



SPORTS UNITED TO END VIOLENCE
AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS:
EXPERIENCE FROM GEORGIA





UN Women Georgia Country Office
#3 Kavsadze street,
office suite #11, 0179
Tbilisi, Georgia
Tel: (995 32) 222 06 04;
(995 32) 222 08 70

www.unwomen.org
www.georgia.unwomen.org

SPORTS UNITED TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS: EXPERIENCE FROM GEORGIA



Tbilisi, Georgia, 2018

UN Women is the UN organization dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. A global champion for women and girls, UN Women was established to accelerate progress on meeting their needs worldwide. UN Women supports UN Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to implement these standards. It stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on five priority areas: increasing women's leadership and participation; ending violence against women; engaging women in all aspects of peace and security processes; enhancing women's economic empowerment; and making gender equality central to national development planning and budgeting. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality. The publication was prepared in the framework of the UN Joint Programme for Gender Equality with the financial support of the Swedish Government.

Text: Will King

Editor: Michelle Minaskanian

Design: Nata Kubaneishvili

Printed by: Fountain Georgia

© UN Women 2018. All rights reserved.

ISBN 978-9941-8-0505-9

CONTENTS

FOREWORD BY THE UN WOMEN COUNTRY REPRESENTATIVE IN GEORGIA	4
INTRODUCTION	5
VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS: A GLOBAL PANDEMIC	7
A NEW GRASS-ROOTS INITIATIVE IS BORN	8
A UNIQUE SET OF CHALLENGES	12
UNITING TO FIGHT VIOLENCE TOGETHER	14
HeForShe	15
PROGRESS REFLECTED IN NUMBERS	17
LOOKING TOWARDS THE FUTURE	18

FOREWORD

UN Women has been supporting national partners in Georgia to end violence against women and girls and domestic violence (VAWG/DV) since 2010. Our journey to promote zero tolerance for the practice of VAWG/DV in Georgia has been inspired and guided by the United Nations Secretary-General's UNiTE to End Violence against Women campaign¹ launched in 2008.

Throughout the past eight years, we have provided technical assistance to the Government of Georgia to align national legislation and policies with the relevant international legal frameworks and standards. To enhance implementation of the laws and policies, UN Women Georgia has supported the establishment of specialized services for survivors of domestic violence, such as the first state-run shelters, crisis centres and hotlines and rehabilitation programmes for perpetrators. We have helped to develop key capacities within the relevant service providers and have promoted these services – assisting the survivors to reach out for professional assistance.

UN Women and its diverse UN and non-UN partners, including women's organizations and state institutions, conducted a series of awareness-raising interventions and campaigns targeting the public and decision makers at all levels, aimed at changing the attitudes, values and structures that sustain inequality and discrimination. The 2017 National Study on Violence against Women, conducted jointly by the National Statistics Office of Georgia (GEOSTAT) and UN Women, provided a baseline necessary for measuring progress against the indicators and targets of Sustainable Development Goal 5 (Gender Equality) defined by the Government of Georgia to address VAWG/DV by 2030.

None of this would be possible without our partners in the Government, civil society and the UN Country Team. We would not have been able to carry forward our work to end violence against women and girls over the past eight years without strong partnerships and financial support from the Government of the Kingdom of Sweden and the European Union, who provided funding and overall support for our operations.

This brief publication captures specifically UN Women's partnership with sports to promote zero tolerance for VAWG/DV since 2010. Its purpose is to describe our joint journey through the achievements and challenges we have encountered and to share our experience with partners within the UN family, civil society and beyond.

We would like to express our gratitude to the Georgian Rugby Union,² Georgian National Rugby Team and individual rugby players for their strong partnership and firm commitment to this cause. Our special thanks go to Mr. Giorgi Nizharadze, former President of the Georgian Rugby Union; Mr. Gocha Svanidze, President of the Georgian Rugby Union; Mr. Milton Haig, Chief Coach of the Georgian National Rugby Team; Mr. Nono Andghuladze and Mr. Lekso Gugava, former players of the National Rugby Team; and Mr. Giga Chikadze, kickboxing world champion. They have made this work a reality and have inspired other athletes and men to take a stand and contribute to ending violence against women and girls in Georgia and beyond.

