

Peacebuilding and conflict transformation through the implementation of the Gender- Responsive Early Warning System at local level in Georgia

Contents

Introduction

Part 1.

The relationship between gender and conflict early warning system and importance of women's involvement at all stages of the system's development

Part 2. Experience of Fund "Sukhumi"

2.1. First steps for the implementation of the Gender-Responsive Early Warning System in communities of Kutaisi, Tskhaltubo (Imereti region), Khurcha, Koki (Zugdidi municipality, Samegrelo region)

2.2. Results of a community-based survey of risks and threats to human security that could cause conflicts

2.2.1. The aim and methodology of the survey

2.2.2. Analysis of results

2.3. Prioritization of problems for further response and problem solution - "Success stories" of Fund "Sukhumi"

Conclusion

Introduction

Conflict relations constantly arise in all spheres of human livelihoods and generate lots of various consequences. There are no univocal and simple explanations for the causes of conflicts and neither those of how they affect conflict escalation and develop into a violent phase. Conflict dynamics is largely conditioned by the interconnection of a number of complex social, economic, political or environmental factors. To understand and efficiently manage conflicts it is necessary to take into account many specific aspects, such as worsening of socio-economic conditions, poverty, unemployment, inequality, discrimination, violation of minority rights, deprivation of power of certain groups of society, the threat of military action and the presence of other sources of danger. A certain combination of these factors can lead to tension, violence or armed conflict. However, it should be considered, that this usually happens when certain conditions for a flash of tension become mature. In order to prevent conflicts that cause irreparable harm to people, violent conflicts should be **warned and prevented** in advance. This is the most sensible and useful conflict management strategy, since it is not aimed at ending or solution of an arisen conflict but at a conflict prevention. The first step in conflict prevention is to predict when, where and why a particular conflict may arise. Consequently, in order to solve any problem, first of all, it is necessary to find out what is the essence of a conflict and what are its causes, what needs to be done to solve it, and how much time it takes. It is very important to realize not only the importance and necessity of practicing early warning system, but also how to ensure its success and effectiveness.

An early warning system, as a rule, combines a collection and analysis of information about actual or potential factors that may provoke conflicts. This information is used to monitor conflict dynamics and predict an outbreak of tension or violence and to develop a strategy for specific actions aimed at conflict prevention or mitigation. The collected, processed and analyzed data is transferred to the agencies capable to respond to an existing problem, either the government or civil society. However, success and effectiveness of an early warning system by-and-large depends, on the one hand, on ensuring the direct participation of communities / local populations (women and men) at all stages of its development, and on the other hand, on the extent to which gender perspectives and approaches are integrated in the process of its elaboration and development.

Practice confirms that local population and communities have more access to reliable and real information about existing problems and a deeper understanding of the dynamics of conflicts on the ground. Therefore, it is very important to treat local

communities not only as a source for obtaining information, but also to involve them in the process of collecting, to some extent, data analyzing, and developing specific recommendations to respond problems.

The local population's feeling of ownership of a conflict-preventing tool can contribute to the overall resilience of communities when being faced with emerging conflicts. An early warning system, that is developed without participation of actors who are directly affected by the conflict and live in an unstable environment, that does not consider population as the main driver for social change, cannot prevent conflicts and bring about positive sustainable changes in the long run.

In addition, it is very important that women and men living in communities feel equally safe and have equal opportunities to participate in creating an environment, which is safe and supportive for the development. As long as women do not feel safe in their homes and in society and feel a threat to their own sustainable development and the development of their future generation, it is impossible to believe in a sustainable world. When women feel safe and can mobilize and unite freely to secure their rights and achieve sustainable peace, the creation of a long-lasting and sustainable peace becomes real.

Unfortunately, experience confirms that conflict analysis, including early warning, traditionally does not take into account women's rights and their gender characteristics. Women's participation in the identification of risks as well as in the development of mitigation strategies, is very low. In the process of the development and implementation of early warning systems (EWS), as a rule, little attention is paid to structural or conflict-specific differences between the situations of women and men. For example, differences in perceptions of threats, the vulnerability level, as well as different experiences and the impact of conflicts on men and women, are not taken into account. As a result, the women's views and approaches are practically not applied in the process of collecting information, planning and developing of the EWS. And, when women are not involved in the EWS, their ability to participate in conflict prevention and post-conflict rehabilitation is significantly limited. The EWS risks being unable to adequately predict or prevent conflict. Gender and diversity issues between women and men are often ignored in actions aimed at conflict prevention, which, of course, is connected with existing discriminatory practices against women. Conflicts affect men and women differently, thus, conflict-preventing tools have to be gender sensitive.

Integration of women's views and gender mainstreaming at all stages of the EWS development is not only an obligation of states to comply with international human rights standards, but also a need for a better understanding of the causes of conflict, which will help develop appropriate and effective measures to mitigate or prevent conflicts and crises.

In order to integrate gender issues in the EWS, men and women should be able not only to report on their situation with relation to security, but to be directly involved in analyzing existing threats and fears, discussing their effects on men and women. It is also important to build a link between the main causes of the problem and their impact on gender inequality. Often, inequalities that already exist in society cause conflicts, which must be taken into account in data analysis collected to formulate and develop relevant recommendations for the prevention of conflicts.

For Georgia, the introduction of an early warning system is becoming more and more relevant. The two unresolved and frozen conflicts (Georgian-Abkhazian, Georgian-Ossetian) in the country, a rather difficult domestic political and social background, and high level of unemployment worsen the psycho-emotional state of the population and contribute to the growth of tension, creating additional threats to peace and stability, especially along the dividing lines. In this context, it is very important to carefully study existing problems, factors and causes and the tendencies of conflict escalation both at the national and at the community level. To this end, it is necessary to create an effective mechanism for the continuous collection and analysis of information and the development of appropriate responses to prevent potential conflicts, followed by actions to communicate this information to policy makers both at local and national level.

The purpose of this article is to provide stakeholders, including representatives of civil society and local self-government in Georgia, with a brief overview of the definitions and stages of early warning system for conflicts. Moreover, the article will cover the importance of community engagement and gender mainstreaming at all stages of the EWS development. It will provide an overview how integration of gender perspective can contribute to improving the effectiveness of the EWS. The article also summarizes results of the survey conducted by the Fund "Sukhumi" in the most conflict-sensitive regions¹ of Western Georgia (Kutaisi, Tskhaltubo, Imereti region and in the villages of Koki and Khurcha of Zugdidi municipality, located on the ABL-specify) to identify problems that can cause tensions and conflicts in communities. The article also provides specific examples from Fund "Sukhumi's" successful practices in problem solution and prevention of tension in society. The experience gained and lessons learnt will contribute to the subsequent development of a broader early warning for conflicts and increasing the communities' impact, including women and civil society, on official authorities.

