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WOMEN ON THE P2P PATH: ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES IN PEACEBUILDING

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ABSTRACTS

Acronyms.....	4
Introduction.....	5
Background.....	5
Methodology.....	6
Interviews.....	7
Role of National and Local Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security.....	13
Human Security of Conflict Affected Population.....	14
Summary.....	16
Individual Interviews: experts.....	18
Recommendations.....	19

CBO – community-based organization

GEC – Parliamentary Gender Equality Council

CSO – Civil Society Organization

DV – domestic Violence

GE – Gender Equality

GBV – Gender Based Violence

EUMM – European Union Monitoring Mission

HR – Human Rights

IDP – The Internally Displaced Persons (In Georgia, additional term – Forcibly Displaced – means the IDP from the occupied territories.)

IDP Allowance – monthly allowance given to the persons with the IDP status

MDG – Millennium Development Goals

MRA –Ministry of the IDPs from Occupied Territories, Accommodation and Refugees of Georgia

NGO – non-governmental organization;

OSCE – The Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe

ODIHR - The OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

PDO – Public Defender’s Office

TSA – Targeted Social Assistance (for poor in Georgia)

UN – The United Nations

UNDP – The UN Development Program

UNIFEM – The UN Fund for Women

UNHCR - The UN High Commissioner for Refugees

UN SC – UN Security Council

UNOMIG- UN observers Mission in Georgia

UNSCR – The UN Security Council Resolution

UN Women – The UN Entity for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women

VAW – violence against women

INTRODUCTION

Based on the fact, that the pandemic caused by Covid-19 has especially evoked disproportionate damage to vulnerable groups, distinctly – to the internally displaced women, such issues as: barriers and opportunities for women’s political participation and participation in the peace processes; barriers and opportunities for women’s economic empowerment; and the impact of the misuse of the natural resources on women’s security and participation – are still of great relevance in 2020. In that event, with the financial assistance of the Austrian Development Agency, the IDP Women Association “Consent”, along with the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP) has started working on a new project. The main objective of the project “**Local communities build and sustain peace: Strengthening women and youth partici-**

pation in building sustainable peace in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kenya, Moldova, South Sudan, Uganda & Ukraine” is to update and deepen the analysis of the peacebuilding environment in Georgia. The following project focuses on the areas bordering with South Ossetian/Tskhinvali region and Abkhazian territories where the above-mentioned topics are relevant. The project builds upon on results of localization project, implemented by cooperative effort of GNWP and “Consent” and is dedicated to sustaining of women’s meaningful participation in issues related with peace and human security.

The research component was important to map the differences after 2018, when the previous similar study was commissioned by the IDPWA Consent with the support from GNWP and ADA.

BACKGROUND

Georgia had experiences multiple armed conflicts on own territory which started in early 90s, and the last war was in 2008. During these years, the profile and situation of IDPs and conflict affected population in Georgia were changed significantly.

In Georgia, we talk about two types of conflict affected population: there are internally displaced persons from all conflicts (early 90s - conflicts in Abkhazia and in Tskhinvali; 1998 – conflict in Gali district and new displacement; and 2008 war between Georgia and Russia over South Ossetia). According to data from Ministry of IDPs from the Occupied Territories, Labor, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia, there are more than 290,000 internally displaced persons; Internal Displacement Monitoring Center gives the number of 304,010¹ persons, and “Women and Men in Georgia”, 2020 – 286,000² persons.

At the same time, 116 villages in 10 municipalities has the status of conflict affected, which gives additionally 45,000 persons affected by the conflict. In total, almost 9,5 % of population of Georgia are directly affected by the conflict (population of Georgia constitutes according to the last census, 3,750,000 persons).

The conflicts led to occupation of almost 20% of territory and massive internal displacement. Currently, Georgia is in situation of unresolved conflicts with slow dynamics, and in situation of **protracted displacement** that means – fatigue of donors, lack of attention from international community and lack of understanding of existing IDP specific challenges also sometimes within the country.

Therefore, the traumatization and specific IDP problems are still present, but response is already

¹ <https://www.internal-displacement.org/database/displacement-data>

² <https://www.geostat.ge/en/single-news/2165/women-and-men-in-georgia-2020>

much weaker, as assumption is that the main response especially from international community, comes during the emergency situation, and after the IDP become within the responsibility of national governments.

In Georgia, among conflict affected population more than 53 % are women and girls. **Women and girls continue to have specific needs (feminized poverty, lack of inclusion and participation, gender inequality, domestic and gender—based violence).** Women have double and triple burden as they needed during the military actions to take on their shoulders also breadwinners function and they continue to do it now; many qualified IDP women cannot exercise their skills and work mainly on low-paid jobs; more and more women leave country as there are no working places, and foreign market mainly requires female jobs.

Gender Based Violence is increasing in Georgia also in general population, and there is no disaggregated statistics on IDPs but we see that almost each second family in IDP community has these problems. Recent World Bank study (2017) did not found very direct link between the unresolved conflicts and increase of GBV and DV; however, they concluded that the decrease of economic opportunities due to conflict situation directly increase level of violence in conflict affected families. Among the main reasons why conflict can increase the violence the respondents named: stress, illness and lack of employment of perpetrator (55%); overall increase of violent activity (22%), - but this indicator is much higher for population

living alongside the conflict division line and comes on the first place (35%). That is mainly connected to lack of physical security and impunity (due to unresolved conflict, borderisation, people's kidnapping).

Psychological traumatization which after many years is reflected in anxiety, lack of confidence, fears and specific somatic diseases: UNDP 2013 survey showed that health status of IDPs is very poor and the profile of diseases is different from local population: access to lands is 6 time less: the salaries twice less, and unemployment - twice higher than in local population.

IDP women suppose together with traditional roles – keeping family alive, look after elderly, children and disabled, deal with challenges such as – to become breadwinner for family, but simultaneously try to keep man in family not traumatize with this changing of gender roles; support traumatized children and ensure their access to quality education and support husbands who are often traumatized and not really able to work and to sustain families.

