



# Study on Women's Participation

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# Women's Participation in Community Development – Experience and Challenges in Four Regions of Georgia

## Introduction

Community development is one of the aspects of civil society building and economic development in Georgia. International as well as local non-governmental organizations maintain their interventions in this field. According to experts, achievements as well as shortcomings are featuring these interventions (Losaberidze, 2012).

One of the problems mentioned in relation to community mobilization is linked to women's participation in the process. Indirectly this observation is confirmed through research that assesses engagement of rural women in state supported programs. According to the findings of one of such studies, women participation in these programs is low and they are usually represented in small-scale projects; moreover, active engagement of women in public affairs are disapproved in rural settlements (Sapari, 2017).

Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development (CIPDD) has been implementing rural community development projects in cooperation with its regional partners. Experience gained, triggered CIPDD to explore causes of lack of women's engagement in community development projects. CIPDD commissioned the qualitative study with the participation of rural women and practitioners working on gender issues in four regions of Georgia.

The study revealed two sets of factors that hinder women's participation. The first group combines economic factors such as poverty, lack of monetary income, material dependence on men. Lack of material resources pushes women to dedicate more time and energy to the fulfilment of daily household duties. Thus, they are left without the possibility (resource) to engage in community affairs. Also, when facing poverty, problems facing entire community are prioritized rather than those specific to women.

The second group combines cultural factors. Partly it is linked to the perception on what are "women's responsibilities" – household duties that are solely assigned to women. One would assume that more balanced allocation of responsibilities at home might have positive effect on women's participation in public affairs. Also, the perception of public affairs as "men's domain" also plays an important role. In few cases, women's engagement in community work are often disapproved; moreover, compared to men, their opinions are less valued and appreciated.

Influence of above-mentioned factors varies among regions as well as within the region. Based on the analysis of interviews, struggle to preserve traditional gendered roles is present in rural households. Sustainability of these traditional roles are challenged by the increase of dependence on monetary income. On the one hand, search for monetary income pushes men to transfer significant part of household duties onto women that increases possibilities of resistance among women. On the other hand, raises opportunities for women to secure monetary income leading to revision of gender roles.

The outcome of this struggle is partly determined by the distribution of capital in the community and within the household. The term capital is used with its broadest definition combining economic, cultural (educational qualifications) and social (network of connections) capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Women with sufficient capital manage to have higher engagement in community life. Thus, expanding the capital under their disposal,

women can more actively participate in community development process. Women, interviewed during the study, confirmed that they need the partnership with and support from non-governmental organizations in achieving this objective.

## Methodology

The qualitative study was conducted in four regions of Georgia: Adjara, Samtskhe-Javakheti, Kvemo Kartli and Shida Kartli. In total 71 in-depth interviews were conducted including 20 in Adjara, 12 in Shida Kartli, 13 in Kvemo Kartli and 26 in Samtskhe-Javakheti. Respondents were representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), employees of Municipality Women's Rooms, rural residents and women engaged in agriculture work. In regions with densely populated ethnic minorities, respondents were representing both major ethnic groups. Interviews were conducted by the members of local NGOs.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, number of interviews were conducted via phone. In many cases it had negative effect on the quality of interviews as respondents gave short and simple answers. In addition, some interviews were observed by men that affected openness and sincerity of participants. There was certain vagueness concerning transcripts of some interviews whether they managed to fully capture the narrative of respondents as they formulated it (word by word) or just presented the summary of the statements made. Some of the interviewers demonstrated high standards of professionalism during the interviews. But the study showed that there is a need for enhancing human resources in this field among regional NGOs.

Transcripts were analyzed by the author of the report on the final stage of the research. Desk study of literature capturing experience of other countries and international organizations in relation to the research topic was also conducted. Few recommendations were drafted based on the literature review. Also, theoretical framework was developed that can guide researchers and practitioners in problem analysis and designing appropriate interventions.

## Adjara

### *Challenges of women participation – Three interpretations*

Analysis of interviews suggest three interpretations on the issue of women's participation. According to the first interpretation, gender inequality is a relatively serious problem in Adjara. It is mainly observed in communities with strong traditional values. According to this interpretation, the problem is manifested in the lack of women's participation in community affairs, child (early-teen) marriages and women's economic dependence on men. Study participants name traditions as the main cause of the problem. Respondents list traditional and stereotypical perceptions as impediments to women's participation. The existing socio-cultural environment questions and disapproves women's participation in public agenda setting. Even women are quite skeptical toward the future in this regard.

*“There are older women, who say that no one asks our opinion and it is not a woman's job to solve that issue. This is mainly because of the mindset”.*

When discussing the options for overcoming the problem, awareness raising and educational activities are believed to be able to play major role in challenging traditional attitudes.

According to the second interpretation, participation of women in public affairs is not welcomed. Women empowerment strategy is linked to their economic empowerment. According to this interpretation, participation of women in public affairs must be limited to provision of recommendations and sharing unique knowledge of women to men. Engagement of women in public activities is believed to be something shameful.

*“I feel uncomfortable [ashamed] to go to the municipality administrative building five times a day. My ethical and moral beliefs do not allow me to do that. To explain it in my words, I am reserved to go to the administrative building on daily basis. So that no one can offend us”.*

Participation of women in public life is disapproved not only by majority men but older women as well.

The third interpretation is more nuanced. It is based on the recognition of importance of both traditional values and the need for increased participation of women. While distinction between public and private spaces are strictly defined in the other two interpretations, here the borderline is more flexible and allows combination of “traditional” and “modern” values.

### ***Participation of women – examples and problems***

Study participants often link lack of women's participation to problems of women's employment. They argue that unemployment (employment is assumed to be considered a job with monetary income) is one of the causes of unequal treatment of women. The major part of monetary income of the household is generated by men. Also, engagement in community life is considered as a “men's job” by the society.

*“What a man can do, can never be delivered by a woman” (a woman respondent).*

*“Women are not participating in problem solving process. There is no initiative group in the village where women can participate. Here, we, women are doing household work, if we work, it's in a school with children. Village problems should be solved by men. We do not have time for that”.*

The problem of economic dependence is more severe in cases of women that are victim of domestic abuse. According to one of the respondents, this practice is quite common in the region. Women that are victims of domestic abuse usually stay with the offender due to the absence of an income.

*“They are mainly abused by husbands, brothers and fathers. They do not address to Women's Room with this problem, we only provide psychological support, say, when they want to share their stories, ideas. Physically [practically] we can do nothing. What advise can we give? Leave the family? Where to go? The main problem is economic situation”.*

Women participate in the general meetings of the settlement – one of the civic participation mechanisms defined by the Local Self Government Code. But their attendance of these meetings as well as the level of their participation is defined by men. According to one of the participants of the study, “invitation of women to these meetings is rather symbolic”. They are allowed to express themselves only by the end of the meeting, when decisions are already made, and their modification is practically impossible. As a rule, in case of discussions, opinions made by men are more valued than those made by women.

Respondents presented two aspects that explain reservations of women to put forward their initiatives: 1) perception on gender roles – community problems must be solved by men; and 2) women do not have enough competence to solve problems.

Scheduling general assembly meetings during unfavorable hours is also an additional impediment. Thus, community activism is often considered as mere simulation and waste of time by women.

*“Women are invited to these meetings, but they do not attend, when I asked why they do not come, almost all answered that “there is no point to our participation”, “no one will listen to us, anyways”, “in the end it will be decided as men want”. Village general assemblies are attended by 2-3 women. As there is no balance insured, they do not engage”.*

NGOs and Municipality Women's Rooms conduct awareness rising and educational activities to address gender inequality including trainings, movie screenings and presentations of stories of “successful” women.

