shifted the focus of development assistance discourse towards the quality of development assistance. More specifically on how the donors and recipients could improve aid delivery and make it as valuable as possible (Bena, 2012), as it became increasingly argued that “the gap between what aid is achieving and what it could achieve is enormous” (Riddell, 2009).

Today, the central question asked by the broader public on valuable development assistance provided by the donors is -Does development assistance work as a whole? To answer this question, many large donors, such as Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Norway, Netherlands, the UK, the EU and large multilateral agencies like the World Bank and UN, have started to commission and publish country-level impact evaluations regularly. These country-level evaluations focus on donor interventions’ overall impact and effectiveness (Riddell, 2008, pp. 212).

## 3.2 Factors for valuable development aid provision

Nevertheless, these country-level aid impact studies have identified that the factors contributing to the effective development aid are often perceived as a “black box,” where concrete factors influencing the level of aid value cannot be drawn (Lehtinen, 2002). Furthermore, universal factors cannot be drawn due to the heterogeneity of aid motives, varied needs of different levels of development agencies and stakeholders, the limitation of tools for the analysis and the complex causality chain linking aid delivered to the changes in international or national statistics and overall outcomes (ibid.).

However, country-level aid impact studies have been conclusive that “It is insufficient to scale up aid efforts by raising and transferring more money to the recipients. Instead, aid is more effective when it is focused and targeted through sector-specific aid” (Killick and Foster, 2007; Mavrotas and Nunnenkamp, 2007; Sundberg and Bourguignon, 2007). Moreover, Riddle (2008) argues that the country-level impact studies have significantly contributed to “understanding of why and when development aid is more or less likely to work” (Riddell, 2008, pp. 215). He brings out that first, country-level impact evaluations have proved that donors’ ability to coordinate, harmonise and align their efforts is a detrimental factor in either contributing to or limiting the positive and broader effectiveness of development aid (ibid., pp. 215-216). The second important factor is the recipient’s country’s political stability and peace, which are crucial for providing and receiving effective development aid.

Above all, Riddle brings out that the degree to which recipients perceive themselves as owning and in control of the development agenda and the degree to which they are committed to pursuing a clear development strategy is the fundamental prerequisites cited across country evaluations for donor’s aid to bring results (ibid.).

This claim is also supported by development cooperation expert Tania Li Murray, whose research (2007) shows the factors contributing to the ineffective development aid provided by donors. She argues that the critical issue of aid ineffectiveness has been the controversial approach of the donors, who often occupy the position of trustees- “a position defined by the claim to know how others should live, to know what is best for them, to know what they need “(Li Murray, 2007, pp. 4-5). She exemplifies this through an anthropological study, which elaborates how since the 19th century Indonesia has seen a list of trustees, including colonial officials, missionaries, politicians, bureaucrats, international aid donors and specialists/experts from various fields. Her study shows that aid should not be delivered according to what is necessary and appropriate from the trustees' perspectives because “what trustees deem appropriate and necessary, usually does not collide with the aid receivers needs” (Li Murray, 2007, pp. 240, 249).

Finally, when defining valuable development assistance in the thematic area of good governance, studies have agreed on one indicator- the assistance must be context-specific. According to Mease (2004), this is the critical indicator for enhancing the value of development assistance in this sector. This is because development assistance, which is defined in technocratic terms, operationalized with little or no attention to context and aims to replicate the Western governance institutional techniques, has been proven ineffective (Mease, 2004, pp. 11). Each government is highly influenced by the country's historical context, previous regime, socio-cultural context, economic system and its international environment (ODI, 2006).

These findings from aid effectiveness research show that fulfilling aid receivers' needs are essential in making development assistance effective and bringing results for developing countries' economic development and welfare. Therefore, instead of viewing valuable development aid from the perspectives of the donors, it should be defined from the viewpoint of development assistance recipients. Due to this, it becomes important to elaborate on factors identified by the recipients regarding valuable development assistance provision.

### 3.3 Valuable development assistance from the recipient perspectives

In 2012, a Cambridge based NGO called Collaborative Development Action issued a book, “Time to Listen- Hearing People on the Receiving End of International Aid.” The book is written on the “Listening Project,” where through global research, over 6000 systematic interviews were held with people who live in a society that has been at receiving end of international assistance efforts (Anderson, Brown and Jean, 2012).

The study brought out repetitive development assistance related observations from the aid recipients’ perspectives. For example, recipients almost always mentioned that international aid is a good thing that is appreciated. However, with the same frequency, it was mentioned that development assistance as it is now provided is not achieving its intent (ibid., pp. 2). According to the study, this problem is persistent because today’s development assistance system is supply-driven and provides goods and services through a top-down approach. This runs counter to the essential principles of effective aid, such as participation, ownership, accountability, and sustainability (ibid., pp. 2).

More specifically, the critical issues from development assistance recipient perspectives regarding received development assistance are summarised below:

- **People in aid recipient societies want more ownership and greater say in their own development.** Participatory planning is just a phrase. Money and time are limited from the donor side and an agenda has already been set long before agencies go into communities.
- **People say that donors still provide assistance based more on national agendas and priorities than on local ones.** Instead, donors should fund a ‘basket’ [of options] and let them propose locally from their priorities so that communities can solve their problems on their own.
- **People are more concerned about “how” assistance is provided than how much is given.** Almost everywhere, people talk about the significant

amounts of waste and mismanagement of resources in the aid system and their governments. People want donors to reduce the number of “intermediaries” between themselves and aid recipients and monitor them more frequently.

- **People say donors should trust local people more but also monitor and verify what has been reported.** Regular visits help donors better understand the local circumstances and their local partners and be more accountable for how their assistance is used
- **Good process is intrinsic to good results.** People suggest that donors need to invest the necessary time to listen and learn about the local context and capacities to show respect for peoples’ ideas and opinions. “We need strategic, long-term partnerships with donors. The impact doesn’t come overnight. We need to know that we can rely on their support, not only tomorrow. If they want to make a change that lasts, they need to start taking longer breaths.” (Anderson, Brown and Jean, 2012)

These empirical findings bring out the base for theoretical indicators, which are necessary for the recipients to perceive donors’ assistance as valuable. Therefore, it can be argued that from the perspectives of the aid recipients, valuable development aid is provided when the following indicators are ensured:

- The development projects are designed and led by the assistance recipients and tailored according to their needs.
- The direction of assistance is decided based on the recipients’ priorities instead of donors’ national priorities.
- There is trust between donors and recipients, and development assistance is delivered from the donors as directly as possible to the recipient. The projects and its results are monitored.
- The donors know the local context by having close contact with the aid recipients.

- The donations are strategic and long-term, ensuring the sustainability of the results.

In summary, recipients perceive the development assistance as valuable when the resources and experiences of outsiders are integrated with the assets and capacities of the insiders. This collaboration produces contextually appropriate strategies for supporting positive and lasting change (Anderson, Brown and Jean, 2012).

### 3.4 OECD-DAC evaluation criteria for measuring the recipient-based value of development assistance

The value of development aid can be measured according to the level of donors' actions, based on the recipient-perspective criteria identified in the previous section. However, to make the measurement more systematic, this study aims to combine the criteria above with the OECD-DAC evaluation criteria. This is because OECD-DAC evaluation criteria can be universally applied and is also the most known and utilised criteria for evaluating the value of development assistance.

In 1991, OECD-DAC first introduced the evaluation criteria for measuring development aid interventions' effectiveness. Since 2017, it has been revisited and updated to "take stock of lessons and experiences to improve the criteria, as better criteria will support better evaluation" (OECD, 2019, pp. 2).

The updated criteria (also illustrated in Graph 1.), which is undoubtedly the most known and adopted tool for measuring the value of development aid, includes six categories: Relevance- is the intervention doing the right thing?; Coherence-how well does the intervention fit?; Effectiveness- is the intervention achieving its objectives?; Efficiency- How well are the resources being used?; Impact-What difference does the intervention make?; Sustainability- Will the benefits last?

Graph 1. OECD-DAC evaluation criteria (OECD, 2021)



These six criteria tackle essential aspects of an evaluation and are applicable to an ample range of aid interventions. The criteria can evaluate a single project or group of projects (programs), large scale sector interventions or the whole portfolio of interventions supported by a donor agency in a country or a state (Chianca, 2008).

Nevertheless, due to the comprehensive applicability of the OECD-DAC criteria and the limited scope of this study, the theoretical framework for this study needed to be modified. Hence, the modified theoretical framework focuses only on capturing the aid recipient's perspectives. This means that the above highlighted OECD-DAC evaluation criteria will be complemented by the theoretical findings on factors for valuable development assistance in part 3.2 and the recipient-perspective criteria in part 3.3. These theoretical factors have been combined into the theoretical framework based on the OECD-DAC evaluation criteria points of relevance, effectiveness and sustainability. These three criteria points were chosen as these aligned best with the recipient-perspective criteria in part 3.3. The modified theoretical framework is elaborated below:

**Relevance:**

The extent to which the objectives and design of a development intervention are consistent with local recipient organisations' needs and priorities and continue to do so

if the circumstances change. The level which the project is developed and led by the assistance recipient organisations. The extent that the assistance is aligned with the recipient country's context, government priorities and strategies.

**Effectiveness:**

The extent to which development intervention's objectives were achieved or are expected to be achieved, taking into account their relative importance from the perspective of the local organisations. The level of donors being aware of local context and have close contact with the assistance recipient organisations.