New challenges related with COVID-19 pandemic, affected all population, but specifically affected IDPs, as it was mentioned in IASC interim guidelines¹. In Georgia, where big number of IDPs still live without individual sanitary units, using joint toilets and water tubs, the danger of horizontal spread of infection was increased for IDP, especially for IDP women, who are responsible in families for water supply and kitchen.

METHODOLOGY

Current research is based on the data gained through focus groups, conducted in conflict affected areas, namely, Zugdidi, Gori and Gardabani municipalities, and individual interviews with grassroots women and youth. Focus groups were conducted by specially trained members of IDP WA

Consent. Both, Zugdidi and Gori, included women – internally displaced by the conflict, as well as women from villages adjacent to conflict division line (ABL). Gardabani was taken as a case where IDP are living together with ethnic minority; Gardabani is located in Eastern Georgia, where atten-

¹ https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/2020-11/IASC%20Interim%20Guidance%20on%20Public%20Health%20Measures%20for%20COVID-19%20in%20Low%20Capacity%20and%20Humanitarian%20Settings_0.pdf

tion and assistance to IDPs are less than in regions with high density of IDP population.

In parallel, project team interviewed representatives of think tanks, NGOs, as well as members of Parliament, we also interviewed researchers from

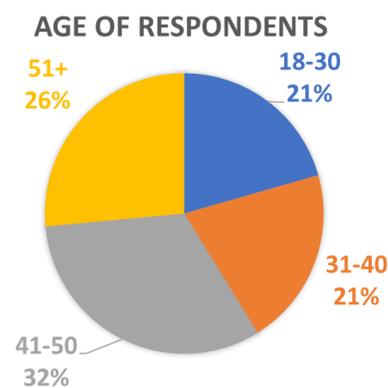
Public Defender’s Office, who presented intermediate report on the implementation of NAP on Women, Peace and Security. The following document introduces a short overview of the conducted research.

INTERVIEWS

In total, 141 respondents have participated in both focus groups and individual interviews.

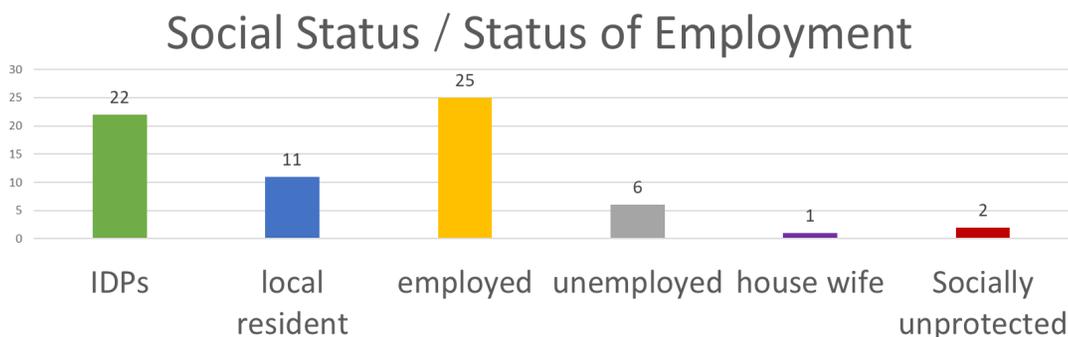
FOCUS GROUPS: ZUGDIDI

Currently, 25 people have participated in the focus group research activity in Zugdidi (with 10 participants from the first group and 15 participants – from the second group). The age of the respondents ranges between 18 and 63 years. Social status (belonging to IDP community or to host community; employment; belonging to group of socially vulnerable families) is shown on the diagram below.



Among the Zugdidi respondents – 15 are IDPs, 17 – with higher education, 19 – employed, 6 – unemployed, and 7 – socially vulnerable. Several positions regarding women’s participation in formal/informal negotiations have been outlined: the dominant position within the first group is that no

barriers for the participation exist; whilst the second group members consider that in order to encourage women to engage in the formal negotiations at a local or international levels – assistance of women mediators is crucial. Interestingly, both Zugdidi groups suggest different obstacles to participation in peacebuilding activities.



The majority of questioned women had heard about National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, some also knew about Local Action Plans (see the figures below). However, women did not have clear understanding what NAPs and LAPs are

given to them in practical terms. Some of women knew that state assisted to conduct special training on economic empowerment (in Samegrelo), but no one from our respondents was participating in this training.

For instance, according to the first group, stereotypes, lack of related skills, and lack of access to education constitute the main obstacles to peacebuilding, whilst the second group thinks that there is a misuse of women’s resources. Also, Russian occupation was named as one of the obstacles.

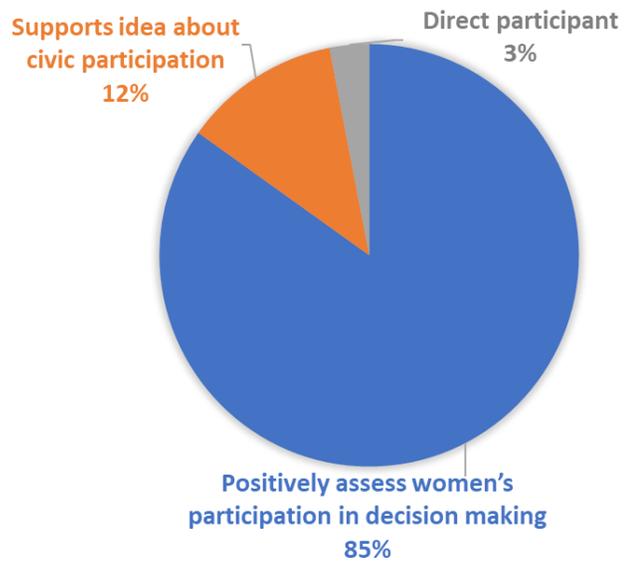
Whilst the main factors preventing economic empowerment are job losses - family issues, education, stereotypes, women’s passivity, and lack of support from the state were named as factors hindering political engagement. According to only one respondent – there exist no obstacles to women’s political participation. Zugdidi focus group respondents believe that a woman can be involved in peacebuilding activities at a political level if this is one of the conditions of party demands, if she has appropriate education and support from her family members, if certain stereotypes are broken and reliability is equal between men and women.

