



women

**in**

**business**

BAS PROGRAMME Armenia & Georgia

"The purpose of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development's (EBRD) TAM/BAS Programme is to promote economic transition through advice and mentoring at the enterprise level and the development of a sustainable infrastructure of business advisory services, and to contribute to improving the policy and regulatory environment for business."

Through its efforts to strengthen economic transition and by promoting the development and sustainability of the micro, small and medium-sized enterprise (MSME) sector, the EBRD TAM/BAS Programme recognises gender equality and broader gender-related issues as an increasingly important component of the transition process. In particular, the Programme aims to help better realise the potential of women's contribution to economic development in the emerging markets.

Transition countries face significant challenges in enabling women to act as economic, social and political agents. Such a process of change, however, has the potential to revitalise civil society and, ultimately, enable the achievement of the region's full economic potential in a sustainable manner.

Pilot projects in the South Caucasus between 2004 - 07 identified the obstacles encountered by women entrepreneurs in that region and provided a basis for the design of the current programme. In particular, the objective was to maximise transition impact by addressing the specific market failures that have resulted in the low participation of women in the Armenian and Georgian labour forces.

The BAS Women in Business Programme has been implemented for the last two years with donor support from the Canada International Development Agency (CIDA), the EBRD Early Transition Countries (ETC) Fund and Taipei China. The objective of the programme is to promote women entrepreneurship in Armenia and Georgia, as an avenue to achieving the BAS Programme's goal.

The programme, organised by the local BAS teams in Yerevan and Tbilisi, included: BAS projects tailored to women entrepreneurs, workshops/ seminars and training courses offering business training for women entrepreneurs, study tours for women active in the information and communication technologies (ICT) sector to Taipei, general visibility and dissemination activities of market economy best practices, and success stories of women entrepreneurs. As part of the business start-up workshops, emphasis was given to linkage with EBRD - funded financial intermediaries to improve access to microfinance institutions for assisted women entrepreneurs.

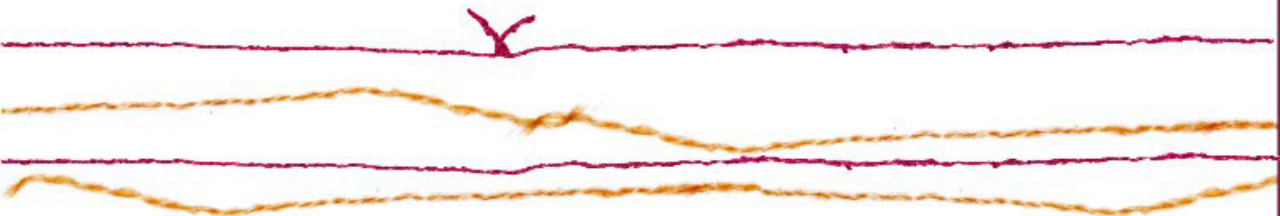
The programme was also instrumental in creating additional jobs, either directly through business start-ups or indirectly through the growth in services and activities, especially in remote regions.

It seeks to capitalise on the potential of entrepreneurs and managers to strengthen skill levels, and has successfully unlocked women's potential through a number of initiatives.

BAS has initiated 36 focus groups and workshops in Armenia and Georgia to identify the obstacles encountered by women entrepreneurs in the region and to provide specific business training to address their needs. Moreover, BAS organised 86 projects in which it advised women on the appropriate type of support, including choosing a qualified consultants, and offered subsidies of between 70 to 90 per cent, depending on the location and maturity of the enterprise

This brochure was written and edited by Ilan Greenberg with photos from Armenian and Georgian photographers, Zaven Khachikyan and Justyna Mielnikiewicz. It was designed and published by Fainberg Ltd; a women-owned and managed company, and a qualified BAS consultant and BAS client. The brochure was produced in close collaboration with the BAS Georgia and Armenia teams under the supervision of the BAS Women in Business coordinator: Brigitte Watson.

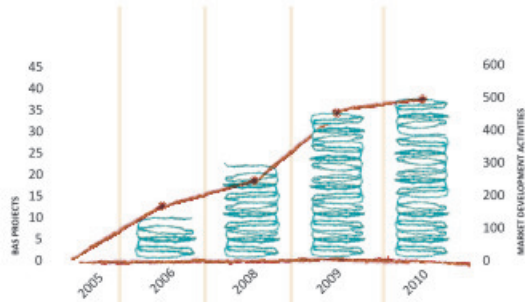
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...a few  
FACTS

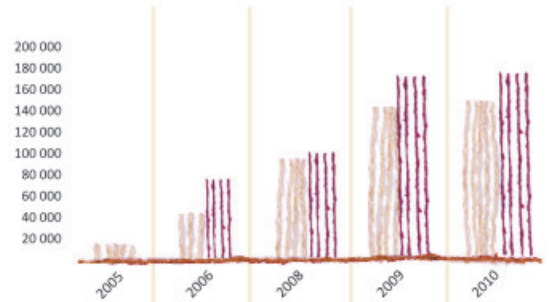
# ARMENIA

BAS Armenia Women-in-Business  
Initiative Beneficiaries 2006-2010 (cumulative)

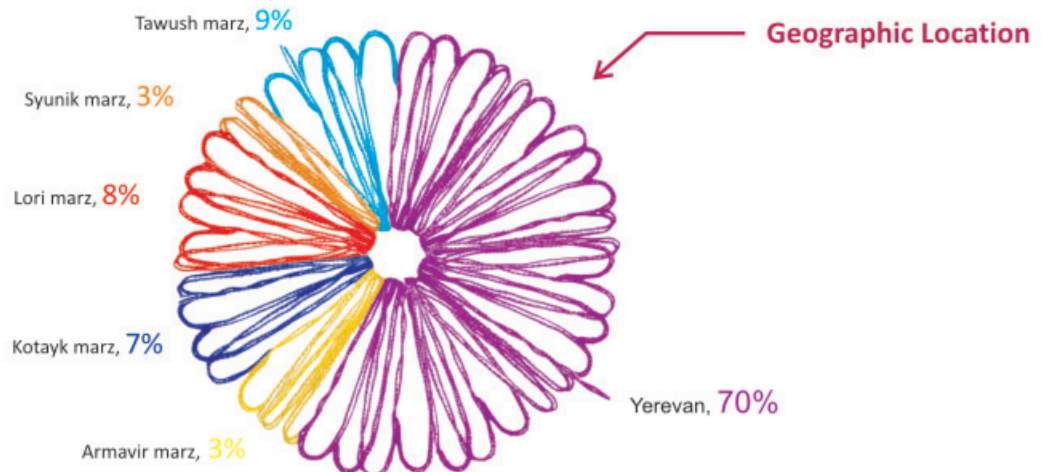


<b>BAS PROJECTS</b>	0	10	22	34	39
<b>MARKET DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES</b>	28	168	247	452	497