**Sustainability:**

The extent to which the intervention is strategic, and the net benefits of the intervention continue or are likely to continue, according to the recipient organisations. Depending on the timing of the evaluation, this may involve analysing the actual flow of net benefits or estimating the likelihood of net benefits continuing over the medium and long term.

Based on the theoretical framework above, sub-questions under each criterion were developed. These are based on the OECD-DAC guide for applying the evaluation criteria (OECD, 2021). In addition, a program evaluation study conducted by the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Ole et al., 2016) was used as an inspiration to formulate the sub-questions due to the study's purpose to evaluate the Finnish MFA assistance from the local organisation's perspectives. Therefore, the theoretical framework indicators and sub-questions indicating the relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability of Estonian development assistance to Georgian recipient organisations, are described in Table 1 below. This table is central to the study, and it was utilised throughout the whole study, especially during the interviews, the coding, and the data analysis process.



Table 1. Interview questions with theoretical framework indicators for analysing the value of Estonian development assistance from local organisations' perspectives.

RELEVANCE- How relevant is the project from the perspectives of the recipient organisations?	
Sub-questions	Theoretical Indicators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Please elaborate on the background of the project (how did the project start; who initiated the project)?</li> <li>• What do you think were the main problems in the sector before the start of the project?</li> <li>• Do you think the project addressed these main issues in the sector?</li> <li>• Were there any issues that you think should have been addressed first?</li> <li>• What do you think about your organisations' sense of ownership during the project? To what extent did you feel that your organisation is on the driver's seat of the project and participated in the decision-making process?</li> <li>• To what extent is the project coherent with national policies and strategies of Georgian government priorities?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The level of which objectives of the project address the relevant needs and rights of the recipient organisations and the level that the project is led and developed by them.</li> <li>• Level of project objectives alignment with recipient country government strategies.</li> </ul>
EFFECTIVENESS- What are the outcomes of projects for the recipient organisations?	
Sub-questions	Theoretical Indicators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the outcomes of the project (intended and unintended) and what are their value and merit from the perspectives of the recipients?</li> <li>• Is there something that should have been done differently?</li> <li>• Have you noticed changes in the project beneficiaries that could be attributed to the project?</li> <li>• Has your organisation received development assistance from other donors?</li> <li>• Compared to other donors, is there something different when receiving assistance from Estonian development cooperation actors?</li> <li>• Suggestions for future Estonian development assistance provision?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recipient organisations' assessment of change and value provided by the Estonian development donors/implementors.</li> </ul>
SUSTAINABILITY- How far do the recipient organisations have the ownership and capacity to sustain the achieved results?	
Sub-questions	Theoretical Indicators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did the project involve any sustainability mechanisms? If yes then are these mechanisms currently in use?</li> <li>• Has your organisation taken any steps to maintain or improve the results of the project? If so, what are the foreseeable challenges?</li> <li>• Do you think that there is a need for next phase of the project?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recipients' future plans with the project and the quality, quantity and use of organisational capacities provided by the donor to the recipients.</li> </ul>

# 4 Method

## 4.1 Research approach

As the aim of the thesis is to understand the recipient organisations' perspectives, this study used qualitative evaluation research approach, which according to Weiss (1997) is used to "understand experience from the perspectives of participants in the action" (ibid., pp. 274). Qualitative approach was also used, because the central question of this study relates to the development project processes as well as understanding the effects of the project, in which qualitative method usually have an edge (ibid., pp. 98). Therefore, to understand the perspectives of the recipient organisations, a qualitative research approach was utilised, and a three-week field study was undertaken to Georgia.

During the field study the research used aspects of Beneficiary Assessment (BA) approach, which is an increasingly used approach addressing the goal of "listening to the client" (Lawrence, 1998). Beneficiary assessment has been defined as "a systematic inquiry into people's values and behaviour in relation to intervention for social and economic change" (ibid.). As the overall aim of the BA is "to make the voices of beneficiaries and other local-level stakeholders heard by those managing development assistance projects or formulating the policy," (Rietbergen-McCracken and Narayan-Parker, 1998) this method fits exactly with the overall aim of this thesis project, which is to identify the value of Estonia's development assistance from the perspectives of its assistance recipients and provide suggestions for future aid provisions.

## 4.2 Research method

The key methods utilized under BA approach are semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews and participant-observations (Rietbergen-McCracken and Narayan-Parker, 1998). Due to the limited scope of this study and various geographic locations of the subjects of this study, this research only used semi-structured interviews, which were conducted physically in Tbilisi and through Zoom platform to reach interviewees in Kutaisi, Borjomi and in Tallinn. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as a method to “stay focused on relevant issues, while remain conversational enough to allow participants to introduce and discuss issues that they deem relevant”(ibid., pp. 143).

To provide structure and comparability of the perceptions from various local organisations, the interviews followed the structure of the established theoretical framework (found under part 3.4). Following this framework with the indicators of relevance, effectiveness and sustainability, it was ensured that each respondent was answering to the same stimulus and provided comparable answers through structured interview questions (Weiss, 1997, pp. 166). The interview questions are brought out in Table1.

However, as the projects under study varied in many aspects, the semi-structured interview questions needed to be modified relevant for each project. Therefore, secondary data from relevant project records (project plans, outputs, theory of change, etc.) was reviewed. These documents were received from Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs as well as from the Estonian implementing organisations. In majority of the cases, this information enabled to tailor the semi-structured interview questions relevant for each organisation, while keeping the overall structure coherent between all the interviews. However, some Estonian implementing organisations did not agree to share their project documents and therefore the preparation was made based on the local organisation’s website.

### 4.3 Sampling

The sample of BA approach usually comprises of all key actors involved in development project, including project managers, beneficiaries, field staff, extension workers and community leaders (Rietbergen-McCracken and Narayan-Parker, 1998, pp. 269). However, due to the limited scope of this research, the interviews on the field were mainly made with the managing staff of each project under the study. In total the study captures the insights through 17 interviews. This covered 8 local organisations and 12 projects funded through Estonian development assistance. A large sample of project staff was chosen instead of various group of stakeholders, as it allowed necessary generalisation of the local organisations' perceptions about Estonian development assistance.

In addition, one interview was conducted with a direct beneficiary of a project (Interview 13) and one with a representative from another donor organisation previously working on the project with Estonian partners (Interview 12).

Moreover, for contextualisation and background purposes, additional meeting were held with two representatives of Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Department of Development Cooperation (Meeting 17), with a representative from Estonian NGO Mondo (Meeting 16), and two interviews were made with the representatives from the Estonian Embassy in Tbilisi, including the Ambassador, representative of development cooperation unit and a diplomat (Interviews 14 and 15). The list of interviewees are found in Annex 1.

The sample for the projects as well as local organisation's staff was chosen through purposive sampling strategy, meaning that the projects were chosen in accordance with the purpose and aim of the study (Bryman, 2007, p. 350). The purposive sampling strategy followed four steps: First the relevant projects were chosen from Estonian Development Co-operation Database: [akta.ee](http://akta.ee). The sampling strategy for choosing the relevant projects was based on two criteria:

- 1) Projects falling under the thematic area of good governance, as this field is one of the strategic priorities in Estonian Development Cooperation Strategy to Georgia (Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021a, pp. 7–8)
- 2) Ongoing or completed projects which are or have been active most recently. As the study seeks to identify perceptions of people on the development projects, then people's memory of the project processes and outcomes is important. If the project has been inactive for too long time, people tend to forget about the details of it. Moreover, including both ongoing and completed projects into the sample, enables to study the achieved results of the projects as well as the ongoing processes inside the project. Therefore, projects conducted during between 2018 to 2023 were considered in the sample.

After choosing the projects, the contacts of Estonian implementing organisations, working with the chosen set of projects, were requested from the Ministry of the Foreign Affairs, Development Cooperation Department. After making a contact with the Estonian implementing organisations, the contacts of relevant Georgian local partner organisation' were requested from them, together with relevant project records. Finally, the contact was made with the local organisation in Georgia, who in turn put me in contact with organisation's staff members who had been either managing or working with the Estonian-funded projects.

In addition, to the planned interviews with the managing staff of the local organisation, the interviewer used snowball sampling strategy and asked for recommendations for other relevant stakeholders to interview, at the end of each interview conducted. This resulted in other stakeholders than local organisation staff also being interviewed (project beneficiary and other donor organisations staff member). These additional interviews increased the validity of the study as the received information was circulated and collected from various perspectives regarding one project. Nevertheless, as the interviews with other stakeholders were not the scope of this study, they also consist of a very limited portion of the sample. Therefore, these

interviews rather served as addition to this study and cannot be considered as capturing the comprehensive view of other stakeholder groups.

During the sampling process of the interviewees, it was also acknowledged that the process was not random and the Estonian implementing organisations as well as the local organisations had the possibility to influence with whom the interviews are conducted. This increased the risk of manipulating the results of this study. However, these risks were minimized by interviewing multiple organisations and multiple staff members from each organisation.

## 4.4 Conducting interviews in the field

The interviews were conducted during the period of 8<sup>th</sup> of April to 18<sup>th</sup> of April 2022. Prior to the interview the informed consent form (found in Annex 2) was forwarded to the interviewee and their oral consent for the interview was requested at the start of the interview. The length of each interview was ranging from 45 minutes to 1 hour. The interviews were recorded with the permission of interviewees. Each interview followed the principles of good interviewing practice, brought out by Weiss (1997, pp. 178-180):

- Listening is the heart of the interviewing job;
- If the respondents' answer is not responsive, the interviewer will be neutral and give no cues on what answer is expected;
- The interviewer's attitude is professional, and she acts as though she has heard everything and is surprised of nothing;
- If the respondent does not want to provide an answer, then after a gentle effort to persuade, the interviewer will courteously back off.

