



# NO ONE LEFT BEHIND: LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE GRASSROOTS SOCIAL MOBILIZATION OF WOMEN IN GEORGIA





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# ABBREVIATIONS

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SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
MRA	Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Accommodation and Refugees of Georgia
MoHLSA	Ministry of Health, Labour and Social Affairs of Georgia
NAP 1325	National Action Plan for Implementation of UNSCR on Women, Peace and Security
NGO	Non-governmental organization
TF	The TASO Foundation
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
UNSCR 1325	United Nation Security Council Resolution 1325
WEPD	Women for Equality, Peace and Development
WIC	Women's Information Centre



*"Fundamental principles that underpin the Sustainable Development Goals are interdependence, universality and solidarity. They should be implemented by all segments of all societies, working together. No one must be left behind. People who are hardest to reach should be given priority".*

**UN Secretary-General  
Ban Ki-moon**

## FOREWORD

The new 2030 UN Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted unanimously by 193 Heads of State and top leaders at a United Nations summit in New York in September of 2015, calls on all countries to achieve 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which address the needs of people in both developed and developing countries. 'No-one Left Behind', the ethical imperative of the SDGs, urges society to re-think ways of reaching-out to the most vulnerable individuals and communities, ensuring that they too benefit from the progress made towards achieving these ambitious goals over the next 15 years.

Specific attention must be paid to multiple disadvantaged communities and individuals in times of peace, conflict, as well as post-conflict situations. These include the poor and socially-excluded living in rural or remote mountainous areas with limited or no access to economic resources, paid jobs or services of all kind; people with disabilities, ethnic minorities with no or limited knowledge of the state language, refugees, refugee-like persons, eco-migrants, the conflict-affected and internally displaced persons.



# GEORGIA IN FOCUS

Georgia is no stranger to conflict. Shortly after gaining independence following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Georgia endured inter-ethnic conflict in its breakaway regions of Abkhazia, which culminated in the loss of territory. This was followed by a short but devastating war in 2008, which saw Georgia lose additional sovereign territory (Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia). The ravages of these conflicts have taken a heavy humanitarian and economic toll on the country, leaving over a quarter of a million people displaced or cut-off from their homes, and resulting in thousands of casualties. While the whole country has suffered greatly because of these conflicts due to the social, humanitarian and economic consequences that have accompanied them, the deleterious effects that these wars have had on women and girls have been particularly severe.

Since 2010, UN Women, along with its partner NGO the TASO Foundation, have been reaching out to internally displaced women and girls affected by the 1990s and 2008 conflicts. This has included mapping their needs and priorities, providing space for their voice to influence local and national decision-makers, and enhancing their capacities to participate in building strong, resilient communities. These efforts aimed at ensuring that they will not be left behind, and that they benefit from national policies and programs, including the National Action Plan for the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 or recently adopted nationalized SDGs<sup>1</sup> embedded in the Annual Governmental Work Plans.

This publication summarizes the lessons learned from the efforts of UN Women and the TASO Foundation to reach out and mobilize women and girls on the grassroots level. These efforts focused primarily on internally displaced and conflict-affected women and girls who face multiple disadvantages. This publication maps the experiences gathered between 2010 and 2015, and outlines the steps forward for future action. We believe that capturing and sharing these experiences and the lessons that have been learned throughout the process may be useful for a variety of development actors, especially those working on empowering individuals and communities on the grassroots level.

UN Women Georgia would like to express our gratitude to the NGOs Women's Information Centre (WIC) and the TASO Foundation for their long-standing partnership in reaching out and empowering the most disadvantaged women and girls in Georgia. The work done so far would not be possible without the generous support of the Government of Norway<sup>2</sup> and the European Union.<sup>3</sup>

Last, but not least, we would like to thank all women and girls, the main beneficiaries of the joint initiatives, for their strength, commitment, and for the contributions they have made to improving the living conditions and overall resilience of their communities. We see them as an inspiration for others, and as an indication that everyone can be reached and empowered, participate in, and benefit from, the progress made at the local, national and global level.

**Erika Kvapilova**

UN Women Representative

1 Georgia is one of 22 countries voluntarily agreeing to regularly report on progress towards achieving SDGs: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf/2016/georgia>

2 UN Women project titled "Women for Equality, Peace and Development in Georgia" (WEPD Phase I and II, 10-2015), in partnership with the Government of Norway

3 Joint FAO and UN Women project titled "Gender-sensitive socio-economic empowerment of IDPs through co-funding of their livelihood opportunities and promotion of social mobilization" (2016-2017), in partnership with EU represented by the EU Delegation to Georgia.





# WHAT IS SOCIAL MOBILIZATION?

Social mobilization is a process that engages and motivates a wide range of partners at the national, local and grassroots levels, with the goal of raising awareness of and demands for a particular objective through dialogue. During the process, members of institutions, community networks, civic and even re-

ligious groups and others, work in a coordinated way to achieve their goals. In other words, social mobilization seeks to facilitate change through the inclusion of a range of players engaged in interrelated and complementary roles.

## INTRODUCTION TO SOCIAL MOBILIZATION IN GEORGIA

A full 55 percent of all IDPs living in Georgia are women. As such, for many women and girls in Georgia's conflict-affected communities, the proverbial 'deck of cards' is stacked against them. The economic empowerment of women, which includes access to paid work, access to bank loans and credit, remains a challenge, especially for IDP women, and women living in the mountainous, rural, and conflict-affected areas of Georgia. Access to crucial information, education, legal, social and health services are still limited or simply don't exist. In addition, the prevalence of domestic violence, combined with deeply-ingrained societal gender stereotypes, and passive attitudes with regard to women's rights and gender-equality, have practically ensured that the women within these already disadvantaged communities remain mired in their current situation indefinitely. This has created an urgent need for development actors like UN Women to get involved and, in partnership with their national and local-level counterparts, take action.

In 2010, UN Women, along with its main NGO partners the TASO Foundation (TF), and the Women's Information Center (WIC), launched an important multi-year project called 'Women for Equality, Peace and Development in Georgia' (WEPD). With the financial assistance of the Norwegian government, the initiative aimed to broadly support the realization of gender equality in Georgia, and to reduce the preva-

lence of feminized poverty by responding to women's specific social and economic needs, and to empower women to meaningfully participate in public decision-making. The target population of the project was internally displaced, conflict-affected and ethnic minority women and girls from the Kvemo Kartli, Shida Kartli, Imereti and Samegrelo regions of Georgia. These regions represent some of the poorest, most rural areas in Georgia, as evidenced by the frequent absence of utilities (reliable electricity, gas and water supplies, has not always been available in these communities) that many in non-impooverished population centers take for granted. Additionally, basic public infrastructure like functioning schools, libraries, traversable roads and medical facilities are often in disrepair or not available at all. All of this compounds the problems and challenges that those living in these communities already face on a daily basis.

The WEPD initiative set out to provide the women in these at-risk communities the crucial life skills they need to empower themselves, inform them of their rights, and through the establishment of self-help groups, build their overall capacity to directly and positively affect their personal situation, and the overall welfare within their communities. Most of all, these social mobilization initiatives strove to help women become more actively engaged – both socially and politically – in all facets of their lives.





# WHY IS SOCIAL ACTIVISM SO IMPORTANT?

In the communities where women struggle most, they often do not know their rights as citizens. For example, there is often a deep chasm that exists between the laws that are drafted in a particular country, and their actual implementation. Whether it's a law drafted to protect the rights of women, or simply the inefficient allocation of funds in a particular village or municipality, many women are rendered helpless because they are often socially and politically passive and unaware that through self-mobilization, they can affect change within their communities.