According to one of the practitioners working on gender issues, often women, including “active” women, do not attend these activities as they have no expectations that something tangible will be achieved. Also, part of women who participated in the study highlight that they have heard about the work of NGOs and Women’s Rooms, though had no direct contact with them.

Often women are reserved to be active as they do not see opportunities for securing support for their ideas. The problem is not only the dominance of men, but other inequalities present within the community. According to one of the respondents: “in every community there are 2-3 men whose opinions are predominantly considered”. There are diverse approaches toward existing problems among village population. One could assume that these diversities have negative affect on participation of women and their establishment as an interest group. The list of problems generated during trainings indicate that priorities indicated by men are often different from those developed by women.

Positive attitudes toward participation of women is observed not only among practitioners working on gender issues. Part of women living in rural areas who participated in the study argued that women, with their knowledge and different opinions, can make significant contributions and thus, it is necessary to facilitate their active engagement in public affairs. Number of respondents expressed concern that NGOs often only invite men to their trainings and other activities. They ask for more invitations and selection of more favorable time and place for these activities.

Organization of women’s initiative groups is also present in the region. Similar group was organized in Shuakhevi to address issues related to the construction of hydro power plants. One of the study participants mentioned that though the group did not manage to achieve significant results, it facilitated women becoming more active. In addition, women are presented in leading positions in few other communities, that is assessed as “having extremely positive effect on community development” according to the study participant.

The study participants provide other positive examples of women participation in public affairs. For instance, initiative group composed by women managed to solve the problem faced by the local kindergarten in one of the villages. In another community women successfully advocated for their favorable decision in a general assembly.

A group of active women can be spotted in almost all villages. Usually they are teachers and young women actively involved in public life.

*“There are enough young parents that actively go to school, participate in various activities. They are not restrained by their husbands, even if the husband is a mullah”.*

Experience of participation in agenda-setting is accumulated among women that have cooperated with various organizations. Analysis of the interviews indicate that active participation of women and acceptance of this participation by a community, is linked to the appreciation of knowledge and experience.

Few women who participated in the study mentioned that solving community problems is not a “woman’s job” and they already have enough responsibilities at home. This opinion is a norm for them as well as a “reality”. They believe that it is the duty of a woman to support and share information or advise to a man.

*“All households have a head who speaks up at the meetings and women members of this family have to agree”.*

They also argue that men have no difficulties to listen to women and consider their opinions. Though, it is noteworthy that these respondents also highlight the need for trainings and economic empowerment of women. One may assume, that with this they express that they have no objections against new initiatives and consider them as an opportunity to accumulate new capital.

The study participants also argue that women are more actively participating in economy or are motivated to engage. According to them, women’s participation in economic activities is more acceptable for local communities than in public affairs.

### ***Options to address the problem***

Various options for addressing the problem were named during the study. Educational activities including trainings, and dissemination of information/educational materials are the most often named solutions. It is important to facilitate changes in the mindset that is named as the major impediment in mountainous Adjara. According to the study participants, “educated women are more active”.

Presence of a group of active women was observed in all targeted municipalities that are motivated to participate in community development process. It is necessary to empower members of these groups with relevant skills and knowledge, increase their access to internet and facilitate establishment of targeted social networks.

The need for strengthening professional education system is also highlighted. The study participants argue that young women fail to attain education due to the early marriages or low quality of education accessible that creates an important impediment in achieving gender equality.

The study participants consider women's economic empowerment, through facilitating their employment or supporting their businesses, as an important factor that will create opportunities for them to have an independent source of monetary income. According to one of the participants, NGOs have already initiated projects in this direction. NGOs/funds are implementing projects that support businesses led by women. But these initiatives are considered “insufficient”. Women are also active in managing guesthouses. Many respondents participating in the study expressed desire to start own business.

The study participants believe that participation of women must be supported by the government as well. The government should encourage women to engage in public and political affairs.

The precondition to addressing the problems faced by women is allocation of an autonomous space for them. Women mainly interact with each other in private settings (in the neighborhood) or when fulfilling household duties (for example collecting water, driving cattle in the mornings). Community problems are discussed during these meetings but have no effect on decisions made on a village level. Some women respondents even mentioned that only private matters are discussed during these encounters.

### ***Recommendations***

The problems listed by the study participants in Adjara are similar as well as different from those named in the other targeted regions. It should also be mentioned that the impact of the traditional culture on gender equality and women's activism calls for more detailed discussions with the participation of historians and ethnographers. The discussions should focus on specific characteristics of local culture and participants should try to avoid idealization of local traditions as well as introduction or promotion of “modernist” myths.

Two interpretations presented above set relatively strict borderlines between private and public spaces. Traditionalist interpretation supports limiting women's domain to private one, while “liberal” interpretation considers lack of women participation in public life as a problem. Alternative – feminist approach calls for revision and adjustment of these borderlines. For instance, more discussions should be organized around the contribution women are making or can make to the welfare of their families and communities.

Part of women respondents living in rural areas set strict borderlines between women's economic empowerment and increase of their role in public affairs. There is a need of more effective engagement of gender activists in this process and provision of explanations how these two aspects of participation are interlinked.

Respondents also indicate that there is a strong appreciation for knowledge and education in local communities. This aspect of local culture should be utilized in the initiatives aimed at increasing participation of women.



## **Samtskhe-Javakheti**

### ***Two interpretations of participation***

Interviews conducted in Samtskhe-Javakheti illustrate that there are two interpretations of problems related to participation of women in the region. According to the first, women restrain themselves from participation in community life due to the mindset. This is more conservative approach according to which, decisions in the households and communities should be made by men. But followers of this approach also recognize that women should be more involved, mainly in economic activities.

According to the second interpretation, the mindset remains as a problem, but not strong enough to hamper women's engagement in community affairs and mainly for active women. There are factors that impeded women participation, but they are embedded more in private affairs (domestic violence, economic hardship).

### ***Women participation – problems and experience***

Number of women participating in the study highlighted the problems faced by communities but were reserved in speaking up about the problems facing specifically women. These problems include lack of monetary income and poor infrastructure (including water and gas supply). They believe that these problems must be solved by men and the government.

The other participants named hard work performed by women as a major problem. They argued that this problem becomes more severe when men migrate for seasonal employment. According to one of the local gender activists:

*“As a result of hard work, they face health problems. There is no ambulatory in the village for them to approach in case of a need”.*

Shortcomings in water supply have negative affect on the welfare of women in number of villages. Some of the women respondents also highlighted the lack of kindergartens and special spaces for children. Domestic violence is also an important problem that is very common in the region but is not addressed by the society or the government.

Men participants of the study name lack of time and the mindset as the main barriers for women's participation. Some of them believe that women should not engage in community problem solving. The representative of a local NGO described the problem in the following statement:

*“Women, who wanted the road to be rehabilitated, bus stops to be installed for them to shelter during rain or snow when taking children to kindergarten had difficulties to speak up. I asked them why they did not make a statement and only mentioned it to me, they answered that it would have been re-narrated to their [husbands]. . . your wife talked a lot. We would have had problems at home”.*

Women have no trust that their ideas will be heard and considered in case there are alternative opinions. According to one of the local gender activists:

*“Because they think that activism is not suitable for women. It is not their job and, even if it was, men will not allow them. Men are dominating”.*

Due to the lack of relevant experience women restrain themselves from speaking up about community problems. They name financial dependence on men as the main problem.

Lack of women participation in public affairs has its effect on general assembly meetings. Women are not attending these meetings in some villages or have minimal representation in others. According to the local NGO representative: “their ideas can be delivered to the assembly by their family members or other acquaintances”.



Part of the women participating in the study have positive attitude toward increased engagement of women in public affairs. According to one of them it could have led to more peaceful solution of many problems in the village, but the other contradicted and argued that it could have led to deepening the problem as men try to avoid conflict and thus damage the process.