¹ Regions with the concentration of a large number of IDPs and the population affected by conflict.

Part 1.

The link between gender and early warning system for conflicts and importance of women's participation at all stages of system's development

Today, gender issues are mostly ignored in the process of conflict resolution and peace building, as well as in the stages of conflict early warning system development, despite the fact that there are many international and national legal documents, that require states to involve women and enhance their role at all levels of decision-making, related to conflict management, peace and security.

International law not only underscores and calls for women's equal participation in the process of introducing and implementing conflict early warning response system, but also provides a basis for developing gender indicators and analysis. The UN Convention on "Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women" states that "Discrimination against women violates the principles of equality of rights and respect for human dignity, is an obstacle to the participation of women, on equal terms with men, in the political, social, economic and cultural life of their countries".² The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action states that "full participation of [women] in decision-making, conflict prevention and resolution and all other peace initiatives is essential to the realization of sustainable and lasting peace". This conclusion is also echoed in United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, "Women, peace and security", which reaffirms "the important role of women in conflict prevention and resolution and peace-building, as well as the need for women's equal and full participation in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution". The OSCE, in turn, confirmed its commitment to both the Beijing Platform and the UNSCR 1325, by including reference to these documents in the OSCE Ministerial Council Decision No. 14/05 "Women in conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation" and the OSCE Ministerial Council Decision No 14/04, adopting the 2004 OSCE Action Plan on the Promotion of Gender Equality, which identifies the inclusion of women in conflict prevention as a priority.

The importance of women's participation in all stages of conflict prevention, management and resolution is also highlighted in 2018-2020 National Action Plan (NAP) of Georgia for implementation of the UNSCR 1325. According to this Action Plan, Georgia

²The UNSC Convention on "Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women", available at http://www.un.org/ru/documents/decl_conv/conventions/cedaw.shtml

undertakes to develop a normative document on gender responsive early warning system, and also collect data and conduct needs assessment of the people affected by conflict, including IDPs, especially those living on the ABL (Objective 3)³. Executors of specific actions are ministries and government agencies, while civil society and other stakeholders will play an important role as supporting actors. It is an innovation for this Action Plan that it for the first time defines the role of local municipalities, which should also play an important role within their competence, to achieve the NAP's objectives. However, unfortunately, today no effective measures are being taken to create conflict early warning system in Georgia.

Gender analysis of the problems faced by the population can help identify their causes, and women's active involvement in this process will ensure the process's effectiveness. Women often have very valuable and important information about existing problems, conflicts or threats of conflict in their communities. For example, they have information about the level of freedom and ensuring women's human rights, or gender-based violence in family and men's behavior within and outside the family. It is noteworthy that an increased level of violence against women within and outside the family often reflect an increased tension and aggression in the whole society. These particular problems may be important signs of impending crises and conflicts.

Women's involvement in the process of information collection can improve quality of the data, since women's views on existing problems are invaluable. Women are socialized differently than men and, therefore, can perceive problems very differently than men. In addition, the level of confidence and openness of women respondents during the exchange of information about security problems and threats will be much higher for a female interviewer. As a result, women will be able to ask different questions, taking into account gender-specific aspects, which will help ensure collection of diverse information and development of the most effective measures to prevent problems or possible conflicts.

The need to integrate gender perspectives in data collection and analysis is conditioned by the following reasons:

- ❖ Gender reflect different needs and interests of men and women who perceive security and security risks differently. Consequently, comprehensive views

³ The 2018-2020 National Action Plan of Georgia for the Implementation of the UN Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security (NAP) available at <http://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20georgia/attachments/publications/2018/the%202018-2020%20national%20action%20plan%20of%20georgia%20geo.pdf?la=en&vs=1043>

toward the issues can be extremely useful in EWS to generate a more detailed picture and a more complete response to the existing situation. A full picture of threats or expected threats of conflict, creates the basis for a timely response;

- ❖ In the process of EWS development, the vast variety of different roles that women play in the context of a conflicts, including in the political, economical and social spheres, should be taken into account. Gender analysis can help examine these roles to avoid discriminatory policies⁴ based on a misunderstanding of gender roles.

Effective are the early warning systems that ensure equal participation of men and women both in the process of planning, collecting, analyzing and developing measures to prevent conflicts, but also ensure their direct participation at the advocacy stage.

An extremely important task in this process of information gathering is the development of gender specific indicators. According to the analysis carried out by the SaferWorld, which examined existing research and guidelines for integrating gender perspectives into the early warning system, there is no consensus on what makes an early warning indicator gender-sensitive. However, the following factors ⁵ can be taken into consideration to determine gender indicators, for example:

- ✓ Whether an indicator refers to women's status in society (e.g. levels of GBV, number of women in government or on decision-making positions);
- ✓ Whether an indicator refers specifically to women or men (e.g. women's human rights violations, level of discrimination against women and men, unemployment of women and men, crime of men and women; gender-related homicide dynamics);)
- ✓ An indicator that reflects the level of control over women's civil society organizations or movements, restrictions on freedom of choice, or the tendency to spreading reactionary views about women;
- ✓ Whether there is a practice for maintaining gender statistics.

The wider society's involvement (including women and men, youth, national and religious minorities, etc.) in the process of developing an early warning system for conflicts is crucial.

Regardless of the fact that societal tensions or insecurities are the result of an armed conflict, civil unrest or denial of basic economic and social right, it has to be stressed

4 Gender and Early Warning Systems, An Introduction, OSCE/ODIHR, 2009, page 13, available in English at <https://www.osce.org/odihr/40269?download=true>

⁵ Saferworld, Gender and Conflict Early Warning, Results of a literature review on integrating gender perspectives into conflict early warning systems. Briefing, May 28, 2014, page 4 (Available in English)

that these tensions are preceded by systemic human rights violations and/or the discrimination of a particular – at most times underprivileged – group of population. It is becoming increasingly clear that human rights violations are a preliminary sign of a possible or emerging crisis. So, the relevant measures to protect the human rights with the wider society's involvement at an early stage will greatly contribute to the prevention of a crisis.

