





# CREATING OPPORTUNITIES

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*Creating opportunities for people with good ideas is the key for transforming communities. Working in Georgia and the South Caucasus, CARE International in the Caucasus (CIC) has come to believe that a successful and sustainable development model hinges on fostering local social entrepreneurship which generates ideas—whether economic, social, or political—that seek to address an unjust societal equilibrium which causes exclusion, marginalization, and suffering. The stories below are collected from CARE’s project “Increasing Quality and Work Opportunities for Women with Disabilities in Georgia” funded by the Czech Development Agency. The Social Enterprise Program has shown to be particularly successful in stimulating women with special needs to be active in the communities and become a role model for other women with special needs. We are proud to cooperate with all of those women and invite you to join this initiative.*

## #QUESTION 1

### HOW DO SOCIAL ENTERPRISES EMPOWER DISABLED WOMEN?

CARE believes people have the ideas and potential to change their lives and that of others, but they lack the capacities and resources to do so. Social enterprises allow the women with special needs to create a sustainable income and improve their livelihoods.

In order to be part of the program, the women are required to take a range of trainings that are aimed at improving their knowledge and awareness of their rights, activism, as well as business planning and technical skills. The project is not only focusing on providing the employment opportunities and economic empowerment of women with special needs but also social inclusion of women. The social enterprises go beyond only providing an income - they also allow women to take part in society, socialize with other women with special needs and form a community.

## #QUESTION 3

### WHAT IS A SOCIAL ENTERPRISE?

A social enterprise is a commercially viable entity that has a social mission or creates social impact as one of its primary aims. It does by: providing high quality employment opportunities for disadvantaged people; purchasing goods or services from disadvantaged people; providing a good or service that addresses a particular developmental value with disadvantaged communities.

In doing so, CARE's activities act as an incubator to creating and stimulating entities that have a long-term goal and exist beyond project goals. Social enterprises are perfectly suited since they improve livelihoods and create social improvement in communities.

## #QUESTION 2

### WHY DOES CARE FOCUS ONLY ON WOMEN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS?

Women with special needs are one of the most disadvantaged groups in rural areas of Georgia. They suffer from stereotypes, stigma and isolation, poverty, lack of access to quality education and healthcare; unemployment; not adapted physical and social environment; lack of access to various services, etc. They often do not get appropriate or any support and are bound to stay in the house. All of this makes them invisible to society and they feel left out. The community of women with special needs is quite weak in the target areas. Years of disrespect and neglect affected their character and motivation to participate in social events. Because of this, women with special needs are not generally involved in the social life and they are more isolated, compared to men with special needs.

## #QUESTION 4

### WHAT IS CARE'S APPROACH TO SOCIAL ENTERPRISES?

CARE developed its approach in the South Caucasus over the years working with donors, the private sector and the government. The basic principle is to select ideas from people, vet the ideas on economic viability and capacitate people to be entrepreneurs. Social enterprise should be based on a business proposal including market research and clearly indicating its economic and social impact.

4 questions  
about CARE's  
Social Enterprises  
Model for women  
with special needs



## New opportunities win over haunting memories Makvala's story

Imagine that a stranger comes to your house at night and screams: Run! *"We left everything behind and ran for our lives with just our night robes on. I ran and thought, I will be back in two days"*

25 years has passed since that night and Makvala hasn't seen her house anymore.

Makvala fled Abkhazia during the war and ended up in Senaki, a small town in West Georgia. Her life turned around again last year when she started to work for "Agro-Kolkhida", a social enterprise working on laurel production in Georgia, after years of suffering from anxiety, diabetes and poverty. Now Makvala's income enables her to buy medicines and better food, but most importantly getting out of the house helped dealing with depression and anxiety, which weighed heavy on her and her family for all those years.

Makvala now lives with her husband in the former military residence which now serves as an IDP settlement in Senaki, the same place where she stepped first after coming in Georgia. Some memories of her early IDP years still come up regularly, as she recalls: *"Our first thoughts were just to stay alive. My husband was wounded after fighting in war and came to us later. I will never forget the moment when my daughter was begging me to feed her something. I went out and saw my neighbors around the fire - they had found some old pan and were frying corn bread. When I finally got my hands on some corn bread and took it to her, she could not swallow it."*

Adapting to new reality was hard. Makvala started to suffer from depression, anxiety and increasingly worsening diabetes. Several years ago, Makvala lost her job. With her daughters having moved away, she mostly stayed at home alone, dealing with lack of money and stress. Financial problems worsened after Makvala's husband also became unemployed. Makvala couldn't afford the expensive medicines she needs for the lifetime and became powerless to do anything herself.