BAS Armenia Women-in-Business  
Initiative Portfolio 2006-2010 (in EUR, cumulative)

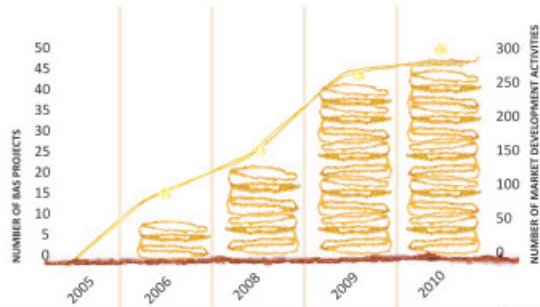


<b>BAS PROJECTS</b>	-	47 000	98 382	141 316	151 932
<b>MARKET DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES</b>	2 850	76 285	99 495	173 097	177 547



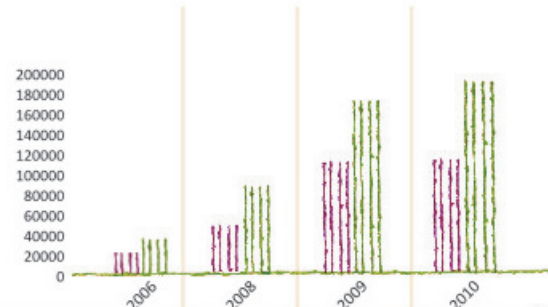
# GEORGIA

BAS Georgia Women-in-Business  
Initiative Beneficiaries 2006-2010 (cumulative)

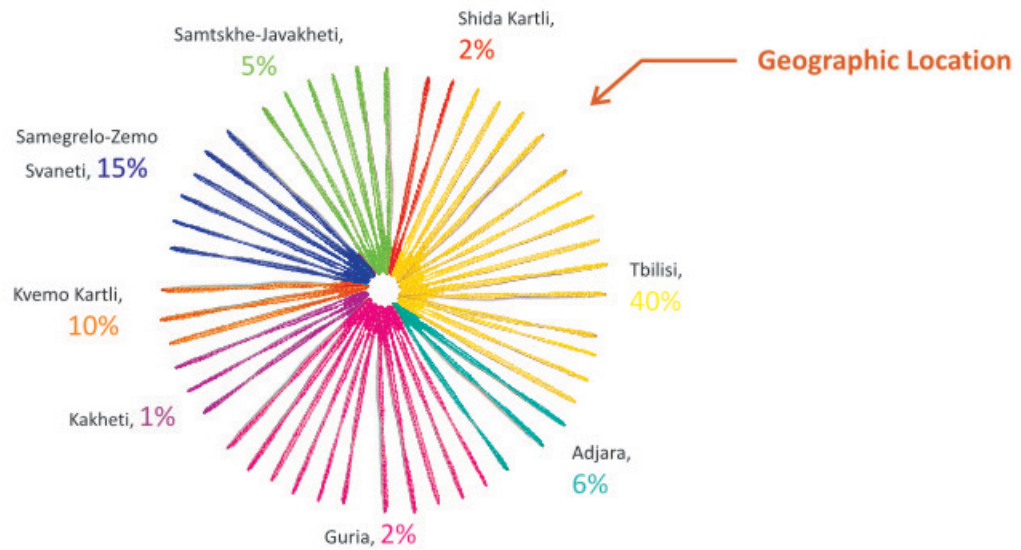


<b>BAS PROJECTS</b>	0	9	21	41	47
<b>MARKET DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES</b>	0	90	150	260	260

BAS Georgia Women-in-Business  
Initiative Portfolio 2006-2010 (in EUR, cumulative)



<b>BAS PROJECTS</b>	31729	85865	173173	190088
<b>MARKET DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES</b>	23944	43715	116957	116957





Women **IN** Business  
BAS Programme Armenia



# On a steep hill near the picturesque city of Dilijan

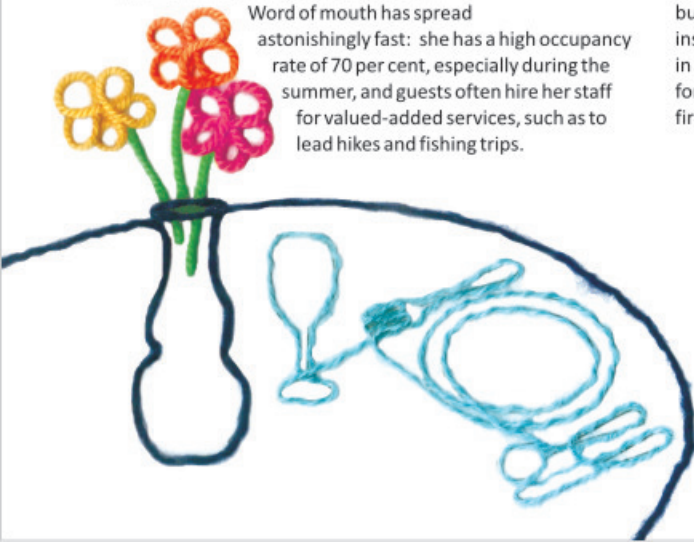
... pungent smoke from a big outdoor meat cooker slowly drifts over the old growth forest quilting the land and the old road that winds towards Jukhtak Monastery. On a tiled verandah, guests staying at Daravand Ltd, a festive, full-service three-storey, seven-room Bed & Breakfast, tuck into meals of grilled beef and lamb, locally grown vegetables, and Armenian specialties such as roasted eggplant, stuffed bell peppers, and jilbour, a minty egg and tomato stew. The scene would not look out of place in the Côte d'Azur.

Melineh Tovmasyan, overseer of the entire hotel and tour operation, had decided to start the business in 2007, while living in the capital, Yerevan, with her extroverted husband, Razmik Arzoyan. Melineh brought natural skills to the enterprise. With a warm, welcoming demeanour, a fluid command of English, an eye for detail and a talent for managing logistics, Melineh quickly created a high-end hospitality oasis in the Armenian hinterlands. Banning the imposing bodyguards that some rich Armenians like to have always on hand, Melineh only accepts reservations from trusted referrals – from past customers or via a small network of travel agencies in Yerevan.


Word of mouth has spread astonishingly fast: she has a high occupancy rate of 70 per cent, especially during the summer, and guests often hire her staff for valued-added services, such as to lead hikes and fishing trips.

