

Greenhouses Build Resilience in Post-War Georgia

“After the 2008 war, the Russians took 50 hectares of our village land. Greenhouses were our only solution.” –Merab Shavadze



Merab Shavadze stands outside his house along the Administrative Boundary Line with South Ossetia.
Nina Prieur, USAID

Merab Shavadze and his son, Giorgi, live along the Administrative Boundary Line (ABL) with South Ossetia, an area that has experienced some of the most intense shocks in Georgia’s recent history. The 2008 war with Russia dislocated people from their homes, tore apart families and neighbors, and ravaged the economy. Today, 20 percent of Georgia’s territory is under Russian occupation, and people living along the ABLs with South Ossetia and Abkhazia continue to face significant challenges.

USAID works with people throughout Georgia to develop the resiliency to adapt and persevere in the face of such adversity. We support farmers in particular because over half the country’s population works in agriculture, yet it constitutes only 9% of Georgia’s GDP.

In 2015, the Shavadze family received USAID support to establish a 240 square meter greenhouse. “We wrote a grant proposal,” Giorgi explains, “and in 2015, USAID gave us the greenhouse kit, seedlings, a drip system, everything we needed. We were up and running in several weeks.” The Shavadzes’ greenhouse is one of 19 demonstration plots that USAID helped farmers establish along the ABL with the occupied

territory of South Ossetia as part of the New Economic Opportunities Initiative (NEO), implemented by Chemonics. The project provided farmers with greenhouse kits, machinery, and technical assistance.

Why greenhouses? “We are able to harvest when prices are higher and the market has more demands,” Giorgi notes. Until recently, most farmers in Georgia lacked the technology needed to produce certain vegetables more than once a year, limiting their ability to capitalize on off-season opportunities to sell their products. Greenhouses can change that by facilitating multiple growing seasons.

In their first season, the Shavadzes produced 4,000 kg of tomatoes, generating revenues of around 2,000 USD. When people in their village and the surrounding area saw the Shavadzes’ success, they, too, started their own greenhouse businesses. The Shavadzes and their neighbors then worked with USAID to form Megobroba, a cooperative where



Giorgi Shavadze set up his first greenhouse in 2015 with USAID assistance.
Nina Prieur, USAID

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The Shavadze family has grown their greenhouse farm from 240 to 700 square meters.
Vladimer Valishvili

farmers share knowledge and work together to overcome obstacles. In total, USAID NEO supported farmers throughout Georgia to establish 22 cooperatives and associations. The project then provided the groups with machinery, trainings and consultations, and information about financing.

The Shavadzes and other co-op members have since expanded their operations. With the help of a low interest loan, the Shavadzes have grown their greenhouse vegetable farm from 240 to 700 square meters where they forecast 12,000 USD in revenue this season. Other greenhouse farmers have followed suit, borrowing

approximately 70,000 USD last year. The Shavadzes are using USAID assistance not only to improve their own lives and livelihoods, but by serving as role models in their community, they are also strengthening the economy of their village and the surrounding area.

USAID's new Zrda activity, which means "growth" in Georgian, will build on past efforts by developing and marketing greenhouse kits to local farmers. Zrda Chief of Party Brian King notes, "We're also hoping to demonstrate the viability of this model to the Georgian government so that such an approach can be adopted by the Ministry of Agriculture for more widespread promotion of the technology, not only in ABL communities but throughout the rest of Georgia, as well. Widespread adoption of greenhouse technology will allow Georgian farmers to meet current demand of the domestic market, reducing reliance on imports, while also building towards new export opportunities in the region and in Europe."



The Shavadze family forecasts 12,000 in revenue this season from their newly expanded vegetable greenhouse farm.
Nina Prieur, USAID

The New Economic Opportunities Initiative (2011-2015) raised incomes, reduced poverty levels, and improved food security for over 80,000 rural households in Georgia. The project provided community-level economic opportunities and support for vulnerable individuals and households. Results included: 5,578 new agriculture jobs, increased incomes of 1,360 vulnerable households by an average of 285 percent, 38,447 farmers trained, and 6,538 micro-enterprises established or expanded.

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