



# WOMEN'S SOLIDARITY CIRCLES IN GEORGIA



Norwegian Ministry  
of Foreign Affairs



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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

This publication was prepared in the framework of the UN Women project "A Joint Action for Women's Economic Empowerment in Georgia" supported by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

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Women's opportunities in society are frequently limited by numerous barriers, including stereotypical notions about women's roles, that restrict their potential and participation in support networks beyond the circle of their extended families. As a result, women are frequently isolated from various opportunities and are disproportionately affected by poverty.

Overcoming these traps is not easy without adequate support. Since 2018, UN Women, together with its key partners – the Georgian Farmers' Association, the TASO Foundation and the Academy of the Ministry of Finance – have been supporting female entrepreneurship in Georgia through an initiative generously funded by the Government of Norway. As part of this work, many women throughout Georgia have participated in events that improved their knowledge, skills, capacities and access to economic resources. Their lives and the lives of their families have changed for the better ever since.

This publication captures the stories of 27 small-business women entrepreneurs supported by the initiative throughout 2018 and 2019. Apart from depicting the women's individual journeys and successes, the stories have a common thread: that of inclusion, support, sharing and creating solidarity circles among the women, all of whom aspire to use their potential to the fullest.

UN Women would like to thank all those who agreed to share their stories. We also thank our colleague, Nino Natroshvili, who travelled throughout Georgia to collect the stories for this publication.



## RUSUDAN TEVDORADZE

65 YEARS OLD, BAGHDATI, IMERETI,  
FOUNDER OF WINE BRAND  
"NAGUTNEBI"

Even in the past, when wine production in Georgia was only male work and women were not even allowed to get close to *qvevri* (wine vessels), my mother-in-law was taking care of a vineyard and was making her own wine. She was a widow, and the vineyard saved and helped her to raise her kids alone.

My husband also produced wine but was not bottling it. I was always helping him; we divided the labour. When my husband died, I decided to continue the tradition. My children were also supportive, which gave me the motivation and courage to continue. With their help, I bottled wine for the first time six years ago and started my own business.

I have 3,000 vine plants; some of them are in the backyard of my house, while the rest are in Nagutnebi, a place in our region that is famous for the taste of the grapes grown there. This is why I named my wine "Nagutnebi". I produce wine from such varieties as Tsolikauri, Krakhuna, Martvili Ojaleshi and Aladasturi. I collect 12 tons of grapes. I produce both dry white wines and semi-sweet reds. The average amount of finished wine is six tons. I produce wine according to the Georgian traditional method of using *qvevri* as well as according to European technology.

"Nagutnebi" is mainly sold in Tbilisi, Kutaisi and Batumi. It is biodynamic wine, and we are working now to receive the respective certificate. I really want to export it. Wine production is a great responsibility. You are serving and giving life to your oldest traditions, while presenting it in a different, new format. If I am successful in taking my wine abroad, I will be able to represent women winemakers and the country as a whole.

I am happy to see the increased number of women winemakers and the popularization of their wine cellars in Georgia. Vines require special care, and women are best at that. I take care of my vineyard with love and care like I would care for a child and even speak to them all the time, asking, "How are my Krakhuna and Tsolikauri doing today?" It requires a lot of hard work, but without work, nothing can be achieved.

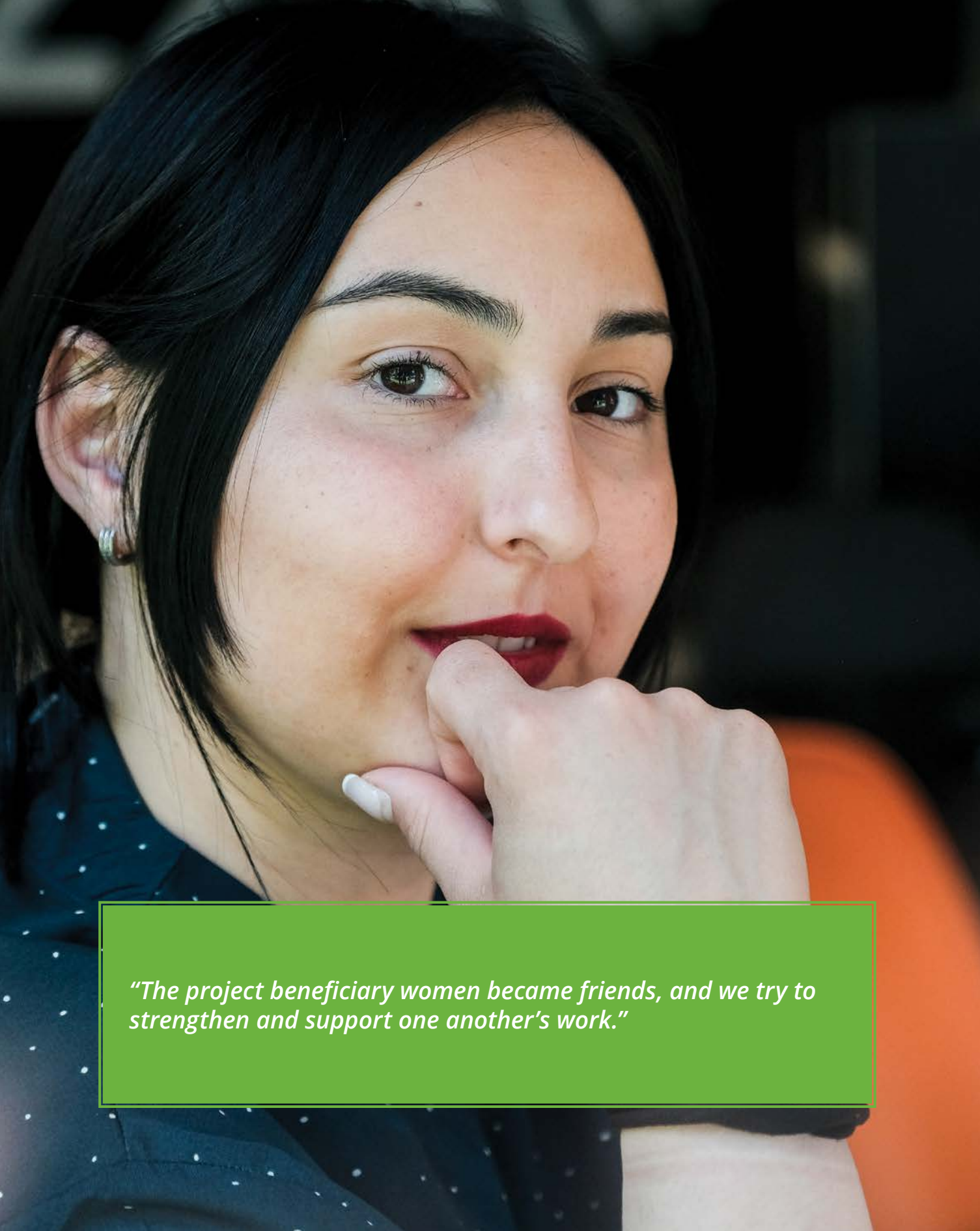
I have been a wine producer for several years and never expected that somebody would learn about me now. When I learned about the UN Women project from the Georgian Farmers' Association, I was excited to hear that they were interested in supporting women as their main focus. Through this project, I met women like me from different regions of Georgia. We shared our opinions and experience and learned a lot. I became younger.



Later I received a grant from UN Women. I needed an electric grape extractor machine. It was hard to work without it. My son had to do all the work by hand. I was able to buy this machine and a 2,500 litre cistern. Now we can finish 10 days' worth of labour in only one day, and I now have a container to safely preserve even more wine. The quality and quantity of my production has significantly improved.

After this project, I purchased a plot of land. I want to start a vineyard there for a different grape variety from Imereti – Otskhanuri Saperavi – and to produce new wine. I am thinking about expanding into agritourism. I am even renovating a wine cellar in order to be able to host tourists, organize wine tastings and participate in the growth of our region.

*"Through this project, I met women like me from different regions of Georgia. We shared our opinions and experience and learned a lot. I became younger."*



## NATIA CHAKHUNASHVILI

25 YEARS OLD, KUTAISI, IMERETI,  
FOUNDER OF "WHITE HOUSE BURGER"

My life is divided into two parts: sports and business. I was 8 years old when my parents first took me to tennis lessons. I was not even tall enough to reach the net, but I knew this was what I wanted the most. I was trying my best despite the fact that there were no favourable conditions for training, so I was spending most of my time practising on the court. When I was 12 years old, I took part in the Batumi Open Tournament as a debutante and won. I ranked seventh in Georgia for quite a long period of time.

Unfortunately I broke my leg when I was 17 years old. The ligaments were so damaged that intensive training was prohibited, so I had to quit tennis. This was not only a physical trauma but a challenging, emotional one. I went through very difficult times. I remember in the mornings I would hold my racquet and pat it. It was hard for me to imagine that the work I invested so much in was finished. Soon I became a student of the pharmaceutical faculty at Technical University of Georgia and started working in one of the fast food chains. The job helped me a lot to forget the old trauma. Later I found a job as a hotel administrator, where I met my future husband. Levan was the chef, and culinary arts was his passion. I started my own business with the help and support of my husband, and we established the fast food restaurant "White House Burger".

The competition in Kutaisi was very tough, but I chose to follow a different concept. I decided to make a fresh and different type of burger with organic products, freshly baked bread and meat prepared without oil on a charcoal grill. The strategy was successful. Soon I learned that I needed to expand because the space was too small for the increased number of guests.

It was at that time that I participated in UN Women's project. This was an absolutely new experience for me. I was very nervous at the beginning, like I was when I took part in tennis tournaments.

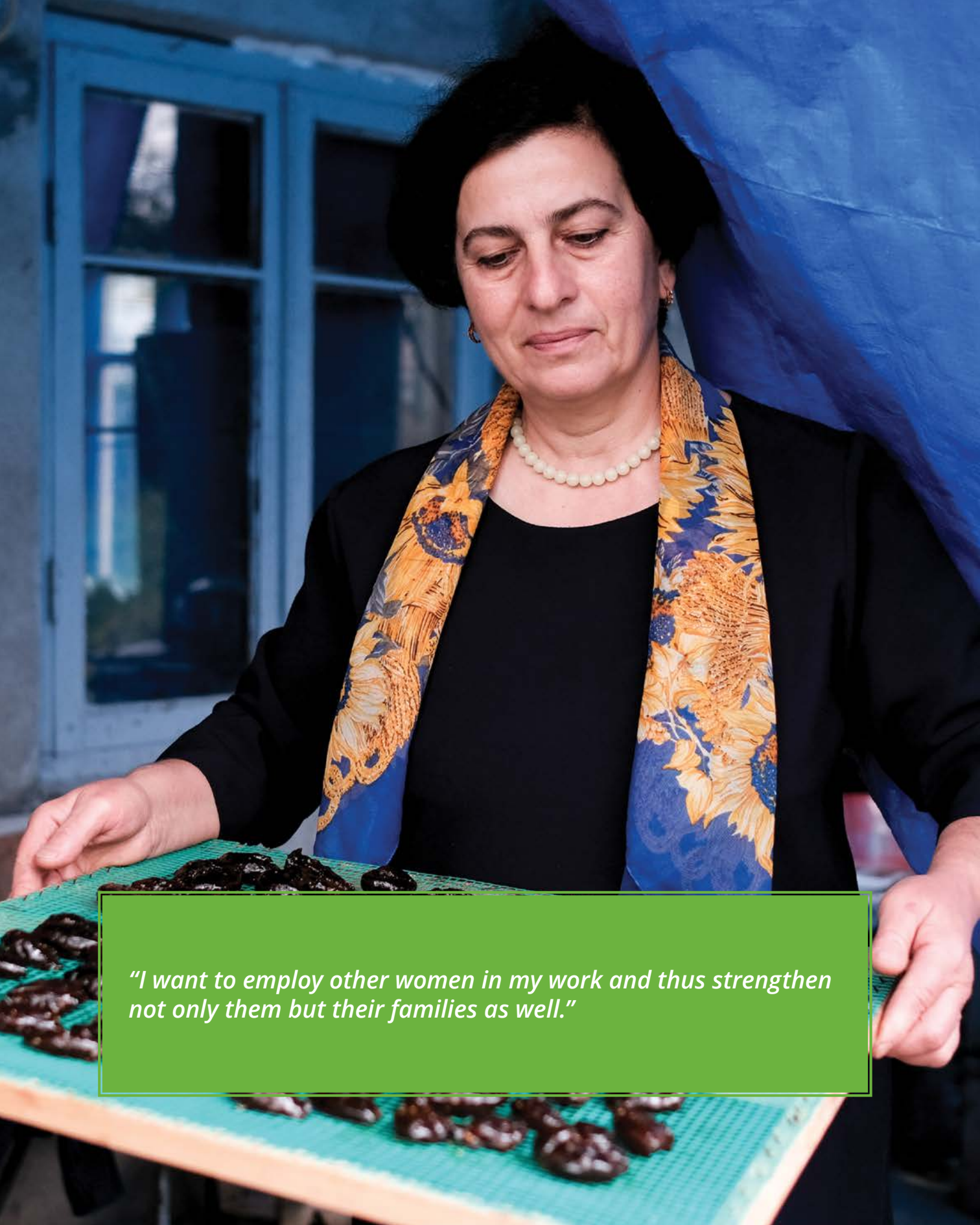
I received funding after the trainings and was able to purchase essential kitchen equipment, especially the most critical of all – a dough-mixing machine. My female employees had been mixing dough by hand, which required a great deal of physical energy and time, forcing us to refuse orders frequently. Now their labour is simpler. Now we can serve more guests. We moved to a bigger, new building this spring. Without this project, it would have taken me more time to expand my business and raise money for the expansion on my own.



