



Defending Dignity.

Fighting Poverty

NEWSLETTER # 31

CARE International in the Caucasus

Striving for a better life for others



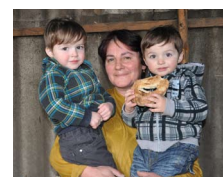
A message
from Mission
Director

Women Unite
to Protect
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Rights



Eco clubs to
protect
environment

Unite,
demand,
advocate



"When I reflect on the efforts that are briefly described in this newsletter I recognize the enormity of the work ahead to achieve more justice and equity in societies across the region. I also recognize that change is possible and that change occurs slowly at times and rapidly on occasion."



A Message from Mission Director

CARE International in the Caucasus is determined to support rural people across the South Caucasus to develop ideas and to become "social entrepreneurs"; people who address injustice and inequity through concerted efforts at affecting change that can be sustained over time.

People are taking action in their own communities; they are people who have a positive vision for the future and are working towards achieving something for themselves as well as their community. Those who are passionate about making a difference from rural areas across the South Caucasus are central to CARE's future plans. We will be working with local organizations, international organizations, private companies, governments, civil society representatives, activists and investors to create a network capable of engendering information sharing, encouragement, advocacy and investment, a network that will result in sustainable rural development and increased stability in the region.

When I reflect on the efforts that are briefly described in this newsletter I recognize the enormity of the work ahead to achieve more justice and equity in societies across the region. I also recognize that change is possible and that change occurs slowly at times and rapidly on occasion. I hope you will enjoy learning about the recent endeavors we have undertaken highlighted on the pages ahead.

Thomas Reynolds
Mission Director
CARE International in the Caucasus

Program highlights

Building Social Change Agents Network

Traditional development projects often do not address the underlying causes of poverty, injustice, and social marginalization in a sustainable way. CIC's new programmatic strategy will tackle development problems in a way that creates grassroots socioeconomic improvement which build upon itself and self-perpetuates over time.

CARE International in the Caucasus (CIC) is seeking partnership to build Social Change Agents Network for transformative change in the South Caucasus. The SCAN network will include social change agents, partners and investors/donors who are interested and become engaged in the initiative.

Care International in the Caucasus continues implementing development projects aligning its objectives with the programme goal. Within the context of a development project CIC will identify, support and empower local leaders so they could bring ideas into the practice and become social entrepreneurs or change-makers overtime.

CARE will encourage local community leaders to propose ideas which addresses social injustice, contribute to sustainable rural development, empower local people to be the change agents and be self-sustainable. CIC will scout such leaders on its own as well as through a network of partners for maximum outreach across the region and attract funding from various sources (donor institutions, impact investors, philanthropists etc.) to bring such ideas into life. CARE will help to market the ideas, build the capacity of change agents through partners and act as a mediator between them and investors to streamline the cooperation and ensure maximum benefits for all the parties.

If you believe in the power of ideas and people to change the South Caucasus, then you can also become a member of the network. Let's join forces to find the ideas, grow with us and grow the network. Contact us to learn more details.

CIC programme focuses on one long-term impact goal: to decrease rural poverty, vulnerability and social injustice in the South Caucasus and to improve conditions for sustainable development, thereby contributing to stability and peace in the region. CIC will view all its activities as part of the path towards this goal.



Striving for a better life for others

Our car bumps along the snow-covered twisting mountain road towards remote Shkmeri village until it comes to a halt. The car is stranded in elbow-high snow. Under a cloudless sky, we come to this lonely village in the mountains north of Oni in the Racha-Lechkhumi region of Georgia.

Shkmeri is now home to 100 families, one-fourth of the number that lived here before. Only 32 families remain during the harsh winters when most migrate elsewhere. Houses that once bustled with activity are now padlocked and only used by vacationers to enjoy Racha's dramatic summertime beauty. Services such as school shut down because people leave and people leave because there are no services.

While most of her neighbours left seeking for jobs, Makvala decided to keep her home fires burning. Five years ago, after being funded, Makvala set up a farm with 22 cows, and in five years' time, increased her herd to 90 through hard work. In this remote village where employment opportunities are difficult to come by, Makvala started hiring her neighbours for dairy production.

One contributor to the region's poverty is the aging of the population, and there are no simple ways to address the migration of the young and economically active people out of the region. In this poor and depopulating area, easy development solutions are difficult to come by.

In its second phase, the RDRL project focuses on the dairy value chains as livestock represents the major source of income for the majority of farming households in Racha. The project decided to help Makvala secure cattle feed and helped her purchase a tractor, a mowing machine and hay bailers. She is now able to process 300 hectares of hay fields and improve her cattle feeding practice all year round. Her farm now produces 20 kg of cheese daily and sells it at the Oni's food market located 22 kms away from Shkmeri. As transportation costs are too high, Makvala also helps her neighbours carry their produce to the market.

Makvala has grander visions for her produce. Further, the project aims to help her start production of new cheese varieties and thus reach out to new markets beyond Oni.

