

BREN

MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE STORY
PARTNERS RESILIENCE



About BREN

In 2022, the project “Building Resilience in the Eastern Neighbourhood” (BREN) awarded 34 small national and local civil society organisations (CSOs) in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Moldova with small grants to implement projects over five months.

The grants varied greatly in their intervention and they all aim to contribute to the same long lasting impact: *Women and marginalised groups experience an increased level of human security, peace, and stability at the local, national, and regional levels through the improved capacity of CSOs.*

Two key results BREN aimed to achieve through subgranting are:

1. **Strengthening the resilience** of CSOs, including women’s rights organisations, **to counter the drivers of conflict, instability, and insecurity**
2. **Enhancing the inclusion of women and marginalised groups in decision-making processes** in Women, Peace and Security (WPS), minority rights and gender equality through CSOs and community efforts.

About the MSC: The Most Significant Change (MSC) technique¹ is a qualitative participatory evaluation methodology that utilises stories to capture and understand the impactful changes that a program produces. The process of story selection plays a crucial role in this method.

Once the stories are collected, a selection panel carefully reviews and discusses them to identify one that best represents the project’s significant achievements. Through the meticulous process of story analysis and selection all participants gain a deeper understanding of the real-life effects of the interventions, learn about positive and negative changes and draw conclusions about the most significant changes achieved. The entire process serves to inform decision-making and to guide future interventions and improvements.

Through the process of story selection, the MSC harnesses the power of personal narratives to uncover and communicate the transformative outcomes of a program.

CSOs Change Stories: As part of the story collection round, implementing partners (CSOs) were asked to share the significant organisational changes they have observed since working on the BREN project.

The BREN selection panel: On May 15, 2023, a seven-member selection panel was tasked to select ONE story out of the ten collected in the four countries. The panel comprised the BREN project staff (six people) and one external consultant. The panel focused on observable changes in the organisations’ concept of resilience, as described below:

“A CSO is resilient when it has a strategy, including vision and planning; policies and procedures; transparency and accountability measures; the ability to work in challenging contexts, including when there is a funding gap; the ability to fundraise and advocate; and the capacity of its staff to implement project activities. A resilient CSO is able to influence government and decision-making and to contribute to fill eventual gaps in a country’s social development processes.”

Ultimately the story selected for the Most Significant Change was:

“Nurturing Trust and Connection for Sustainable Youth Civic Engagement”

¹ More info: <https://mande.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/MSCGuide.pdf>

Nurturing Trust and Connection for Sustainable Youth Civic Engagement.



Prevention for Progress | Georgia

*This story was shared by Anton Kelbakiani,
Chairman of the Board and BREN grant
coordinator at the NGO Prevention for Progress.*

“Our organisation has been operating since 2013. In 2021, we implemented a major reorganisation of our priorities, which led to the development of a new strategy and a change in our name. Our new strategy focuses on three main areas: the penitentiary and probation system, gender and youth; I am leading the youth component. While we have had extensive experience in programmatic work related to juvenile justice, child welfare, penitentiary and probation systems, working with young people and connecting with civil activism is a new focus [for us]. The BREN project is specifically focused on youth.

The processes and results of this project have been instrumental in setting a strong foundation for our vision about young people. We have been able to tap into the expertise gained from our penitentiary and juvenile justice advocacy efforts, but we have also had to adapt to a completely new group, which required a new approach. Together with a group of young people in the Marneuli municipality, some of whom were my previous students, we defined an intervention that focused on strengthening their nascent organisation and initiating youth integration into decision-making processes, mainly in the formulation of the municipal budget. While there is still much work to be done, we are amazed by the changes we observed in both the organisational strengthening of the Civil Activism and Engagement Center (CEAC) and the capacity to influence decision-making in the budgeting process.

I can think of many significant changes for our organisation through the project implementation. First, we have been able to adapt and transfer our advocacy, organisational strengthening, and research expertise to a completely new and different target group and in an area where we had never worked before. We have captured a lot of evidence and knowledge on how to continue working at the municipal level on these topics, and we have outlined plans to continue our efforts, including obtaining funding for our local partner to continue working.

