

ARTS UNITED TO END VIOLENCE
AGAINST WOMEN: EXPERIENCE
FROM GEORGIA



Tbilisi, Georgia, 2019

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

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FOREWORD

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

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

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

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

This brief publication captures specifically UN Women's partnership with artists to promote zero tolerance for VAWG/DV since 2010. Its purpose is to describe our joint journey through the achievements and challenges we have encountered and to share our experience with partners within the UN family, civil society and beyond. It is the second publication to capture lessons learned from partnering with specific groups to promote gender equality and zero tolerance for violence against women and girls.²

We would like to express our gratitude to the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport of Georgia, the Georgian National Film Center, Shota Rustaveli State Drama Theatre, Kote Marjanishvili State Drama Theatre, Mikheil Tumanishvili Film Actors Theatre and individual writers, playwrights, directors, filmmakers, actors, journalists and others for their strong partnership and firm commitment to this cause. They have made this work a reality and have inspired other artists to take a stand and contribute to ending violence against women and girls in Georgia and beyond.

Erika Kvapilova

UN Women Country Representative in Georgia

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

2 In 2018, UN Women published Sports United to End Violence against Women and Girls: Experience from Georgia, referenced in this publication.

ARTS UNITED TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN: EXPERIENCE FROM GEORGIA



An old Soviet-era block house in Tbilisi. Photo: UN Women/Janarbek Amankulov

As the camera pans over Tbilisi's urban landscape revealing row upon row of gloomy, greyscale, Soviet-era apartment blocks, a recording of a series of personal phone calls plays ominously in the background.

"What have you decided?" a man asks.

"I have decided not to share my personal story," the woman on the other end of line tells him.

The dreary sound of a dial tone fills the empty space...

Subsequent phone calls end in a similar fashion, with each woman abruptly cutting the conversation short, refusing to talk for long.

"Hello?"

"Hi, Tea. I think you know why we are calling."

"Yes."

"So, what can you tell us?"

"I think I will refrain from participating in this because I don't want to have any more problems."

(Hangs up)

This is how the dramatic opening scene of the documentary film *Speak Out!*³ begins, serving as a powerful reminder to viewers of what it is like to be a woman living in a state of fear under the dark cloud of domestic violence. The 45-minute documentary film provides viewers with an intimate but heartbreaking look into the lives of the women directly affected by domestic violence and the true stories they share about their survival.

The film, which was first screened in Tbilisi back in March 2015, was commissioned by UN Women within the framework of the UN Joint Programme for Gender Equality in Georgia⁴.

Directed by Georgian documentary filmmaker Zurab Inashvili, *Speak Out!* was part of a nationwide campaign that united various members of Georgia's arts community, which included writers, actors, filmmakers and journalists, and set out to combat and prevent violence against women and girls (VAWG). One of the main goals of the film was to promote increased public awareness and dialogue about this insidious phenomenon and to encourage those suffering from domestic violence (DV) to *speak out* and claim their rights to a life free from violence and abuse.

3 UN Women Georgia, "UN Women Presents SPEAK OUT! A Documentary on Domestic Violence", 3 March 2015. Available at <http://georgia.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2015/03/un-women-presents-speak-out>.

4 The programme has been implemented jointly with UNFPA and UNDP since 2012 in partnership with the Government of Sweden.

“It took me 11 months to travel all around the country and collect these amazing narratives of brave women who fought their way out of being domestic violence victims,” noted Inashvili in 2015. “I do hope that the moving stories of these women will be an inspiration for many other women who face domestic violence in Georgia today and that society will *speak out* in their support.”

Despite its heavy subject matter, the film, which enjoyed the support of the Georgian National Film Center, was shown in schools and universities⁵ around the country in an effort to sensitize the younger generation to this ongoing problem and encourage them to discuss this issue among their peers. It was also shown to law enforcement bodies⁶ and the country’s politicians.

Similar to UN Women’s *Sports United* campaign,⁷ which used high-profile Georgian athletes and sports figures to bring attention to the problem of domestic violence and gender inequality, the *Arts United* campaign utilized the country’s arts community to get the message out to the public. This was done by staging creative plays, interactive exhibits and theatrical stage performances, publishing literature that featured female protagonists, holding workshops that teach gender-sensitive reporting⁸ and, of course, supporting the aforementioned documentary film, among other creative initiatives.

The *Arts United* campaign set three goals at its outset: to encourage society at large to recognize the problem of VAWG/DV in Georgia; to foster public discourse on the subject in order to promote a culture of zero tolerance for violence against women and girls; and to promote the existing services for victims and survivors.

5 UN Women Georgia, “SPEAK OUT! Public Launch of Documentary Movie on Violence against Women”, 15 December 2015. Available at <http://georgia.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2015/12/speak-out-public-launch-of-documentary-movie-on-violence-against-women>.