But after two years of steady growth, Melineh hit a wall. She needed to reach out to new potential customers by promoting the hotel via the internet, and to better manage the hotel's storehouse and its staff. Since Armenia offered little in the way of business development training for small businesses, she turned to the EBRD BAS Programme for help.

BAS stepped in by enabling Melineh to hire a local consultant, Business Solutions Ltd, an experienced and flexible consultancy in web site development and IT systems, with a background in assisting other hospitality businesses in the region. The project envisioned the installation of storehouse management software; a web site in three languages that provided an online reservations form, a guest house photo gallery, and enough internet firepower to provide a foundation for future needs.







"It's made my life so much easier," Melineh marvels as she guides her staff around rapidly churning guests at lunchtime.

Melineh has stopped purchasing most of her inventory from expensive shops, instead turning to a cheaper wholesale distributor. "And the staff feel more responsible because they can use the inventory system, giving them more control."

Employee development, in fact, is one of the unexpected dividends of the project. Melineh cites the story of her cook, who quit her position at the hotel to take a better job elsewhere; a single mother in a region of Armenia where single parenthood carries a damaging stigma. Melineh was unhappy to lose a valued staff member but proud that her enterprise – and the example she set as the relatively rare female boss – instilled in her cook the confidence to strike out indepen-

dently. "I'm more valuable to my staff because I am a woman. I can show them that it is possible to take charge, to have a normal life. This business is not only imparting professional skills but changing how they see the world," Melineh recounts with emotion.



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# The BAS Programme is deeply invested in many areas where women entrepreneurs intersect with the hospitality industry.

Another beneficiary of the BAS Programme has been Gayane Harutyunyan and Larisa Mkoyan, the owners of Travelon Ltd, a travel agency and tour agent, as well as the Armenian distributor of the Swiss Zepter line of home products.

The travel agency came first, but an affluent clientele led the women to believe they could establish a complementary business in household flatware and other home items. They turned to BAS to help fund their efforts to build a web site, create a branding plan, and to publish marketing and other promotional materials, such as a catalogue. They also built a customer relationship management system, and a barcode scanning system to track their inventory of plates and cutlery. The result has been a 70 per cent reduction in the staff time devoted to inventory management. "Before I would look up sale numbers on the computer and I would have the feeling I was still looking at handwritten notes," exclaims Gayane.

The women and their sales staff often spend two or three hours with clients. "It's not a purchase like buying bread," says Gayane. Both travel and plates, it turns out, attract customers requiring a lot of hand-holding.

"We were in a situation where we had no time to manage either business," says Gayane. "We were also in a situation where we could not afford the consultants we needed to help us. But we also were in a situation where we really, really needed them!" The BAS Programme's capability to provide assistance through a trusted consultancy was the difference between viability and decline, perhaps even bankruptcy.

Travelon has taken the women-entrepreneurship ethos to heart. The owners have started a "ladies club" to gather women clients into a community to discuss travel and twice a year they plan a foreign tour. "Armenia is slowly changing and women are leading the way. Men are starting to respect women who own their own businesses. And we slowly start to become role models. Men are starting to learn from us."





# Yerevan is a city where the streets sizzle with energy

In sleek, crowded cafes and restaurants, Armenians of all stripes jockey for tables, while stylish young people zigzag around corners and groups stop to admire bursting displays of new imports in shop windows. Industries such as fashion have an opportunity to thrive in a city such as Yerevan, and like the hospitality industry, fashion is a sector where women have opportunities not just as consumers, but as entrepreneurs.

The EBRD BAS Programme is currently running a Women Entrepreneurs Programme in Armenia to capitalise on this potential. The idea is to create formal "Women Networks" where there are embryonic commercial activities to create a pilot fashion centre with professional training programmes to teach the basics of fashion design, marketing and business development to about 50 fashion designers over several months. The idea is to create a platform for the development of a comprehensive fashion centre, to become fully operational within two years of the initial training programme. To date, the programme has 25 graduates in the city of Gyumri and another 25 in Yerevan.

The rate of success has been astounding: out of 52 designers, upwards of 70 per cent have found jobs, while the remaining 30 per cent have gone on to start their own businesses. But the success of the project is measured in more than percentages. Armenia has an exciting, promising incipient fashion industry, mostly characterised as micro businesses – in most cases, a single designer. But few Armenian designers have a full line of merchandise, and while the designers are formally trained and highly skilled tailors, they lack the kind of collateral skills, such as marketing, branding, and exposure to new fabrics that can take them – and the Armenian fashion industry – to a sustainable level.

Take the example of a young woman designer named Gayane, who has been in the tailoring business since 1995. "When I met with the fashion council I realised that sewing is not enough," she relates. But at the BAS-funded centre,

Gayane learned how to market herself as a designer rather than just a tailor. "It gave me the confidence to take the first step in registering my business. Prêt a porter brought me recognition. Going to a tailor is one thing, going to a designer is another." Gayane counts among her new clients Yerevan's emerging female middle class. "Now I know how to price to this market," she enthuses. Gayane already has two distinct merchandise collections in her shop, with plans to do much more.

Gayane is still ramping up her brand recognition; still struggling to achieve distinction in a competitive Armenian marketplace. There is no question she has a good shot, thanks to the fashion centre providing an analysis of Gayane and her colleagues' businesses, a well-publicised showcase for their new designs, and strategic business planning and marketplace analysis. But the assistance, however, is also geared towards making successful Armenian designers more successful.







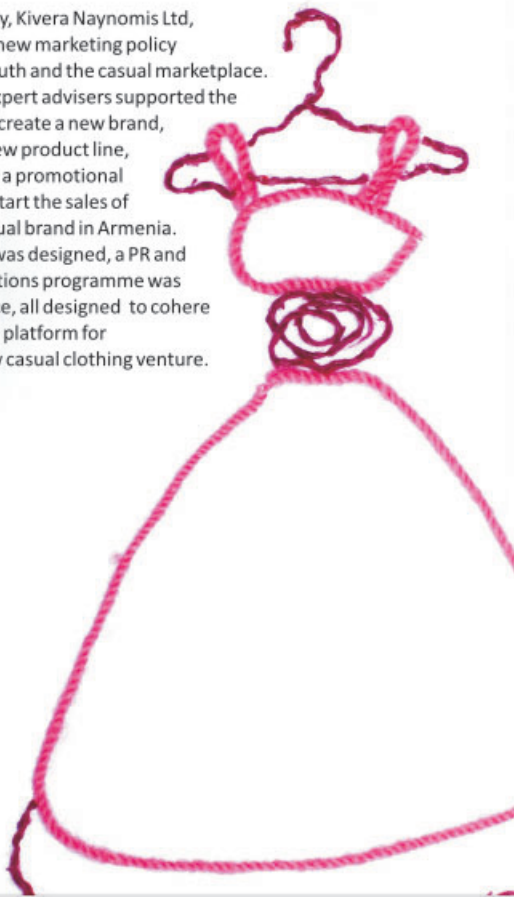
# A good place for a young designer to make mistakes

Arevik Simonyan is a fashion designer who has reached the pinnacle of fashion success in Yerevan. She relocated back to Yerevan in 2005 for family reasons and discovered that Armenia is “a good place for a young designer to make mistakes.” In her ultra modern store in downtown Yerevan, Arevik has created a fashion-driven mystique around her flamboyant persona – she has become a local celebrity, known for her fashion-forward designs, celebrity clientele, and temperamental Chihuahua mascot.

