

Gender Relations and Conflict: Causes, Course, and Strategies

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I will try very briefly to talk about some experiences and hopes as well as challenges, which characterize contemporary situation in Georgia. I will use my experience both, as a leader of IDP self-created organisation – the Association of IDP Women, and as a member of the UNDP led project “New Approach to IDP Assistance”, dedicated to increase of self-reliance of IDPs and advocating their equal rights.

During its short history of independence Georgia experienced two severe military conflicts on its own territory. In result of these conflicts thousands people were killed from the both sides, hundreds thousands – exiled, and two regions – Abkhazia and South Ossetia - separated *de facto* from Georgia. As a result, around quarter of million people, mainly ethnic Georgians were displaced into Georgia proper.

Nowadays, about 42% of IDPs continue to live in communal centers – former public buildings such as hotels, hostels, kindergartens, shops, hospitals. The living conditions vary significantly according to the region and type of shelter, but generally are below any acceptable living standards. Other people live with relatives and friends, some succeeded in purchase of their own accommodation.

The main identified problems of the displaced population are related with poverty, lack of proper accommodation, high unemployment, health problems and social exclusion. Still, the peace process is frozen and the possibility of military escalation is not excluded completely.

As in many other conflicts, the first and main victims during the conflict were women and children. Analysing the role of women before and during the violent stage of the conflict, it is necessary to state that that time this role was quite passive. It can be explained by several reasons – as our surveys showed, women were not organised to participate in actions, which were not popular among majority of their ethnic group, they did not imagine the possibility of outbreak of violence, even the conflict in Nagorno Karabach already started, many of them were too dependent on patriotic opinions of their husbands, sons and other male relatives, and many simply were afraid of activism. It is not correct to say that women were not active in pre-conflict stage at all – but their activities (in Georgian part of population) more were directed to support of ex-President Zviad Gamsakhurdia, and in Abkhazian part of population to acting Chairman of Supreme Council of Abkhazia Mr. Ardzinba. In these actions women were quite active. Such type of activism was organized top-down, and the population more was involved in political discussions about restoration of Gamsakhurdia power, then reflected the most real thread – possible clash and conflict between different groups within society of Abkhazia.

It is also important that during those years civil society was not developed at all and women were not equipped with knowledge, understanding of situation and skills to resist. All this came later, when open phase of conflict already was frozen and when it was much more difficult to deal with the consequences of the conflict.

1. After the displacement, almost total depression among men forced women to start first their breadwinning activities – to save family, and then – start to think about future in more wide perspective. Learning from own experiences, women found that they need to protect their interests themselves. It is interesting that self-organising in IDP community started from women

– they were more willing to work as volunteers, they had enough education and expertise and they wanted to survive not only physically, but also psychologically. First women's groups were created almost immediately after the military actions stopped. If the first need was – how to survive, the second and third already were about development of children and possibility to re-establish links with women living in former places of origin. Conducted in 1995 two years after the conflict, survey named these three main concerns of IDP women, it's why the first programmes were organised exactly in psycho-social rehabilitation, informal education for children/youth and peace building activities.

2. It is possible to talk about several stages of development of women's initiatives: first stage – self-organised activities without clear strategic plan, mainly ad-hog, to cover immediate needs. But also on this stage such initiatives as peace camps for the children from divided parts of society took place and it was done by women's initiative – since 1996, the Association of IDP Women together with UN Volunteers had organised peace camps for Abkhazian, Georgian and Ossetian children, later other groups from the South Caucasian conflict parties – Armenian and Azerbaijani children joint to this initiative. The programme allowed to unite efforts of several NGOs from postconflict, confront zones to start peace education programmes in parallel regimes and to give children chance to improve things which were broken by adults. The participants were selected through the Peace Children's Magazine "White Crane" network.

On the next stage women's groups and organizations started to cooperate and to define goals already related with women development and, later, with gender equality. Here important to mention several women's leadership programmes, organised by AED, Harmony and other US programs, support for OSCE /ODHIR for organization of coalitions. Since 1999 the first regional women's network was organised with the support from IDEE/USIA. The network included 24 organisations working mainly in regions of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan and provide the opportunity to facilitate relations between Armenian and Azerbaijani women, to develop common curricula for training in democracy development, reconciliation and advocacy for peace. Important contribution was made by the Georgian network "Unity of Women for Peace", part of regional coalition "Unity for Peace", created with the support of UNIFEM.

At the third stage, different coalitions and groups started advocacy actions for promotion of gender equality and achievement of participation in decision making. The intention of IDP women was – somehow to achieve participation in official negotiations. The point is, to participate in official negotiations you need to keep certain position in state hierarchy. It leads to phomema when socially active women turned to NGOs as to the possible way to participate in dialogues with the other side of the conflict.

Several important surveys and studies were conducted on gender issue with the support from such institutions and HBF and OXFAM.