The sustainable integration of young people in decision-making is a long and challenging process that cannot be done alone. Therefore, we have expanded our engagement at the regional, central, and local levels. At the regional level, we have identified colleagues in Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia with whom we may continue to cooperate. At the central level, we have maintained good dialogue with the youth coalition. However, **the most significant change for us has been establishing a good connection and collaboration with the Marneuli municipality, which is home to sizable ethnic and religious minorities.** We gained the trust of CEAC, a local youth organisation, engaged in dialogue [with them], and initiated planning with local CSOs. We had

been wanting to work in that municipality for a long time, but in seven years, we managed to have only one meeting. With our approach and continuous dialogue with actors at the local level (CSOs) and our support for the nascent youth organisation CEAC, we have established trust and set the basis for joint planning among local actors, which is crucial to overcoming silos/duplication and competition for resources.

This achievement led to good results and will give even more results going forward. Toward the end of the five-month grant, we realised that this joint effort was so crucial to the long-lasting efforts and our partner’s capacity to impact that we revised our activities to allow for more networking efforts, which in turn set the basis for future collaboration, a key step to move away from competitive CSOs competing for funding.

Today, our local partner is organisationally stronger, it has funds to continue working, and is connected and involved with local CSOs. We have learnt a great deal about how to work on this new theme and what challenges come with it at the local level. We now know who does what and where in the Marneuli municipality, and we are able to collaborate and dialogue with them for future activities. Joint efforts are necessary to deliver significant, long-lasting change for youth civic engagement at the local level, and we are now a step further.



“Joint efforts are necessary to deliver significant, long-lasting change for youth civic engagement at the local level, and we are now a step further.”

Reasons for selecting this story

This story was selected because it showed how, by delivering their intervention on the ground, the grantee has developed in key aspects that contribute to its greater organisational resilience as well as and its partners’.



Adaptation and learning: The CSO demonstrated great adaptability and learning capacity through the BREN subgrant. It expanded its operational capacity by venturing into a new geographical area, the Marneuli municipality, and addressing the new topic of youth civic engagement. This ability to apply their previous expertise in different fields and contexts reflects the organisation’s adaptability and learning.

The geographical area: working in the Marneuli municipality was challenging, as the grantee faced difficulties in engaging with it in the past. However, due to its sizable population of ethnic minorities, it was crucial for the CSO to work in the area to ensure inclusivity and representation.

The theme: the BREN project allowed the CSO to work on youth civic engagement for the first time, aligning with its revised organisational strategy. This marked a new area of focus for its scope of work.

Establishing collaboration The collaboration with local authorities, the emerging youth organisation CEAC (the main local partner), and other local entities created an environment where all actors could work together, also beyond the project’s duration. The CSO adapted its approach to foster greater cooperation and network-building, recognising the importance of long-term, trusting partnerships to create a meaningful impact on the local youth. This approach aimed to overcome the fragmented and competitive nature found in the advocacy field, where

entities compete for resources and recognition. Such an approach contributed to significant results, most notably, the capacity of youth groups to engage in local decision-making, including the budgeting process.

Long term vision: Within a short period, the CSO established conditions to continue working in the new geographical and thematic areas. The lessons learned from this initial experience will inform future interventions related to youth, demonstrating a long-term vision for the CSO’s work.

One for all for one: As the CSO strengthened its own capacity, it also enhanced the resilience and operational capacity of its partner organisation. The local partner received capacity-building support and actively participated in networking efforts, ultimately securing additional funding by the project’s end.

The selection panel of the MSC chose this story because it highlighted significant gains in terms of resilience for the implementing organisation (PFP). Furthermore, the PFP grant had a substantial impact on the ground. For instance, the Marneuli local government increased its budget for youth sports and cultural activities by an impressive 82% compared to 2022. This positive change was influenced by the advocacy efforts made by the project. Additionally, the local partner, CEAC, successfully obtained additional funding and improved its operational capacity through the policies and skills developed with the support of the BREN-funded small grant.