The study revealed that women are more actively engaged in community life in Georgian speaking villages. They attend assembly meetings, speak up and participate in implementation of initiatives. Young women are more active in this regard.

Few women respondents expressed having experience of participating in activities organized by NGOs, while others said that they had no prior experience of such interactions and have only heard about their work.

Majority of the study participants are open, and welcome cooperation opportunities with NGOs. One of them said that it is important to “plan activities that will reveal their potential and importance of participation”.

Trainings aimed at awareness raising were named as major activities when discussing NGO work. Also, conduction of focus groups and individual meetings were identified as key for assessing the needs of local women.

Active local women will be the first to engage in these activities including teachers and young women. School resources can be utilized for these interventions as the major social space available for women teachers and mothers.

According to the part of the respondents the skeptical attitude toward the NGO work is quite widespread in the region. Locals believe that “all NGOs think only about themselves and not about the village”. One of the women participants mentioned that many husbands will forbid women to participate in activities organized by NGOs.

### ***Recommendations***

Negative attitudes toward women's participation in public life and their economic empowerment are quite common in the region. One could assume that traditional family roles are challenged by the labour migration. In response to this process both women and men try to hold on traditional roles and distrust any novelty. Thus, NGOs are facing the very difficult challenge of attaining the status of a trustworthy partner among women. At this point, it might be advisable to organize the cooperation with women around the most important problems faced by them, including those related to healthcare, childcare and financial security. These attempts have the potential to create strong foundation for the future cooperation among women and NGOs.

Relatively long-term initiatives can be implemented in villages with more positive attitudes toward women activism. It is recommended to establish women groups in these communities that will plan and implement specific projects with the support from NGOs. Implementation of small-scale projects with active participation of local women can trigger long term cooperation. The project objective will be to introduce a specific novelty as well as identify other problems. Participatory research methods and other participatory methods can be used during the project implementation process.

## **Shida Kartli**

### ***Challenges to women's participation – two interpretations***

The study revealed two interpretations of challenges related to women's participation. According to the first interpretation, women in rural settlements face the same problems as men. The foremost among these problems is a lack of financial income. Women are actively involved in discussions and attempts to solve the problem. Women are either directly (for example by participation in general assembly meetings) or indirectly (through consultations within the household and “advising” men) involved in these discussions.

According to the second interpretation, women are actively participating in community affairs as well as addressing issues specific for them. They engage in discussions at general assembly meetings and often are more active than men. Women also actively cooperate with NGOs that act as their local partners and advocates.

### ***Women's participation – examples and problems***

Part of women that participated in the study are reserved in listing problems that are specific to female members of the community to focus on more general issues. Often, they mention that women and men have similar problems, and both play active roles in addressing them.

At the same time, it is also mentioned that some of the problems affect women more than men. For example, shortcomings in drinking water supply obliges women to carry water from distance. One of the study participants said:

*“Woman's work is harder and unappreciated, you harvest and then fail to sell, you need water for plants to grow but there is no water. So, everything is a woman's problem”.*

According to the NGO representative when discussing community problems, women are more active than men. Women speak up more during meetings organized within rural development program. But, as another study participant mentioned, women do not raise issues that are specific to female population and focus on the same issues that are relevant for men too (water, roads). The attitude is well elaborated in the following statement:

*“I think that women's participation is as valuable as men's participation, in all aspects, in my opinion”.*

Another study participant named cases when women raised issues different from those highlighted by men. In some cases, they even managed to solve the problem. One of such issues was establishment of a community center in the village and it was solved with the support from the municipality. According to one of the local gender activists:

*“I can tell you that there is a possibility that behind this decision was a discussion held in the household and who really made the decision is hard to say and nobody knows how the discussion was held and etc. Of course, I do not have an answer.”*

The NGO representative participating the study mentioned that women's participation is in correlation with availability of relevant local resources and how active the community life is. Though outward migration of active citizens is a problem for active as well as less active communities.

The same problem was highlighted by another respondent saying that local population is not very active in her village. Unemployment is the main problem that should be solved by the government and businesses.

According to a rural woman participating in the study, young women are more actively engaging in addressing problems facing the community. It is because men are employed and have no time for it.

Another respondent also agrees that women are more active than man in addressing daily problems such as harvesting and selling products. According to her, active local women are planning to address issues they are facing in more organized way. To do so they are seeking support from NGOs, and their mediation with the government.

According to one of the respondents widely spread conservative perceptions are important impediments to women's active participation. It is related to the understanding of “woman's job” – duties that should be the fulfilled by a woman in the first place and there will be no time left for engagement in public affairs.

There is a Gender Equality Council established in Gori Municipality. The Council is composed of members of Sakrebulo and representatives of NGOs. The Council aims to coordinate gender related work and exchange experiences.

Part of the study participants have experience of cooperating with NGOs through participating in educational activities or receiving specific support. Their assessment of the work of NGOs is quite positive. For them, this cooperation is associated with specific results as well as opportunities to participate in social life.

One of the NGO representatives mentioned that her organization is serving as a link between local women and the government. It delivers messages and problems from local women to the government that are collected as a result of focus groups and meetings organized with participation of female population of the municipality.

The role of NGOs as a mediator is also highlighted by the local gender activist:

*“NGO has more freedom, more skills, more [resources] to lobby. . . thus, as you know resources are always limited, priorities have to be set, and the voice of population is very important in setting these priorities”.*

Study participants name introduction of civic education, including gender topics, to villages as very important:

*“They should know themselves, in terms of organization, how to raise an issue in the municipality or government and focus on the problem and how to jointly engage the government and self-government in solving the problems with their own participation”.*

The need for awareness raising on reproductive health was named as an important issue by a local gender activist participating in the study. She believes that gender education increases self-confidence among women.

Other respondents mentioned the need for financial support for women's projects. They argue that women's engagement in these initiatives will rise awareness as well as deliver specific results.

During the interviews it was also mentioned that daily tasks and problems are usually discussed during house visits. In the past there was a social club in the village that was used as a space to discuss issues important for the community. Discussions around problems is a part of common daily routine.

### ***Recommendations***

Analysis of the interviews conducted in Kvemo Kartli illustrate that private spaces are used for discussion focusing on problems facing women. It is anticipated that there is a significant difference between opinions expressed in public and private spaces. Thus, it is difficult to capture women's problems and attitudes without analyzing their opinions expressed in private settings. To do so it is advisable for NGOs to include ethnographic and non-reactive research methods in their studies including critical ethnography, diaries and others.

It is also evident that there are no public spaces to hold public meetings and discussions. NGOs can prioritize providing support to rural population in this regard.

During the interviews, part of the women respondents put themselves in a defensive position and denied that women in their villages faced any specific problems. Thus, there is a need to explain that participation in solving problems specific to women does not contradict, rather contributes to highlighting women as an interest group with its own agenda. Often their interests are linked to their participation in community work. It is also noteworthy that these interests are diverse and vary between countries, regions and social groups.

## **Kvemo Kartli**

### ***Women's participation – interpretation of the problem***

Women's participation is discussed in relation to economic problems in interviews conducted in Kvemo Kartli region. According to this approach, economic empowerment of women should precede their active engagement in public affairs. Women that are not overloaded with responsibilities will better manage to participate in community development process, support other women, own family and community as a whole.

Respondents in Kvemo Kartli are more appreciative of women's participation in community affairs. This attitude is partly linked to economic problems as well. Due to outward labour migration, communities experience lack of active members, thus involvement of women is more welcomed. The study participants also highlight the differences between settlements populated by Georgian and Azerbaijani ethnic groups. According to them, compared to Azeri villages, traditional culture is lesser of a barrier of women's participation in community life in Georgian settlements. It is even possible an "active" woman to be used as a marker of local Georgian ethnic culture.

