



**WE  
WOMEN  
HAVE POWER**

**WE  
WOMEN  
HAVE POWER**



### KVEMO KARTLI

#### MARNEULI MUNICIPALITY

MARADISI	10
KHULDARA AND MOLAOGLI	13

#### TETRITSKARO MUNICIPALITY

ASURETI	22
JORJIASHVILI	28
CHIVCHAVI	34



### SAMTSKHE-JAVAKHETI

#### AKHALTSIKHE MUNICIPALITY

SVIRI	40
-------	----

#### ASPINDZA MUNICIPALITY

TOLOSHI	46
KHERTVISI	53



### KAKHETI

#### LAGODEKHI MUNICIPALITY

CHIAURI	60
SHROMA	62
VARDISUBANI	66
KARTUBANI	68

#### TELAVI MUNICIPALITY

RUISPIRI	72
KARAJALA	74

#### AKHMETA MUNICIPALITY

SABUE	76
KORETI	78
TSINUBANI	81
BIRKIANI	84

The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily represent the views of UN Women, the United Nations or any of its affiliated organizations or that of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the Austrian Development Cooperation (ADC).

The publication was prepared in the framework of the project “Women’s Economic Empowerment in the South Caucasus”, funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the Austrian Development Cooperation (ADC).

Author: Nino Natroshvili (UN Women)  
 Photographer: Tako Robakidze  
 Designer: Tornike Lortkipanidze  
 Translator: Lela Dumbadze  
 Editor: Michelle Minaskanian (UN Women)

© 2024 UN Women  
 All rights reserved.





## WE WOMEN HAVE POWER

Since 2013, the UN Women Country Office in Georgia has been working on strengthening the capabilities and skills of women living in rural areas with the support of social mobilization. Community training sessions on this topic help them to continually

participate in how local priorities and budgeting are determined. Through this initiative, women in different parts of Georgia now engage in volunteer activism, create self-help groups, conduct needs studies and present the results to their local self-governments in

round-table meetings – and then they take care of solving these problems.

Social mobilization is being carried out across various municipalities in cooperation with partner organizations, namely the TASO Foundation and the Kakheti Regional Development Foundation. Taking place in four of Georgia's regions – Kvemo Kartli, Kakheti, Mtskheta-Mtianeti and Samtskhe-Javakheti – this initiative is part of the UN Women regional project “Women's Economic Empowerment in the South Caucasus” and is supported by the Governments of Switzerland and Austria.

Since the social mobilization initiative first launched in these regions in 2019, self-help groups have united 727 women. In 2023 alone, they interviewed 8,105 people and, to improve their living conditions, implemented more than 30 initiatives in cooperation with self-governments. Through their own work and success, they have set an example for

other women to improve not only their own lives but also daily life in the villages. They themselves have also changed for the better: they got out of their homes, got involved in the life of their community, got to know and support one another, and became more self-confident, determined and united through their newfound knowledge.

Unfortunately, despite these successful results, the work and contribution of these activist women are not properly appreciated. So, this publication is about their accomplishments – about the tangible and impressive changes that they have made to improve daily life in villages in Kvemo Kartli, Kakheti and Samtskhe-Javakheti,\* bringing new light and hope to their communities.

The stories you will read will both inspire you and convince you that women have a lot of power indeed.

\* The region of Mtskheta-Mtianeti was added to the second phase of the project and therefore is not included in this publication.



**KVEMO KARTLI**

# MARNEULI MUNICIPALITY MARADISI



**I**n 1989, the landslide in Adjara turned thousands of people into ecomigrants. After leaving their native home, some of them settled in Kvemo Kartli, including the village of Maradisi, although it was difficult to start a new life in the hard years of the 1990s. The families stayed overnight in railway boxcars. They had no water, no natural gas and no electricity, but gradually they got back on their feet. New residents joined them and turned Maradisi into a village full of life.

Currently, 49 families, a total of about 240 people, live here. The population is partly engaged in livestock breeding but mainly in gardening, and they sell their harvest in Tbilisi.

Sometimes, parents unexpectedly discover that they can learn a lot even from their own children. This is exactly what happened in the lives of the women of Maradisi: the children, who were in the school Eco Club, became the initiators of garbage removal – an important problem not only for them but also for the entire village.

Until 2022, there were no bins in Maradisi at all. Local

---

Young people from Maradisi, members of the Eco Club, who installed homemade garbage cans near the local school. They made these bins themselves and distributed them across every street in the village, except for the school grounds.

residents collected waste in plastic bags and dumped them in specially dug pits at the entrance and exit of the village. They often had to drag those bags by hand for quite a long distance, so sometimes they asked someone with a car to help them. Due to the lack of bins, garbage was mostly dumped right on the ground in the streets of the village, which sometimes even poisoned the livestock, attracted reptiles and polluted the environment.

After joining the Eco Club, the young residents of Maradisi primarily decided to hold a clean-up campaign. They then

“BEFORE, WE THOUGHT THAT [PARTICIPATING] WAS NOT WOMEN’S BUSINESS, SO WE WOULD JUST ASK OUR HUSBANDS WHAT HAPPENED AT THE MEETINGS.”

made handmade bins from used washing machines and barrels and placed them on every street in the village. The children’s enthusiasm strongly motivated their mothers. At that time, the women were already involved in a social mobilization project organized by UN Women and were also learning how to present the village’s problems to the self-government for consideration. After seeing their children’s activism, they decided to appeal to Marneuli City Hall and ask for a garbage truck for the village. They submitted an application, went to meetings, fought to the end and were successful. Today, a car comes to the village once or twice a week to take out the garbage. In Maradisi, one landfill has been completely cleared, and the other one is

no longer polluted, although the women want this place to be quickly cleaned as well.

“Before, we thought that [participating] was not women’s business, so we would just ask our husbands what happened at the meetings,” says Naira Bolkvadze, a farmer and community worker from Maradisi. “But before long, we realized that we knew better and had to intervene in everything. Since then, we have become more active and now attend all of the village meetings.”

That is how the local women became aware of their rights and now know what to do and how they should pursue the interests of the village. So they are already making plans: there is no kindergarten in the village, so the parents take their children to Marneuli with a rented minivan at their own expense. They want to ask the self-government to allocate transport and solve this problem. In the future, they want to build a park and an open stage, where they will hold presentations and film screenings for the local residents.



Ramila Afandieva, a 53-year-old teacher from Khuldara, in her own home. Ramila lives by the village road. Thanks to local women’s activism, the road to Khuldara was paved. As a result, Ramila’s daily life completely changed, as did the lives of Khuldara’s other residents.

## MARNEULI MUNICIPALITY KHULDARA AND MOLAAGLI

**K**huldara and Molaogli are villages located on the Georgia-Armenia border. Both are populated by Azerbaijani speakers, so they have different, culturally specific needs. More than 250 families live in Khuldara and 300 in Molaogli; among them, there are quite a lot of young people. Both villages are alive and active. The inhabitants mainly grow fruits and vegetables and then sell them on the street or in Marneuli’s market.

**“WE ARE PROUD THAT WE DID THIS AND SHOWED THE POPULATION WHAT WE CAN ACHIEVE! WE HAVE CREATED EXAMPLES FOR OTHER AZERBAIJANI WOMEN, EXAMPLES THAT ARE VERY IMPORTANT.”**

Ramila Afandieva is a civic education teacher at Khuldara Public School. She is 53 years old and often jokes about her life, saying that she has spent more than half of it cleaning her flat and doing her children’s laundry. Ramila lives by the village road, although it was impossible to call it a ‘road’ as such until 2021. Before then, it was completely dilapidated, and in the summer, every passing car made tremendous noise and left a thick layer of dust not only in Ramila’s house but also in the houses of her fellow villagers. The so-called road also made all of Khuldara so muddy that it was impossible to take the local children to school.

Due to the lack of normal roads, movement for both pedestrians and vehicles was

not only difficult but also risky, especially in winter. There was also no public transport. Even taxi drivers refused to go to Khuldara from the district centres, so the villagers had to walk 4 kilometres on foot to reach the neighbouring station.

“Even the ambulance could not get to us,” Ramila recalls. “Once, an eighth grader was injured at school, and we had to carry the child down to the main road in our arms. The doctor then told us that if we had been a little later, it would have been very difficult for them to save the child.”

After this incident, local women involved in social mobilization took the initiative, started advocacy campaigns, held a village meeting, invited journalists and asked self-government representatives to solve the problem at a round-table meeting. Their steps turned out to be decisive: not only in Khuldara but also in neighbouring Molaogli, the road was paved for the first time in the history of these villages.

This completely changed everyday life in Khuldara and Molaogli: after solving the road problem, it became possible to provide the villages with natural gas, and the problem of garbage more or less improved. There are five bins in the village: two were purchased by the women within the project, and three were supplied by the self-government. Now the garbage truck serving Maradisi can reach both Khuldara and Molaogli too. The villages are

better supplied with food and hygiene products, and Ramila jokes that after so many years, she has a chance to fearlessly invite guests to her house.

“We are proud that we did this and showed the population what we can achieve! We have created examples for other Azerbaijani women, examples that are very important,” says Ramila, adding that her house no longer needs frequent cleaning, so now she has more time for activism.

The road connecting Khuldara and Molaogli, which was paved for the first time in the history of the villages.