As for women’s role in peace negotiations, respondents claim that women do not possess enough education, self-confidence and financial

FOCUS GROUPS: GORI

The focus group in Gori consists of 8 women, whose age ranges between 30 and 61 years. Among the Gori respondents – 7 are with higher education, 4 – employed, the rest – unemployed. When discussing possible ways of women’s participation in peacebuilding activities, according to the dominant opinion – the state must promote women’s engagement. A leading position about

ASSESSMENT OF WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION



resources in order to participate. Moreover, an opinion has been outlined that nongovernmental organizations should contribute to their material reinforcement. Based on the fact that job losses were named as the main obstacle to women’s economic empowerment, the issues that need to be addressed first is job creation. Therefore, there should be a base for the employees and employers to get easily connected with each other. As for the long-term plans, there should be grants for small business revival, low interest-rate loans, and free professional trainings for women.

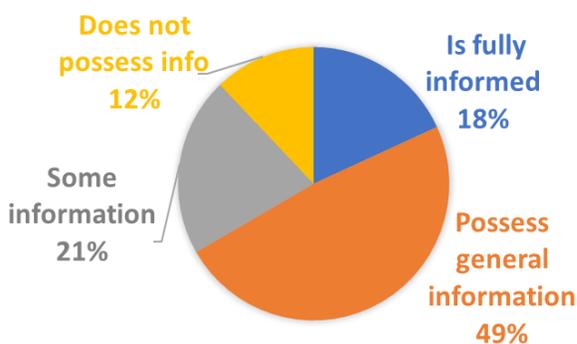
the influence of women’s participation in the above-mentioned process is that women’s participation at a non-governmental level in informal negotiations has no impact. According to the respondents, the factors that hinder participation in peacebuilding activities are: Covid-19, stereotypes, lack of appropriate education, and refusal to apply changes to the composition of

IPRM. On the other hand, factors hindering women’s economic empowerment are believed to be: refusal to finance women-related projects, job losses, lack of information and public transportation. The main obstacle to political engagement is considered to be a men dominance over women and a mocking attitude towards women. One of the respondents also claimed that since women want to hide their private life from the public – they tend to avoid political involvement. The respondents believe that the existence of women decision-makers will encourage them to engage at a political level. In order for them to participate in peace negotiations women must have appropriate skills, education and the will of state must exist. Finally, according to Gori respondents, economic issues that need to be addressed primarily are: grants for the small business revival, low-interest loans and free

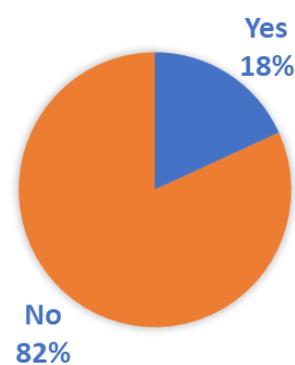
professional courses for women. Both long-term and short-term plans require material and financial resources.

In all groups, women are informed about existing formats of negotiations , although they do not know specifics and differences between Geneva International Discussions and Incident prevention and response Mechanism. Participant from Ergneti was more aware about IPRM, as meetings in Ergneti still are conducted, as meetings in Gali were suspended and practically are not in place. Talking about meetings with participants of GID and IPRM, women mentioned that although the participants are quite open talking about problems in negotiations, they do not name concrete issues which are discussed as in formal format, as well as in informal talks outside the negotiation table.

AWARENESS ABOUT EXISTING NEGOTIATIONS FORMATS



DIRECT PARTICIPATION IN PEACE BUILDING



FOCUS GROUP: GARDABANI

On September 25, 2020 the IDP Women Association “Consent” has organized a meeting in one of its target locations – Gardabani IDP compact center, where it managed a focus group meeting in the frames of two different projects. These projects are: “Women and Girls against

Covid-19” (conducted by the UN Women), and “Women Focused Networks – Women Rights are Human Rights” project that is oriented at creation of women’s focused networks in South Caucasus and strengthening women living in rural areas (conducted by CRISP – Crisis Simulation for Peace).

The focus group meeting was supervised by Marina Pochkhua and invited UN Women Expert Maia Avaliani.

During the meeting, IDPs and conflict-affected women have discussed several relevant issues. They have emphasized topics, which not only describe the overall problems of women living in compact center, but also the challenges that emerged during and after Covid pandemic. Those challenges are:

- Absence or unavailability of social assistance programs. For example, several women have noted that initially, they have been receiving government assistance, however, for the last twelve years they have remained beyond focus and received minimal assistance during the Covid-19 pandemic. When mentioning state compensations for families that lost source of income due to the pandemic (compensation consisted of 200 GEL monthly for 6 months, or one-use 300 GEL), it was established that part of compact center members could not receive the compensation because of being self-employed thus not able to submit proof of payment from the bank. The women also stated that state social programs do not cover unemployed part of population which means that unless they reach the retirement age which is 60 they are left without any source of income.
- Lack of information, which prevents Gardabani compact center members from acquiring

complete information about existed state assistance programs. According to the women, this has repeatedly become the reason why residents of Gardabani compact center were late for registration in order to get the assistance that was intended for them.