The project beneficiary women became friends, and we try to strengthen and support one another's work. One of them has already influenced my business: new uniforms and covers for wood pallets for the new space were made by Shorena Chijavadze. Shorena owns a sewing business, and we became friends during the trainings. In the future, I plan to buy products such as cucumbers, tea, sweets and other goods from the women who participated in the project. I want us to support one another more.

I was very nervous at the start of my business. I had a loan. I did not know whether my business idea would be successful. I think there are many others like me, but they need to overcome this fear. Women entrepreneurs should do our best to achieve our goals. We need to stand up every time we fall, and we should continue to be vocal about our say.

*"The project beneficiary women became friends, and we try to strengthen and support one another's work."*



## KETEVAN DIAKONIDZE

56 YEARS OLD, BOSLEVI VILLAGE,  
ZESTAPONI DISTRICT, IMERETI,  
FOUNDER OF THE DRIED FRUIT AND  
CONFECTIONERY BRAND "MZISA"

I am a bakery technologist, specializing in making macarons and confectionery. I was 22 when I started to work at a cannery in Terjola. After a while, the cannery was remodeled into a food production enterprise, and at the same time, it was also decided to open a confectionery. I was in charge of the latter project. At first, I worked as a technologist and later as the head of the laboratory. Incidentally, we were the ones who were producing some of the most popular confectionery products in Georgia at the time: the so-called Pigeon's Milk as well as marshmallows called Zephyr.

Time passed, and when my children finished school and went to Tbilisi to get a higher education, I accompanied them. I always tried to improve myself, to increase my knowledge. I dreamed of starting some business on my own, so, when my children were at their lectures, I sat in the library and read professional literature. I had an idea to produce some wholesome product that would be healthy and useful for people. After returning to Zestaponi, I decided to realize my idea in the village of Boslevi, where the environment is ecologically clean and the fruit is healthy.

At the time, the government project "Enterprise Georgia" was underway. I took part in it and even won a grant. In the beginning, I started to experiment and substituted the more typical methods for my own ideas. First, I tried making candied figs, then - dried plums and fruit Swiss rolls. I processed the fruit so that they preserved all their valuable qualities. Then I enriched the assortment of my production with dried persimmons, soufflés and candied fruit dipped in chocolate, which brought me great success.

After getting involved in the UN Women project, my production became more diverse. I met very interesting women at the trainings and meetings. They shared such fascinating stories from their personal experience, based on their practical life, that one cannot find in any book on theory. The grant that I won through that project improved my production. It enabled me to purchase very important equipment: two electric dryers, two refrigerators and an appliance for packing dried fruit. Now I can produce a large amount of dried fruit, and the weather won't be an obstacle any longer. I will be able to store the already made products for a longer time. The branding support provided by the project helped me launch my brand "Mzisa" and will facilitate with brand awareness and with the growth of product realization too.



I also participated in business forums and became more enthusiastic. The fact that people expect from me some innovations and success, fills me with more motivation. I took on this responsibility and cannot allow myself to relax. Now I want to make some wholesome delicacies from pumpkins and some special sweets for diabetics. I am also thinking about diversifying my delivery locations and supplying Mzisa to tourist centres.

I attach special importance to the wholesomeness of my production, so I grow fruit trees in my own garden. However, my supply does not entirely meet my needs, so I buy some fruit from my neighbours. But I want to combine the entire process into a smooth production - starting from planting the trees and up through producing the final products. I want to employ other women in my work and thus strengthen not only them but their families as well.

*"I want to employ other women in my work and thus strengthen not only them but their families as well."*



## MAGDA KUPATASHVILI

50 YEARS OLD, KUTAISI, IMERETI,  
FOUNDER OF DESIGN SALON  
“MAGDASALO”

I was 17 years old when I moved abroad to study in Latvia. Back then, designing clothing was not popular, but I have loved this profession since my childhood because all my family members were handcrafting. Despite this, I began my studies at the faculty of engineering and ceramic technology at Riga University in Latvia. I wanted to study at the art academy but was afraid to fail. Instead, I had to pass by the road in front of the art academy for five years, always thinking about how lucky those students who were studying there were.

After completing my studies in ceramic technology, I started attending private classes in which I learned clay sculpting, sewing and batik making. When I turned 30, I fulfilled my dream by enrolling in the Clothes Design School at the Riga Academy of Arts. It was very difficult for me. I was taking private orders for sewing clothing in order to pay tuition. In the end, though, I became a professional and returned to Georgia after I completed my studies.

Living in Georgia in the mid-1990s was difficult, but my sister, who was also a designer, and I purchased a 20-year-old, Soviet-made knitting machine and opened a design salon in our own house. We were making constructions and designs, sewing and knitting. It was hard for us because the old equipment failed to produce proper quality products. When the Government of Georgia project “Enterprise Georgia” launched, we participated in it and were able to buy new equipment. Later I was contacted by UN Women and the Georgian Farmers’ Association, and I was happy to join their project.

I was most impressed with the combined training. In addition to gaining concrete, specific information, we improved and broadened our knowledge. We learned about women’s rights, equality and the problem of violence. I remember the unusual motivation I had after each meeting. We lack such trainings in the regions, and these types of trainings were like a spark for inspiration for me. I was especially encouraged by the success and stories of the other women and was able to feel the power each of us had.

I was lucky to win a grant through a UN Women competition. I had not been able to knit due to the lack of special equipment, but with this grant, I purchased two modern knitting machines. This equipment allows us to produce high-quality clothing. We are thinking about hiring and training one additional female employee. I expect to broaden my business more and to employ other women for sure.



The role women play in Georgia’s economy should not be underestimated. They were able to survive the economic turmoil of the mid-1990s. But the share of women in the economy should still increase. I think that the project participants have their own important function to play in this process. Our success will have a positive impact on other women, who will then become more motivated. I would love for our work to become a positive example for others.

*“We are thinking about hiring and training one additional female employee. I expect to broaden my business more and to employ other women for sure.”*



## NONA BAKURADZE

54 YEARS OLD, TKIBULI, IMERETI,  
PRODUCER OF "NONA'S YOGHURT"

There are several apartment buildings near my village. Women who live there do not have a yard, cannot have farm animals and are not able to produce their own dairy products. Around 10 years ago, most of these women had young kids, and it was hard for them to find fresh, organic yoghurt, a product which is very healthy for children. I had two cows and was producing yoghurt for my family and two children. When I learned about the problem facing these women, I decided to offer them my natural product.

I remember that at first, I only made five jars of yoghurt. The women liked it, so later I made 8 jars, then 10 and then even up to 15 jars. When I was short on milk, I was buying it from others, and the number of yoghurt jars increased gradually. Step by step, "Nona's Yoghurt" became popular, and the name is still recognizable today. I started delivering the yoghurt to shops. It was difficult at the beginning: sometimes I had to walk to the main road with 50 jars of yoghurt. I had to walk 1 kilometre, then take the bus to Kutaisi and hand-deliver the yoghurt. My husband was helping me. We were struggling for two years but finally saved enough money for a car.

I became a member of the Georgian Farmers' Association and learned about the UN Women project from them, becoming a part of it with pleasure. The trainings gave me great knowledge. Now I am able to submit my own tax declaration, and I also acquired better computer skills. The grant received from the project has been the most helpful: I had been hand-milking eight cows, which is very physically demanding, but the milking machine I purchased has greatly simplified the process. I was able to make more yoghurt because I was not fatigued from hand-milking. As a result, production increased by 20 jars, and now I produce between 70 and 80 jars of yoghurt daily. My business income has increased.

In addition, I was able to buy milk-testing equipment for quality assurance, the milk fat analyser Lactoscan, a refrigerator for yoghurt storage and an oven. Now I would like to diversify our production by starting to make low-fat yoghurt. That is why I purchased the Lactoscan, which will help me produce a quality product.

I need an additional 18 to 20 litres of milk. I always buy milk from two ladies and check its quality to produce fresh and organic yoghurt. This is very important to me: I know that mothers trust my product and feed it to their kids; when they need fresh yoghurt, they always trust Nona. They call me and express their gratitude; this is the best outcome of my hard work and makes me happy.



I always wanted to have my own income, and despite the obstacles, I did not back down. When you are economically strong, you are able to help others, which makes you proud of yourself. I wish for women to be more independent and to have better opportunities in order to see the outcomes of their work and become economically stronger.

*"I always buy milk from two ladies and check its quality to produce fresh and organic yoghurt. This is very important to me: I know that mothers trust my product and feed it to their kids; when they need fresh yoghurt, they always trust Nona."*



## SHORENA CHIJAVADZE

50 YEARS OLD, KUTAISI, IMERETI,  
FOUNDER OF DESIGN STUDIO  
"JACQUARD"

I turned 50 this year and discovered that I have entered the best period of my life. Somehow it happened so that the outcome of all my work is visible now.

I graduated from art school and was good at painting. I wanted to become a sculptor, but my parents did not allow me to live and study alone in the capital. In the end, I graduated from Kutaisi Polytechnic Institute's faculty of automation and complex management mechanization. I am an engineer but have never worked in my profession: everything I have done was based on my love of art and painting.

At school, I was interested in sewing. I was around 14 years old when my neighbour showed me how to make a basting stitch, and from there I learned everything else myself. I got married during difficult times in 1990: it was hard for everyone to survive. The search for survival made me start sewing. People were happy with my work. Approximately six years ago, I started sewing professionally. My children are older; they are students, so I decided it was time to develop my work more. I found a place and opened a sewing studio in a small room. The business was good from the beginning. In my imagination, I was not sewing but painting and sculpting the cloths, which I enjoyed very much.

The Government of Georgia's project "Enterprise Georgia" gave me my first funding. This financial support allowed me to hire employees. In addition to sewing, I started creating designs and drafting clothing patterns. I soon expanded my business and established the design studio "Jacquard".

I learned about UN Women from the Georgian Farmers' Association. I turned into a different person already at the first meeting. When we were asked to introduce ourselves, I discovered that I was speaking publicly about myself for the first time. I had the sensation of looking at myself from another angle and discovered that I too have accomplished something interesting.

I received a grant after attending the trainings. The funding absolutely changed the level of my work: I purchased four sewing machines, one of which is for leather. After I sewed for the first time on the new machine, only then did I realize how I had been struggling for years with the old equipment. I also purchased two mannequins and an iron, which are essential in our work.

Automation processes have saved me lots of time and energy; the productivity and number of orders has significantly increased. I started producing leather bags and have employed an additional two women.



This project also added the sales side to my work: I opened a store in a Kutaisi shopping centre, where people can buy the clothing and bags made in our studio. All pieces are exclusive and unique, which gives me the freedom to design and be creative. Now I want to open a small shop in Batumi. Most importantly, since the labour process has been simplified, I have returned to my favourite occupation – painting.

I have two children – a boy and a girl – and they help a lot and are actively involved in the day-to-day work at "Jacquard". I am once again certain that entrepreneurship for women is important, not just so they can receive an income. An economically strong mother is the best role model for her kids, especially girls.

*"I started producing leather bags and have employed an additional two women."*





## TAMAR GVALADZE

50 YEARS OLD, BAGHDATI, IMERETI,  
WINEMAKER AND CO-FOUNDER OF  
“BAIA’S VINEYARD”

Once you begin winemaking, you can never walk away from it – it captivates you. In my case, everything started from my childhood when I was helping my parents take care of their vineyard. This was back when women were not involved in winemaking. Women’s participation was limited only to grape picking and other manual labour in the fields.