\* \* \*

Bahar Mamedova and Gunel Jalilova, both 20 years old, live in Molaogli and are childhood friends and classmates. After finishing school, the two girls chose to pursue the same profession and are now studying psychology at Ilia State University in Tbilisi.

Commuting to university is not easy for Bahar and Gunel. Since the construction of the road, there have been private

shuttle taxis going to Tbilisi, but the girls say that the transport schedule does not always coincide with their study schedule. So to attend their lectures, they sometimes have to walk to the village of Sadakhlo on foot, then travel by transport first to Marneuli and then to Tbilisi. In all, it takes them about three hours to reach Tbilisi. Public transport continues to be a problem for the other residents of Molaogli as well.

Bahar Mamedova and Gunel Jalilova on Molaogli's main road. It is still difficult for the girls to attend lectures in Tbilisi due to infrequent public transport options.



\* \* \*

Due to the lack of irrigation, 39-year-old Kamala Tashtamirova's 38 saplings of persimmon rotted last year. Kamala lives in Molaogli, where she grows fruits and vegetables, keeps part of the harvest for home and sells the rest on the street or in Marneuli's market to create additional income for her family.

In Khuldara and Molaogli, gardens and orchards are mostly tended by women, like

Kamala. They work very hard, but sometimes all of their work goes to waste because they cannot water their fruit trees and vegetables. Kamala tries to save her crops with drinking water, but this effort is not enough.

"I want to make my kiwi plant happy," says Kamala. "I have a [water] tank, but it is an extremely arduous process: it takes three days to fill it completely, and during that time, the plant is already dying."

Kamala Tashtamirova from Molaogli watering her kiwi plant with drinking water collected in a tank in her garden, trying to save the plant from drying out. The problem of irrigation water in the village is still unsolved.



Kamala Tashtamirova at home by her tap. The problem with running water has somewhat improved.

Thanks to the work of women involved in social mobilization, the problem of drinking water in Khuldara and Molaogli has been partially resolved. Irrigation water, however, is still a concern for the population, especially since the cultivation of fruits and vegetables in these villages is an important source of income for many. The local women continue to work on solving this problem.

Unfortunately, there are no playgrounds for children in these villages. The only small, modest square at the entrance of Khuldara was, once again, created thanks to the work of local women. Together, they cleared out the former garbage dump, added outdoor lighting with the help of the city hall, made it a green space and turned it into an orderly, cosy corner, making the children happy. However, this small square is not enough for everyone, so the women want to build a playground in Khuldara and install speed bumps on the road. Another concern of theirs is the kindergarten: since there is only one kindergarten group in the whole community, the women are forced to take their children to Sadakhlo, so they plan to open a kindergarten in Khuldara or Molaogli too.



A small square at the entrance of Khuldara. This is the only place where children from Khuldara and Molaogli come together. Their peers often come here even from neighbouring villages.



TETRITSKARO MUNICIPALITY  
**ASURETI**

**A** Georgian village with a German heritage and a rich, interesting past, Asureti is located just 29 kilometres from Tbilisi and attracts many tourists with its outstanding history. The architecture, culture and environment created by the German colonists who settled in Georgia at the beginning of the nineteenth century are of particular interest to visitors. In the 1940s, the Germans were deported from the then-named Elisabethal, and the village was resettled by Georgians from Racha, Ambrolauri and Oni and was given its old name, Asureti. There are many sights of that period in Asureti, including the Lutheran Cathedral, an ancient, unique cellar, and residential houses built in the German architectural style. Asureti is also associated with the famous “Shala” wine, produced from a rare grape variety cultivated by German farmer Otto Schall. Even today, the wine of the same name made by the locals is one of the hallmarks of the village. Asureti is an active and large settlement of about 1,250 residents.

Running water is only available in the morning and only for three hours; however, residents of Asureti also remember a time when not a drop came from the taps for months, so even this difficult schedule is a great relief for them. Asure-

---

One of Asureti's cisterns, the only places where the population can access water. Due to the lack of filtration, however, locals use this water for domestic purposes only.

tians get water from special cisterns, but due to pollution, it is unfit for drinking, so the population mostly have to buy their drinking water.

Although this problem has been partly solved as a result of the women's active involvement in social mobilization, they have not stopped working on it. With their advocacy, the supply of potable water has begun. The project should be completed in 2024.



Women in Asureti now able to walk along the streets because, as a result of their activism, the roads have been paved, outdoor lighting has been installed, and travel has become safer.

“THEY BELIEVED THAT WE WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN ABLE TO DO ANYTHING [ON OUR OWN]. NOW THAT WE HAVE ACHIEVED MINOR RESULTS, WE HAVE BECOME MORE SELF-CONFIDENT AND CAN THINK ABOUT WHAT ELSE WE CAN ACHIEVE.”

\* \* \*

You can often hear in Asureti that the residents have gotten to know one another better over the past few years. Outdoor lighting was installed thanks to women’s activism, and the lighting and

paving of the roads illuminated the darkened village, revived the place and made it safe to get around. So today, the locals walk along the historic streets of Asureti in the evenings and often meet up with one another.

“At first, many people in the village thought that we had a material interest [in the improvements],” explains Shorena Metreveli, one of the locals involved in social mobilization. “They would ask us directly, ‘How much money do they pay you?’ because they believed that we would not have been able to do anything otherwise.



Nino Chelidze, 54, collecting plastic bottles. Local women involved in social mobilization will hand them over to a designated collection point in exchange for cash that they will use to support their work.



Now that we have achieved minor results, we have become more self-confident and can think about what else we can achieve.”

The women have also set an example of environmental protection for their fellow villagers: in the room that they use for meetings, they have a special storage closet where they keep plastic bottles. Some of them are collected during clean-up campaigns, while others are brought to them by the locals. They want to hand them over to a designated collection point in Rustavi and use the obtained money for the group’s continued work.

“In this way, we are both protecting the environment

and increasing our income at the same time,” says Shorena. “We can set a good example for others, so that they may follow our lead as well.”

Asureti’s women continue to work. They not only want to build a hall for gatherings but also really want to make their own contribution to the realization of the village’s tourism potential. This includes restoring the historic sulfur bath, near which sulfur healing water runs naturally, and turning it into another landmark of Asureti, as well as opening a small booth for visitors to treat the guests with local dishes and to offer souvenirs.

Shorena Metreveli in Asureti, near the spring where sulfur healing water runs naturally. Historically, there was also a sulfur bath in the vicinity of this place.

## TETRITSKARO MUNICIPALITY JORJIASHVILI

The village of Jorjiashvili, where the Silk Road historically used to pass, still maintains its strategic trade importance and key functions along the highway. Its proximity to Asureti also increases the tourism potential of the village. More than 1,000 people live in Jorjiashvili.

In the morning, when the trucks start running, it becomes especially dangerous to travel on the central road in Jorjiashvili. In particular, this is the time of day when children have to go to kindergarten and school. And in general, in a crowded, active village where all of the key facilities are on the roadside, safe movement is very important for people every day.

First of all, the danger is caused by the lack of sidewalks, which is why the locals are forced to be careful when walking on the side of the road and do not let children go anywhere



alone. In Jorjiashvili, they have been asking for the creation of sidewalks and the installation of speed bumps for a long time, although with no success.

“Numerous traffic accidents have occurred on the central road,” says Nino Sarukhanov,

who is involved in social mobilization and works together with other local women to solve the problem of road safety. “There is one extremely sharp turn where nothing is visible; thus, it is even more dangerous there. We are all afraid, especially

since children on their way to school have no other choice but to cross the road.” The local women have solved the problem of paving internal roads in the village, and now they want to be more active in ensuring greater road safety as well.

Nino Sarukhanov, who lives in Jorjiashvili, with her children on the central road of the village. Due to the lack of sidewalks and speed limits, this is one of the most dangerous places for locals.



Residents of Jorjiashvili in the public transport waiting area, which serves various functions for the villagers. It is one of the main gathering places for the locals.

\* \* \*

In any weather – sunny, rainy or windy – the locals of Jorjiashvili were waiting for transport in the elements, on the road. Only after the local women’s activism, a waiting area was built. The villagers can now take shelter from bad weather and peacefully wait for transport and for their children, who are enrolled in art

classes or sports clubs, to safely come back home. This place has become one of the main gathering spaces for them.

The women now want to turn the small yard near Arsena Jorjiashvili Museum into a green square arranged with park benches, and they are also thinking about renovating the museum itself in the future.



Children playing on one of the streets in Jorjiashvili. However, as soon as a car appears, they have to stop their game and wait for it to pass. There is no safe space for them to have fun in the village.

\* \* \*

The narrow streets of Jorjiashvili are filled with children in the evenings. Ball games, skating, cycling – there is lots of entertainment, but the most important thing is lacking: a safe space where young people can have fun freely. Parents are very worried about this issue. The drivers who have to

navigate through streets full of children are also worried.

At this time, in a secluded part of the village and away from the road, there is a huge free space: it is the field that once actually served as a stadium, now overgrown with plants but still promising enormous potential. The local women involved in social mobiliza-



tion say that there is enough room for all of the children in the entire village to gather here. They could play football and basketball, and it would still be possible to find space for other activities for minors. Once the green space is created and the lighting installed, the village will have acquired a new recreation area. The women in Jorjiashvili have already collected signatures and approached the self-government with the relevant request. Now they are waiting for an adequate response.