As a result of this passivity, civic and political participation is low among women in these populations. Although following Georgia's 2016 parliamentary elections, the percentage of women-parliamentarians reached 16%, this number remains far below the global average of almost 30%.<sup>4</sup> In rural communities like the ones targeted in the WEPD project, female participation at the local government level is even lower. In the local self-government elections that were held as recently as 2014, rural women repre-

sented only 11 percent of the seats in Georgia's local self-governing bodies. This figure has remained unchanged since the 2010 elections. This is problematic, as democracy in Georgia, which today allows for a much greater degree of civic participation than in previous times, runs the risk of becoming watered-down if all members of society are not actively engaged in the process. In short, this under-representation of women greatly compromises the democratic political development of a society. However, when communities are mobilized (especially women), they are then able to see the complexity of the problems at-hand, and are thus better able to analyze these problems and respond to them accordingly with the right kind of activism and political engagement.

Frequently, the women among the WEPD target populations are wholly unacquainted with the fact that they can play an active role in improving their lives and the lives of others around them. This is where UN Women and the efforts of their partner organizations played an important role over the past five years.



Biofarming in Tsitskaro Kvemo Kartli region  
Photo: UN Women

4 Source: IPU, <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm>

# AN INITIATIVE IS BORN

For the WEPD project to be a success, cooperation would be needed across the board, and a comprehensive plan had to be put in place that included a wide range of actors. From the start of the project, two non-governmental organizations – the TASO Foundation (TF) and the Women’s Information Centre (WIC) – were UN Women’s key local partners. The Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Accommodation and Refugees of Georgia (MRA), and the Ministry of Health, Labour and Social Affairs (MoHLSA) acted as the two main stakeholders.

However, from its outset, the WEPD initiative was met with some degree of skepticism. It was believed that it would be difficult to successfully empower and mobilize women within the targeted communities. One of the main challenges to community mobilization and especially achieving the participation of women in the process, included an overall lack of motivation and self-confidence among the women, as well as the social and cultural barriers that existed within the target communities. This was especially the case as it related to women belonging to certain ethnic minority groups where the idea of women taking an active role in deeply entrenched patriarchal societies was received with a great deal of reluctance. In many of Georgia’s rural communities, women play a caretaker role within the family structure, while men act as the key the decision-makers in many important aspects of family life.

So the task at-hand was a daunting one. It was a task that would require WEPD representatives to become intensively involved with the targeted communities in an effort to dislodge an engrained culture of passivity, and to get women motivated to the point where they would take action within their own communities. The affected groups also needed to be provided with the knowledge and skills that would serve as a

prerequisite to their empowerment, which would enable them to take on roles and initiatives outside the family, and in community life.

According to Marina Tabukashvili the Director of the TASO Foundation, aside from passivity, one of the other challenges they faced was getting those within the target population to embrace a community-spirited mindset.

“Many people in these communities had an individualistic disposition rather than one that takes into consideration the community at-large. This was one of the other challenges we faced,” she notes.

Despite the initial skepticism, there were regional precedents to refer to where social mobilization had been successful. One such precedent was in Kazakhstan. By employing its own social mobilization methodologies, Kazakh women’s rights organizations were able to successfully empower Kazakh women in the sphere of gender equality.

A good example of this came in 2012, when Kazakhstan achieved a ranking of 33rd on the Gender Equity Index (GEI) performed by the organization Social Watch<sup>5</sup>. The GEI is an index that measures the gap between women and men in education, the economy and political empowerment. Kazakhstan’s ranking among 156 countries of the world had risen eight places on the index from the previous year. This improvement was largely due to effective policies and programmes that Kazakh women’s rights groups initiated that aimed at protecting the rights of Kazakh mothers and children, as well as improving the demographic situation in the country overall. A special Action Plan adopted at the Congress of Women of Kazakhstan in 2011 with a view of improving the representation of women among Kazakhstan’s political ranks, facilitated a 30 percent increase in female representation in Kazakh government agencies.

5 Source: Social Watch, GEI 2012: <http://www.socialwatch.org/node/14367>



However, according to the TASO Foundation's Marina Tabukashvili, Kazakhstan did not represent the only precedent where social mobilization was used effectively.

"In India, social mobilization methodology was used to reduce maternal mortality caused by hunger, and in Kyrgyzstan, social mobilization initiatives were successful in addressing poverty in certain communities," Tabukashvili notes.

By adopting the successful social mobilization methodologies and best practices utilized in other countries, and using them as a blueprint, UN Women and its partner organizations adapted them to fit the unique context that pertained to IDPs, conflict-affected and ethnic minority women in Georgia.

"You can't just take the methodologies used in other countries and expect them to work in Georgia. You need to adapt them to the local situation," emphasized Tabukashvili.

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*"Community mobilization is a process carried-out based on a certain methodology. This process has different goals in different countries. But in Georgia, the community mobilization work that we are engaged in focuses on mobilizing women to take part in social activism, in order to achieve economic empowerment."*

*– Marina Tabukashvili the Director of the TASO Foundation*

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Marina Tabukashvili in action  
Photo: UN Women

# TAKING THE FIRST STEPS

At its outset, Phase I of the WEPD project in Georgia (2010-2012) laid the foundation for the social mobilization of Georgia's IDP, conflict-affected and ethnic minority women and girls. During this phase, UN Women and its partner organizations employed a holistic, three-pronged approach by working on the national level (advocacy and policymaking), the institutional level (capacity development and providing much-needed services to women), and the grassroots level (social empowerment).

On the national level, one of the key interventions centered on the adoption of Georgia's National Action Plan for the implementation of UNSCR 1325 on 'Women, Peace and Security' in 2011 (NAP 1325). The plan offered an opportunity to address IDP and conflict-affected women's needs and to make national authorities accountable for ensuring that these needs were adequately addressed. During this period, capacity-building was the *ordure du jour*: much focus and attention was placed on rights holders (in this case, IDP and conflict-affected women). More broadly, the project was designed to increase the capacity of the state, as well as national and local governmental institutions to meet their obligations to the target groups. At this stage, women were encouraged to contribute to the drafting process of national legislation, so that the laws would better reflect and represent their present specific needs (see section regarding self-help groups). In the end, through these initiatives, the NAP 1325 was completed with input based on the recommendations of 13 conflict-affected villages and IDP settlements in Georgia.

On the institutional level, conflict-affected women and their families were provided legal consultations free-of-charge. In 2010, with the close cooperation of the MRA, five legal clinics were established that provided valuable legal advice in locations with a high concentration of IDPs. Over the course of the project, many of the consultations centered on the accommodation issues that IDPs faced, as well as issues related to receiving or obtaining IDP status. To a lesser extent, clinic representatives provided legal advice on social matters and concerns over court proceedings. It is worth noting that the WEPD initiative also

provided technical assistance to ministry representatives, to help them better integrate women's needs and priorities into policies and programs targeting the IDP population.

"One Stop Window" meetings were also organized to help bring together gender equality advocates, IDPs, conflict-affected persons, and ethnic minority women and local government in order to solve these groups' immediate social and legal protection issues. The One Stop Window initiative aimed to facilitate interaction between representatives of various government bodies and the targeted IDP and conflict-affected populations in one place – bringing government and public service representatives to locations where the beneficiaries live.