- Offering local projects without assessment of the needs of the region, which means that offered project proposals are not targeted correctly, making their implementation impossible.
- Infrastructural issues – meaning that families live in 12 sq.m. apartments. Since they are already legalized, the state has no obligation towards them.
- Finally, education-related problems, for example: access to internet. Despite the fact, that fiber-optic internet is provided to Gardabani - families often cannot afford connecting to it and paying for it afterwards, which hinders students from attending online classes. Another problem is that in the age of online education, families cannot afford providing technical equipment to their children, which also worsens the existing situation.

Additionally to the above-mentioned problems, the women have also discussed the improvement of situation in the terms of early marriages and integration with the Azerbaijani part of the population.

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS: GRASSROOTS

As for the individual interviews, currently, 103 of them have been conducted. The respondents' age ranges between 18 and 72 years. Among the Zugdidi individual respondents – 60 are IDPs, 21 are locals, 50 – employed, 42 – unemployed, 15 – socially vulnerable.

It is interesting to observe how respondents' opinions from different villages and communities of the same municipality differ from each other regarding the same topics. In order to make those differences (as well as similarities) visible, the analysis of received answers from each village or community is presented below.

Rukhi, Rike, Anaklia, Zugdidi

7 Respondents out of 35 from Rukhi, Rike, Anaklia and the city of Zugdidi from Zugdidi municipality believe that the non-governmental sector contributes to their engagement in formal/informal negotiations. According to 9 respondents – a woman must possess enough education, desire and readiness in order to engage in the above-mentioned activities, whilst 5 of them think there must be a will of the state. 6 Women claim that society must encourage their involvement in the given processes. 28 Respondents positively assess the impact of women's participation in peace processes, whilst 4 respondents generally

positively assess the involvement of citizens in these processes. The most common factors preventing participation in the peacebuilding activities were: stereotypes, women's passivity, lack of education and lack of desire. However, according to 4 respondents – no obstacles exist. The factors hindering economic empowerment are: stereotypes, lack of desire, education and lack of support from the family members and giving preference to men. Only one respondent named an unequal pay between men and women as one of the hindering factors. As for the obstacles to political involvement, respondents mostly named family issues, lack of additional knowledge, lack of internet, lack of desire, and lack of funds. 34 Respondents assess the involvement of women in peacebuilding activities positively at different levels (political level, women's advocacies, community level and peace negotiations). According to Zugdidi individual respondents, to deal with the country's economic crisis – the projects oriented at solving economic issues must be financed/co-financed. In order to encourage the creation of new working places - professional trainings for women must be arranged. As for the long-term incentives – there must be an encouragement of women's economic engagement, change of banking regulations (e.g. low interest-rate loans), and promoting small businesses. According to the majority of respondents, the existence of human, material and financial resources is essential for the implementation of these recommendations.

As for the Public Defender's mid-term report, according to it, local self-governments mostly depends on the activity of donors and nongovernmental organizations. Moreover, the responses given by the respondents are supported by the fact that women are less likely to participate in meetings held by municipalities and local communities.

Koki, Orsantia

According to 20 respondents from Koki and Orsantia villages, when speaking of women's participation in formal and informal negotiations, two dominant positions were outlined: women are free to engage in such negotiations; and they must

show interest and initiative. The majority of these women think that women's participation in such format of negotiations impacts the process positively. Only 1 out of 20 respondents claims that women's participation does not have any impact on the process. Main obstacles to participating in the peacebuilding activities, according to the respondents is not having relevant education. 5 women consider, that another obstacle is family, whilst 2 of them name gender inequality. The main factors hindering economic empowerment according to 12 respondents are believed to be job losses and lack of finances, other consider lack of education whilst only one of the respondents names rejection of gender balance. Principal barriers to political involvement are believed to be: lack of relevant education and lack of desire. Only one respondent names stereotypes as a hindering factor. 11 respondents claim that women's participation in peacebuilding on political level is crucial, and that more women must be appointed at decision-making positions. Economic issues that need to be addressed primarily are: provision of women with products and hygiene means (short-term measures) and financing projects oriented at development of agricultural sector (long-term). In order to achieve both short-term and long-term goals - financial resources are required.

Based on the mid-term report publicized by Public Defender's Office based on the 2019 May-July research period, the representation of women in decision-making positions in the Ministry of Defense of Georgia has been dropped by 23% compared to previous years, whilst the representation of women in peace negotiations has been reduced by 30%.

Ingiri

10 out of 21 Ingiri respondents consider that in order for women to engage in formal/informal negotiations, more meetings and negotiations are needed. 4 women think that it is necessary to single out and encourage women leaders in the community, whilst according to 3 respondents, women must show action and initiative in order for them to participate. Other respondents refrained from answering. 16 women think that participation

of women in formal/informal negotiations positively affects the process, 4 of them claim that it does have a partial effect, whilst the others refrained from answering this question. Barriers to participating in peacebuilding activities according to 11 respondents are considered to be distrust and negative attitude towards women. The second main obstacle is believed to be women's passivity and lack of involvement. Only 2 out of 21 respondents named lack of information and unstable environment in the country. According to Ingiri respondents, the main obstacles to economic empowerment are unstable environment and unemployment. 1 out of 21 women named lack of information as a barrier. As for the political participation, the dominant hindering factors include lack of relevant education and family issues, whilst 7 respondents consider lack of interest as a main hindering factor. Unlike Koki and Orsantia respondents, who claim that women must be actively engaged in peacebuilding activities at a political level, Ingiri respondents think that women must be active on the community level. And last but not least – economic goals that must be achieved firstly according to the respondents are conducting free professional trainings for women, and providing humanitarian support. Provision of employment for women is a long-term purpose, which requires human and financial resources.