Part 2. Fund “Sukhumi’s” experience

2.1. First steps for the implementation of Gender-responsive Early Warning System in communities

The long-term work of Fund "Sukhumi" on peace building and transformation of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict has identified the need to study the level of human security from women's perspective at existing challenges. Applying the methodology used by Israeli and Palestinian women's organizations and adapting it to the specific conditions within their societies, women's organisations Fund “Sukhumi” and the Association of Women of Abkhazia jointly developed a methodology for determining the level of human security for women and carried out research on women's human security.

For Fund “Sukhumi” this study represents an attempt to broaden the traditional understanding of the term “security” and to gain insight into the feelings and thoughts of women who have to handle personal risks and insecurities on a regular basis.

The research made it possible to study the needs and problems that women have to handle every day and which pose threats both to their personal security and the security of the whole society. Ensuring women's human security is not just a desired outcome for the women, but the government's obligation stated in many international legal acts, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Millennium Development Goals, UN Security Council Resolutions 1325, etc. Ensuring women's human security should be the basis for peace and security policy planning whether at the local, national or global level.

The work on the study of human security has become a catalyst for the a new project, which included specific steps to develop and implement a Gender responsive early warning system in places prone to tensions and crises. Within the framework of this project “Conflict Early Warning - Theory and Practice”, supported by the Swedish Women's International Foundation Kvinna till Kvinna, representatives of both organizations (FS and AWA) and their partners thoroughly studied the methodology and stages of the Gender Responsive Early Warning System for Conflicts and developed a

specific strategy for its implementation in practice. In order to test the acquired knowledge and skills, Fund “Sukhumi” undertook a survey in several regions of Western Georgia to identify problems faced by people in everyday life, which might threaten security and stability in the target communities. In addition, an important task was to involve community representatives in the process of developing concrete steps to prevent identified problems and to ensure their direct participation in problem advocacy. A summary of the survey results and communities’ specific actions aimed at solution of their problems are presented in the subsequent parts of this publication.

2.2. Results of a community-based survey of risks and threats to human security that could cause conflict

2.2.1. The aim and methodology of the survey

The aim of this survey was to identify the main problems and challenges communities are facing, posing a threat to stability or containing an inherent potential for conflict in the target regions.

The target groups of the survey were young, middle aged and elderly women living in Kutaisi, Tskhaltubo (Imereti region), Khurcha, Koki (Zugdidi municipality, Samegrelo region). Target regions of the survey have been selected due to the concentration of a large number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) there and due to the population affected by conflicts, living along the ABL. 100 women took part in the survey (see Diagram 1), and the age of the participants varied from 18 to 70 years old (see Diagram 2).

Diagram №1

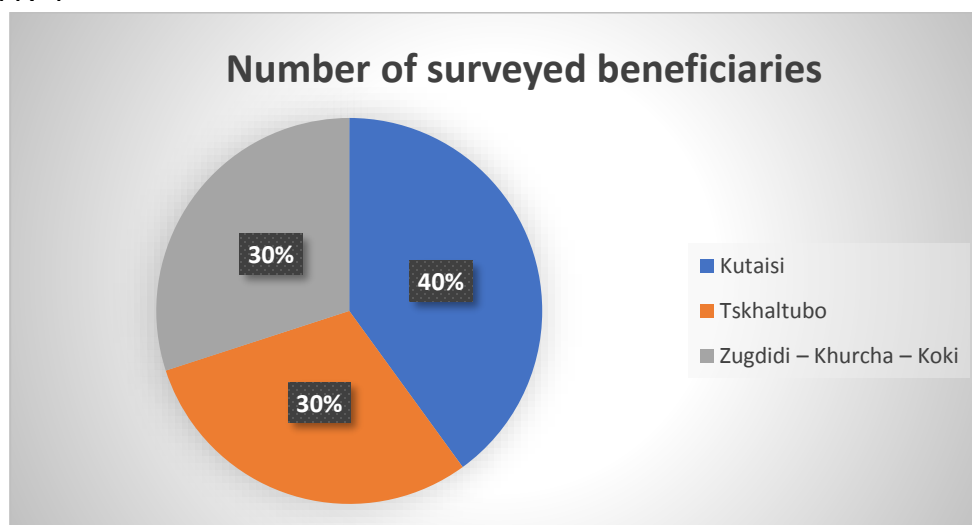
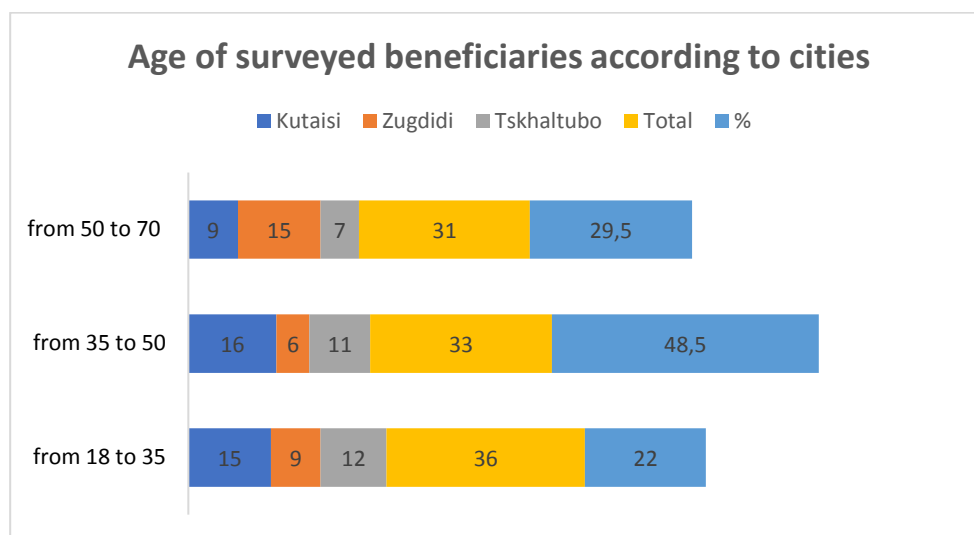


Diagram №2



Questionnaires were used to collect information. Questions were grouped according to different human security categories, which allowed to identify problems that women face in the target locations and to understand what causes tensions in communities today. In addition, the survey reflects attitudes and the level of participants' confidence of the participants to the actors who entitled to take measures to prevent existing problems and possible tensions in society.

