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GEORGIA

SUCCESS STORY

Engaging Women on Civic Involvement

Outreach methods seen during West Virginia trip inspires social activist



Photo: Marina Modebadze

The editorial board and volunteers of the political newspaper *Meskheti Express*, including Marina Modebadze (a founder and current member of its editorial board, seated on chair, far left), are raising interest in civic issues in Georgia's Samtskhe-Javakheti region.

A participant in a study tour to the United States on non-governmental organization development, Marina Modebadze is now at the forefront of providing Georgian women with information about their role in society.

Telling Our Story
U.S. Agency for International Development
Washington, DC 20523-1000
<http://stories.usaid.gov>

Marina Modebadze, chair of the non-governmental organization Society of Women Democrats, has long been concerned about the lack of women's involvement in Samtskhe-Javakheti region's politics and society. She felt that women in the region were often not aware of their civil rights and responsibilities. Through her involvement with a USAID study tour on non-governmental organization development, Modebadze is now at the forefront of providing the region's women with information about their role in society.

During her three-week visit to West Virginia, Modebadze saw young students on the streets in matching T-shirts talking to people about civil society-related issues. This model of youth taking an active role inspired Modebadze to include youth from the organization Women's Hope in her next project, launching a political newspaper.

In 2007, Women's Hope began publishing *Meskheti Express*. The eight-page monthly newspaper includes two pages dedicated exclusively to local women's issues. Those pages feature interviews with women leaders, articles about trafficking and domestic violence, and information about equality-related issues.

The newspaper is also a watchdog on local government, publishing information about government expenditures and monitoring government activities. Youth volunteers from Women's Hope go out in groups to distribute the newspaper. The volunteers wear clothing related to the organization and talk with people they meet about the organization and its goals.

The first run of the paper was a success — all 400 copies were sold within a few days. Since then, an additional 10 editions have been published. Half of each 500-copy run is distributed free of charge thanks to the help of youth volunteers. The newspaper and its distribution scheme give young women opportunities to get involved in civil society while providing necessary information about local women's issues and government activities.