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INTRODUCTION

The publication „Chemi Sakhelia” (Eng: My name is) includes the stories of nine women living in several parts of Georgia. These stories, on the one hand, are quite different from each other, but on the other hand, they have one very big thing in common - they tell us about strong, successful, energetic, motivated and powerful women.

Who are these ladies and why are their stories interesting? At first glance they are ordinary people: they live around us, they have jobs, have families and friends, different hobbies, and so on. But if we look closely, we will see that these women are special - throughout their lives, they have found the kind of strength, that they needed to change themselves and their environment for the better. Despite many obstacles in their lives, they gathered courage, became brave enough to face difficulties and took the steps, that led them to success.

This publication has been prepared with the support of the project „Economic and Social Participation of Vulnerable Displaced Persons and Local Population in the South Caucasus (EPIC)“ implemented by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) in cooperation with the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labour, Health and Social affairs of Georgia.

Economic and Social Participation of Vulnerable Displaced Persons and Local Population in the South Caucasus (EPIC)

Economic and Social Participation of Vulnerable Displaced Persons and Local Population in the South Caucasus (EPIC) is a regional programme, implemented by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH since 2017. The programme is commissioned by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Development and Cooperation (BMZ). Programme aims at improving the economic and social participation of vulnerable internally displaced persons and members of the local population in the South Caucasus. EPIC intervenes in the following five fields of action:

1. Capacity development of state actors to promote the economic and social participation of vulnerable internally displaced persons and the local population
2. Fostering income opportunities of vulnerable internally displaced persons and members of the local population, especially women and young people
3. Improvement of economic perspectives of vulnerable internally displaced women and women of the local population
4. Increasing the opportunities for participation and integration of vulnerable internally displaced persons and members of the local population
5. Improvement of capacities for dialogue among state and non-state actors and vulnerable internally displaced persons and the local community.

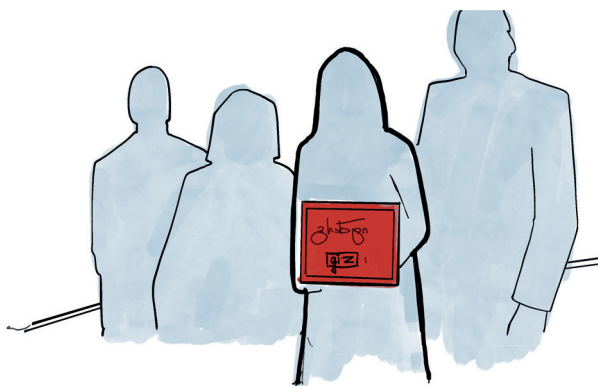
Throughout all project activities, participation and empowerment of women and youth is a priority which is also reflected in the programme's indicators

MARIAMI

I am Mariam Zeinalashvili, 30 years old, mother of three children and a choreographer by profession. My hobby is creating items out of wood and currently this is also my job: I have orders, I make wooden decorative shelves, various items, and thus I am slowly getting acquainted with the Georgian market.



Participating in an entrepreneurship programme and winning a grant helped me a lot in implementing my idea. In general, I always had lots of ideas, but I could not implement those ideas without special equipment. I only had wooden tools, and I had to work very hard with those. But one day my agent told me about the existence of this programme and offered me to participate in it.



I was very happy and immediately agreed. I was pregnant at the time and for five months of being pregnant I went to the trainings, learned lots of new things there, gained knowledge and gained a lot of experience.