6 UN Women Georgia, “Screening of the Documentary Film on Violence against Women and Girls”, 28 April 2015. Available at <http://georgia.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2015/04/screening-of-the-documentary-film-on-violence-against-women>.

7 UN Women Georgia, *Sports United to End Violence against Women and Girls: Experience from Georgia* (2018). Available at <http://georgia.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2018/09/sports-united-to-end-violence-against-women-and-girls>.

8 UN Women Georgia, “Stories of Survivors Portrayed by Journalists in Georgia”, 1 May 2014. Available at <http://georgia.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2014/05/stories-of-survivors-portrayed-by-journalists-in-georgia>.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN: THE UGLY TRUTH



**1 IN 4 WOMEN IN GEORGIA
HAS EXPERIENCED AT LEAST
ONE FORM OF GENDER-BASED
VIOLENCE**

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

**1 IN 7 WOMEN (14%)
HAS EXPERIENCED VIOLENCE
BY AN INTIMATE PARTNER**



AMONG THEM:

- PHYSICAL VIOLENCE (31%)
- SEXUAL VIOLENCE (13%)
- PSYCHOLOGICAL VIOLENCE (73%)
- ECONOMIC VIOLENCE (54%)

NON-PARTNER VIOLENCE

**1 IN 5 WOMEN (20%)
HAS EXPERIENCED
SEXUAL HARASSMENT**



STALKING

**OVER 42,300 WOMEN (3%)
HAVE EXPERIENCED STALKING
IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS**

VIOLENCE IN CHILDHOOD

**1 IN 10 WOMEN (9%)
HAS EXPERIENCED CHILDHOOD
SEXUAL ABUSE**



VIOLENCE DURING PREGNANCY

**OVER 15,000 WOMEN
HAVE EXPERIENCED
PHYSICAL VIOLENCE**

**AMONG THOSE,
37% HAVE EXPERIENCED
PUNCH IN THE ABDOMEN**



Source: National study on violence against women 2017

Concept/Design: ForSet

Violence against women – particularly intimate partner violence and sexual violence – remains a major public health and human rights issue throughout the world. In fact, the latest global estimates published by the World Health Organization indicate that as many as one in three women (35 per cent) worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence at some point in their lifetime. Worldwide, almost one third (35 per cent) of women who have been in a relationship report that they have experienced some form of physical and/or sexual violence by their intimate partner in their lifetime.⁹

In Georgia, it is no different. The latest data points to widespread experiences of violence against women across the country. Intimate partner violence as well as early or forced marriage are among the most prevalent forms of violence against women in the country.¹⁰ This kind of violence is not relegated to a single group. In fact, it cuts across all social, cultural and economic divisions. It also transcends culture and economic status and can be found in both wealthy and impoverished segments of society.

Although much progress has been made over the years to strengthen national laws and provide better services to women affected by domestic violence, many challenges still remain.

According to the 2017 *National Study on Violence against Women in Georgia*, one in every four women in the country has experienced gender-based violence in their lifetime (if you combine all forms of violence). Among those, some 15,000 women have experienced physical violence from an intimate partner during pregnancy, and 9 per cent of women in Georgia admit to having been subjected to sexual violence during childhood, before the age of 18.¹¹

The study also shows that ingrained societal attitudes towards domestic violence still need to be addressed, as both men and women continue to show a high degree of tolerance and acceptance towards the use of physical violence against women in relationships. Of those surveyed in the study, almost a quarter of women (22 per cent) and a third of men (31 per cent) believed that wife-beating is justified under certain

circumstances. Moreover, almost one quarter of all women (23 per cent) and nearly half of all men (42 per cent) believe that a wife should obey her husband even if she disagrees.

However, as a result of the hard work and dedication of a wide range of local NGOs supported by UN agencies and other development actors, as well as increased involvement among legislators and policymakers, the issue of violence against women in Georgia is starting to get the attention that it deserves, and things are starting to change for the better. The latest statistics bear this out.

Today, an increasing percentage of women are reporting intimate partner violence to the police: 18 per cent in 2017,¹² compared with 1.5 per cent in 2009.¹³ Most encouraging, however, is the fact that the percentage of women who believe that domestic violence is a private matter best handled privately among family members, has dramatically decreased – from 78 per cent in 2009 to only 33 per cent in 2017.¹⁴

No in-depth studies have been conducted to measure men's attitudes towards domestic violence as of yet. However, there is growing evidence that the VAWG/DV campaigns in Georgia are making an impact. For example, in 2014, 93 per cent of men thought that a woman's main responsibility was taking care of her family.¹⁵ That figure dropped to 78 per cent in 2017.¹⁶ According to the same studies, in 2014, 53 per cent of men agreed with the following statement: "If a woman doesn't physically fight back, you can't really call it rape". By 2017, this number dropped to 50 per cent. In 2014, 69 per cent of men believed that it was the woman's responsibility to avoid getting pregnant. In 2017, only 37 per cent of men still held this belief.