Erika Kvapilova

UN Women Country Representative in Georgia

1 Information available at <http://www.un.org/en/women/endviolence/>.

2 Information available at <http://site.rugby.ge/en/home/>.

INTRODUCTION



School children in Pankisi during meeting with Georgian rugby players (July 2010) Photo: UN Women/Leli Blagonravova

In 2010, unusual billboards began to appear on the streets of Georgia's capital. The ads displayed famous figures associated with one of the country's most beloved sports – rugby. But these weren't your run-of-the-mill billboards. There was a deeper, more important meaning behind these signs. The billboards were encouraging Georgian society to get involved in a campaign aimed at putting an end to violence against women and girls (VAWG).

The initial public reaction to the billboards was one of bewilderment – even shock – as the subject of domestic abuse and violence against women was largely a taboo subject in Georgia at that time. Moreover, the prevailing attitude towards domestic violence among many in society was that it was something that should be dealt with privately in the home, not for the authorities or state institutions to handle.³ Not

only that, there were cultural elements at play that helped keep cases of domestic violence bottled-up within a confined space away from the public eye and far out of reach of the law. As a result, violence against women was rarely reported.⁴

It was this very attitude and these circumstances that were at the heart of what needed to be changed. If UN Women was going to be successful in its campaign to tackle the problem, it would have to first change the deeply embedded behaviours, beliefs and structures rooted in society that were reinforcing gender inequality and normalizing violence.

As such, in 2010, an innovative advocacy campaign began a partnership between UN Women and the Georgian Rugby Union.⁵ The partnership was employed under the aegis of the United Nations Secretary-General's UNiTE to End Vio-

3 In Georgia, 78 per cent of women believe that domestic violence is a private matter and that no one should interfere in it. UNFPA and ACT, National Study on Domestic Violence against Women in Georgia (2009).

4 Information available at www.police.ge.

5 Video available at http://georgia.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/videos?videoid=F3DRdqx_dBY.

lence against Women campaign⁶ and later under UN Women's solidarity movement for gender equality, HeforShe.⁷

As a starting point, this grass-roots campaign targeted young boys and men, particularly in Georgia's rural regions, where rugby players hosted a series of meetings with boys throughout the country. The players spoke to the boys about rugby, as well as the principles of equality, mutual respect and support that are the foundation of rugby. They encouraged young men and boys to take a zero-tolerance stance regarding violence against women and girls.

The campaign also embarked on a mission that sought to instill in the boys a deeper understanding of what it means to

be a man and how to be respectful towards both men and women. The campaign also underscored how violence – especially against women and girls – is never acceptable behaviour in solving personal conflicts.

During the multi-year campaign, Georgian rugby players also inspired other athletes outside of Georgia to get behind the UN Women initiative against VAWG. In 2016, the Spanish football club Valencia invited former rugby player Nono Andghuladze, a UN Women partner, to share his experience with the Spanish athletes in order to help promote gender equality through sport. In addition, the Samoan rugby team also followed suit by expressing their support for the UNiTE campaign.



The first outdoor billboards with rugby players condemning violence against women and promoting the nationwide domestic violence hotline (October 2010) Photo: UN Women/Leli Blagonravova

6 Information available at <http://www.un.org/en/women/endviolence/>.

7 Information available at <http://www.heforshe.org/en>.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS: A GLOBAL PANDEMIC



According to the World Health Organization, it is estimated that 35 per cent of women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or sexual violence by a non-partner at some point in their lives.⁸ However, some national studies show that up to 70 per cent of all women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner in their lifetime.