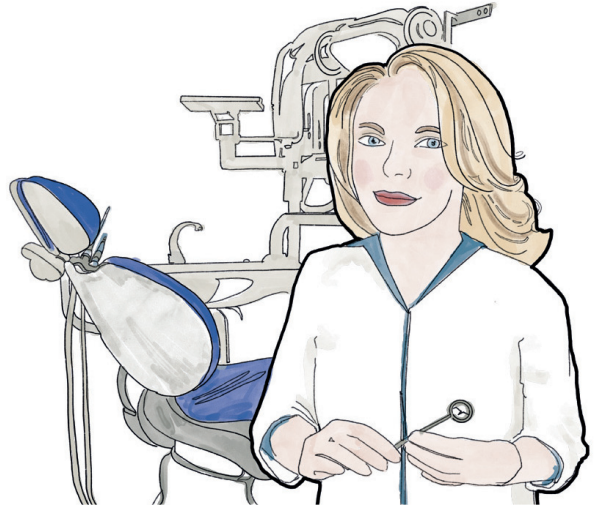
Gradually I made new plans, wrote a business plan and wrote down everything what my business needed in detail. At first, I was nervous, and I thought I might not succeed. However, the desire I had was very strong, I had high expectations and I knew it was my chance to implement my business idea.

Today I am very active, and I make various products from wood. In the future, I want to expand my business and build a workshop in my own yard, where I would place all my machines, as well as to create some job opportunities for others. What I would also like to explore is a line of children's wooden toys. I am sure I will spare no effort and sooner or later I will be a successful female entrepreneur.



MAIA

I am Maia Khvichia, 38 years old. I am an internally displaced person and currently live in Senaki. Furthermore, I am an individual entrepreneur and run my own dental clinic together with my husband. When the promotion of micro, small and medium entrepreneurship programme started, I dared to participate following the advice of a relative.



The competition lasted for several months: we had trainings that I remember very pleasantly and positively, I met a lot of good people and I gained knowledge not only on one specific topic, but also on life-related issues.



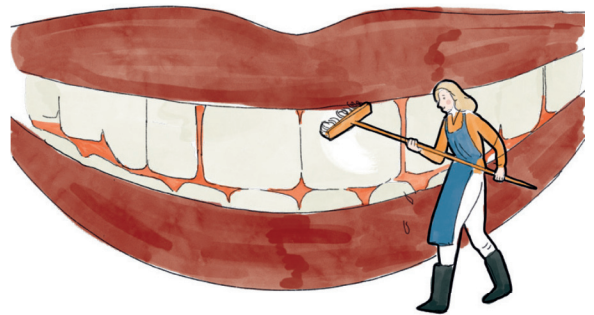
I realized that the ends justify the means and that successful people also start from scratch, work on themselves and are motivated.



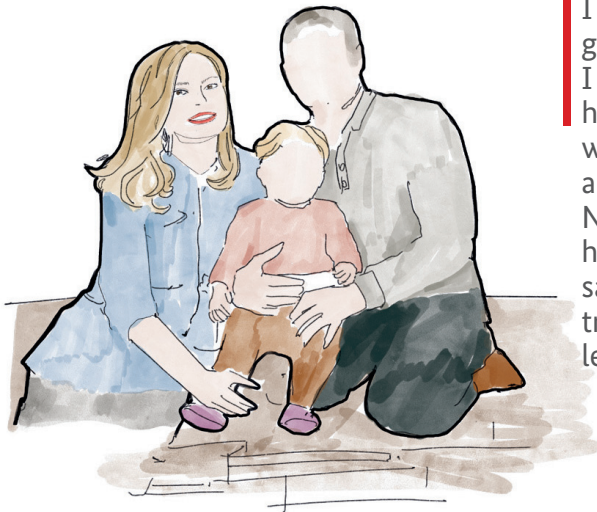


Alongside with winning, it is a great pleasure for me to hire a person, whom I have a very good relationship with. Even if I hadn't won, I think I learned a lot from the process.

Thanks to the programme, I bought innovative medical equipment, which are unique in Senaki. One of these devices provides safe sterilization of the patient - sterilization has always been a priority in our clinic, and especially in a pandemic situation it matters even more.



I think that the right treatment gives the maximum guarantee. I must point out that the process has not always been easy. There were some kinds of difficulties and challenges that I overcame. Nowadays, I am very proud to have the opportunity to work safely, have my patient's teeth treated to the fullest and leave a patient satisfied.



