

Georgia CCM
Oversight Committee
Field Visit to Batumi
January 25-26, 2018

Sites of the visit:

1. Batumi Infectious Diseases, AIDS and TB Regional Centre
2. Batumi Center for Mental Health and Prevention of Addiction. Methadone substitution therapy program
3. Georgian Harm Reduction Network (GHRN)/Imedi
4. Center for Information and Counseling on Reproductive Health TANADGOMA, Batumi branch
5. HIV/AIDS Patients Support Foundation, Batumi branch
6. Batumi Resource Center, “Identoba”

Purpose of the visit: to assess the current status of the implementation of GFATM-funded HIV and TB programmes and to identify challenges that impede their operations.

Objective of the visits:

1. Collect information from SRs and SSRs about the implementation of GFATM-funded programmes, their performance and operations;
2. Review challenges in the process of grant implementation and discuss ways of their overcoming.

Methodology:

- ✓ Discussion with project implementation staff.
- ✓ Conducting interviews with beneficiaries of programmes.

All these organizations have direct communication with program beneficiaries (Female sex workers (FSWs), Men who have sex with men (MSMs), and injecting drug users (IDUs)).

1. Infectious Diseases, AIDS and TB Regional Centre in Batumi

Participants

Tamar Bortsvadze – CCM, Chair of OC

Irina Grdzleidze – CCM, Executive Secretary

Natia Khonelidze – CCM, Administrative Assistant

Dimitri Tsetskhladze – Batumi Infectious Diseases, AIDS and TB Regional Centre, Head of TB department

Soso Sikharulidze - Batumi Infectious Diseases, AIDS and TB Regional Centre, Phtisiologist

Nino Tunadze - Batumi Infectious Diseases, AIDS and TB Regional Centre, Phtisiologist

Nargiza Beridze - Batumi Infectious Diseases, AIDS and TB Regional Centre, Head of HIV/AIDS department

Tamaz Karanadze - Batumi Infectious Diseases, AIDS and TB Regional Centre, Acting Director

Kirakoz Zananiani - Batumi Infectious Diseases, AIDS and TB Regional Centre

Ketevan Tsereteli - Batumi Infectious Diseases, AIDS and TB Regional Centre

Tengiz Chogadze - Batumi Infectious Diseases, AIDS and TB Regional Centre, adherence consultant

Irma Tavartkiladze - Batumi Infectious Diseases, AIDS and TB Regional Centre, Phtisiologist

Irma Davitadze - Batumi Infectious Diseases, AIDS and TB Regional Centre, Phtisiologist

Mziuri Gabodze - Batumi Infectious Diseases, AIDS and TB Regional Centre, Phtisiologist

Zaza Babunashvili - Batumi Infectious Diseases, AIDS and TB Regional Centre, Phtisiologist

Tuberculosis

The following topics were under focus during the meeting with the staff of Batumi Infectious Diseases, AIDS and TB Regional Centre:

- **Inadequate infrastructure** was named as one of the acute problems, which creates a barrier for proper service provision. The MDR TB in-patient ward (10 beds in total) has been renovated with assistance of MSF though improper infrastructure of in-patient ward for sensitive TB patients still remains a challenge. The Center is willing to renovate the mentioned premises (first floor) using its own resources (dividends) and asked the OC to raise this issue before the CCM. The laboratory will also be placed there. For this purpose the Center is requesting using its dividends. As the management of the Center declared the approval lies within the mandate of MoLHSA. It was asked to raise of this issue at the CCM.
- **Licensing conditions.** There is non-favorable situation in terms of provisions services in the service centers organizationally integrated with district hospitals of general profile. For example, proper service provision for the patients is problematic in the small slot

allotted for TB treatment in the Batumi Republican hospital. Due to expiration of licensing conditions some centers are facing the possibility of being closed.

- In summer of 2017 some delay was observed in terms of timely submission of incentives for TB patients. Though it was improved in following months. It was noted that by the date of the OC visit (January 25) the incentives have not been received yet.
- According to the leadership of the Center the problems in terms of **drug stock** was not observed. By the time of the OC visit the Center had quarterly stock of all medicines.
- The management of the Center expressed their concern with regard to downsizing the Kobuleti staff by 1 doctor and 1 nurse. As stated by them, existing Human Resources is not sufficient for managing expanded referral of the patients. It was noted that the patients are referred to Batumi also from Guria region.
- The readiness for introducing VOT was expressed by the staff. This will facilitate the observation of treatment conditions.