Ganmukhuri

Different opinions were expressed by Ganmukhuri respondents regarding the ways of women's participation in formal/informal negotiations such as: engaging in a diplomatic format (at a formal level), conducting trainings and with the help of nongovernmental organizations. According to the respondents, women's role in above mentioned format has a positive and significant impact on the process, however 9 out of 17 women refrain from answering this question. The main barriers to engaging in peacebuilding activities are family issues and lack of relevant education and information, whilst 3 women name negative attitude towards women and stereotypes as barriers. Various factors hindering economic empowerment are named by the respondents such as: neglecting women's role, passivity of women, family issues, discrimination, and lack of education. 6 respondents refrained from providing answers. The obstacles to political participation

were believed to be lack of education, finances and family issues. As for women's role in peacebuilding activities, majority of the respondents do not see women at a political level. Several different opinions were expressed regarding their participation in international advocacy – on this level, some of the respondents do not see women at all, whilst others consider their role important. Economic issues that must be addressed in the first place similarly to Koki and Orsantia are considered to be the provision of humanitarian support and organizing trainings for women. As for the long-term recommendation, financing projects oriented at the development of agriculture are necessary and require finances and technical base.

“Vector”

Finally, according to the majority of the respondents of IDP community “Vector” of Zugdidi municipality, women's engagement in formal/informal negotiations require action, 2 of the respondents claim it is possible in a diplomatic format and only 1 woman believes that nongovernmental organizations are capable to encourage their participation in such format. 10 out of 10 respondents think that women's participation has a positive impact on the process. The main obstacles to women's participation in peacebuilding activities are believed to be family issues and stereotypes, 4 of them think that no barriers exist. According to 5 respondents, barriers for economic empowerment do not exist either, however, several respondents believe that those barriers are family issues and stereotypes. 5 respondent do not have any interest in political participation, thus other 5 participants believe they do not possess relevant education. When speaking of women's participation in promoting peace at a political level, as well as in international advocacy, the majority of the respondents consider women's role as important. Women's engagement on community level is reduced, whilst their increased involvement is required in peace negotiations. The issues that must be primarily addressed for women's economic welfare similarly to Koki, Orsantia and Ganmukhuri respondents' opinions are: trainings in project writing for women, humanitarian assistance, and agriculture-oriented projects. Financial and technical resources are needed in order to accomplish both short-term and long-term economic goals.

ROLE OF NATIONAL AND LOCAL ACTION PLANS ON WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY

Georgia was the first post-Soviet country which approved and implemented National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security since in 2011. After this, two following NAPs - 2016-2017 and 2018-2020 were approved and implemented. However, written on National level, these Plans were more general and were not taking into account specifics of each conflict affected municipality. For instance, such municipalities, as Zugdidi and Gori, located alongside the ABLs¹ have also bin number of IDPs; Tskhaltubo municipality has the highest percentage of IDPs, but does not have ABL; in Kaspi municipality the majority of conflict affected population live in villages adjacent to ABL, so, the needs and situation is different.

To adapt NAPs to local needs and priorities, it was necessary to localize envisaged in NAP actions and activities to local context. In 2017, the first workshops on NAP localization were conducted in Georgia by IDP Women Association “Consent” within the project of Global Network of Women-Peacebuilders, supported by Austrian Development Agency.

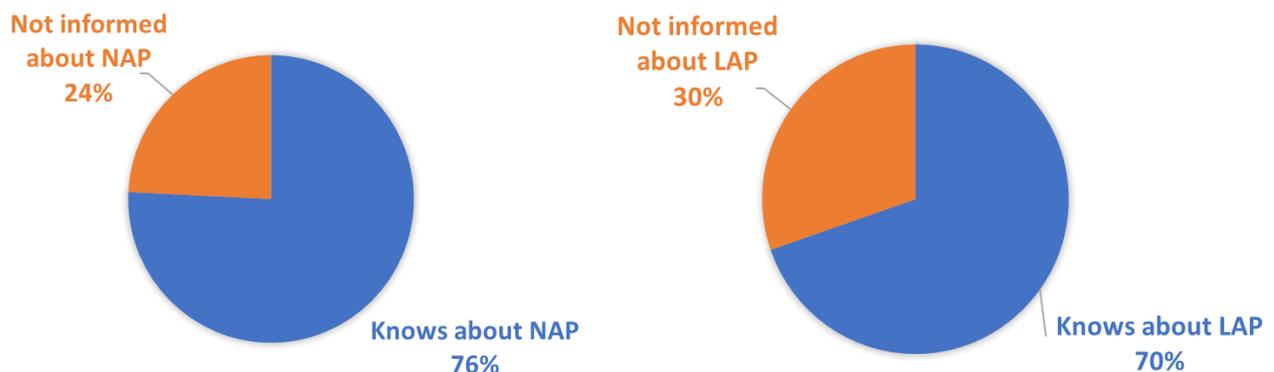
What does “localization” mean? “Consent” has been working in Zugdidi region since 1998 and during all these years it has been cooperating with local authorities and local nongovernmental

organizations. However, the direct and planned working on Resolution 1325 “Women, Peace and Security” has become a part of the agenda since 2017, when “Consent” has arranged a civil forum in Zugdidi with two international organizations – Global Network of Women Peacebuilders and UN Women along with all governmental or nongovernmental institutions that already were or should have been engaged in the process of empowering internally displaced and conflict affected women. In Gori, the same workshop was conducted by IDPWA and GNWP, which started localization process in Shida Kartli.

Since 2018 “Consent” together with Fund “Sukhumi” and Women’s Information Center, with the support of UN Women commenced localization process of 1325 Resolution in 10 conflict-prone villages, which meant adaptation of the NAP to the local context.

The third NAP already included “localization” in the Planned activities and paid more attention to increasing role of municipalities. However, the research showed that not all women still are familiar with Nap and LAPs, and moreover, often they do not understand how they can implement existing Plan to solve their real problems at community level.