Arevik, whose merchandise line is called Kivera, her name spelled backwards, wants to reposition her brand for the mass market in Armenia and abroad while retaining her reputation for high-end design products. “In Armenia, the issue is being able to manufacture at volume,” she explains. A lot of the factories are out of date in terms of technology and there is a “shortage of working capital for refurbishing factories.” It can be difficult to acquire the right raw materials. And the skills in Armenia’s clothing industry are now out of date. Moreover, potential business investors “don’t take me seriously because I am a woman.” As a result, Arevik often takes her husband to negotiate terms with factory owners. Arevik, in short, faces daunting obstacles.

But the clients are there, she says, and if she could find staff and outsourced workers with university training who are motivated to modernise, Arevik feels she can grow her business substantially. The BAS Programme is geared towards making all this reality, and Arevik is a sterling example of an enthusiastic benefactor.

Her company, Kivera Naynomis Ltd, was given a new marketing policy targeting youth and the casual marketplace. A team of expert advisers supported the designer to create a new brand, develop a new product line, and support a promotional package to start the sales of her first casual brand in Armenia. A new logo was designed, a PR and communications programme was put into place, all designed to cohere into a viable platform for Arevik’s new casual clothing venture.





# "I always had the idea of running a beauty salon"

Far from the glitz of Yerevan's emerging fashionistas, the BAS Programme has initiated a women entrepreneurship training programme in rural Armenia with the American University of Armenia Extension Department. The priority goal of the programme is to develop a comprehensive entrepreneurship package that enables entrepreneurial thinking – an approach that gets to the heart of the challenge: to re-engineer the mindset of promising women candidates so that they can build viable small businesses for themselves, their families, and their rural communities.

The testimonials of women who entered the programme in the Aragatsoth region, where a large number of husbands are working abroad, confirm that they face severe challenges exacerbated by the global financial crisis. Says one participant: "I graduated from university but never worked, but still I had the identity as a business woman. What I needed was self-confidence." Said another young woman who had been trained as a nurse but lived in a town where her skills could not be used: "I always had the idea of running a beauty salon. There was no salon in my village, and everyone got haircuts at home. I wanted to create someplace where families could have a social centre, where they could find a good service and create a physical appearance that they could use to look professional."

Yet another woman was a geography teacher for 23 years but owned orchards outside a small village: "I remembered from my childhood, because we had a family fruit business, that there is a market for our goods, and I had a plan to grow and sell organic dried fruits. Before attending the training sessions I thought opening a business was beyond my reach. I had no concept of marketing. Now I know I was thinking too small, aiming my product too locally. I needed to extend my scope to target more visitors."





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First, the women said, they had to overcome the objections of their husbands.

Then they had to confront the retrograde attitudes among some in their communities. But the result has been “to see equality among the sexes and improve women’s standing in the community,” says one participant. “We will be the pioneers, the role models,” she said. “We are the ice breakers.”

The women in the training programme took on a rigorous course that included subjects such as government regulations in Armenia; taxation; legal aspects; marketing, distribution channels and logistics; learning to use spreadsheets and other computer productivity software; and building a viable financial plan; the nitty-gritty of street-level entrepreneurship in a country where few have the horizons to see businesses take root. The women in the programme say they are now committed and armed to the teeth with the skills they need to tackle innovative enterprises in a rural region where they had little opportunity to move ahead.

But if the women are moving forward, there is more opportunity ahead. The Extension Department’s pilot project with the EBRD’s BAS Programme could contribute in the future with monitoring and assessing needs and requirements, looking at what has worked – and what has not. Strengths and additional needs could be assessed; recommendations for additional support could be made. Much of this is already embedded in the programme, and a report containing trainee profiles, business ideas and business plans is forthcoming.





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# The BAS WIB Programme has also fertilised the activities of vital NGOs fighting to empower women entrepreneurs in Armenia.

GOY, an Armenian agency actively engaged in projects that enhance business developments and ensure civic participation among women.

The BAS Programme chose GOY to implement a training programme for 30 women already involved in business start-ups but who lack the tools and resources to become successful. The project sought to provide these new business entrepreneurs with the skills to write business plans, seek financing (often via micro credit sources), and plan for future growth. Over more than two months, a team of experts mentored the women on every aspect of how to build a new business.

One such business was a new venture in dried fruit. "I learned how to invest in my business and in my village, who to hire and how to market," says one participant. The programme, in fact, has been judged an outstanding success, with new ground floor businesses sprouting up in small-scale organic agriculture, beauty salons, and consultancies such as a legal advice service. Says Lianna Mkrtchyan: "After attending the training programme all my plans changed." Now, she says, she would like additional training to learn how to manage employees and expand her client base.

The project targeted 30 female participants from two struggling industrial provinces, Syunik marz in the south, and the Lori marz in the north. The major goal of the project was to train women in accounting skills and to raise the participants' self-confidence so that they could find jobs in a professional environment. Hundreds of women applied for the programme, and the IAB Centre carefully vetted applications to find the most motivated candidates.

The requirements were purposely tough. The participants would need to relocate to Yerevan for the duration of the course. They would need to find their own accommodation. There was a considerable commitment of their time and resources. But successful candidates would learn the basics of accounting, the accounting standards of Armenia, as well as the rudiments of accounting software and tax legislation, both for financial accounting and management accounting. The course would also allocate time for such crucial skills as how to interview for a job, how to write a professional CV, and generally improve on interpersonal skills.