These interactions, spearheaded by the Women's Information Center (WIP), focused mainly on housing, legal support and protection issues. They also helped those within the target population access social and healthcare services. For example, representatives of the Women's Information Center along with representatives of local government (*gamgeoba*) conducted onsite visits in the villages of Tsvane, Ergeta and Tsatskhvi in the Zugdidi municipality. There they spoke with vulnerable families and beneficiaries about their problems and their needs. This was undertaken as a means to better understand exactly the types of problems they faced and how they could be of assistance to them.

"With the Women's Information Centre (WIC), and other representatives of local government, we visited several vulnerable families in the municipality that have various problems. We aim to study their problems, living conditions, and to find out what they need and how we can assist them," says Natalia Pachkoria, a Social Specialist from the Zugdidi Municipal Government who was accompanied by members of the Women's Information Centre to help identify problematic cases.

This is important to note, as one of the greatest challenges that these communities faced was associated with receiving social assistance. Implementing



the One Stop Window approach was a useful way to address this problem. In total, sixteen One Stop Window meetings were organized by the Women's Information Center in the period 2012-2015 serving ninety one beneficiaries (75% women).

Another important direction covered by the Women's Information Center centered on increasing awareness and knowledge of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which became part of Georgian legislation in 1994 after its ratification without any reservations. The Convention, adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly, is often described as an international bill of rights for women. It defines what constitutes discrimination against women, and sets-up an agenda for national action to end such discrimination. By ratifying the Convention, states commit themselves to undertake a series of measures to end discrimination against women in all forms. As such, as part of the WEPD initiative, representatives of the Women's Information Center held training courses that aimed to raise the awareness of community representatives on the rights of women under the Convention in the target regions of Georgia.

According to WIC Project Coordinator Mariam Robatishvili, one community that was in particular need of this information was the village of Perevi, near the town of Anaklia, located directly on the line of control with Abkhazia, in western Georgia.

"Apart from the social and economic problems prevalent in this village, women and girls have other special needs. Security issues are also very important. This is why we decided to hold a training course here," she said.

Robatishvili notes that the training course was very basic, and aimed to introduce community representatives to Georgia's national legislation and the country's international obligations with regard to CEDAW. "We simply wanted to explain to them what the basic principles of gender equality actually mean. In turn, we felt that this would help them with their future activities, help them realize their opportunities, and inform them of what the state's responsibilities are in this field."

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### **Fact: Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB)**

*The establishment of Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) on two levels, was a strategy used to help IDP, conflicted-affected and ethnic minority women improve their access to decision-making, as well as justice and social and economic services.*

*Institutional Level: Five (GRB) working groups in Sachkhere, Zugdidi, Gori, Tetrtskharo and the Marneuli municipalities were formally established at the level of local government in order to ensure that the needs of the target groups are integrated into the local budget and social programmes that promote improvement of livelihood conditions.*

*Grassroots Level: Local GRB committees comprised of self-help groups created and supported by WEPD in the Sachkhere, Zugdidi, Gori, Tetrtskharo and Marneuli municipalities, were established with the goal of empowering women from the target communities to act as effective agents of change, and to make a substantial contribution to the improvement of living conditions and access to social and other services for women and others in their communities.*

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On the grassroots level, the TASO Foundation also provided women in targeted communities with training courses in the field of human rights in order to advance their understanding of social justice and gender equality. An environment that facilitated better communication between grassroots communities and local government was established by providing training courses that prepared women for future collaboration with local government bodies and officials. The training courses also taught members within these communities how to analyze local budgets from the gender perspective and contributed to the creation of **gender-responsive budgets (GRBs)** – the type of budgets that reflect more equally the specific needs of women and men in the community. In 2013, UN Women assisted in the establishment of Gender Responsive Budgeting Working Groups (GRBWG) in the local governments of five municipalities in Georgia. These included the towns of Zugdidi, Sachkhere, Marneuli, Gori and Tetrtskaro. Since then, UN Women has been providing demand-driven technical assistance to the GRBWG in an effort to improve their knowledge on integrating a gender perspective into local planning and budgeting.

## Holistic approach to empowering women

Policy/Legislative Level: advocacy and policy-making  
Institutional Level: capacity development/service provisions  
Grassroots Level: social empowerment

Through these efforts, the hope was that the WEPD initiative could achieve three interlinked goals. The first was to improve the capacity of civil servants to provide legal, social and economic services to women within these excluded communities. The second was to ensure that these women's groups actually increased their capacity to both demand and benefit from the services provided, and lastly, the project envisioned that women would have an increased role in the confidence-building and conflict-prevention process, as envisioned by NAP 1325. In this regard, the importance of involving women in the peace-building process should be noted, as research has repeatedly shown that the inclusivity of women in the peace-building process was often contingent on its success.

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*Fact: One of the key aspects to UNSCR 1325 (2000) is that it reaffirms the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peace-building, peacekeeping, humanitarian response and in post-conflict reconstruction. The resolution also underscores the importance of women equal participation and meaningful involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security.*

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It was exactly this holistic approach – one that employed multiple strategies and directions – that would later be instrumental in achieving many of the project's stated objectives, and result in the desired changes that the WEDP initiative sought to accomplish over the course of the five-year period.



Peace quilt sewn by IDP and conflict-affected women  
Photo: UN Women

# ANATOMY OF THE SELF-HELP GROUP: EMPOWERING WOMEN TO HELP THEMSELVES

In February of 2010, the TASO Foundation joined the WEPD initiative and was tasked with four main responsibilities: the social mobilization and economic empowerment of IDP and conflict-affected women; providing education in the field of women's human rights for the improvement of social justice and gender equality; the creation of an enabling environment that fosters cooperation between grassroots communities and local municipalities; and providing small grants to joint initiatives of IDP, conflict-affected populations and local government. Through these four main directions, the TASO Foundation set out on a campaign to empower women in select villages and to show them how they could work together to solve their own problems. The foundation of this effort lied in the creation of voluntary self-help groups.

At the first stage, the TASO Foundation in close collaboration with UN Women, selected a group of community workers to take part in a six-day training course that focused on community mobilization and communication skills. Armed with the relevant knowledge on a range of pertinent issues, these community workers would later be utilized within the target communities. Once the target communities were chosen, TASO Foundation representatives set out to visit the selected villages.

"We enter a given village or settlement as an organization and introduce the population to our method and the work that we want to implement. We invite them to take part in self-help groups that help to carry out our activities in their community," explained Marina Tabukashvili, Director of the TASO Foundation. "You must introduce yourself to these women, introduce your program... they have to have a picture of what it is that they will be involved in, so they can decide on whether they agree or not," she added.

Tabukashvili went on to emphasize the fact that to procure voluntary contributions, you need to find the most motivated individuals within the community.

However, establishing efficiently-run self-help groups is not an easy task, nor is it easy to get groups to a level of functioning where they can become a community foundation. At the outset, getting a self-help group up-and-running is an arduous task. The process can take as long as 3-4 months and involve several steps and quite a bit of intensive training.

The TASO Foundation, along with representatives of local government bodies, held meetings with those within the population. At the first few meetings, TASO Foundation representatives gave presentations, explaining to those in attendance what the program was all about.

"We placed a large emphasis on grassroots community mobilization during the presentation. We also underscored the conditions of the self-help groups, because these groups have their rules," noted Tabukashvili, citing the various tasks that were assigned to members of the group, such as establishing a group statute, embracing a democratic mindset in the decision making process and determining who can join the group and who cannot.