Awareness about NAP on Women, Peace and Security and Local Action Plan



¹ ABL – former Administrative border line – in case of Georgia ABL divided South Ossetia from the rest of controlled by central government Shida Kartli, and another ABL divides Abkhazia (concretely, Gali district) from Zugdidi municipality, which is controlled by central Government

HUMAN SECURITY OF CONFLICT AFFECTED POPULATION

Women in all villages mentioned that they do not feel secure, and that this feeling is always increasing after any of cases of borderisation or kidnapping of peaceful citizens. For instance, one of women interviewed, medical nurse, shared her own experience when she was returning from the patient (she temporarily was living in Gali) and was taken as hostage by Russian border guards. She was taken into basement, where she was staying several hours, without giving water and access to toilet. When she was asking about toilet, she was getting insulting answers. After several hours, without explanation she was allowed to go, and since that time she never feel safe walking to patients or generally leaving home.

In Samegrelo, when the division line is practically going alongside the river (Enguri), which is natural obstacle for crossing the line, many people, including women and elderly, in order to go from Gali do Zugdidi and back, go through river. It is dangerous, as on Enguri river is hydro power station, and due to activities of this station, sometimes the flow can increase, which is very dangerous for people crossing the river. During the meeting, women shared video, showing how people can cross the river.

Opportunity to go from Gali (controlled by Russian/Abkhaz) to Zugdidi (controlled by central Government) and back is dependent on several factors:

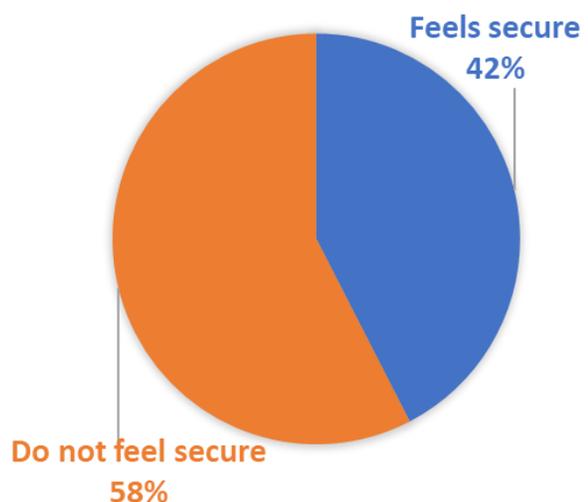
The check point should be opened and people should be allowed to cross: during the period 2020-2021 mainly the check point on Enguri bridge was closed – sometimes due to COVID-19; sometimes due to political considerations (elections in Georgia; elections in self-proclaimed Abkhazia; different events; fairs in winter 2020/2021 and so on). Due to closure of check point, pensioners living in Gali and registered as IDPs (mainly – women) were not able to get their pensions in Zugdidi and purchase medicines. After long negotiations, in Autumn 2020 they were allowed to visit Zugdidi by organized way during 3 days per month, under control of UNHCR, Russian border guards and Georgia authorities. Similar agreement was achieved for students, who could not after holidays return to universities. There were also other challenges – as many of Gali former residents – IDPs, still had opportunity to work their lands in summer and to receive harvest, they were kept in Abkhazia and

could not return to controlled territory and to realize their harvest, which was necessary to survive winter.

Additional problems appeared due to COVID 19 regulations – so, residents of Gali, coming to controlled territory of Georgia, needed to stay several days (it was reduced to 5 days) in quarantine. As mainly they were coming for very short period, these 5 days were big burden for them. NGOs many times appealed to State Minister for Reconciliation apparatus, to Parliamentary Temporary Commission on Restoration of Territorial Integrity and De-occupation and to other agents. Unfortunately, during number of months this issue was not solved, and only after several people drowned during crossing river, it was decision made about cancellation of quarantine.

However, still there were limitations – to cross the check point it is necessary to have passes, issued by “de facto” Abkhaz authorities, which the majority of IDPs in Gali do not possess. So, people continue to use informal ways to go from Gali to Zugdidi and back.

In 2020, borderisation, which was before mainly conducted in Shida Kartli, started also in Samegrelo, why the human security of population became even more challenged. In 2020, children who were before crossing the division line to study in Georgian schools in Pakhulani (Tsalnejikha district), Ganmukhuri (Zugdidi district), and this was allowed due to agreement between conflict parties, in 2020 were unable to continue study in Georgian schools, which limited their opportunities to study on native language (as in Gali district schools already are only in Russian language).



Women in Shida Kartli shared their feelings - when suddenly new posters “Entrance prohibited – territory of South Ossetia” appeared on their land plots, they feel very frustrated and already existed psychological burden is severely increased. Women and young girls mentioned threats, related with lack of transportation in evening hours; lack of children’s institutions such as kindergartens; poorly equipped ambulances – in some of ambulances, no any equipment or medicines are available (e.g. Chorchana), in some villages ambulances are far and not available for elderly (Zardiantkari in Gori district; Karapila and Saribari in Kaspi district, and so on).

Especially difficult situation was in Akhlagori – district which was occupied in 2008. The district is isolated from Tskhinvali even there was built the road, but still using this road which go through high maintains, is dangerous for sick people and can leave to additional complications for lungs and heart; the check point with controlled territory was closed all this period and people needed to go for medical treatment through Tskhinvali, which in many cases led to their death, as medical assistance was late. Special case of civic activist – blogger Tamar Mearakishvili, who was five time called to court and who was prohibited to leave Akhlagori by de facto prosecutor office, took attention of all concerned NGOs and international organisations. Due to very difficult socio-economic conditions, many Georgia families decided to leave Akhlagori and move to controlled territory, who led to depopulation of Akhlagori.

COVID 19 pandemic and related curfew brought new challenges to women and generally, population: prohibition of movement left several villages without access to food and everyday products, as they do not have shops (e.g. village Ergneti 3 days could not get bread, as there were no cars allowed, and there was no shop in village). Such situation was registered, due to women’s words, in many places. Villages are not equipped with pay-boxes, which does not give the opportunity to women and elderly to pay communal facilities, to get pension and generally, to implement any kind of financial activities.