These statistics can be looked at in two ways: as a reminder of how much work still needs to be done to combat this public health threat, or as a reflection of the effectiveness and impact that various campaigns have had on the public's perception of domestic violence and how attitudes within Georgian society have begun to shift in a positive direction over the last few years.

The fact is, Georgia has the knowledge-base and the necessary tools in place to prevent and eliminate this kind of vio-

9 World Health Organization, Department of Reproductive Health and Research, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, and South African Medical Research Council, *Global and regional estimates of violence against women: Prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence* (2013). Available at <https://www.who.int/reproductive-health/publications/violence/9789241564625/en/>.
10 UN Women, GEOSTAT and the EU, *National Study on Violence against Women* (2017). Available at <http://georgia.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2018/03/national-study-on-violence-against-women-in-georgia-2017>.
11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
14 UNFPA and ACT, *National Study on Domestic Violence against Women in Georgia* (2009).
15 UN Women, GEOSTAT and the EU, *National Study on Violence against Women* (2017).
16 UNFPA, *Men and Gender Relations in Georgia* (2014). Available at <https://eeca.unfpa.org/en/publications/men-and-gender-relations-georgia>.
17 UN Women, GEOSTAT and the EU, *National Study on Violence against Women* (2017).



BELIEVE THAT WIFE-BEATING IS JUSTIFIED UNDER CERTAIN CIRCUMSTANCES



BELIEVE THAT A WIFE SHOULD OBEY HER HUSBAND EVEN IF SHE DISAGREES WITH HIM



THINK THAT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IS A PRIVATE MATTER AND THAT OTHERS SHOULD NOT INTERVENE



Source: National study on violence against women 2017

Concept/Design: ForSet

lence, and through campaigns like Arts United, the country is starting to show real signs of progress. This is a huge victory for women and one of the keys to solving the problem over the long haul.

However, domestic violence is insidious; it is not a problem than can be solved easily or overnight. Society must be engaged, informed and brought on board with the campaign's

message. Over the past five years, UN Women and their partner organizations have done their part in accomplishing this goal by launching a series of creative initiatives that have brought the specter of violence against women out from the shadows and into a public forum where the subject can be discussed openly among members of society. This is how they have done it.

INTERIOR OF VIOLENCE



A scene from the interactive exhibition/performance *Interior of Violence* (March 2014). Photo: UN Women/Maka Gogaladze

*Interior of Violence*¹⁸ was one of the first creative endeavors commissioned by UN Women as part of the UN Joint Programme for Gender Equality in Georgia.¹⁹ The initiative, which premiered on International Women’s Day in 2014, was a project that took the form of an avant-garde, interactive exhibition/performance, featuring a cadre of local actors from Tbilisi’s Kote Marjanishvili State Drama Theatre.

Director and producer of the theatrical exhibition Nino Maglakelidze reflects that *Interior of Violence* was a lot of work, but she and her cast of talented local artists and performers managed to put the project together in less than two weeks.

“We utilized a wide variety of theatre forms which included multimedia, environmental theatre and verbatim, a form of

theatre where the audience gets to hear the authentic voices of the victims,” Maglakelidze explains.

The setting of the exhibition took place in a typical Georgian home.

The goal of the performance was to engage the audience and elicit an emotional response from them – even if that meant, in some cases, upsetting them. The exhibition also aimed to foster increased dialogue about domestic violence and to encourage people to start talking more openly about the subject – something that is not always easy to achieve in countries like Georgia, where long-held traditional attitudes are hard to change.

The stories and narratives were drawn from a workshop

18 Video available at <http://georgia.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/videos?videoid=605falSjsqk>.

19 The programme has been implemented jointly with UNFPA and UNDP since 2012 in partnership with the Government of Sweden.

conducted by UN Women that focused on gender-sensitive reporting. The three-day workshop taught members of the media how to cover domestic violence issues in a balanced, non-discriminatory way by stressing the importance of gender-sensitive reporting, informing them of the various types of domestic and gender-based violence and ways to prevent it, as well as how to interview survivors and protect their identities. Also stressed during the workshop was how to use the appropriate language, terminology and information sources.

“I have been writing about these issues for many years and even attended several training courses. This makes you feel like you know everything. Nevertheless, I must admit that the workshop conducted by UN Women was an eye-opening experience,” says Eka Kevanishvili, a journalist at Radio Liberty.

As for the performance itself, Maglakelidze admits that the characters portrayed by the actors were on the grotesque side, but the themes and situations that played out during the performance were ones that were all too familiar to many of the women in the audience.

“The situations we depicted during the performance were those that are culturally specific to Georgia and situations that many women in Georgia could easily identify with,” she says.

While some of the scenes in *Interior of Violence* traffic in stereotypes – for example, the idle husband wearing a white T-shirt sitting on the sofa watching TV, the wife ironing and folding clothes, and the grandmother stirring a pot of soup – such easily recognizable cultural stereotypes were necessary in order to create the desired impact on the audience.