The years passed. The stereotypes about women and wine had started to collapse. After getting married, my husband and I started our own farm. We are both teachers, and we were working together at school, in the vineyard and in the wine cellar. We had 3 hectares’ worth of vines that we did not need for ourselves, so we began selling the extra wine we produced. This was our first source of income. At the same time, I was reading professional literature and looking for information on the Internet, and over the years, I became a self-educated winemaker.

In 2015, I won a grant through the Government of Georgia project “Enterprise Georgia” and started bottling our wine. It was my daughter Baia’s idea; she played a key role in branding our wine. The chairwoman of the Georgian Farmers’ Association, Nino Zambakhidze, helped us with the promotion of our wine. Soon our second daughter Gvantsa joined us.

Currently my daughters and I manage the winemaking process: Baia is in charge of making the white wines while Gvantsa produces the red wines. My son Giorgi helps his sisters with distribution. We have 4,000 vines. We have a wide variety of grapes including Tsolikauri, Tsitska, Krakhuna, Otskhanuri Saperavi and Ojaleshi. In total, we produce an average of 8,000 bottles of wine every year. Baia’s Wine and Gvantsa’s Wine are two of our brands that are sold in Georgia and also exported to France, Germany, Norway, Spain, Switzerland and the United States.

They say that our wine is distinguished by its character. Wine is a special drink that combines a multitude of details. Even the character of the winemaker has an impact on a wine. Without full dedication, nothing can be achieved. I work with love, and I think this love is reflected in our wine and is felt by those who drink it.

I like winemaking, but I also want to do something good for my country: I would like to promote more *qvevri* winemaking, a method that has 8,000 years of tradition in Georgia and which is included in the UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage. I started thinking about increasing the quantity of wine produced by this traditional



Georgian method. The grant received from UN Women helped us purchase five units of *qvevri*, each weighing one ton. These units will help me fulfil this idea. We will be able to make more wine and to maintain our place in the market. On another note, the project supported me in connecting with the Georgian hotel chain “Adjara Group Hospitality”, where Baia’s Wine is now part of the wine menu.

We are also involved in wine tourism, and I would like to further develop our business in this direction. I discovered many interesting things when I visited the region of Tuscany in Italy with the help of the UN Women project. I learned that agritourism entails more than just winemaking. It is important to share with tourists your everyday life, to show them farm animals and gardens, and to hold masterclasses. I came back from Italy full of ideas. Now I have decided to build a new space where we will offer masterclasses in Georgian cuisine.

The main achievement of this project is the improvement to one’s self-confidence, which is vital to one’s success. I am sure if you try something with all your heart, you will be able to succeed and fulfil your dreams. Now I know that I found my destiny, and I am happy that my example helped my girls, Baia and Gvantsa, to find their purpose. We have a job that we will never give up.

*“The main achievement of this project is the improvement to one’s self-confidence, which is vital to one’s success. I am sure if you try something with all your heart, you will be able to succeed and fulfil your dreams.”*



## TATIA KHURTSIDZE

32 YEARS OLD, KUTAISI, IMERETI,  
FOUNDER OF HOTEL CASA CALDA

I have been working since the age of 15, but I was always employed in the civil sector and never thought about owning a business. My city has become very attractive to tourists during the past several years. There are many attractions around Kutaisi, and the opening of the new airport has significantly increased the town's popularity. These circumstances convinced me to start a business and open a hotel.

I had a house that I could use to fulfil the idea, but initially I was hesitant. I was not sure whether it was worth starting a business, and I had questions about the prospects and my ability to manage the business. Despite my apprehension, though, I decided to fulfil my idea and make it a reality.

I had already begun planning and renovating the space when I learned about the UN Women project through the NGO Abkhazintercont, where I was working as a business consultant. It was clear that I had to take this opportunity, especially considering my lack of entrepreneurial experience and my need for proper hotel management skills.

I received valuable knowledge through the trainings. As a result of these trainings, I am able to manage my hotel's accounting, our social media accounts, our web page on tourist platforms and other online public relations activities. I learned precise planning, and my management skills improved considerably. Later I received a grant from UN Women that was very helpful financially. I purchased air conditioners, improved the system and hosted the first guests in my hotel Casa Calda in February 2019.

My life absolutely has a new spark. I understand that I took a big step forward by making this decision; I now manage a profitable business. Tourists come to my place without advertising, which I consider to be a marker of success for a newly established hotel surrounded by big competition.

Having economic independence and business management skills bring substantial changes: you become able to make independent decisions, and you become more open and understand that you have completely new opportunities. I am very proud of myself, but I know that I can do even more. I need to improve many issues. I want to add several rooms to the hotel and organize conference facilities. I visited the Tuscan region of Italy with the help of UN Women and came back with unforgettable memories. I would like to replicate my Tuscan experience here in Georgia. For instance, I would like to build a wine



cellar in the yard, organize wine tastings and support the development of wine tourism in my country. I strive for more progress. I read the news every day and try to identify the latest trends.

My sister and I invited our mother to help us with the hotel management. Two more women help me when I have many guests, but women's empowerment does not stop here. I plan to purchase groceries for the hotel from women entrepreneurs, including the ones that I met through the project. This is one of the important plans that I will definitely fulfil.

*“Two more women help me when I have many guests, but women's empowerment does not stop here. I plan to purchase groceries for the hotel from women entrepreneurs, including the ones that I met through the project.”*



## TINA DAVADZE

26 YEARS OLD, KHARAGAULI, IMERETI,  
FOUNDER OF HANDMADE ACCESSORIES  
BRAND "LASHE"

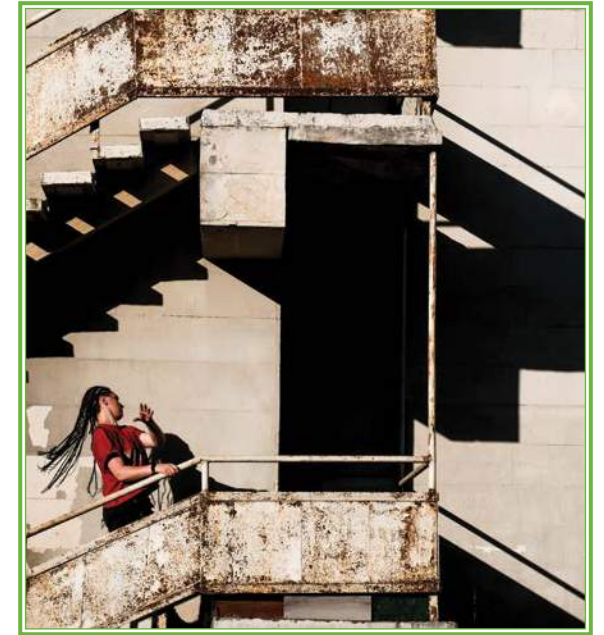
I was most concerned about my profession two years ago when I was coming back to Georgia from Germany. I am a professional restoration architect and was working in this profession prior to immigration. Being part of the restoration process and strategic decision-making was always my passion, but I was always advised to find an office job or to perform simple measurement tasks that are more suitable for women. I escaped from this stereotype to Germany, but despite the fact that I was successful in my profession, it was difficult for me to live far from family and my country.

When I came back to Georgia, I knew that continuing to work as a restoration architect would invite similar attitudes, so I decided to make handmade craft items from leather. I transformed my father's cellar into a studio and created my first product – a notebook. Later I started producing bags. From the beginning, I decided to make each of them exclusive and memorable and named my brand "Lashe".

Around three weeks after returning to Georgia, I learned about UN Women's project and became part of it. I was always interested and busy with creative work and was not well aware of business and sales. I received helpful theoretical knowledge through the training courses at the Academy of the Ministry of Finance, and I was fortunate to receive funding from UN Women. I purchased a sewing machine, lighting equipment and an extruder machine. As a result of this funding, the manual labour was simplified. For instance, if in the past I needed five hours to craft one item, now the time has decreased to 1.5 hours. Now I can even experiment, create different accessories and broaden the choice of handmade items. In addition, I got involved in another initiative of UN Women and learned webpage programming and social media marketing for free. I created my workshop's Facebook page, and I sell my goods online. The course taught me effective management and advertising.

I always think about the changes that the project offered me. The other women entrepreneurs made a major impression on me. I received great emotional support from them. I remember how astonished I was when I learned how hard they were working and the workload they had to deal with. A story of struggle is behind the work and success of each of them, and these stories made a great impact on me. My motivation and courage improved from one meeting to another.

By the end, I became so self-confident that I made my childhood dream come true. I always wanted to learn



martial arts but did not have enough courage because only boys were attending such sport classes. The project was still going on when I started attending karate lessons and began training. Later, other girls from the village also joined me. Now there are three of us, and nobody has skeptical attitudes towards us.

This project has changed my perception. Now I am confident about what I want and how to make my wishes come true. I had not even thought about women's rights in the past. Now I am better aware of these rights and know more about the importance of equality. Now I am aware of how to react differently to such statements claiming that a girl cannot be a restoration architect because of her gender. Now it is much easier for me to deal with stereotypes.

*"The other women entrepreneurs made a major impression on me. I received great emotional support from them. I remember how astonished I was when I learned how hard they were working and the workload they had to deal with. A story of struggle is behind the work and success of each of them, and these stories made a great impact on me."*



## NONA GVADZABIA

53 YEARS OLD, KUTAISI, IMERETI,  
FOUNDER OF HANDMADE ACCESSORIES  
BRAND "UZARELI"

I was raised in Gulripshi, Abkhazia, and the most difficult day for all of us living in Abkhazia was 27 September 1993. I had to abandon my childhood home forever on that night. I will never forget the sky lighted with bullets, the shattering noises and the panicked people who were running away with their belongings in search of shelter. My father was a bedridden patient, and my mother was asking my sisters and I to run away and leave them. Others also advised us that there was no time to run with a disabled person, but we were not able to leave our parents. Friends used a tractor to help us, and our family was able to escape to a peaceful place.

I was able to take only a few photos of our seaside house with me. I have never seen that place since then. Only two days after fleeing, we arrived to our relative's house in the village of Rukhi in Samegrelo. I was 28 years old and began my new life as an internally displaced person (IDP).

Before 1993, I graduated from Textile University in Ivanovo, Russia and from the Carpet Training Center in Senaki. I received a good education at school, but when I returned from Ivanovo, the situation in Abkhazia had grown difficult. The war started soon after, and I was not able to continue my professional work. One of my sisters and I moved to Kutaisi from Samegrelo. The IDPs from Abkhazia were employed by the local electro-mechanical factory: a humanitarian organization gave me a knitting machine and I started to knit carpets. This was the most difficult of times. It was hard for people to buy bread – who needed my carpets?

After several years, I started to cooperate with non-governmental organizations, including Abkhazintercont. I was working on private orders to knit carpets. I first learned about UN Women from Abkhazintercont. At first, I did not have enough courage to submit an application but then I attended an information meeting by UN Women's partner organization, the Georgian Farmers' Association, where I learned that the opportunities were real and decided to try.

I had already been knitting for several years when I started producing handmade accessories from leather with my husband, who is an artist-designer. I never registered my business. It was hard for me to do that. After I participated in the project, though, I was able to do something that I never had enough courage to do in the past: I learned about taxes and accounting, organized my work and became more confident. I created my brand "Uzareli" and registered as a micro-entrepreneur. With



the skills acquired through the trainings, I am better able to manage my own business. It is obvious I am moving forward and that I will be able to participate in other projects more easily.

I purchased my dream leather sewing and knitting machines with the grant I received from the project. These were the pieces of equipment I needed the most for my business. Now I can make a wider array of leather goods; for instance, I can make bags in different sizes. I can simplify my work and better regulate prices. As for knitting, my old machine required thin thread, which frequently was in short supply and could only be purchased in Tbilisi. This created serious problems with workflow. Now I can use thick thread, so it is easy to buy raw materials. I sell my items through small stores, but I know that I need to work more on online sales.

I advise many women to participate in these projects, and I encourage them to start their own business. Other women will often ask me if the projects will give them funding. My answer is always that they need to try and become financially stronger because economically strong women make themselves, their families and society as a whole stronger.

*"Other women will often ask me if the projects will give them funding. My answer is always that they need to try and become financially stronger because economically strong women make themselves, their families and society as a whole stronger."*



## KETEVAN TOMEISHVILI

47 YEARS OLD, VANI, IMERETI,  
FOUNDER OF "KETI'S FARM"

I was 33 years old when I divorced my husband and returned with my child to my parents' house in the village. My sister had serious surgery and we had financial problems: sometimes I did not have money, even 5 lari, to pay for kindergarten meals. I thought about emigrating, but my mother was against it; she was concerned about the public perception and thought it was shameful. But one day when my child returned home with wet feet because of damaged shoes, I made the decision within a few hours: I went to Tbilisi and then emigrated.