From 2001 UNIFEM started the implementation of regional project "Women for Conflict Prevention and Peace Building in the Southern Caucasus" that will end in 2006. Throughout its work the project managed to mobilize over 200 women's NGOs, women's groups and individual women in the three countries of South Caucasus in national women for peace Networks.

UNIFEM supported national women's network "Unity of Women for Peace" works in Georgia to achieve greater gender equality and sustainable peace with women participation. In the frames of the project women have carried out multiple people to people diplomacy initiatives bringing Georgian, Abkhaz and Ossetian women together to share their views regarding gender equality and peace-building. The Network actively uses UNSCR1325 and CEDAW in its advocacy work

The practice shows that the combination of discussions and training activities is the most successful during the bilateral and multilateral meetings, it gives the opportunity to discuss the issue of conflict, but also provides frames for this discussion and some remedies from other experiences.

Requirements of European Institutions, from one side, and pressure from NGOs from the other side, created good conditions for development of institutional mechanisms for gender equality and promotion of women's participation. UNDP started the project "Women in Politics", in the framework of which Consultative Council on Gender Equality was created under the Parliament of Georgia. Shortly, the State Commission also was created. With the support of UNDP, UNFPA and UNIFEM the joint working group of the Parliamentary Council and Governmental Commission for Gender Equality have elaborate Gender Equality Strategy of Georgia that consists of Gender Equality Concept to be adopted by the Parliament, National Plan of Action for Gender Equality along with Package of recommendations for the establishment of institutional mechanisms for gender equality to be adopted by the government of Georgia. The Concept it already submitted to the Parliament and undergoes hearings in the Parliamentary Committees. The debates around the Concept are heated It is expected to have severe discussions about this concept, as in Georgian Parliament only 9,6% are women (22 sits) . The Concept includes in proposed articles for political participation also Article 5.4 stated "Support for full and equal involvement of women and men in the processes of conflict regulation and peace building".

Is there a potential to implement this Article and where it is?

The peace education traditionally belongs to women's organizations. During number of years, the capacity of women's organizations and groups working in this issue, were increased through education and training, dialogue seminars and internships. Organisations such as EED, Conciliation Resources, Berghof Foundation, assisted to their partners to develop training curricula and manuals and to orgnaise informal education courses, trainings, bilateral and multilateral meetings among women and youth.

I would like to bring several examples about peacebuilding educational projects, organsied in Georgia youth and women's dialogue.

Under the Berghof Center for Conflict Management /Conciliation Resources aegis the Discussion Pack on Georgian-Abkhaz conflict was created by the group of Georgian and Abkhazian scientists. The Pack includes the exercises which analyse different aspects of the conflict from different lens. The student in Georgia proper and in Abkhazia in parallel work on this exercises trying to understand views and interests of the other side. After preparatory stage, they can meet and discuss in peace camps. Such youth dialogue has many problems, but also visible successes as the framework given by this manual, allows to structure discussions and to have civilized dialogue. In parallel, the participants have trainings in complementary topics.

Gender and Peace Education Manual is the joint initiative of three NGOs from Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, supported by UNIFEM. The training manual is preparing for youth aged 14-18 and includes chapters on Human Rights, Gender, Conflicts and their regulation, Peace Culture, Practical experiences of women and youth in peacebuilding in South Caucasus and practical tools for peacebuilding. This manual will be used in all three countries to have common regional approach to teaching peace, gender and activism.

Why youth? First, in modern military conflicts and wars basically suffers peaceful population, women, children and teenagers, old men. Second, young people of military age would be summoned to the combat field army and become the first victims or are compelled to commit violence. To prevent this, and to answer on challenges of populist slogans appreciating "Heroes" of war as the best samples of male society, we need to provide youth with alternative education

which should be based on non-violent ideology, but will use techniques which will be enough attractive for youth

Peace education through publications – to increase access of women living in remote areas, to education for peace, the quarterly Bulletin was arranged by the South Caucasian network, which disseminates the information about work of youth and women organizations and provide training materials for those who cannot personally participate in the trainings.

We think that in current environment **women's leadership** education is key to foster peace builders and to empower activists from the communities to participate in actions, to come to dialogue, to be involved in advocacy efforts. One of quite new forms of women's involvement and at the same time, education, became women's forums for peace – especially actively such forums are conducted by women's organizations in Imereti region. Women's forums assist to define women's role and place in the peace process, prepares recommendations, supports the involvement of new volunteers and supporters.

Work with political parties to force them to include the conflict issues in their agenda started not long ago, but already gives some fruits – some of oppositional parties already organized women's groups and started to develop agenda for gender equality. This work is conducted not only in Tbilisi, but also in regions, where the members of IDP subnetwork of **Women's Unity for Peace** are acting.

Among the IDPs is one category who are originally from the border region – the Gali district. They represent approximately 80 000 persons, and part of them seasonably return to Gali – to work their lands and to receive some income. Gali is famous for its fertile lands, and before the war this district feed whole Abkhazia.