NANA

I am Nana Stepliani, 29 years old. Currently, I am working at school, however, at the same time, I am an entrepreneur, I create handicrafts and have my own small business. In parallel with teaching at school, I am also an active member of the Koda Women Club.



We receive a lot of new information in the club, both from each other and from the trainers, we discuss very interesting topics as well. Club membership plays a huge role in my life, as I try to be actively involved in all activities and trainings.

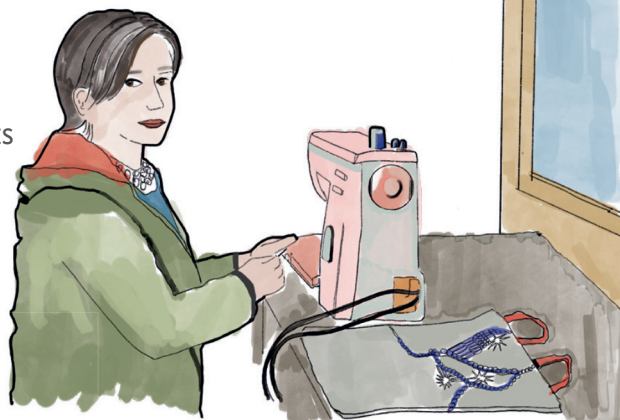
One of the activities I participated in was the photo contest named "Captured Empowerment". I became one of the winners and I received a digital camera as a prize.





As what refers to photography, in the beginning I used to take photos for my social network.

I took pictures of handicrafts with my mobile phone, observing the lighting. Even though I was not unsatisfied with the results back then, I now try to shoot from a different perspective.



I believe it is crucial to show the environment and society through photos, as photos are a great way of reflecting reality and sharing the problems of real life. For the future, I plan to use the knowledge that I gained from photo contest and photo trainings, to continue taking photos of my accessories and actively upload them on my social page.



NINO

I am Nino Kavtaradze, from the city of Jvari. My occupation is the production of dried fruits, which I have been doing for 28 years. I started this activity to support my family in the 90-s, when the economic situation was difficult. A few years later I was diagnosed with a serious illness, I am an oncology patient and consequently there was more demand for money.



Added to this was the fact that my three children were in their last year of school, followed by their student years, which made me more motivated to start raising money and take care of my health. Despite my illness, I am very motivated and enjoy my work. In the past years, before participating in the entrepreneurship programme, I used to sell my products in Zugdidi, and my goods were exported directly to Abkhazia as well.

However, before I discovered the programme, I could not open up, I was shy and reserved and did not know the meaning of special terms like: business plan, marketing, brand. Of course, I've heard these words before, but I could not understand their content. The programme and the trainings helped me to gain knowledge about these topics.





In general my production is seasonal, and in late autumn, when we have bad weather in Jvari, the dried fruit would usually spoil. Now I have a machine where I can put these dried fruits and the rain can't spoil them - this is a great advantage for me. At the same time, I met a woman who decided to help me with branding. I also met one gentleman who sent my products to Japan. He sent dried persimmon, dried figs and tkłapi there to check if my product was a bioproduct.



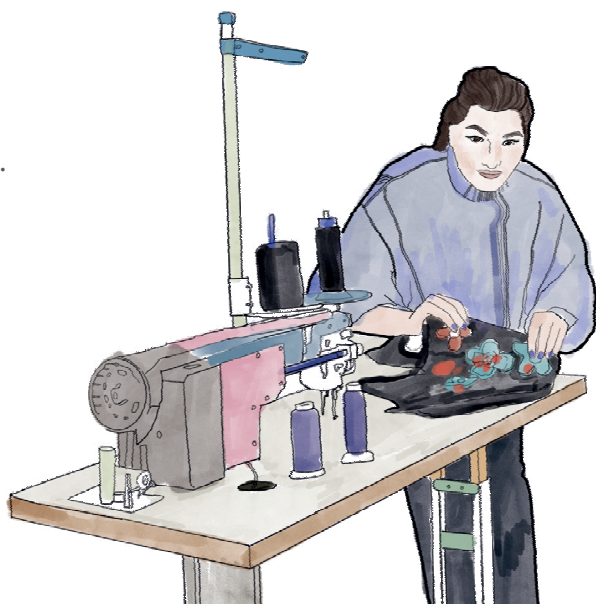
My son told me about the programme, and he also advised me to participate in it, hoping that something could come out of it and I could get a machine, that I really needed that time, because I was processing fruit by hand and I had to work very hard. With the support of this programme, I got this machine, which made my work easier.