I returned to Georgia after 14 years. The years in emigration were very difficult. The single thought that helped me survive was that my child was not hungry. I always remembered that I was a single mother, which made me stronger any time things were at their most difficult. Homecoming was not easy either: the environment and culture significantly changed, and I was estranged. It even took my mother and I almost a year to adjust to each other.

As soon as I returned, I decided to start my own business. I wanted to have a year-round business that would be productive during any season. I remember I was driving to Kutaisi when I saw greenhouses on the road and people working around them. I stopped the car and approached the workers. From that moment, I became interested in this topic; I visited different farms in Georgia and learned a lot. I discovered one of the varieties of cucumber – the "evolution" – in the village of Tsaishi in Samegrelo. This variety is very delicious but hard to produce. This difficulty is what attracted me the most, and I made the decision to start a business producing the "evolution" cucumber.

I sketched a plan for two greenhouses and purchased the construction materials myself. Men were working at the site and were surprised when they saw a woman in charge. Some of them had suspicions – what does she want, she will definitely fail – but in several months I managed to have two greenhouses and harvested five tons of cucumber in the first year. Then I developed a distribution plan and was able to expand my business, adding more greenhouses.

When I became part of the project organized by UN Women and the Georgian Farmers' Association, I was in a very complicated situation. My plants were diseased; I tried everything but was not able to save them. The Georgian Farmers' Association supported me in finding an agronomist who helped secure my crop. Later I was awarded a grant and was able to purchase expensive equipment that helps me regulate the greenhouse



conditions so that the plants do not become diseased. As a result, production has increased by four tons, and I do not need to spend money on plant medications or treatments. Instead, the product is healthy and organic. Now I would like to acquire a special quality certificate that will permit me to sell the cucumbers on the European market. The Georgian Farmers' Association is helping me with this process.

Now I have five greenhouses. Five women and two men work for me, but I am always working alongside them. In Georgia, they say women have nothing to do in the greenhouse. Farming is considered to be a male job, and sometimes people remind me about this. I think this is the reason why I am the only woman entrepreneur in Vani municipality, which is unfortunate.

The UN Women project empowered me. I was afraid but not any more. I take steps forward more easily and bravely. Now I have two small hatchery farms, I own pigs and cows and I planted gardens of plums. All this was possible through the income of my cucumber greenhouses. I hope to open a small wine cellar and holiday chateau that will serve ecologically clean products to the guests. The airport is nearby, and I think this venture will attract tourists.

We, the women in the project, also empower one another, especially by supporting our businesses. For example, I needed nut shells for the heater of my greenhouse and bought them from Mari Kodua, who I met at the project trainings. We will continue our cooperation in the future. I have one more wish: I do not want other women to become emigrants. Many women still choose to emigrate. One of the goals of expanding the farm and fulfilling new plans is to help these women come back and employ them. Economically stronger women will be able to take better care of other women.

*"Many women still choose to emigrate. One of the goals of expanding the farm and fulfilling new plans is to help these women come back and employ them."*



## MARIAM TSKHOVREBASHVILI

44 YEARS OLD, TKIBULI, IMERETI,  
FOUNDER OF THE SEWING SALON  
"MARIAM'S ATELIER"

Sewing has been part of my everyday life since early childhood. Almost everyone used to sew in my family – my granny and my aunts too. I learned this craft from them. When I was a student, I always wore clothes I made myself. I took patterns from the fashion journals of those days and followed the contemporary fashion designs.

I moved to Tkibuli from my home town of Akhaltsikhe after marriage. That is when people started asking me to make dresses for them and I started getting orders. At first, I worked with a very old sewing machine that wasn't even mine – a friend of mine lent it to me. I remember how I became popular after I made a red coat for a teenage girl. Everyone was asking about who made it. By and by, the number of orders increased, so I decided to rent a workspace and register as an entrepreneur.

At the same time, I realized that I needed modern equipment, so I joined the government project "Enterprise Georgia" and got a grant. With this grant, I purchased a new sewing machine. It worked on fabric much more accurately than the old one, enabling me to produce much finer clothing. I soon managed to buy a space for "Mariam's Atelier" close to my house and equipped it accordingly.

In the meantime, I learned about the UN Women project. With its help, I got acquainted with many motivated women and attended a very useful training. Unfortunately, it's difficult to get good up-to-date knowledge in Tkibuli, so I was happy that I had such a welcome opportunity. After those meetings, I began to look at my work differently. I managed to balance and calculate my financial monthly income in detail, even assessing my production costs for a single dress, and eventually developed a business plan for my work.

Then my idea earned me a grant from this project, which made it possible to purchase very important equipment – sewing machines for embroidery and hemstitching, as well as a special electric iron. It enabled me to increase production, which became much more diverse and modern, and the quality improved too. At the same time, labour became easier and I could save time. Beyond that, the project helped me with branding, and now I already have my own new logo. Now I want to focus more on making wedding dresses and to expand my workspace as well. So far I have employed only two women, but if the scale of my work expands, I will be able to increase their number.

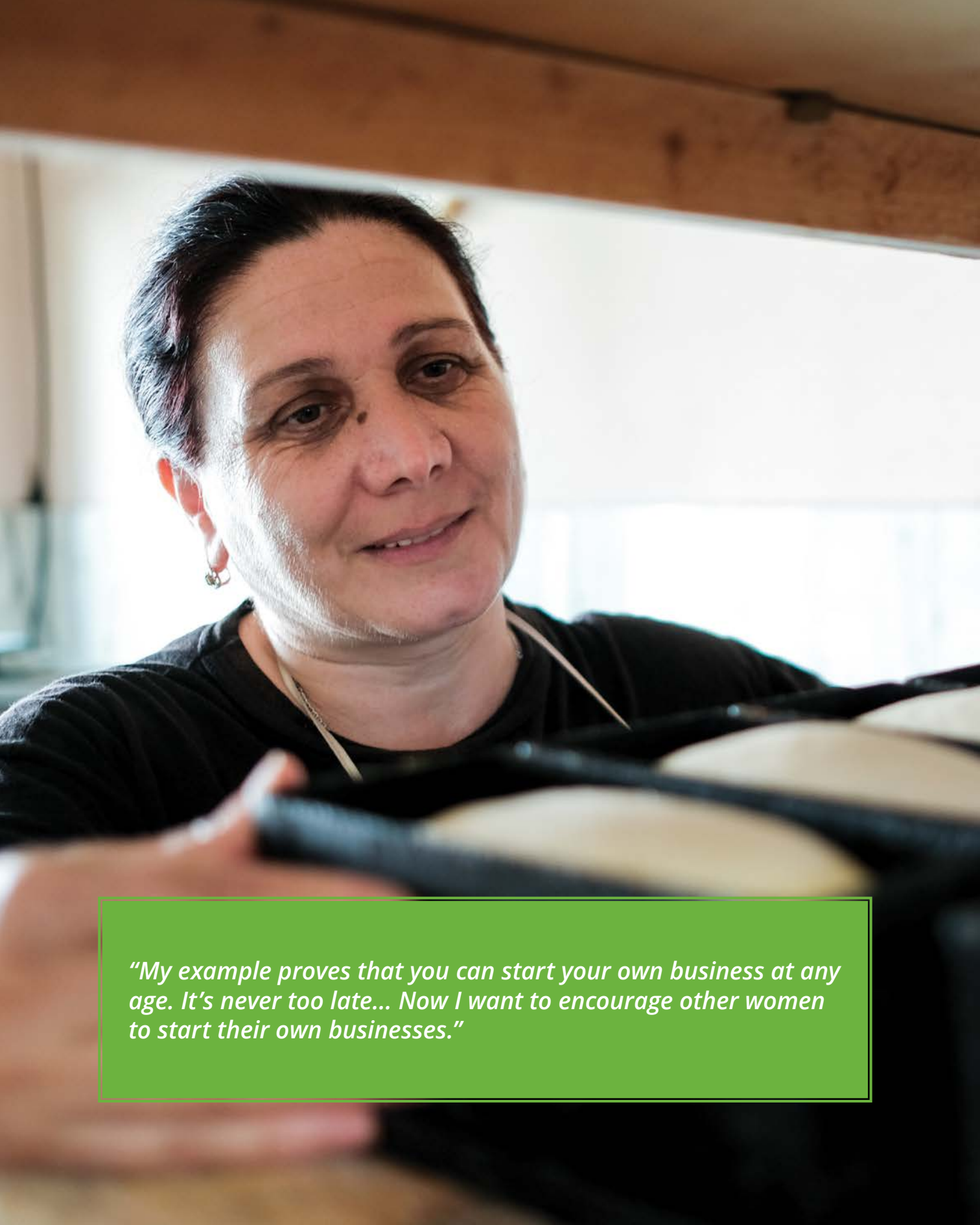
Along with clothing, I offer customers bags and other accessories. And I try to set prices so that they are



affordable for the local people. Pleasing people is one of my most significant priorities. Nothing makes me happier than seeing them leave the atelier with smiles on their faces. Tkibuli is somewhat of a grey town, and I think my atelier brings to it something new and colourful. I often call the clothes I make "the laces of a grey town". I dream of organizing a fashion parade and making some desolate spot colourful with my dresses.

I have five children. Only my husband helps me bring them up. So, you can imagine how difficult it was for me to start my own business; but nevertheless, I dared, I followed my goal and today I am raising my family and running my business successfully. It is a great feeling. Sometimes people are surprised when they hear that a mother of five kids can run such a business. I want my story to motivate other women because women's integration into the economy is a positive outcome for the long-term development of our country. It is we – women entrepreneurs – who create material well-being, and the more of us there are, the more large-scale the economic development will become.

*"I want my story to motivate other women because women's integration into the economy is a positive outcome for the long-term development of our country."*



## IRMA CHKHAIDZE

51 YEARS OLD, ZEMO PARTSKHMA VILLAGE, CHOKHATAURI DISTRICT, GURIA, FOUNDER OF A BAKERY

I had never worked anywhere until I was 50 years of age. I had been busy solely with homemaking. My life changed only after I returned from Tbilisi to live in my village. I won a grant through the government project “Enterprise Georgia” and opened a bakery in my house.

My husband is a food technologist, and baking bread had been his regular occupation. I studied this business from him, and despite being a novice, I was successful from the very beginning. Together with a female relative of mine, I started baking *khachapuri*, *lobiani* (Georgian traditional bean pies), buns, cookies and cakes and selling them to schools. Then I applied again to “Enterprise Georgia”, won another grant, expanded my business and started baking brown bread too. Just then, I learned about the UN Women Georgia project, so I became active and involved in this initiative at the same time.

This project gave me a strong motivation: I attended interesting meetings and trainings and got acquainted with amazing women. I became more sociable and presented my products at an exhibition. It was very moving for me when I made my first public speech at the age of 50. It meant a lot indeed.

The sum of grant money that I acquired thanks to the project enabled me to purchase a multifunctional baking oven. With its help, I will be able to bake not only brown bread but various kinds of bread, white bread among them. If previously I was able to bake only around 800 loaves of bread daily, now I will be able to increase that number up to 2,000.

Bread is a breathing creature. Everything – from kneading it to shaping and baking it – needs to be done on time. And besides, you have to handle it like a baby; you must do everything lovingly, as nothing will work otherwise. It is important for me that the bread I make is ecologically clean, without any additives. I am very strict at controlling the quality of my bread, and if I see even a small visual defect, I never offer it for sale. I know that this product bears my name, and I feel especially responsible for its quality.

Now I supply bread to different shops, but the demand is so high that I can’t meet the need. My hot “Partskhma Bread”, as they often call it, is very popular. I want to add some buns and cakes in the future again and open two bakery stands in Chokhatauri, where I will be able to employ other women as well.

My example proves that you can start your own business at any age. It’s never too late. I never would have dreamed of winning a grant from either of these important



projects, nor that I would be able to become a successful entrepreneur. Now I want to encourage other women to start their own businesses. In Georgia, it often happens that women go abroad in search of work and leave their families behind. If they had the opportunity to start their own business locally and employ other women too, the lives of many women would change for the better. Women in business mean diversity, wealth, quality and especially strengthening other women, doesn’t it?

