

Project Evaluation Report from Implementer to Post

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Basic information	
Project Title:	Short-term emergency project intervention in Georgia, Abkhazia, to address and mitigate secondary impacts of C19
Name of implementing organisation/s:	Peaceful Change initiative (UK) IDP Women's Association "Consent", Asarkia
Country/ies – region/s covered:	19 communities in Georgia, Abkhazia
Total length of the Project (mm/yy - mm/yy)	August 2020 – December 2020 (including no-cost extension)
Period covered by this report (mm/yy - mm/yy)	August 2020 – December 2020 (including no-cost extension)

1. Context update

The project took place in a volatile context of significant changes in both Tbilisi-administered Georgia (TAT) and Abkhazia. Significant features were:

- Rapid acceleration in the number of COVID-19 cases, hospitalisations and deaths, leading to extensive restrictions on movement, gatherings and – most significantly for the project – school closures. By the final weeks of the project, all schools in the target area had been closed with dates for re-opening not fully confirmed. The project team reoriented its work from *building a safe environment for school to remote education*.
- Communities were not equally impacted by the pandemic. The project worked in isolated communities that were less exposed but nevertheless required to follow national guidelines, which increased the necessity for the team to counter disinformation that the pandemic was 'fake'
- Parliamentary election in Georgia at the end of October provided an unhelpful context for policy discussions and were disruptive to activities in some communities. Concerns surrounding the participation of school teachers in local electoral commissions did not emerge, however.
- The outbreak of war in Nagorny Karabakh (NK) in September was a preoccupation for the partners and their close associates, to the extent that they are part of a broader peacebuilding community in the South Caucasus. Civil society in Abkhazia and TAT Georgia hold opposite opinions on the resolution of the NK conflict, which spilled out into the public sphere in this time.
- In the final month of the project, the partner in Abkhazia experienced significant practical challenges owing to a general deterioration of service infrastructure including extended water and power cuts. These difficulties come in the context of increased leverage by the Russian Federation over Abkhazia and an apparent trend for the authorities in Abkhazia to impose restrictions on the work of NGOs (especially those with international partners).

2. Evaluation of project

The project's material support to the target communities of equipment necessary to meet government requirements for safe schooling, sometimes tackling long-term underlying issues in schools where, for example, running water was not available (in the context of the pandemic, these schools would not have opened if assistance had not been provided).

The project team's work to digest and re-formulate official rules and advice on managing the pandemic made essential information more significantly more accessible to teachers, parents and students than the multi-page documents issued by official bodies. These were reprinted at minimal cost to reach (at least five) additional communities. Informational work was further supported by the partners' contact with focal points in each community, passing on advice on how to adapt to changes in a fluid context. In many communities, groups gathered around these focal points were effective in mobilising people to respond to events and highlighted the importance of community-based action.

Project partners conducted ad hoc communities surveys to understand whether the work contributed to the confidence of parents that education was not excessively compromised because of the pandemic. While the evaluation found that the direct support received from the project was appreciated, it was not sufficient to build trust towards education as a whole. In Georgia, this was influenced by the ad hoc way in which the government was perceived to respond. In Abkhazia, the partner referred to a complete absence of "a foundation on which others can build".

The research in TAT Georgia highlighted existing institutions and practices helpful to manage the pandemic but are which are underutilised. Evidence developed by the project provides a promising foundation for an advocacy agenda to modernise education, re-energise parent-teacher committees, etc. In Abkhazia, the project partner raised its credibility with the authorities, building its stature for future advocacy.

3. Challenges and lessons learnt

- A key underlying assumption – that the authorities would have made good use of the summer period to prepare for an autumn wave of infections – proved to be incorrect. Neither of the authorities had prepared their guidelines for the reopening of schools by the start of the academic year and supplementary guidelines were constantly being issued right up until the spread of infection forced a complete closure of all schools. While this dynamic made the work of the project more valuable, it was severely undermined the team's ability to have an organized approach to meeting formal requirements, addressing community needs, etc. PCi and partners will draw lessons about how contingencies can be better planned for when a project's design specifically aims to support the government's approach.
- In the early phase of the project, school closures were ad hoc based on detected cases of COVID-19. This hampered planning of visits over a large project area. PCi allowed itself to be partner-led in terms of selection of target communities. In future, PCi may be more firm in requesting a narrowing of target areas in a project of such a short duration.
- A number of institutions exist – especially in Georgia – that are relevant to the management of COVID-19, and these were not on the project team's radar at the start of the project. The project team's mapping at the beginning focused on the support given by international organisations. PCi will be paying greater attention to lesser-known national institutions in the future.