"I experimented with coriander and basil cheese, and introduced this new product at the Ambrolauri agricultural fair and Expo-Georgia in Tbilisi. There was huge interest in my cheese at both, and I have completely sold out. Various customers asked me to work with them in future projects, and I even received a phone call wanting to export my cheese to Switzerland!" Makvala says.

Makvala brings more than just job opportunities to her community. "Makvala motivates us to find a better

life. We are inspired to be active and believe in ourselves," says her neighbor Dali. "It is unfortunate that most people in our village are dependent on government social assistance. Such people don't wish to be more active and such an illusion Makhvala has destroyed in the minds of many women. We are responsible for ourselves—Makhvala reminds us of these important words all the time. She is a perfect example of a determined woman who fought through the hard time, and in the end, she achieved her goals. Moreover, she created a chain of positive change in the mind of every woman in our village."

Makvala hopes to open a milk collection and processing plant and employ additional people to improve the social conditions of people living in remote regions and prevent depopulation.

Services such as school shut down because people leave and people leave because there are no services.

But Makvala brings more than just job opportunities to her community.



The Rural Development in Racha-Lechkhumi project is implemented by CARE International in the Caucasus and funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).



Speaking in a single voice

We face many acute problems in the community: there is no sewage system, the road is in poor condition and the children find it difficult to walk to school, there is no kindergarten at all in our community.

Local initiative groups from the 15 displaced communities are joining forces to make their voice stronger and achieve solutions for their community's problems. CARE is creating a platform for the local groups to unite in an advocacy network and speak up in a single voice.

The communities have different needs: starting with basic infrastructure problems like building a small bridge or repair roads and ending with building irrigation channels, water and gas supply systems.

Khatuna Kristesiashvili, from Skra, 43, says that she pins high hopes on this advocacy network.

"We face many acute problems in the community: there is no sewage system, the road is in poor condition and the children find it difficult to walk to school, there is no kindergarten at all in our community. We will try to reach our voice to the government and have these problems solved."

Galina Kelekhsaeva, from Shavshvebi, 50, has a similar attitude.

"People trust me and they know I will not spare any efforts to help solve our problems. I don't want to disappoint them," she says.

The individual groups will develop individual advocacy strategies to define

the audience, types of action, resources etc. Their activities will include writing letters, petitions, meetings, communicating with media etc.

On the next stage the groups will convene community meetings to report back about their progress.



Women Unite to Protect Own Property Rights



What challenges do women in Georgia face when having no property?

CARE in the Caucasus' partner in Georgia, IDP Women's Association Consent is ramping up a campaign to educate women all across Georgia about their property rights. Consent is teaming with other local NGOs to propel the campaign and has already reached over 1000 women in the country.

Women's property rights are enshrined by law. But when cultural norms, religious beliefs and family traditions run deep, laws fail to protect the rights of the unprotected.

Georgia is a largely patriarchal society: women are expected to marry, leave their family and join the household of the husband. Inheritance, consequently, remains with the male part of the family. In addition, women who do marry, often fail to register their marriages, preferring just to have a religious ceremony, which does not have full legal standing. In such cases, women's right to the household's joint property is very difficult to assert in the case of separation.

The consequences are manifold. Women get stuck in bad marriages and tend to tolerate more abuse in the family, because if the couple splits up, women are in danger of leaving empty-handed. Moreover, women without their name

on a deed face a range of administrative difficulties and have no chance of accessing credit from a bank.

Aside from the cultural constraints, women's own lack of awareness of their rights contributes to the problem. For this reason, women's right groups are embracing Consent's initiative to educate women, direct them to legal assistance and thus give more power to women over their lives.

The campaign is the first under the EU-funded project "Strengthening women's capacity for peacebuilding in the South Caucasus region", which works with partner organizations and women's activists across the region, including in the unrecognized conflict territories, to build an enabling environment in which women can better protect their rights.

In the upcoming months, campaigns in Armenia and Azerbaijan will be launched in similar formats. In Armenia, campaigning will focus on the barriers experienced by women to starting small enterprises. In Azerbaijan, the work will focus on improving the relations between women and local government.

The campaigns are conducted under the project Strengthening Women's Capacity for Peace-building in the South Caucasus, funded by the European Union with funding from the Austrian Development Cooperation.



Gendering value chains in Georgia and Armenia

Women not only do most of the work but are actually responsible for most of the day-to-day budgeting, financial management and decision making, a research conducted in bordering regions of Georgian and Armenia found. However, in the public domain it is still important to both women and men, that men have the role as the main bread-winner and decision-maker.

The research commissioned by CARE for JOIN project aimed to identify the ways in which gender plays a part in the value chains of rural communities in these regions. The field work included focus groups and interviews in six municipalities of Georgia and six municipalities in Armenia.

There is a broad consensus that gender discrimination exists in both countries. Culture and tradition restrict the range of activities that women engage in, their control of resources and influence in decision making. However, while tradition may require that women take a subordinate role, practically they often take the lead.