Maglakelidze admits that some aspects of the performance were disturbing to the audience. For example, in one scene, a woman is kidnapped, a tradition that used to occur with more frequency in Georgia’s rural communities but is much less common today. During the scene, the woman is wrapped in a white sheet and violently whisked away, as spectators stood paralysed, their eyes affixed to the drama unravelling before their eyes. Shortly thereafter, the kidnapped woman is seen lying on the ground shrouded in a white sheet, as actors and bystanders gently place roses on her lifeless body, likely an allusion to a string of tragic femicide cases that occurred in the capital in 2014.

It was exactly this kind of theatrical drama that the authors hoped would make an indelible imprint on the minds of

those who witnessed it, thereby spurring robust public discussion over the topic of domestic violence.

Teiko Anjaparidze, another journalist who attended the exhibition, says that the performance was unique in that the audience could actually become a co-participant: “From what I read and what I saw during the exhibition, it all centred around things that are unfortunately happening all around us – things that society often does not have an adequate response to. I think that we as journalists, and perhaps everyone in society, can and should do something about this.”

According to Maglakelidze, the response to the Marjanishvili performance was encouraging.

“Considering the interactive nature of the performance, it was really great to see people taking part. The audience was very excited because this theatrical form allowed them to interact with what was going on all around them,” she says.

At one point, Maglakelidze says, the performance was so realistic that some of the people in the audience did not realize that these were just actors playing prescribed roles.

“In some cases, the actors purposely provoked the audience, which resulted in some members of the audience getting upset, some even angrily interjecting when they perceived that someone was not being treated fairly,” Maglakelidze notes with a grin of satisfaction.

Zura Papiashvili, a playwright who participated in a separate UN Women initiative that aimed to address domestic violence, notes how important the play was and how it functioned as a valuable tool in raising awareness about this public health threat.

“The performance, with the events and situations it portrays, should be repeated many times,” he said. “This kind of mental and psychological violence should be ended. There should be love, love and only love.”

In addition to the Marjanishvili Theatre production, *Interior of Violence* was also staged at a theatre in the Black Sea coastal city of Poti in July 2014. Later in October, *Interior of Violence* was performed at the annual Tbilisi International Festival of Theatre,²⁰ which features the best local and international works of modern art and culture and is held every autumn.

20 Information available at <http://www.tbilisiinternational.com/en/>.

SPEAK OUT!



Screening of the documentary film *Speak Out!* in Rustaveli cinema in Tbilisi (March 2014). Photo: UN Women/Maka Gogaladze

In 2013, UN Women and the Georgian National Film Center organized a competition for script writers and film directors for the production of a documentary film that aimed to chronicle the prevalence of domestic violence in Georgia. In the end, Zurab Inashvili's film *Speak Out!* was the film that was selected.

Inashvili's film offers viewers an unapologetic, up-close look at domestic violence in Georgia, telling the authentic stories of women who have survived domestic violence and some that did not. The film was released to the public but was also used as a tool to inform key stakeholders and influential members of society about this pressing public health issue. Targeted groups included the country's various political parties, students of the police academy, university students and others who might have a role in advancing the campaign's goals and message. The screenings were followed by a public discussion with experts on the subject and representatives of relevant state and public institutions.

The aim of the documentary film initiative was to raise public awareness about the issue and foster more discussion about violence against women, its root causes and its prevention, as well as provide effective responses.

The film documents the experiences of several women, some of whom were the subjects of domestic violence and others who were family members of the victims. The author of the film does not soften the edges for the viewer; some of the stories that are told are uplifting and bring with them hope, while others are tragic and bleak.

One of the first people featured in the film is the mother of a domestic abuse victim who was gunned down by her controlling husband. While her story is painful to listen to, the story she tells leading up to her daughter's tragic murder is instructive and underscores how much work still needs to be done as it relates to changing the prevailing societal attitudes about domestic violence. In the scene, a mother shares with



Premiere of the documentary film *Speak Out!* in Rustaveli cinema. (March 2014). Photo: UN Women/Maka Gogaladze

the viewer her deep sense of regret for not acting on the death threats her daughter received before her life was taken. Knowing that there was a problem, she spoke about how the family wanted to keep the problem private. Eventually it was too late, and her daughter was killed.

Another woman featured in the film shares her story of getting married at 15 years of age and raising a child with her jealous husband, who confines her to their home and beats her, as well as their child. At one point, she leaves him and moves back in with her parents. Her parents, however, do not accept her and eventually push her out of the house, forcing her to take up residence with her abusive husband again.

The woman's story once again underscores the slow pace at which shifts in attitudes take place, especially among older members of society.

Another woman in the film recalls in heartbreaking fashion how the man she once loved, morphed into someone

“whose cruelty has no limits” and who she describes as a “monster” without a human face.