*“My example proves that you can start your own business at any age. It’s never too late... Now I want to encourage other women to start their own businesses.”*



## NANA MELASHVILI

56 YEARS OLD, DVABZU VILLAGE,  
OZURGETI DISTRICT, GURIA, FOUNDER  
OF TEA BRAND "CHANITI"

Tea is a cultural tradition in Guria. Unfortunately, although it goes back 170 years, it has lost its former significance and recognition. But for me personally, tea culture has always meant a lot and still does. Maybe I attach such a special feeling to it because I have been in this sphere for quite a long time – since my studentship, when I started to work at the tea factory in Likhauri village. At first, I was the head of the technical laboratory and later became director. Nine years ago, I opened my private tea enterprise and took my first pre-packed Georgian tea to market. Unfortunately, my illness interfered with this work: I was diagnosed with cancer and had to stop production. Years later, when I got over the disease and started a new life, I returned to producing tea.

I was working in Ozurgeti Municipality when the government project "Enterprise Georgia" launched. I got together with three women, my neighbours, and founded a cooperative. I applied for a grant for the production of tea and won it. Then I bought the necessary equipment for the process and started to sort out and supply tea.

At present, I produce ecologically pure black tea of two sorts, but after I got involved in the UN Women project, I won a grant and bought new equipment. It will help me sort out the tea according to its quality, categorize it and offer consumers a variety of products. Another step forward has been the branding of my tea. It was also the same project that helped me with this too. Now I am planning to supply "Chaniti" to a wholesale market with adequate packaging and sell it for a higher price, which will increase my profit. Incidentally, I negotiated with one of the other members of the project, Natia Chakhunashvili, who wants to add tea to the menu at her eatery "White House Burger" in Kutaisi and who intends to choose Chaniti.

Producing tea is also a social project for me, and it is also an opportunity for other people to find a source of income. Indeed, Chaniti has inspired hope in many local residents. Already 14 families supply us with tea, which means that our cooperative employs them too. This year we have received up to five tons of tea, which is three tons more than last year. When people see such an increase, it gives them motivation to restore the tea-growing tradition in Guria and earn an income that way. Moreover, since our cooperative has become a successful business, our entire village is more respectful to us. They ask how things are and offer us help. They often say, "Look at what these women have achieved!" Isn't this a good example for other women?



I want to buy special equipment to produce green tea and to make our product more diverse. My years of experience tell me that I really can have my own say in the sphere of Georgian tea production, and maybe I will even manage to start anew my old factory, which I had to close because of my illness.

*"Producing tea is also a social project for me, and it is also an opportunity for other people to find a source of income. Indeed, Chaniti has inspired hope in many local residents."*





*“It should be stated that women are more daring when it comes to experimenting in Georgian winemaking. The active process initiated by women in this sphere is a kind of explosion of creativity.”*

## KETO NINIDZE

36 YEARS OLD, MARTVILI DISTRICT,  
SAMEGRELO, CO-FOUNDER OF THE  
FAMILY WINE CELLAR “ODA”

There is a tradition of philology in our family – my mother and grandmother are both philologists. I too chose that profession. Wine unexpectedly entered my life. I was offered to write an article on this topic and to head the informational centre on wine. I agreed and soon became so fascinated that I literally plunged into this new sphere. My husband suggested that we make our own wine. I remember that my mother helped me financially. With the sum of money I received from my mother, I bought stainless steel containers and the grape variety Ojaleshi. Then I pressed grapes and produced wine in an absolutely different way, without making *chacha* (Georgian wine vodka).

It was an experiment few people believed in. They said, “How can one produce white Ojaleshi without *chacha*?”, and they were very skeptical about my initiative. Another fuss was caused by my idea about the etiquette for the wine. I wanted it to have a clearly feminist message. I even thought about using the label’s design to respond to the femicide cases that had increased in our country. Many people advised me to give up the idea of such a grave topic and tried to convince me that it would impede sales. However, I didn’t change my mind. We depicted two women on the label of my first bottle of “Naked Ojaleshi”: one of them was standing in a vineyard, feeling free and happy, while the other was caged in a glass, thus depicting the women that Georgian men so often like to toast at our *supra*, while at the same time, they humiliate, offend and even kill them! Ultimately, this label became a symbol of my winemaking.

In 2016, my husband and I made our dream of moving far from the capital come true when we moved to Martvili with our two daughters. We opened our wine cellar and started offering wine tourism. Our story, of a couple who moved from Tbilisi to the region, brought us popularity. A lot of people visited us and contributed to the success of our wine cellar.

Now we mainly produce Racha Dzelshavi and Mengrelian and Lechkhumi Ojaleshi. All of these are red varieties, though I make pink wine from some of them. I am fond of experiments. On the whole, I produce 3,000 bottles each year, and all of it is organic. Besides Georgia, it is sold abroad in Australia, Denmark, Germany, Israel, Japan, Sweden and the United States. Up to this point, I have had to buy grapes. I planted my own vineyard three years ago, and this year I expect the first harvest. Last year, I started to revive some forgotten varieties; this is one of the most important and innovative directions of



my work. With the help of the UN Women project, I will develop it further and even expand to entirely different activities.

I learned about this initiative from the Georgian Farmers’ Association and got a very interesting experience by participating in it. Most inspiring were the stories told by the other women participants – the stories of the challenges they had to overcome, along with the pride of coping with the difficulties.

Then I earned a grant for the business idea I presented. I purchased a spirit distilling machine, which I had wanted for so long. Now I can distill *chacha* and produce an absolutely new product line. Distilling spirit has always been associated with men in Georgia, but I will try to make my little contribution to the breaking of that myth. I have a lot of ideas, and I feel that it is time in my life for another experiment.

It should be stated that women are more daring when it comes to experimenting in Georgian winemaking. The active process initiated by women in this sphere is a kind of explosion of creativity. They don’t follow old technologies and, instead, try to find new ways and propose innovative views and styles, which helps advance the entire field of winemaking. I am sure that the more time and opportunity women have to free themselves from their boring and tiresome routines, and as more stories are written about successful women, the faster and better the business environment will develop, and the more affluent our country will become.



*"I regularly give information about the grants to the women around me. I believe that being informed is the first step they have to take towards success."*

## IRINA KHORSHIA

33 YEARS OLD, ZUGDIDI, SAMEGRELO,  
FOUNDER OF HANDMADE ACCESSORIES  
WORKSHOP "IRDA"

I was in the eighth grade when I replaced the soles of my shoes with my own hands. Even now I can't believe that I managed to do it, but I was fond of doing such things and was good at it. In my childhood, I always painted, knitted, sewed and embroidered. Then I chose my profession accordingly and graduated from the faculty of modelling and design. After graduation, I started to produce handmade articles at home. I even worked at the House of Fashion for several months, and then finally, I opened my own workshop, "Irdá".

I started working step by step, but I was full of strong motivation. The French technique of soutache played a special role in the work of my workshop. I discovered it by accident three years ago on the Internet and learned it myself, by watching videos. Little by little, I created quite a big collection. I packaged my goods properly and delivered them to shops, in addition to selling them through my Facebook page.

I have known about the Taso Foundation for a long time. For years now, I have participated in their community mobilization activities, and besides that, I am a member of a Self-Help group, supported by the Taso Foundation through UN Women. It was from them that I learned about the UN Women project "A Joint Action for Women's Economic Empowerment in Georgia" and enthusiastically became involved in it. I remember the trainings held at the Academy of the Ministry of Finance best of all. The knowledge acquired there helped me write my grant application perfectly and flawlessly, and as a result, I won the grant. Then, I used that sum for the creation of a new line. The thing is that I had conducted a survey and knew that there was strong demand for leather bags and wallets in Zugdidi. I wanted to add this line too, but I didn't have adequate equipment, so I bought a leather sewing machine with the grant awarded by UN Women. This machine enables me to produce high-quality, complex goods. I already produce leather accessories, but I want to create leather bags, wallets, belts and business card holders for men as well because I know there is demand for that too. Plus, I am opening another workshop in the village of Anaklia.

With the help of this project, I participated in an annual trade fair for traditional goods in Hita, Spain. It was this festival that was followed by a very fortunate opportunity for me – I was invited to the city of Alcalá in Spain to conduct masterclasses in the soutache technique.

I believe that every woman should be able to govern her own life. Today many women are repressed, thinking



that they won't be able to do anything. Some of them are repressed by their families or are cut off from social life and therefore cannot realize their abilities. Later this reflects on their children's lives negatively. Women have great strength and can achieve success, but they must have the opportunity to make use of their strength.

I think that supporting women is very important. I know that if I had had the opportunity to learn soutache earlier, or if I had had a teacher to help me take this path, I could have learned this technique much sooner and easier, so I thought it would be good if I could share my knowledge with other girls. I have already taught this technique to more than 10 girls and even employed one of them in my studio. Today Lana and I are colleagues. I know that some of my former pupils are already spreading the knowledge that I gave them, and it delights me.

I regularly give information about the grants to the women around me. I believe that being informed is the first step they have to take towards success. Now I want to retrain one more girl to work in leather and then employ her in my studio. I want us to grow the business together and to achieve our overall goal of strengthening women together.



## NONA KVARATSKHELIA

55 YEARS OLD, JGALI VILLAGE,  
TSALENJIKHA DISTRICT, SAMEGRELO,  
FOUNDER OF SEWING ATELIER "NONA"

I chose to become an accountant on my mother's insistence. After graduation, I had a successful career, for years holding the position of chief accountant. But actually my favourite hobby was sewing, which I learned from my aunt in my early childhood.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, when the Soviet *kolkhozi* were dismissed, I lost my job and remained unemployed, and our family moved to Tbilisi. There, together with my husband, I started a small business. About eight years later, we returned to the village again. I couldn't find a job as an accountant. Just then, a USAID project started in Tsalenjikha. I decided to get involved in its activities, so I got a grant and bought a sewing machine. A friend of mine, who was very fond of sewing, joined me, and I opened a sewing atelier.

At first, I started with sheets. I was very nervous because I didn't know what the reaction of the customers would be like. I had lots of orders and started to sew clothes as well. Soon I became the winner of the governmental project "Enterprise Georgia" and got financed. With this money, I bought two more sewing machines, armchairs and a mirror for my atelier.

Now it's easy to talk about those days, but it was very hard in the beginning. I had cows, chickens and turkeys and was in charge of the housekeeping. My children lived in Tbilisi. My husband and I took care of everything. On the very first day of joining the UN Women project, Nino Zambakhidze, the Chair of the Georgian Farmers' Association, gave me a book by Sheryl Sandberg entitled *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead*. I keep the book open to one marked passage, where the author speaks about the importance of combining business with care work. I remember that I read it to my husband as well, and he said, "You should do it, and if you can't deal with the housekeeping, don't worry. I will support you." And he did: he helps me with everything.

On the whole, I am an active person. I never say no to participating in a variety of initiatives. The UN Women Georgia project also made me happy. Despite the fact that I attended trainings in Tbilisi, I never missed a single day and was always on time. Thanks to these trainings, I met many interesting women. Now we are all friends on Facebook, share our experiences and products and encourage one another.

With the money that the project awarded me, I bought a professional leather sewing machine. It is the best one I have ever had, and it will enable me to expand my product line. Now the demand has increased so much



that I see that our current atelier room is not enough, so we will need to expand. Although there are three of us now, we would like to add one more seamstress. I am also planning to diversify our business activities in the future: there is no beauty salon in the village, so the locals have to go to Tsalenjikha. Accordingly, the demand for this kind of service is high. I think that if I manage to have a salon, I will start a café nearby too. I am enthusiastic about it, as I feel that I will be able to run all of them successfully.

My enthusiasm owes to the fact that now I am doing what I like to do. If I had kept on being an accountant, I wouldn't have the motivation I have today. I remember how difficult it was for me to get up early in the morning. Now, since sewing has become my main business, I wake up early at dawn – at 6 a.m. – and manage to do everything on time. Now it feels like I just fly through the air to my atelier and that I am an absolutely different Nona today.

I want as many women as possible to have their own business. Whoever I know, whoever I communicate with, I tell them all: just get out of your homes, you will be able to do everything. On another note, I am thinking of offering sewing courses as well because I want to help other women too – to teach them and then to employ them.

*"I want as many women as possible to have their own business. Whoever I know, whoever I communicate with, I tell them all: just get out of your homes, you will be able to do everything."*

## TIKA DIDISHVILI

52 YEARS OLD, ZUGDIDI, SAMEGRELO,  
FOUNDER OF THE GUEST HOUSE  
“MTSVANE SAKHLI” (GREEN HOUSE)

I was in charge of a computer centre in Zugdidi when a foreigner visited us and then stayed at my place for several days. He liked it here and advised me to turn my hospitality into a business. Like in many Georgian families, the door to my home was always open for guests, but I had never thought of renting out the rooms or opening a hotel. I have two professions: ecology and software engineering. I had worked in these fields for years; however, the idea of running a guest house left an impression on me. My husband was working abroad back then, so I called him and shared my intention with him. He supported my idea at once.