The Russian peacekeepers, who monitor the situation in zone of security (12 km in each direction from *de facto* border) cannot provide real security and very often themselves are involved in smuggling and other crimes. In fact, people, living in Gali, are not real returnees as no one of conditions, which are necessary for secure and dignified return, are not realised there – but they are forced by circumstances to be in Gali to survive. There is a widely distributed stereotype that for women's return to postconflict zones is more save – for instance, these cases we can observe in Chechnya, when usually women were sent to get missing documents, to receive assistance and so on. Men are more often stopped for passport or other type of control. In Gali, where the border is guarded by Russian peacekeepers, women has more chances to pass freely – the assumption is that women can not participate in paramilitary groups. It is why very often exactly women are sent by families to work lands and to carry the harvest back. This is related with physical, psychological and moral risks for them. The health, particularly, psychological and reproductive health of women and young girls, are under the threat; political and civic participation of spontaneous returnees is very limited; the quality education is only a dream. Language issue continue to stay a problem in the zone of return, as Georgians in the Gali are oblige to study in Russian, which is not familiar language for them, which significantly decrease level and quality of education.

With the aim to implement 28 and 29 Articles of Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (Stating rights of IDPs for secure environment and full participation after return), number of NGOs started to work in the Gali district – assisting to build confidence between spontaneous returnees and rest of population, creating self-support groups from women, assisting to schools. Our Association supported the crisis center in low Gali, the most dangerous zone of return, where women are experiencing abnormal pressure and often become the victims of harassment and violence. We also conduct seminars in conflict management, reconciliation,

women's rights and gender equality. It is important to mention that topic of gender education included in training course, made very big impression on women and men and was specially requested to be conducted additionally,

Economical education with the provision of seed money for women IDPs and returnees to start new life is another tool of implementation of Guiding Principles, stating necessity of education for women and girls.

Support for the local reconciliation process is going through creation of local commissions of multicultural understanding, conduction of round tables and meetings, public events.

Psychological rehabilitation still is relevant, as majority of the programmes addressed IDPs were already completed. Rehabilitations centers, created by the IDPWA in Gori and Republic Hospital in Tbilisi, provide both opportunities - to prepare social workers and volunteers working with traumatized people, and to deal with traumatized children and women through medical and psychological assistance.

Inclusion of women as active participants of peace process is recommended by the **Resolution 1325**. In Georgia UN Observers mission is led by woman – one from three, who still are on the high positions within UN system (H.E. Ms. Tagliavini is a Special Representative of UN Secretary General to Georgian-Abkhaz conflict). Intensive study of Resolution was organised throughout the country, as in Georgia proper, as well in postconflict zones. Women learning Resolution were seeking the tools for real empowerment and inclusion not only at community level, but also in political negotiations.

MDGs provide another opportunity for women to be included and to extend gender perspective on the sphere of conflict transformation and management Unfortunately, till now MDGs were not very much practically exercised in Georgia, even there is a possibility to connect the implementation of Goal 3 with the Goal 1, which for Georgian context includes also social integration of displaced people and other victims of conflicts.

In 2005, the International Conference reflecting cooperation between UN and civil society for prevention of conflicts was organized. UNIFEM project “Women for prevention of Conflicts and building stable peace in South Caucasus” facilitated preparation of special package of recommendations, concerning increasing of women's role in conflict regulation at different level. Majority of these recommendations were accepted and included in the final recommendations.

Talking about possibilities to promote gender-sensitive conflict resolution, it is necessary to look on this from different perspectives:

Governmental level

- -strengthening institutional mechanisms
- Realisation of obligations on MDGs
- Implementation of recommendations, provided by the Gender Equality Council and State Commission
- Commitment from all involved state actors not to use force for the conflict resolution
- Implementation of Resolution 1325, including appointment of Special Representatives on Peace process, use of existing resources of women's networks and their experience in cooperation across the borders
- Inclusion of peace education in school curricula

Support from international organisations/foundations

- Dissemination of proper experience among women's organisations.

- Support for public debates on the issue of gender dimension of conflicts
- Internships and exchanges, organisation of women' peacebuilders programmes
- Lobbying with UN, European institutions and own governments of issue of only peaceful solution of existing conflicts and inclusion of women in peace negotiations and decision making
- Financial support of proper initiatives

- **By NGOs and women's groups:**
- To continue educational work among women and youth; to involve men on our side
- To advocate only for peaceful solution- to spread information among interested actors within Georgia and abroad and to find allies
- To use newly created institutional mechanisms for promotion of women's participation in solution of conflicts
- To use international mechanisms such as MDG, Beijing +10, Resolution 1325, and any other relevant documents for advocacy and concrete actions; to provide recommendations to IO and Governments
- To create and widely use new educational materials to confront challenges of pseudo-patriotism and to spread the concepts of non-violence, gender equality and tolerance.

Thank you for your attention.