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**GEORGIA**

## FIRST PERSON

# Community Work Motivates a Student

**Youth groups create ownership and interest in community service**



Photo: Sopo Titvinidze, Urban Institute

***“We, the young people, are identifying local problems and reporting the results to city officials,” said Rezo. “We feel useful, we believe that we can make changes.”***

In 2003, a young high school student from Gori, an economically depressed Georgian city 50 kilometers outside the capital, was looking toward a future of uncertainty.

“Every day was the same: school and then homework,” says 18-year-old Rezo Nadiradze. “Then, one day, on my way home from school, I met young people in the city park. They were writing something and observing the park area. Someone asked me if I wanted to help. I agreed happily — I had found the activity I was looking for.”

Rezo had found a USAID-sponsored project that seeks to get young people involved in local government activities. Youth groups have been established in 10 Georgian cities to rate the quality of city services, conduct citizen surveys and report the results to City Hall.

Gori’s youth group, made up of 40 high school and university students, evaluated the city’s park maintenance, garbage collection and street cleaning services. The results of their first survey prompted the city to publish a garbage collection schedule for the first time. Ten months later, the proportion of citizens who knew when their garbage was picked up increased from a quarter to more than half. The youth group also found that satisfaction with garbage service increased from 26 percent to 43 percent.

“We, the young people, are identifying local problems and reporting the results to city officials,” said Rezo. “We feel useful, we believe that we can make changes.”

Today, Rezo Nadiradze is a high-school graduate and works as a reporter for a regional newspaper — a career he never considered before becoming involved with the Gori youth group.