In situation of COVID, women – activists demonstrated their readiness to help to communities and to increase resilience. In many communities, IDP women and women from conflict affected villages created resilience groups, which helped to the most vulnerable to overcome difficult period

and to survive. Women implemented different initiatives: started from March 2020, when the first quarantine was announced, they started to produce face masks, which were absent in pharmacies, and distribute it to vulnerable families in conflict affected villages and IDP centers free of charge – this not only supported their security, but also positively influenced psychological status, as people felt more protected. Women organized groups which were helping to elderly and single persons with disability; were assisting to children with education issues; were helping with distribution of food, humanitarian items, bed linen, seeds and other necessary for normal life items.

Women’s organisations role during COVID 19 Pandemic

Women’ organisations were, as always on the first line of work since the first days of pandemic.

In Zugdidi, women’s center “Tanaziari” immediately started work, providing medical consultations and assistance. Later, they opened 24 hours medical pediatric center which was extremely important for women, affected by conflicts.

Organization “Women’s Peace movement “Imedi” assisted women in 8 conflict affected villages with preparing of face masks and then – with distribution of small agricultural techniques (with support from Turkish Development Agency, IOM, Red Cross).

Women’s organisation – Cultural and Humanitarian Center “Sokhumi” (based in Kutaisi) conducted several studies about COVID 19 influence on women’s situation, demonstrated new challenges related with lost of jobs in informal sector, problems of medical personnel, increasing of violence related with COVID. The studies were shared with the Government with advocacy purposes.

Women’s NGO Sapari and women’s organization “Hera XXI” were conducting advocacy campaigns to create security conditions for women-victims of domestic violence, to protect reproductive rights of women and, especially, young girls, and were conducting direct assistance and protection of victims. In parallel, these organisations were making international advocacy related with implementation of CEDAW in Georgia.

With the support from EU Instrument Rapid Reaction Mechanism, two women’s organisations – IDP Women Association “Consent” with partner – Women- Entrepreneur Fund, and Women’s Infor-

mation Center (WIC) with partner organisations – were working on increasing resilience and self-reliance of women. WIC assisted to many women with psychological consultations and information dissemination about assistance to victims of domestic violence: IDPWA assisted to women in self-organizing in more than 50 communities where women's groups raised awareness of population about resilience, organized trainings and seminars, organized more than 20 projects, supporting employment and livelihoods in this difficult time.

The same two organisations, IDPWA Consent and WIC, with the support from Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (financial support from ADA) conducted educational seminars for journalists and for young women - peace activists on peace building and UNSCR 1325; WIC conducted interesting competition which assisted to raise awareness among journalists about peace building and women's participation.

IDPWA continued during whole period to conduct

leader's academy, preparing women to participate actively in decision making and peacebuilding, that increased number of activists in all conflict affected regions (Bread for the World). With support from Bread for the World and Global Network of Women-Peacebuilders, IDPWA supported women's initiatives as in Georgia, as well as in neighboring countries, Armenia and Azerbaijan, which experienced open war in Autumn 2020.

To support women activists in networking, with the support from UN Women and UK Embassy, IDPWA organized trainings for women in cyber security and provided them with free Internet and devices = to be able to stay in constant communication during COVID time.

There is a very small part of what women's organisations were doing during the COVID 19 time to increase women's ability for participation in decision making and peacebuilding, to help victims and vulnerable groups and to support grassroots women in their intention to become local leaders.

SUMMARY

The research demonstrated wide range of opinions concerning women's participation in peace building activities, negotiations and implementation of women, peace and security agenda.

Since as a result of both - focus groups and individual interviews different positions were observed in different villages/communities regarding the same issues, it is possible to conclude, that there are not consolidated position in the grassroots regarding women's role in peacebuilding activities, which complicates the identification of common tendencies. Apart from the fact that different circumstances of different locations promote/prevent formation of opinions in a specific direction, is it important to consider the period that meetings with respondents took place in. For instance, meetings with focus groups were organized during the post-quarantine period, when people were concerned with new challenges and problems, and due to increased poverty, unemployment and other post-COVID effects they might see participation in peace building as not the most priority issue. On the other hand, the majority of individual interviews were arranged 1-2 months after the quarantine. It is also necessary to mention that among the participants of focus groups and interviews

were as women-activists, who for certain time already are working with NGOs and are more aware about what does peacebuilding mean in their situation. The other part of respondents were women who never were participating in such activities and for whom participation in peace building meant only direct dialogue with other side – Abkhaz and Ossetian women. Therefore, several summary points of the study are presented below:

- In order for women to participate in formal/informal negotiations, women-mediators must exist and be encouraged by the government; women can be involved in the mentioned processes with the help of NGOs; and women themselves must express interest and initiative.
- Women believe that factors hindering them from engaging in peacebuilding activities are stereotypes, distrust, the negative attitude of the public towards women and lack of education and experience.
- Participation of women is named as a priority by the government, but no real steps are made to ensure this participation. As a result, as mentioned above, representation of women in peace negotiations has been reduced by 30%

compared to previous years.

- According to the majority of the respondents, women's role in formal/informal negotiations has a positive impact on this process, however, Gori focus group respondents do not believe that their participation has positive impact on the negotiations.
- The main obstacles preventing women from economic empowerment are job losses and distrust towards women (discriminatory attitude). Women believe that they have ability for economic activities, but are prevented due to lack of initial capital, lack of practical skills and mistrust from businesses. It echoes the findings of mid-term report prepared by the Public Defender, which states the issue of women's economic empowerment remains a challenge, as the only source of income for the majority of women are social benefits and pension.
- Factors hindering women from political participation are stereotypes, lack of desire, lack of finances, and general attitude in society, giving preference to men. Women mention that expert assessments from women are not taken into account by men-politicians, which hinders the opportunity for meaningful participation. The same conclusion was made by expert making study "Barriers to women's meaningful participation" (Erin Mooney, UN Women 2019).
- When speaking of women's participation in promoting peace at different levels, majority of the respondents believe that if a woman has relevant education, experience and has support from the government, her participation at all levels is encouraged and assessed positively (especially at a political level). However, Ganmukhuri respondents do not see women's participation at a political level at all (although this is one of very few villages where Mayor's representative is woman, and she is very active).
- Women see their role in advocating for increasing of human security: according to women's

statements, human security is decreasing, and especially during the COVID pandemic. They see the necessity of more involvement of women in issues related with provision of security.