At first, I rented out two rooms, until eventually the number of visitors increased to such an extent that it became necessary to expand. I attached some additional space to the house, installed communication lines, arranged everything and realized that I had discovered my favourite occupation. Certainly, I had to cope with a lot of stereotypes in the beginning. People were surprised, saying, “Her husband is abroad. How can she accept strangers to her house?” Some even asked me directly, “Who was the man that visited you yesterday?” But I got through all these difficulties and didn’t give the stereotypes any chance of hampering my decisions.

Despite my long-term experience of running businesses, the trainings I attended after enrolling in the UN Women Georgia project were very meaningful for me. I remember how focused I was, how I tried not to miss anything, down to the smallest detail that I could use for my future business. Sometimes I returned home after the meetings and promptly reshuffled my business according to the knowledge I had just acquired.

Having visited Tuscany, Italy within the framework of the project, I had a new view as to the rules of the hospitality business. That visit became an inspiration for a lot of things. As soon as I came back, I restored old items and turned them into decorations for my yard. I also arranged the basement into a space where I can entertain my guests while making jams and compotes. If earlier I cooked dishes by myself alone, in silence, now I incorporated my guests in the process. In Italy, I saw that business owners purchased the products they need in their own villages. So upon my arrival home, I started to negotiate with local suppliers, among whom are women, so that I too can buy everything I need locally. This means that I support and encourage their businesses too.

The UN Women Georgia project even awarded me with a grant. I used the sum to buy containers that keep



products at a certain temperature, so when I have big groups of guests, it helps me with better managing the food supply for them. I bought a washing machine and a dishwasher, which has simplified the work for both me and my personnel, in addition to saving us a lot of time. Moreover, I bought two bicycles and some tents for those who are fond of camping. It fits the concept of my “Mtsvane Sakhli” (Green House), and the place has become much livelier since. I can say that after this project, the quality of service management has advanced and became even more diverse. In addition, I hired a new assistant, so now I employ two women!

Just recently, I realized another desire of mine: I started making ecologically pure green *ajika* (hot sauce). I have been cooking it according to my granny’s recipe for many years now, but now I have it branded and sell it successfully. On a related note, the project got me in touch with the Cron Palace Tbilisi Hotel, and we are now negotiating the delivery of *ajika* on a regular basis. I intend to organize a farmers’ corner at the “Green House” in the future so that I can introduce to my guests such products that are produced by other participants of the project, along with my suppliers. I also wish to construct a traditional Megrelian *oda* (a type of wooden house specific to western Georgia) and arrange the farmers’ corner there. One more plan of mine is connected with agritourism: I am going to buy some land and cultivate bilberries. In general, the agritourism sector and its development is very important to me, so I am actively involved in advocating agritourism on the legislative level within the framework of the UN Women project.

This project has again shown that we women should devote a lot more time to ourselves, to our businesses. In doing so, we value time more, and I am so happy when my children say, “Mom, you’re great, we are proud of you.” This is the biggest source of motivation for me.

All of my years of experience have become a model for many women. Sometimes they even joke saying, “You deserve to be competed against by the women you helped open their own hotels.” As a matter of fact, though, I am happy when I realize that women have followed my example and that they have their own businesses. It means that they, along with me, confirm the fact that women are very good at business and that we accomplish whatever we start.

*“I intend to organize a farmers’ corner at the ‘Green House’ in the future so that I can introduce to my guests such products that are produced by other participants of the project, along with my suppliers.”*



*"I buy the products I need only from the local women. I always tell them, 'Go on producing, and I will buy your products.'"*

## LELA KHMELIDZE

34 YEARS OLD, KORENISHI VILLAGE,  
TSAGERI DISTRICT, RACHA-LECHKHUMI,  
CO-FOUNDER OF THE FAMILY HOTEL  
"KORENISHI VERANDA"

About four years ago, my brother Levan and I expanded the vineyard planted by our grandparents and made wine from the grape variety Tsolikauri. We wanted to publicize our village as well, so we called the wine "Korenishuli". Initially we presented our wine at Tbilisi Festival. Korenishuli was a great success, and many people expressed their desire to visit us in the village and to taste the wine locally. That is how tourists began visiting us. The road to our mountainous village of Korenishi is winding and tiring. Sometimes visitors couldn't make it in a day and asked us to find them a room for an overnight stay. In response to their requests, Levan and I decided to turn our childhood home into a hotel and share its cosy atmosphere with the visitors.

Our grandparents built this house in a truly amazing place. Whoever has visited just once and has seen the picturesque views of the Lechkhumi mountains from our veranda, has always expressed special emotions concerning its peculiar beauty. When we were thinking about what to call the hotel, we remembered that view and called the hotel "Korenishi Veranda".

Later on, I started another business – producing honey, together with my family – although I always found it difficult to talk about myself in public, even about the things I produced myself. Levan always encouraged me and said, "You made it all, so you must present it yourself", but I still preferred to remain in obscurity. It was again my brother who informed me about the UN Women project; he told me I can do it, and he was right.

After attending the trainings, I won a grant. I bought beds and space heaters with this sum. A lot of tourists visit Korenishi in the winter, and the heaters and beds help me offer them comfortable conditions and earn income throughout every season. Today I can receive up to 15 guests, but the demand is so high that I am building a new house already.

I buy the products I need only from the local women. I always tell them, "Go on producing, and I will buy your products." Even if I have no tourists, I will still buy their products so that these women won't lose their motivation.

Besides offering lodging for the night to the tourists, I offer them horse riding, river rafting, tours to the fabulous Khvamli Mountain crest, tasting menus and even culinary masterclasses. Within the framework of the project, Terabank and the advertising agency Windfor's even developed a brand identity for my hotel that, I hope, will be even more helpful to my future success.



Participating in this project has given me the most important thing – self-confidence. Although I had actually been running our entire family hotel, I was still worried by the stereotype that managing a hotel is not a woman's business. When I went to Tuscany on a training visit, I saw that women there led huge businesses and were the public face for their companies. It was there that I realized that we too can be the leaders and that it isn't difficult at all.

I returned from Tuscany an absolutely different person. I understood that women in Georgia often do more than men but men are more conspicuous. If previously I preferred to remain in obscurity, now I realized that I can and should stand on the stage. So since then, I have started making decisions myself, independently, and founded the cooperative "Ertoba" (unity). I produce up to two tons of honey each year under this name. In addition, I am going to open a family hotel in Kutaisi, and it will be another business of mine. If not for this project, I never would have taken such steps. Today I advise women around me to free themselves from obscurity. No doubt, they still have plenty to do in the background, but we deserve to come out from behind the scenes and be in the spotlight too.



## NATO SILAGADZE

50 YEARS OLD, TSAGERI DISTRICT,  
RACHA-LECHKHUMI, FOUNDER OF THE  
FAMILY HOTEL "KHVAMLI 2002"

I am an economist who always held high-level positions, so it was also my responsibility to host guests coming from the capital and other regions very often. As there was nowhere to give them a place to stay overnight, I hosted them in my house. That is when the idea of opening a hotel first struck me. In the beginning, I started to rent out only two rooms, but when I saw that there was a high demand, I expanded and opened the first hotel in Lechkhumi, called "Khvamli 2000".

Certainly, I went through a lot of difficulties during these past 12 years. I remember how, before I made my own reservoir, I had to carry water by hand and without anybody's assistance. Due to the nature of the area, it is extremely difficult to build a comfortable hotel and offer high-end services in the mountainous regions, and regardless, it requires hard work. Local people used to ask me, "Why do you take such pains? Don't you know that your kids will leave the village and go to the capital for good?" and, "Why would a foreign tourist want to visit Lechkhumi?" But I believed that Lechkhumi had great potential. And as long as there is faith and purpose, you must still try your best. Now I have 11 comfortably furnished rooms, and my hotel has already become very popular.

The UN Women project has made a great impact on my life. I have learned how to delegate work to others, how to distribute responsibilities and how to be a better manager. Thanks to these new skills, I have found time for myself and, just at the peak of tourist season, even allowed myself to go for a rest. I realized that besides work, a good rest is necessary too.

The trainings and the visit to Tuscany helped me immensely. It was there that I saw how I could encourage other women in Lechkhumi. When I came back to Tsageri, I searched for local farmers, and now I buy all the products I need from them. So, I treat my clients to local, natural products.

I employ three women in my hotel, though I could say that those 10 farmer women are also employed by me. Unfortunately, the local population has a strong tendency to leave the high mountainous regions like ours. So, I think my example is very important for young girls; they must feel that women can support one another, and through such mutual support, we can strengthen our region as well.

I think you should find some good examples for yourself to better understand which road to take. For me, Tuscany turned out to be such an example. Along with



encouraging local women farmers, I started to develop food tourism, for which the grant that I won was of great help. So, I bought some kitchen appliances, and now I am able to conduct masterclasses on cooking local dishes for my visitors. In general, food has great potential, and I intend to develop it further. I want to expand my business and to have my own *marani* – a Georgian wine cellar. Years ago, everyone told me it wasn't worth trying, but now I have self-confidence. I believe that my effort won't be futile and that my children will follow my career more intently.

Incidentally, after my participation in this project, Terabank and the advertising company Windfor's presented me with a brand identity for my hotel. But my most precious acquisition from the project are the women with whom I got acquainted. We are always in touch and assist one another. For example, when I wanted to get some sheets for my hotel, I reached out to Ketivizivadze and her sewing salon. I got to know Ketivizivadze through this project. I am sure that this friendship and support will last the rest of our lives. Every one of us is working hard, and our contribution to the economy will undoubtedly change the future of our country.

*"The trainings and the visit to Tuscany helped me immensely. It was there that I saw how I could encourage other women in Lechkhumi. When I came back to Tsageri, I searched for local farmers, and now I buy all the products I need from them."*



## NINO KIRVALIDZE

54 YEARS OLD, TSMENDAURI VILLAGE, ONI DISTRICT, RACHA-LECHKHUMI AND LOWER SVANETI, FOUNDER OF THE FAMILY HOTEL "ZE BOLTA"

I was born and grew up in Tbilisi. My husband is from Racha, where we visited every summer. Recently we had increased our visits to Racha as my father-in-law lived alone and we had to take care of him.

During these frequent trips there and back, I realized that my health problems disappeared after visiting Racha and that I felt healthier and fine there. That was the first reason for my decision to move to Tsmendauri. Then I started to think about launching a business of some sort that could help me realize my full potential.

Nobody believed that I really wanted to move to a province from the capital, neither the locals nor the Tbilisians. They thought that one day I would become bored and would return to Tbilisi. However, time has passed but I am still here. The UN Women project has played a big role in that.

I learned about the initiative to strengthen women's economic opportunities from the Georgian Farmers' Association. The idea of opening a family hotel in our small house occurred to me right away. So, I joined the project with this idea in mind, though I soon realized that I was dealing with my future business.

After getting involved in the trainings provided by the Academy of the Ministry of Finance, I understood that business is a regulated system of certain activities, and if you fulfil them appropriately, you have the chance to achieve a desired result. The trainers explained to me what I would have to do to draw attention in the future, what kind of help I might need and how important it is to have the right products, clear communication and impeccable service.

Then I was awarded a grant for my project and purchased a kitchen. This is one of the most important components for a family hotel. Guests are fond of tasting local dishes, so it is essential to offer them an adequate space. Now we have all the necessary appliances, not only to entertain our guests but also to hold culinary masterclasses. This set-up is helping me immensely with developing the gastronomic tourism side of my business.

