

## Generations For Peace - Georgia - “Outreach And Community Initiatives For Interreligious Peace And Cooperation In Old Tbilisi, Georgia” Report

### 1. Introduction *(Background, brief description of the project and how the activities reported on relate to the objective or the goal of the project.)*

Historically, Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia, has always been inhabited by people from different ethnic and religious backgrounds. For centuries, the different groups used to live side-by-side without any serious clashes or violence as an understanding of multiculturalism and diversity has been on the high level. Circumstances changed after Georgia's independence in the 90s, as the country faced severe political, economic and social challenges. Georgia and Tbilisi in particular, became devastated after civil, internal and external wars and conflicts. Bridges between the people from different backgrounds were severely damaged and as a result, ethnic minorities became vulnerable groups as their inclusion into the society and access to public resources continued to be restrained. Their conditions have worsened along with the rise of Orthodox Christian Church's power and influence as their religion was found different from the majority. At the times of social and political hardships nationalism also became dominant public opinion that excluded more ethnical minorities from countries daily affairs.

The project, **“Outreach and Community Initiatives for Interreligious Peace and Cooperation in Old Tbilisi, Georgia,”** was meant to complement a broader Dialogue For Peace Programme (DPP) in Old Tbilisi. The Dialogue For Peace Programme utilises GFP's cutting-edge model of community-led transformative dialogue to train, mentor and support members of diverse faith communities to carry out a sustained series of intra and inter-group dialogue sessions. The goal of the project was to contribute towards a more peaceful society in Georgia through activities based on a religious spirit of tolerance and coexistence that vitalizes local communities and invite broad social participation and collaboration amongst and between religious groups in conflict to support the positive transformation of their conflict relationships.

In designing and implementing the project, our volunteers got engaged with stakeholders and Target Group from three different ethnic groups. Due to challenges in engaging the initially intended Target Group, our volunteers re-selected a new Target Group comprising of participants from the Tbilisi University aged between 18-24 years. The Target Group participated in Advocacy for Peace Events conducted by the volunteers and later on organised Community Initiatives supported by the volunteers. The primary goal to bring youth from Georgian, Armenian and Azerbaijani communities and create a safe venue for informal conversations and sharing of ideas and opinions was not altered. The project aimed to equip these youth with the necessary skills for enabling them to contribute and participate in social activities to strengthen their sense of social responsibility and inclusion.

The planned activities in this project (preparatory meeting, consultative planning meetings, debriefing, outreach events and community initiatives) provided opportunities for diverse Christians and Muslims to carry out collective actions beneficial to the community.

## 2. Summary of Results

August Activities				
S/No	Date	Activity	Location	In Attendance
1	2017 October 31	One Preparatory meeting	Public space at Old Tbilisi	7
2	2017 November 4	Pre-survey	Tbilisi State University – Ethnic Minority Empowerment program 1+4	18
3	2017 November 4	ADPE 1	Tbilisi State University – Ethnic Minority Empowerment program 1+4	18
4	2017 November 11	ADPE 2	Tbilisi State University – Ethnic Minority Empowerment program 1+4	15
5	2017 November 18	ADPE 3	Tbilisi State University – Ethnic Minority Empowerment program 1+4	20
6	2017 November 18	Preparatory Meeting for Community Initiatives	Public space at Old Tbilisi	5
7	2017 November 25	First Community Initiative Pre- and post-activity surveys for participants	School of Free Knowledge (non-formal educational centre)	42
8	2017 December 1	Second Consultative meeting Pre- and post-activity surveys for participants	Youth Centre of Tbilisi State University	8
9	2017 December 8	Second Community Initiative Pre- and post-activity surveys for participants	Youth Centre of Tbilisi State University	38
10	2017 December 15	Third Consultative meeting	Public space at Old Tbilisi	5
11	2017 December 15	Third Community Initiative	Youth Centre of Tbilisi State University	45
12	2017 December 22	One debriefing session; data analysis Post Survey of Participants & Report making	Public space at Old Tbilisi	4
13	2017 December 22	Report-making	Public space at Old Tbilisi	4
14	2018 January 10	Report submission	Public space at Old Tbilisi	2

**Key achievements/Highlights against planned results** (*What are the major achievements made aside from numbers reached*)

The religiously-diverse Christian and Muslim youth volunteers (Georgian, Armenian and Azeri ethnic groups) collaboratively prepared for the project and planned three Advocacy for Peace Events. They held consultative meetings with Muslim and Christian faith participants to plan interreligious community initiatives deciding on the collective action to be carried out in the initiatives, and the roles and responsibilities of each member in planning and implementing.