### ***Women's participation – problems and examples***

According to the study participants poverty is the main impediment of women's participation. Women in rural settlements devote their time and efforts to addressing economic problems. "In order women to become more active and increase their participation, it is necessary to ensure their economic empowerment; when a woman is economically weak she will fail to increase her role in the community" – says one of the NGO representatives participating in the study. Poverty pushes active women to leave the region.

Wellbeing of local women is also negatively affected by the infrastructural problems, including shortcomings in drinking and irrigation water supply, poor conditions of internal roads and non-regulated public transportation, lack of kindergartens and public squares for children. In some villages, women have to take over addressing infrastructural problems as men engage in labour migration. Lack of available kindergartens is one of the major impediments to women's participation in any public activities. Lack of adequate public spaces, such as community centers is yet another important barrier.

Many problems are linked to education. Young women often lack opportunities to attain vocational or university education as there are no relevant educational facilities in the region. According to one of the NGO representatives:

*"Lack of education is directly linked to other social issues. Women do not have information about their rights and fail to establish themselves in social life. Majority of women from ethnic minority groups do not speak state language and are victims of child (early) marriages and domestic abuse".*

Even after graduating from universities, woman fail to secure adequate employment and have to either leave the region or give up personal professional ambitions in this regard.

According to the study participants, women are active in community life. They attend and voice their opinions during general assemblies, participate in volunteer work and organize protests. They argue that these practices are more evident in Georgian speaking villages and mostly in those communities where majority of male population is engaged in labour migration.

But other respondents think that lack of women participation and imposing constrains to their engagement in public life is a significant problem in settlements with majority of ethnic Georgian population. One of the study participants said:

*"I think, they need a push. Many are quite suspicious towards everything; they think that it is in vain and there is no point in standing in the street and talking".*

Another respondent mentioned that women are often seen in a negative light when they actively participate in public affairs.

Widely spread pessimism in public is yet another impediment to women's participation. This attitude is often reflected on women that have previously been active in public life. Sometimes they fail to maintain the energy generated by implementation of a specific project and often turn their focus back to family duties. Psychological problems such as lack of self-confidence and inferiority complex are also listed among problems hindering women's participation.

Almost all women participating in the study have a positive view on the perspectives of their involvement in community development process. They believe that their participation will be beneficial not only for women, but for the community as a whole:

*“I think a woman is more motivated to grow and can achieve more than a man”.*

One of the respondents said that every new case of woman's participation is a trigger for others to engage in public life.

Political polarization of the society creates unfriendly environment for participation. Political loyalty is one of the major criteria for securing employment and promotion in public office. According to one of the respondents: “similar situation is observed in educational institutions where mostly women are employed – the statement is relevant for all positions including teachers, cooks, cleaners, etc.”.

Bolnisi Municipality is implementing a policy aimed at addressing gender problems. The Council of Women and The Women's Room is operational at the municipality. But some of NGO representatives consider their work as “superficial and cosmetic”. Few rural women participating in the study have never heard about The Women's Room, while the NGO representative positively assessed the work of local self-government. According to her, the mayor and village representatives pay significant attention to this issue that resulted in the increased participation of women throughout the last few years.

The study participants highlighted that interest toward civil society has increased in the region. When discussing the support delivered by NGOs they focus on micro entrepreneurs' assistance and non-formal education:

*“The best thing NGOs can do is conduction of practical trainings. They have to show that it is possible to solve problems independently, that their increased participation can solve many problems.”*

In their statements, the study participants mainly referred to the work done by Fund “Taso” and projects implemented by CIPDD and CENN.

Assisting small businesses in organizing their paperwork or supporting beekeeping are named as the most favorable developmental projects. Respondents mentioned that often they do not receive information about available calls and grant competitions in time and sometimes even lack necessary skills to participate. Here too they need assistance from NGOs.

Education is one of the priority spheres named by respondents. They refer to formal as non-formal education. They argue that there is a need to broaden the network of vocational educational institutions. As for non-formal education, they are more interested in trainings focusing on business development and project management. Following needs were also highlighted:

*“First of all, we should know our rights, competencies of local self-government. Also, it is necessary us to know how to approach local self-government with different problems”.*

Young women were mentioned by the study participants when discussions were held around active women. They believe that young women are more open and motivated to engage in community life, but active women can also be found among representatives of older generation.



The study participants name three places where women meet on regular basis. The first is house visits; one respondent from a rural settlement mentioned that house visits are becoming rarer due to the lack of time and outward migration. Schools and kindergartens were also named as spaces for frequent encounters, where common problems are discussed but are not always included in the community agenda. The same is applicable to meetings held in other spaces.

### ***Recommendations***

Analysis of interviews conducted in Kvemo Kartli region illustrate openness and readiness to cooperate with NGOs. Expectations of the study participants is mainly linked to the economic empowerment of women and relevant educational activities. There is a need for further research to identify the capacity of NGOs and donors on the one hand, and realistic economic development niche available in the region, on the other.

When discussing active women, the study participants mentioned women that are not engaged in any public affairs but are motivated to do so if supported and encouraged by NGOs. Thus, it is recommended for NGOs to pay more attention to building self-organizational skills among women and ensuring sustainability of initiatives as well as developing future intervention plans.

NGOs working in the region should pay more attention to political empowerment of women. The communication with local women should focus on explaining complexity of inequality, including the approach that increased access to material resources does not necessarily translate in increased power of women in other spheres. Open discussions about non-linear relationship between power distribution and economic inequality in local context can broaden and deepen local gender agenda.

The need for conduction or representative study was also highlighted during the interviews. According to respondents it can better reveal local problems. Various qualitative research conducted by NGOs create a fruitful foundation for planning and carrying out a survey. Local cultural characteristics and experience of qualitative studies focusing on women conducted in similar cultural environment should be considered in this study.

## **Conclusion and recommendations**

The study illustrated that there are number of factors that hamper women participation in community life. These factors can be grouped in two:

Economic factors – combines all problems that are linked to the fulfillment of material needs that obstruct women initiate and implement projects that are beneficial for their families and communities. Poverty is among these factors as it pushes women to devote their time and energy to meeting their basic needs. Here they face “poverty traps”: when poverty prevents people to participate in different spheres while lack of participation contributes to leaving them in poverty (Sachs, 2006). Lack of time and energy to engage in community initiatives mentioned by women from households with labour migrant men, is a vivid example of this trap.

Cultural factors – the study participants often mentioned “mindset” as one of the main barriers for women’s participation. According to them, perception that community problem-solving is not a “woman’s job” is the part of this “mindset”. This perception prevents women from engaging in community initiatives and utilizing their knowledge and experience. At the same time, lack of their participation in community affairs prevents them from gaining knowledge and experience translating into yet another barrier for women’s participation.

The study participants often “essentialize” cultural factors and define them as core, constant and stable. The similar approach is also seen in the narrative of some NGO representatives and gender activists. It is recommended for development workers to pay more attention to local cultural specificity and intra-regional diversity. Also, they should carefully consider local cultural, relatively “fundamental” characteristics and links between current social-economic and political situation.

The problems listed by the study participants are similar to the barriers faced by women in other countries all around the world. In Kenya, similar to Georgia, women carry the pressure of poverty, economic dependence on husbands and cultural discrimination (Fonchingong and Ngwa, 2006). Authors of this research highlighted that women are insufficiently represented in local government units leading to the overlook of their interests in community development process. The similar problem is observed in Georgia according to Ketevan Sartania (Sartania, 2020).

Implementation of projects tailored to the specific needs of women is seen as one of the opportunities to address the problem of women's participation. Also, introduction of additional component to developmental projects focusing on interests of women (World Bank, 2011) can reduce the probability of capture of projects by elites and powerful groups in the community (Mansuri and Rao, 2012).