Lessons learnt from all stories

The BREN project has learnt from all the stories submitted. There are some relevant common reflections:



Dialogue, collaborations, partnership, network building:

most of the stories indicated the establishment or strengthening of collaboration as a significant organisational achievement. Dialogue and cooperation have been established or strengthened among CSOs, with informal groups and with governmental entities, within a country or across countries. Individuals and organisations invested time and efforts in nourishing these relationships, which are instrumental to organisational sustainability, growth and impact. Both well established and nascent CSOs have identified this change as crucial.

To establish dialogue, collaboration and partnership, the CSOs were able to identify common goals, a working structure suitable to all parties, clear and transparent communication, clarity on responsibilities and accountabilities, and horizontal and inclusive decision-making. The process resulted in new ideas, greater operational, technical and financial capacity, and accuracy in internal and external communications. Initially, good partnerships and networks are the result of time and effort invested by motivated individuals: if sustained and supported by the organisation they belong to, these results may expand in scope and impact.

Organisational change: stimulating organisational change/strengthening is a process, and the shift may not always be clearly visible in a short timeframe. Most CSOs said that the development of policies, strategic

communication documents or practices are key to increase organisational internal dialogue and public visibility; they also indicated increased fundraising efforts as significant changes for their organisation. These points can be seen as tangible products (outputs) that have not yet shown results in terms of increased performance or resilience. Yet, the organisational ability to develop and adopt these products as own organisational strategic documents to guide decision making is a key progress marker necessary for CSOs to strengthen and become more resilient.

BREN's capacity building translated into practice.

BREN's partners voluntarily attended capacity building sessions and some of them have used new ideas and contents to support their work. One partner stated that the Most Significant Change (MSC) seminar contributed to changing the way the CSO operates internally and engages with sub-grantees. Members of the CSO said that they have shifted their focus from the activities to the changes these can produce. The storyteller felt that this brought the human component to the centre: the organisation's members are more motivated and committed to their work, with a clearer understanding of change to inform future work.

BREN's specific requirement to **target** vulnerable groups and inequalities motivated CSOs in piloting new approaches and partnerships or working in new geographical areas and thematic fields.