Later on, the meetings became more interactive. At that point, TASO Foundation representatives then asked those in attendance to list the things that they had and the things that they were lacking. For example, things like drinking water, irrigation water, a functioning school, pharmacy and so on. According to Tabukashvili, those in attendance were enthusiastic over the fact that they finally had a chance to tell someone about their problems. For many, it was the

first time they had a captive audience – an audience that listened to them and actually cared about their opinions and their situation.

Once the lists were made, they were then listed in two separate columns on a black board – it was essentially a have and have not list. From there, they categorized the ‘problems’ column into three separate but distinct groups.

The first group of problems was filed under the ‘we can do it ourselves’ category. These were things that could be done without any financial assistance, or local government contribution.

“Things like clearing garbage, or tasks that can be achieved through community-wide involvement. We told them that these issues would require that each individual and family representative would have to contribute their time and effort in order to accomplish the task at hand,” Tabukashvili said.

The second problem category required volunteerism, as well as a small amount of financial assistance. These included problems such as the absence of an internet connection or the establishment of a small library for the community. The group was told that this could be handled by providing small grants to cover the costs.

The third problem category was comprised of larger projects that required a great deal more assistance – both financially and via the involvement of local

government. For example, things such as road construction, or installing external lighting within the community. Because finding a solution to these kinds of problems would have to involve the local government, this would require the members of the prospective groups to learn the proper procedure and legal channels to take in order to apply for, and advocate for the allocation of the required funds in local plans and budgets.

Tabukashvili explains that these kinds of meetings, where project representatives verbally outlined the ways in which these groups can find solutions to their own problems, helped to inform and motivate people, and at the same time, it was a way to discover who the motivated members of the community were. In fact, it was the individuals who were the most motivated that made the greatest contributions to the self-help groups and the community.

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***Operational components to supporting women’s economic activity and community and political engagement:***

- *Dialogue with female representatives in select communities in order to identify their needs, resources and human potential*
  - *Stimulate economic activism, promote social responsibility (motivate)*
  - *Giving out small grants to support women’s economic activity*
-





Improving life of community in Tergvisi village, Shida Kartli region  
Photo: UN Women

# SELF-HELP GROUP DEVELOPMENT

Once a self-help group is established, the work is far from over. Developing these groups into efficient, self-functioning entities required both patience and persistence. As such, there are three stages of self-help group development that need to be reached before the groups can be considered sustainable, and thus qualify for the status of community fund.

If even one group is formed (groups must consist of at least five members), TASO Foundation representatives would then return to the village and assign a community worker among the group's members. It's important to note here that the selected community worker doesn't have to be the most educated among the group, but she should be the most motivated. This was a key attribute that UN Women and the TASO Foundation were looking for.

"Once we hired a highly-qualified lawyer among the group who seemed to have all the skills and qualifications we look for. She was highly educated, but when it came to being active within the self-help group, she did very little. The motivation just wasn't there," recalls TASO's Tabukashvili.

The community workers, who were trained and given the necessary knowledge by UN Women and the TASO Foundation, played a crucial role in motivating fellow groups members, and represented a key tool in the recruitment of other members to the groups. In essence, they acted as de-facto liaisons, answering questions, helping the self-help groups organize tasks and stay on track in the development of the project. Within the framework of the WEPD initiative, one community worker was assigned to each village or settlement.

From this initial stage, meetings were held, sometimes as many as twice per week in order to get the members up-to-speed. And because self-help groups are rules-based entities, members were given tasks to accomplish. They needed to decide how many

people would be a part of the group (the majority had to be women). They were also asked to establish a constitution and create a statute within the group. Members were also asked to keep minutes for each meeting. The goal from that point was to develop these groups like institutions and individuals.

And while it may seem trivial, Tabukashvili emphasizes that at the initial stages of self-help group development, the democratic process and decision making process at the meetings are crucial. Teaching the group members that democratic principles are vital components to the overall philosophy of self-help groups was important. As such, group members were encouraged to discuss issues, and debate over certain aspects of the group at every turn. Even decisions regarding something as simple as establishing the group's name, or deliberating over a policy that addresses who can join the group and who cannot, were key democratic exercises that would be stressed throughout the self-help group initiative.

Once the groups finish this stage, they move on to the sustainable development stage where they are essentially asked to fine-tune the skills and processes they have already learned. At this stage, a level of continuity should exist and group attrition should no longer be an issue. Group members need to demonstrate that they are attending the group meetings regularly, that they are continuing to develop the group's statute, know the statute, and follow it accordingly. They also have to have established an organizational committee, and the leader of the group should demonstrate her organizational skills, her ability to inform the group members of all the latest developments, and keep other members abreast of the group's activities.

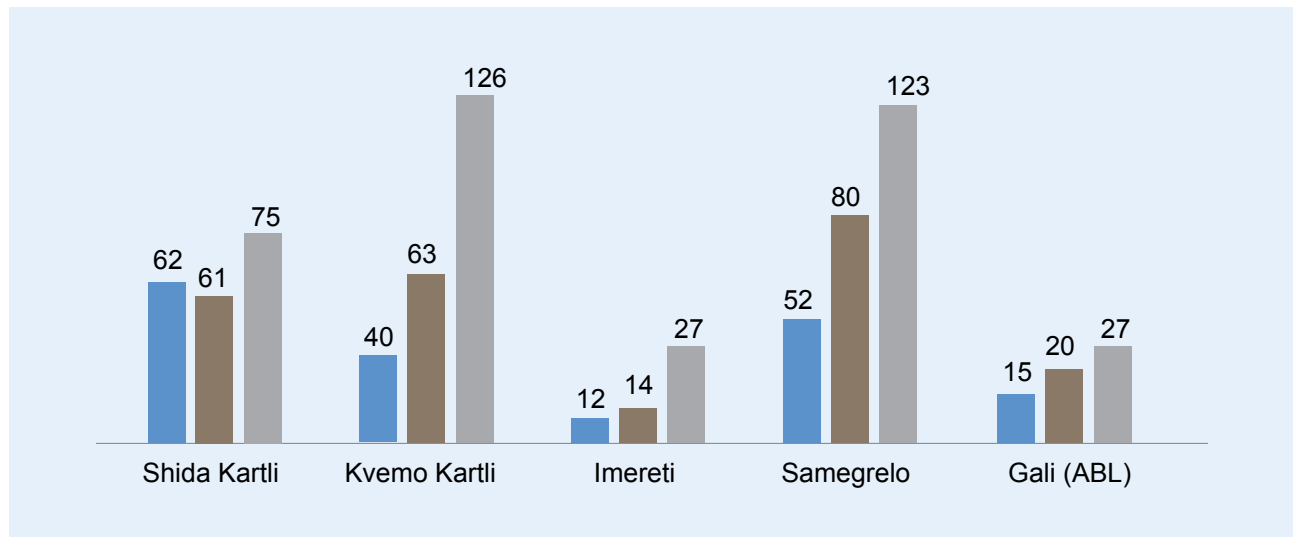
At last, the group reaches the success stage. This is when group members demonstrate vital group aspects such as shared interests, a group-wide ability to implement the group's statute, member-wide

comprehension of the group's goals and objectives, and the consistent ability to schedule and attend regular meetings and plan activities and initiatives. Training courses that focus on topics like women's

rights issues, how to establish small businesses, and computer literacy classes were offered to help enhance group members' new skills and abilities.