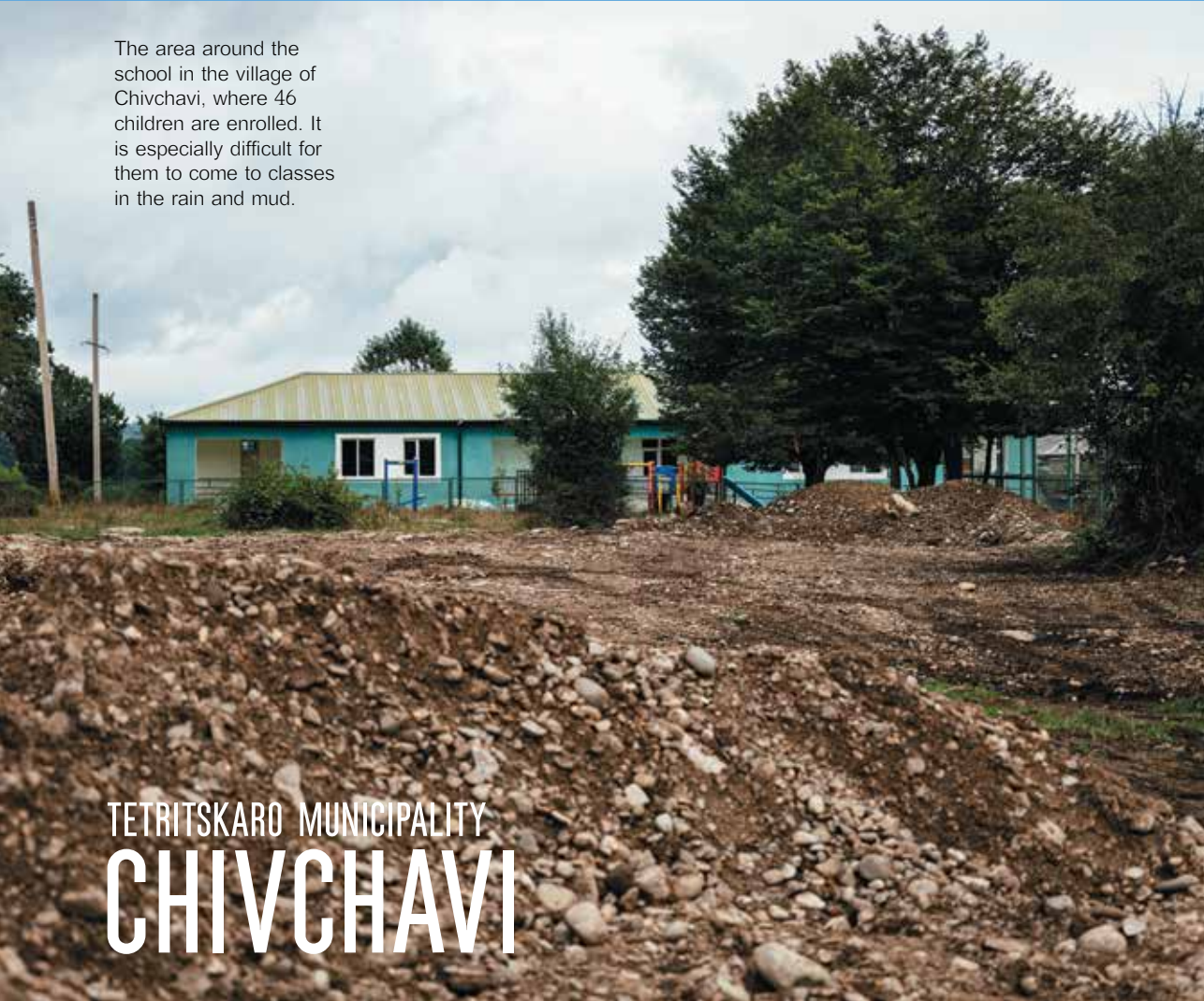
“Social mobilization gave us hope that something can be done in the village with our initiative,” says activist Nona Ebralidze. “Moreover, it made us women come together – it united us and strengthened us. I too have changed along with it: if earlier I used to beg, now I know that I can demand. Before, we did not attend village meetings at all, but now we do. [The officials] have even praised us and said, ‘What resourceful women these Jorjiashvili women are!’”

The former stadium in Jorjiashvili. Women involved in social mobilization are working to restore it and set it up for new functions.



**“SOCIAL MOBILIZATION GAVE US HOPE THAT SOMETHING CAN BE DONE IN THE VILLAGE WITH OUR INITIATIVE. MOREOVER, IT MADE US WOMEN COME TOGETHER – IT UNITED US AND STRENGTHENED US.”**

The area around the school in the village of Chivchavi, where 46 children are enrolled. It is especially difficult for them to come to classes in the rain and mud.



## TETRITSKARO MUNICIPALITY CHIVCHAVI

**A**T the end of 1980 in the village of Chivchavi, houses were built for the victims of the natural disaster in Svaneti. Now mainly ecomigrants live in Chivchavi. The village is small, with about 450 people. Due to the difficult living conditions, the majority of residents left Chivchavi a long time ago.

Children in Chivchavi have different dreams than their peers do: it is both unusual and sad that they simply want to reach the school building without getting their shoes and clothes muddy.

There are practically no roads in Chivchavi, and after it rains, the ground becomes so muddy that it is impossible to walk. Due to the absence of road gullies, the inhabitants have to bail out their flooded basements by hand.

There is also no public transport in the village. To reach Tbilisi or the town of Tetrtskaro, the locals first have to walk 3 kilometres to reach the central road.

In Chivchavi, drinking water is supplied intermittently – and only from taps installed along the road. Locals, including children, drag water to their homes by hand, and sometimes women do laundry directly in the street. Unfortunately, the quality of the water is not tested, nor is it filtered, so bottled water is mainly purchased by those who can afford it.



The area surrounding the kindergarten.



The road that the residents of Chivchavi have to cross every day.



A girl from Chivchavi carrying water home from the street. Water in the village comes from taps installed along the road.



Because there is no natural gas in the village, the use of wood-burning stoves in winter and summer is part of daily life for the residents of Chivchavi.

When the women participating in social mobilization studied the needs of the village, they knew in advance that water and roads would be the two main problems for everyone. These issues were

raised at a round-table meeting, but it took a long time to start working on solving the problems. Now the installation of water pipes in Chivchavi is almost finished, largely thanks to the advocacy of the local women. The next stage will include building the drainage canals, supplying the village with natural gas and completing the road construction.

The home of a family of ecomigrants in Chivchavi. There is no natural gas in the village, so residents have to use wood stoves.

# SAMTSKHE-JAVAKHETI





**S**vir is a high mountain village with a harsh climate, difficult living conditions and inadequate infrastructure. This creates additional needs for the local population. There are about 140 families living in Sviri. People here are mainly engaged in farming, agriculture and animal husbandry and earn their income primarily from these activities.

Tamar Shubitidze, 40, has a washing machine in her bedroom, next to her bed. It was not her own choice to place the machine in this unusual spot. There was a long period of time when there was a lack of water, which forced her to

place the washing machine in such a way that it could easily be filled with collected rainwater that was piped through a window. It was especially hard for her in winter: the waterline would freeze, making the washing machine impossible

Svir resident Tamar Shubitidze next to the washing machine in her bedroom. Due to the water shortage, for years Tamar has used rainwater for her washing machine, supplied through a special pipe installed through the window.

to use for months. So she, like other Sviri women, was forced to fetch water by hand from up to a kilometre away.

The lack of water and unsanitary conditions, especially during the pandemic, extremely affected women's daily life and health and made domestic work even more difficult. So in the end, they took action again and, in cooperation with the local government, solved the problem to a large extent. The water supply system is still being perfected, and the women hope that the lack of water will soon be a thing of the past and that washing machines installed in the bedrooms will become a distant memory.

"At first, we were surprised when [the project organizers] said, 'You will cooperate with the municipality and achieve useful things.' We thought that no one would listen to us, but we soon realized that it was all coming true," says Tamar, who is also a community worker with the TASO Foundation and, at the same time, heads the Sviri Youth Center and Library.



\* \* \*

Nino Sudadze, 31, used to wait for public transport for a very long time with her two small children in the rain and snow, unable to find any shelter around her in the bad weather. She often had to take her children to see a doctor or teacher in Akhaltsikhe, and the minibus taxi went from the village to the city only once a day, at 9 o'clock in the morning. Nino, like other locals, mostly used public transport, so she had to wait for hours at a time. "We, all the women, were standing with our children in the rain and snow, and it was especially difficult to bear in the cold," Nino recalls.

Nino Sudadze with her children on the school grounds of the kindergarten, where she works as a watchwoman. She also takes her little ones to the same schoolyard. The opening of the kindergarten in Sviri was accelerated thanks to the initiative of local women.



The public transport waiting area in Sviri, which was organized by women's activism and is one of the favourite gathering places for locals.

Nino still has to regularly take one of her children to a speech language pathologist, although she no longer waits for transport in the open air. Thanks to the work of local women, a waiting area was organized in the village, and it is now a favourite gathering place for the population. There is a communal table with benches, a bulletin board for important announcements and a public toilet, which was also thanks to the women's initiative.

It also helps Nino that she can leave her youngest child

at the kindergarten; she is now full of hope and no longer worries about whom to leave the little one with. Social mobilization and the activism of Sviri women hastened the opening of the kindergarten in the village, eased Nino's care work and helped her find an income-generating job. She works as a watchwoman on school grounds and says that many local women have found employment since the kindergarten opened, as the women now have more free time.