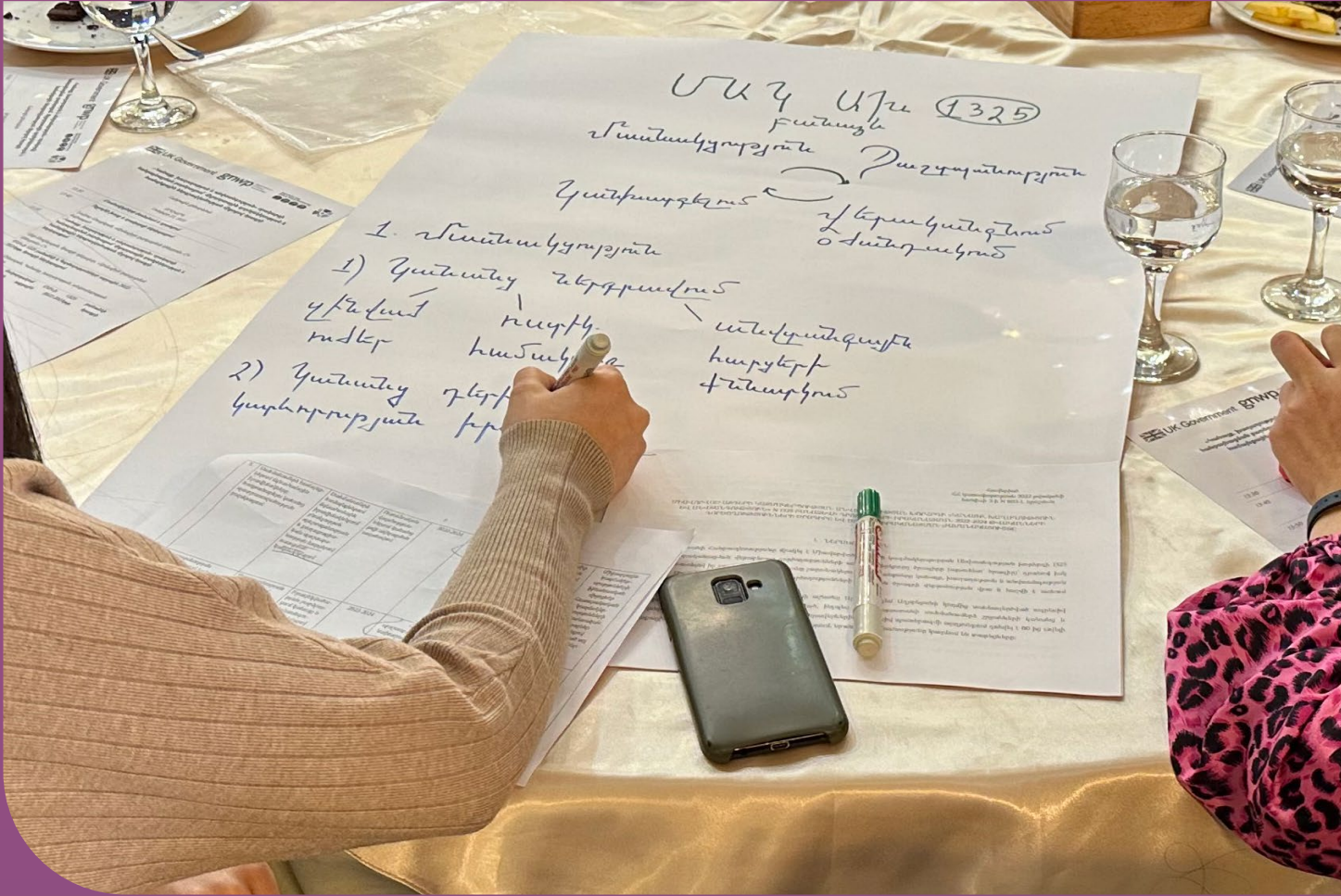
Going forward, the selection panel recommends and commits to:

- Promoting Organic Collaboration instead of Forcing Collaborations: creating an environment that encourages participants to freely express themselves, learn together, discuss issues, brainstorm solutions, and apply new ideas through creative thinking and collaborative discussions can naturally foster collaborations and partnerships. While face-to-face meetings are more effective in initiating meaningful engagement, online dialogues can help sustain momentum. These, however, should be carefully adjusted to match participants' interest, motivation, and availability to actively take part.
- Mapping Expertise: as part of the mentoring and peer-to-peer technical assistance, it is possible to identify and utilise the best practices and expertise available among CSOs and all storytellers for future interventions.
- BREN should continue to engage with partners to assess how the organisational changes implemented through the grant have, or have not, contributed to enhancing the actors' resilience.
- Capacity Building and Dialogue Sessions: the design of the capacity building and dialogue sessions should align with the participants' needs and capabilities to ensure their attendance, active engagement, and a practical application of the training. Similarly, organisational strengthening efforts should prioritise early buy-in and tailored responses to specific needs to achieve success.

Thank you! The panel members would like to express their appreciation for the remarkable effort put forth by all the storytellers, BREN's implementing partners, and project staff involved in the MSC analysis. We are sincerely grateful for your dedication and commitment. We are committed to maintaining an open and effective communication channel.

BREN has applied the MSC analysis for the first time and is preparing for another round in a few months. This short feedback should serve for future MSC rounds: all stories were gathered shortly after the completion of the intervention, as part of the sub-grantees' final reporting. As BREN aimed at stimulating organisational change, the long-term impacts or their sustainability are yet to be seen. Differentiating between the CSOs' programmatic success and their organisational change, to specifically capture the CSOs' behaviour change (practices, actions, norms, relationships) as an enabler of programmatic impact, adds complexity to the story collection process. However, storytellers found it to be a valuable conversation that allowed them to reflect on aspects they hadn't had the opportunity to consider before. The story collection serves as a milestone for evaluating progress and planning future steps. In terms of analysis, the selection panel felt that the stories lacked information about the "pre-BREN" situation and the significance of the change. In addition, since the accounts focused on organisational changes, they were somehow impersonal and lacked the emotional and empathetic details that were present in the "changes on the ground" stories. Providing more information about the sub-award goals and results could be useful for the panel to better contextualise the stories, even though the selection process should primarily focus on CSOs' resilience rather than their impact on the ground.