In Georgia, the latest research points to widespread experiences of violence against women across the country. Intimate partner violence, as well as early or forced marriage, are among the most prevalent forms of violence against women in Georgia.⁹ It is important to note that this kind of violence is not relegated to a single group; it cuts across all social, cultural and economic divisions.

Compounding matters is the fact that of the majority of countries with available data, less than 40 per cent of women who experience this kind of violence seek help of any kind. Among women who do seek help, most look to family and friends for assistance, while very few look to formal institutions such as the police or community health services. Less than 10 per cent of those women seeking help after experi-

encing violence sought help by appealing to the police.¹⁰

While these are very disheartening statistics, UN Women, its partners and many others have worked tirelessly to change this. The first state-run crisis centres and hotlines were established in 2010 to serve survivors of domestic violence, and shelters have been set up in various regions across the country to help women cope with the violence perpetrated against them.¹¹

Over the last few years, UN Women, along with Georgia's UN agencies and local women's organizations, have advocated for and provided technical assistance to legislative reforms to address violence against women. In 2017, Georgia ratified the most comprehensive regional legal framework to address the problem, the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence.

With the goal of putting an end to VAWG, UN Women continues to work towards and support the development of national capacities to ensure that violence against women is properly investigated and prosecuted and that justice for women is achieved.

8 WHO, Global and regional estimates of violence against women: prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence (2013), p. 20. Available at http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/85239/9789241564625_eng.pdf;jsessionid=0292DA1AAC94DABFAD3E6EBB07040611?sequence=1.

9 UN Women, GEOSTAT and the EU, National Study on Violence against Women (2017).

10 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, The World's Women 2015, Trends and Statistics (2015), p. 159.

11 This work would not be possible without committed partners – the Government of Sweden and the European Union – who have provided funds for UN Women-led initiatives.

A NEW GRASS-ROOTS INITIATIVE IS BORN

One of the boldest, most innovative moves to raise awareness and address the problem of violence against women in Georgia was UN Women's decision to unite forces with the Georgian Rugby Union - says Irina Japharidze, UN Women Programme Analyst for Ending Violence against Women and Girls.

At this point, some might ask – why rugby players?

It's a fair question.

According to Ms. Japharidze while the idea to enroll men who participate in one of the world's most violent sports in a campaign to fight against domestic violence may seem counter-intuitive at first, there is logic in using rugby to help drive home the anti-violence message.

Although the rugby player's image is one of masculinity and is closely associated with a sport fraught with violence, rugby players command respect from many within civil society – especially Georgia's male population. This provides organizations like UN Women an opportunity to amplify the message that they seek to parlay to the public. In fact, when Georgian rugby players lend their support to a campaign aiming to stamp out violence against women, it provides automatic credibility to the campaign, as the words of the rugby players are authoritative and are taken to heart by many almost instantly. The rugby ethos of never using violence or physical force beyond the pitch is also an important starting point.

Nono Andghuladze and Lekso Gugava are both former rugby players. They began their partnership with UN Women when the campaign launched in 2010.

The collaboration came about after members of the Georgian Rugby Union had met with UN Women and learned how prevalent domestic violence was in the country. Immediately they wanted to be part of the solution. Since then, both Andghuladze and Gugava have made countless visits to schools in small towns and villages throughout Georgia, speaking with young boys (and girls) about the importance of ending violence against women.

However, from day one, their approach to the children has been one of nuance, as they have nimbly used the topic of

rugby as a vehicle to get at the greater issue of gender equality and violence against women.

On a chilly weekday in February, Andghuladze and Gugava took their campaign on the road to visit a school in the village of Tirdznisi, located on the outskirts of the town of Gori. Over the years, Gori had fallen on hard economic times. Not only was economic hardship prevalent throughout the city and the surrounding villages, but the city was also in close proximity to one of Georgia's conflict zones. As a result, a large portion of its residents consists of internally displaced persons (IDPs) – a population that, due to multiple social and economic disadvantages, may be at particular risk of violence, including violence against women.