Tamar Kharaishvili with her daughter, Teona Kapanadze. This road did not exist in the village before the social mobilization initiative. Now, thanks to this road, children from the neighbouring village of Boga also come to Sviri's school by transport.


\* \* \*

Tamar Kharaishvili, 37, lives in Zemo Sviri, quite far from the central road. Not so long ago, when there were practically no internal roads in the village, Tamar used to carry her children to school on her back, especially in bad weather, to the central road. Now her children are no longer school-aged, but the lack of road is a thing of the past: the women worked hard and, together with the self-government, built a new concrete road leading to the end of the village. The children are brought to school

not only from Sviri but also from neighbouring Boga, and they no longer need to carry a second pair of shoes with them for when their first pair becomes muddy.

"Now the children have peace at last, and it is much easier for us to deliver our precious cargo [to the school]," says Tamar. "Because of the [lack of] roads, even private taxis used to refuse to go to Zemo Sviri or they charged high rates, so we often had to carry the weight ourselves – literally in our hands. Now we don't have this problem any more."





“AT THE BEGINNING, PEOPLE SAID, ‘WHY DO YOU BOTHER YOURSELF WITH GOING [TO THE LOCAL MEETINGS]? DON’T YOU HAVE ANYTHING ELSE TO DO? DON’T YOU KNOW THAT NOBODY WILL DO ANYTHING FOR US?’ BUT THEN THE ATTITUDE CHANGED. AND WE CHANGED TOO: OUR SELF-CONFIDENCE HAS INCREASED, AND OUR RESPONSIBILITY ALSO INCREASED.”

Lighting followed the construction of the road. Lighting is very important in a high mountain village, where there is wild game nearby and the inhabitants have to round up cattle or search for a lost cow in the evenings.

“At the beginning,” Tamar recalls, “people said, ‘Why do you bother yourself with going [to the local meetings]? Don’t you have anything else to do? Don’t you know that nobody will do anything for us?’ But then the attitude changed.

And we changed too: our self-confidence has increased, and our responsibility also increased. So, we have gotten to know one another, we have grown closer, [and] we have made progress.”

The women are now working on the rehabilitation of the event hall and the opening of a mini playground. They are going to present the issue of public transport to the municipality and ask the local government to improve it.

Street lights installed in Svir on the initiative of local women. The lights have made it safe to get around the village and have revived the lives of the people here.

## ASPINDZA MUNICIPALITY

# TOLOSHI

Toloshi is a village 15 kilometres away from the city of Aspindza. About 360 people live here, and most of the families are engaged in cattle breeding and dairy farming. Due to the difficult topographical conditions and climate, agriculture in Toloshi is less developed, and the local people produce only a small amount of agricultural products for their own use.

There is neither a cinema nor a playground for young people in Toloshi, so one of their favourite pastimes is riding bicycles and rollerblading. However, when 44-year-old Olya Grdzelishvili sees a bicycle, all she remembers is when her daughter Ania fell into the ravine and how she barely managed to pull the injured girl out. On the stone path, which served as a road in Toloshi for years, Ania's bicycle wheel failed. She was 11 years old at the time, but since that day, she has been so afraid that she has never ridden a bike again.

After this incident, the locals were especially careful and did

Toloshi children entertaining themselves by riding bicycles and rollerblading. Years ago, this area was covered in stones, but the road in the village was built after the work of local women.





**“EARLIER, WE COULD NOT GO OUT AFTER DARK. BUT I REMEMBER THAT AFTER THE STREET LIGHTS WERE INSTALLED, WE WOULD TAKE WALKS [AT NIGHT] AND BE PROUD OF OUR WORK.”**

Toloshi women with their children. Since installing the outdoor lighting, they can visit one another even at dusk, and the children are having fun together until late evening.

not let their children play in the street without supervision. Due to the lack of roads, there was also no transport in the village, so the residents of Toloshi had to carry heavy loads to their homes by hand.

Today, though, the children here eagerly come together with their bicycles and roller-blades. The women who joined

the social mobilization initiative brought the road problem to the self-government. They then accelerated the process, building a road and installing outdoor lighting in Toloshi.

“Even the dead ends are safe now,” remarks Olya, who is one of the members of the self-help group. “Earlier, we could not go out after dark. But I remember that after the street lights were installed, we would take walks [at night] and be proud of our work. Even in summer, we are always outside with the children.”



Manana Beridze-Tabatadze from Toloshi. Due to the lack of bins, garbage was thrown onto the road in the village for years, and many livestock died due to the unsanitary conditions. Manana was one of those villagers who lost their livestock. Now in Toloshi, there are bins on every street.

\* \* \*

Manana Beridze-Tabatadze is 58 years old. Her family, like most Toloshi residents, breeds cattle and takes great care of each animal. Due to the lack of roads, there were no garbage bins in the village at all, and the cattle ate discarded trash like cellophane bags and plastic bottles, becoming so sick that it was often impossible to save them. Then Manana’s only cow also died for the same reason.

After the construction of the road, bins were installed in the village, and a garbage truck runs regularly. Along with the bins, the drainage canals were also fixed, and now Toloshels are no longer afraid of rain or flooding in their homes and yards.

\* \* \*

For a long time, water in Toloshi came only from a single tap in the street, so local women fetched water from far away



A drainage canal in Toloshi. On the initiative of local women, drainage canals were built in the village. Even during heavy rain, the houses and yards of the local residents no longer flood.

Olya Grdzelishvili washing her vegetables. Years ago, she had to fetch water from far away to prepare dinner. Thanks to the work of local women, the water supply system in the village has completely changed. Today, water is readily available to every Toloshi home.



in the cold and the heat, then used it to wash the dishes, do the laundry, make dinner, clean up the home and take care of their children. And when this single tap would freeze in the winter, the women were left hoping for rain.

After the work of Toloshi women, the water supply system in the village has completely changed. New tanks were arranged, and water is flowing throughout the day. The women breathed a sigh of relief, taps were installed in yards, washing machines were put into operation, and

domestic work has become easier.

\* \* \*

Tamila Kapanadze, 49, raised her two children from infancy to kindergarten without having anybody to leave them with. She wanted to work, but because of the lack of childcare, she could not even dream of getting a job.

The construction of a kindergarten in the village had started, but it was delayed many times. After the start of social mobilization, Tamila, together with other local women, got so involved that today, up to 70 children

“WHEN THE ROAD WAS LAID, THE WOMEN OF THE NEIGHBOURING VILLAGE ALSO BROUGHT THEIR CHILDREN (TO OUR KINDERGARTEN). PUBLIC TRANSPORT IS RUNNING, AND WOMEN’S LIVES ARE GETTING EASIER. SOME HAVE STARTED WORKING.”

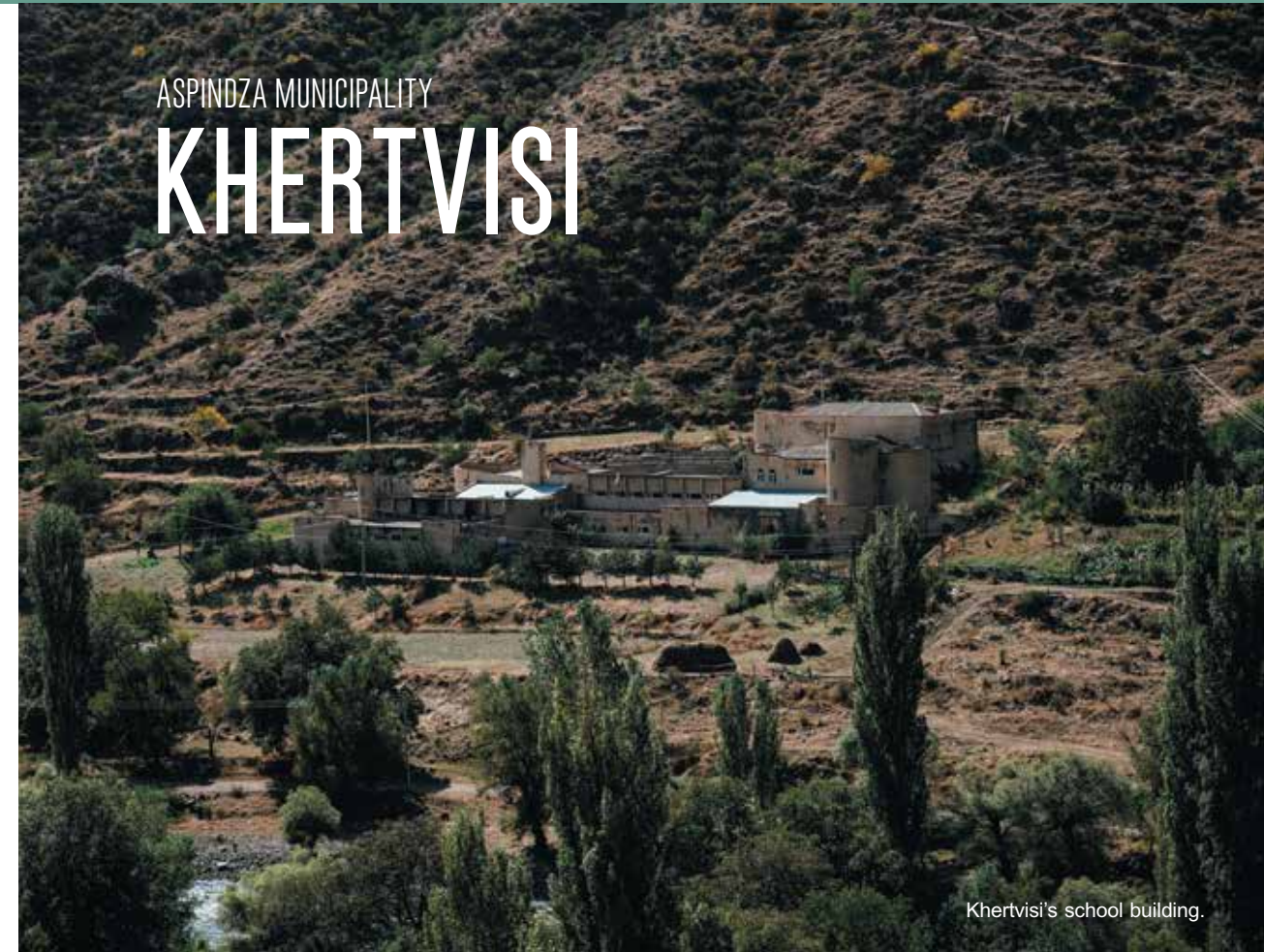
from eight villages attend Toloshi’s kindergarten. Tamila herself also works there as a teacher, and she can take care of her children, who are now in grade school themselves.