## 4.5 Transcribing and coding the interviews

To analyse the empirical data collected, the interview data was transcribed straight after each interview. More specifically, from the recordings the data was transcribed to the qualitative data analysis platform NVivo. To ensure the deductive reasoning approach which enables preventing interviewer's presumptions arising for the following interviews (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006), the author only coded the interviews after all of the interviews and the transcribing processes was finalised. Coding is hereby understood as identifying themes, topics and systematising the data along the theoretical framework. After coding the material into three broad categories of relevance, effectiveness and sustainability, the sub-criteria based on the occurring themes were also created. After, the analysis was conducted based on the three broad criteria and identified sub-criteria.

During the transcribing and coding process, I was aware of the risks on coding the transcribed material according to my personal perception. Therefore, to minimize this risk, I transcribed material repeatedly and tried to ensure that the coding conducted as neutral as possible.

## 4.6 Limitations

The main limitation of this study is the short time and scope of this research, which does not allow to evaluate the value of Estonian development assistance from all relevant stakeholder perspective. Therefore, this study presents the perspectives of only one stakeholder group, meaning that the conclusions regarding the value of Estonian development assistance can only be made in regard to the local organisation's staff perspectives. To get closer to more comprehensive knowledge of the value of Estonian

development assistance, further research is needed considering other stakeholders' perspectives as well.

First, the BA brings out the importance of considering the perspectives of all stakeholders in the recipient side of the development assistance. In order to provide a more representative picture of the recipient perspectives, it is therefore important to collect data from the project beneficiaries, field staff, extension workers and community leaders (Rietbergen-McCracken and Narayan-Parker, 1998, p. 269).

Second, the data should be further confirmed through looking into the perspectives of the donor, hence Estonian MFA as well as Estonian implementing organisations' perspectives should be considered. This would be important for providing most relevant suggestions for the future assistance provisions. Moreover, triangulation of collected data with other donors on the ground would also provide a valuable perspective in the assessment of Estonia's development assistance value in Georgia.

Another limitation of this study is the limit of the projects and thematic areas considered in this study. This research only looks into the sector of good governance and 8 chosen projects under it. However, Estonia is providing its development assistance in plethora of other fields and through many other projects. Therefore, this study is only analysing assistance provided under specific thematic area and regarding projects included in the sample. This also means that the findings cannot be considered as conclusive for the Estonian development assistance provision in Georgia. Therefore, future similar studies in other thematic areas and regarding other projects are needed.

## 4.7 Ethical considerations

It is acknowledged that ethical issues deserve a high priority in this study, as the thesis deals with real people in real programs. Hence, multiple ethical considerations were followed in the study:



First, it was acknowledged, that all evaluations intrude the work of the managing staff of the local organisation. Development assistance recipient organisations are often obliged to participate in evaluation studies, meaning that many evaluators come and go and ask multiple questions, which takes up a lot of time of the project staff and intrudes their work. Therefore, the interviews conducted in this study tried to disturb the managing staff as little as possible. This was aimed through concise and efficient interviews. Therefore, prior to each interview, I prepared and become aware of the specifics of each project, in order to be aware of the basics of the project and to be able to move to the detailed project related evaluation questions.

It is also acknowledged that the interviewer aims to receive information from the local organisations, which could praise while also criticise the Estonian Foreign Ministry as well as the Estonian implementing organisations in their development assistance provisions. This puts the local organisations under difficult situation, by asking their perceptions of their direct donors and partners, with whom cooperation is ongoing and often expected also in the future. Therefore, prior to the interviews the author has been honest and disclosed the purpose of the study. According to Weiss (1997, p. 105) not lying to the respondents, is first principle of evaluation. Although it might be tempting to cover up the purpose of the study, because of the fears of the respondents to disclose honest information, it is hard to maintain a fake cover and discovery of deception could easily bring the study to an end. Therefore, the first principle of evaluation of not lying to the respondents, was followed.

However, it is also acknowledged, that if interviewees know about the purpose of the study, they may not be willing to share their true opinions and perceptions. Hence, to limit this threat, the interviews were conducted under option of confidentiality and anonymity, of which the interviewees were also informed. Nevertheless, all of the interviewees confirmed their consent to mention their organisation's name in the study. Therefore, I did not see the need to take any further measures for anonymity and confidentiality in the study.

Moreover, to avoid the risk of interviewees sharing diluted information regarding the projects, the questions during the interviews were asked according to the relevance, effectiveness and sustainability criteria (in Table 1), which enabled to take away the directness and the negative or positive value of the answers provided by the respondents. Instead, the information was received on the processes of the projects and the experiences that the respondents have encountered. Assigning certain values to the responses of the interviewees was strictly avoided during the interviews, for not revealing “right and wrong answers” to the interviewees. Instead, the values to the answers were assigned, based on the theoretical framework, after the data collection process. Hence, during the coding and analysis part of this study.

# 5 Context

Before analysing the results of the interviews, the context of Estonia as a development aid donor as well as Georgia as the development aid recipient will be elaborated on. In the first part Estonia's development cooperation structure, its general and Georgia specific priorities, as well as main motivations for development assistance are elaborated on.

The following chapter regarding Georgia covers its country-context, reasons for being considered as an upper-middle income development recipient country, and trends of received development assistance.

## 5.1 Estonia as development aid donor

During the 1990, Estonia was a recipient of foreign assistance, concentrated on consolidating its statehood after re-establishing its independence, in 1991 (Kasekamp 2010, ch. 8). Similar to most other Central and Eastern European countries, Estonia started its development cooperation programmes as a part of its EU accession process (Andrespok, et al., 2012). However, already in 1998, Estonia became a donor itself. Since then, Estonian development assistance has steadily increased and today country's development assistance budget represents 16% of its gross national income (GNI). Moreover, Estonian government is committed to achieving a 0.33% ODA/GNI ratio by 2030 (EstDev, 2022b).

Estonian development cooperation is regulated by the Estonian Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid Programme 2022–2025 and since 2021, Estonian Centre for Development Cooperation (EstDev) has become the responsible unit for the

implementation of Estonian development cooperation, while the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) focuses on the development cooperation related strategy and policy formulation (EstDev, 2022c). Key implementing organisations in the structure are Estonian NGOs, public institutions and increasingly private companies.

Estonia's primary development assistance focus is on the countries on the eastern border of the European Union, hence Ukraine, Georgia, Republic of Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus. According to EstDev, the aim of the cooperation is "promoting a secure and economically successful neighbourhood based on a democratic state governed by the rule of law and its gradual integration into the European Union (ibid.)." Estonia also provides development assistance in other countries, such as Afghanistan, Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Kenya, Uganda, Namibia, and Botswana (ibid.).

Georgia has been one of the priority countries for Estonian development cooperation since 2006. Estonia has supported Georgia with more than 12 million euros, of which more than 6 million euros were contributed during 2014 – 2020 (Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021a). According to the guiding document of Estonia's cooperation with Georgia- "Country Strategy for Estonian–Georgian Development Cooperation 2021–2024," Estonia has four strategic objectives in the country, including- Strategic objective 1: Strengthening Democratic State Structures and Systems; Strategic objective 2: Support for Entrepreneurship; Strategic objective 3: Improving the Quality of Education; and Strategic objective 4: Protection of the Rights of Woman and Children (Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021). This research focuses on projects related to Strategic objective 1, which in the Estonian funded projects database akta.ee, has been assigned under the good governance thematic area.

For achieving Strategic objective 1 of Strengthening Democratic State Structures and Systems, Estonian MFA supports activities related to knowledge transfer, training and advising the governmental authorities and civil society organisations. Moreover, democratic state structures are enforced by strengthening

cyber cooperation capabilities, developing e-governance systems, and transparent policies that support democracy, human rights, and social inclusion (ibid.). Through transferring the technical expertise based on the experience gained from the governmental, administrative, and social reforms of Estonia and its accession to the EU" (Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021), Estonia aims to support Georgian existing state structures and act as a constructive partner (Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021b).

Moreover, according to the interview with the Estonian Embassy in Tbilisi, the general approach of Estonia's assistance is to show with limited resources to the Georgian counterparts that the system works in Estonia. Then it becomes up to the recipients if they want to utilise this or not (Interviews 14 and 15). However, according to the country strategy, Estonia's approach entails an expectation that after the assistance is provided, "then the Georgian partner is expected to take over and implement the results at the end of the project" (Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021, pp. 4).

### 5.1.1 Motivations of Estonian development assistance

"The overarching vision of Estonian development cooperation is to ensure peace and stability, contribute to eradicating poverty, and help attain the Sustainable Development Goals by sharing its reform experience with transition countries (EstDev, 2022c)." Nevertheless, it is often argued that development aid has always been, and still is, provided for non-development reasons, mainly for political and commercial purposes (Collier, 2016). Collier further argues that the purpose of the development assistance is detrimental to its effectiveness (ibid.).

Estonian development cooperation is no exception. For example, Made (2015) concludes with his research that Estonian aid is motivated through ethical, geopolitical and international visibility reasoning (ibid.).

According to Made (ibid., pp. 110), the ethical reasoning sources from the Kiplingian white man's burden and the feeling that during Estonia's transition and state-building in the 1990s, Estonia received large amounts of aid and assistance from Europe, and now it is time for Estonia to join the burden-sharing and become an aid donor in return.