- For the economic goals that need to be addressed primarily, the short-term goals are: professional trainings for women and provision of humanitarian support, whilst long-term goals include: creation of working places, promotion of small businesses, low interest-rate loans, and financing projects oriented at agricultural development. In order to achieve the mentioned goals – human, material, financial and technical resources are required.
- All women stressed the important role of NGO sector and international organisations, as the main funding is coming today from international organisations through NGOs. Women believe that financing of women's initiatives is one of ways to increase women's meaningful participation in negotiations, mediation, and in decision making at all levels – starting from community and going to the central level of decision making. They believe that good governance could be only in case, if women's participation will be ensured and their voice will be taken into account.
- Finally, women see their increased role during the COVID 19 pandemic as the prerequisite for increasing their participation in decision making.

Women still have certain difficulties to access technical and professional learning. Women feel that if professional trainings will be organized locally, they will be more able to participate and gain necessary skills. Currently, vocational training institutions/lyceums are located in big cities, and lack of transportation, lack of ability to leave temporarily children and family issues prevent women from participation in vocational trainings. Moreover, the number of conflict-affected women participating in trainings oriented at improving entrepreneurship skills is drastically low.

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS: EXPERTS

In the frames of the referred project, the IDPWA gained additional information regarding women's participation in peacebuilding activities as a result of conducting individual interviews with leading experts and public servants, such as Nino Kalandarishvili – Director of Institute of Conflict and Nationalism Studies; Eliko Bendeliani, Coordinator of project of peacebuilding of youth; Ekaterine Gamakharia, expert, Cultural and Humanitarian Foundation "Sokhumi". Guguli Maghradze, Professor of Psychology, Member of Parliament from ruling party; Lia Gigauri, Deputy State Minister of Reconciliation and civil Equality; Sopho Russetski, Leading Specialist of Gender Department in Public Defender Office. The researcher also used the opportunity of meeting with GID participants, to clarify some questions directly from representatives of Geneva Discussions.

When speaking of women's engagement in peacebuilding activities within formal/informal formats, several opinions have been emphasized: (1) women can become peacebuilding activists through nongovernmental organizations; and (2) women should hold leading positions in official structures. Other respondents mentioned several formats of women's involvement in peacebuilding processes based on their practical experiences, for example: the format of face-to-face meetings of conflicting parties mediated by international organizations where women-representatives participated; the cases of forum participation of IDP women or those living in the villages adjacent to the conflict division line; and the presence of several women in Geneva negotiations format. The respondents have also suggested that during informal meetings, women are more active unlike formal meetings, when instead of sitting around the table, they are sitting behind. According to all of the respondents, women's participation in formal/informal negotiations would bring positive results.

All public servants mentioned how important is

grassroots women participation in consultative meetings – as Deputy MFA stated on the meeting, 70 % of women's proposals were verbalized during the Geneva International Discussions and meetings of Incident Prevention and Reaction Mechanism (IPRM). However, no concrete women's initiatives were named which were implemented during previous years. It was also stated that women's participation in Geneva International Discussions is extremely important, and that both women – participants of GID are from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Answering question – why Georgia's party which took the obligation to have 50 % of women at negotiation table – is not implementing this commitment, public servants mentioned that the participants are selected due to their position in responsible agencies, and there are no women currently on these positions.

The obstacles to economic empowerment that were named by the respondents are: gender inequality, unequal obligations, gender stereotypes, mentality, lack of information, internet and relevant skills. According to one of the respondents, severe economic situation forces women to be much more active. As for the factors hindering women from political participation, those are: lack of support, education and finances, the necessity of provision and satisfaction of basic needs, non-recognition of women, the presence of men on the leading positions in political parties and lack of stable environment. All expert respondents perceive it important and necessary for women to be involved in peacebuilding processes at all levels. As for the economic needs that need to be primarily addressed, according to the respondents, significant work is needed in order to establish a strong mechanism of gender analysis and women's needs survey; grants for businesswomen and financial assistance to women left without livelihood due to the pandemic must be provided, and finally, basic needs of those women must be satisfied.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

To Government of Georgia:

1. To increase number of consultations in the regions with women-peace and civic activists; to involve NGOs in the process of preparation of such consultations and to use existing women's networks
2. To implement previously taken commitment concerning percentage of women in GID and IPRM: for this, to revise the principles of selection of participants for GID and IPRM and promote women to the positions which allow to participate in such negotiations
3. To increase number of civil servants trained in negotiations and mediation skills; to organize joint trainings for civil servants and women-leaders from communities.

To conflict affected municipalities:

1. To train staff on topics related with conflict transformation, civil participation and women's participation
2. To familiarize Mayor's representatives with "Women, peace and security" agenda
3. To include issues related with WPS, in their socio-economic development plans and plans of Gender Equality Council; to work on inclusion of women's proposals in budget for the next year
4. To provide budget support for plans on WPS and to make monitoring of implementation of women's proposals
5. To support women's groups created in communities with support from NGOs, giving them advisory role and opportunities for participation

To international and local non-governmental organizations:

1. To support women's education in WPS agenda;
2. To support women's economic empowerment through provision of training and financing their projects of self-reliance and small business
3. To organize open forums where women will have the opportunity for direct dialogue with decision makers
4. To support localization of NAP on Women, Peace and Security in conflict affected municipalities
5. To increase number of projects which directly involve conflict affected and IDP women

To women-activists:

1. To increase participation in women, peace and security localization
2. To actively engage in work with municipalities