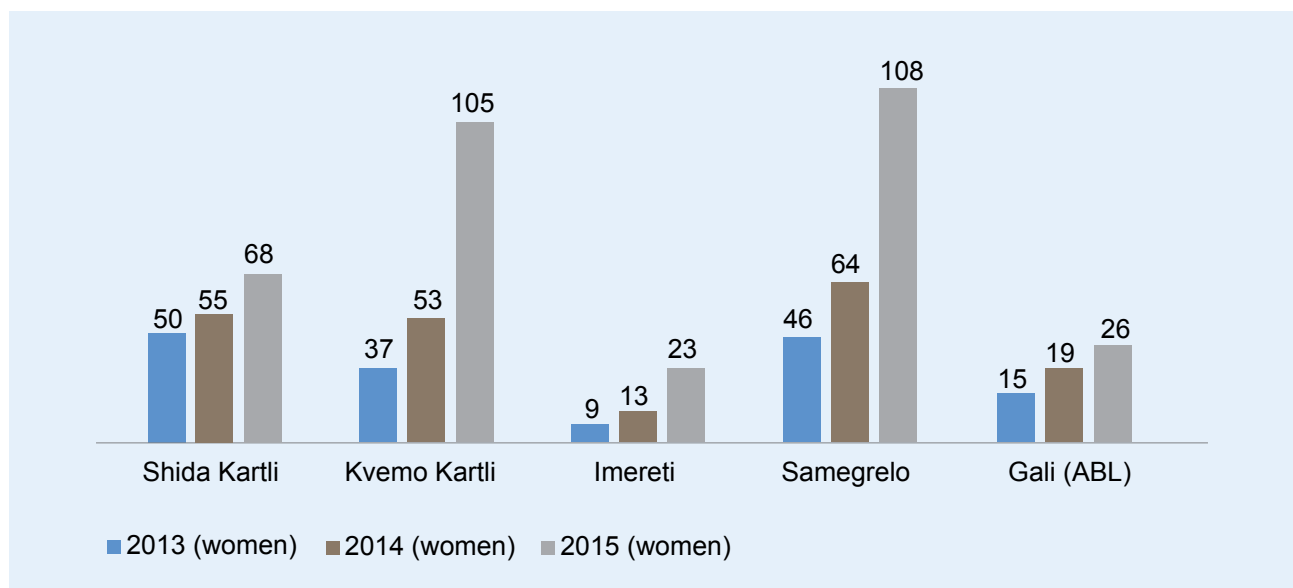
**Chart no. 1:**

Participation in SHGs by region



**Chart no. 2:**

Participation in SHGs (women)





Once group members were armed with the necessary knowledge and organizational skills – especially knowledge on the process of applying for grants and interacting with local governmental bodies – they could then address more complex problems as they began to work more independently.

It should be noted that during the second stage of the WEPD initiative, social mobilization methodology was expanded to reach new target groups. These groups included women from ethnic minority groups in villages located in the Marneuli municipality of the Kvemo Kartli region, which has a significant Azerbaijani ethnic minority community. As mentioned previously, despite the initial challenges and difficulties in mobilizing these women at the early stages of the mobilization process, over time, new, novel approaches were devised, which led to improved results. These new approaches included introducing family-orientated, mixed male and female groups, as well as increasing the overall level and quality of communication (in ethnic minority languages).

After these new approaches were taken, the participation of ethnic minority women in self-help groups rapidly began to increase. It also brought young people into the fold (young men and women, boys and girls). In fact, in the Marneuli region, mobilization levels in self-help groups doubled between 2014 and 2015, making Marneuli the highest growth region among all target regions. It can be said that after showing initial reluctance, self-help groups representing ethnic minorities warmed-up to the merits of the initiative and unanimously agreed that the project offered a significant opportunity to break the long-term isolation of their community. They also agreed that the initiative provided their communities an opportunity to increase their level of participation and influence on political and social processes, including the activities of community workers, human rights observers, and their participation in GRB committees and meetings. An increased level of trust in governmental structures among representatives of ethnic minority communities, as well as new-found confidence in employing mutual cooperation to solve community problems was an unintended, but positive consequence of this initiative.

By the end of 2011, 45 self-help groups had been established comprising of 216 individuals. These groups operated in 16 different locations throughout the country including Shida Kartli, Kvemo Kartli, Tbilisi, Imereti, and Samegrelo. Aside from making an economic impact on people's lives, one of the other byproducts of the formation of self-help groups was that they served to socially and emotionally reinvigorate the overall morale of the women within the target communities.

The transformative effects of self-help groups can be illustrated by Esma Goglidze, whose life was turned upside down after her village of Tirdznisi in the Shida Kartli region was bombed in 2008, leaving the local irrigation system destroyed, and leaving the community without drinking water. Afterwards, she and the residents of her village were depressed. Esma wanted to do something for herself and the people in her community. It was at that point that she was put in touch with representatives of the TASO Foundation. After joining a local self-help group, Esma led a group that would eventually form the Shida Kartli Community Fund for Peace and Development.

"I looked after my ill mother for 14 years, and after she passed away, I was looking for something new, and thanks to all of these non-governmental organizations, I became a strong woman who does not give-up," she said.

Goglidze is now the Chair for the Local Committee for Cooperation with Local Government, and works with local government bodies in the conflict-affected region of Shida Kartli to help improve the lives of those in her community.

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### ***Fact: Young people and volunteerism***

*Involving young people at the grassroots level during the stage when self-help groups were being established was an important strategy during the course of the social mobilization process. In fact, the involvement of young people into the self-help groups proved to be a useful way to promote the development of volunteerism, as well as responsible attitudes towards the community.*

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## MAKING AN IMPACT ON THE COMMUNITY

In other cases, small grants were provided to help conflict-affected women and those in their communities establish small businesses to help improve their economic situation. Bio-farming is a popular business venture for many of these women.

“We were funded by UN Women and we were able to purchase nine bee families. We bred them, and now we have twelve bee families. By harvesting the honey and selling it on the local market, we have improved our economic situation. We also provide help to our neighbors,” explains Leila Gochashvili who is a small grant recipient living in the IDP settlement of Skra.

“Bees do not need much work, and it’s an easier job for women to do. Honey is valued and there is a demand for it. This is why we decided to take part in this project. The best part about it is that we succeeded,” she added.

The benefits achieved from the social mobilization efforts undertaken by UN Women and their partner

organizations over the course of the WEPD initiative are hard to ignore. This is especially true with regard to the establishment of the aforementioned self-help groups, which have had an overwhelmingly positive effect on people living in several of the target IDP, conflict-affected and ethnic minority communities. Through the multi-directional efforts of UN Women and their partners, thousands of people living in these struggling communities have had their lives improved in some way or another. The establishment of self-help groups and community funds has re-kindled a sense of hope in many people within these communities, who previously knew only hopelessness and despair. For those who have lost so much over the years through war and conflict, a feeling of self-determination has returned. For many women in the IDP, conflict-affected communities, the establishment of self-help groups has brought with them a renewed sense of independence, optimism and the realization that some things are not out of their control, and that their fate is not completely in the hands of someone else.

And while the activities of these self-help groups do not in any way represent an overall magical cure to the ongoing plight of those who have lost their homes, or have been excluded or marginalized within broader Georgian society, they do offer hope. As such, in this section, it is only appropriate

that we highlight the many examples that illustrate the power and ability of self-help groups to mobilize members of these affected communities to achieve greater things, and most of all, to improve their lives and the lives of those around them.

## IMPROVING ROADS, IMPROVING LIVES

As a starting point, one needn't look any further than the village of Kordi, which is located just a short distance from the line of control with the Tskhinvali region/ South Ossetia. In Kordi, a local self-help group called 'Unity' managed to work in cooperation with local government bodies to organize and execute a much-needed road rehabilitation project for the local community.