I first got interested in gastronomic tourism when I went to Tuscany on a study visit. It was there that we were told that local cuisine attracts tourists more than local sight-seeing. So, we understood that gastronomic tourism can bring great opportunities. I related this to Racha and saw its potential more clearly. I realized that we can hold exquisite culinary masterclasses, offer visitors amazing wine tastings, introduce our folklore to them and even offer mountaineering tourism. Incidentally, Tsmendauri



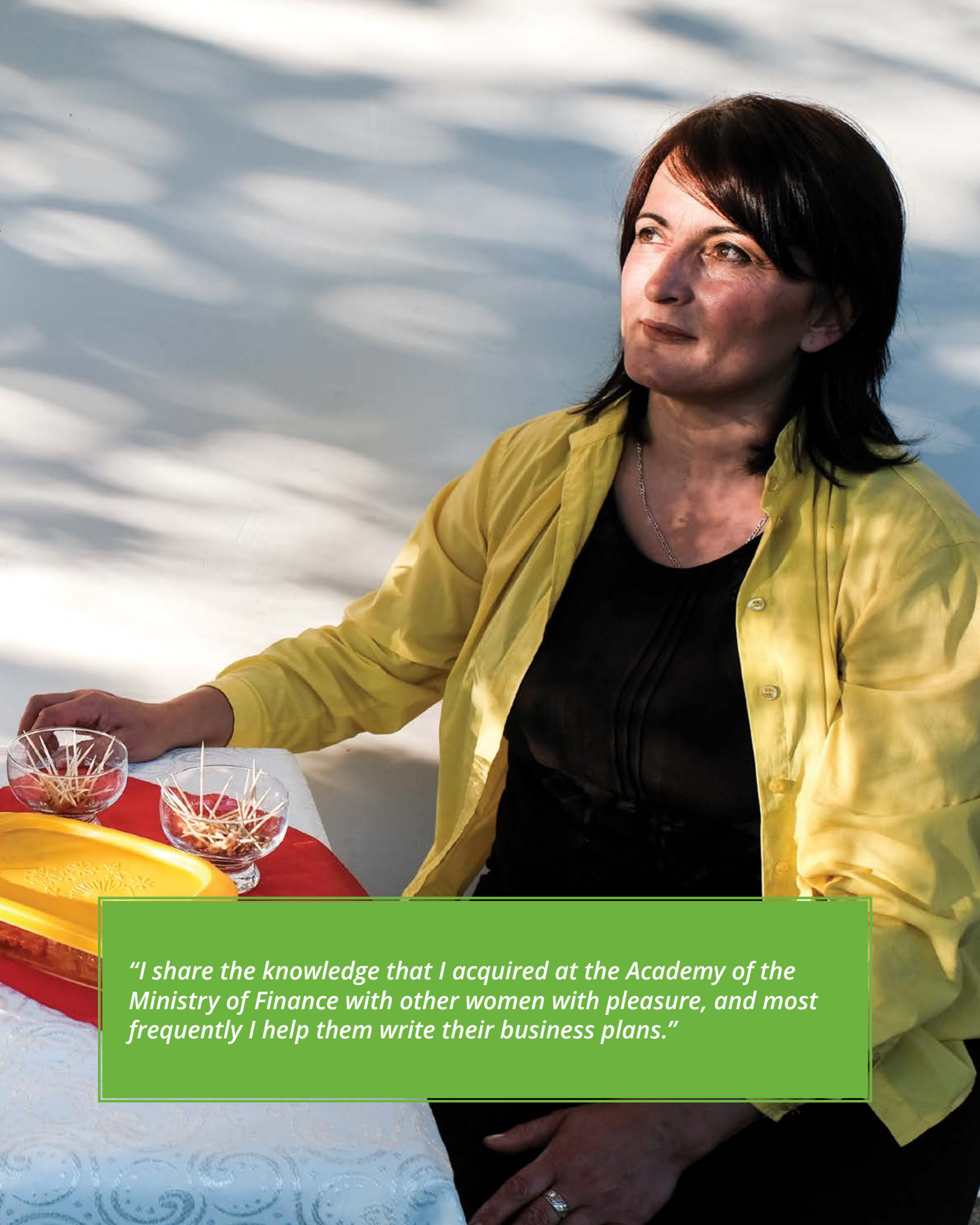
village used to be a resort years ago and was even a popular tourism base. Unfortunately, time and lack of care destroyed everything, and it fell into oblivion. But in Tuscany, I made up my mind to help the village regain its former status and to develop it anew.

When I returned to Tsmendauri, I got together with the active local women. We started to cooperate with the local government to develop the infrastructure of the area. Here, as well as in the communities, young locals have not abandoned their native villages. If they see that the government supports them, they will stay home and will start to cultivate land and produce food, which is especially important as local products are essential for the development of gastronomic tourism.

For the time being, "Ze Bolta" can accept 10 guests. At the same time, I am organizing a meeting room, and I have a separate space for a dining room and for accessing the Internet. In the future, besides the hotel, I am planning to build cottages in the yard. After participating in this project, Terabank and the advertising agency Windfor's presented me with a free brand identity, which will help me with the plans to further develop my business.

I suppose that in about two years' time, the tourism potential of Racha will have increased. The winners will be those who will be ready by then, and I hope that I will be one of them. I know that the project has put immense resources into my business, so I will try my best to meet its expectations and to share the knowledge I acquired with as many women as possible.

*"When I returned to Tsmendauri, I got together with the active local women. We started to cooperate with the local government to develop the infrastructure of the area."*



## EKATERINE TSIKHISELI

43 YEARS OLD, GHARI VILLAGE, ONI DISTRICT, RACHA-LECHKHUMI AND LOWER SVANETI, HONEY PRODUCER

I wanted to get a higher education, but I got married at the very early age of 17 and soon had babies. So for quite a long time, my only business was raising my three children. A lot of people around me kept honeybees. When I became interested in it, I got involved in one of the government projects and attended a course on beekeeping. After finishing the course, I was presented with two honeybee colonies. Unfortunately, one of them got completely destroyed, but I took care of the surviving colony with special care. I intended to make honey production my business.

I felt the need to expand my knowledge and attended another training with the NGO Abkhazintercont. After I earned my honeybee trainer's certificate, I attended agritourism courses. In this way, I became more active, and the local women selected me as a community worker for the Taso Foundation.

I am very fond of learning, which is why I got involved in the UN Women project with pleasure. The trainings were held in Batumi, so while commuting, I had to change buses twice. It wasn't easy, but I was glad that I had an opportunity to acquire new knowledge.

The project filled me with self-confidence, and it taught me how to distribute work and how to present my product. The knowledge and guidance acquired at the trainings turned out to be highly productive while composing the grant application. Finally, I even received financial support.

Modern spinning honey extractors play a significant role in honey production, but our village had no such equipment. We only had one out-of-date extractor for 30 beekeepers, so we each had to wait for our turn to use it. The grant that the project gave me allowed me to purchase a new stainless-steel honey extractor. It helps me produce ecologically pure honey faster. It is also beneficial in another way: I rent out my extractor to other beekeepers, which is additional income for me while it makes their work easier.

Now I own 24 colonies of bees. On average, I get 20 kilograms of honey from each hive and sell it locally. I have no problem with making sales as everybody knows that my product is of high quality. I want to develop my honey's branding and to produce bee milk as well, which is a very interesting and wholesome product. I also intend to develop agritourism in the future. I would like to set up a cottage where I will be able to offer my visitors tastings of my honey, as well as to sell it and to conduct masterclasses on beekeeping.



I share the knowledge that I acquired at the Academy of the Ministry of Finance with other women with pleasure, and most frequently I help them write their business plans. With the support of Abkhazintercont, I conduct trainings on beekeeping as well. I often visit home apiaries and consult with them on the spot. I remember the difficulties I encountered when I started this business, so I want others to avoid those difficulties and to make their business easier to deal with.

The desire of women to strengthen and improve their economic conditions is very important, but the stereotypes existing in society often impede them. Unfortunately, even today, there are many people who think that being an entrepreneur is inappropriate for a woman because they believe that women should stay at home and just do housework. When a woman is fulfilled and happy, her feelings are contagious and make her entire family happy. My 10-year-old daughter Salome is delighted when she sees me at exhibitions and various events. I am sure that her mother's business will be a good example for her too.

*"I share the knowledge that I acquired at the Academy of the Ministry of Finance with other women with pleasure, and most frequently I help them write their business plans."*





*“Thanks to this project, we have many more contacts and opportunities now; it has made us popular and more self-confident.”*

## MIRANDUKHT AND TAMAR DAVITULIANI

26 YEARS OLD, SADMELI VILLAGE, AMBROLAURI DISTRICT, RACHA-LECHKHUMI AND LOWER SVANETI, FOUNDERS OF THE HOSTEL “GAREMO”

**Mirandukht:** When I was a schoolgirl, many peers of mine dreamed of leaving Racha to live in the capital, Tbilisi. Young girls and boys going to the capital did not return to their villages. It was something that made my sister and me very unhappy. So, we always told each other that we too would leave for our studies but that we would come back to our home village in Racha, without question. After graduating from school, I entered the faculty of sociology, while Tamar joined the faculty of architecture and design. While students, we were already planning to use our land and old house that our father had in Sadmeli village to build a hostel and make our long-desired dream come true.

**Tamar:** When we finished our bachelor's degrees, I already had a fiancé. He worked and lived in Tbilisi's central district, but naturally, he followed us to Racha, where we got married. In short, we had a goal but no finances, so I started to work as a receptionist at the local hospital and made jewellery at the same time. We sold the handmade jewellery and saved the money. We believed that our region had great potential, but we also realized how much energy and effort was needed in order to fulfil our dream. As to the resources, the place truly required a lot: the house was in ruins, and the courtyard was unkempt and overgrown with weeds to such an extent that we had to call for a snowplow tractor just so we could walk in.

It was then that the government project “Enterprise Georgia” started. We submitted an application and won a grant. However, the grant only enabled us to buy some furniture and inventory, so we took out a loan. Unfortunately, the sum was enough only for construction materials. Since we could not afford to hire workmen, we decided to do everything ourselves. Just then, I learned I was pregnant, so the hostel was constructed only by Mirandukht and my husband.

**Mirandukht:** We received our first visitors in May 2017, when we started advertising on online platforms. Before long, tourists were fully booking the hostel throughout the entire summer. Such a demand and positive response was a great motivation and stimulus. We also realized that the space would not suffice and that we had to expand. By and by, we arranged the garden, built a pool and began construction on a separate cottage. Later we were able to offer customers another service – hosting weddings and parties. I remember that when we were building the cottage, somebody called and said UN Women and the Georgian Farmers' Association had selected us for their project. It was a lucky opportunity for us. The courses held by the Academy of the Ministry of Finance were especially productive and helpful, as they gave us knowledge on all of the most important issues.



**Tamar:** The project was very beneficial for our development. We won a grant, which we used to furnish our kitchen. We bought the necessary equipment and started to serve food to our visitors. It was an added comfort for their stay at our place, while for us, it meant more income. It encouraged us to save our finances and to develop new directions in our business. Beyond that, it gave us an opportunity to support the region and its population. We employ two local women full-time, plus another two when we hold some parties. When we attended meetings in Tuscany, we saw that people involved in agritourism bought products from the locals. We too introduced this same practice, so that the regular and stable income provided by our purchases strengthens the suppliers' motivation as well.

**Mirandukht:** Most importantly, our accomplishments have made it clear that the potential of our region is truly great. A number of people have already called us to say that they have a house in Racha and want to go back to their villages to open hotels there. Some of them visited us personally, looked around, saw our hostel and learned from our experience because they too want to start their business here, in Racha. It makes us happy. There is another thing that delights us as well. It is the fact that we are called strong women now. We are invited to meetings; people care about our development. Such support boosts our motivation. Thanks to this project, we have many more contacts and opportunities now; it has made us popular and more self-confident. And most importantly, it has enabled us to meet amazing people. For instance, one of the participants of the project, Mariam Tskhovrebashvili, was so nice as to make and gift a wedding dress to me. It was such a positive experience.

**Tamar:** I believe that people are attracted by our hostel's coziness and by its different design, light colours and original concept. It evokes positive associations. Indeed, “Garemo” is a place where you can come to relax and feel free.

At present, we have four hostel rooms and one cottage, so we can host 20 guests at the same time. However, we are constantly thinking about development. We want to arrange a wine cellar in our yard and open a café in our garden, which will serve not only Garemo's guests but other visitors too. We would also like to make our own wine with our own grapes growing in our vineyard. And as the demand is high, we are going to construct two or three new cottages as well. We women are often reminded of the fact that we can't do anything without men. My two-year-old daughter Kesane, however, has an absolutely opposite picture before her, which delights me immensely. If only for that, it is worth developing and expanding Garemo so that this story stimulates other women too, the women who also deserve success.



## TAMAR MIKAUTADZE-ELBAKIDZE

60 YEARS OLD, TSESI VILLAGE, AMBROLAURI MUNICIPALITY, RACHA-LECHKHUMI AND LOWER SVANETI, FOUNDER OF THE FAMILY HOTEL PENATI"

I settled in Kutaisi, where I live now, because of internal displacement. It happened in 1993, when I had to leave my home in Abkhazia as bombshells fell on Sokhumi. My husband, Archil Elbakidze, boarded my baby and me on a luggage boat and said goodbye to us, as he himself stayed behind, in his hometown. That night, we miraculously survived a shipwreck. At dawn, a group of rescuers carried us over to Poti beach, and then we went to the home of my father-in-law's sister in Kutaisi.