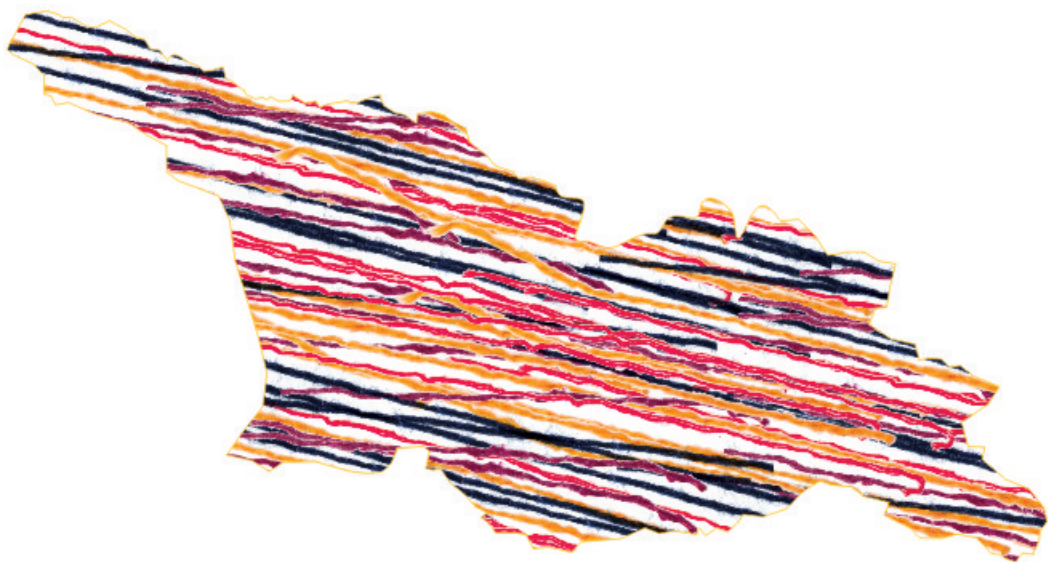
To empower women entrepreneurs across Armenia, the BAS Programme also assisted an organisation called the International Business Centre, Accountancy and or IAB Centre, which operates on several floors of a building in Yerevan.





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Women **IN** Business  
BAS Programme Georgia

Participants were hand-pressed to marshal all their resources in order to take part in the programme, but they later marvelled at the uniqueness of the opportunity.

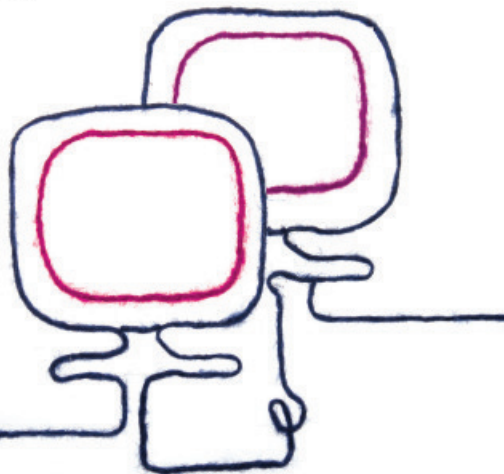
**"I don't think any other organisation would do this for us," says Lala Avetisyan, a participant who found a subsequent job at an NGO.**

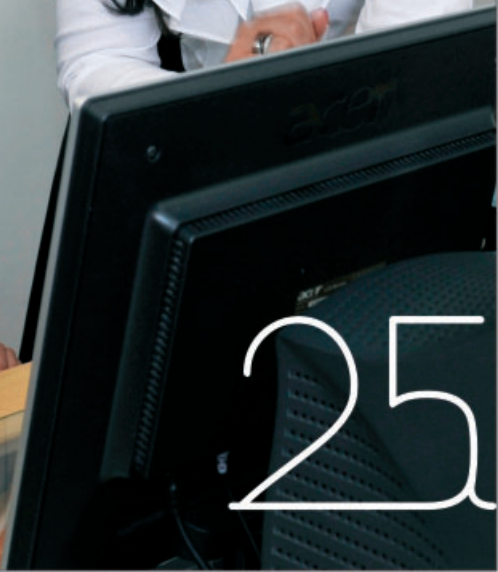
**"Keep in mind that many of these women had the job title of bookkeeper but in fact they were just doing data entry," explains Araksya Melkonyan, the peripatetic director of the IAB Centre. "This programme allowed them to become professionals in more than just name."**

In the autumn 2007 session, one-third of the participants found new jobs. Overall employment for the participants has held at a steady 50 per cent, and a further 30 per cent were given promotions. And a promotion can be life-changing for these participants. Anna Vanesyan reports that she was promoted to the level of accountant at the architecture firm where she had worked as a bookkeeper, receiving €120 a month, a substantial increase from the €80 a month she had previously earned. For Anna, this meant the difference from simple subsistence to a middle class living that allows her to save and to make ambitious plans for the future.

Furthermore, other participants have found work as freelancers, itself a kind of entrepreneurship training. Lala, who found work at an NGO, for example, says she is now

interested for the first time in starting her own business. "It would be great to have additional training to prepare for this," she says. "Being valued is more important than just more money."





"I was amazed at how the Taiwanese promote their own country, their own industry."

The BAS Programme's efforts to help enable a new wave of women entrepreneurship in the Caucasus has also taken the form of travel grants when unique opportunities for development in BAS member countries arise. For example, Araksya Melkonyan of the IAB Centre and Tamari Gabisonia of the Caucasus University journeyed to Taipei China to receive IT training. "I was amazed at how the Taiwanese promote their own country, their own industry," marveled Araksya, who was particularly impressed by the slew of Taiwanese programmes supporting its small- and medium-sized businesses.

Araksya returned from Taipei China with specific ideas on how to integrate what she learned there into her enterprise. She was introduced to business models that foster collaboration between employers and training centres, and new ideas on how to more creatively involve Armenian businesses in the curriculum and courses she offers in her training centre.

Tamari, meanwhile, returned to Tbilisi armed with the latest in advanced training methodologies, in particular a plan to use new techniques in her internet-based training classes, or "e-learning" programme. "Travelling to Taipei China and being exposed to contemporary issues and notions in my field was really one of the most valuable gifts that any organisation could fund for us," she says. "It has given us the knowledge base to build our IT training programme in ways that will give us meaningful results going forward."

Georgia and Armenia are small countries struggling to overcome tumultuous histories and excavate a path toward

vibrant, sustainable futures. It is a daunting challenge. Transformation requires a spirit of entrepreneurship and a willingness to embrace innovation, risk, and new ways of thinking – an outlook that people in much more developed economies sometimes struggle to achieve.

But where private sector leadership may be difficult to find, the BAS Programme has found it in no small measure as the professional staff in BAS offices in Tbilisi and Yerevan bring a wealth of local knowledge and savvy to the search. In so doing, these staff have worked tirelessly to identify and recruit women entrepreneurs who have demonstrated the capabilities and determination to advance their communities by building viable and growing businesses.

The result: a crest of new women leaders in small- and medium-sized businesses with the skills, resources, and self-confidence to help Georgia and Armenia prosper. These businesswomen are on the march. They won't be turning back.