"We were able to gravel a road that was 1.5 kilometers in length. During the process, eighty percent (or more) of the local population participated in the community project, including the elderly, women and children. The local government also allocated a grader for us to use for three days to help level the gravel," says Thea Butskhrikidze, one of several volunteers from the 'Unity' self-help group that took part in the community project to fix the road in Kordi.

# COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS

## SET THE BAR HIGH

Another great example can be illustrated by the work that 'Egrisi' and 'Nefa' has done. These two community funds have enjoyed great success contributing to their respective communities in the Zugdidi municipality located in western Georgia close to the administrative border of breakaway Abkhazia.

The Egrisi community fund promotes volunteerism in the villages of Koki, Orsantia, Rukhi, Rike, Shamgona, Oktomberi, Tsvane, Darcheli, Kirovi, Ergeta and Tkaia. In these villages, the community spirit is evident, as volunteers are recruited to clean public spaces and plant trees. But physical, hands-on type initiatives are not the only direction that Egrisi embarks on. The group has also taken advantage of the social grants they have received. These grants have enabled them to assist in awareness-raising campaigns that aim at the prevention of early marriages, which are unfortunately still not uncommon in some of the more remote, impoverished regions of Georgia. Additionally, Egrisi has taken part in helping to repair outpatient medical clinics in the villages of Koki, Orsantia and Rukhi, as well as procure basic medical equipment for them to use in their day-to-day practice. Egrisi has also participated in projects that address the needs of children, by providing toys, children's books and furniture to the kindergartens of Koki and Orsantia. Egrisi has also assisted in some creative endeavors by opening a puppet workshop in Orsantia, where local teenagers are now able to create their own marionettes, which they use to both entertain and educate children within the surrounding villages.

"We are always looking at how to help people in villages improve their lives," explained Levan Jichonaia, the Deputy Board Chairman of Egrisi, one of several men who have taken part in UN Women's social mobilization initiative in Georgia's target communities. Jichonaia notes that the group is currently working to implement a project called 'Village House', which will be staffed by a veterinarian and an agronomist, who will meet with local Orsantians to instruct them how

to better take care of livestock, poultry, orchards and crops. He emphasizes how important it is that people within the community not only understand how they can improve their yields, but also how to take the environment into consideration in the process.

"We plan to establish five small agricultural cooperatives for women in Koki and Orsantia," he says. We believe that working in cooperatives will help them improve their livelihoods and generate more income. Many here, especially women, are poor but willing to work."

"We are also working on creating green spaces in the community and ensuring the involvement of young people in the process. We accomplish this through implementing small grant-giving activities," says Egrisi community worker Irakli Khubua.

Khubua is one of the few men that have gotten involved in the project, and is a welcome member of the group. Male involvement in such community organizations lends additional credibility to the group, especially when they address issues like violence against women and child marriage.

"Not unlike other rural communities of Georgia, our community also faces the specter of child marriage. All of the older girls in the local school have dropped out – they all got married, so none of them have actually graduated. Violence against women is also a real problem in our community. So the more men that are involved in projects like this, the easier it will be to overcome problems like domestic violence," notes Khubua.

In total, the Egrisi community foundation has received five grants in years 2011-2015, and has succeeded in making a difference in the lives of those within the community. The group has improved social and infrastructural services and has raised awareness among the people.

Nefa is another community fund that is doing its best to transform the lives of as many people in their community as they can. Nefa works in a decidedly women's direction by promoting women's rights, women's leadership and encouraging civic activism among the youth in several villages along the line of control with Abkhazia. Nino Korshia and Maia Pipia are the two founders of Nefa. They both believe that women and youth represent agents of change and have great potential to positively contribute to the transformation of the local communities. As of the middle half of 2015, Nefa had already implemented 16 initiatives aimed at mobilizing women and youth, increasing social responsibility among community members, and strengthening the social cohesion of the surrounding villages. Of the number of projects they have undertaken, a few of the more notable initiatives include organizing a school for women that teaches leadership principles, an initiative that has improved access to public spaces for children with disabilities, they have also provided training courses that center on inclusive education by utilizing the help of a local teacher, organized an information and education campaign pertaining to water usage and safety, and have executed a campaign that promotes zero tolerance in cases of domestic violence.

The Nefa community fund has also pursued initiatives that fall within the arts and culture realm. For example, Nefa organized a festival that was held in conjunction with the observance of the popular holiday of Anaoba (Ana's Day). The theme of the festival was cultural diversity, and with a focus jointly centered on Abkhaz-Georgian cultural traditions.

Nefa's success has enabled it to expand its funding sources outside UN Women and the TASO Foundation. The Nefa community fund also partners with those in the private sector. This cooperation has included the European Union, People in Need, United Water Supply Company of Georgia, and Bank of Georgia, among others. Nino Korshia, Nefa's co-founder, emphasized the importance of facilitating diverse partnerships within the municipality.

"We have assessed the needs and problems in all four villages, and then planned and implemented our interventions. Without strong partnerships with donors and cooperation with the municipality, none of the needs could be met," she said.

As a community fund, Nefa has taken the success it has achieved, and passed it down the line, using it to assist and empower other smaller groups, who in turn are able to help others who are in need. For example, with the financial support of the Australian government, Nefa has been able to provide small grants of up to one-thousand GEL (about 500 USD) to self-help groups in four villages located in Anaklia, Tsvane, Ergeta and Ganmukhuri. These particular grants are used to promote a healthy lifestyle among the youth in these villages.

"It is impressive to see both the older and younger women in leadership positions working together to improve overall life in their villages," said UN Women Country Representative Erika Kvapilova. "They look around, see a problem, get together, develop a plan, meet those who have the necessary power and resources, and do not give-up until it's done. These people may be poor in terms of income, but they are rich in terms of determination and commitment to the next generation," she added.

As of July of 2015, with the support of UN Women, both Nefa and Egrisi undertook an important project that aims to rehabilitate kindergartens in the villages of Tkaia, Anaklia and Ergeta. Unfortunately, poor technical infrastructure, collapsing buildings, and a lack of furniture, toys and books for children are problems that are all too common in many IDP communities. Compounding matters is the fact that the quality and accessibility of kindergartens represent key reasons why local women refrain from using these services. This in turn contributes significantly to their inability to obtain gainful employment or become engaged in public life.

Via support from Egrisi, the kindergarten in Tkaia will have its kitchen and playroom renovated and a playground will be cleaned-up and made useable for the children. Nefa will provide new toys and improve conditions in the yard for children in the kindergartens located in Anaklia and Ergeta. In addition, Ergeta's kindergarten was fitted with a brand new façade and kitchen furniture. Through the determined efforts of caring members of the community and nearly 7,000 Euro collected from private donors by the Austrian UN Women National Committee, the children that live in these communities will enjoy a happier, safer environment.

# A STORY CLOSE TO THE HEART

Tsitsino Biblaia is an IDP from the town of Gali in Abkhazia. She used to be a teacher in Gali, but since she left her home and her career behind and moved to the village of Koki to escape the conflict, she says that no one in her new village knew her as a teacher or a woman who could do something. Biblaia is a textbook example of how IDPs not only lose their homes and their livelihoods on account of the ravages of war, but also how they can lose their identity and purpose in life. In a lot way, Tsitsino Biblaia was a lost soul.