The volunteers conducted three Advocacy For Peace Events involving the Armenian Azerbaijanis, Armenian and Georgian Orthodox and Muslims. The first Community Initiative involved GFP youth leaders (from different nationalities and across inter-religious divides) leading Target Group to conduct a visit to a school for special needs and vulnerable children. The GFP youth leaders conducted a session on diversity, and the Target Group youth members from each nationality played different cultural games with the children.

The success of this Community Initiative strengthened the readiness of the Target Group youth to be comfortable in engaging their peers and others outside the university and instilled the motivation and confidence for them to plan the second and last Community Initiatives supported by mentoring and guidance from the GFP youth leaders.

The participatory debrief with 20 members of the Muslim and Christian Georgian, Armenian and Azeri ethnic groups identified best practices, lessons learnt and impact of the project:

**Project Outcomes**

Two expected outcomes of the project for the direct beneficiaries were selected, and these were *strengthened cooperation among people actively engaged in continued efforts to achieve a peaceful society* and *strengthened understanding and cooperation amongst and between religious groups*. The two outcomes were selected because they would reveal whether there was an improvement in relations between and among the project participants.

The volunteers carefully selected the participants from a group of university students belonging to different ethnic and faith groups, Muslims Armenian Azerbaijanis, Armenian and Georgian Orthodox.

The Target Group reported that the programme had had positive effects on them as it effectively broke barriers between and among the three groups, the Muslims, Armenian and Azerbaijanis, Armenian Orthodox, Georgian Orthodox. The three groups participated in three volunteer-led Advocacy Events and one Community Initiative. They planned and implemented two community initiatives with the support of the volunteers. The quality of interactions was reported to be visible by the volunteers and was expressed by the Target Group during the debrief session. Over and above gaining new knowledge and skills giving them confidence, the project helped the Target Group to get to know and understand each other better.

The data from the baseline and end line surveys results are as follows:

- an increase of 22 percent of Target Group who report they are now more informed about ethnic minorities living in Georgia.
- 26% increase in the number of participants who interact with people from different ethnic groups.

- The data also showed a 27% increase in the number of participants who feel confident with their ethnic background society.
- There was also a 26% increase in the attitude towards participants that exist from people of different backgrounds.
- The number of participants who think they can contribute to solving ethnic minority problems based on their skills and knowledge increased by 37%.

This data was supported by the debrief discussions held at the end of the project where the Target Group expressed how valuable the project was to them as it helped them gain knowledge and make new friends. The friendly and positive environment gave them the confidence to confidently and comfortably interact with people from different backgrounds freely expressing their ideas, opinions and experiences.

The project improved social participation and collaboration in interreligious activities. Throughout the activities, a total of 20 youth participated in three different advocacy events, one community initiative, planned and implemented two community initiatives. More than 100 people benefited throughout the three community initiatives that focused on diversity and multiculturalism, conducted by both, GFP Volunteers and the Target Group. The experience increased encouragement for interreligious peace-making activities as the Target Group wanted to continue with the activities beyond the project timeline.

### **3. Stakeholder and Community Engagement** *(How stakeholders and community members been engaged or involved in the programme).*

The Key Stakeholders and community members' involvement and engagement was the key to the success of the project as they connected the Youth Leaders to the Target Group and Beneficiary Community. They also provided venues, advised on content, logistics, methodologies and approaches. They supported the volunteers in follow-ups and keeping the Target Group organised and well-coordinated.