HIV

The meeting was attended by Ms. Nargiza Beridze, Head of HIV/AIDS department. She articulated the concern of HIV patients travelling to Turkey for work. They have to leave country for several months. The problem is that one month take away dosage of ARV is allowed. She asked the CCM to support putting in place mechanism allowing exception for such patients for three months take away dosages.

2. Batumi Center for Mental Health and Prevention of Addiction. Methadone substitution therapy program

Participants

Tamar Bortsvadze – CCM, Chair of OC

Irina Grdzleidze – CCM, Executive Secretary

Natia Khonelidze – CCM, Administrative Assistant

Maia Kontselidze - Batumi Center for Mental Health and Prevention of Addiction

The following topics were under focus during the meeting:

- **Insufficient Human Resources:** Starting from July 2017 methadone substitution program became free of charge for all beneficiaries. Resulting from this the referral of the patients has considerably increased. This year, during the last 1 month 44 people were

enrolled and overall number of the patients increased from 276 to 320. Despite the tendency towards increased number of the patients, the number of the staff was not increased. According to the leadership the existing human resources is not sufficient to manage increased inflow of the patients. Due to this the queues of the patients in the process of receiving medicine are observed.

- During the meeting it was highlighted that **take away dosages** represent a significant barrier for enrollment and stay in the opioid substitution program. It was noted that allowing take away dosage for reliable patients would solve this problem. It was noted that private clinics providing subutex therapy allow take away dosage for several days.
- **The device for optimization of issue of methadone is out of order.** This prolongs the process. The staff stated that the process has been approximately prolonged by three times.
- The center has unfavorable **infrastructure**. The heating is also problematic. Due to infrastructure the detox program is closed.
- At this stage **only one woman** is enrolled in methadone substitution program. In previous years more referral from women was observed. After a certain period the number of women considerably decreased. Stigma and in some cases discriminatory approach from men-beneficiaries towards women-beneficiaries represent a significant barrier for enrollment into the program for women. The issue of allotting separate time for provision the services to women was highlighted though it was noted that implementation of such approach would be very problematic considering existing insufficient human resources.
- The issue of adding one social worker to the center was highlighted. The employee would support the patients during the enrollment with collecting necessary documentation and with other bureaucratic procedures.

3. Georgian Harm Reduction Network (GHRN)/Imedi

Participants:

Tamar Bortsvadze – CCM, Chair of OC

Irina Grdzleidze – CCM, Executive Secretary

Natia Khonelidze – CCM, Administrative Assistant

Zoria Tsurtsunia - Imedi, Board Chair

Miranda Jgenti – Imedi

Tmar Esebua – Imedi, VCT Consultant

Maia Butsashvili – HRU, Member of OC

Imedi, which provides HIV secondary prevention services to injected drug users, covers around 600 patients monthly.

- **Needs:** To improve organisational infrastructure; the organisation expressed the need for a projector, office chairs which are not encompassed by the GF program.
- **The issue of women-beneficiaries utilizing prevention services** was highlighted during the meeting. It was noted that during previous years more women were using the services provided by the Center. This fact was related to dissemination of special hygienic items by the Center. At this stage the number of women-beneficiaries has been decreased which according to the staff is related to the compartmentalization of such services.
- **Mobile ambulatories** used by the organization for Hep C screening throughout the region do not have an access to Stop Hep C data base. This makes impossible identification of those patients who have already undergone rapid Hep C testing.