Later in the film, using grainy, black-and-white news footage to harness the full grisly effect, the viewer is taken back to a string of high-profile femicide cases that took place in Tbilisi a few years earlier (when 34 women were murdered in 2014). One of the most tragic incidents was one in which a distraught former husband showed up outside his ex-wife's classroom at Ilia University and, in broad daylight, shot her to death in the hallway, killing himself afterwards. This incident would eventually be the catalyst that would put pressure on the Government to draft tougher domestic violence legislation in the country.

The film's dark subject matter continues, as it shifts focus to the first-hand accounts of men in prison who have been convicted of femicide. From the emotionless tone of their voices, one can't help but get the impression that they have little remorse for the crimes they have committed.

However, what resonates most for the viewer is a scene about halfway through the film in which three older men, who reside in what appears to be a rural part of the country, give chilling testimony of their views of domestic violence.

“A woman should do her housework. If she does not perform her duties as a housewife, then a man of course will be quite dissatisfied and kick her quite hard. He will beat her up. This is a rule. A woman who doesn’t respect her family or her husband must be beaten up,” the first man says.

As disturbing as this might be, it is the next sequence in the film that sends chills up the spine of the viewer and illustrates just how formative the resistance is to efforts to shift public attitudes about violence against women – especially in the rural regions of the country.

“They tell us on TV about violence against women... [But] Georgia will not be like this. If a wife is adulterous, then, according to the Georgian mentality, she should be treated violently. You should break her neck and kill her with torture,” the older gentleman says unapologetically to the camera.

The film goes on to document several more stories of women who have survived violence in their relationships and how they managed to escape. But by then, the film has already left a deep emotional impression on the viewer. And in many ways, that is the response that the filmmakers were in search of.

Just how much of an impression the women’s stories made on the viewers can be measured by the responses of some of the young women who saw the film.

Rusudan Nikolaishvili, a student at the Georgian Institute of Public Affairs (GIPA), wrote an emotional essay²¹ after viewing the film in which she writes: “The stories in the film are extremely heartbreaking and left an unforgettable impression on me. They made me willing to knock on every door and help all women to protect their rights. High rates of femicide and domestic violence in Georgia in recent years have unveiled the cruel truth about this severe problem and the necessity to fight [it] more vigorously. We should not let any woman suffer! Everybody should *speak out* and unite for their protection.”

Fellow GIPA student Salome Bendianishvili also offered her thoughts on the film after being moved by the stories featured in it, writing: “This documentary thrilled me. I never thought that men and women enjoyed different rights and were not equal, but the movie *Speak Out!* made me more courageous; and I started to think that I am a woman myself, and if I happen to be in a similar situation, I must *speak out* and fight for my rights.”

The film – which was produced by UN Women as part of the UN Joint Programme for Gender Equality in Georgia and made possible through generous funding by the Government of Sweden, in cooperation with the Georgian National Film Center – is a film that all audiences should watch. While already more than three years old, the film’s message remains relevant today: Those who suffer from domestic violence must not live in fear; they must speak up and tell their story for their own well-being and for the countless other women who suffer the same kind of abuse.

21 UN Women Georgia, “SPEAK OUT! Public Launch of Documentary Movie on Violence against Women”, 15 December 2015. Available at <http://georgia.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2015/12/speak-out-public-launch-of-documentary-movie-on-violence-against-women>.

9 PLAYS VS. VIOLENCE



Public reading of 9 Plays vs. Violence performed by the actors at Kote Marjanishvili State Drama Theatre (December 2012). Photo: UN Women/Maka Gogaladze

In 2012, UN Women, in partnership with the Ministry of Culture and Monument Protection of Georgia and Kote Marjanishvili State Drama Theatre, launched a special theatrical initiative that aimed to raise public awareness about VAWG/DV and to promote public discussion on the topic. Within the framework of this initiative, Georgian playwrights were asked to submit plays that touch on the subject of VAWG/DV.

As a result, nine plays were developed and published as a book entitled *9 Plays vs. Violence*, which was then presented to the public. Special readings of the plays were conducted by Kote Marjanishvili State Drama Theatre actors during the annual 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, observed from 25 November to 10 December around the world.

With the cooperation of Kote Marjanishvili State Drama Theatre, the play *Seven Dreams*, written by Zura Papiashvili, was performed for public audiences and subsequently included in the theatre's official repertoire. Since then, the play has been performed numerous times in several rural regions of Georgia. The play garnered so much positive feedback that from 2012 to 2014, it was performed 18 times, and the book *9 Plays vs. Violence* was distributed throughout Georgia's universities, theatres and libraries – including the National Parliamentary Library of Georgia.

Ultimately, the *9 Plays vs. Violence* initiative would act as a pilot project or test run for future campaigns involving Georgia's arts community and set the stage for similar projects that would utilize Georgia's rich arts and cultural resources to help bring attention to the problem of violence against women and domestic abuse.