Implementation of educational and practical projects aimed at freeing women's time is another direction for developmental projects tailored to women's needs and interests (Fonchingong and Ngwa, 2006). NGOs can disseminate knowledge and technologies that assist women in fulfilling their daily duties at home. Women can be offered trainings in skills they need to fulfill additional responsibilities that are imposed on them due to the outward labour migration of male members of their households.

In order women's interest to be sufficiently represented, it is necessary to facilitate their active participation in community meetings and other public discussion (Nadelman, nd). Women actively participate in general assembly meetings and community problem discussions in villages all around Georgia. But the quality of their participation has to be considered carefully. Often, due to cultural perceptions and internal power structures within communities, women fail to ensure equal participation in discussions compared to men.

Parallel to increased participation of women in public life, it is recommended to create new and develop autonomous spaces for women (Fonchingong, 2013). It will enable women to gain new knowledge/skills and improve self-assessment that, in the long run, will be reflected in their increased participation in community life (Ahmed et al., 2009). Special attention should be paid to building relations between women involved in autonomous groups and community members to avoid their (group members') stigmatization or discrimination based on any other basis.

Accumulating additional capital can facilitate active participation of women in community life. It refers to three types of capital: economic capital (money and material assets), social capital (network of connections) and cultural capital (educational qualifications) (Bourdieu, 1986). Holding the capital is a precondition for participation in public life and recognition (Bourdieu, 2005). It should also be noted that only through direct communication with community members it is possible to identify the type of capital they lack. Thus, participation of beneficiaries and consideration of their opinions during project design process, especially for those projects aimed at increasing participation, are necessary preconditions for ensuring its success.

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# Causes of lack of women's participation: Analysis of secondary data

## Introduction

Lack of women's participation in political and social life is caused by economic, cultural and social factors. There are not many women represented in political parties, executive branch of the government and local self-government. Their under-representation in decision making process has negative affect on incorporating issues concerning women in political agenda and improving their conditions.

Women's participation and engagement in politics has two main measures: (1) quantitative measures – their representation in all three branches or government and local self-government, political party lists and high political offices; and (2) quantitative measures – barriers hampering women to engage in public life, politics and political party work on local as well as national levels.

By 2020 there were 21 women (out of 150) members of Georgian Parliament and 5 women Ministers out of 11. By October 2018 there were 306 judges in the Georgia. 53.3% were women, though the share in managerial positions was significantly lower. There were only 4 women out of 26 chairpersons, 2 out of 9 Chamber chairpersons, while all board persons were men<sup>1</sup>.

There are 1550 members of sakrebulo (municipality assembly) in 59 municipalities and 5 self-governing cities in Georgia. Significant majority of them are men – 88,9% (1379), while there are only 171 (11%) women. The highest share (20% and more) of women members of sakrebulo are observed in Tetrtskaro 28% (8), Keda 26% (5), Oni 26% (6), Adigeni 21% (5) and Senaki 20% (5) Municipalities<sup>2</sup>.

The above presented data illustrates the need for more thorough research and identification of causes behind the under-representation of women in politics.

Women face numerous barriers in their attempts to participate in public life or engage in politics. Identification of these barriers is the main objective of this study that presents the overview of previous studies and reports focusing on women's participation. The research will apply two methods for analysis: the first one will focus on analysis of the statistical data and the other will attempt to elaborate on the content and significance of these data. The final part will summarize main statements explaining the lack of women's participation and causes hindering or contributing to the process.

## Methodology

The presented report is based on the analysis of the secondary data from open sources including reports on women's political participation. Reports were categorized by the issues: (1) what are the barriers to women's participation in politics? And (2) how is this participation expressed in the statistical data?

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1 Main factors contributing to the under-representation of women judges in the management of the common courts; the study conducted by ACT and commissioned by the Council of Europe, 2019; pg: 3. <https://rm.coe.int/study-main-factors-contributing-to-the-under-representation-of-women-j/1680986e7d>

2 Representation of women and Gender Balance in Local Self-Government Sakrebulo in Georgia, ISFED, 2014, <http://www.parliament.ge/uploads/other/75/75726.pdf> (GEO)

Reports were categorized according to the above-mentioned questions while data gathered was analyzed in line of topics such as family, public attitudes, political parties, expectations of women and men according to assigned roles, economic factors, importance of gender issues in euro-integration process.

## Statistics

Over 50% of Georgian population are women. In 2017 58% of women were economically active while the same indicator was 75% among male population. Within the economically active women 51% are employed and remaining 7% – unemployed. 18% of economically inactive women are housewives and pensioners, 5% – students<sup>3</sup>. These data indicate that there are different women groups and sub-groups with different needs that require political representation. To illustrate the level of their representation in politics, it is necessary to present respective statistics.

By 2020, 14% of members of Parliament were women (21 out of 150)<sup>4</sup>. The share of women MPs was 12% in 2016. In 2020 45% of Ministers were women and in 2016 – 10.5%. Increase in the share of women holding highest offices in the executive branch was affected by the “small government initiative” when 4 ministries were closed in 2018. For 2016 parliamentary elections 16.4% of registered single-mandate majoritarian candidates (in total 835) were women and only 10-40% in political party lists. As for the local self-government, women representation in municipalities was 11.1% in 2014.

When 2020 data is compared to the outcomes of previous elections, one would argue that women participation in politics is slightly increasing. But the concern whether this is an untraversable trend or that the increase rate is satisfactory to sufficiently represent women’s issues in political discussions is still valid. According to various studies, in order to ensure that women’s interests are reflected in the political agenda, the share of their representation in various branches of government should be at least 30%. Experts in the field argue that this is the minimum level of representation that can prioritize women’s concerns and incorporate them in political agenda.

Between 1991 and 2010 share of women members in Parliament of Georgia never exceeded 10% and in local self-government – 11% (ACT, 2013). Even though since 1998, various legislative amendments were initiated with the aim to increase participation of women in politics, this object remains unfulfilled by 2020.

Statistics of women representation in Parliament, executive branch and local self-government illustrate that 2-3% increase in female participation in politics is low and insufficient for effective advocacy for their interests.

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3 Women and Men in Georgia, Statistical Publication, National Statistics Office of Georgia, 2018. <https://www.geostat.ge/media/21015/W%26M-ENG-2018.pdf>

4 Following Local Self-government Elections, share of women elected in sakrebulo was 14% in 1998, 12% in 2020, 11% in 2006 and 10% in 2010. Source: Convention on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) Implementation Study in Georgia, Final Report, Part Two, Chapter 4 – “Women’s Participation in Georgian Political Parties and Public Life and International Missions” by Lela Khomeriki. Georgian version available at: <http://www.parliament.ge/uploads/other/75/75725.pdf>

**Table #1<sup>5</sup>**

Year	Women in Parliament (%)	Year	Women Ministers (%)	Year	Women in local self-government (%)
1991	6.8%				
1992	5.6%				
1995	7%				
2003	6.4%				
2008	9.4%			2010	10%
2012	5%	2013	21%	2014	11.1%
2016	12%	2016	10.5%		
2020	14%	2020	45%		

According to 2011 study, share of women represented in Parliament and executive branch was between 10-16%, while it exceeds 40% in judiciary. It is argued that the relatively high rate of female representation in judiciary compared the other two branches of government is due to the fact that judges are selected as a result of open competition after passing professional qualification exams and women often manage to succeed in a competitive setting<sup>6</sup>.

Women's participation is lower in municipalities densely populated by ethnic minorities. Traditional gender roles, poverty among women, language barrier, lack of access to education and overwhelming household responsibilities are strongly represented here creating impediments for women. Statistical data of multiethnic municipalities confirms this attitude. According to 2014 data, "...women's share in municipality sakrebulo settled by multi-ethnic population was 7.5% (183/14), indicating that situation in this regard in these municipalities is not satisfactory. Women's share in monoethnic municipalities is 11.5% (1341/157)" (ISFED, 2014). "The ratio of elected female politicians is especially low in the cities with a significant number of national minorities" (EMC, 2014, pg. 17).