As the two men entered the unheated classroom, they were greeted by about 35 enthusiastic students, many of whom were under the age of 16 and had come from IDP households. Clutching two shiny rugby balls under their arms, Andghuladze and Gugava kicked off the conversation by asking the kids about rugby-related topics.

"Have you ever been to a rugby match?" Gugava asked the students, as a stream of hands went up in the air in excitement. Gugava tossed the rugby ball to one of the kids as he enthusiastically told them about a match he saw at Dynamo Stadium in Tbilisi a few months back. From there, more answers came forth from the kids with each toss of the ball. As the children contributed to the conversation, Andghuladze added more words to the blackboard.

Andghuladze later recalls: "We hold open discussions with the boys. In doing so, we like to approach them as if we are having a 'man-to-man talk'. But we broach the topic gently, first engaging them in a broad discussion about rugby and then gradually bringing up the subject of violence against women."

However, engaging the boys is not as easy as it sounds. There is a nuanced method that is required in their approach, and that approach centres around the values that rugby espouses. "The rugby community promotes a set of universal values. Whether it's Georgia, South Africa or Australia, rugby players around the world abide by what we call 'oval values' – consequently, the shape of a rugby ball," Andghuladze explains. "And these are the values we are trying to impart on these



Joint press conference to reaffirm commitment to promote zero tolerance for violence against women. From left to right: Giorgi Nizharadze, Head of the Georgian Rugby Union; Milton Haig, Head Coach of the Georgian Rugby Union; and Erika Kvapilova, UN Women Country Representative in Georgia (August 2016) Photo: UN Women



UN Women partners and former rugby players Nono Andghuladze (centre) and Lekso Gugava (right) speak to children at a school in the village of Tirdznisi about family values and violence against women (April 2018) Photo: UN Women

kids. It is useful to use these oval values as we make the transition towards deeper, more serious topics like violence against women.”

As the two called on the kids to describe these values in a kind of “word-association game”, positive affirmations like teamwork, health, love, friendship, bravery, respect, relationships, loyalty, equality, support, trust, unity and understanding quickly filled the spaces on the blackboard. The answers from the kids came like rapid-fire, as they submit words associated with the topic being discussed. Andghuladze struggled to keep up as he furiously wrote them all down on the blackboard while the children shouted them out one by one.

“You have to treat other players as you want to be treated,” Gugava told the children. “This is true whether you are on the field or at home. And the same applies to how you treat women.”

With that, the two former rugby players directed the conversation towards the topic of violence.

“Not all of them are eager to discuss it,” Andghuladze later

reflects. “That is the hardest part. If you do this long enough, then you can see it on their faces – the ones who are abused or who have witnessed abuse at home. It kills you. We tell them about the hotline they can call and how if you witness abuse and stay silent, then you become part of the problem and not the solution. We plant the ideas, but there isn’t much else we can do.”

Andghuladze and Gugava were quick to point out to the kids that not all violence has to be physical. They informed the children that they should be aware of other insidious types of violence. They taught the kids about psychological, economic and emotional violence, as well as the problem of bullying.

Over the course of about an hour, there was some attrition in the classroom. Some kids left the meeting in the middle (mostly the youngest members of the group and a few girls), but the majority stayed and continued to engage, despite a few that had already appeared to tune out of the conversation (judging by the expressions on their faces). Nevertheless, what was once a raucous classroom atmosphere had slowly turned into a much more introspective and focused environment.



Argentinian rugby players and Georgian rugby players meet youths in Pankisi Gorge of the Kakheti region during International Refugee Day (July 2014) Photo: UN Women/Maka Gogaladze



Nono Andghuladze (left); Mamuka Gachechiladze, representative of the CSO “Women’s Information Center” (centre); and world champion kick-boxer Giga Chikadze (right) meet with boys in Pankisi Gorge, Kakheti region (July 2012) Photo: UN Women/Leli Blagonravova

When the meeting finally came to a close, the school children filed out of the classroom slowly, seemingly still absorbing the information that was given to them. Several of the older teens stopped to chat with Andghuladze and Gugava on the way out, slapping them “high fives” as they left the room.