When "Dafna" - a social enterprise of partnership "Agro-Kolkhida" appeared in Senaki, Makvala gave it a

try and succeeded. Despite her health issues, she is becoming more and more dynamic and is happy with her work: *"I was so glad that they called me, I never missed a training, I met everyone, got used to the situation and don't want to go anywhere else now."*

The increased income for her family relieved a lot of stress and gave chance to better treat her condition. Money problems are not rare in Senaki and while they weigh extra hard on people with medical problems they are problematic for everyone. Many jobless people become hopeless. Makvala mentions an example: *"In our settlement a poor woman decided to sell ice-cream, the children would follow her and ask their parents to buy one. The parents almost beat the poor woman and tried to kick her out because they couldn't afford ice-cream for their children. But that woman has nothing else to do. I see this all the time and sometimes I want to cry"*.

"Agro-Kolkhida" has become a hope for many women besides Makvala that have to provide for their families. Makvala thinks that enterprises like "Agro-Kolkhida" are crucial to get people employed, because a lot of them, especially IDP's in Senaki share similar stories and hardships. "Agro-Kolkhida" is one of the several social enterprises of CARE in Senaki that target people who are left out and most in need but have great potential to change their lives themselves.

As for Makvala, fortunately, with her salary, she doesn't have to depend on goodwill of others anymore. She can afford her medicines and save for her family:

*"I don't need anything fancy, but at least, I'm able to buy some things and also buy medicines, that's what I'm depending on and this work is my hope..."*

# The persistent prevail Darejan's story



Getting up at 6 every morning, doing housework and groceries, Darejan comes at the sewing enterprise "Gvirila" in a small town of Samtredia much earlier to prepare a sewing work for women who work here.

It's going to be an active and tiring day, but that's how Darejan lives. Darejan takes her life as it is, full of hardships, and never gives up.

Almost all of her time is committed to the people with special needs. It's not a wonder she is the leader of "Gvirila" and the head of the "Union of people with disabilities in Samtredia". Back in the 1990's, Darejan started her own enterprise and bought knitting machines for women with disabled children and health problems, which – not much later - were all destroyed by armed forces during the war. Not a single piece survived. The encouraging words she now gives to women are not just words, but stem from her own life. Hurtful experiences like this taught Darejan to fight. It makes you believe that disability is not a limitation.

## **"I'm fighting since childhood"**

Darejan was a child with special needs: she couldn't hear or speak till the age of 22 and had difficulties walking. No one believed her problems could be solved except Darejan. Being old enough she herself sought treatment while at the same time she was working to make her dreams come true: *"When I was in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, I moved to evening school and started sewing classes. When I was 19, I moved out. I started working and rented my own flat. I always tried to live independently"*.

Darejan says that her family's support was important to make her a fighter: *"My family never differentiated between healthy and disabled children. They never said, don't go there or don't do that"*. This spirit given to her at an early age made Darejan strong to overcome many drawbacks during her childhood and later life. *"Yes, I have been mocked and rejected, and at one moment, I was depressed that I couldn't normally walk and I shut myself off, but then I just decided to stop paying attention"*. She now encourages other people with similar problems to do the same.



**“Now that I have experience in my life, I want to make it possible for others”**

Darejan didn't give up when her grandchild was born mobility challenged. She sold her apartment to get her a medical treatment: *“Doctors were telling me that it wouldn't work, but I was trying, I was carrying her with my hands to school, she got education, now she can live independently”*.

Darejan helped many people live normal life, even the ones who seemed disabled and hope-

less. She remembers: *“I had two girls with mental disabilities, whom I taught how to sew and knit. They changed a lot and now live happily with families”*. When she started “The Union for people with disabilities in Samtredia”, Darejan often found medical help for desperate: *“I know some people whose life was saved with our effort, as we assisted them to get medical surgeries”*.

Even now, disabled persons often visit Darejan to get psychological help, like this young man: *“He would come and talk to me about his fears and emotions. I calm him down to tell that it's*

*in his head. He understands”*. With this, it's not surprising that the only advice Darejan has is: *“Be active, come out of your house, and don't give up”*. Who else than she knows that communication with people is important. Darejan also calls for others to help people with special needs change their mind and life. That's what she is doing.

**“Beginning is always hard but you must follow what you started to the end”**

“Gvirila”, a small enterprise supported by the program for women with disabilities is a fresh stage of Darejan's life. With financing this sewing enterprise, Darejan was given another chance to help women with special needs improve their lives. She's the mentor, instructor, teacher and friend for women. Her energy motivates women to work hard for their future.

“Gvirila” has brought new experiences for Darejan as well: *“I learned how to make patterns, which I didn't know before. Having a standardized work is completely different from what I was doing before”*. By coming here, not only she assists others, but also encourages herself to never stop, because if she does, *“I will get sick”*- as she says.

Darejan is happy that she has the opportunity to use her experience in “Gvirila”. The women learned fast and Darejan is proud of her efforts. The outcome makes Darejan forget her tiredness and begin new day with hopes of improving “Gvirila”.