The geopolitical reasoning for development aid provision is related to Estonia's Soviet past and security-related debates. In these debates, Estonian aid becomes necessary for promoting a secure and economically successful neighbourhood, which would serve as a pretext for its threatful neighbours.

According to my field study observations, the third and most evident motivation for Estonian aid is achieving international visibility (ibid., pp. 113). This purpose can be understood when looking more specifically into the motives of giving development aid by small states, where development assistance is shaped by the purpose of strengthening small states' presence in their foreign policy arena, state's social mobility and national interests with the limited resources available. For example, a study by Crandall and Varov (2016) concluded that the Estonian development aid strategy aims to improve its own status and weight in other Western European countries and EU institutions as well as promote Estonian country status in the recipient countries. This is done using its own success stories for development aid provision (Crandall, Varvov, 2016, pp. 422).

## 5.2 Georgia as development assistance recipient country

Georgia is an upper-middle income country in the eastern neighbourhood region, located in a geopolitically strategic hub of Europe, Russia and Central Asia (UNDP, 2020). The country has faced a plethora of obstacles in its development process, which have resulted in significant dependence on external development assistance. Georgia's

key development-related issues are argued to be problematic public service system with widespread corruption, high vulnerability and dualism in the economy, high out-migration, regional disparities and the ongoing ethno-political conflict culminating in 2008 with Russian forces occupying 20% of Georgia's territory (UN Georgia, 2020). Nevertheless, since 2003 Rose Revolution protest, Georgia has carried out ambitious reforms, both in governance and economic management, and earned the reputation of a "star reformer"(ibid.).

When conducting the field study in Georgia's capital Tbilisi, in April 2022, it became evident that for Georgian people, Russian invasion to Ukraine painfully recalls Russian invasion to Georgia, in 2008. Since, the 24<sup>th</sup> of February, thousands of Georgians regularly gather in front of the Parliament in Tbilisi to show support and solidarity with Ukraine.

Nevertheless, Georgian government has been hesitant. For example, Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili refused to join in sanctions against Russia, blocked a plane transporting 60 Georgian volunteer soldiers to Ukraine and claimed that sanctions against Russia would be ineffective (Sheils, 2022). This in turn has resulted in Ukraine solidarity rallies becoming synonymous with anti-government protests. The protests call for the PM's resignation, with main statements being „We are not our Government“ (ibid.). Simultaneously, the president of Georgia has publicly announced its disagreement with the PM and travelled to Brussels and Paris to express Georgian solidarity with Ukraine (Cathcart, 2022). This in turn caused a political crisis in the country as the ruling party announced that it would sue the president in the Constitutional Court, claiming that she made unauthorized trips to Paris and Brussels “without any prior consultations with the government and informed it only after the trips, which confirms the president violated the Constitution with premeditated intent”(CivilGeorgia, 2022).

This internal dispute in Georgian government and with Georgian people is reflecting the key developmental obstacles in the area of good governance in Georgia today. These include weak democratic institutions, low capability of the public sector

and highly polarized political environment, with two antagonistic parties leaving little space for viable alternatives to solve the country's deeply embedded socioeconomic problems (Bertelsmann Stiftung Transformation Index, 2022).

Although Georgia indeed is a “star reformer, the above-mentioned problems have left strong marks on Georgia's development and increased country's dependence on foreign development assistance.

### 5.2.1 Trends in Georgia's development assistance

According to the Georgian development cooperation statistics, collected by Georgian Development Cooperation Unit (DCU), the cumulative value of development finances received by Georgia has reached 8.0 billion EUR. Moreover, the amount of assistance donated in 2020 has increased 29.65%, in comparison to 2019 (Donor Coordination Unit (DCU) Georgia, 2020).

Majority of development assistance is received through multilateral aid (77%) and remaining (23%) is provided bilaterally. The most significant multilateral partners are EU institutions (37.13%) and Asian Development Bank (22.67%), while the most important bilateral donors are Germany (13.28%), France (3.23%), and the USA (3.02%). In 2020, Estonia's contributions equalled 0.02% from the overall Georgian development aid budget, putting Estonia on the 8<sup>th</sup> donor position (DCU, 2020).

According to the key document of Georgian Government development strategy “Government Program 2021-2024 Toward Building a European State,” the government addresses four priority areas: 1) Foreign policy, security, conflict resolution, and human rights; 2) Economic development 3) Social policy and human capital development 4) State governance (Government of Georgia, 2020).

The amount and direction of donor funds are directed towards similar sectors. Nevertheless, its order is varying by prioritisation of: 1) Economic growth 2) Sustainable use of natural resources 3) Good Governance 4) Social welfare 5) Human capital development 6) Other.



The flows into the field of 3) Good governance or 4) State governance remain modest 10.13% from the aggregated bilateral aid flows in 2020. However, DCU (2020, pp. 8) report brings out, that the good governance sector has seen a record of 65% increase in aid flows. Therefore, the sector is growing its significance.

The thematic areas covered under the good governance area include legal and juridical development (6.2%), human rights and mobility (3.7%), gender equality (2.0%), public administration, anti-corruption and public financial management (62.4%) as well as support to civil society (10.8 %), decentralization (9.3%), and conflict prevention (5.6%).

Finally, according to the additional statistics requested from the DCU, it was possible to conclude, that Gorgia has recorded the largest contributions by Estonian development actors in four sectors. These include public administration, anti-corruption and public financial management; support to civil society; human rights; and gender equality (DCU, 2020).

All these sectors were also covered by the sample of the projects and local organisations interviewed under this study. In summary, the sample of organisations include 1) governmental institutions who are working with training diplomats and civil servants as well as provide ICT related government services; 2) civil society organisations working with access to public information, addressing domestic violence issues through municipalities and engaging community for increased resilience; and 3) research institutes working with policy research. The specific list of projects covered and local organisations interviewed are found in Annex 1.

# 6 Analysis

In the following part of this research, I will analyse the data collected from local organisations through the fields study in Georgia. The analysis will be based on the formulated theoretical framework (in part 3.4) of relevance, effectiveness and sustainability. Through the analysis I will respond to my second research questions regarding the value of Estonian development assistance from the aid recipient organisation's perspectives in Georgia.

A limitation to mention regarding the following analysis is that the findings cannot be considered specific regarding any individual organisation interviewed. Rather the analysis aims to present the general themes mentioned by the local organisations and bring examples from individual statements. Therefore, this analysis represents a collection of perceptions from various viewpoints.

The upcoming chapter is structured as follows. For each criterion in the theoretical framework, I will first restate the relevant sub questions and indicators for assessing the value of the assistance provided. Then, from the data collected through the interviews, I will elaborate on the perceived strengths, weaknesses as well as suggestions for future Estonian development assistance provision.

## 6.1 Relevance

According to the theoretical framework, development assistance is considered relevant if projects are developed and led by assistance recipients and tailored according to their needs. Moreover, when it comes to the assistance in the sector of good governance, then it is even further argued that assistance relevant to the country

context is vital for the effective provision of development aid (ODI, 2006). This section therefore analyses the level of which relevant needs and rights of the local organisations are covered by the Estonian development assistance in Georgia. This is assessed through the perspectives of local organisations, though broadly asking if in their perspective, the intervention is/ was doing the right thing? This question is investigated through the following sub-questions: did the project address local organisations and project beneficiaries most relevant needs, to what extent was the local organisation on the driver's seat of the project and has the project been coherent with the priorities and context of the Georgian government authorities.

### 6.1.1 Addressing the most relevant needs

One way to measure relevance of the project is to investigate the alignment between project goals and recipient organisation views on their importance (OECD, 2021). According to the local organisations, cooperation with Estonian organisations had many advantages. For example, Head of Local Government and Internet Department at Institution for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI) stated that the project with Estonians started due to mutual goals and interests from all stakeholders: *"IDFI saw it important to implement particular reforms, public institutions were ready to implement these reforms, and the donor community was willing to support our initiatives"* (Interview 3). Similarly, the project manager at the Georgian MFA Diplomatic Training and Research Institute (DI) explained that the project was initiated by them, after they drafted a letter, which was sent from the deputy Foreign Minister of Georgia to Estonian Diplomacy School, explaining the context why the project was needed from their organisation's perspectives (Interview 11). Also, a project manager at Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies (GFSIS) highlighted the advantage of Estonian assistance not being externally pushed and therefore considerate towards the local priorities and needs: *"The greatest thing about the project was that it was not externally pushed, meaning that the Estonian*

*donors did not say that you will be provided these Estonian experts and this type of training. Instead, the project was very flexible, and we could define our interests and choose preferred topics for the trainings held during the project”* (Interview 4).

From the statements above it can be argued that Estonian assistance is considerate and able to take into account the most relevant needs of the recipient organisations.

### 6.1.2 Participation and Ownership

Nevertheless, with many of other projects, it became apparent that the participation of local organisations, especially during the start of the project, can be limited. For example, Deputy Head of Civil Service Bureau Georgia (CSB) mentioned that their project with Estonians begun, as the Estonians already had the project ready: *“Estonians presented us a ready-made project, which they were willing to offer to us and implement it”* (Interview 1). Although the interviewee did not express concerns with this kind of approach, it has been proven that local organisations’ participation in the planning phase of the project is highly important for relevant and hence valuable development assistance provision. For example, Tania Li Murray, exemplifies with her research, how external aid should not be delivered according to the perspectives of the donors, because “what trustees deem appropriate and necessary, usually does not collide with the aid receivers needs.” (Li, 2007, pp. 240, 249).