When asked what they learned, a few of the teens responded with the predictable precociousness and bravado you might expect from a teenager. Others seemed to have absorbed a deeper understanding of the topic.

“I already knew a little bit about the subject of violence, and I already knew that it was bad. But today I feel like I deepened my knowledge about the subject a little bit,” noted 16-year-old Ucha.

Another young man had a different take on what he learned. “Today I learned that rugby is a great game that not only requires strength and purpose, but that rugby is also like family and involves love and loyalty. However, the main thing I

learned today was the different types of violence that are out there,” said Dato, aged 16.

While Dato and Ucha both agreed that there is no situation in which violence against women can be justified, it is impossible to know whether or not the boys were just saying that to appear agreeable or if they really believed it in their hearts. In fact, it is difficult to gauge whether any of the information that Andghuladze and Gugava had imparted on the children registered with them or not.

Nevertheless, neither Andghuladze or Gugava lose too much sleep worrying about whether or not their message sunk in with every kid. They know that they are not miracle workers. Instead, they embrace a missionary-like perspective about their work.

“If just one boy left the meeting thinking about the discussion and left with a better understanding of why violence is bad, and how to deal with it, then for us, the day was a success,” says Andghuladze.

A UNIQUE SET OF CHALLENGES

When it comes to reaching the kids they speak to, Andghuladze and Gugava note that not all regions of Georgia are the same. Some regions of the country present a unique set of challenges and circumstances as the duo works to convey their message.

One example that differs from others is Pankisi Gorge, a region that is ethnically and religiously much different from other parts of Georgia. Pankisi is a region where the vast majority of its population claim Kist and Chechen roots. The culture, religion and mindset in Pankisi is much different than the Orthodox communities that make up other parts of Georgia. In addition, like many of the villages Andghuladze and Gugava have visited during the campaign, Pankisi suffers from severe economic hardship as well.

“In Pankisi, we are speaking to a religious minority that has its own ideology and attitude towards the issue of violence against women,” Gugava explains. “I have to admit that the talks there are never easy. You really have to be persuasive. The point is, we never try to influence someone and forcibly change their opinion. We simply explain the principles of rugby and how it is a sport that embraces the values of respect, solidarity and tolerance. We tell them that we have to support and protect each other in real life, just like team members do in rugby.”

In May 2018, Andghuladze and Gugava conducted the rare programme in Tbilisi. This time, they spoke to a group of 35 boys and girls who were refugees. The children, all under the age of 17, attended the event on behalf of the UNHCR. The children came from diverse backgrounds – hailing from places like Iran, Iraq, Lebanon and Ukraine.

After giving the children a behind-the-scenes tour of the facilities at the Georgian Rugby Union’s headquarters, Andghuladze and Gugava conducted their usual discussion outdoors on the stadium’s bleachers. Once again, the two men used a rugby ball to engage the children in the subject matter, encouraging them to contribute answers to the topic centred around family and “oval values”.

At the end of the programme, the kids had the chance to participate in rugby activities on the pitch with England’s under-20 national rugby team, who were in Georgia for an upcoming match.

The boys and girls ran, tackled and threw the ball with over 20 members of England’s rugby squad. They were visibly thrilled to have the opportunity.

“I don’t like rugby, but I wanted to hear the guys talk about this subject,” said Ahmed, aged 13, a refugee from Lebanon. “As far as violence against girls is concerned, I don’t do it. Not even when I am angry. I never hit girls or anyone for that matter. I already knew that it’s not something that we should ever do.”

