

# **Belarus:**

Local governance and cooperation  
between Local Authorities (LAs)  
and Civil Society Organisations  
(CSOs) for development





# System of local government in Belarus

- A rigid vertical of executive power implementing the will of the president.
- Local authorities (chairman of the district or city executive committee , chairman of the local council) are just the lower levels of the formal hierarchy.

In reality, it looks not always so.

- There is **great diversity** in the organization of life in regions, towns, districts.
- There are **informal relationships** between people that influence implementation of power in local areas.
- There are **deviations** from the standard form of management.
- Local authorities must take into account **the specific conditions** of a town or region.

## Local governance includes the following questions:

- Who participate in local governance? Which groups have influence on decision-making, from where the people are recruited to power positions? Who can influence the appointment of local staff?
- What is the object of management? What is covered by the local power, where the power is applied?
- How the power is implemented? What are the ways and mechanisms of management?

## **Local authorities: WHO GOVERNS?**

- The town/district is ruled by people or entities that control (influence) personal filling of key positions in the local administration.

## Groups and structures of influence

In the perception of local residents , the authorities may be “our own” or “aliens”.

- “Our own” usually come from this town or area, i.e. people whose personal story is familiar to local residents.
- “Aliens” - mostly those who came from another region and do not familiar to the towns’ people.

The same we can say about the influence groups and structures.

- “Our own” are groups and structures which are linked (in personal history) with the town in which they realize their power aspirations.  
"Aliens" - are external to the town or district people who however affect the power in the town or district.

There is always some combination of the influence of "us" and "them."



# "Aliens"

- The authorities are controlled by superior state structures of the district or the regional level. Local municipalities perform their regulations with the minimal own initiative (Turov, Mstislavl)
- The authorities are controlled by outside corporate structures : the military, law enforcement, industrial , power groups in the central country administration (Chavusy, Shchuchin, Lepel, Kamjanets).

# “Our own”

- **Clans or families** that control the administrative appointment and conduct business (Glubokoe);
- **“Quasi-community”** of people who worked together for a long time, and developed close personal relationship (in industry, business, with ties to the central government, etc. ) (Postavy)
- **Ecclesial community** (Olshany). Most of the inhabitants in Olshany belong to the Pentecostal community, have agricultural business (cultivation and sale of cucumbers). Corporate solidarity allows them to effectively lobby for their interests .

## **For management the local government uses a system of indicators:**

- 1) The system of social standards, economic and development indicators** on national level and socio-economic development plans of individual towns (State complex programs of development of the regions, small and medium towns, the state system of social standards of public service, etc.).
- 2) An additional system of indicators** reflecting how "**problem-free**" is the town/district: the level of undesirable socio-economic activity.

## **A system of indicators for the town is based on the following definition:**

- Town of regional subordination - town with a population of over 6000 people having industrial enterprises, the set of institutions with socio-cultural purposes, with the prospect of further development and population growth.
- This definition sets the criteria for what is good for the town and what is not.

- **Activities, which are covered by indicators'** system is the subject to impact for local authorities. That's what they run.

- **Activity that does not fit into the system of indicators** drops out of sight. The local administration tries **to suppress** this activity, in accordance with the general principle "Everything is forbidden that is not expressly permitted."

- In the case of **considerable benefit, at low cost**, and a **small degree of threat** to break the established indicators, local authorities can go on such a risky venture.

- There is space of activities which are not forbidden , but not permitted, the "gap".
- The art of management in small towns is the management of the “gap”.



## **Society in local areas**

- The alienation of the population from power is seen as a normal and natural state of things.
- The population of Belarus did not perceive themselves as a source of power in their own city.
- Self-government for citizens is a revolutionary idea.

# Situation of CSOs

- Fragmentation, no networking, poor contacts
- Independent CSOs and GONGO
- Concerned about survival
- Successful cases exist and are closely connected to the personalities of leaders, other key stakeholders.

## Civil society: goals

- Quality of life – as the freedom of choice.
- Quality of life involves , firstly , the presence of the range of possible ways of life, and secondly, possibility of their implementation , as well as the conditions for dialogue and harmonization of different lifestyles ( find compromises without leveling diversity).

## Important characteristics of local situation

- Sparse urban environment which leads to fragmentation of people's efforts.
- Historical and cultural "gaps" (related to culture heritage, historical artefacts, contemporary culture products)

# Boundaries of possible cooperation (cooperation strategies)

Option 1 . CSOs built into the system ,  
strengthening local government and preserving  
the status quo

Option 2 . Strengthening the "marginalized" CSO  
actors.

Option 3. "Enrichment techniques" for people  
and situations - the cultivation of community,  
civic activism, awareness raising, development  
of proper urban environment and  
communication sites, etc.