One month later I got the positive response saying it was indeed a bioproduct. Currently, I really want to develop my technological skills and study different fruit preparation technologies. I want to say that participating in this entrepreneurship programme paved the way for me when I was totally reserved. Because of the difficult disease that I have, I was doing chemotherapy for 8 years, but this programme discovered me and thanks to it, today I am a successful woman.

TAMAR

I am Tamar Tchikaidze, 40 years old. I have a husband and four children. My regular job consisted of just housework. I was a usual monotonous housewife, and it has been a problem to get out of my house and get involved in my daily routine. But one day I decided to change my reality.



I always wanted to have my own business and I thought of such thing: I created my workspace at home – I could work and take care of the house under the same roof. With the support of my husband's business, I started making different things from leather.



The information about the entrepreneurship programme was accidentally read by my family member, and she offered me to have a look at it. Although leaving the house was a bit difficult for me, my mother-in-law helped me a lot and in the end, at the cost of a lot of energy, hard work and nervousness, I went on a qualifying round.





After 17 years of staying at home and not appearing in public, it was not easy for me to speak up in front of the public. Even though I had an emotional background, everything went very well, because I gave my maximum and did everything I could.

I am very happy that I have become an example for the surrounding people- many of my friends really want to get information about the programme. The programme changed me radically: I developed a vision, I became more brave, I fearlessly state what I want and what I do not want.



I also realized that lacking knowledge is not a shame. Although I have a very busy schedule at home, I do my job with pleasure and passion. With the support of the programme I was given motivation, I gained trust of myself and now nothing can really stop me from moving forward.

NATIA

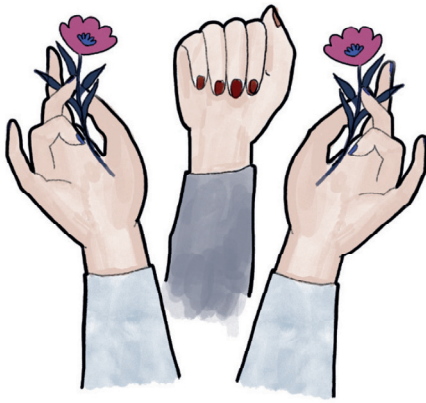
I am Natia Okropiridze, I live in Shaumiani, Marneuli district, in the IDP settlement, and I am the head of the community education center. I want to tell you the whole story of how this programme changed my life.



Generally, I have lots of interests, but earlier in my life I did not have the opportunity to do what I loved, I was only doing what I needed to do. I was 16 years old when I started a family and because of that I had to stop studying - it was the biggest heartache of my life and the beginning of a lot of stereotypes accumulated in me.

I thought, that because I had not received a proper education, I could not even dream about a career. I could do a lot of things, but I was not able to do them, because I did not know how to and could not find the strength in my head to do them. I could not express what I wanted, what I liked and what I was interested in - I always did what others offered me to do.





Every topic discussed in the Women's club was carefully selected and adjusted to us, focused precisely on our problems and showing us how we could address and deal with them. We often talked about: gender, equality, stereotypes about women. I broke these stereotypes within myself, which obviously affected my family and my children. The women's club taught me that nothing is impossible and that we should not give up and should not tolerate the existing reality that we don't like