2.2.2. Analysis of results

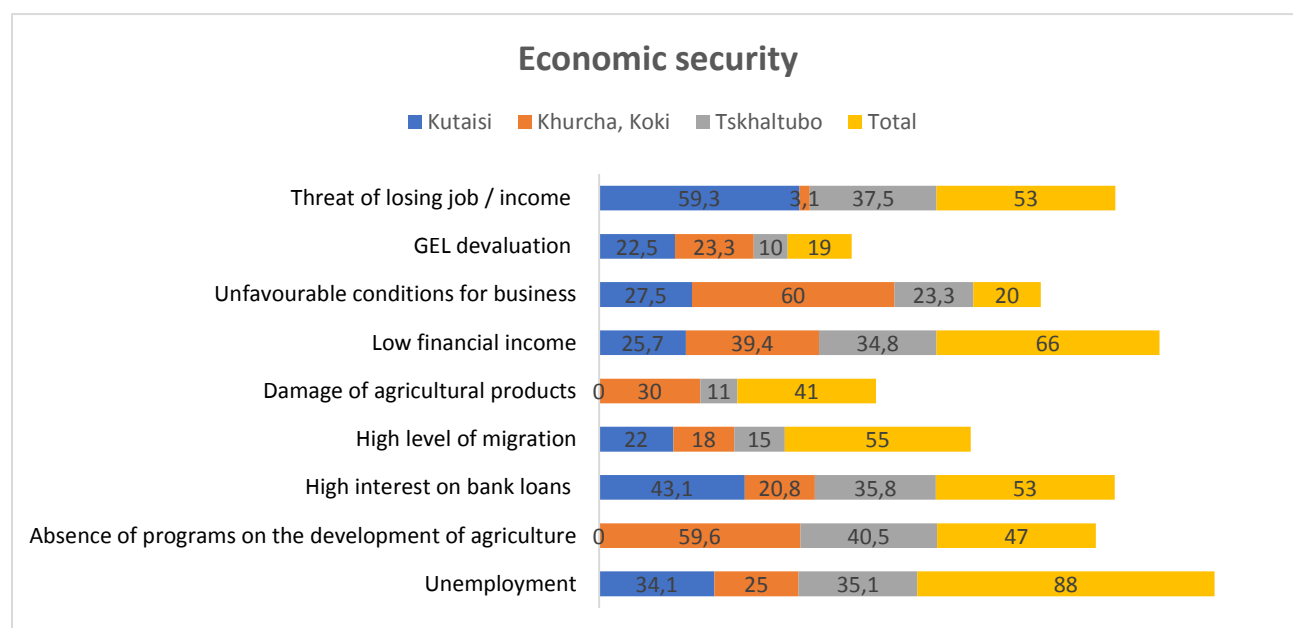
Economic security

The survey results show that economic security, which may cause instability and conflicts in community, is the most acute and pressing problem for women in the target regions.

88% of the surveyed women indicated unemployment as the primary risk factor for tension. 47% of respondents believe that the emergence of conflicts is conditioned by the lack of appropriate government programs to support population in the development of agriculture, which is a priority for rural residents, and directly affects the level of employment of rural population. The most relevant problem for rural women is the total destruction of agricultural products, in particular hazelnuts and maize, by the marble (Asian) bug. These are the main products that bring income to the rural population. The majority of the population remained not only in a serious condition due to the spoilage of the main products cultivated in the target villages, but without means for subsistence and became debtors of the banks.

According to 53% of women, *high interest rates on loans in banks*, impede access to financial resources for the development of their own business. It is also the reason of a high number of “debtors” among the population, which affects the high level of migration in society, and especially among women who migrate to survive and help their families. According to 55% of the female respondents, one of the main problems equally affecting urban and rural women is the problem of *high level of migration*. 66% of women mentioned that the low level of financial income, even for those who are employed, also impedes the creation of a stable environment for life and development. The threat to stability, according to 32% of women, is the *threat of losing their jobs/income*. 20% of respondents believe that the environment *for business development is unfavorable* nowadays, while 19% of respondents link worsening economic situation to devaluation and a sharp *depreciation of the national currency* (see Diagram 3).

Diagram №3



Social security

Among the factors that pose a threat to sustainable life and social development of society, 76% of women emphasized a high level of “*drug addiction and alcoholism*”, which almost equally concerns both urban and rural population, especially in locations close to the ABL.

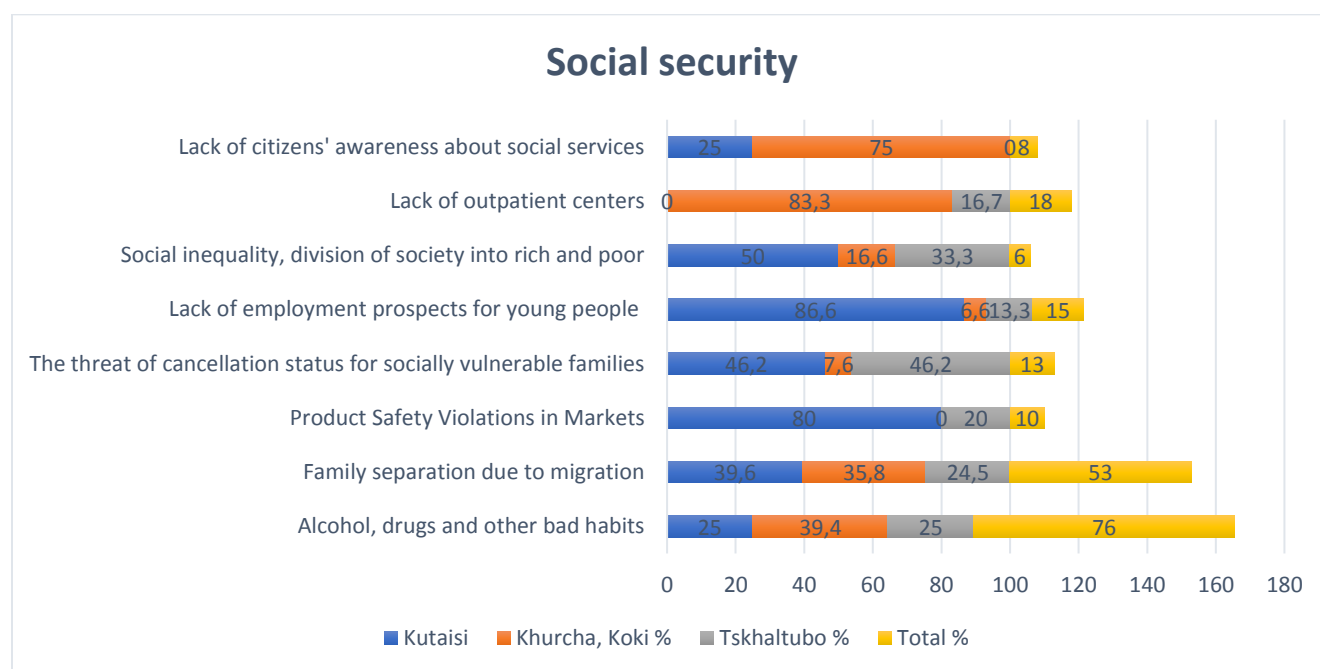
15% of women are concerned about the problem of *unemployment* and *the lack of prospects* for young people, which can negatively affect their psychological state and become a source of social tension, generating criminalization or a threat to public stability and security.