LYSISTRATA



Premiere of Lasha Bugadze's *Lysistrata* at Shota Rustaveli State Drama Theatre (December 2015). Photo: UN Women/Maka Gogaladze

Lysistrata is a famous theatrical comedy penned by Aristophanes and originally performed in Athens, Greece in 411 BC. It is a comic account of a woman's extraordinary mission to end the meaningless fighting between Greek city states. It also holds the distinction of being one of the first historical examples in theatre that made an attempt to bring to light the sexual dynamics of a male-dominated society.

How exactly did she accomplish this feat?

She hatched a genius plan in which she rallied the female community together, convincing the women to deny sex to all the men involved in the fighting, effectively depriving them of the one thing they desired most.

Her plan worked.

Using the feminist undercurrents of the original *Lysistrata* play as a foundation, prominent Georgian dramatist and

playwright Lasha Bugadze authored his own version of the play by adapting it to the realities of violence against women in Georgia.

According to Bugadze, the play was inspired by what was happening in Georgia with regard to domestic violence and violence against women. In his blog, Bugadze wrote using metaphor while he expressed his views on the topic: "Now is the time when nobody should remain silent, and the victims of violence should not be left alone, face-to-face with a despot. We should stop perpetrators together. We should help the *Lysistratas*."²²

So, as part of the broader Arts United campaign, UN Women decided to parlay the success of the *9 Plays vs. Violence* initiative into another creative endeavor by turning Aristophanes's classic play into an artistic vehicle to raise awareness about the problem of domestic violence and to spur increased public dialogue on the subject.

22 Lasha Bugadze, "Become Lysistratas!", 3 December 2015. Available at <http://georgia.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2015/12/become-lysistratas>.

Lysistrata was first performed as a poetry recitation during the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence in late 2014, which took place at the Mikheil Tumanishvili Film Actors Theatre in Tbilisi.²³ After receiving a positive response from the audience, *Lysistrata* would stage its premiere the following year (on 8 December 2015) at the famous Rustaveli Theatre. The high-profile event was even attended by Georgia's First Lady, who had already supported numerous other initiatives to end violence against women and girls in the past.

To fully appreciate the creative idea that was behind using the stage as a platform for expression and as a way to convey an important message to the public, we must first revisit Georgia's Soviet legacy.

"Theatre has a very special importance for a post-Soviet society like Georgia's. Theatre was and still is very attached to the social life of the people," explains playwright Davit Gabunia, who participated in a previous joint UN Women initiative to encourage contemporary playwrights to write about social issues – in particular, violence against women.

Gabunia went on to explain that for Georgians, the theatre is not necessarily a place for entertainment but, rather, a place where a kind of connection between truth and life takes place.

"For Georgia, theatre allowed for a kind of freedom of expression. Ideas that were not acceptable during Soviet times could be expressed through metaphor and the subtext buried within the dialogue of the plays. For us, everything that was happening on the stage was real, and everything that was happening in reality was fake," notes Gabunia.

Playwright Lasha Bugadze echoed Gabunia's remarks, driving home the point that it is sometimes more fruitful to talk about tough issues like domestic violence in the language of theatre, rather than to discuss these issues in newspaper articles or comprehensive scientific journals.

"Theatre has become a place – a social room, if you will – where everybody can come together to have a communal experience and talk about difficult social issues," explains Bugadze, echoing Gabunia's sentiment.

Nevertheless, Bugadze felt that the above approach was an ideal way to address the problem of violence against women, so he and the play's director, Davit Sakvarelidze, began putting the play together in a way that allows the Georgian audience to "read between the lines".

"We started developing the idea to include the subject matter in a hidden way, but in a way that was still closely connected to the subconsciousness of society," he notes.

On 8 December 2015, members of the Shota Rustaveli State Drama Theatre performed a new version of Aristophanes's *Lysistrata*. The production was a success – so much so that the play, along with the actors and actresses involved, received multiple honours.

"We had several women approach us after the play who said that they now felt like they had a voice. They felt empowered... stronger. It was the play that gave them the power to make tough decisions," Bugadze remarks.

In retrospect, Gabunia notes that Georgia is a country that has historically been enveloped by revolutions, and from that comes things such as inequality, which he is quick to point out is not part of Georgia's history.

"Inequality is not in our tradition; it was developed artificially during revolutions and during the Soviet period. Georgia had had strong female figures throughout our history – as far back as Queen Tamar in the twelfth century, and Georgia was one of the first countries in Europe to achieve women's suffrage in 1918," he says.

23 UN Women Georgia, "Rustaveli Theatre Hosts Performance on Violence against Women", 8 December 2015. Available at <http://georgia.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2015/12/rustaveli-theatre-hosts-performance-on-violence-against-women>.

THERE ONCE WAS A GIRL



Children at the presentation of the collection of fairy tales *There Once was a Girl* in Telavi, Kakheti region (November 2018). Photo: UN Women/ Maka Gogaladze

According to the UN Women Country Representative in Georgia, Erika Kvapilova, deeply ingrained stereotypes are difficult to break. “The best way to address them is to start at childhood,” she notes.

