



GEORGIA

BACKGROUND

Since the Rose Revolution in 2003, Georgia has made notable progress in improving democracy and human development, and has become an established regional leader in governance reforms. In particular, the peaceful transition of power following the parliamentary elections in 2012 showed the maturity of democracy and rule of law. However, since winning that election, the Georgian Dream party has seen two Prime Ministers resign, most recently when Irakli Garibashvili resigned in December 2015, less than a year ahead of the 2016 parliamentary elections.

In the last 10 years, Georgia has undertaken a number of reforms in the areas of human

rights and rule of law, including the adoption of a Criminal Justice Reform Strategy, a Civic Integration Strategy, a National Human Rights Strategy and Personal Data Protection and Anti-discrimination legislation. It has also adopted new legislation that increases the independence of the judiciary, the establishment of an independent legal aid service, and the improvement of prison conditions. Georgia is also undertaking significant reforms to decentralize power to the regions. All of these reforms require further support to ensure adequate implementation.

Georgia has long prioritized integration into the EU and Euro-Atlantic structures, and in June 2014, took a significant step by signing an Association Agreement with the EU. This

agreement, which includes joining the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area, significantly deepens political and economic ties with Europe. Georgia has also acceded to a number of international treaties on human rights, including the CRPD.

Despite the progress to date though, several challenges remain in Georgia. Most prominently, inequality and unemployment remain high, and the protracted conflicts in the territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia are still unresolved.

ASSISTANCE AND IMPACT

The continued improvement of human rights is a key priority for UNDP in Georgia. UNDP's focus has been to support the National Human Rights Strategy and the implementation of the Action Plan adopted in 2014, as well as the formulation of a new 2016-2017 Action Plan. Reforms to the criminal justice system, judiciary, penitentiary system and personal data protection are to be implemented by the National Human Rights Council. As a member (without voting power) of this National Council, UNDP contributed directly to monitoring the implementation of the action plan and confirming progress against benchmarks.

Steps are also being taken towards greater transparency, with the Georgian Parliament engaging in the OGP Initiative and adopting a Parliamentary Openness Action Plan in July 2015, one of the first parliaments in the world to do so. With UNDP actively supporting and facilitating, the Parliament developed the plan through a consultative process involving civil society organizations, and it includes commitments to promote public involvement in the legislative process, access to information, as well as new technologies and innovation to reform Parliament's web services and accountability. The Georgian Parliament has already started to implement up to 18 openness commitments by establishing the Permanent Parliamentary Council on Open and Transparent Governance to monitor the implementation of the commitments and ensure sustainability and local ownership of the process. A number of web innovations were also introduced and legislative amendments prepared to advance transparency and citizen engagement. As an acknowledgement of its commitment to openness and effective co-



Youth for Open Parliament - Winners of the ideas contest receive gifts and certificates

Photo by: Daro Sulakauri/UNDP

"Parliament is the democratic institution closest to the people. In Georgia, we formed an Inter-Factional Working Group that worked closely with civil society leaders to develop a concrete plan for increasing parliamentary openness, with specific, objective milestones, to make sure we are on track. We are pleased that this work is recognized internationally and we are honoured to host this meeting of the Legislative Openness Working Group"

– Mr. Davit Usupashvili, Speaker of the Georgian Parliament, opening remarks at the 'Committing to Openness: Parliamentary Action Plans, Standards and Tools' conference

operation with civil society, the Georgian parliament was awarded the global OGP Government Champions Award in October 2015. Building on recent decentralization reforms, UNDP assisted national, regional and local authorities to continue with the reform process. In a significant step, a new Law on Mountainous Regions Development was adopted in July 2015, after intensive policy consultations involving the Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure, other Ministries and the Parliament. This law is designed to provide substantial social, economic and business ben-

efits, together with a guarantee of annual funds from the national budget reserved for mountain development. UNDP also supported the Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure to reach agreement with other ministries on 30 separate amendments promoting the decentralization of power to municipalities, adding to the four acts¹ and four competencies² agreed upon in 2014.

With continuing protracted conflicts, UNDP is working to increase both the number and capacity of civil society organizations by providing training to improve the implementation of conflict-sensitive interventions at the grass-roots level, and enhancing the sustainability of the organizations themselves. The provision of grants to help address shared challenges across the Georgian, Abkhaz and Ossetian ethnic communities is resulting in improved intercommunity relationships, and improvement in well-being and livelihoods. An example is the support to Georgian and Abkhaz ethnic communities to collect anonymized personal stories (micronarratives), in addition to more traditional survey data. This information is used to identify issues of concern across these communities, with a focus on those concerning women and youth. Overall, these grants have seen the number of projects involving people from two or more of the Georgian, Abkhaz and Ossetian ethnic communities increase to 73 percent, or 55 out of a total of 75 projects, and have positively affected over 90,000 conflict-affected people.