“When the road was laid, the women of the neighbouring village also brought their children here,” Tamila says. “Public

transport is running, and women’s lives are getting easier. Some have started working; some have planted a vegetable garden. When they have their children in the garden, they do not have to worry and can do their household chores better.”

The concern of the women of Toloshi now is the arrangement of a public transport waiting area and a small sports field, so that the children can be more actively involved in sports. They also want to open a square and a club – a place where they can gather and attend cultural events.

Tamila Kap-anadze, teacher at Toloshi’s kindergarten. The protracted construction of a kindergarten in the village was completed only after local women got involved. Its opening changed not only Tamila’s life but also the lives of the women living in neighbouring villages.



Khertvisi’s school building.

**K**hertvisi is a village in Aspindza Municipality with a unique, interesting history and heritage. It is here that one of the region’s cultural landmarks is located – Khertvisi Castle, which adds additional tourism value to the village. About 125 people live in Khertvisi. Due to the difficult living conditions, the village suffers from a high level of emigration. Many families have gone to other countries, and their houses are boarded up. The remaining population mainly engages in cattle breeding and agriculture.

Just a glance at Khertvisi's school is enough to understand what a remarkable building it is. Its appearance resembles the village's famous castle and evokes a special emotion in its visitors. The school is connected to the village by a single pedestrian bridge, which the children have to cross several times a day.

The bridge today is completely safe, although there was a time when mothers had to walk their children to and from the school every day across the broken planks of the damaged bridge.

The school has a total of 23 pupils, including second-grader Sandro, whose mother, Mzia Surmanidze, nowadays calmly escorts him just to the bridge

Children safely going to school. The bridge, which was once dangerous to walk on, was completely repaired and renewed.

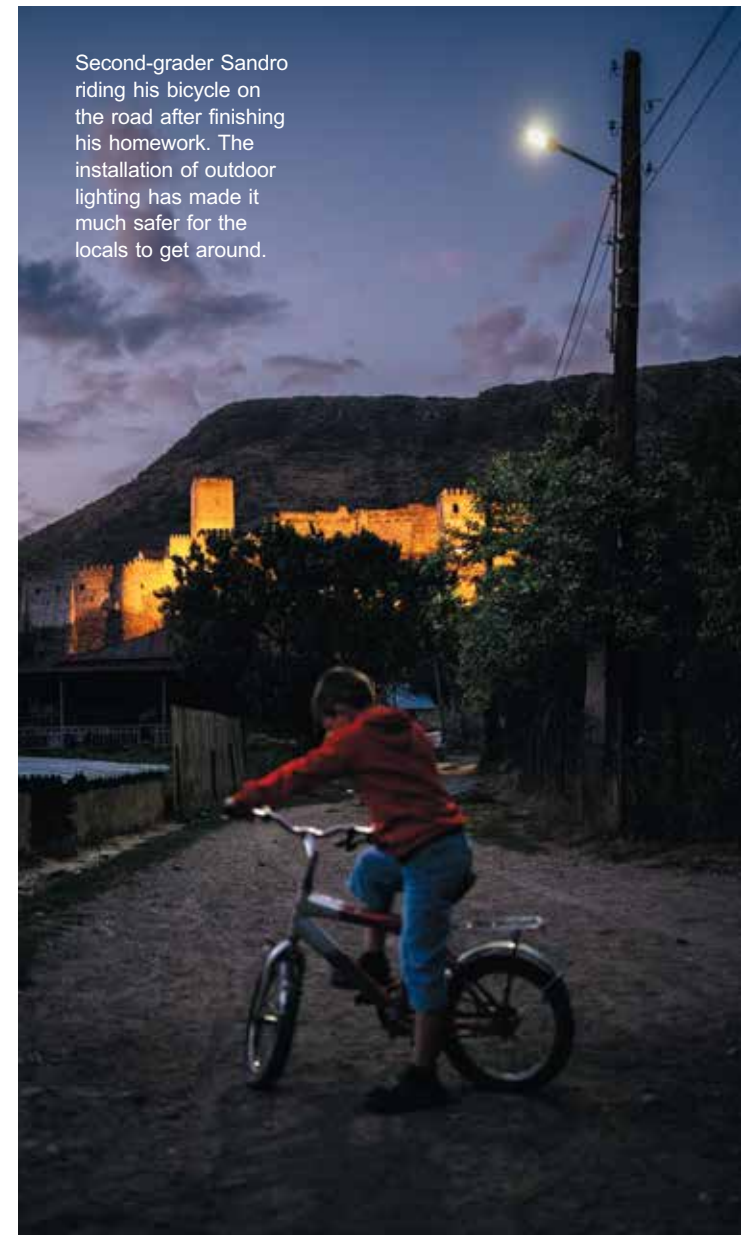


every morning. Sandro crosses it on his own, and after his classes, he returns home again, together with his mother. When the social mobilization initiative started in the village, the first thing that 36-year-old Mzia took care of together with the other Khertvisi women was the strengthening of the bridge connecting to the school, and together they achieved their goal.

\* \* \*

Men from Khertvisi often go up to the mountains to mow the fields during the season, while the women, who are left alone, lead their families and take care of the livestock. In the evenings, it is they who have to look for the late or lost cattle, so the outdoor lighting, which was installed in the lanes on the initiative of the local women, has made movement much safer.

"As soon as it got dark, we locked ourselves in our houses, but now that these street lights illuminate our yards as well, the village has come



Second-grader Sandro riding his bicycle on the road after finishing his homework. The installation of outdoor lighting has made it much safer for the locals to get around.

“I COULDN’T HAVE IMAGINED THIS BEFORE, [BUT NOW] EVERYONE ALREADY KNOWS US: WE HAVE A DIFFERENT AUTHORITY, [AND] PEOPLE ALSO COME TO US IF THEY ARE INTERESTED IN SOMETHING.”

alive. You can hear the sounds of children playing,” says Mzia Surmanidze.

The work of the local women did not end there: the village cemetery was fenced off and became more protected, with its gate replaced and renewed. Khertvisi women involved in social mobilization have been actively attending village meetings. “I couldn’t have imagined this before, [but now] everyone already knows us: we have a different authority, [and] people also come to us if they are interested in something,” says Mzia. “The most important thing is that we continue our work and want to open an outpatient clinic and a library in the village.” Mzia has been involved in the social mobilization initiative since the first day and, like her fellow activists, has no plans to stop.



The cemetery in Khertvisi, which was fenced off and renovated on the initiative of local women.



КАКХЕТИ



LAGODEKHI MUNICIPALITY  
CHIAURI

The village of Chiauri is located in Lagodekhi Municipality. About 350 families live here, mostly of Imeretian origin. Many of the locals are engaged in farming; greenhouse farming is also well developed in Chiauri. The markets across the region, as well as those in Tbilisi, are supplied with the local harvest – vegetables and garden crops. So orderly roadways and accessible irrigation water are of particular importance to the population.

Thea Darbaidze, 50, lives with her family in Chiauri and teaches Georgian language and literature at a local school. There is a private enterprise near her house, so the street is often overloaded with trucks, although nowadays

the heavy traffic does not bother Thea as much as it used to.

“Now we have no problems of that kind,” Thea recalls, “but before they laid the asphalt, sometimes we would get all covered in dust, sometimes in

Thea Darbaidze on the balcony of her house. Before the start of the social mobilization initiative, there was no road for pedestrians to walk on, so it was difficult not only to pass through but also to live in the village.

mud. It was impossible to open the window, to put the freshly washed clothes and laundry on a washing line to dry. There was even no point in cleaning the house! And if we were unable to be on time for the public transport, we had to pay twice as much for a taxi to get here.”

It was thanks to social mobilization, through the work of Thea and other local women, that finally asphalt was laid in Chiauri, road signs were posted, and speed regulators were installed. Since then, the new road has changed the daily life of the locals and made it easier for them to sell their crops and earn an income. While earlier they had to bring their products to the distributors on the main road, it is now much easier to sell them directly from their own homes.