Mohamed, aged 15 from Iraq, had his own philosophy to share: “I don’t like violence because when you fight, it will eventually come back to you. Maybe tomorrow or maybe next week. But it always will come back. So I don’t like fighting with anyone – boys or girls.”

To date, Andghuladze and Gugava have held these special meetings with over 3,000 boys and girls throughout Georgia.



A boy from village Duisi meeting with Nono Andguladze and Lekso Gugava, Pankisi Gorge (July 2012) Photo: UN Women/Leli Blagonravova

UNITING TO FIGHT VIOLENCE TOGETHER

UN Women has been part of the UN Secretary-General's UNiTE to End Violence against Women global campaign since it launched in 2008. During the early stages of the campaign in Georgia, only Georgia's rugby community had joined forces with UN Women. Eventually, several of Georgia's water polo players and other national athletes became interested in the project and expressed their willingness to lend a hand.

Andghuladze explains: "Giga Chikadze, a world champion in kick-boxing, as well as the Georgian Football Federation also joined us.¹² We felt that there was no better way to promote behavioural changes among youth and men than by using sports and famous athletes as role models. Our primary goal was and remains to get more men on board in this fight."

In 2012, the Georgian Rugby Union dedicated the international test match between Georgia and Russia to the UNiTE campaign. About 50,000 rugby fans at Dynamo Stadium in Tbilisi listened to players speak about the subject. In addition, popular Georgian rugby players were featured in vid-

eos¹³ condemning violence against women and girls, which thousands of people watched on television and social media during the course of the campaign.

The Lelos, Georgia's national rugby team, also got in on the action by devoting several international matches to raising awareness about violence against women and girls. To date, 27 rugby matches have been dedicated to this cause. In addition, the Georgian Rugby Union, in partnership with UN Women, developed a manual for rugby coaches, which helps them teach the principles of rugby along with gender equality and zero tolerance for violence against women. The training courses target children, mainly boys between the ages of 8 and 15 in rugby clubs across the country. Milton Haig, Head Coach of the Lelos, continues to fully stand behind the initiative. "Each and every one of us – the Lelos, the coaches and members of our large rugby family – are proud to wear campaign t-shirts that condemn violence against women and girls," Haig said in 2016.



Giga Chikadze, a world champion kick-boxer, works with children after discussing the topic of violence against women (July 2012) Photo: UN Women/Leli Blagonravova

12 Video available at <http://georgia.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/videos?videoid=xCCTqllk4A0>.

13 Videos available at <http://georgia.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/videos>.

HeForShe



Award-winning photo by Andrey Kovalyov (2018) from the Tokyo Foto Awards (TIFA), which was also featured as one of the outdoor billboards produced within the framework of the UN Women campaign "Georgian language has no gender prejudice. Why is it in your head?".¹⁴ The photo features Nina Tibilashvili, a Georgian fencer and a world champion in sabre fencing, and Luka Ghaghanidze, a bronze medal winner of the U23 European Championships in foil fencing (July 2017)

Hosted by Georgia, the World Rugby U20 Championship 2017 saw its participating teams and the World Rugby Organisation declare their support for HeForShe, the UN Women solidarity movement for gender equality. An official ceremony, which took place on 10 June 2017 at the premises of the Ministry of Justice's National Archives, served as the venue for affirming the partnership between UN Women and World Rugby within the framework of the championship. A special report detailing the event was drafted by World Rugby social media and posted on their website. The report was seen by more than 20 million viewers over the course of the World Cup. During the Championship Finals, a fan zone was organized at the stadium promoting gender equality and women's empowerment through sport.

As part of the U20 Championship, a surprise event was organized by the Georgian Rugby Union for female rugby players from the town of Darcheli. The event aimed to promote women's empowerment through sport. The girls had an opportunity to meet England's U20 players, who also provided them a masterclass in rugby.