“Having arrived from Gali I cast myself away, I had a certain complex: that I was someone who had nothing, owned nothing, and someone without a past. I became a burden by entering a society that was very poor itself. I couldn’t find a solution either. This was a very difficult issue for me. I thought I was an extra for society. Being an internally displaced person isn’t easy today either – how could it be? I lost everything. I can’t even go to visit my parents’ graves. Sometimes I see something that I used to own at somebody else’s house during a visit. During those times it feels like I’m dying,” Biblaia lamented in an interview<sup>6</sup> with UN Women back in October of 2014.

Eventually, right before returning to school, Biblaia decided to volunteer for a project that was spon-

sored by UN Women and the TASO Foundation. As Biblaia recalls her turbulent past, she points to the WEPD initiative as the catalyst that turned her into a completely different person.

“It was thanks to this project that I returned to school,” she says with a sense of pride.

After she left Gali, Biblaia didn’t teach for many years. But after getting involved in UN Women’s social mobilization project she is now teaching history, geography and civic education in the village of Koki. Her job as a teacher goes a long way in defining who she is.

“If I were to be born a thousand times, I would choose to be a teacher every time. I don’t feel how old I am while I’m at school – age usually only catches up to me when I am on the road walking home,” she says with a smile.

Her students also love her.

“Why? Probably because I know straightaway if any of them has a problem, and I take it very close to the heart if any of my students don’t feel like listening to me. But at times like that I never treat them like I’m older. On the contrary, I try to approach them as their peer,” Biblaia says.

6 Source: UN Women <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wPd6KzTIGf0&feature=youtu.be>





**Tsitsino Biblaia, leader of Egrisi Foundation**  
Photo: UN Women/ Maka Gogaladze



# EMPOWERING WOMEN IN A MAN'S WORLD

The existence of traditional, patriarchal-based societies is a fact of life in much of Georgia. In rural communities outside the country's major population centres the problem is even more pronounced. Compounding the issue is that many Georgian women have yet to fully conceptualize the fact that women have rights, and not only duties in society. However, through the work of UN Women's WEPD initiative and others that aim to mobilize and empower women, Georgian women are slowly beginning to turn the corner, and Iruza Kakava is one woman that others can look to for inspiration.

Today, Kakava is one of only just over 200 women holding seats in city and town councils throughout Georgia. In fact, she is part of the meagre 11 percent of all women that participate in this sphere nationwide. In conservative western Georgia, women's participation in local government is even lower. In Zugdidi, a town with a population of roughly 76,000 that she calls home now, Kakava is one of only four women that managed to win seats in the June of 2015 forty-five - member local assembly.

Although Georgia's parliament has passed legislation specifying that women enjoy equal rights with men, in practice, gender equality remains elusive. In a 2013 survey conducted by the United Nations Population Fund, 88.5% of 2,402 respondents cited looking after the family as being a woman's primary duty. Kakava, who is now in her forties, became aware of her own rights while filling that exact role.

Kakava lost almost everything during Georgia's turbulent war in Abkhazia that lasted from 1992-1994. Twenty-one years-old at the time, Kakava is one of over a quarter of a million people who were forced to flee the region in search of safety during this period. She wound-up settling in Zugdidi, a small town

in western Georgia that represents ground-zero for many Georgians who were displaced from their homes due to the conflict in Abkhazia. It was in Zugdidi that she began rebuilding her life. Through it all, Kakava remained resilient.

"I knew desperation, hunger, and homelessness, but I never wanted to give up," she told the Guardian newspaper in 2015<sup>7</sup>. "We do not sit and look at the problems; we look for solutions. We are problem-solvers," she added.

Kakava began working with non-governmental organisations that focused on women's rights. While still balancing work with taking care of her two children, she made the choice to go back to university at the age of thirty-one to earn a degree in English. It was a difficult time she recalls.

Eventually she began providing private lessons to children, often-times free-of-charge, in villages along the Enguri River, which represents the line of control between Georgia and the country's breakaway Abkhazia region.

Though the help of UN Women and their partner organizations, Kakava eventually managed to establish a community fund called 'Enguri', which works to meet the needs of female IDPs from Abkhazia.

While in contemporary Georgian society, women are often a household's sole breadwinner, men still take the role as the family's decision-makers outside the home.

"I realized that women's concerns need to get into the political forum – not just be limited to NGO projects," Kakava noted.

7 Source: [https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/08/women-post-soviet-world-profiles?CMP=share\\_btn\\_fb](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/08/women-post-soviet-world-profiles?CMP=share_btn_fb)

This realization prompted Kakava to run for Zugdidi's town council. During her pursuit of a seat in the local government, Kakava said that she received a lot of support along the way. However, she also had to contend with the prevailing sexist attitudes that remain ingrained in much of Georgian society today. In some cases, she was even asked politely to back-down and let a man run in her place.

"No way, I thought," she says. "I have not come this far to drop it."

Kakava persevered. Now in office, she set out to raise awareness among other women, letting them know that opportunities do exist where women can take more responsibility for their lives.

"I want to show them that if you try, you can make it like I did."

## GEORGIA'S ETHNIC MINORITY ARMENIAN COMMUNITY NOT FORGOTTEN

While IDP and conflict-affected groups represented much of the focus of the social mobilization initiative, Georgia's minority Azerbaijani and Armenian communities have also stood to benefit from the work that UN Women and their partner organisations have undertaken over the course of the WEPD project. In fact, ethnic minority women were among the key target communities.

One example of how ethnic minority communities have benefited from self-help groups can be found in the ethnic Armenian-populated village of Damia located in the Marneuli municipality of Kvemo Kartli. There, a local women's self-help group comprised of four women and one man, supported the refurbishment of a community center, which is being used as a meeting place for the ethnic minority population in the village. The opening of the new community center, which has already hosted an event, has inspired the group to launch more ambitious initiatives in the future.

"Prior to establishing our self-help group, we thought that we were just supposed to wait around for the government to provide us with services. Now we realize that we ourselves can be proactive and initiate dialogue with local governmental bodies with regard to our needs," says one of the group members.

Because there was no kindergarten in Damia, members of a women's self-help group raised the issue at roundtable meetings for nearly two years. Finally, after an appropriate pledge was made, a project aptly titled 'Said and Done' was launched. Using an initial grant of 6,800 GEL (\$2,700 USD) the group received from UN Women, the group was able to renovate two rooms of a designated building, and retrain a young teacher in the Georgian language. Once the renovation was complete, the local government (*gamgeoba*) committed to refurbishing the rest of the building. In the end, the village's first kindergarten was established employing six people. The activities of this self-help group in Damia represent only one of many inspiring examples of how women's empowerment, social mobilization and development can work interchangeably together to achieve positive outcomes in a community.



Self-help group in village Damia,  
Kvemo Kartli region -  
turning community house into a theatre  
Photo: UN Women

# ETHNIC AZERBAIJANI GROUP AIMS FOR KNOWLEDGE

Located in the small town of Marneuli in the Kvemo Kartli region, and home to a large ethnic Azerbaijani population, the Molaoghli Development Group is another example where social mobilization has yielded successful outcomes. With the help of the TASO Foundation, the group set out to create a small library in an effort to bring knowledge and information, and improve quality time of the members of this small community.

“We seek to usher in greater knowledge, and the only way to accomplish this is to facilitate the establishment of a modern library, which will also serve as a center of education,” said Ariz Dashdamirov, an ethnic Azeri, and member of the Molaoghli Development Group, which was established in 2014.