As such, by using Georgian folklore, literature and history as a template, UN Women devised a creative idea to help foster gender equality within a different demographic – children. The concept came in the form of a book. But this was not your average book; it was a book comprising a collection of fairy tales featuring female protagonists throughout – something that, up until now, was in short supply among contemporary children’s literature in Georgia.

*There Once was a Girl*²⁴ celebrates in fantastical fashion the historical accomplishments and contributions made by Georgian women throughout history. In doing so, the book deftly

helps to address gender inequality, which is one of the biggest hurdles that must be cleared if campaigns are to be successful in their fight to stamp out domestic violence.

One of the writers who took part in the project was Nestan Kvinikadze, whose fairy tale centred around Barbare Jorjadze, a nineteenth-century Georgian poet, playwright and women’s rights advocate. Jorjadze is also known for publishing a series of famous cookbooks that highlight Georgian cuisine. It was Jorjadze’s cooking acumen that Kvinikadze used as the basis for her fairy tale “The Bridge of Blancmange”.

“First I researched Jorjadze’s recipes and created an imaginary kingdom made up of various foods – random foods like vanilla, creams, sugar and various fruits and vegetables. Then I took details from Jorjadze’s biography and tried to incorporate them into the story,” notes Kvinikadze, who admits that the premise of a story using food sounds a bit silly at first.

24 UN Women Georgia, “Fairy tale collection ‘Once There was a Girl’ – A gift for children from UN Women”, 15 June 2018. Available at <http://georgia.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2018/06/fairy-tale-collection-once-there-was-a-girl>.

At first glance, a fairy tale that features food items in a prominent role might seem over the top, but the author is quick to emphasize the strength and prowess of the main protagonist in the tale – a strong, fiercely independent girl who eschews society’s deeply ingrained ideas about women.

“She was an extraordinarily powerful girl who ruled the kingdom. And when enemies came to invade the kingdom, she used various foods – for example, onions – to repel the invaders.”

The author also underscores that the main character confronts the gender-based behavioural norms widely expected of women in traditional Georgian society. Recalling her childhood, Kvinikadze notes that female characters in children’s books were always feminized and would often be depicted wearing lace dresses. Naturally, young girls would imagine themselves in those roles. Kvinikadze says that *There Once was a Girl* utterly destroys these gender stereotypes.

“The character in my fairy tale is the only one who dares to dance and sing in the centre of the kingdom, which is forbidden, as women were expected to stay in the house and do housework,” she says.

While Kvinikadze says she drew many of the ideas for her fairy tale from Jorjadze’s real biography, she made sure that the lessons she was imparting to the children reading the book were easily understood.

With the support of UN Women, 26 authors and illustrators collaborated on the project in total. The fairy tale protagonists included notable Georgian women like Rusudan Zhordania, who has the distinction of being Georgia’s first female pilot and having fought in World War II; Maro Makashvili, who was a famous military nurse; Medea, who hailed from the ancient kingdom of Colchis and who was eventually immortalized in Greek mythology; and Gurji-Khatuni, the ruler of the powerful Seljuk Empire, whose story was largely lost amid Georgia’s long and turbulent history.

What’s most important, however, is that these stories resonate with the young female audience that read them. Tbilisi-based school teacher Lela Kotorashvili says the book has captured the imagination of several of her female pupils and has helped to inspire some of her young students to set higher goals in life.

In fact, the response from her Tbilisi students has been so positive that Kotorashvili decided to introduce the fairy tales to her students in Racha, where she holds an annual two-week summer school. This is important because women living in rural mountainous regions like Racha often drop out of school early to work in the family home. In addition, early marriages

are more common in such remote regions of Georgia. The empowering fairy tales in the book help mitigate this trend.

“The stories in *There Once was a Girl* open the girls’ minds to new possibilities. They inspire them to set their goals much higher than simply getting married and raising a family. In short, the tales in the book give them inspiration to achieve bigger and better things in life,” Kotorashvili explains.

After having read the fairy tale about Rusudan Zhordania (Georgia’s first female pilot), Mariam, one of Kotorashvili’s students, was so inspired that she decided she wanted to pursue a career as a brain surgeon – a pursuit that many in Georgian society still view as a career reserved for men. When the 15-year-old girl told people about her goal, they tried to dissuade her, warning her that she would have to work long hours and be on her feet all day. However, Mariam was undeterred by such talk, and she remains committed to pursuing her dream in medicine.

Kotorashvili also notes the importance of the illustrations featured in the book and underscores how they work to inspire and empower the reader. For example, in the fairy tale about Rusudan Zhordania, the illustration depicts the famous Georgian pilot with short, tightly cropped hair and dressed in a pilot’s overalls.