After the construction of the road, the women took care of solving the problems concerning running water and adding water wells. “There were old, rusty pipes, and you could never guess where or when they would break unexpectedly,” Thea explains. “Previously, we drank



water from a borehole or a well, which is harmful to one’s health, but now we have a constant supply of drinking water, which is so important for the village.”

The local women are also trying to speed up the construction of a kindergarten in the village. Two years ago, the dilapidated building of the kindergarten was demolished, but the construction of a new one has been delayed, so local residents have to take their children to the neighbouring village of Tamariani. Despite the fact that they are provided with transport, there is never enough room for everyone on the small shuttle bus. The kindergarten will be ready in the very near future, so the women’s next plan is to provide Chiauri with high-speed Internet and open a cultural centre.

Thea Darbaidze watering flowers in her garden. The problem with the water supply was also solved thanks to the work of local women.

Zurab Gelashvili walking with his grandson in his yard. Before the repair of the drainage network, the courtyards of the residents of Kavkaz Street in Shroma were often flooded and covered with mud.

LAGODEKHI MUNICIPALITY  
**SHROMA**

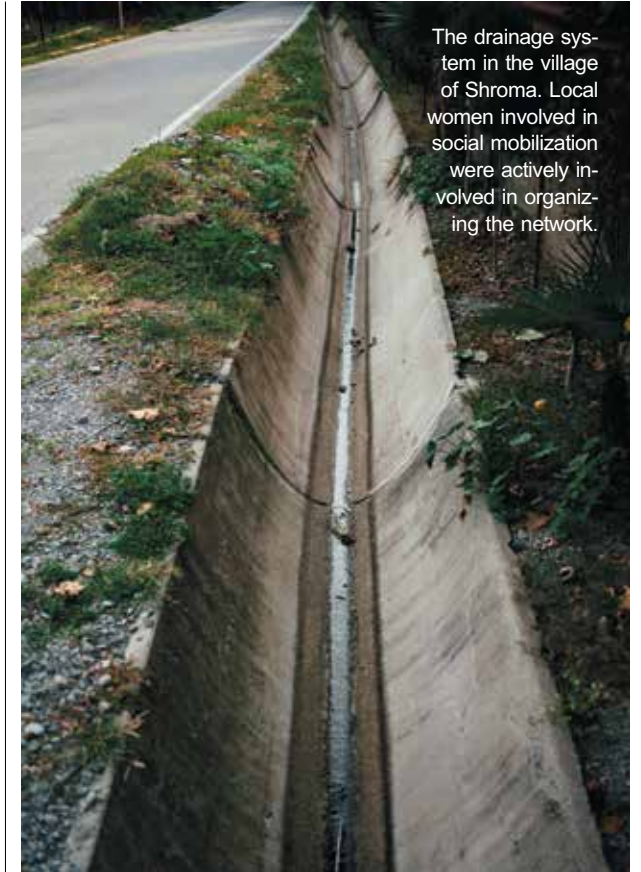
Similar to other villages in Lagodekhi Municipality, Shroma is notable for its greenery and bountiful harvest. It is also home to about 430 families of Imeretian origin who are mainly engaged in agriculture and sell their crops at local markets or through distributors. However, due to frequently heavy rainfall, the village often experiences flooding, which further highlights the importance of well-managed infrastructure.

The courtyard of the house of 63-year-old Zurab Gelashvili in Shroma is perhaps one of the most outstanding. Beautiful, diverse species of plants and flowers give the impression of a small botanical garden. Zurab's son-in-law, florist Shota, took care of the greenery, but he was able to fulfil this desire only a few years ago, after the drainage network was repaired. Before that, during heavy rainfall, the entire street used to flood, and not only Zurab's house but also the neighbouring houses would be littered with garbage and debris brought down from the mountain.

When social mobilization began in Shroma, the local women firstly approached the self-government with this problem. As a result of this cooperation, a sewer system was built in the village, outdoor lighting was installed, and a playground was built, which is the only entertainment space for children in the village.

\* \* \*

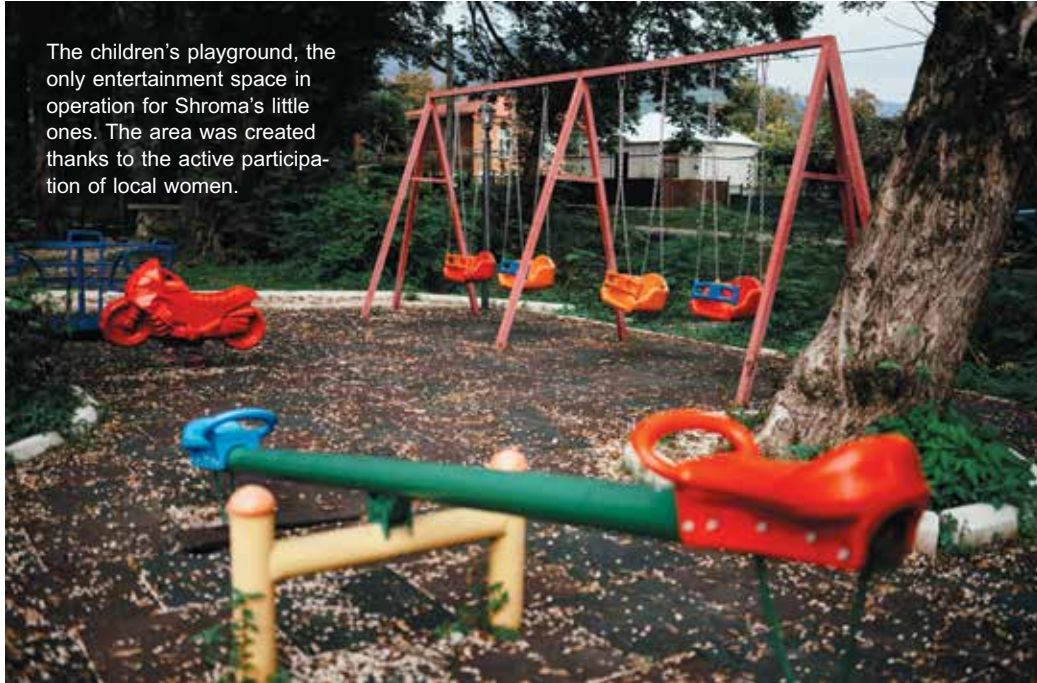
While the activist women were working and figuring out



The drainage system in the village of Shroma. Local women involved in social mobilization were actively involved in organizing the network.

local needs, water sometimes did not reach the village for two or three months. Thanks to the women's work, the pipes were replaced and renovated. Water is already flowing, but its quality remains a problem, especially during rain when it cannot be filtered.





The children's playground, the only entertainment space in operation for Shroma's little ones. The area was created thanks to the active participation of local women.

**“THERE IS NEITHER A THEATRE NOR A CINEMA HERE, SO OUR MEETINGS ARE A HUGE WAY FOR US TO UNWIND. IN THE BEGINNING, [OTHER PEOPLE] CALLED US POINTLESS. BUT IF NOT FOR OUR ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT, OTHER WOMEN WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN INSPIRED BY OUR MOTIVATION.”**

“There is neither a theatre nor a cinema here, so our meetings are a huge way for us to unwind,” says 54-year-

old Manana Kurtanidze, one of the members of the self-help group. “In the beginning, [other people] called us pointless. But if not for our active involvement, other women would not have been inspired by our motivation. Nobody could have ever dreamed that we would get support. There was great distrust among the population in general, but our outcomes have made them believe.”

\* \* \*

In the villages of Georgia, you will often come across uncontrolled landfills, where local residents take their collected waste from home. Such places not only damage the environment and ecological conditions but also pose a threat to the health of the residents.

Over the years, there used to be an uncontrolled dumpsite in Shroma, and that is why the women did their best to see it closed and outlawed and to have proper waste bins installed in its place. Then, in order to raise awareness, they organized cleaning actions in the village and placed a compost bin in the courtyard of the house where they have a meeting room. In this bin, women throw away



their compostable waste and prepare organic fertilizer.

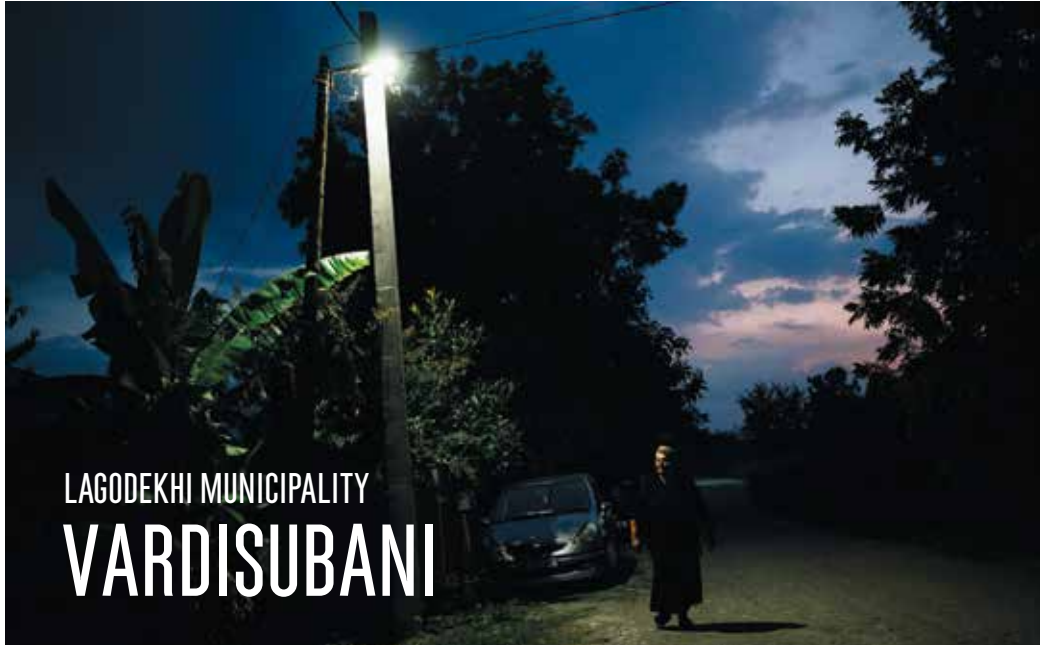
“Sometimes, even schoolchildren visit us at our office, and we are well aware of how important it is to set an example for future generations,” says Ana Khatiasvili, head of the self-help group.