Unlike English and many other languages around the world, the Georgian language is gender-neutral: there are no words that denote or specify gender. It was this linguistic peculiarity within the Georgian language that helped conceive the Georgian version of the global UN Women HeForShe movement for gender equality.¹⁵

14 Video available at <http://georgia.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/videos?videoid=xCCTqllk4A0>

15 The global campaign launched in 2014. In Georgia, it was used to attract male gender-equality champions promoting women and equal partnerships in all areas of life. Rugby players were among these advocates.

The HeForShe campaign set out to underscore to society that women have enjoyed no fewer achievements in sports than men. Yet, when people start talking about a strong, fast or fierce athlete, many automatically assume that the athlete is male. The HeForShe campaign aims to defy this stereotype by demonstrating that both men and women can participate in sports equally, and that gender is irrelevant when it comes to achieving success in sports or in life.

The campaign was followed by several advertisements, which included posters and videos. The ads forced viewers to think and re-evaluate their ingrained prejudices about gender roles. One poster featured a male and female wrestler standing side by side, arms folded authoritatively, with the caption: “Georgian Language has no gender prejudice. Why is it in your head?”

The campaign was implemented in cooperation with the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs of Georgia. According to Vasil Liparteliani, Head of the Ministry’s Research and Analysis Division at the time, enhancing the engagement of girls and women in various sports was one of the campaign’s main priorities.

“Partnering with UN Women and this campaign is a great opportunity for us to reach out to the broader community and provide information to every family that it should be no surprise if a girl opts for any stereotyped ‘manly’ sport – for example, weightlifting,” Liparteliani noted. “We need to change the mindset that certain sports are intended only for girls and certain sports are for boys. Girls’ involvement in sport is their decision entirely, and it should not be subject to public judgment.”

In one of the campaign’s video advertisements, a girl named Nino from the village of Darcheli narrates her story about how she began training to be a rugby player and how many in society did not believe that girls could play rugby. As the

inspirational video plays on, it depicts a team of female rugby players tackling each other and running on the pitch, while Nino provides an account of how she and her friends struggle to combat such stereotypical attitudes and how parochial mentalities often extend beyond the pitch. Nino affirms how both men and women can be successful in sports, and as the video ends, she concludes with a defiant statement: “We are girls, and rugby is our sport.”¹⁶

While the HeForShe campaign enjoyed wide support among many within Georgia’s sports community, the reaction from society at large was not always positive – especially in social media circles.

“We received a lot of negative comments on Facebook,” says Gvantsa Asatiani, Communications Specialist at UN Women. “Many people were upset that these social advertisements portrayed Georgian girls in a way that differed from their traditional notions of what women’s roles should be in society.” That acknowledgement underscored how vitally important it was to challenge the prevailing patriarchal attitudes towards women that existed within society. In other words, if the campaign was to achieve success, establishing a greater sense of gender equality within the community was key.

As the years have passed, UN Women, the Georgian Rugby Union and other partners have continued to work intensely to change hearts, minds and attitudes about gender equality and violence against women. Through their efforts and the efforts of other organizations and various community initiatives, Georgia has begun to turn the corner on domestic violence and violence against women. While there is indisputably much more work to be done, the numbers suggest that the country has made major inroads in addressing this problem over the last few years.

16 Video available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZHaejVwDM8s&feature=youtu.be>.

PROGRESS REFLECTED IN NUMBERS

It is impossible to say to what extent the positive changes seen in society's attitude towards violence against women can be attributed to UN Women's campaigns. The fact remains, however, that Georgia has made measurable progress in its crusade to combat the problem, and the statistics seem to support this.

Over the last several years, the reporting of domestic violence cases has dramatically increased in the country. According to the new National Study on Violence against Women in Georgia, released jointly by UN Women and the National Statistics Office in 2017, there has been a significant increase in the percentage of women who have reported acts of violence committed by an intimate partner to the police – 18 per cent in 2017,¹⁷ compared to just 1.5 per cent in 2009.¹⁸ This indicates an increase in women's confidence in the willingness and effectiveness of police to intervene in cases where intimate partner violence occurs.