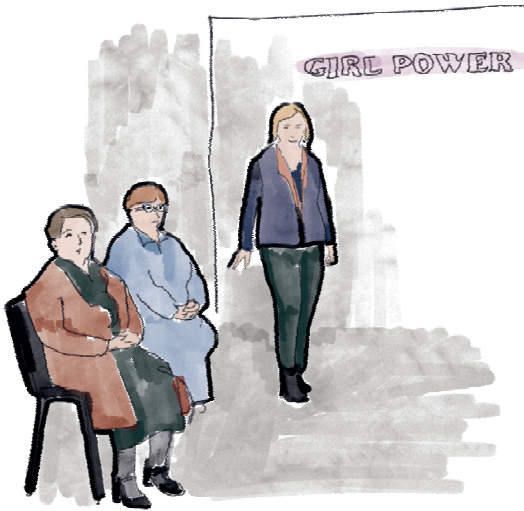
My family had a store and I spent whole days working there. Right in the store, I accidentally heard about the opening of a women's club. After hearing about it, I closed the store and went to the very first informational meeting. Since that day, I have not missed a single meeting organized by the Women's Club, I have always had high expectations and interest in them. After joining the Women's Club, I felt as I was reborn as a new person. I have been a very active member from the beginning, I've always had a great desire to be involved and to attend everything.



We should not be dependent on stereotypes and should try to always speak up and express what we dislike. We should give examples to others in order to move on to the future for the better. Even though I couldn't even have imagined it before, something unbelievable happened to me - I became the head of the Shaumiani Women's Club, I decided to continue with my education and become a student at the age of 38. That one dream, the fulfillment of which I thought was unimaginable, is my goal today.

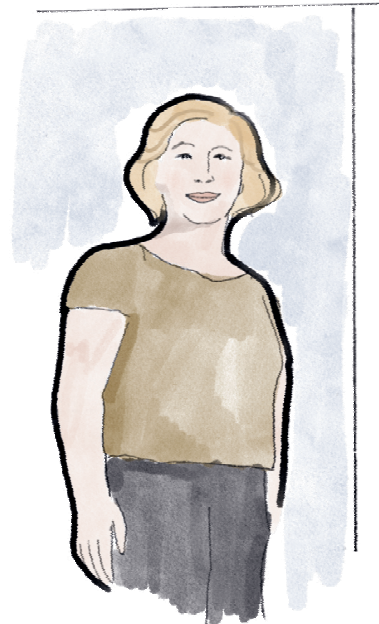
MADONA

I am Madona Okropiridze, a member of the Women's Club in the village of Koda. I was working at the Koda Community Education Center when I found out that a women's club was going to be established under the programme "Economic and Social participation of Vulnerable Displaced Persons and Local Population in the South Caucasus (EPIC)".



At first, as a person who took responsibility to carry out the programme successfully, I was very afraid that I would not be able to gather women who would be willing to join the women's club.

In the beginning, we spread the information and started looking for women living not only in our village, but in the whole municipality. A lot of people approached us, we, ourselves, contacted also a lot, filled out the application and finally 25 women were selected, whom I still have a very good relationship with - we became a family.





There were several participants involved, who have never attended any trainings before. Last year I offered jobs as trainers to some women, and they conducted the trainings quite successfully.

The change of a lifestyle has its consequences – acquiring and learning new skills helped women to think more about their development. I am happy I met these ladies throughout my life. I can say, that they are my best friends today. Their main source of motivation was mutual success.



Both theoretical and practical trainings, which were led by quite experienced trainers, had excellent outcomes. For me personally, the source of motivation is seeing women, satisfied with the trainings conducted by us - this is my most important goal. I want to address every woman: think about the economic and social empowerment of women - "learning is never too late"!

TAMAR

I am Tamar Tkemaladze, I live in the Maradisi village, district of Marneuli. I am a greenhouse worker and own a plot in the village.



Two greenhouses have been built on this plot, where I cultivate various vegetables such as lettuce, cauliflower, bell peppers, cucumbers, tomatoes, eggplants. At all four seasons, I take harvest without pesticides and poisonous chemicals from the greenhouse and sell the products at the local market.