Next, the women want to build a sports complex in the village, complete with various activities, a small stadium, an entertainment corner and some picnic tables, so their future work is related to this plan.



The compost bin in which activist women prepare organic fertilizer from raw waste.

The place where there used to be an uncontrolled landfill in Shroma. The sign now posted here warns the residents that environmental pollution is punishable by law.



**A**bout 345 families live in Vardisubani. Part of the village population is from Imereti. Like other areas in Lagodekhi Municipality, cultivation of horticultural crops and vegetables is the main source of income for the locals.

“Grandma, you’ll meet us in the evening, won’t you?” This was the deal they made: without it in place, Dali Chincharashvili’s grandchildren would refuse to go to their dance lessons. So Dali – sometimes alone, sometimes together with her female neighbours, in fine weather and bad – would walk from the

alley to the main road, to meet the children coming out of the dance group and bring them back home through the dark street, where the asphalt had not been paved until recently.

Dali is 69 years old and lives with her husband at the far edge of Vardisubani, relatively far from the central road. There are

Dali Chincharashvili going home on the illuminated road. This lane did not have any lighting for years, making it especially dangerous to walk here in the rain.

eight families in her neighbourhood, and the area is relatively new and less populated. Dali’s grandchildren moved to Tbilisi a long time ago, and she is mainly engaged in cattle breeding but also takes care of chickens and pigs. Now all of the lights on her street are glowing. The problem of lighting was solved by the local women after the start of social mobilization just a few years ago.

Waste collection had been another problem in Vardisubani, but new waste bins were installed, and the old, improvised landfill was closed. “We were in

an unbearable situation,” Dali says. “We collected garbage in bags and took them ourselves to the landfill using carts. [But] now, on Wednesdays, a car comes and takes it all away. I was so happy when this terrible thing was closed and a prohibitory sign was posted.”

Drainage channels remain one of the problems in Vardisubani. Yards and homes continue to flood during heavy rainfall. The women want to solve this issue as well, after which they will work to arrange for a sports hall and a public square in the village.

The land previously used by the inhabitants of Vardisubani as an uncontrolled dumpsite. With the participation of the local women involved in social mobilization, today this space has been greened, and a prohibitory sign has also been posted.



LAGODEKHI MUNICIPALITY

# KARTUBANI

**K**artubani is one of the largest villages in Lagodekhi Municipality, with about 600 families, most of which are from Imereti. The population is engaged in agriculture and, like the inhabitants of the neighbouring villages, supplies the markets of Tbilisi and neighbouring cities with their harvest.

Kartubani Square, equipped with a sports field, children's playground and chess table. Before the rehabilitation, the village had only one other stadium.



Kartubani girls in the garden square, which is a favourite place of the local youth. The square and the sports field were built thanks to the work of women in the village.

Ana Arutinashvili and Mariam Tabatadze are classmates and childhood friends. The girls are studying in the ninth grade, and like other Kartubani youths, they also have one favourite place for entertainment – the sports ground in the public square, which was opened in the village a few years ago. “Besides the square, there is no other entertainment in the village,” Mariam

explains. “When there was only an unattended stadium here, we used to gather in the neighbourhood, but now we always come to this square with our friends. It is a very popular place. The young people from the entire village gather together here, especially in the evenings.”

Ana adds: “We also have made new friends [here and]

hang out with many of our peers. This place revived the village, but it would be good if some exercise machines were also added.”

The square was opened thanks to the work of local women. Many people did not believe that they would be able to do it, but after the start of social mobilization, they managed to rehabilitate the square and the sports field and add garbage bins.

“WE ALSO HAVE MADE NEW FRIENDS [HERE AND] HANG OUT WITH MANY OF OUR PEERS. THIS PLACE REVIVED THE VILLAGE, BUT IT WOULD BE GOOD IF SOME EXERCISE MACHINES WERE ALSO ADDED.”

“We are proud of this place, as it came to fruition thanks to our initiative,” says Ana Kilas-onidze, one of the members of the self-help group. “Now we cannot wait to install [outdoor] lighting and to tell everyone that this has also worked.”



Garbage bins in Kartubani, installed after the start of social mobilization. Along with the reduction in pollution, travel along the rural roads has also become safer for livestock.

## TELAVI MUNICIPALITY RUISPIRI

Ruispiri is one of the largest villages in Telavi Municipality, with 1,200 families living here. The population is mainly engaged in farming and cattle breeding, and the main source of income for the locals is the sale of the crops they grow.

Eka Kuknishvili and Diana Papunashvili are 11 years old. They have been friends since childhood and study in the same class at school. Eka is

fond of football, while Diana likes volleyball, but the girls rarely get a chance to play in the only sports field in the village. They live relatively far



Girls from Ruispiri playing ball at the village's only sports field, thanks to the initiative of local women involved in social mobilization.

“BEFORE [THE SPORTS FIELD WAS CREATED], CHILDREN WENT TO SPORTS CLUBS IN TELAVI, BUT NOW SUCH CLUBS HAVE STARTED UP HERE AS WELL.”

involved in social mobilization. Even so, Ruispiri is a big village, and one sports field is not enough for everyone. Eka's mother, Inga Gurjidge, who is also a member of the self-help group, says that there is a place in their neighbourhood where a second playground, even a small one, can be built.

“However, it is very good that this sports field already exists,” says Inga. “Before that, children went to sports clubs in Telavi, but now such clubs have started up here as well. Who knows? A girls' football team might also be created, and then Eka too would have a chance to participate.”

Among the issues that the women presented to the local self-government, the access road to the cemetery was fixed. But the lack of drains still remains a problem, often causing the village road to flood when it rains.

away, and even when they get there, they find that it is usually being used by older boys. The sports field was created through the work of women



**K**arajala is a large village inhabited by ethnic Azerbaijani residents. About 2,200 families live here. The population mainly engages in horticulture, cattle breeding and trade.

Kheiran Rasulkizi, 65, recently returned to her native Karajala after 15 years of living abroad. Her children still live in Kazakhstan, but living in a foreign country turned out to be very difficult for Kheiran. “When I got older,” she recalls, “I missed my homeland and returned to Karajala. I planted

a vegetable garden and have taken care of it.”

Like Kheiran, the women in Karajala are mostly engaged in gardening. They have a hard time: they get up at dawn to harvest the crops, and they carry so many big sacks on their backs that sometimes it is impossible to even see them,

Kheiran Rasulkizi watering her vegetable garden with an irrigation system. Ever since the system started operating, she has been able to take better care of her crops, and the yield has increased. The water problem in Karajala has relatively improved, thanks to the work of local women.

but it is precisely the kind of work that enables them to earn an income to support their families.

Irrigation water is of particular importance for horticulture. But for years, water only reached a few places in Karajala, which made the women’s daily lives even more difficult. After the start of social mobilization with the participation of local women, including Kheiran, this issue has been partly resolved, with irrigation systems built in many areas.

“It is not a 24-hour system yet,” Kheiran explains, “but we are told that such systems will be added gradually. [But the system we have now] is not even comparable to the previous one. Now water runs much better, and as a result, we take much better care of our vegetable gardens, and the harvest has increased too.”

Getting the women in Karajala together proved particularly difficult. At first, there were only five of them, but little by little, they managed to attract others too. They got the wom-

en of the village out of their homes, and they started to acquire new knowledge together. Kheiran was also very active in this process: “People would say to me, ‘What are you doing? Don’t you have anything else to do?’ But I came here to learn, to be aware of what my rights are. I visited families and begged them to let their young girls attend the meetings, which were like a ray of light for them. We learned how to speak, we became self-confident, we gained the knowledge that we lacked, [and] our lives became beautiful. Now they appreciate us: they have seen that we women have great strength.”

With the involvement of Karajala’s women, at the entrance of the village, a sports field was built for children and young people, who practically have no other sources of entertainment. Outdoor lighting was installed and roads were paved, although the women really want to have a small square and one small room for meetings in Karajala.



Sabue is located on the bank of the Ilto River, in Akhmeta Municipality. The village has a picturesque landscape and a strong potential for tourism. However, due to the lack of the necessary infrastructure, it is very difficult here, not only to host tourists but also to even lead one's daily life. There is no kindergarten, school, general store or pharmacy in the village, nor is there any available transport to Akhmeta. Over the years, these difficulties have forced many people to leave their native homes, and today only five families live in Sabue.