Another similar issue was observed during the designing process of the project. For example, the project manager at DI mentioned that she was actively participating in the planning of the content for the project. Nevertheless, she still noted that she was not involved in drafting of the project proposal. It was developed by the Estonian organisation and the DI was sent a short summary in English afterwards (Interview 11). This is again viewed as an issue for project relevance because project proposal is the key document defining the project activities and goals. Preparing the proposal without the participation of local organisations as well as other relevant stakeholders

significantly increases the risk of projects' irrelevance from the recipient perspectives. Castelloe, Watson, and White (2002) research instead brings out the benefits of including local partners into project proposal writing, arguing that it is an integral capacity for the recipient organisation's development. Moreover, they bring out that learning-by-doing process is proved to be more useful for the local organisation, which enables the organisation to build the skills they need to sustain themselves, without becoming dependent on external resources"(ibid.). Therefore, local organisations involvement in project designing process should be considered as beneficial development assistance work in itself.

Majority of the interviewees confirmed that they feel ownership over the projects. For example, the project manager from GFSIS, former deputy mayor of Kutaisi City Hall and project manager from Economic Policy Research Centre (EPRC) respectively mentioned: *"I felt the ownership in this sense that I was the one responsible for the successful implementation of the project (Interview 5); "Yes, we felt that we participated in the decision-making and were in the driver seat during the project. Therefore, yes, the ownership was there" (Interview 13); "Our opinion is very well taken into account. This project is owned by us" (Interview 8).*

However, there were still issues observed during the interviews, in regards to enabling the local organisations to initiate and bring out their most important and relevant needs. For example, it was mentioned that Estonian partners approached the local organisation with a list of topics they could deliver and asking which ones our diplomats would find most relevant and useful (Interview 11). Although this statement exemplifies that Estonian actors are considerate toward local organisation's needs, it also shows that the ideas and solutions to address the local needs are proposed by the Estonians themselves and based on what the Estonians can offer, rather than communicated by the recipients on what they are needing. This problem again falls under the common issues identified in the theoretical framework and brings out the potential threat for projects relevance due to lack of meaningful participation of the local organisations.

Similar issue was observed during an interview with the former director of DI, who on one hand stated to be satisfied with the level of ownership during the project with the Estonian development partners, while simultaneously stating that:” *I think that donor work in Georgia is too much donor driven. It should be vice-versa. Although, the project with Estonians was not donor driven, often we still had choices between capacity building projects and capacity building projects. I think if the scope of the projects would be extended and diversified, then the organisation, each sector and unit can think more of their real needs and address these. If I would be able to receive assistance for my organisation’s development, then that would be great. I would really think in my organisation what we lack and what is that we need. However, if I only have the opportunity of capacity building activities (training, provide skills), then I would think only with limits in these dimensions*” (Interview 9). This statement is supported with theoretical findings from the aid effectiveness studies, describing how the local organisations often make their projects fit into the categories they think can get donor’s support. This however results in local organisation not being able to pursue their own agenda, but instead become dependent on funding categories made available regarding donor agendas. This in turn reduces the relevance and value of the development assistance received as the local organisations are constrained by being in the middle of local community and donor needs, goals and agendas.

Similar issues were also exemplified by GFSIS: “*Yes, we feel ownership over all of the projects that we do in GFSIS, so there is no issue that the projects are donor driven. However, they are donor-driven in the sense that we can only do projects for which funds become available. Therefore, if there is some outside topic we would like to implement, we are constrained*” (Interview 5).

These findings can also explain why the local organisations often brought out their preference for core-funding, provided by other development donors, for example by Swedish Development Agency. Core support is defined as donor grants with a high degree of flexibility, which can be used to cover organisational development work, the

administrative running costs of the organisation, as well as programmatic work (INTRAC, 2021).

The interviewees mentioned their preference for core support over project-based supports, as the flexibility of the core support is seen as one of the most effective means for supporting their own efforts for development. According to local organisations receiving core support, it was mentioned that this type of aid enables them to focus on their own long-term organisational development priorities and on the issues the organisation itself deems most relevant, which in turn increases the level of ownership of the assistance received. For example, a project manager at GFSIS stated that: *“If we have the core support, then the project is solely ours, as all the money transfers go through us. If it is project-based support, then the finances are managed by the Estonian partner. Therefore, if there is a demand from the participants to have a different kind of activity or extra lectures, then we are not able to provide these, because the money is already allocated to somewhere else. However, we can allocate the money differently through amendments”* (Interview 5).

Nevertheless, according to the statements from Estonian Embassy in Tbilisi, it was understood that Estonian development assistance will not be able to offer local organisations core support, because of the limited resources of Estonian development cooperation budget (Background Interview 14). Despite this limitation, critical studies still argue that project-based support often provides recipient organisations with donor driven, technically defined and simplified solutions (Li Murray, 2015). For example, Li Murray (ibid., pp. 79) argues that project-based support is often too simplified to address the complex problems which are the real issues of the development assistance recipients. For instance, projects are developed with an aim to reduce poverty however, the processes through which poverty was systematically produced were not addressed due to the inability of donors to offer these complex issues a simplified, project-based solutions.

These critical perspectives highlight the importance of Estonian assistance utilizing participatory methods in its funded projects. This is because, participatory

approach would “enable local people to use their own categories and criteria, to generate their own agenda, and to assess and indicate their own priorities“ (Mubita, Libati and Mulonda, 2017). This would ensure incorporation of local knowledge, skills and resources as well as ensuring that the project truly corresponds to the local organisations’ and beneficiaries’ relevant needs, which in turn is considered as the key precursor for successful project and programme completion (ibid.).

### 6.1.3 Coherence with recipient country’s national strategies and priorities

The project relevance is also measured from its coherence with recipient country’s national strategies and government plans. Coherence with Georgian government goals is especially important in the thematic area of good governance. This is because, the hard lessons from many countries have shown that when the donors have too much control in choosing, designing and implementing development programmes or projects, by definition they are unlikely to succeed or to be sustained after the donors leave (OECD, Policy Brief 4., no date).

From positive perspectives, local organisations mentioned that the Estonian-funded projects are often rooted and in alignment with the Georgian government strategies. For example, the Head of Local Government and Internet Department in DFID mentioned that their project was: *“based on commitments done by Georgian Government and that is why the project was very relevant and could produce tangible results”* (Interview 4). Similarly, the former Deputy Mayor of Kutaisi City Hall mentioned that: *“The project with Estonians was part of the municipalities’ commitment for increased transparency”* (Interview 13).

However, the former deputy mayor also mentioned that after the project with the Estonians, which succeeded in producing relevant webpages for three municipalities in Georgia, a new and larger project was initiated by other donors through the central government. This larger-scale project aimed to produce change to



all local municipalities from the central government level, which resulted in all the websites of the municipalities being replaced by new ones. The former deputy mayor mentioned that although they found the websites created during the project with Estonians useful, they needed to adopt different websites, after the project with the Estonians had ended (Interview 13).

This experience is also colliding with multiple suggestions by the local organisations, for future Estonian development aid provision. For example, a project manager from Data Exchange Agency (DEA) regarding an Estonia-Georgia Twinning Project mentioned: *“Development assistance in general should be initiated from the highest government level possible.”* She explained that although the project was very relevant and successful from the Estonian side, then currently the project outputs are not implemented due to the low motivation and will from the Georgian government side. Based on this experience, she suggested that the projects should always be checked with the strong and influential political actors on high levels. After receiving their request, the cooperation can begin with the subordinate local government levels. This ensures that development cooperation projects, especially among the good governance sector, are not wasted and left unimplemented (Interview 2).

The interviewee further elaborated on the issues arising from lack of government’s will and support for the projects: *“It is only reasonable to make projects if the results are implemented, otherwise one can write great documents and projects, but without implementation it does not make any sense.”* She further explained that not further developed projects rather make the government workers leaving their positions: *“All good employees switch directions and leave the DEA, as have I. This is because, employees see that the projects they have been working on do not bring results, because there is no will from the government side. This is just highly un motivating as are the salaries of the Georgian public sector”* (Interview 2). On one hand this statement exemplifies the importance of government ownership in development cooperation projects. It has been proven that when aid bypasses public institutions, governments do not take ownership of aid programs and are less likely to continue work after foreign

development actors leave (Anderson, Brown and Jean, 2012). Therefore, it is important that Estonian assistance is further ensured to be in alignment with Georgian government priorities.

Simultaneously, this statement again exemplifies Le Murray's (2007, 2015) arguments on development cooperation projects „rendering technical “some issues of the recipients. She argues that the donors are often oversimplifying the issues of the recipients and offering simple technical solutions for addressing these. In this case, it appeared that although the project was appreciated by the organisations, it failed to address the key and systematic issues of the organisation, which during the interview appeared to be low salaries and motivation of the staff (Interview 2). It is acknowledged that these issues are highly complicated and single projects are probably not going to be able to solve these. However, with this in mind it is even more important that the recipient organisation itself can direct the development cooperation funding in the areas where they see it most relevant, and donors are there to support them.