53% are concerned about the *separation of families* due to the high level of migration. 13% of women are worried about the threat of unexpected and unreasonable *cancellation of status* for socially vulnerable families. Many families are at risk of being deprived the status and left without a single means of subsistence, which in turn, can cause complaint and tension in society.

This issue is also associated with the lack of information about social services among the population, which, according to 8% of women, also creates tension and anxiety among the population.

Food security, and in particular the violation of food safety standards in stores, represents a threat to public health in the opinion of 10% of the surveyed women. The problem of the *lack of outpatient centers*, or their insufficient number, is particularly acute for 83.3% of women from Khurcha. It is noteworthy that *social polarization* in society, and in particular, a high level of social inequality and society's division into rich and poor, is also a topic for concern for 6% of women respondent. In their opinion, this represents a threat to stability in society (see the diagram №4).

Diagram №4



Security and infrastructure

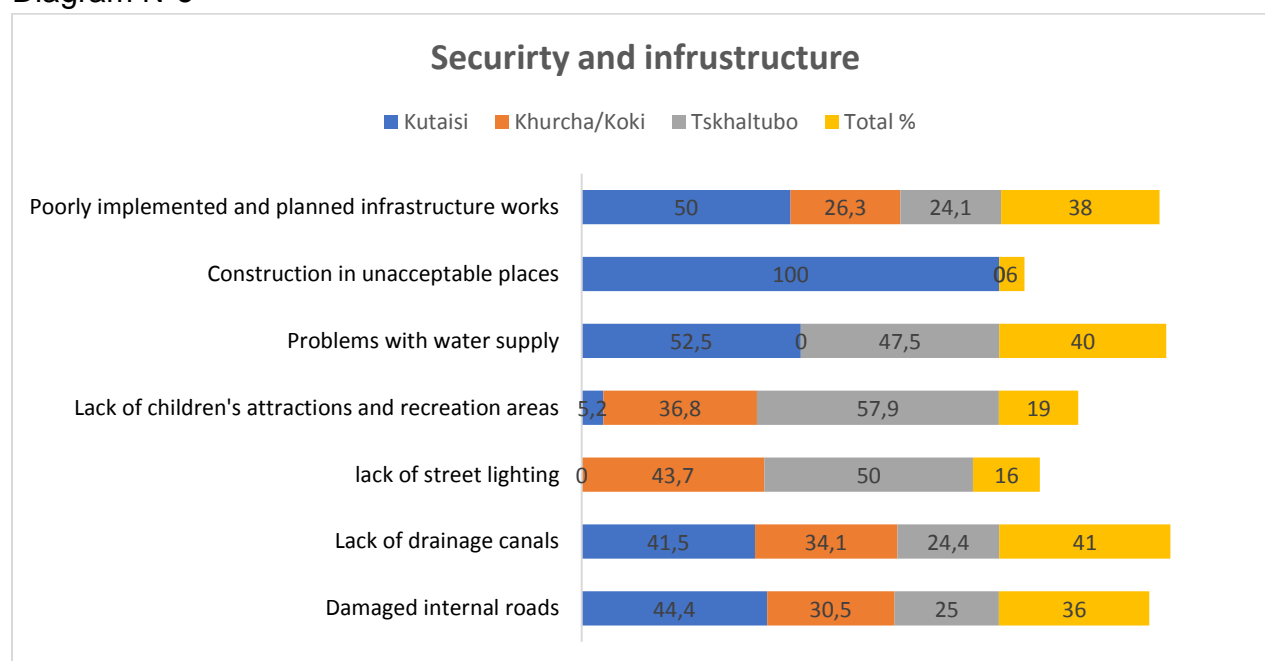
The survey has identified issues related to infrastructure, which are of particular concern for women. The majority, namely, 41% of the surveyed women, noted the problem of

lack of drainage canals (drainage systems), which in the case of heavy rains and precipitations poses a threat to movement of population, and in the worst case represents the risk of drowning settlements. In Kutaisi and Tskhaltubo, 40% of women report *problems with water supply*, and 36% of the surveyed women from cities and villages, are concerned about the problem of internal *road disrepair*.

The lack of street lighting, according to 16% of women, is a threat to both physical and public security for the target communities. This affects women differently, as the lack of street lights undermines the freedom to leave the house after dark.

38% of interviewed women are unsatisfied with the quality of implemented infrastructure projects. This is often associated with poor quality or a long-term process of repair work, and creates great discomfort to the population. Construction in unacceptable places is also of concern to 6% of the interviewed women from Kutaisi (see diagram No. 5).