Khatuna Svimonishvili, 40, moved from Akhmeta to Sabue many years ago. After returning from abroad, she first lived in Akhmeta, but she was so fond

of the mountains and the village life that she always dreamed of returning to her native village of Shakhvetila. "There was nothing for sale in Shakhvetila, so we

Khatuna Svimonishvili driving on the Sabue-Akhmeta road with her own car. The road was opened after the start of social mobilization in the village.

bought a house in neighbouring Sabue and settled here with our three children," Khatuna recalls.

Since there was neither a kindergarten nor a school in the village, Khatuna would take her children along the old, dilapidated road to Akhmeta – sometimes by taxi, sometimes by other people's cars.


"So, there were no roads or drains or garbage bins," Khatuna recalls. "When it rained, the ground floor of people's homes would flood with water up to our knees, and we would just throw out our rubbish directly into the river. I was terribly worried that I was polluting the environment, but I simply had no other choice."

Although the village has no school yet, Khatuna takes her younger son to Akhmeta's school by a new road, with her own car. After the start of social mobilization, asphalt was laid in Sabue, drains and outdoor lighting were arranged, garbage bins were installed, and once a week, the garbage is regularly carried out by a garbage truck.

"EVERYTHING THAT WAS DONE HAS BEEN OF GREAT HELP TO ME. EVEN IF WE TAKE THE LIGHTING ALONE: WE ARE SURROUNDED BY A FOREST, SO WOLVES AND BEARS OFTEN COME DOWN IN WINTER. [THESE WILD ANIMALS] MAY APPROACH OUR WINDOWS, SO THESE STREET LIGHTS HAVE REALLY SAVED US."

The new road has also made it easier for Khatuna's family to earn an income: they have four cows and practice dairy farming, including cheesemaking to produce an outstanding product of Georgian cuisine, Dambal Khashcho, which they sell directly from home. Previously, before the asphalt was laid, Khatuna had to go to Akhmeta's market because of the lack of potential customers passing through Sabue.

"Everything that was done has been of great help to me," Khatuna notes. "Even if we take the lighting alone: we are surrounded by a forest, so wolves and bears often come down in winter. [These wild animals] may approach our windows, so these street lights have really saved us."

A woman, Pikria Sulakauri, stands on a balcony of her house. She is wearing a blue long-sleeved shirt, a grey cardigan, and a dark headscarf. She is looking upwards. The balcony is cluttered with laundry hanging on a line. There are various items of clothing, including a red shawl, a yellow top, a white and blue patterned shawl, a pink top, and several white t-shirts. The balcony railing is made of metal and wood. The background shows a corrugated metal roof and a window with a cross-shaped object hanging on it.

Pikria Sulakauri on the balcony of her house. For years, the mother of eight had to fetch water from up to a kilometre away to do the washing.

## AKHMETA MUNICIPALITY KORETI

**K**oreti is located in Pankisi Gorge, on the banks of the Alazani River. It is a mixed village: among the residents are the Tush, ecomigrants from Adjara and the local and refugee Kists, among whom are many young people. The living conditions are particularly difficult in Koreti: there are no stores, no pharmacy, no outpatient clinic and no transport. The only bridge that connects the village with the central road is so damaged that the residents are afraid to cross it.

Pikria Sulakauri, 40, has raised her eight children in Koreti without having running water for even a single day. Like other women residents of the village, she had to fetch water by hand from a distance of up to a kilometre.





Koreti Bridge, which connects the village with the outside world and is in need of rehabilitation. Its repair is the main concern of local women.

Pikria Sulakauri filling her container with water from a tap installed in the street. For the first time, water started flowing from this tap after the local women got involved in solving the problem.

When they heard about the social mobilization initiative, the local women started thinking about solving this problem first and foremost – and soon they had partially solved it.

“I remember the first time we got water coming from our tap,” Pikria recalls. “We were



as happy as people living in a desert would be. But it is not enough yet, especially in summer.”

\* \* \*

Koreti is connected to the outside world by a single old bridge that has not been repaired since its construction. The women are always afraid that the bridge may fail one day and that the village will be completely cut off, so now they are working to restore it.

“At first, they thought we were engaged in social mobilization for the money,” Pikria says.

“But getting new knowledge was always important to us. We knew it would be useful in life. When we realized what we have the right to, what we can do and what power we have, we became brave and raised our voices.”

The local women continue to gather together and work. Along with the village bridge, they want roads to be built, public transport to be set up and at least a small playground to be established.



## AKHMETA MUNICIPALITY TSINUBANI

**T**sinubani is a village in Pankisi Gorge. There are about 84 families living here, mostly the Kists, including many Chechen refugees. Most of the population is engaged in small family farms and sheep breeding.

Eliso Kavtarashvili, 59, was born and raised in Tsinubani. After marriage, she moved to Chechnya but returned to Georgia during the Russo-Chechen War.

For years, Eliso had been collecting rubbish, taking it in

a cart to the main road and throwing it away in an old, ruined bin there. Due to the absence of more convenient bins, waste in the village was scattered right onto the roads. Sometimes, the waste was eaten by sheep, making them

The kindergarten's schoolyard, which often gets flooded by rain and becomes a dangerous place for children. There are also garbage cans here, but garbage collection services are not available on a regular basis, so the environment is still being polluted.

**“PEOPLE WERE VERY SURPRISED AT FIRST, BECAUSE WOMEN’S GATHERINGS WERE NOT AN ORDINARY THING FOR THE LOCALS. AND WE EVEN STARTED HANGING OUT TOGETHER FOR THE FIRST TIME. WHEN WE GET TOGETHER, WE FEEL LIKE WE CAN RELAX.”**

so sick that the villagers had to slaughter them. After the social mobilization initiative started, thanks to the work of Eliso and other women, trash cans were set up, and a trash truck started coming to the village. But be-

cause the cans are not always emptied on time, garbage still litters the road.

Tsinubani women are also worried about the lack of water: there are families who have no wells at home, so they have to fetch water by hand from their neighbours. There is neither a shop nor a pharmacy or medical unit in the village, so women have to go on foot to the neighbouring village of Duisi for these services. Moreover, once a week, they take turns hiring a

taxi to go to Akhmeta’s market. The kindergarten’s schoolyard also needs repairs, as it often floods when it rains.

The local women continue to work on these issues. Even their meetings with one another are of great importance to them. “People were very surprised at first, because women’s gatherings were not an ordinary thing for the locals,” says Fatima Machalikhshvili, one of the members of the self-help group. “And we even

started hanging out together for the first time. When we get together, we feel like we can relax.”

“When a woman gets involved in village affairs, it is good for her family and for the community,” Eliso Kavtarashvili adds. “Men would never worry about the problems that we highlight. We are still working, and we want to make a lot of improvements because we believe that there is always room for change.”

Fatima Machalikhshvili and Elsa Chikovani – residents of Tsinubani. Internal roads in the village are dilapidated, and there is no public transport here, so the local women often have to go to neighbouring Duisi to buy medicine or other necessities.



Eliso Kavtarashvili on the main road, waiting for the car to get to the market in Akhmeta. Local women go shopping there once a week by Akhmeta taxi.



AKHMETA MUNICIPALITY  
**BIRKIANI**



Mary Pareulidze washing dishes in her own kitchen. For years, she and the other women in Birkiani had to do the washing-up in the streets. Prior to social mobilization, water in the village ran only from the taps installed in the streets.

**B**irkiani is a village in Pankisi Gorge. There are 728 inhabitants, mainly the Kists, including refugees. Emigration is high in the village, with most of the locals going to foreign countries for work.

**“PEOPLE WERE VERY SURPRISED AT FIRST, BECAUSE WOMEN’S GATHERINGS WERE NOT AN ORDINARY THING FOR THE LOCALS. AND WE EVEN STARTED HANGING OUT TOGETHER FOR THE FIRST TIME. WHEN WE GET TOGETHER, WE FEEL LIKE WE CAN RELAX.”**

Mary Pareulidze, 56, lives in Birkiani. Now she has a tap at home, but before social mobilization, residents could only get water from the taps in the streets of the village. So not only did the women have to fetch their water from there, they also often had to wash their clothes and dishes directly on the road. When it rained, the water became muddy and turbid-like in the streets, while in the summer, there was no water at all for most parts of the day.

“At last, we somehow managed to install water lines to our homes, but its quality is still a problem. We get our drinking water from the wells,” says Mary, who is a member of the self-help group herself and who, together with the other women of the village, had tried her best to alleviate the water problem in Birkiani.

Over the years, women in Birkiani could not use their washing machines, nor their stoves or refrigerators. They

tried their best, but electricity was supplied at such a low voltage that the equipment kept short-circuiting, so they had to do all the washing by hand, and storing temperature-sensitive food was also a big problem. When social mobilization began, the issue was raised at a round-table meeting, and soon the problem with the voltage was regulated. Now the women’s labour-intensive housework has become much easier.

“This project has emboldened us,” Mary says. “We have learned that we can be bold and protect our rights. Before now, I hesitated because I felt too shy to say something, but now I know that this is my right.”

Members of the self-help group now also want to open an outpatient clinic in the village, and because they do not have a dedicated meeting space, they are trying to find a little room where they can continue their important work.