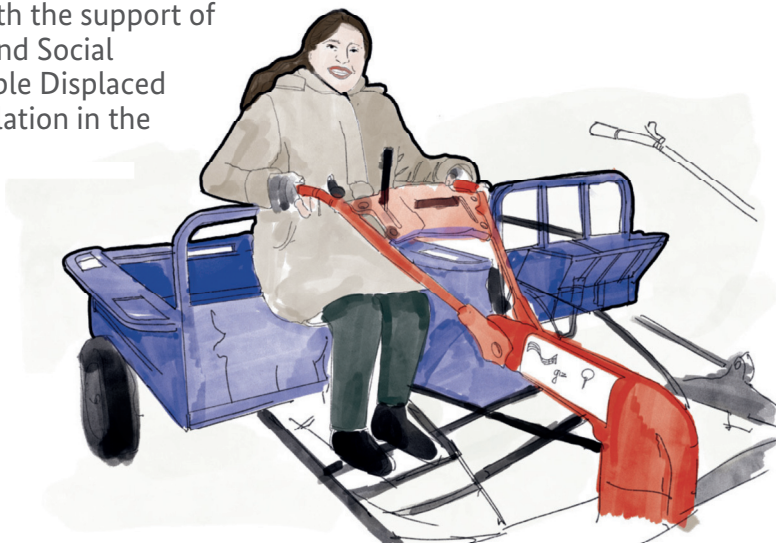
Mostly, distributors take my vegetables. If not, my husband supports me and brings the product to the agrarian market himself. I have been involved in this field for already 8 years.





When I was a child and lived in the village, I was very excited to do some planting related activities with my grandfather, who was a botanist – watching him and learning from him motivated me a lot. I was observing various plants with him, and he was explaining the different rules of sowing and planting. This is when my love for this work started.

As for the problems in the greenhouse, there was nothing significant, except that we needed a small cart and a tractor, which were delivered to me with the support of the project "Economic and Social Participation of Vulnerable Displaced Persons and Local Population in the South Caucasus (EPIC)".



I am very happy and satisfied with this technic, as with its support I will reduce the cost of production and develop my agribusiness even more.

ZEINAB

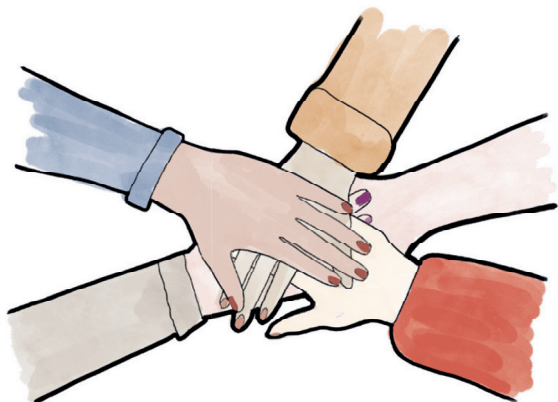
I am Zeinab Abuladze, 63 years old, a historian and a lawyer by specialty and a teacher by profession. I have been working as a teacher for 25 years, in terms of which I was teaching history, history of religion and law.



Currently, I am the head of the art department of the Tetrtskaro Center of Culture and Sports. I am also involved in the Koda Community Education Center, and I am an active member of the Women's Club. It all started when, one day, the head of the Koda Center approached me and offered to join the Women's Club.

I consider the relationships that I created there as a great success. It was also from the Women's Club that I learned about the photo contest. I decided to participate and try my competencies in photography as well.





The main inspiration of my life is self-realization and doing kindness during this process – it is my inner calling and I cannot live without it.



Photography for me means art, which includes painting, history, philology, music, colors, space, environment and the ability to recognize people. A particularly big discovery for me in the competition was the black-and-white photos. Thanks to the photo contest and photo trainings, I became more self-confident than I was before.



My whole life I've been trying to gain experiences and have never limited myself in anything. Even today, I never say that I fully know something or stop myself from participation - on the contrary, I am always willing to try everything with great pleasure. If there is a possibility to learn, I learn everywhere and from everything. I am very happy to say that I have fully realized myself as a woman, as a wife, as a mother and as a person who works for the society.

WRITE YOUR STORY

My name is _____