In conclusion, local organisations appreciate Estonian development assistance and perceive it to be relevant. Moreover, it is felt that local needs and priorities are taken into account and that Estonian aid is not externally pushed. However, when observing relevance from the level of local organisations' participation and ownership during a project, then issues such as limited participation during the start and designing phases of the project were regarded from the interviewee's responses. According to research, these observations pose a threat to development assistance relevance, as limited participation and ownership regarding the project reduce the possibilities of local organisations addressing their organisation's key and systematic challenges. This can in turn result in a situation where donors propose, and recipients accept development assistance which is not addressing the most important needs of the organisation (Li Murray, 2007, 2015; Anderson, Brown and Jean, 2012). Therefore, it is important that Estonian assistance is further considerate toward the needs of the local organisations, which can be ensured by:

- Instead of donors offering options to choose from, local organisations should be further supported to define their needs and priorities themselves. Some donors ensure this through core support financing mechanisms, which according to the interviewees is seen as one of the most effective means for relevant aid provision.
- However, it is acknowledged that core support demands extensive financial capabilities, which are not feasible for all donors. This is also the case for Estonian development assistance. Therefore, it becomes essential for Estonian development donors and actors to further utilise participatory methods in the planning and implementation phases of the project. This would maximize the incorporation of local knowledge, skills and resources as well as ensure that the project truly corresponds to the local organisations and beneficiaries' relevant needs.
- Moreover, according to the local organisations, Estonian assistance is considered valuable, as it is often in alignment with the Georgian government priorities and strategies. Nevertheless, local organisations further highlight the importance of receiving confirmation regarding government will and ownership in regard to the donors planned project. This ensures further relevance, effectiveness and sustainability of Estonian-funded projects, especially under the thematic area of good governance.

## 6.2 Effectiveness

Development intervention is considered effective when the project achieves or has achieved its objectives (OECD, 2021). According to the theoretical framework, project is effective from the local organisation's perspective if achievements are important to

them and again fit into the local context. In order to assess the level of effectiveness of Estonian development assistance, local organisations were asked about the outcomes of the projects, their value and if the Estonian actors had any advantages for providing aid effectively. Also, suggestions for further effective development assistance were asked.

### 6.2.1 Achieving objectives

From various interviews it became apparent that the common approach and objective of Estonian development assistance in Georgia, is to show to the local organisations the way that the system works in Estonia and the specifics of its working. After that it becomes up to the local organisations if they are interested to utilise the introduced system or not (Background Interview 14). That is why, the interviewees also commonly mentioned objectives sourcing from this approach. For example, interviewees brought out achieved objectives regarding production of the reports with useful recommendations on how to build the same online system as Estonians have (Interview 1); production and attendance at relevant and interesting training programmes showing how things work in Estonia (Interview 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 12); as well as provision of technical assistance for piloting a specific system, which is implemented in Estonia (Interview 2, 3, 7, 8, 12, 13). There were no interviewees mentioning that the objectives of their projects were not achieved.

### 6.2.2 Advantage of Estonian aid for effectiveness

Together with positive and achieved objectives, the local organisations almost always brought out the competitive advantage when working with Estonian partners. The positive cooperation was often reasoned with Georgia and Estonia similar country contexts and historical background. For example, the former project manager from GIZ mentioned: *“The value added of the Estonian expertise is its Soviet background, which*

*can give a good example to other post-Soviet countries. In the case of study trip to Estonia, the Georgian Delegation could easily link with the background that was shared by the Estonian experts and the issues coming from Georgian delegation members were easily understood by the Estonians. Therefore, I can confidently say, that this study trip was the most effective one I've seen over my 11 years of working experience in the field” (Interview 12). This statement is in alignment with previous studies arguing that the common past of the annexed Baltic states within the Soviet space provides a distinctive identity background for their today’s development cooperation (Made, 2015).*

Another example on how Estonian organisation’s understanding of the local context influences positively the effectiveness of development cooperation, was stated by the former director of DI: *“When attending for example an event, where the Estonian expert is talking about cybersecurity issues or hybrid warfare, then one can be certain that the experts understand Georgians perspectives and the context where Georgians are coming from. It doesn’t happen often, but sometimes there have been trainings by other donors, which thematically are not viewed as a priority in the Georgian context for the diplomats. In Georgian government context, for example, the topic of environment becomes secondary, as Georgia’s current reality is that we are at war with Russia, since 2008. We of course care about the environment, but mostly we care about Russians doing cyberattacks to our government and spying on our phones today and tomorrow. With Estonians we have similar worries and experience. Therefore, we understand each other well” (Interview 9).*

This statement is also supported by research on development cooperation effectiveness. For example, OECD’s comprehensive study brought out that one of the common burden for the recipients is that donors staff often lacks awareness of local conditions and realities (OECD, 2003). Studies have also confirmed that recipient organisations deem it valuable, when the donors are aware of the local context and have close contact with the aid recipients (Anderson, Brown and Jean, 2012).

Moreover, the interviewees also mentioned the importance of the recent development experience that Estonia has recently undergone itself: *“What is important, is that in Estonia you don’t speak about experiences long time ago, which is the case for Germany, France, Austria, and other old EU member states. You see that 10 years ago there was nothing, but now Estonia has everything digital. Estonian experts showed us how this digital transformation happened with all these practical tools and real examples. Therefore, practicality and very recent experiences and examples make Estonia’s experience unique compared to the other development cooperation partners. Estonia’s experience enables Georgian partners to easily compare Estonia’s case with Georgia’s and identify gaps where Georgia needs to improve”* (Interview 2).

During the interviews, the common words when describing partnerships with Estonian organisations were: “trust, friendship, similarities, they understand us, they are comfortable partners to work with.” This indicated that that there definitely is an added value for the local organisations to cooperate with the Estonian partners. Therefore, it appeared that similar contextual understandings between Georgian and Estonian actors as well as Estonia’s recent reform experience are perceived by the local organisations as the most valuable advantage for effective development assistance from Estonian actors.

### 6.2.3 Suggestions for more effective development cooperation

Through the interviews it became evident that the majority of Estonian development assistance is delivered through workshops, seminars, lectures, study visits and other forms of educational activities. This kind of assistance was appreciated, and the local organisations emphasised how Estonian assistance has given them a good theoretical understanding. However, the interviewees also noted the need for assistance in the implementation phases of the project, which would enable more effective and long-term outcomes of Estonian development assistance. For example, according to

project manager at GFSIS, a project aiming to increase Georgian civil servants' capacity has been successful in providing lectures and introducing how the sector could be improved in Georgia, based on the experience of Estonia. Nevertheless, to implement more valuable and effective change, there is a need to support the civil servants with more practical aspects of capacity building. For example, by assisting civil servants in developing relevant policy papers, in the following phases of the project (Interview 5).

Similar statements were also provided in regard to the need of next phases of the projects, as according to the recipients this way the effectiveness of Estonian assistance can be enhanced. For example, according to the Head of Local Government and Internet Department at IDFI, the project *"...was effective in its immediate objective, but currently the outputs are not used by the citizens, due to the low awareness of mechanism's existence. In the coming years there would be need to have projects regarding actual implementation of participatory budgeting mechanisms"* (Interview 3). Another statement was made in regards to ongoing project by the project manager EPRC: *"This project will not be fully efficient unless the recommendations developed during this phase of the project are implemented in the next phase. Therefore, a continuation project is highly important"* (Interview 8). Hence, interviews with local organisations showed that recipients see the need and are interested to increase projects' effectiveness, but for that continuous support though follow-up phases of the projects are needed.

Nevertheless, as also elaborated under the Sustainability criteria, majority of the local organisations mentioned that they have received support from Estonian donors one or maximum two times. Only few organisations argued their cooperation with Estonian partners to be long-term and continuous. This was also confirmed through the interview with the Estonian Embassy in Tbilisi whose staff mentioned that the Embassy prefers to provide support to various and new local organisations through short-term and one/two-time grants (Background Interview 14). From this observation, the

argument on Estonia's development cooperation strategy being rather focused on increasing Estonia's own visibility (Made, 2015) was exemplified.

From the perspective of the Embassy, whose purpose is to increase country's visibility abroad, the approach of providing small but multiple grants to various beneficiaries is understandable. However, from the local development perspective, this strategy is highly problematic for producing effective and valuable outcomes for the recipients of development aid. This is because, prior research has shown that shifting funding allocations to pursue new agendas is highly disruptive and counterproductive. People in recipient countries want external engagement and funding support that they can rely on for long enough to achieve their planned results (CDA, 2015). According to one of the leading Estonian development cooperation experts, persistent and steady approach would, in the long run, increase Estonia's prestige as a donor who does not search for quick-impact intervention for political visibility, but builds its limited capacity on a neutral and needs-based approach, which targets the root causes of people's vulnerabilities, and makes sure that people have control over their own lives (Kuusik, 2006). However, according to the observations in the field it appeared that Estonian development assistance often lacks long-term support strategy, which is problematic for providing valuable and effective development assistance to the local organisations.

A key limitation for deciding whom to support and if the project should be continued is the absence of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system under the Estonian development cooperation structure. According to the Estonian Embassy in Tbilisi there is no follow up system regarding project's sustainability. More specifically, there is no M&E system introduced by the Estonian MFA, which means that the Embassy does not have the leverage to check what the project has achieved. It was also explained that currently the decisions are based on the reputation of the local organisations and by checking if the very tangible goals have been achieved. For example, if project entailed purchasing 10 laptops, then it is checked if 10 laptops are



present. If there are no laptops, then the organisation is not further supported (Background Interview 14).

When asking regarding other donor's systems for defining the effectiveness of their project and the need for their continuation, then a former employee of GIZ explained that GIZ has a comprehensive M&E system for these purposes. First the projects are always designed with the clear objectives, which should be followed up and measured. Then each objective is systematically monitored by providing clarifications regarding what has been done and what was achieved. The monitoring findings must also be provided with a source of qualification, hence with an evidence proving proof regarding the achievement (Interview 12). Similar system is necessary for Estonian development actors in order to properly and sustainably decide the direction of development assistance provision.