4. Assessing monitoring efforts

The project team (with both partners) held weekly team meetings to reflect on the context, the progress of activities and to discuss necessary adaptations. These are all documented, allowing on the team to reflect on the development of the project and draw lessons learned. In the context of extreme turbulence over the implementation period, these meetings took on an essential role for the partners to provide moral support to one another (and contributed to strong relationship building).

Additional accompaniment was provided for the research, with additional meetings held to develop the questionnaires and work with the data.

PCi required partners to provide meeting notes on key meetings, separate activity reports on each individual activity (trainings, workshops), and to hold logs of discussions with focal points or other key stakeholders (peer organisations working in the same area). In the rapidly changing context, partners struggled to meet these requirements in a timely way and many monitoring formats were submitted long after the end of the project. While these could not have been used to contribute to project adaptation, they form a useful information base to reflect on the way the work was conducted.

Meeting notes, activity reports and logs noted the number of men and women engaged in the activity. Since these were submitted late this information could not be used in a systematic way to adapt programming in response to gender-sensitive monitoring (though this may not have been realistic, in any case, for a project of

this duration). Gender considerations were part of the weekly calls, so all members of the project team were aware of gender balance with respect to engagement in the project. As expected, women were significantly overrepresented in the activities (trainings and local meetings), which the project team considers to be appropriate given the additional burden placed on women by school lockdowns.

The project research tracked the responses of men and women and was integrated into the analysis of data for the evidence base for advocacy.

M and E was part of the job description of all staff. While it is difficult to be specific on how much time personnel time was devoted to this, the project was very well documented in a way that would allow an external evaluator – for example – to understand the progress of events and the nature of activities held.

5. Assessing evaluation activities

Partners conducted ad hoc surveys in 12 of the 19 communities (6 in TAT Georgia, 6 in Abkhazia) to assess outcome-level questions about whether the activities contributed to parents' confidence that children's education wasn't excessively compromised by the pandemic. The restrictions in place at this time made it more difficult than had been originally planned.

No external evaluation had been planned.

6. Gender and conflict sensitivity appraisal

Both partner organisations have a strong focus on women's empowerment. This is an essential part of their working method and may have contributed to the fact that activities were dominated by women. The field of education is also dominated by women. In all target schools but two (one in Georgia, one Abkhazia) the school directors participating in the project were also female. Significantly, all of the parents participating in the activities were female, and the project may have missed an opportunity to consider strategies to engage more male parents. This would require longer-term strategies, but could have been started under this project.

While there were no express gender equality and women's empowerment objectives for this project, the project contributed to lessening the burden on women, who take on the majority of responsibility for child care:

- Had the re-equipped schools not opened at the start of the year, the burden would have fallen on women in the household.
- The support provided by psychologists and trainers through the project activities helped to manage the stresses of the pandemic.

Additionally, the research findings provide an evidence base for advocacy on the need for more institutional support for women and about the importance of women's engagement in public life and decision making.

The project team managed a conflict-sensitivity interactions matrix, which informed discussions at the weekly call and was partially reviewed at the monthly board meeting with the donor. The matrix was useful for including a series of activities that mitigated potential tension such as:

- The project team mapped similar initiatives at an early stage to ensure the project was not leading to unhealthy competition between projects or disrupting the work of others.
- The project team looked for opportunities to multiply the impact of their work (reprinting COVID19-preparedness information) to neighbouring communities in order to minimise a sense that some communities were receiving preferential treatment.

The project period coincided with the most accelerated spread of COVID-19, which de-prioritised cross-conflict considerations in the project. The project team discussed situations at the administrative border lines, but the environment did not allow the team to look into elaborating strategies for conflict-transformative action.