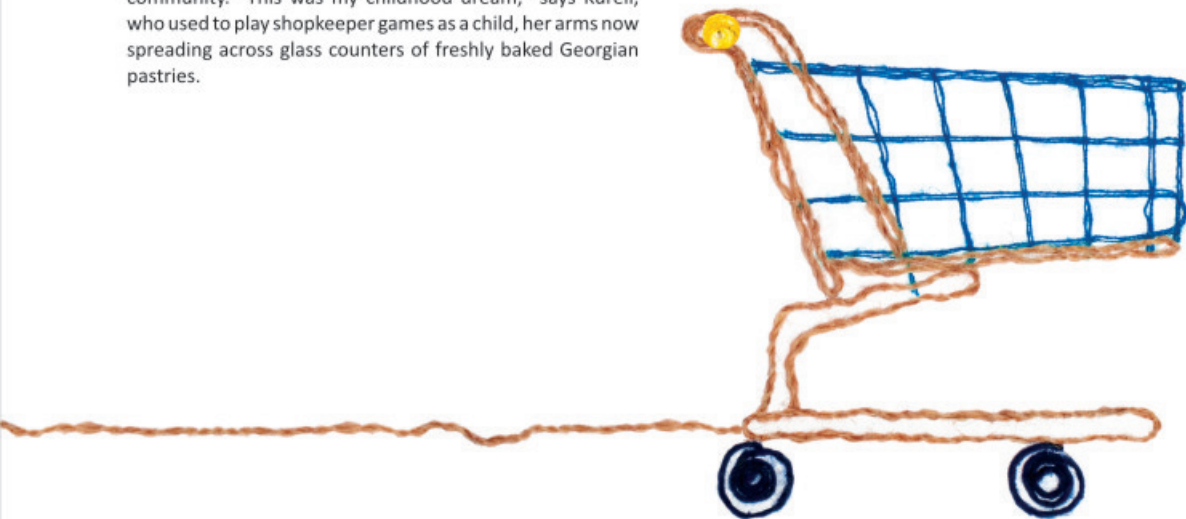


# A few minutes' walk from a statue of Stalin

Gori's last remaining civic acknowledgement of its most famous native son, and past darkened apartment buildings rippled with bullet holes from Georgia's 2008 conflict with Russia, the bright yellow light from a bustling grocery supermarket illuminates dozens of people milling around a wide sidewalk. Late into the evening, a steady stream of Gori's residents – students, young mothers pushing strollers, uniformed Georgian soldiers, just about everyone at one point or another – navigates Dafne Supermarket's three rows of meticulously arranged produce and food products.

The Dafne Supermarket LLC was ransacked by foreign soldiers during the war, but Ana Kureli, the indefatigable owner and manager of the store since 1997, quickly refurbished the premises, and then set about upgrading its capabilities. In the last year, the store has become both a symbol of Gori's resilience and a beacon of forward-looking enterprise in a city struggling with serious economic and social problems. And in that time, in Georgia, Ana Kureli has become a recognised, celebrated example of a woman providing business and community leadership in her community. "This was my childhood dream," says Kureli, who used to play shopkeeper games as a child, her arms now spreading across glass counters of freshly baked Georgian pastries.

Ana Kureli had already taken giant steps in elevating her enterprise to a unique level in her region of Georgia, Shida Kartli. The previous owner of the store gave Kureli the opportunity to acquire the business after watching Kureli, the mother of a young son, pour energy and enthusiasm into improving the store. "I was constantly scanning the internet for marketing ideas," she says. After becoming the owner, she travelled to Europe for more merchandising ideas, and she bought modern Italian equipment.







# Really make a difference in her customers' lives.

To take her business to the next level, Kareli looked to the BAS Programme to help her implement a store debit card system – an innovation that would not only increase her revenue by creating a customer loyalty programme but also provide a new financial mechanism for employers and social service providers serving the people of Gori.

In 2007 the company applied to the BAS Programme in order to support the development of computerised management processes and the installation of 1C integrated modules for trade and cash management. This system gives enormous opportunities by offering customers three types of cards: a loyalty card, a discount card and a store charge card. Kareli selected the consulting company IBS Ltd to implement the project, which advised her to implement a debit card system rather than the credit card scheme she had originally planned.

“The system has been excellent,” says Kareli. The supermarket has benefited from an immediate uptake in sales, and now the store is well positioned to further modernise: Kareli has plans for a software system to better track costs and profit margins, and to attain ISO 22000 certification.

Says Kareli: “Almost all the small retailers in Gori are women. Our businesses are what keep this city afloat.”

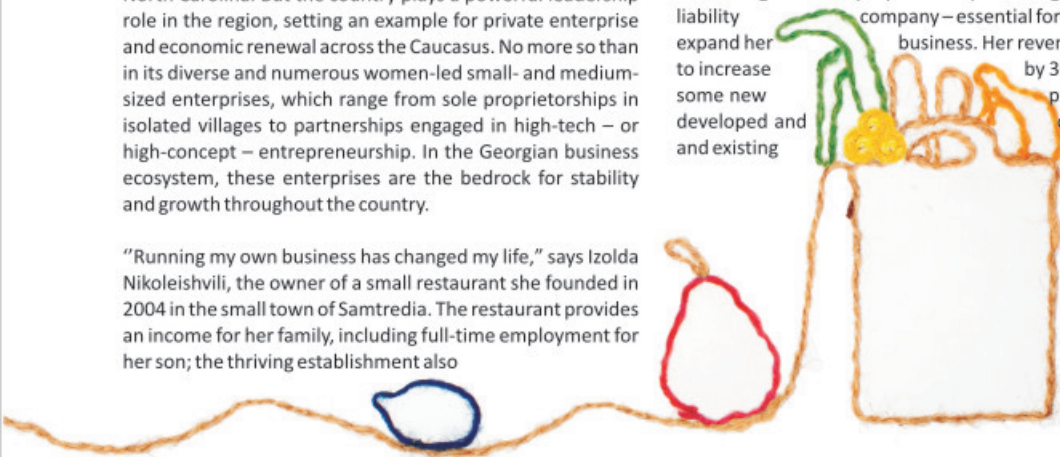
Georgia is a small country. It is half the size of the US state of North Carolina. But the country plays a powerful leadership role in the region, setting an example for private enterprise and economic renewal across the Caucasus. No more so than in its diverse and numerous women-led small- and medium-sized enterprises, which range from sole proprietorships in isolated villages to partnerships engaged in high-tech – or high-concept – entrepreneurship. In the Georgian business ecosystem, these enterprises are the bedrock for stability and growth throughout the country.