**As she says, “I'm thinking how to make “Gvirila” stronger”. The start is always the hardest, but I know that I won't give up on work, we will have many good changes and it's going to improve.”**

## Handicrafts and **Kristina's** hopes



*Kristina is the newest member at "Chveni Sivrce", a handicrafts social enterprise in a small Georgian town in West Georgia. Kristina joined three months ago, and her transformation is visible for everyone, from women in enterprise to Kristina's neighbors and even herself. From roaming the streets and being self-conscious, Kristina now is dedicated to develop herself and contribute to the work of "Chveni Sivrce". It's not always easy to overcome developmental and psychological hurdles, but the work helps Kristina to be financially independent and find a meaning in her daily life.*

Kristina spends her day at the enterprise "Chveni Sivrce" in Senaki. The building of the enterprise stands in the garden, covered in green, full of beautiful handicrafts. Kristina feels calm and slowly forgets that she had a bad morning at home. Every day at "Chveni Sivrce", Kristina is dedicating her time to make handicrafts from felt. Being busy helps her to focus on positive things in her life.

Kristina's difficult childhood isn't pleasant to remember, and she prefers not to talk much about it. There was little support for Kristina which made it difficult to overcome developmental and psychological problems. That's why most of the time she was roaming in the streets, which people didn't approve. Kristina seemed difficult child for everyone. There was a lack of confidence and motivation. *"I couldn't make myself do something I wanted to achieve. My brain was always telling me: Kristina, you can't learn it, you can't do it. I thought I couldn't do anything anymore".*

Kristina's life took a sudden change when her neighbor told Kristina about a new social enterprise near her house. *"I*





*just went to have a look and the women there really made me feel good and were open to have me there.” Kristina started to attend the trainings and learned about other people with special needs and also about doing the handicrafts work. “I was very nervous and it was the first time I had to do something with my hands, but the teacher Matsatso was very patient and wanted to teach me everything. I am getting much better now and can make the handicraft pieces independently.” Kristina started to love her new job and friends. From now on, her interests and plans revolve around “Chveni Sivrce”. She says: “I gained friends here who give me advices. I feel part of the group. I’m motivated and want to study everything in the future, such as how to make pictures and flowers from felt”.*

Becoming part of “Chveni Sivrce” has made Kristina believe in herself. People also notice that she takes more care of herself and even started wearing earrings. Kristina now warns her sister not to go in the streets too much. Having something to hold on, she is waiting for a new day to come:

*“When it’s evening and I’m leaving, I’m dreaming when the morning comes to come here again”.*





## CARE's Social enterprises for disabled women in West Georgia

### DK-Kolga

A cooperative and fruit drying enterprise located in the village of Nosiri, in West Georgia. The cooperative consists of nine members of which four are women with special needs. The cooperative has a large strawberry production and offers different employment opportunities for non-member women. DK-Kolga plans to increase and diversify its current lines.

### Soplis Imedi

"Soplis Imedi" is a cooperative with 31 members in Senaki. The four women members are in charge of a new processing line on hazelnut packaging. Their buy in share into the cooperative ensures a stable income, besides their income generated from the packaging. The packaging department is one of the important directions of the cooperative.

### Gvirila

A sewing enterprise in Samtredia, West Georgia, employs 7 women with special needs. The enterprise produces different products such as uniforms, bad sheets, and medical robes. Darejan, the leader of the enterprise who is a great motivator for women in "Gvirila", also advocates the needs of people with special needs on local and central government level.



### Chveni Sivrcce

“Chveni Sivrcce” is located in Senaki, and produces handicrafts: felt scarfs and paintings, accessories and jewelries. Currently the enterprise employs 5 members, but they are planning to add one more. Doing handicrafts is an art-therapy that helps women with special needs overcome barriers in communication and connect with each other.

### “Agrokolkhida”

Laurel processing enterprise “Agrokolkhida” is located in Nosiri in Senaki. The enterprise employs 20 women of which 6 are with special needs. The leaders Tato and Giorgi have committed themselves to take a lead role in promoting equal opportunities in the region.

### Art-Samkaro

“Art-Samkaro” from Senaki has 8 members, and produces bamboo handicrafts: sofas, armchairs, barrels, beer cans, ashtrays, accessories for beverages and more.

### Tavtuki

.. is a bakery employing 12 people of which 6 have special needs. It is headed by an experienced lady. The bread and buns from TAVTUKI are distributed across the whole Samegrelo region.

### Megobroba

Megobroba (friendship) is an art café in Abasha, founded by a social worker and 6 women with special needs. Free wireless internet access and reading hall with bestsellers are available for all visitors. Poetry evenings and various events create comfortable environment for team work and social gatherings, especially for youth and local population from Abasha.

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