Thus, statistics of women's participation in Georgian politics is nonlinear. The data illustrates that women are underrepresented in politics and there are limited number of women holding offices with decision-making power. It creates barriers for coordinated efforts to be taken in politics and representation of women's interest in political agenda setting.

Women's participation in legislative, executive and judicial branches of government are affected by their engagement in political party work. Often, political party member women are quite active in election campaigns but fail to secure promotion or public offices when the party succeeds or remain as inactive members of a political party that loses elections or even leaves the political field. Accordingly, political parties themselves are barriers for women's engagement in politics. "No matter the type of an electoral system that exists in a country and no matter the incentives that are introduced, it is ultimately up to political parties to increase women's political participation"<sup>7</sup>. Financial incentives are effective only when intra-party gender quota systems are present. The study published by the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association says: "Most parties recognize that women's participation in the country is low but they do not recognize the problem in their own party"<sup>8</sup>.

Gender statistics illustrate the inequality in women representation. For example, the inequality is manifested in the list of candidates for 2014 local self-government elections. "In particular, only two women out of 14

5 Gender Equality Policies and EU Integration – Experience of Visegrad for EaP Countries. Gender Equality Policies on the way to European Integration and International Commitments. The experience of Georgia and Visegrad Countries, Maia Kuprava-Sharvashidze, Kutaisi, 2016. <http://dSPACE.nplg.gov.ge/bitstream/1234/170939/1/GenderPoliciesAndEUIntegration.pdf>

6 Convention on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) Implementation Study in Georgia, Final Report, Part Two, Chapter 4 – "Women's Participation in Georgian Political Parties and Public Life and International Missions" by Lela Khomeriki. Georgian version available at: <http://www.parliament.ge/uploads/other/75/75725.pdf>

7 Women in Georgian Politics, GYLA, 2017 pg. 6. <https://gyla.ge/files/news/2008/Women%20in%20Georgian%20Politics.pdf>

8 Ibid, pg. 9.

candidates were nominated for the position of Tbilisi Mayor; in self-governing cities 65 men and 8 women were nominated as mayoral candidates. It is also noteworthy that the nominated party list of election subjects included 427 women among 1129 candidates. The quantity of women among 5707 independent candidates registered by parties amounted to only 846<sup>9</sup>.

This data indicates that gender inequality experienced in political organizations is more severe in regional offices of political parties where social and cultural factors have stronger influence on women's participation in politics.

## Main barriers to women's participation in politics

There are numerous barriers to women's participation in politics in Georgia. They can be grouped as cultural, social, political and economic factors. Social and economic factors combine issues related to women's access to education, healthcare, financial and other resources; cultural factors are defined by public attitudes, family and other traditional roles.

Studies conducted in Georgia observe that factors hindering women's participation influence each other and create a barrier for women. Despite that, significant shifts have been observed in women's participation in politics throughout last decade expressed in changes of public attitudes and behaviors. "In March 2010, the Government of Georgia adopted the law "On Gender Equality" and developed a National Action Plan. The Gender Equality Council of Parliament, initially a temporary advisory structure, became a standing body in March 2010" (ACT, 2013; pg. 7). According to the 2014 public opinion poll on women's participation in Georgian politics, commissioned by NDI stated: "70% of population think the number of women in parliament should be at least 30%" and "55% of citizens think having 17 women out of 150 members in parliament is too few"<sup>10</sup>. The same poll results show that "68% say they support the parliament adopting mandatory gender quota". Even though more than half respondents supported the idea of increase of women's participation in politics in 2014, by 2020 it still remains low.

The following chapter presents the literature review and highlights the factors that hinder women's participation in politics identified and discussed in previous studies.

The various study findings show that public attitudes as well as women's self-assessment, major factors affecting women's participation, are preconditioned by early childhood dilemmas faced by girls when they have to balance between attainment of education and family duties or are forced to devote all their time to household work.

Family is the main space where public and self-perceptions on social roles of women and men are formed and expectations shaped, reinforced or weakened. According to 2013 ACT study family takes the first place in a hierarchy of values (99%, N=1760) for both men and women followed by religion, work and friends (pg. 17). Family itself is related to national identity and intrafamily hierarchy is defined by the traditional roles that are often based on patriarchal belief. Within this belief a man has a strong role as a breadwinner in the family (88%; ACT, 2013 pg. 17), only 11% think that man and woman should equally contribute to the family budget and only 1% state that a woman should be a breadwinner. According to the study report, no significant differences were observed in relation to these perceptions between the rural (90%) and urban (86%) population. It is noteworthy that there is a different reality beyond these perceptions and the same study shows that 34% of respondents think that women are breadwinners in families nowadays. Family is also seen as the main space for women to be self-realized. Woman can be self-realized as a homemaker, mother, wife. 79% of respondents think that "a woman is more appreciated for her family rather than her career success" and "most respondents (92%) believe that the most important role of a woman in life is taking care of her

9 Gender Equality Policies and EU Integration – Experience of Visegrad for EaP Countries. Gender Equality Policies on the way to European Integration and International Commitments. The experience of Georgia and Visegrad Countries, Maia Kuprava-Sharvashidze, Kutaisi, 2016. pg. 156. <http://dspace.nplg.gov.ge/bitstream/1234/170939/1/GenderPoliciesAndEUIntegration.pdf>

10 Women's Political Participation in Georgia, Results of October 2014 Public Opinion Poll. NDI. 2014 [https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI%20Georgia\\_October%202014\\_Gender%20poll\\_Public%20ENG\\_Final\\_0.pdf](https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI%20Georgia_October%202014_Gender%20poll_Public%20ENG_Final_0.pdf)



family” (ACT, 2013; pg. 19). According to the same study, despite economic independence of women “this new situation has done little to alter the traditional gender division of labour and women remain the primary caregivers, responsible for the housework and feeding and caring for the children. The majority of women who remain employed in the formal sector work in the low-paying fields of agriculture, education, healthcare and light industry” (ACT, 2013; pg. 7). These findings support the idea that women's self-assessment and role in society are shaped by socialization and experience gained during early childhood. They are further reinforced by social and cultural norms based on traditionally expected roles to be played by men and women. For example, 58% of respondents think that it is difficult for a woman to combine work and household duties<sup>11</sup>. In the society where family holds the highest rank in the hierarchy of values, women and men are valued according to their contribution to household duties. For example, 39% of respondents completely agree and 31% somewhat agree that “it is better for a preschool aged child if the mother does not work”<sup>12</sup>. Even though employment is a major determinant of woman's independence, according to public attitudes, it is more appreciated when women choose family over independence.

As already mentioned above, family has a foremost value for Georgian families. In the 2019 public opinion poll to the question “who should be a breadwinner in the family?”, 65% replied that it should be a man, 1% said that it should be a woman and 34% answered that both men and women should equally contribute to the family budget. But the reality is different as to the question “who is a breadwinner in the family?” 43% responded that it is a woman, 34% think that it is a man and 21% think that the responsibility is shared by a man and a woman<sup>13</sup>. There is a difference between public perceptions and reality about allocation of gender roles in society and family. Perceptions are in line with the beliefs of traditional culture where man is a breadwinner and a decision-maker, while women are self-realized when fulfilling household duties. In reality, women are both: contributors to the family budget and main caretakers in the family, despite the fact that they usually occupy lower positions compared to men and have lower salaries. These differences create barriers for women and indicate to the public disapproval of women's participation in public life.