“Running my own business has changed my life,” says Izolda Nikoleishvili, the owner of a small restaurant she founded in 2004 in the small town of Samtredia. The restaurant provides an income for her family, including full-time employment for her son; the thriving establishment also

provides revenue for local food producers and bakers, and offers the capacity for large-scale meal programmes for schools in the region.

The BAS Programme enabled Nikoleishvili to conduct market research with detailed statistics of demand and supply in Samtredia, cross-checked with pricing analysis.

Her consultants also helped with developing such business basics as conceiving of a company name, logo and style for appropriate branding and packaging needs and assisted in converting her sole proprietorship to a registered limited liability company – essential for Nikoleishvili to expand her business. Her revenue is expected to increase by 30 per cent and some new products will be developed and offered to new and existing customers.





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# A very different business.

Advantage LLC urgently needed a computerised financial accounting system to stay economically viable. The company publishes a feisty eight-year-old weekly newspaper, called Akhali Gazeti, the only independent newspaper in Kutaisi, a city of 200,000 in Georgia's Imereti region.

Akhali Gazeti is in a precarious business, rocked by the same challenges facing newspapers globally: a declining circulation, weak advertising revenues from its web site, and high printing costs.

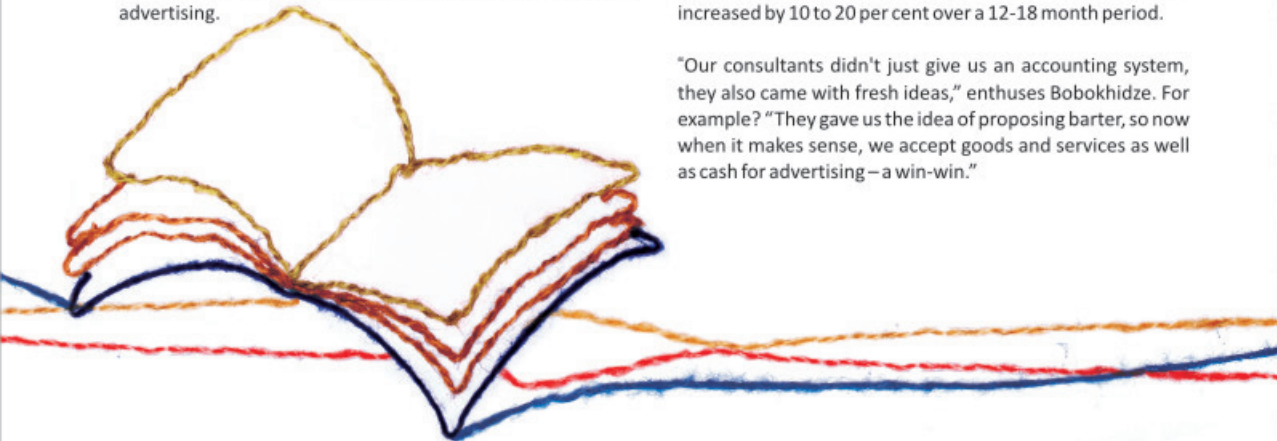
The newspaper has a circulation of only 30,000, but Ia Bobokhidze, the director and editor-in-chief, has enthusiasm, a zeal for enterprising and crusading journalism, and a determination to provide the people of Kutaisi with a quality media product. Her newspaper has won journalism awards and national recognition for its hard-hitting stories. But... "the main problem," explains Bobokhidze, "is most people can't afford to buy the paper. We don't have good financial assets but we do have excellent information resources."

Bobokhidze wants her newspaper, which she owns with three other women partners, to stand tall on its own financial footing. While international organisations have supported the newspaper with funding grants in the past, true independence requires financial independence – and for that, Akhali Gazeti requires an income derived from advertising.

To prepare the company for an advertising-generated income plan, Bobokhidze decided to install a computerised financial accounting system and to train the staff. The BAS Programme brought in regional representatives of the Young Economists Association of Kutaisi to provide the expertise and necessary hands-on consulting services, a local partnership geared towards synergistically helping both organisations.

The result is expected to improve the performance of the fledgling media company to the point where the numbers of managers will be increased and the quality of business management will be significantly improved. The implementation of a modern accounting system will increase the level of control on incomes and expenses that will result in cost optimisation, and in general the business will become more successful and profitability will be increased by 10 to 20 per cent over a 12-18 month period.

"Our consultants didn't just give us an accounting system, they also came with fresh ideas," enthuses Bobokhidze. For example? "They gave us the idea of proposing barter, so now when it makes sense, we accept goods and services as well as cash for advertising – a win-win."





WE DID IT

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# "I couldn't find a job without basic computer skills,"

Fully formed businesses are not the only target of the BAS Women in Business Programme. Individual women lacking elementary skills for using office equipment and computers also have been beneficiaries. "In the regions, it is just as difficult to get employment as to start your own business, and just as important," says Mirian Nadaraia, the owner of the consulting company Saatec Ltd, a company based in Tbilisi but also serving customers throughout Georgia and in Western European countries.

Among the core business activities of Saatec are offshore software development, web design services, legacy application re-engineering services and business process outsourcing. Training in IT skills is a significant new part of their activities. Saatec Ltd is a standout as one of the qualified consulting companies of the BAS Programme.

Saatec offered 14 sessions in basic computer training. By the end, the women understood the basics of business productivity software such as Excel, Word, and PowerPoint; how to use the internet to search and to use email; and the basic technical specifications of the PC. All foundation skills for any office job, and essential to gain employment anywhere in Georgia.

But the benefits go beyond employment. Participants and trainers alike point to the independence that computer skills provide women – independence from inadequately paying jobs, from other family members, and the independence that the information explosion on the internet generates generally. "What we are talking about is very basic but profound: an independent life," says Mirian.

For Neli Lomidze, a workshop participant who worked during Soviet times for a construction company as an administrator but spent seven years unemployed because

of a lack of computer skills, the workshop led directly to a job one month after the course completion, at a cash register reseller outfit. Now Lomidze wants to learn accounting software to be eligible for a promotion.

"I couldn't find a job without basic computer skills," she laments. "And I didn't have the financial resources to pay for a course. These were excellent teachers. I got my self-confidence back." Lomidze, a widow, is now also able to help her fourteen-year-old son learn computer programmes.





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"We need more technical equipment and to give women access to this equipment," says Tamari Gabisonia,

Dean of School of Technology of the Caucasus University, a recipient of the BAS Programme's grant to aid her work in evaluating IT training in the country. "Beyond what's done in the regions, we need future management consultancy help with the unique needs of our technical schools and the needs of the markets." Having attended the WIB study tour to Taipei in March 2009 Tamari recognised the importance of professional, industry related ICT Training and made valuable contacts with ICT universities in Taipei China, to facilitate exchanges of tutors and students between her faculty and Taiwanese universities.