Diagram №5

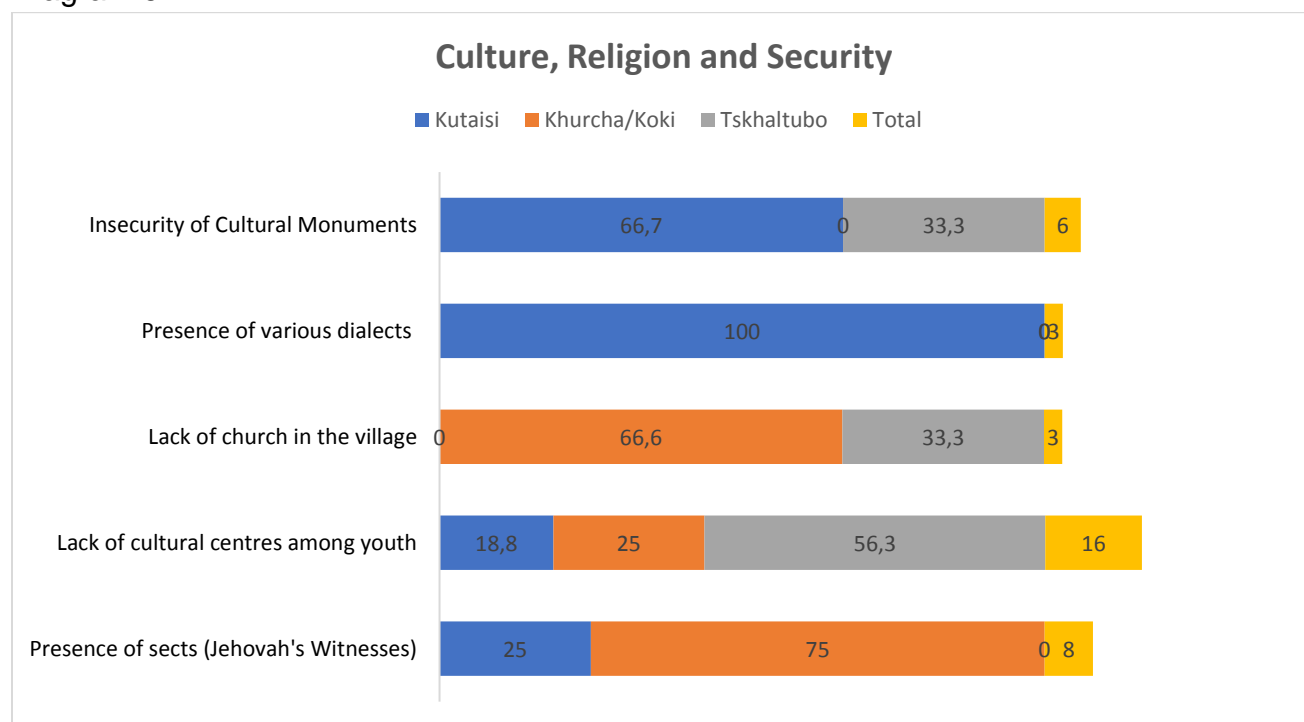


Culture/religion and security

According to the survey results, issues of religion and culture are the least topical and do not pose a particular threat to security and stability for the society of the target regions. However, several factors that can create conditions for conflict development, were mentioned. For example, 16% of female respondents believe that *the lack of cultural centers for young people*, where they could take leisure and be involved in various social activities, can negatively affect the stability in society.

3% of women are concerned about the lack of a church in the village of Khurcha. Unlike other respondents, 8% of women from Kutaisi outline that *different dialects* existing in Georgia could be the reason for tension and conflicts in society. 8% of respondents, especially residents of the village of Khurcha are worried by the *presence of sectarian groups* (for example, Jehovah's Witnesses) and consider it as a threat of conflict. 6% of the women believe that unprotected cultural monuments are a big problem for society, and pose a risk for conflicts (see diagram 6).

Diagram 6



Political security

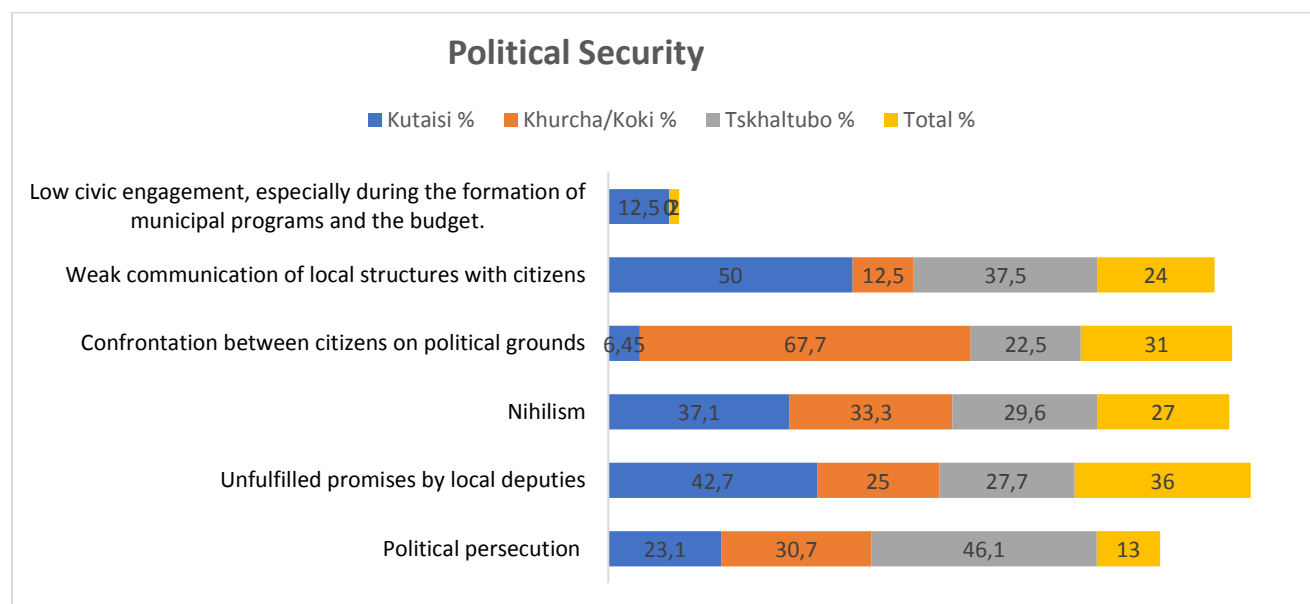
One of the most important indicators of a socio-political climate in the country is the level of political polarization of the views of population. It is obvious that this indicator is directly linked to the level of social tension in society. 31% of the interviewed women underlined that the strained pre-election confrontation affects everyday life and leads to the radical confrontation between the citizens. The level of polarization of political views and positions is quite high in society and often leads to aggression.

The situation is aggravated by the *threat of persecution of citizens* on a political basis, which, according to 13% of the interviewed women, is a risk of destabilization and conflicts in society. In the opinion of 36% of respondents, public disappointment caused by the systematic deceit of citizens and the failure to fulfill promises by elected deputies, may also cause destabilization and tensions. 27% of women believe that socio-political

nihilism dominates in society. This is reflected most often in the passivity of the population and in the reluctance to take part in political and social processes that are important for society and for the country, which, in turn, slows down development and threatens the public safety of the population.

24% of the respondents perceive as a problem low level of interaction and communication of local authorities with citizens (see Diagram No.7). This, in turn, hinders the active involvement of citizens in the process of devising local policies and budgets aimed at solving the pressing and most acute problems facing the population. The lack of communication and interaction between local authorities and citizens also affects the level of trust and attitude of the population towards local authorities. This was clearly reflected in the responses of women. Only 8% of women mentioned that they prefer to address local authorities in case of problems within their societies.