In conclusion, the local organisations say that Estonian development assistance is achieving the objectives set out for each project. Moreover, according to the local organisations Estonian assistance is effective due to similar historic and geopolitical context between Georgian and Estonian actors as well as due to Estonia's recent reform experience. These factors are considered as the most valuable advantages for effective development assistance provision by Estonians.

In regard to suggestions for Estonian donors to provide more effective assistance, following proposals were made:

- To enhance the effectiveness of Estonian supported projects, there is a need for long-term development strategy regarding each local organisation. This is because, local organisation needs external engagement and funding support that they can rely on for long enough to achieve their planned results. Short-term and inconsistent assistance is disruptive and counterproductive.

- Local organisations appreciate the theoretical knowledge received through Estonian assistance and are eager to implement learnt ideas. However, for multiple instances the local organisations expressed the need for moving beyond of just introducing how the system works and receiving further practical assistance for implementing the ideas introduced by the Estonians.
- There is a strong need for a reliable M&E system, which would inform the effectiveness of Estonian supported projects and give strong ground for the future direction of the assistance.

### 6.3 Sustainability

As mentioned above, development assistance is valuable if it is long-term and strategic. The impact of development assistance does not come overnight and for the change to last, donors must start taking “longer breaths” (Anderson, Brown and Jean, 2012). Assessing projects according to the sustainability criteria allows evaluators to determine if an intervention’s benefits are long term, strategic and most importantly will last (OECD, 2021). In order to analyse the sustainability of the Estonian development assistance, the interviewer asked questions regarding the extent to which the net benefits of the interventions continue or are likely to continue, according to the local organisation’s perspectives. The indicator for the assessment was recipient organisations’ future plans with the project and the quality, quantity and use of organisational development capacities provided during the projects. Questions were posed regarding the persistency of Estonian assistance, the need of its continuation as well as about organisation’s capacity and aim to improve or maintain the results after the project.

### 6.3.1 Persistency of development assistance

Regarding the persistency of Estonian development assistance, the recipient organisations were asked about previous and future projects with the Estonian funding. From the local organisation's perspectives, the responses varied significantly. Representatives from DI and IDFI respectively stated that: „*We have had similar projects priorly with the Estonians and actually Estonia is our most longstanding partner, we don't have this cooperation with any of our other partners*“ (Interview 10); „*The cooperation with Estonians has been ongoing for two consecutive projects*“ (Interview 3).

However, multiple other organisations expressed that the support from Estonia has been short-term, consisting of one or maximum two times of funding (Interview 1; 6; 8; 13). The lack of persistency in Estonian assistance was well exemplified by the Director and the project manager at NGO Anti-Violence Network Georgia (AVNG) who explained that: „*Every three years we wrote a new project to the Estonian Embassy in Tbilisi and won their funding for two times in a row. But the third time we applied the rules of the Estonian Embassy had been changed. They said that they need new NGOs to support and give chance to others. We have not received their funding since then*“ (Interview 6).

Moreover, multiple organisations mentioned that often donors are unreliable, and persistency of their donations is highly uncertain, which in turn is causing instability for the organisation: „*When you are dependent on the donor, it is difficult to predict, as the projects can be suddenly suspended. Therefore, sustainability of the projects is a big issue from our organisation's perspective.*“ (Interview 4); „*Some donors think that we have easy time to find funding, but it is very difficult. Sometimes donors have strange ideas about the development of the organisation, they finance us and when the project is over the donors pull out. It is of course problematic for us if we do not receive the funding*“ (Interview 6).

These statements above are also in accordance with previous researches on the factors which undermine the value of development assistance provision. For example, Anderson, et al. (2012) has concluded that when donors introduce new policies and shift funding strategies to pursue new agendas, it is highly counterproductive and undermines the sustainability and local control. Instead, local organisations need and benefit from funding, which is long-term and persistent enough, enabling the recipients to achieve their planned results.

### 6.3.2 Continuation of the net benefits and sustainability mechanisms

To further understand the sustainability of the net benefits resulting from the projects, the interviewer asked about the likeliness of Estonian-supported projects being continued or being further developed by the local organisation itself. The aim to continue the project results were stated by all of the organisations. However, the capacity to continue the project benefits were mentioned only by few, while others mentioned the need for next project phases to sustain the results. For example, a most positive sustained benefits of the assistance were mentioned by IDFI: *“After the pilot phase of the project in three municipalities, all three municipalities adopted themselves the participatory budget program. Therefore, as of now a particular amount of money is allocated for citizen ideas from their local budget. The system has been inspiration for other municipalities as well”* (Interview 3).

Another positive example for sustaining the outcomes of Estonian supported projects was brought out by Deputy Head of CSB, who mentioned that the projects with Estonians only entailed production of specific recommendations. Although the recommendations could not be implemented in the end of the project, then today these are used by the USAID IT-experts to build an innovative system for the CSB organisational development (Interview 1). Therefore, due to coherence with other

donors, the project grew from Estonian theoretical recommendations into practical tasks and ensured the sustainability of project's net benefits.

Moreover, some of the interviewees also elaborated on sustainability mechanism potentially ensuring continuation of the project's net benefits. For example, in regards an ongoing project in Borjomi region, the project manager at Borjomi Local Action Group responded confidently that sustainability will not be an issue after the project ends. He justified his confidence with the following statements: *„Borjomi Municipality is part of the project, as they needed to provide 10% of project co-financing. Therefore, their investment ensures that they are taking responsibility for the sustainable use of the products provided during the project“* (Interview 7). This statement is also confirmed by the OECD (2021) findings, which mention that increased national financial or budgetary commitments are seen positive indicators for project's sustainability and continuation of its net benefits. Therefore, this project approach could be considered as a good example for ensuring the sustainability of the Estonian-funded projects in the future.

Another positive example was mentioned by former deputy mayor of Kutaisi City Hall, who emphasised the importance of support from Estonian actors throughout the longer period: *“The cooperation was especially great, as we also continued it after couple of months, when we started to further implement the project. For example, our IT needed a lot of support. With other donors we usually receive something and then the support stops, but with Estonian's we had this continuation support which was part of the project”* (Interview 13).

Nevertheless, in general, the local organisations mentioned the need for continuation phases of the projects for ensuring that the net benefits are sustained after the project. They explained the need with the following statements: *„Often there is a challenge to implement project outcomes and make the project outcomes sustainable, because of the change in government administration. New people come and want new and fresh things and ideas. Therefore, a follow up project would be necessary to ensure the proper implementation of the project outcomes “* (Interview 13); *„ After getting*

*proof of the trainings positive impact, it would be important to prolong the project and keep on training new civil servants.* “(Interview 5)

On one hand the local organisations need for continuation projects can be seen as a positive sign of Estonian assistances’ relevance and importance for the recipients. Nevertheless, previous research has indicated that inability of the local organisation to further improve or maintain the project results themselves is a sign of problematic provision of assistance from the sustainability perspective. This is because the assistance is increasing recipient’s dependency and instead of addressing the causes of their issues, seem only to lead to more projects (Anderson, Brown and Jean, 2012). According to OECD’s definition, sustainable project, which ensures that net benefits are continued in the future, entails that local organisation’s capacity is built or strengthened so that the local organisation becomes resilient to absorb external changes and shocks themselves. However, with multiple Estonia-supported projects there were very few organisational capacity development aspects included in the project, according to the recipient organisations.

Therefore, when asking the director of DI about suggestions for future Estonian assistance, the director came up with potential follow up projects for strengthening organisational capacity: *„For further sustaining the impact Estonian projects, we would appreciate that our experts would be trained into trainers, hence a Training of Trainers (ToT) format of projects. This would enable us to provide necessary trainings ourselves instead of importing experts from abroad. I think this initiative would be highly effective for our organisational development“*(Interview 10). Another interviewee mentioned that: *“There is a need to support the civil servants with more practical aspects of capacity building, for example by assisting civil servants in developing relevant policy papers, in the following phases of the project.”* The interviewee after mentioned that this way the civil servants would themselves become able to push for various necessary reforms in their relevant government departments further (Interview 5).

In conclusion, the interviews revealed that Estonian assistance is much needed and sustaining the benefits of the assistance are seen important by all recipient organisations. Local organisations appreciate most the support which is persistent, strategic and long term, while short-term projects and strategy will likely cause further stress and instability for them. Furthermore, for the local organisations, it is important that the support includes organisational development mechanisms, which would ensure that the local organisations can independently sustain the project results after the support from the donor has ended. The suggestions for Estonian development assistance provision according to the sustainability criteria can be summarised by the following points.

- Local organisations want to sustain the results of Estonian funded projects. They see that increasing their organisational capacities is a way for sustaining the results of the projects. Therefore, inclusion of organisational capacity building aspects into the project are appreciated by the local organisation. For example, by including a provision of smaller scale advisory support into the project after a major part of the project has ended, enforcing the accountability of the duty bearers through co-funding mechanisms or ensuring that local organisation staff is trained to carry on the project after the donors support has ended.
- Multiple local organisations expressed that the support from Estonia has been short-term, consisting of one or maximum two times of funding. Nevertheless, according to the local organisations, short-term assistance creates instability and is counterproductive. Therefore, it is essential for the Estonian development actors to provide funding which is long-term and persistent enough to achieve local organisation's planned results.