The “Women and Political Representation, Handbook on Increasing Women's Political Participation in Georgia” (EMC, 2014) identifies three groups of barriers: structural, institutional and cultural. Cultural barriers are expressed in access to formal political powers. Under-representation of women in political arena is also caused by social-economic, ideological and psychological barriers. According to the Handbook, poverty among women is a major barrier to their participation in politics. Social and economic factors affect education, unemployment and poverty: “Socio-economic obstacles include poverty and unemployment, lack of adequate financial resources, illiteracy and limited access to education, choice of professions and the “dual burden” of family and a full-time job. Women take on a disproportionate share of household tasks which makes a political career almost impossible. Moreover, household tasks, taking care of the children and elderly are not always considered as actual work. Poverty is also one of the major hindrances for women to be involved in politics, namely, the disproportionate effect of poverty on women” (EMC, 2014; pg. 8-9). Perception on women's role as primary caregivers in households affects their self-assessment as well as distribution of family resources on education from early childhood. Women are appreciated according to their work in households. In traditional communities, women have adopted these roles. When women have an employment outside the household, they also fulfill household duties just to compensate for the time spent outside the family.

## Political party politics and women

Reports on gender equality and gender aspects of electoral systems focus on human rights and equality. Georgian legislature and in particular, Election Code are gender-neutral, they do not promote or demote gender equality in the county. But “mixed system and especially the single-member majoritarian system that exists

11 Public opinion poll on women's participation in Georgian politics, NDI, 2014. [https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI%20Georgia\\_October%202014\\_Gender%20poll\\_Public%20ENG\\_Final\\_0.pdf](https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI%20Georgia_October%202014_Gender%20poll_Public%20ENG_Final_0.pdf)

12 The Caucasus Research Resource Centers. (2018) “ Women's economic inactivity and engagement in the informal sector in Georgia”. Retrieved through <https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/ga2018ge/ATTPRECH/>

13 The Caucasus Research Resource Centers. (2019). The annual household survey about social economic issues and political attitudes. <https://caucasusbarometer.org/ge/cb2019ge/codebook/>

in Georgia not only doesn't promote but also serves as a barrier to women's political participation" (GYLA, 2016, pg. 24-25). The study by Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA, 2016) names instability of political parties are the primary barrier to women's political participation. Newly established parties that do not achieve electoral success usually leave the political arena including its women members.

GYLA identifies lack of women recruitment and promotion policies within political parties as the second main problem. The third barrier is underdeveloped internal party structure where women members fail to achieve high ranking positions. Assigning responsibilities of a district coordinators mainly to women is a common practice and is considered as their participation in politics. Also, nominating celebrity women in winnable party lists have negative affect on women that have faithfully served the party for many years and have not been promoted (GYLA, 2016).

Failure to prioritize gender issues and financial barriers, meaning that a woman politician should bring own finances and not impose additional burden on the party, are additional impediments to women's political participation. And finally, self-assessment is another barrier as women often think that they are not ready to occupy political positions. Political parties fail to provide any support to women in this respect (GYLA, 2016). Introduction of a gender quota system is a short-term solution to these problems. But there is a disagreement among researchers as some believe that "mandatory regulations are more effective than financial incentives" (GYLA, 2016; pg. 30). The experience shows that large political parties usually ignore financial incentives and quota practices when they are not made mandatory.

Along to poverty, cultural factors have strong effect on women's political participation. Traditional beliefs on women's role prevents society to see women as politicians and decision-makers: "These attitudes toward gender equality are often seen as an important factor in analyzing women's entry into elected office. Traditions still emphasize women's primary roles as mothers and housewives. A strong, patriarchal value system keeps these sexually segregated roles in place. The responsibility of women as mothers and wives as well as her domestic duties complicate their involvement and participation in the public sphere" (EMC, 2014, pg. 9-10). Public opinion poll also confirms that men are perceived to be decision makers in the family. 26% completely agree and 28% somewhat agree that "men should have the final word about decisions in the home"<sup>14</sup>. This belief is based on perception of men as being strong and women – weak at home, as well as in political and cultural life. According to ACT (2013) study: "the research identified several factors that help perceive men as superior in politics and make it less appropriate for women.

1. Woman's specific nature – a woman is perceived as a weak person compared to a man
2. Woman busy with household chores
3. The peculiarity of politics
4. Negative attitude of a family member (husband)
5. A low possibility of voting for a woman candidate" (ACT, 2013; pg. 48).

First three questions in the 2014 public opinion poll on women's participation in politics commissioned by NDI focus on following aspects: age, experience and interest. It is interesting that responses among men and women were similar with minor differences. For example, to the question "What is the biggest obstacle to your involvement in politics?" 9% women and 3% men answered: "Family responsibilities prevent me from that" (NDI, 2014; pg. 37). To the question "In your opinion, what are the biggest obstacles for women in Georgia to engage in politics?", 57% named family related issues (NDI, 2014; pg. 38). Following reasons were also named: lack of self-confidence and negative perceptions about politics, lack of education and resources (NDI, 2014; pg. 38). The findings of the poll once again confirm that early childhood experiences, economic and social factors determine public and even women's disapproval of women's participation in politics.

One of the determinants of poverty among women is public perception that family assets are passed on sons and not daughters. The ACT study says: "All types of property are considered as property of a son. The only exception refers to jewellery (daughter should be given a major part of it – 11%, the daughter should be given all of it – 3%) in comparison to other types of property where the tendency of preferring sons or equal

14 The Caucasus Research Resource Centers. (2018) "Women's economic inactivity and engagement in the informal sector in Georgia". Retrieved through <https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/g2018ge/ATTMEFW/>



division is detected. Arguments explaining similar attitudes were voiced during qualitative research. Giving property to a son is a Georgian tradition based on the idea that family property should be given to a man which is compensated with dowry for a woman. At the same time, in case of marriage, the woman becomes the “owner” of a spouse's property that her husband inherits from his parents in accordance with custom. However, this “ownership” is more considered as a right to consume (live in the house, use things) and hardly implies its governance in case of divorce” (ACT, 2013, pg. 70). In 2019 public opinion poll, 45% responded that it should be a son, 1% a daughter and 49% equally distributed to the question “Who should inherit the apartment?”<sup>15</sup>. Accordingly, cultural traditions and traditional allocation of family resources create barriers for women to start an independent life. Moreover, unequal distribution of resources at home is extended to the political parties where women are unlikely to be financially supported.

Financial and economic inequality faced by women at home and in political parties are also observed in societies in general. In the NDI commissioned public opinion poll, 18% of respondents confirmed that physical appearance is the most important characteristic of a female politician and only 10% said the same about male politician (NDI, 2014; pg. 40). Despite extreme criticism toward and demands from female politicians, respondents believe that women are slightly more devoted to Georgian population and their constituencies (NDI, 2014; pg. 41). They think that women can best handle issues related to education (schools and universities) and least agriculture and business (NDI, 2014; pg. 43). The same poll findings confirm that professional expectations of women are linked to children and other areas related to care. As for the job positions, respondents think that women will be best serving as judges (16%) or deputy-ministers (15%) (NDI, 2014; pg. 45); 53% say that male politicians do not treat female colleagues as equals, while 55% think that female politicians do treated their male colleagues as equals (NDI, 2014; pg. 46-48)<sup>16</sup>. The poll findings show the paradox where respondents believe that female politicians are better serving Georgia population and their interests, but at the same time consider their physical appearance as the most important characteristic. This attitude proves the negative effects of cultural and economic factors on women's participation in politics.

Parallel to above discussed barriers to women's participation in politics, there are “other barriers that include a lack of confidence to run in elections, the perception of “dirty” and corrupted politics, and the influence of the media which portrays women as “sex objects” while not paying enough attention to women's activities and issues, and ignoring the problem of female political underrepresentation” (EMC, 2014; pg. 10). Lack of self-confidence hinders women's participation not only in politics but also in other areas such as business (ACT, 2013). But it should be mentioned that women's participation in business is relatively more welcomed as it does not entail constant presence in the public light and is considered more as a family affair.