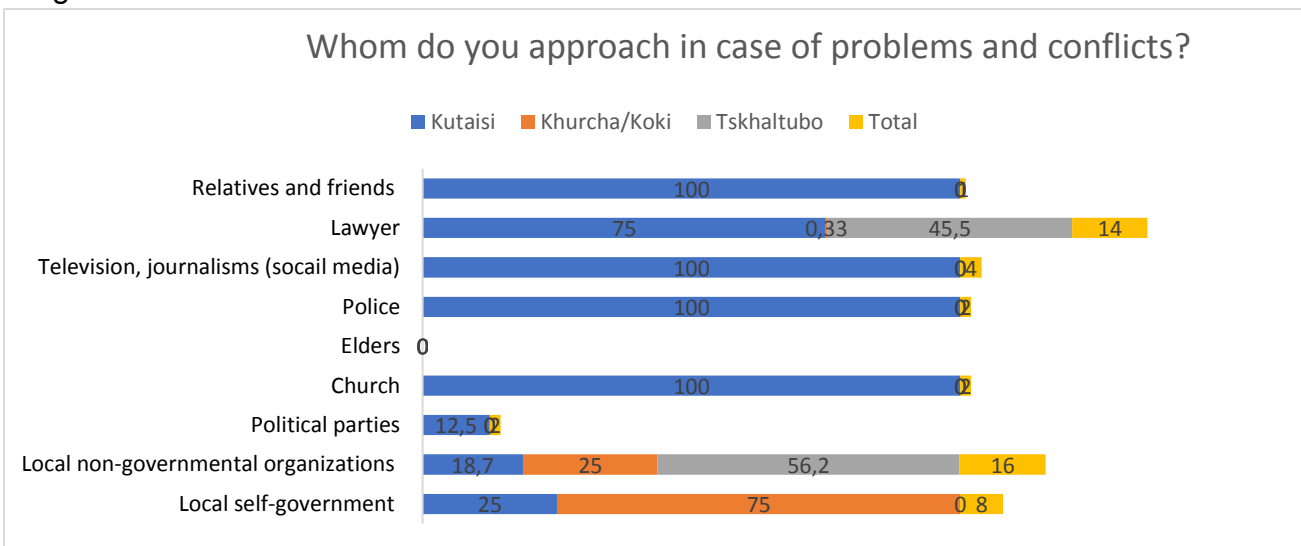
Diagram №7



Where the population prefer to address in conflict situation

On the question, “where do communities most often address in case of problems and conflicts?” women expressed a certain passivity and abstained from answering. However, the majority of those who responded, and in particular 16%, indicated that they applied or will apply to non-governmental organizations. 14% prefer to contact a lawyer and only 8% mentioned local authorities. Only 2% are ready to cooperate with human rights bodies. The same low percent of women are ready to address individual political parties and church representatives. 4% of the total number of women are ready to contact media outlets (see diagram number 8).

Diagram 8



2.3. Prioritization of problems for subsequent response and problem solution - success stories of Fund "Sukhumi"

The next stage of the study was to highlight and prioritize the most important and urgent concerns of the target communities. On the one hand, it was necessary to determine whether an existing problem contained risks and threats to security, stability and normal livelihood of people in the target communities. On the other hand, to identify clear gender dimensions of the problem, namely, how existing problems affect women and children, the degree of negative impact if the solution is delayed, and how many women will benefit from the timely solution of existing problems.

Through active involvement of the target communities, including women-leaders of specific settlements, Fund "Sukhumi" analyzed all problems in terms of their relevance, urgency and gender indicators. Then specific challenges were identified and a response plan and a follow-up-strategy were developed. In order to implement specific actions, Fund Sukhumi, established a "*problem-response group*" (initiative group) consisting of the Fund representatives, communities and local authorities to ensure maximum inclusiveness and effective advocacy work within the process of finding solutions for problems.

The carried-out work has shown that the main challenge and risk of conflict in the three target areas, were the problems related to infrastructure that directly affect the lives of women. Unlit and darkened streets, uncomfortable roads, poor drainage systems and water supply cause discomfort, first of all, to women and children, and prevent the

creation of favorable living conditions, which, in turn, causes tension in society and increases the threat of conflict.

Several specific examples of the problems and challenges facing the communities, as well as the measures taken to prevent them in each target region, will be further reviewed.

Kutaisi

The problem of the lack of night lighting on the street

There was not an outdoor lighting on Gugunava street in Kutaisi. The street is inhabited by ten families, including women with many children and women with small children. For the residents the situation worsened in winter time, when it was getting dark early and women with children or schoolchildren had to return from school in total darkness. There were cases of theft, or constant gatherings of suspicious and unknown people. The situation became particularly tense and turned into a conflict between neighbors, when a neighbor's dog chased after a woman living on the same street. It became known that, despite the constant discomfort felt by the population from day to day and the threats to their physical security, they did not make a single attempt to address the relevant government agencies. Residents were not informed about the ways and methods of the problem solution.

After studying the situation of the settlement, Fund "Sukhumi", together with the residents, took specific actions to draw attention of local authorities to this problem. With the help of the Fund, a letter for the local self-government was written and the residents collected signatures. A number of meetings between the local government representatives and the community, were carried out in the City Hall as well as in the settlement. As a result of active advocacy work within the three months, a street light pole was installed. However, having learned the methods of drawing attention to the problem and the ways of communication with the local government, in the following months the women of the settlement have independently advocated for the installment of two additional poles. They managed to solve the seemingly unsolvable problem facing the community for 25 years.

The problem of poor drainage system

In one of the yards on Zurab Chavchavadze street in Kutaisi, where three multi-storey residential buildings are located, the capacity of water pipes was too weak. Heavy rains often flooded the yard with water. Residents of the ground floor were especially exposed to this threat, as the water reached the windows of their apartments. All the walls of the

lower floors were almost ruined, and there was a terrible smell of moisture in the building. The population was in despair, as the problem had a negative impact on the health of the residents, and especially on women and children, who had to spend most of their time in an unhealthy environment, because of the fact that women were the caretakers for children at home.

After the participants of the survey aroused this problem, representatives of the Fund "Sukhumi" studied in detail the situation on the field and initiated a tripartite meeting at the organization's office. Residents of the buildings concerned about this problem, representatives of the relevant services of the City Hall and the chairperson of the above mentioned territorial unit participated in the meeting. For several hours, the residents shared their problems and its consequences with local government officials and together they planned solutions. It is noteworthy that the problem was responded from the next day. A group of specialists was sent from the City Hall to diagnose the causes. It turned out that the problem was caused by improperly installed water pipes. Soon the causes were eradicated. In the process of repair work, it turned out that there was another problem of crossing trees with an electrically conductive system, which created a huge risk for the population. This problem was fixed too. Frequent floods caused a problem with outdoor lighting as well.