In addition, the number of restraining orders issued by the police has increased almost twenty-fold over the last several

years; criminal prosecutions in cases of domestic violence have quadrupled in the past four years; and women survivors are accessing shelters and services more than ever before.¹⁹ This increase is largely attributed to a significant shift in public attitudes towards domestic violence as a whole, as the percentage of women who believe that domestic violence is a private matter and that no one should interfere has decreased from 78 per cent in 2009²⁰ to just 33 per cent in 2017.²¹

More proof of progress made on this front can be seen in other figures contained within the 2017 report, which shows some considerable shifts in reasoning towards staying in abusive relationships. For example, since the 2009 study was published, there has been a 10 per cent decrease in the rate of women who stayed with violent husbands because they believed the violence to be normal. This can be interpreted as a positive development and an indication that fewer women are willing to tolerate violence as a normalized occurrence in Georgia.

17 UN Women, GEOSTAT and the EU, National Study on Violence against Women: Summary Report (2017), p.15.

18 UNFPA and ACT, National Study on Domestic Violence against Women in Georgia (2009).

19 Information available at www.police.ge.

20 UNFPA and ACT, National Study on Domestic Violence against Women in Georgia (2009).

21 UN Women, GEOSTAT and the EU, National Study on Violence against Women: Summary Report (2017).

LOOKING TOWARDS THE FUTURE



The President of Georgia, George Margvelashvili declared 2015 the Year of Women at a press conference held in the presidential palace on 15 January. Photo: Administration of president of Georgia/Leli Blagonravova

Through the tireless campaigning of UN Women and its partners – including other UN agencies in country such as UNICEF, UNFPA and UNHCR – negative social stigmas pertaining to domestic violence and abuse have taken root within Georgian society. Across the country, there is now a palpable sense of shame that is associated with the use of violence against women. Violence against women is no longer widely viewed as normal. Nowadays, violence against women can result in punitive legal consequences for offenders, and such behaviour carries with it a severe social cost. In a society that places great emphasis on a family's social standing within society, domestic violence is no longer looked at indifferently or as something normal.

That being said, within the backdrop of a spate of highly publicized murder cases since 2014 where women were the victims of their former husbands or intimate partners, we are reminded of just how much farther we need to go in addressing domestic violence.

The President of Georgia, Giorgi Margvelashvili, declared 2015 the Year of Women at a press conference held in the presidential palace on 15 January. "We have to condemn violence against women and girls and make tangible steps to eliminate domestic violence and violence against women," he said, highlighting this initiative as a direct reaction to the rise in the killings of women as a result of domestic violence.²²

22 UN Women Georgia, "Georgia Declares 2015 as Year of the Women", 15 January 2015. Available at <http://georgia.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2015/01/georgia-declares-2015-as-year-of-the-women>.

However, while even one femicide is too many, the increase in societal awareness – that domestic violence is a criminal offence punishable by law and carries social consequences – is proof that the country has come a long way since 2010.

As such, UN Women, along with its UN sister agencies and local and international partners, will continue to work very closely with the key national actors engaged in intersectoral coordination, referral and service provision to the victims/survivors of domestic violence and sexual violence, including the Public Defender's Office, police, social workers, lawyers, prosecutors and judges. UN Women will also continue its support for its national partners in the development and implementation of a socioeconomic rehabilitation programme for the survivors of domestic violence.

UN Women will also continue to carry out social behaviour change communication (SBCC) campaigns and events by driving home the message to the public that violence should not and will not be tolerated, and the organization will continue to work to mobilize resources for women and the survivors of violence to protect them from further harm.

Without achieving gender equality among society, violence against women cannot be prevented and eliminated. The fight, therefore, will continue in an effort to level the playing field between the sexes and to combat this type of behaviour so that no woman or girl has to fear becoming a victim of violence in the years to come.