7. Assessment of risk management

See Question 4. PCi should have anticipated the risk that the authorities would not manage to prepare a clear approach and appropriate guidelines for managing COVID-19 in time for the restart of the school year. This was not in the risk-management matrix and was managed in an ad hoc way. As stated earlier, the relative

disarray in government communication actually provided an opportunity for the implementing partners to demonstrate the value of the project to the target communities. However, anticipating this at the project design stage would have allowed a more systematic approach.

The risk matrix listed separately risk related to COVID restrictions, political tensions, and the election campaigning period and offered proposed mitigating strategies. While each of these challenges could be managed separately, in reality it was the combination of all of these together that provide created the greatest obstacles. This experience provides some useful reflection on how risk matrices might be tackled in the future (perhaps more akin to scenario planning rather than individualized risks).

Linked to the above, the risk matrix may not have anticipated the full range of options deployed by authorities with respect to movement/meeting restrictions. The matrix assumed that something would be either allowed or not, whereas in fact the situation was extremely fluid – especially in the first half of the project where identified contagion led to rapid closures that disrupted programming. Considering such a scenario at the outset may have helped to forward planning.

8. Sustainability appraisal

This was designed as a three-month project to meet immediate needs related to the re-opening of schools at a crucial time in the pandemic and responding to needs in that period. In the case of three schools, the project had the opportunity to address more underlying issues for schools in the provision of running water, which adds long-term quality to the school's environment.

The project produced separate analytical documents on the underlying needs of the target communities, which constitute and advocacy base to treat these issues in the future. The TAT Georgia report is held by Consent, which is present on a number of Government-of-Georgia working groups on relevant issues, and the work is expected to play an important role in their ongoing advocacy. In Abkhazia, the opportunities for advocacy may be more restricted because of the way their systems were overwhelmed and it was difficult to identify clear foundations from which to build. However, the work did raise the stature of the partner organization and its associates who worked on the research as experts who are able to work constructively with the authorities. PCI has been in touch with international actors with findings drawn from the research with a view to identifying entry points for advocating on the issues that have been revealed. The donor has helped to make valuable connections in this respect.

The project partners had not worked together before. The intensity of communications over the lifetime of the partnership meant that they built strong relations based on an understanding of one another's approaches and genuine empathy about how their communities coped during a time of high volatility and fear.

9. Appraisal of your communication activities

The project's approach to visibility focused on building the stature of the implementing partners in the target communities, prioritising this over other parts areas of visibility.

Material support in Georgia carried stickers indicating UK support. As a result, all of the participants were aware of UK funding for this initiative. Wider attempts to communicate about the activities were limited to small entries on the partners' and PCI's website.

<https://www.facebook.com/IDPWAConsent/posts/3811467188866053>

<https://peacefulchange.org/pci-supports-isolated-communities-in-georgia-abkhazia-to-mitigate-covid-19-impact/>


In addition, the partner in Georgia commissioned two radio programmes on COVID-19, which were broadcast and available on the internet.

<https://www.radioatinati.ge/r-e-k-l-a-m-a/article/74458--ovid-19-.html>

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=852191582201086>

In Abkhazia, the partner was part of civil-society initiatives to bring attention to COVID-19, which included participation in televised discussions.

10. Review of Finances and Value for money			
Original Total Budget for the financial year covered by this report (£):	69 680	Actual amount spent for the financial year/s covered by this report (£):	68 417
Overall how effective was your financial management and how has the project demonstrated value-for-money? What evidence is there to support that (for instance, referring to the variance between original budget and actual expenditure)?			
What challenges or opportunities did you face during implementation regarding finances? What would you do differently next time?			

Signature	
Name	Anthony Foreman
Position	Europe and South Caucasus Programme Manager
Date	03-February-2021

Now submit this form to your contact at the British Embassy to complete the final section:

Project Officer Comments	
Having read this report are you satisfied this is a fair and accurate description of project's achievements (or the period that this report covers)? Why/why not?	
Do you believe the project was successful? Why?	
What are the key lessons that you've learnt by working with this implementer?	
Please provide some feedback on visibility of activities conducted during reporting period	
Comment on risks, including what steps you have taken to manage them; and whether you have escalated risks to the Programme manager	
In case if the implementer is interested in applying for more funding in next FY, explain any major concerns that you might have	
Has this report been discussed at the Post Programme Board?	

Signature.....
 Name.....
 Position.....
 Post.....
 Date.....

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