Active advocacy work and response led to the solution of three very important problems for the population, which created a threat to their physical and social security.

Tskhaltubo

Problem of water supply

In one of the settlements of the city of Tskhaltubo, there was a systematic problem of water supply. Inhabitants of the settlement were left without water because of the old pipes, which often spoiled and broke. Women, housewives, who spent most of their time at home and were engaged in housekeeping, had to drag water in buckets from the nearest artesian wells. Naturally, this had a negative effect on the women's health, and at the same time, created tension in the settlement. The situation was especially tense during the summer, when the water in the nearest artesian wells dried out and women often had to overcome rather long distances to carry water from non-dried wells.

The women of this community shared their problem with representatives of the Fund "Sukhumi" during the survey. A decision was made to immediately create an initiative group and respond to the problem. Together they outlined specific steps to solve the problem. After an unsuccessful attempt to solve the problem through the infrastructure service of the City Hall of Tskhaltubo, due to the lack of a relevant article in the municipal

budget for the rehabilitation of the water supply system in a particular locality, the issue was raised before the City Council (Sakrebulo) members. One of the city council representatives, who, at the same time, is a member of the municipal Gender Equality Council, and an active ally of the Fund “Sukhumi”, raised the issue of the problem urgency and convinced her colleagues that its solution cannot be postponed. As a result, funds for the rehabilitation of water supply pipes were allocated from the local budget 2019. To date, the tender for the implementation of rehabilitation work is completed and the settlement residents are waiting for a soonest solution to the problem.

Damage of an electric pole

One of the most pressing issues of concern to the population was a damaged electric pole on the city cemetery in Tskaltubo. The electric pole leaned to such a level that it was likely to fall. This situation created a great risk to the life and health of the citizens visiting the cemetery. In addition, the disrepair and the likelihood of the fall of the electric pole forced the population to bypass it, crossing other cemeteries, which often caused complaint and conflicts among relatives of the deceased. After the conversation between the representatives of the Fund “Sukhumi” and one of the survey participants, the response initiative group decided to actively advocate for the solution of this problem before the local government. Citizens’ signatures, confirming the danger that comes from the leaned electric pole, were collected. Letters and petitions were repeatedly submitted to the officials of the relevant municipality services.

However, the local government declared that the pole belonged to one of the Tbilisi electric companies, and only the company could decide on reinforcement or dismantling of the pole. As a result of a three-month tireless advocacy campaign, systematic communication with the owners of the electric pole and local authorities, the decision to reinforce the pole was made and appropriate measures were taken to prevent the problem.

Khurcha

Lack of an outpatient clinic

The Village Khurcha is located along the administrative boundary line and this area is rather conflict-sensitive. There are no elementary services (such as pharmacies, shops, school) in the village to meet basic and necessary needs, which is subject to tension the population and has a negative influence on the lives of people. Constant tension, stress and heavy psychological background in the area adversely affect the health of the population. There is not even an outpatient clinic in the village to receive first aid, and the villagers have to travel to the nearest village or to the city of Zugdidi.

Elderly people, who represent the majority of the villagers and suffer from various diseases are particularly concerned about the problem. Despite multiple requests of the villagers to open an outpatient clinic in the village, they were not satisfied. According to existing regulations, an ambulant clinic may be opened only in the area inhabited by at least 300 families. The village of Khurcha cannot meet this criteria, especially in conditions when the majority of the population, and especially the younger generation, migrate inside or outside the country in search of a better and decent life.

The initiative group decided to advocate for the existing problem at the local and central levels. The group prepared letters and petitions and sent to the Ministry of Health, as well as to local government. The Ministry readdressed the problem to the local authorities. Numerous meetings were held with officials from the relevant services of the municipality. The local government recognized that, based on the specifics of the area, it is possible to make an exception and open an outpatient clinic in the village. They promised the villagers to schedule the establishment of the Clinic in the local budget for 2020.

Lack of bus on Sundays

Public transport does not operate on Sundays in the village of Khurcha. The villagers, especially women, faced big movement problems. It is known, that the villagers are mainly engaged in an agricultural activity, and the main source of income is trade. On weekends the villagers have to go to the markets in the nearest cities to sell their products and buy various food and necessary household utensils (it should be noted that there are not even shops in the village of Khurcha). Because of the lack of transport on Sundays the villagers had to walk a few kilometers on foot to the nearest village of Koki to take a bus to Zugdidi and back. Given the fact that, in most cases, these are women, who sell agricultural products in the markets, and moreover, older women, difficulties associated with transportation and carrying of heavy goods for several kilometers each week had a negative effect on their health. Constant dissatisfaction of the residents created a tense situation in the community, which frequently turned into conflicts.

After identifying the problem, the Fund "Sukhumi's" initiative group, comprised of community members and the city council representative of Zugdidi municipality, active efforts were made to solve the problem. Representatives of local authorities visited the village to study the situation and interview residents. Petitions were submitted to the City Hall and the City Council of Zugdidi municipality. After numerous meetings of the representatives of Fund "Sukhumi" and the rural community with local officials, an

agreement on the availability of a bus on Sundays was made. From February 2019 the problem with transport was resolved.

Conclusion

Therefore, it is very important to consider local communities not only as a source of information, but also as one of the main actors in achieving problem solution. An early warning system can only prevent conflicts and bring about positive and sustainable changes if it is based on the participation of the people affected by the problem. This system should consider the population as the main driving force. It should partner with people rather than control them.

The early warning system should be “people-responsive”: it should support and expand opportunities of citizens to protect themselves and their interests. It is important to maximize gender measurements and consider both women’s and men’s needs and priorities. For effectiveness of the system, it is necessary to include as many women as possible. Integration of women’s views and consideration of gender features at all stages of the early warning system development, will ensure a deeper understanding of the causes of conflict and, as a result, will help to develop more effective measures to mitigate or prevent it.

This system will help to increase the role of participating women in public processes. Women will be at the heart of events taking place in the community and will influence decision making processes. Their status and image in the family and society will change, as they will be able to protect not only themselves, but also their family or community members. The implementation of a gender-responsive early warning system of the conflict is not just a mechanism for conflict prevention, but a tool for creating a healthy environment. It ensures the stable and harmonious development of society, which is based on the interests, needs and rights of every person.

Any problem solved at an early stage is a conflict that was prevented at an early stage. The more positive examples of preventing and responding to conflicts citizens will observe through cooperation between the population, non-governmental organizations and government officials, the greater the possibility to approach a model of non-violent, peaceful, stable and sustainable society.