It was a horrible time. My husband was in Sokhumi while we were in Kutaisi, where we lived side by side with other IDPs. I remember how, after a hundred days had passed, I had no idea as to my husband's whereabouts. As I could not call him on the phone, I went to Sokhumi under a hail of bullets. I found him, but despite my pleas, he didn't follow me. He left his hometown only at the very last moment.

I graduated from Sokhumi State University of Subtropical Agriculture and used to work there. After the war, the university continued functioning in Kutaisi, so when we returned home, I went on working there at the Department of Ecology. Archil started to work in a governmental structure too, though he, along with some friends of his, later founded a non-governmental organization, the foundation Abkhazintercont. After some time, I too joined them. Since then, I have participated in quite a number of projects on various topics for many years now. Now I am mainly in charge of the public relations of Abkhazintercont, and I am employed by the Ambrolauri office in Racha. My job enables me to be informed about the activities of the Georgian Farmers' Association. That is where I learned about the UN Women project.

So, I thought, why shouldn't I participate? Besides, I remembered the 125-year-old family home of the Elbakidzes, which my husband's grandfather and grandmother - Anthimoz Elbakidze and Mariam Mkheidze - had built. It had the most beautiful Georgian traditional ornaments and a balcony with an amazing view. So, I decided to open a family hotel there. Archil enthusiastically supported my idea.

While working on the business concept, I was already intending to attach special importance to the hotel - to create such an atmosphere that would make it more than just a place to stay overnight or have a day's feast and leave. Every detail, every little corner of the house had to tell old stories and speak of old traditions. They had to lead our future guests into the world of the past and enchant them with unforgettable impressions. With this in mind, I entered the project and, as it turned out later, into a business of my own.



I can state with certainty that the study tour in Tuscany was undoubtedly helpful. It was in Italy that I saw what agritourism means and what it is in reality; how important dedication and responsibility to one's work is; and how you have to respect the items and objects that served people in the past. Meeting so many businesswomen and hearing their stories and shared experiences was very impressive. We, the participants, have developed a kind of supportive network that has been functioning ever since.

The grant that I won enabled me to purchase a bread-baking oven. The road to our house is long and tiring, so it is essential that bread can be baked on the spot. Within the framework of this project, Terabank and the advertising company Windfor's presented me with a brand identity for my hotel.

I am still working on furnishing the hotel, though the idea I had conceived has turned into a reality. My guests have the opportunity to get acquainted with Georgian traditions, Georgian *supra* and toasts against the backdrop of traditional songs and music - to live the way the old residents of the house used to live and to taste local dishes and wine. In addition, our hotel has become a positive incentive for the local population. We have already employed some of them, and we buy products from others, which means that it all together creates a strong ecosystem. I intend to build a Georgian *tone* and ask local women to conduct masterclasses in making bread and *lobiani*. I also plan to restore the old wine cellar that used to be here and to plant old, forgotten varieties of Racha grapes.

If it hadn't been for this project, I would have never started my own business. It filled me with the energy to get involved in business and has fundamentally changed my life.

*"If it hadn't been for this project, I would have never started my own business. It filled me with the energy to get involved in business and has fundamentally changed my life."*



## INDIRA JAPARIDZE

43 YEARS OLD, AKHALSHENI VILLAGE,  
KHELVACHAURI DISTRICT, ADJARA,  
WINEMAKER AND CO-FOUNDER OF  
“JAPARIDZE MARANI”

Twenty years ago, wine culture didn't actually exist in Adjara. The traditional agriculture was citrus cultivation, and our yard too was entirely occupied by a tangerine garden. It was at this time that, to everyone's surprise, my husband and I decided to grow a small vineyard instead of tangerines. I remember how people were shocked when we started chopping down the trees, but we still proceeded: we planted the Chkhaveri variety, and when it yielded grapes for the first time, we started producing wine in our small cellar.

By profession, I am a chemist and specialized in food technology. I hold the positions of a Researcher and Assistant Professor at Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University. My husband is a chemist too. He had worked at a wine factory for many years, so I must say that the two of us make a great team. I put my knowledge acquired at the university into practice, and he backed me with his experience – we complemented each other. So brick by brick, we turned the tangerine garden into the “Japaridze Marani”.

We buy grapes for winemaking. We press mainly four varieties of grapes: Rkatsiteli, Chkhaveri, Tsitska and Tsolikauri. We make about 10 tons of wine every season. We grow only 70 grapevines in our yard, mostly as a kind of demonstration for our guests, whom we have hosted and offered wine and culinary tours of our *marani* (wine cellar) for the past five years.

The first financial aid I received was from the government project “Enterprise Georgia”. With the grant I got, I re-equipped our production tools, but then I engaged in the UN Women Georgia project too. I remember I liked the trainings so much that I didn't notice how quickly time flew. By that time, I had already envisaged my path and what direction to choose, so I formed my objectives clearly. The trainings were like a source of insight and inspiration for new ideas for me.

Unfortunately, there are no women winemakers in Adjara. After this project, I thought it would be better if I made Chkhaveri wine in a different way, by cold maceration; I will bottle it and make visible in its branding that it was produced by a woman. Thanks to the assistance of the UN Women Georgia project, I already have the branding and necessary equipment for its bottling. I can't wait to produce it. It will be a great delight for me.

I think that branding, in general, will help me explore new places and increase my income, though I have more plans as well. One of them is related to the local vine variety Satsuravi, a distinguished grape species, so



I would like to try and make wine with it. Another future prospect is to open a guest house, with special rooms where I can conduct courses on wine tasting and lecture on my knowledge and experience. It is a demand that really exists in Adjara, and I know that such lectures will be useful.

I am sure that women's participation in business, their comprehensive insight, their purposefulness and their motivation will change the social fabric for the better. They will become positive examples and will demonstrate to other women that they too can take that path and become successful.

*“I am sure that women's participation in business, their comprehensive insight, their purposefulness and their motivation will change the social fabric for the better.”*



*“My own example has already become a model for many. Many women have developed the idea of cultivating raspberries, and I even gave them my saplings to get them started.”*

## NINO GABRIADZE

36 YEARS OLD, AKHALSHENI VILLAGE,  
KHELVACHAURI DISTRICT, ADJARA,  
FOUNDER OF BERRY BUSINESS AND  
“NINO’S DRIED FRUIT”

After I got married, I moved to the village of Akhalsheni, where I have lived for the past 14 years. In the city of Gori, where I grew up, my father always took special care of a raspberry garden himself. I went to visit my parents after I got married, and on my way back, I took two of the raspberry saplings. Hardly anybody grows berries in Adjara, so I was very curious if I could manage to cultivate them. The saplings multiplied and grew sumptuously. The locals were amazed when I treated them to this very expensive and rare kind of berry.

Two years ago, the Ministry of Agriculture started a project in order to popularize berries in Adjara. It enabled volunteers to cultivate blackberries, goji berries and raspberries for free, so I took advantage of this opportunity. I had a small patch of land, and with the help of my father-in-law, I chopped down our fruit trees and cultivated raspberries instead. The patch yielded its first nice harvest in 2018. As raspberries are very rare here, the demand for them is very high too, so we were successful in selling our products.

However, various impediments arose: my garden wasn't fenced, and I didn't have enough money to arrange the necessary infrastructure. As a result, domestic animals often spoiled the plants; and once, somebody stole my saplings. Just then, I learned that the UN Women Georgia project was intended to start in Adjara.

At first, I didn't pursue it. I didn't know if I could cope with travelling to Tbilisi to attend the trainings while I had two children on hand, but Natia Ninikelashvili of the Georgian Farmers' Association convinced me that this was a very significant opportunity, and she proved to be right. After attending the trainings, my business plan was financed, and I managed to fence my orchard. Now I grow a variety of berries on 2,020 square metres of land: 600 square metres allocated to goji berries and raspberries on the rest. Moreover, my berries are ecologically clean: I have never sprayed them with pesticides.

The most important thing is that the project gave me knowledge, which in turn has given me self-confidence. I left the trainings full of such positive energy and motivation that I was willing to make my work an example for others. I was always thinking about what to do next, what to try next. Now I am getting rid of some fruit trees to grow more berries. Some time ago, I started to produce dried berries and loquat. Indira Japaridze helped me improve the quality of my dried fruits. She is a specialist in food technology and is also a participant of this project.



My fruit brand “Nino’s Dried Fruit” was created within the framework of the UN Women Georgia project and with the support of the Georgian Farmers’ Association. Now I want to dry goji berries and try to produce tangerine crisps. But I have another plan as well: I want to put up some small arbours in the garden and attract agritourists.

I had never thought about business before, but now after this project, I have found myself and my business, and that makes me a happy Nino indeed. And in general, I like that women have become more active in this respect. When you have your own income, you become much more confident and independent, and people, even your family members, start to respect you more.

My own example has already become a model for many. Many women have developed the idea of cultivating raspberries, and I even gave them my saplings to get them started. Today they too cultivate this kind of fruit. I am also trying to purchase berries from those women. They know that they can rely on me: I inform them about these grants, and if necessary, I will write up their projects for free in order to help them. I already know that this kind of support is very valuable.



## TAMAR SHEITNISHVILI

25 YEARS OLD, SHIDA KARTLI,  
CO-FOUNDER OF THE APPLE-CHIP  
COMPANY "ENKENI"

I met Shako Mdzinarashvili and Nona Noniashvili at university. They studied at the faculty of food technology, while I studied business administration. We became friends during our very first year at university and soon realized that all three of us were interested in starting some business of our own. We wanted to create an innovative and competitive product, so we decided to focus on a promising trend – wholesome food.

In the beginning, we tried a lot of products. We used to meet at the university laboratory to test our ideas in practice. During one of those experiments, the idea of apple chips occurred to us, and we liked it very much. That moment coincided with the start of the innovation contest "Startup Georgia". So, we decided to take part in it and to present to the judges our apple chips as an innovative product. We collected the entry fee of GEL 100 as fast as we could, got registered and built a small-volume piece of equipment with our own hands. Unfortunately, it could only produce four chips at a time, so we had to keep vigil all through the night to make the necessary amount of chips. In the end, our apple chips became the winner of Startup Georgia. As a result, we went to Estonia for all three study tours, and we saved the GEL 5,000 awarded to us for the future development of our business and constructed a larger piece of equipment.

It turned out that our apple chips were a distinctive product, both innovative and wholesome. The production process, system and approaches that we created from beginning to end, guaranteed our product's innovative character. However, it needed further development, so we applied to the government programme "Startup Georgia" and indeed got the funding – GEL 100,000. So, we worked out a business plan and started to prepare for the launch of our enterprise.

Shako is from Ditsi, a village in Shida Kartli located close to the conflict zone. Both Nona and I had been there too, so we knew about the problems experienced by the villagers and decided to build our business entirely in Ditsi. In this way, we could employ local people and thus strengthen them. Happily, we were able to accomplish this goal.

No sooner had we opened our firm than we learned about the UN Women project. I did not expect that it would be so interesting, but the very first training turned out to be really fascinating. The course I had attended at the Academy of the Ministry of Finance helped me enhance my knowledge and apply it in practice, directly to my business.



Before that, we made chips only from red apples, but now we wanted to add some green apple cultivars and expand our business, for which we needed special cutting and drying equipment. After winning the grant of this project, we were able to purchase high-tech appliances and started to produce chips from green apples. The process became speedier and more automated. Within the framework of the project, rebranding was also done: we have a new logo and packaging now, which "speaks" to the customers exactly in the language characteristic to "Enkeni". In addition, the project assisted us with the possibility of supplying well-known supermarkets with our chips and also enabled us to present our product at the International Women's Forum in Lithuania.

At present, we produce about 500 packets of apple chips each month. We are planning to introduce more kinds of chips made of other fruits and vegetables. This way, we will maintain the trend – wholesome and delicious. We also want to export our products, so we expect that diversification will be very beneficial in this respect too. Currently we employ six women, though we hope to increase their number to 40 after fully developing our commercial production.

One idea occurred to us while visiting Tuscany on a study tour. In the future, if we have apple orchards, we are going to develop agritourism and will get tourists involved in the production process. It will revive the region significantly. Other start-ups may also follow suit, thereby strengthening the stability along the dividing line. If that happens, then we will believe that Enkeni has fulfilled one of its most important missions.

*"Currently we employ six women, though we hope to increase their number to 40 after fully developing our commercial production."*





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