### **4. Key Challenges** *(Any unforeseen problems and how they were dealt with).*

The delays in the Dialogue for Peace Programme led to the suspension of the Project activities and significant change of timeline. The delays were as a result of the volunteers finding the time required for the initial intra-group phase to be significantly greater than they had anticipated. To ensure the success of the project, the project activities were planned and implemented independently of the Dialogue for Peace Programme. The advantage of focusing on completing the project activities helped the volunteers regain momentum and encouraged the Target Group to be motivated to plan and implement more community activities engaging Georgian Orthodox, Muslims, Azeri and Armenian ethnic children and youth.

The scheduling of activities to ensure maximum participation was equally harder than expected due to limited availability of GFP-GEO volunteers during the week, the initial Target Group's preferred time for activities. Previous GFP activities with youth had been scheduled at weekends, but the appropriate Target Group for participation in the DPP activities preferred activities to be held during the week. This necessitated a change in the Target Group from adults to university youth.

The changes in Target Group required a change in the timeline and requesting for a "No Cost Extension" to ensure quality implementation of the planned activities. In addition to the additional mentoring of the volunteers, the Programmes Director travelled to Georgia to further

support the GFP-GEO volunteers and ensure all was on track for completion of the NPF activities.

**5. Lessons Learned** *(Examples of highlights of project learning. These can either be successes or failures, but show how adaptive learning is used in the programme to improve implementation).*

The debrief session at the end of the project provided space for learning and reflection for the volunteers involved in the implementation. The participatory debrief also confirmed that the delays in the DPP negatively affected the project timeline which compelled the change in the Target Group. The constant reviews of the project encouraged testing of different resolutions before the final decision to implement the project activities independent of the DPP. The documentation of lessons regarding the implementation of the DPP has improved the planning of Dialogue for Peace Programmes in other countries.

On the field, the volunteers also learnt vital lessons in coordinating, delegating tasks to each other with full trust, mentoring, guiding each other and flexibility. Regular consultations and open feedback after every event or activity encouraged volunteers to be culture-sensitive when dealing with the different ethnic groups.

**6. Quotes from the programme participants** *(Quotes of direct and indirect beneficiaries, how the programme is helping them, how do they see it useful for them in the future, what are they learning, etc.).*

However, anonymous, the quotes shared showed the impact the project had on the participants.

“Project gave me an experience of interacting with people from different ethnic groups and I have learnt that there is nothing to be afraid of interacting with them.” (Target Group)

“I always try my best to take every opportunity for learning new that’s why I joined this project. Starting from the very first sessions I got enchanted with the friendly and positive environment. I have not missed any single session and I am very sad as it is now over. I have found here new friends, new knowledge and confidence. Thank you for that and love you.” (Target Group)

“This project gave me so much positive emotions and so many dear friends. I love this project.” (Target Group)

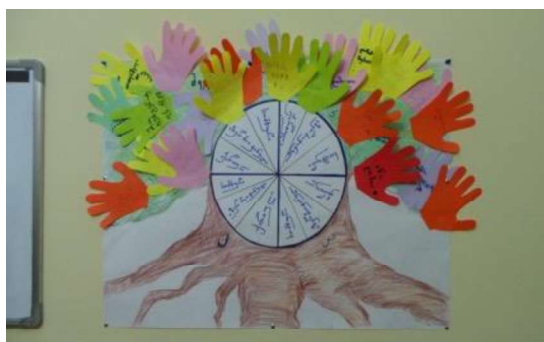
“It was exceptional project. Although I had a very busy schedule I was thinking about this project 16 hours per day.” (Target Group)



## 7. Photos



*Introductory session with the Target Group getting to know each other.*



*The Volunteers and the Target Group conducting the first Community Initiative on diversity with children at a School for Vulnerable Children.*





*Target Group-led Community Initiative on bullying in schools.*



*Target Group Certification after the Third Community Initiative*

Please, find more photos on the following link:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1pwE6rgmvxQBkvcVBWrDHmhV90WBGvJty?usp=sharing>