Collection of fairy tales “There Once Was a Girl”, Rusudan Zhordania, Illustration: Maka Jishkariani



Children drawing fairy-tale characters at the presentation of the collection of fairy tales *There Once was a Girl* (June 2018). Photo: UN Women/Maka Gogaladze

“This is one of the things that caught Mariam’s eye. This made her want to cut her hair short too. But her mother and grandmother didn’t like the idea,” notes Kotorashvili. “In the end, Mariam settled for shaving the sides of her head underneath her long hair instead.”

We can include in the formatted PDF versions the relevant illustration for Rusudan Jordania

Aside from simply having the girls read the text contained within the book, Kotorashvili has channeled the power of the book in a creative way. During her 2018 summer school, she had her students in Racha stage a theatrical performance of one of the tales using shadow puppets. She also had them stage an improvisational play based on one of the fairy tales. “Only reading these fairy tales is not enough. We have to do more to help them fully understand and absorb the message these stories are trying to convey. By having them act out the

stories themselves, they get to stand in the shoes of the characters, which helps them achieve this goal,” she says.

As a teacher, Kotorashvili is a big supporter of *There Once was a Girl* and believes that more teachers throughout the country should start incorporating the book into their classes regularly.

“As a teacher, I believe that these fairy tales are very important. This kind of literature can really help empower girls and provide them with much-needed strength.”

With its fantastical stories, captivating illustrations and empowered female characters, *There Once was a Girl* is a relevant book for all children. Because of that, an English edition of the book has been published so that more children will have the chance to read these inspiring tales.

2019 AND BEYOND

A recent joint study conducted by UN Women and the National Statistics Office of Georgia (GEOSTAT) in 2017²⁵ found that, one in every seven women in Georgia has experienced intimate-partner violence in their lifetime. Among those, 73 per cent have suffered psychological, 31 per cent physical and 13 per cent sexual violence.²⁶

The study also underscores that both women and men still show a high degree of tolerance and acceptance towards the use of physical violence against women in relationships, as well as share inequitable views on sex and sexual violence. Of those surveyed, almost one quarter of women (22 per cent) and one third of men (31 per cent) believe that wife-beating is justified under certain circumstances. Moreover, almost one quarter of all women (23 per cent) and nearly half of all men (42 per cent) believe that a wife should obey her husband even if she disagrees.

These latest statistics seem to paint a grim picture of the state of VAWG/DV in Georgia and further underscores that there is no magic bullet when it comes to addressing the problem of violence against women. But the study also shows areas that have undergone huge improvements as well – especially as it relates to women’s attitudes pertaining to VAWG/DV.

For example, the study reveals that there has been a significant spike in the percentage of women who have reported acts of violence committed by an intimate partner to police – 18 per cent in 2017, compared to 1.5 per cent in 2009. In addition, the percentage of women who believe that domestic violence is a private matter that should be handled within

the family has been halved – from 78 per cent in 2009 to just 33 per cent in 2017.

The study also uncovered other indicators that bode well in the fight to reduce and eventually stamp out the prevalence of VAWG/DV in Georgia. These include the fact that societal attitudes are becoming less conservative in the country; the younger generation of men and women show more non-discriminatory attitudes; there has been a decrease in the number of women who choose to stay with violent husbands because they believed the violence to be normal; and finally, there has been a significant rise in the percentage of women who have experienced intimate partner violence who reported it to the police.

All of this demonstrates that the contribution of UN Women (and many other governmental, non-governmental and development partners) to combating this pandemic in the past nine years is starting to pay dividends; Georgia is slowly but steadily chipping away at the prevalence of VAWG/DV.

In the years to come, more minds need to be changed, more attitudes need to be shifted, more people need to be made aware and more resources need to be allocated to the women who have fallen victim to this violence.

UN Women with its partners will continue its campaigns and initiatives that seek to bring about transformative change in behaviours, beliefs and structures that reinforce gender inequalities, with the goal of stamping out the existence of violence against women and girls for good.

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

26 UN Women Europe and Central Asia, “One in seven women in Georgia experiences domestic violence new national study finds”, 12 March 2018. Available at <http://eca.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2018/03/one-in-seven-women-in-georgia-experiences-domestic-violence-new-national-study-finds>.

6% OF WOMEN HAVE EXPERIENCED PHYSICAL OR SEXUAL VIOLENCE FROM AN INTIMATE PARTNER

WHY WOMEN STAY SILENT?

I WILL BRING BAD NAME TO MY FAMILY

NO ONE WILL BELIEVE ME

I MAY LOSE MY CHILDREN

THERE WILL BE MORE VIOLENCE

I WILL BE BLAMED



36% OF WOMEN WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED PHYSICAL OR SEXUAL VIOLENCE HAVE NEVER TOLD ANYONE ABOUT IT



ONLY 18% OF WOMEN REPORTED TO THE POLICE



Source: National study on violence against women 2017

Concept/Design: ForSet