## 7 Conclusion

The first aim of this study was to identify the factors contributing to valuable development assistance. Previous research has shown that these factors are often “donor-centric” and too frequently used to advance the donor’s view on how things should be done. Therefore, this study aimed to identify the factors for valuable development assistance from the perspectives of the receiving end of aid. Identified recipient-based factors include: the level of projects being developed and led by the recipients; the level of assistance being context-specific and based on the needs of the recipients; the level of trust between the recipients and donors; and the level of assistance being strategic and long-term.

Based on these indicators, a theoretical framework was developed. Furthermore, this framework was combined with the OECD-DAC three evaluation criteria of relevance, effectiveness and sustainability.

Previous studies, based on similar criteria, have concluded that development assistance recipients almost always mention international aid being a good thing that is appreciated. However, with the same frequency, it has been mentioned that development assistance as it is now provided is not achieving its intent (Anderson, Brown and Jean, 2012). Therefore, the second aim of this thesis was to investigate this claim and learn from the perspectives of the receiving end of development assistance, assess if aid is making a difference for them and give voice to their suggestions.

This was studied based on the case study of Estonian development assistance in Georgia. A three-week field study to Tbilisi, was undertaken, where a total of 17 interviews were conducted. The interviews covered the perspectives of 8 local organisations regarding 12 projects funded through Estonian development assistance.



It is important to emphasise that these study observations and suggestions are based on the combined viewpoint of local organisations included in the study sample. Therefore, there is a strong need for further research considering other groups of stakeholders, which would enable gathering a more comprehensive understanding regarding Estonian development assistance.

Nevertheless, the analysis of this specific interview data concluded the following insights regarding the relevance, effectiveness and sustainability of Estonian development assistance in Georgia:

First, local organisations appreciate Estonian development assistance and perceive it to be relevant. According to them, it is valued that Estonian aid is not externally pushed. Moreover, the aid is often aligned with the Georgian government's priorities and strategies, which is according to the recipients one of the most important factors for valuable development assistance. However, when observing relevance from the level of local organisations' participation and ownership regarding the project, issues such as limited participation during the start and designing phases of the project were observed. Therefore, to truly address the relevant needs of the local organisations further utilisation of participatory methods shall be introduced by the Estonian development actors.

Regarding effectiveness, local organisations say that Estonian development assistance is achieving the objectives set out for each project. The cooperation is also considered advantageous due to similar historic and geopolitical contexts between Georgia and Estonia. To further enhance the effectiveness of Estonian assistance, local organisations emphasise the need for a long-term development strategy for each supported organisation. Short-term and inconsistent support is seen counterproductive. Moreover, on multiple instances, the local organisations expressed the need for moving beyond of just introducing how the system works and receiving further practical assistance for implementing the ideas introduced by the Estonians.

Third, the interviews concluded that the local organisations want to sustain the results of Estonian-funded projects. Nevertheless, the support they have received has

often not been persistent enough to achieve this aim. Therefore, local organisations further need long-term and persistent funding, which would enable them to achieve their planned results. Furthermore, local organisations see projects which focus on developing their own organisational capacities and, in turn, enable them to sustain the project results after the donors work has ended, as highly valuable.

Finally, it can be concluded that there is a positively distinctive identity background of Estonian development work in Georgia. Estonian partners are often described with words such as "trust, friendship, similarities, they understand us, and they are comfortable partners to work with." This, in turn, means that Georgian recipient organisations' perceptions hold significant potential for Estonian actors to provide further valuable development assistance in the country. Nevertheless, to provide more valuable assistance, Estonian development cooperation requires stronger focus and prioritisation on the recipient's perspectives together with improvements regarding all three criteria of relevance, effectiveness and sustainability.

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# 9 Appendices

## Annex 1: List of interviews

- Interview 1. Deputy Head of Civil Service Bureau Georgia (CSB), Location: Zoom, Date:15.04.2022. Regarding project Development of central civil service training system in Georgia with PRAXIS think-tank.
- Interview 2. Former project manager at Data Exchange Agency (DEA), Location: Zoom, Date: 15.04.2022. Regarding project Twinning between Georgian Data Exchange Agency's (DEA) and e-Governance Academy (2016-2017), with e-Governance Academy.
- Interview 3. Head of Local Government and Internet Department at Institution for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI). Location: IDFI Office, Date: 11.04.2022. Regarding project How Good Governance Works in Practice: New e-Governance Initiatives to Meet OGP Commitments in Georgia (in GGI pilot cities Kutaisi, Batumi, Akhaltsikhe, and the Ministries of Finance and of Health), with e-Governance Academy.
- Interview 4. Project Manager at Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies (GFSIS). Location GFSIS office, Date: 14.04.2022. Regarding project Training of future Georgian public service leadership, with Estonian School of Diplomacy.
- Interview 5. Project Manager at Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies (GFSIS). Location GFSIS office, Date: 18.04.2022. Regarding project Training of future Georgian public service leadership, with Estonian School of Diplomacy.

Interview 6. Director and the project manager at NGO Anti-Violence Network of Georgia (AVNG). Location: AVNG Domestic Violence Shelter, Date: 12.04.2022. Regarding projects 1) Armenia, Georgia, Ukraine: Local ownership of democracy: transparent governance on local level; 2) Sharing Estonia's EU-related reform experiences with Imereti region, Georgia (2018) 3) Policy research about the reform developments in the Eastern Partnership Countries (2017-2018) with Estonian Centre for Development Cooperation (EstDev)/ Estonian Centre for Eastern Partnership (ECEAP).

Interview 7. Project manager at Borjomi Local Action Group/ Mercy Corps Georgia. Location: Tbilisi, Date:14.04.2022. Regarding project Enhancing the co-operation between civil society and governmental institution in Georgian rural areas: creation of voluntary rescue capabilities in Borjomi region with Estonian Voluntary Rescue Association.

Interview 8. Ambassador and Project manager at Economic Policy Research Center (EPRC). Location: Zoom, Date:13.04.2022. Regarding project Building a legislative framework for securing Georgia's strategic assets, with Tallinn Technical University Law School.

Interview 9. Former director of Diplomatic Training and Research Institute (DI), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, Location: Tbilisi, Date:14.04.2022. Regarding project Development of Diplomatic Training Centre of the Georgian MFA 2018-2020, with Estonian School of Diplomacy.

Interview 10. Director of Diplomatic Training and Research Institute (DI), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, Location: Tbilisi, Date:14.04.2022. Regarding project Development of Diplomatic Training Centre of the Georgian MFA 2018-2020, with Estonian School of Diplomacy.

Interview 11: Project Manager at Diplomatic Training and Research Institute (DI), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, Location: Tbilisi, Date:14.04.2022. Regarding project Development of Diplomatic Training Centre of the Georgian MFA 2018-2020, with Estonian School of Diplomacy.

- Interview 12. Former project manager at German Institute for development (GIZ).  
Location: Tbilisi, Date: 13.04.2022. Regarding project Introduction of IPSAS (International Public Sector Accounting Standards) on Local Government level in Georgia based on Estonian experience (2018), with ECEAP/ EstDev.
- Interview 13. Former Deputy Mayor in Kutaisi City Hall, Location: Zoom, Date: 18.04.2022. Regarding project How Good Governance Works in Practice: New e-Governance Initiatives to Meet OGP Commitments in Georgia (in GGI pilot cities Kutaisi, Batumi, Akhaltsikhe, and the Ministries of Finance and of Health), with e-Governance Academy.
- Background Interview 14. Estonian Ambassador to Georgia, Head of Development Cooperation, Diplomat. Location: Estonian Embassy in Tbilisi, Date: 13.04.2022.
- Background Interview 15. Head of development cooperation unit at the Embassy of Tbilisi to Estonia. Location: Zoom, Date:1.03.2022
- Meeting 16. Project manager at NGO Mondo. Location: Zoom, Date: 22.03.2022
- Meeting 17. Head Desk Officer of Eastern Europe Region and Head Expert of Humanitarian Assistance at Department of Development Cooperation in Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Location: Zoom, Date:28.01.2022

## Appendix 2: Example of an Informed Consent Form

### **Informed Consent Form for an Interview with IDFI**

My name is Hanna Pintson, and I am a master's degree student in Development Studies, at Lund University, in Sweden. I am conducting research for my Master Thesis project titled "The value of Estonian development assistance from the perspectives of the recipient organisations in Georgia, in the field of Good Governance and Democracy."

I would like to gain from your knowledge and perceptions through an interview. The interview focuses on the project between IDFI and eGA titled "New e-Governance Initiatives to Meet OGP Commitments in Georgia (2016-2018)." The aim of this interview is to gain insights into your | and IDFI perspectives of that project.

Please note that the participation in this interview is voluntary. I am not asking you to share any confidential information, and you do not have to answer any question or take part in the interview if you do not wish to do so.

This research will publish findings according to the interviewees preferred level of anonymity (please choose and state your preference from the options below):

- ◇ Completely anonyms, meaning that the interviewee will be referred as *a representative of a local implementing organisation*.
- ◇ Anonyms by interviewee name, but the *name of the local implementing organisation* can be mentioned in the research.
- ◇ The *interviewee name and the local implementing organisation* can be mentioned in the research.
- ◇ Other preference.

The interview will take place on a private location where the interviewer and the interviewee can speak freely and openly. The expected time for the interview session is approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour.

If you agree, the interview will be audio-recorded. Information recorded is confidential, and no one else except the researcher will access it.

If the interviewee has any further requirements posed prior or during the interview, these will be considered and written down below:

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**To confirm your permission for having the interview, please provide your oral consent**