Confidence-building among ethnic communities in Georgia is being complemented with more systematic attempts to remove ethnic discrimination. Following on from the adoption of the Law on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination, in 2015, UNDP supported efforts to promote equal access to government services for linguistic minorities. This involved UNDP and the Ministry of Justice facilitating the translation of a number of government websites and other resources into the Abkhaz language. Georgian language classes are also being provided for national and ethnic minorities in remote rural destinations to promote their integration into society.

In efforts to improve access to justice, advocacy from UNDP, USAID and the EU led to an extension of the Legal Aid Service mandate from April 2015. As a result, the Legal Aid Service now provides services in selected civil and administrative cases, in addition to those of criminal nature. UNDP also brokered an agreement between the Legal Aid Service and the Public Service Development Agency for working space to be provided for Legal Aid Service lawyers at Public Service Development Agency Community Centres in six rural locations. The Legal Aid Service delivered services to over 30,000 disadvantaged citizens in 2015.



10 years of legal aid in Georgia - Niels Scott, head of UNDP Georgia, congratulates the Legal Aid Service

Photo by: Vladimer Valishvili/UNDP

This expansion of legal aid to regional and rural areas was one of several efforts to improve the livelihoods of people outside the major administrative centres. Following up on the Regional Development Strategies and Action Plans approved in 2014, UNDP support for regional and municipal-level strategic planning in six target regions resulted in the implementation of 600 proposed projects. Accordingly, the annual State budget for these regional infrastructure projects has increased from approximately US\$63 million in 2014 to US\$79 million.³ UNDP also supported 22 pilot municipalities in drafting development plans, and is expected to be followed-up with strategic planning support for all 42 municipalities in the six target regions.

In efforts to promote gender equality, UNDP facilitated a micro-grants programme for rural women's groups to complete small priority proj-

¹ Public school infrastructure maintenance, stray animals care, cultural heritage monuments upkeep and maintenance, and parking regulations

² Potable water supply, irrigation water supply, waste management, and transportation service provision

³ Based on an exchange rate of 1 US dollar to 2.21 Georgian Lari

ects in 12 communities. This work included projects such as the rehabilitation of kindergartens, recreational spaces and the organization of specific events for women and youth. The success of these grants and resulting projects have allowed these community groups to secure an additional US\$700,000 in funding from local authorities to fix additional problems.

With these economic and political pressures, there is also a risk that potentially less popular reforms, such as implementing existing human rights and gender equality policies, and honouring commitments for increased legislative openness and transparency will become more difficult. To mitigate this, UNDP will work with candidates and parliamentarians from all ma-



Key results

Adoption of a highly ambitious Parliamentary Openness Action Plan within the OGP framework with 18 solid commitments

90,000 people benefitted from 75 projects to improve relationships between Georgian, Abkhaz and Ossetian ethnic communities.

Legal Aid Service expanded, providing access to free legal aid to more than 30,000 disadvantaged citizens

Adoption of new Law on Mountainous Regions Development, guaranteeing annual funds from the national budget for mountain development

CHALLENGES, LESSONS LEARNED AND THE WAY FORWARD

One of the primary challenges facing Georgia going forward is the regional economic slowdown. Already, falls in export revenues and flows of remittances have resulted in GDP growth slowing from 4.6 percent in 2014 to 2.8 percent in 2015.⁴

⁴The risk is that this slowdown will exacerbate existing socio-economic disparities and divides between ethnic groups. In response, a key priority for UNDP will be promoting inclusive growth and continued support for democratic reforms, with the Sustainable Development Agenda particularly central to policy formulation.

for parties to ensure they remain committed to reform. UNDP will also work with the EU to encourage a credible and fair election process, in particular by pushing for unbiased and balanced media coverage.

Decentralization also remains an ongoing priority. UNDP plans to continue supporting local self-governance reform with, amongst other things, capacity building of institutions and civil servants (at both the local and national level), to ensure all levels of government are able to manage and facilitate the decentralization process and provide better services to citizens. This will become particularly important with the Government indicating its commitment to fiscal decentralization to municipalities.

⁴ The World Bank, "Georgia Overview". Available from <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/georgia/overview#1> (accessed 3 June 2016)

UNDP also plans to continue supporting the Georgian Parliament in developing its institutional capabilities, policy-making ability and oversight functions.

Finally, UNDP will be working to improve social cohesion across Georgia. By supporting civil society organizations, UNDP will look to scale-up

conflict prevention projects and initiatives that address shared challenges and improve livelihoods across ethnic divides. Continued work will be also carried out in Abkhazia to enhance social inclusion through interventions to improve the quality of life and income generation for rural communities.