Shapa Memadova, an ethnic Azerbaijani from the village of Sadakhlo in Marneuli, and a member of the self-help group “I Too Am Able” had her own plans for the community.

“We are establishing a women’s club to educate not only children, but their mothers as well. Our women’s club will feature a small library, computers, and children’s books amongst other things. What we want is for mothers to take these books home and read them with their whole family together. This is so that the mother, father and the child can sit together and enjoy reading. We feel that this will facilitate equality in the family,” she said.

Memadova says that the TASO Foundation-led social mobilization project has benefited her and her group by making them understand that being proactive can really lead to positive things.

“The way we are working now, enables us to seek resources within our community, as well as engage in local self-government and budgeting in a way that helps solve our community’s problems locally. We no longer wait for someone to help us, we are taking the initiative and proactively bringing our problems to them,” she says.

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*“We should not wait for someone else to solve our problems, we should not question our ability to make a difference in this wide world. There are many taboo problems that exist, but if someone comes forward and raises the problem of this kind, and two, three or even five people join in, then the problem will surely be solved in the end.”*

*- Nino Korshia, Co-Founder of the Nefa Foundation*

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In a 2014 video<sup>8</sup> that highlights how the social mobilization process helps to improve the lives of IDP, conflict-affected and ethnic minority women, co-founder of the Nefa Foundation Nino Korshia perfectly summarizes the community spirit that represents one of the most fundamental aspects of the social mobilization process: “We should not wait for someone else to solve our problems, we should not question our ability to make a difference in this wide world. Yes, there are many taboo problems that exist, but if someone comes forward and raises the problem of this kind, and two, three or even five people join in, then the problem will surely be solved in the end.”

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8 <http://georgia.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/videos>





# KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN THE SOCIAL MOBILIZATION OF IDP, CONFLICT-EFFECTED, AND ETHNIC MINORITY WOMEN (2010-2015)

Throughout the five-year WEPD project (2010-2015), there is much that has been accomplished and worth mentioning:

- In total since 2010, 124 self-help groups were established in 46 different communities. These groups were comprised of 750 individuals, 98 percent of which were women. An additional 13 volunteer youth groups were established consisting of 139 volunteers, in which 76 percent of the volunteer members were girls. Four (4) community foundations were established.
  - Among the all of the self-help groups and community foundations, 124 projects were implemented.
- This includes 30 community resource centers and small libraries.
  - Four GRB workgroups and community committees were established. Project activists in ethnic minority villages cooperated with local government in the sphere of rural development in five of the target municipalities. 1.2 million (\$480,000 USD) was spent on the welfare of the communities, while a total amount of 336,236 (\$134,000 USD) in grants were used for the project.
  - The Nation Action Plan for UN Security Council Resolution 1325 was based on the recommendations of 13 conflict-affected villages/IDP settlements in 2011.



There is always space for learning  
Photo: UN Women

# LOOKING TO THE FUTURE (LESSONS LEARNED)

As with anything in life, great things can only be accomplished through a process of constant self-improvement. Remaining static is not enough. When it comes to human development issues, the situation is often times fluid, and the dynamics can change over time. So using the lessons learned from past successes and failures is a critical aspect to improving processes over the long run. UN Women and the people, groups and organizations that have worked with them on the WEPD initiative have devised several key points that illustrate what has been learned during the social mobilization process over the past five years.

According to the WEPD Final Evaluation Report published in late 2015, there are several key lessons that can be of use going forward when undertaking other similar social mobilization initiatives in Georgia and in other places. Sharing the experiences (results and stories) gained in this project by self-help groups and small business owners is critical for the up-scaling of the initiative. Not only is it important to learn about the achievements and successes of the project, but it is also important to learn about the difficulties faced and what it took to overcome them (i.e. strategies, time frame, teamwork).

- The involvement and engagement of **young people** during the self-help group phase proved to be an effective means to promote the development of volunteerism and the development of responsible attitudes towards the community. It is also the only way to ensure that the results of the time-limited social mobilization project will remain sustainable and local communities and individuals will further benefit from its results.
- It should be understood that change or improvement in the working capacity of self-help groups and their **cooperation with the community and local government bodies** takes time and sustainable resources before visible results can be achieved. It is a process. Continued technical support should be provided until confidence in the group's independence can be observed. Time is necessary before changes in attitude, level of support and cooperation is demonstrated by the local communities and local government bodies. Therefore, exit strategies from similar initiatives have to be well thought through, to ensure that the end of the "project" is not the end of the long and demanding process. Ensuring sustainable, institutionalised partnerships with central government and development partners specialised in regional development is an important part of the (project) exit strategy.
- The approaches taken towards the various regions should be adapted to address the specific needs of the beneficiaries in those communities. The factors that may prevent them from participation should also be noted and adapted to accordingly. Various strategies should also be considered when addressing different target groups (women, men, boys and girls). Knowing people's concrete needs, priorities, but also their assets, such as knowledge, personal capacities, skills – this is the starting point in any attempt to activate individuals and assist them in improving their and their community's lives.
- It should be noted that participatory and inclusive approaches employed by the initiative have strong potential to increase interaction between the different ethnic communities and between ethnic minorities and local governments. This creates favorable conditions to advance further confidence-building, communication and cooperation among ethnic minority communities or communities divided by conflict, and contributes to the strengthening of social cohesion.
- Co-funding initiatives (small, seed grants) proved to be a cost-efficient and effective tool to activate people and promote trust and cooperation between the local government and self-help groups. The ability to translate small seed funds to improving livelihoods, sustainable income or im-



proved infrastructure in the village, also help to raise the social status of individuals and self-help groups in the community.

The WEPD project is over, but the initiative is alive and well. Many self-help groups created with the support of UN Women and the TASO Foundation continue to be enthusiastic and committed individuals, improving lives within their communities and investing in the future generations. Several groups officially registered and obtain support for their livelihood activities and local community development projects from various donors, state programmes and local authorities. Many individuals regularly participate in meetings with local authorities and have a say in local planning and budgeting. Behind the numbers, there are people – women and men and their communities – who demonstrate their resilience, take the initiative and improve the roads, plant trees, reconstruct kindergartens, start their own small businesses, all in order to improve their livelihoods and the livelihoods of others.

Yet, there are still thousands and thousands of individuals and families who have lost trust in themselves, and for years have fully been dependent on state assistance or the help of their extended families

and neighbors. Many of them though, with very little help, still have the potential to change their lives and create a better future for themselves and their children. They should not be forgotten and they should not be left behind.

Informed by our experience and the lessons learned from the WEPD social mobilization initiative, UN Women along with the TASO Foundation have partnered with FAO and the European Union (represented by the EU Delegation to Georgia)<sup>9</sup> to advance social mobilization and reach the most vulnerable IDPs, including single-headed poor IDP families (headed mostly by women). The aim of this follow-up initiative is to ensure that they are informed and ready to benefit from the existing state programmes for the improvement of IDP livelihoods in rural areas. In addition, the initiative works with the MRA, to mainstream gender in their programming and budget allocation. As of the date of this publication, the ministry adopted by internal decree the Gender Equality Strategy. As such, more than one thousand one hundred vulnerable IDPs, out of that approximately two-thirds of women, have been reached by TASO Foundation between April and October 2016 and have been given assistance in applying for livelihood grants provided by the MRA.

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9 Joint FAO and UN Women project titled “Gender-sensitive socio-economic empowerment of IDPs through co-funding of their livelihood opportunities and promotion of social mobilization” (2016-2017), in partnership with EU represented by the EU Delegation to Georgia.







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