## Gender equality policy and EU integration

In Georgia, gender equality and women's participation in politics is often discussed in relation to EU-integration along with their representation in political parties and in public offices with decision-making power.

Georgia-EU Association Agreement was signed in June 2014. In the framework of this Agreement Georgia took the responsibility to ensure gender equality in political life (Patariaia, 2015)<sup>17</sup>. The work on adoption of a policy promoting gender equality on national level in Georgia started in 1998 as “between 1998 and 2000, measures directed at women's empowerment considered in the national action plan were taken and in 1999, a state commission was created at the National Security Council of Georgia and a Women's Empowerment State Policy was devised”<sup>18</sup>. Since then, various official documents were adopted addressing the violence

15 The Caucasus Research Resource Centers. (2019). The annual household survey about social economic issues and political attitudes. Retrieved from: <https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/cb2019ge/APTINHERT/>

16 Public opinion poll on women's participation in Georgian politics, NDI, 2014. [https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI%20Georgia\\_October%202014\\_Gender%20poll\\_Public%20ENG\\_Final\\_0.pdf](https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI%20Georgia_October%202014_Gender%20poll_Public%20ENG_Final_0.pdf)

17 Georgian Politics without Women – Quotas as a Lotion to the Problem, Policy Brief; B. Patariaia, 2015, OSGF. [https://osgf.ge/files/2015/Publication/EU-Geirgia%20Association%20Angarishi\\_A4\\_3.pdf](https://osgf.ge/files/2015/Publication/EU-Geirgia%20Association%20Angarishi_A4_3.pdf)

18 Gender Equality Polices and EU Integration – Experience of Visegrad for EaP Countries. Gender Equality Policies on the way to European Integration and International Commitments. The experience of Georgia and Visegrad Countries, Maia Kuprava-Sharvashidze, Kutaisi, 2016. pg. 156. <http://dspace.nplg.gov.ge/bitstream/1234/170939/1/GenderPoliciesAndEUIntegration.pdf>

against women and trafficking. The Gender Equality Consultancy Council was established in the Parliament of Georgia in 2004 and Gender Equality State Commission under Ministry of EU reintegration – in 2005. On May 26, 2010 Georgia adopted the Law on Gender Equality to ensure that there is no discrimination in any aspect of public life. Since 2011 the Gender Equality Consultancy Council was established as a permanent Parliamentary Council. Thus, Georgia has a 22-year history of policy making in the field of gender equality and women’s participation in politics.

2014 Association Agreement “outlines three major directions under the equal treatment section:

1. Enhancement of gender equality in social, political and economic life;
2. Approximation of health and safety rules to European standards;
3. Strengthening the implementation of legislation regarding domestic violence, awareness raising and increased access of victims to counselling” (Patariaia, 2015; pg. 87)<sup>19</sup>.

Some of these directions were not sufficiently reflected in the 2014-2015 National Action Plan though they were considered in the Association Agreement itself. For example, no attention was paid to “approximation of health and safety rules to European standards” or equal representation of women and men in politics. Though the National Action Plan did address issues of domestic violence, here too overlook of women’s interests is observed that can largely be attributed to their underrepresentation in politics and decision-making positions. To solve the problem, following the recommendation from the Venice Commission: “on July 29, 2013, in order to enhance women’s political engagement, Paragraph 71 of Article 30 of the Organic Law of Georgia on Political Union of Citizens was formed as follows: The party will receive from the state budget 30% of supplement, if in the nominated party list it includes at least 30% of different gender in each 10 candidates”<sup>20</sup>. Despite this amendment no significant changes were observed in practice. 2016 Self Government Elections proved that no large political parties followed the new regulation: “financial incentives did not produce any tangible results, making mandatory quotas the only viable option for resolving the problem of very low representation of women in politics”<sup>21</sup>.

## Conclusion

The studies show that increasing women’s representation in legislative, executive and judicial branches of government as well as in local self-government bodies and political parties is necessary to increase their participation in public life. “According to 1325 UN Resolution, 30% is a necessary level of representation of women in Parliament to have a meaningful influence on Parliament”<sup>22</sup>.

Cultural, economic and social factors create barriers for women’s participation that is supported by gender statistics.

Cultural factors are based on the traditional perceptions on division of roles in families and expectations that see women as caregivers to be involved in household duties. According to 2018 public opinion poll results, 34% of respondents completely agree that “Taking care of the home and family makes women as satisfied as having a job”<sup>23</sup>. 85% of respondents are satisfied (60% satisfied and 22% very satisfied) with the labour distribution in the household<sup>24</sup>. Also, women are forced to make a choice between attainment of education and fulfillment of household duties in early childhood. Women with higher education and employment face

19 Patariaia, B. 2015, Equal Treatment, Assessing the First Year of Georgia’s Implementation of the Association Agenda – Progress and Opportunities, in the Political Sphere; OSGF, 2015 [https://transparency.ge/sites/default/files/post\\_attachments/assessing\\_the\\_first\\_year\\_of\\_georgias\\_implementation\\_of\\_the\\_assosiacion\\_agenda.pdf](https://transparency.ge/sites/default/files/post_attachments/assessing_the_first_year_of_georgias_implementation_of_the_assosiacion_agenda.pdf)

20 Gender Equality Policies and EU Integration – Experience of Visegrad for EaP Countries. Gender Equality Policies on the way to European Integration and International Commitments. The experience of Georgia and Visegrad Countries, Maia Kuprava-Sharvashidze, Kutaisi, 2016. pg. 149. <http://dspace.nplg.gov.ge/bitstream/1234/170939/1/GenderPoliciesAndEUIntegration.pdf>

21 Georgian Politics without Women – Quotas as a Lotion to the Problem, Policy Brief; B. Patariaia, 2015, OSGF. [https://osgf.ge/files/2015/Publication/EU-Georgia%20Association%20Angarishi\\_A4\\_3.pdf](https://osgf.ge/files/2015/Publication/EU-Georgia%20Association%20Angarishi_A4_3.pdf)

22 Women in Georgian Politics, GYLA, 2017 pg. 6. <https://gyla.ge/files/news/2008/Women%20in%20Georgian%20Politics.pdf>

23 The Caucasus Research Resource Centers. (2018) “Women’s economic inactivity and engagement in the informal sector in Georgia”. Retrieved through <https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/gS2018ge/ATTWOSA/>

24 Ibid: <https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/gS2018ge/SATLADIS/>

another challenge of holding lower positions and receiving lower salary compared to men. The same challenge is observed in politics and in political parties. Exceptions are women with significant financial resources that can support own electoral campaigns and political work between elections.

Despite the fact that 34% of women are breadwinners in the household, and employment is considered as the most effective way for a woman to be an independent person (39% completely agree and 29 somewhat agree)<sup>25</sup>, decision-makers in a family and politics are believed to be men. This perception is rooted in traditional division of gender roles and seeing women as weak while men as strong.

Cultural factors have economic dimension. Here poverty among women, lack of access to healthcare and education, also lack of property ownership are defined by traditional, religious and cultural beliefs. In the environment surrounded by these beliefs, women have limited resources for self-development or engagement in public life outside their families.

Along with cultural and social-economic factors are also observed in public attitudes. There are very harsh expectations set for women with stricter assessment (demand) systems. Physical appearance and duties fulfilled in the household are main criteria used to evaluate women either involved in politics or not.

Psychological factors, including lack of self-confidence and media portrayal of women in politics, business or families are additional factors highlighted in gender studies.

Accordingly, women's participation in politics is determined by numerous interlinked factors. Experience indicates that introduction of financial incentives for inclusion of women in political party lists or non-compulsory quota system are insufficient for addressing all these factors.

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