4. Tanadgoma

Participants:

Tamar Bortsvadze – CCM, Chair of OC

Irina Grdzleidze – CCM, Executive Secretary

Natia Khonelidze – CCM, Administrative Assistant

Rati Tsintsadze – Tanadgoma, Social Worker

Keti Jubladze - Tanadgoma, Social Worker

Zaza Babunashvili – Tanadgoma, Consultant

Roman Trmanidze - Tanadgoma, Direvr

Shota Makharadze - Tanadgoma, Social Worker

Medea Gugunava - Tanadgoma, Consultant

Imeda Siradze - Tanadgoma

Ekaterine Oragvelidze - Tanadgoma, Social Worker

Ilia Urushadze- Tanadgoma, Social Worker

Giorgi Bolkvadze - Tanadgoma, Social Worker

Natia Kharati – Tanadgoma, Director of Batumi branch

Program Beneficiaries

The meeting with Tanadgoma was representative, with more than 10 members of staff in attendance, including all social workers and VCT consultants. The following topics were raised and discussed by Tanadgoma staff during the visit:

- **Reaching the target:** The expansion of interventions towards Gonio and Sarphi has considerably increased the indicator on reaching sex-workers with prevention services. The coverage of MSM-s has been increased as well, which is the result of active, proper cooperation and coordination with Identoba resource centre.
- **Beneficiary needs:** according to the social workers, some MSM-beneficiaries expressed their non-satisfaction with regard to the quality of the lubricants in the prevention package. As per them, lubricants provided last year were of a better quality thus the desire for having the same lubricants provided last year was expressed.
- There are frequent cases **of the violence towards FSWs from their clients.** Based on the fact that provision of sex-services is stigmatized and prostitution represents an administrative offence the majority of sex-workers do not reveal their activities. Usually they do not ask for assistance since they are afraid of administrative penalties and in general prefer not to refer to law-enforcement bodies. Thus the violation of rights of sex-workers remains without response.
- **Beneficiaries' view:** The OC Chair had a meeting with one MSM and two sex-workers. All of them expressed their gratitude for the services provided and expressed the desire for the distribution of wet-wipes.

5. HIV/AIDS Patients Support Foundation, Batumi branch

Participants:

Tamar Bortsvadze – CCM, OC Chair

Irina Grdzeldze – CCM, Executive Secretary

Natia Khonelidze – CCM, Administrative Assistant

Giorgi Dokhnadze - HIV/AIDS Patients Support Foundation

Ekaterine Natsvlshvili - HIV/AIDS Patients Support Foundation

Galina Kosunkova – HIV/AIDS Patients Support Foundation

Marine Chelidze - HIV/AIDS Patients Support Foundation

- According to the staff the last year demand regarding computers is still valid. The need for condoms stock is valid as well. Despite the fact that the organization is provided with the certain amount of condoms on non-systematic basis, it's insufficient and the organization has to frequently request the condoms from other organizations (e.g from Tanadgoma).
- According to staff starting from last year they are actively cooperating with Batumi Infectious Diseases, AIDS and TB Regional Centre. The staff can directly meet with the patients on certain days of the week, have conversations with them and if needed to coordinate the receipt of the relevant services (e.g psychological services). Such approach appears to be effective and the consultancies provided to HIV positive patients increased.

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6. Identoba Resource Centre

Participants:

Tamar Bortsvadze – CCM, OC Chair

Irina Grdzeldze – CCM, Executive Secretary

Natia Khonelidze – CCM, Administrative Assistant

Natia Kharatishvili – Identoba

Marina Gordeziani – Identoba, project manager

Sofiko Pataraiia – Identoba, Batumi Resource Center Manager

Ketevan Lejava – Identoba, psychologist

Valtina Voronina – Identoba, VCT Consultant

Starting from 2015 the organization has been performing the Global Fund project aimed at mobilization of LGBT community for HIV prevention.

The following topics were discussed during the meeting:

- According to the staff due to insufficiency in qualified human resources it appear to be quite difficult to staff the organization with professionals having at the same time qualification and sensitive approach towards the topics of LGBT community. The management of Batumi office has been changed 3 times during 2 years. This is not desirable in terms of organizational and project management.
- The problem related to adequate office space. In common cases the organization has to leave the office due to homophobic attitude from the neighbors and/or owners' side. The organization has to change the office for several times and finally, just several months

ago, they moved to the current office. The leadership expressed the hope that current space and the location of the office separately from the neighbors will have them possibility for smooth continuation of their activities.

- According to leadership the sufficient stock of prevention material is in place. There is no delay in terms of the disbursement of the salaries and reporting.
- Recently one psychologist and one social worker have been added to the staff. The possibility to undertake outreach gives more opportunities for reaching the beneficiaries and increased coverage.