But for the basics in the here and now, the PC training courses provided by the programme in the regions were conducted over two weeks, with 10 students per class. The result: not only an intensive learning environment but the forging of close friendships and new professional networks among the women.

One of the unanticipated successes of the training sessions, Mirian says, is how the whole town takes advantage of having computer gurus in town to help. To his mind, the value of the computer seminars cannot be under-estimated. Women came to him with questions about how to use business plan software. Women went to extraordinary lengths to capitalise on the opportunity to learn the basics of business computing skills. "Three women travelled 40 kilometres every day to attend training. One woman walked nine kilometres each day," recounts Mirian breathlessly.

"The next step is to create a mobile classroom and to purchase laptops," says Mirian. "Each region needs custom solutions. Every region is very individual, with different industries, different businesses."

The BAS Programme in Georgia's PC workshops alone assisted 80 women in total (20 women in each region). The idea of conducting the IT workshop in the regions was developed by the BAS Programme after discussing the training deficit problem with local representatives and potential employers. Such basic IT training had not been offered in Georgia's rural districts in the past and the BAS Programme support has been lauded as crucial for women to enter the job market.







# The first year was very difficult

The BAS Programme hasn't only been wrapping its resources around economically important ground-floor enterprises such as supermarkets and basic computer training. The programme has also helped finance projects like helping Verulashvili and Marika Bibileishvili, two savvy entrepreneurs in Tbilisi determined to introduce Georgia's coffee-swilling consumers to the joys of gourmet tea.

"The first year was very difficult," concedes Bibileishvili. "Georgians weren't used to such a big selection. The first year was really educational – everyone used tea bags." But the partners, who opened their first outlet as a "shop-in-shop" at a popular Tbilisi supermarket, persevered. An Irish whiskey flavoured-tea soon caught on, and Georgians were intrigued by a homegrown tea harvested in the country's southern province.

The company, Gama Plus Ltd, has grown to five shops and 14 employees – all women – and applied to the BAS Programme to acquire help in developing a commerce web site, develop printing materials and other marketing collateral, and to devise a sophisticated media plan.

Gama's marketing and media consultants, a Tbilisi company called INDUSTRIA – 2007, came up with a media plan over several months, suggesting media-like billboards, and conducted customer research. On successful completion of the project, Gama Plus will have a corporate design for their "shop in shop" concept, new and attractive promotional materials, and a corporate web site which has been requested by many of their clients as well as their foreign suppliers.

It is estimated that with opening of at least two new shops, the company revenues will increase very quickly, to 30,000 Euros over a period of 12 months and six to eight new full-time jobs will be created (most likely to be filled by women).

In addition, the partners hope to expand their customer base to restaurants, and possibly extend their product line to include pottery and candles. "There is more we need to do, and more we need help to do," says Bibileishvili. Ambitious and eager to expand, she plans to automate all her stores with business intelligence software to better mine her sales numbers. In the future, she also intended to bow to Georgian market demand and sell coffee.

It's heady growth for a company started only a couple of years ago. But the two women are exuberant about their business potential. "A lot of my friends have opened shops, selling clothes for example. We wanted to be different, so now we are tea sellers," exclaims Bibileishvili without inhibition.





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# Women professionals have also participated in the BAS Programme

– and found their business growth unleashed through careful implementation of the advice proffered by consultants. “The consultants laid out a management structure. Now each dentistry clinic has its own manager and dedicated staff.”

Moreover, Gzirishvili had never thought about advertising. “I thought word of mouth was enough.” The consultants came up with a media plan.

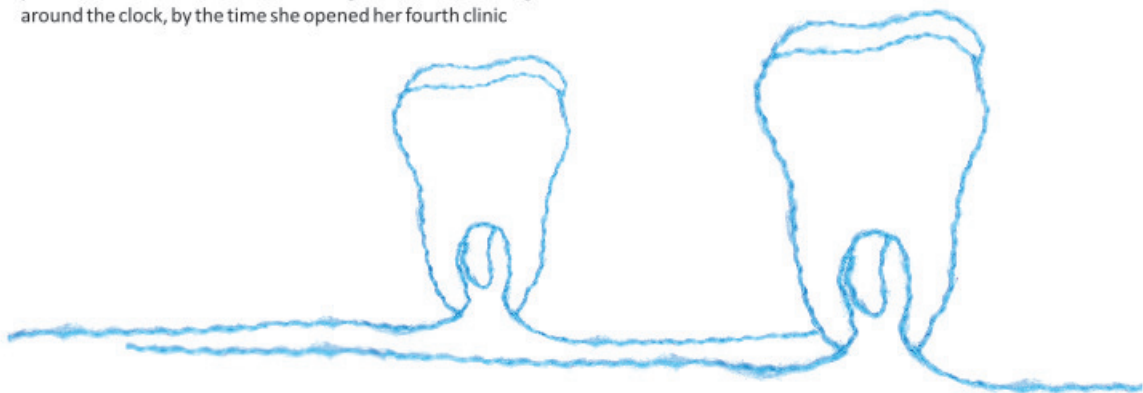
But her biggest problem was incentivizing employees. “How could I not know about monthly bonuses, or the importance of highlighting someone’s worth?” she admonishes herself. Gzirishvili felt she had simply compiled clinics without thinking through a management philosophy or putting enough thought into motivating employees. “I now look at this as a business, not just clinics. The consultants suggested cost-saving measures like buying dentistry equipment directly from manufacturers, and revenues have increased because she has a stable of contacts with insurance agents – another consultancy suggestion. But revenues are not the only metric by which she measures the success of the BAS Programme: she now has something she cannot put a price on, ‘more free time.’”

Gzirishvili was putting “enormous” energy into hiring dentists, only to find employee retention was a continuing problem. With a staff of 120, including 80 dentists working around the clock, by the time she opened her fourth clinic

she realised that management issues were overwhelming her time.

For Tea Gzirishvili’s NEWDENT dental clinics, the key was unlocking the mysteries of good personnel management. She had waited two years to open her second clinic – pausing until her first clinic had established a high degree of stability. “But with two clinics, problems were spinning out of control,” she remembers. “I had to make decisions about everything. I didn’t know how to deal with the problem, and that’s why I applied to the BAS Programme.”

The BAS Programme’s experience in the dentistry industry is likely to pay dividends in future projects not only because it now has industry-specific experience, but because some 80 per cent of Georgian dentists are women, pointing to yet more potential clients down the road.





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women  
**in**  
**business**  
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