"We are not women anymore... we work so much on the land that there is no time to feel like a woman... to look after ourselves and look better," – a participant of women's focus group in Ninotsminda notes.

Women indeed are responsible for the bulk of day-to-day agricultural activities including field work, milking cows, the

processing of food and house-keeping, hold budget management/small sales. This creates a biased division of labor, where women work longer hours on agricultural activities than men.

Decisions are mostly made in consultations within a family but, according to both men and women, the final word is usually left to the men. Although women perform most of the agricultural tasks, when it comes to "big decisions" and "big money," it is usually up to men.

The full report of the gender analysis will be available on the CARE Caucasus website.

The project titled Local Actors Join for Inclusive Economic Development and Governance in the South Caucasus (JOIN) is funded by Austrian Development Cooperation (ADC).

Eco Clubs to protect environment



Walk down any street in Georgia and it is common to see garbage and waste materials strewn about. The country lacks an adequate waste recycling system and landfills often exceed capacity.

This particular challenge is currently being championed by students in the eastern Georgian town of Telavi. Over 20 environment-conscious students joined a school-based EcoClub and are working toward finding a solution to the poor waste collection services available to the 21,000 people who reside in Telavi.

"We clearly need more garbage bins in the streets and better collection," says Nino Tsignadze, a member of the eco club.

"The key is to promote sound environmental behavior," adds Eka, another member. "We have to fight for the environment, and when the movement is led by children, it will be more motivating to people."

Thirty-eight EcoClubs, like the one in Telavi, have been established in four pilot areas of the Rioni, Alazani-Iori river watershed basins through the Integrated Natural Resource Management in Watersheds program, a four-year USAID program, implemented by the GLOWS' Consortium, composing of Florida International University, UNESCO-HIE, CARE International, Winrock International and CENN.

Each organization has a specific focus, and all are united in the effort to promote environmental awareness in Georgia.

Telavi EcoClub members have started expanding their work to promote better waste management: their enthusiasm has even attracted pupils from neighboring schools. Telavi parents also started to support the EcoClubs with monetary contributions and value the increased skills, knowledge, confidence and commitment their children are gaining from being a part of the cause.

"I used to keep to myself. Because of this experience, I am different now and started to talk with my friends, and do things together. This has been inspiring," says fourteen-year-old EcoClub student, Ana Arabuli.

Telavi EcoClub students have taken up the cause with fervor. They have begun discussing the environment with their peers, friends, and parents encouraging them to produce less garbage and also promote the services of a local drug store which uses paper bags instead of polyethylene to encourage the environment-friendly behavior.

"This is the first time parents started paying fees to sustain the EcoClub. It gives a hope that the EcoClub will continue functioning well after the project lifetime," says Nino Laghidze, Project Officer.

The Telavi EcoClub is expanding and adding new members on a daily basis. The environmental outlook for this town is good. Students say they are committed to participating as long as there are environmental challenges to be tackled.

Unite, Demand, Advocate

"There are so many mushrooms sprouting up within the cottage, neighbors say you can turn it into a greenhouse," Natia, 32, is mixing irony with frustration as she shows me mushrooms growing on a plank dropping out of the wooden floor.

Mold and fungus have engulfed the walls and floors of the cottages in Akhalsopeli settlement. The floors are decaying and entirely collapsed in dozen of them pushing the families to already tiny space of housing. The problems with the houses stem from hasty construction, poor quality of materials and little or no supervision as the government grappled with housing 10,000 IDPs in the aftermath of the 2008 August war.

But there is a hope for Natia and 105 other families in Akhalsopeli settlement.



With CARE's support, an initiative group from Akhalsopeli organized a series of meetings to reach out to the local government and ask for help. And the help is now coming: the local governance body has committed to repair some parts of the flooring space.

Overall 15 communities started advocating for their needs as CARE tries to foster a dialogue and build bridges between the government and the local residents. Whereas assistance is still in the pipeline for the people of Akhalsopeli, 47 other families in neighboring Kareli village already have a safe shelter over their heads.

The displaced families were housed in a 3-storied house which had a leaky roof letting rain drip down from the ceiling, causing mold and moisture and letting wind blow in. Kareli authorities assigned funding for roofing, window repairs and building storage facilities, all this after similar efforts by CARE to boost citizen involvement in defining local budgeting priorities.

The government is not the only party CARE helps to negotiate with. Many IDP communities are now trying to persuade a private gas supplier to build gas supply system.

"The key is to demonstrate that their voices have importance and clout, and to teach them to negotiate with many different parties to defend their interests," says Aleks Kharshiladze, community mobiliser with CARE.

The advocacy campaign is conducted under the second phase of Stabilization and Integration of IDPs into Mainstream Georgian Society (SIIMS) project funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.



CARE International
in the Caucasus



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Our programme impact goal is to reduce rural poverty, vulnerability and social injustice in the South Caucasus and improve conditions for sustainable development, thereby contributing to stability and peace in the region.

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