No negative impacts were evident from the stories, but it is worth considering future iterations to further enhance the evaluation process.



The BREN Most Significant Change Stories: **CSOs** Resilience Stories

1. Nurturing Trust and Connection for Sustainable Youth Civic Engagement. Prevention for Progress Georgia.....	3
2. Only together we are stronger Human Rights Embassy Moldova	10
3. The Contributions of a Civil Society Organisation Foreign Policy Association Moldova	11
4. The Power of Change! Georgian Democratic Initiative (GDI) Georgia	12
5. Nurturing Trust and Connection for Sustainable Youth Civic Engagement. Prevention for Progress Georgia	12
6. From Gender-Based Violence to Peace and Security: Our Journey with IWPR's BREN Project Gender Hub Azerbaijan	14
7. The Locomotive of Awareness YIDPW4P Azerbaijan	16
8. A New Way Forward in ADC's Communication Armavir Development Center Armenia	17
9. How to Scale it up? Frontline Youth Network Armenia	18



Only together we are stronger | Human Rights Embassy | Moldova

This story was shared by Lela Metreveli, Director of Human Rights Embassy



"As a founder and member of the Human Rights Embassy, I am proud to say that we have come a long way since the NGO was established in 2011. Our focus has always been on human rights, and while we initially worked more on a regional and international level, we realised that we wanted to refocus our efforts and work more locally. The BREN project provided us with the perfect opportunity to kickstart a deeper locally based intervention.

Initially, working with Ukrainian refugees posed some challenges as we were used to interacting with professionals in the legal sector, civil society and media. However, we adapted and engaged with this diverse group, which was experiencing socio-economic and mental stress. The warm response from the Ukrainian refugees has been a great motivation and inspiration to shift our approach at the Human Rights Embassy.

During the BREN project, we observed changes in diverse areas, including a great dialogue with IWPR and the project donor. Our open and frank communication proved to be instrumental in finding quick solutions, such as when we were not able to publish a handbook due to a change in status [of the refugee and engagement at the national level]. We explained the issue to the IWPR [representative], Olesea Garbuz, and we were able to quickly identify a solution: in about 24 hours we had the approval to go ahead with the new approach. This quick response was well received and instrumental to the success of the activity.

Initially, I was the only one working on resources mobilisation for BREN; we now have three people in total [from three organisations] tasked with designing



"Only together are we stronger and we are excited to see what the future holds for the Human Rights Embassy."

proposals: the Human Rights Information Center (CIDO) and the Lawyer's Bureau "Veaceslav Turcan & Co" [and our NGO]. We also worked with the Centre for Organisational Consultancy and Training (CICO) to create a donor mapping document that will help us enormously for our organisational growth. Through BREN's training sessions and face-to-face interactions, we connected with colleagues in other countries, such as LGBTIQ+ partners and other human rights organisations in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, as well as within Moldova, including Tekedu. I have personally decided to engage more with the Moldovan Women's network.

From my perspective, the most significant change for the Human Rights Embassy's organisational growth was the partnership formed with CIDO and the Lawyer's Bureau. They were responsible, trustworthy, and highly professional partners who shared our vision. While we have always collaborated with Moldovan CSOs, it has typically been on an ad-hoc basis, limited to specific interventions and needs. This partnership has strengthened us and we will continue cooperating going forward. Only together are we stronger and we are excited to see what the future holds for the Human Rights Embassy.

The Contributions of a Civil Society Organisation | Foreign Policy Association | Moldova

This story was shared by Natalia Stercul, the Executive Director of the Foreign Policy Association.



"I joined the Foreign Policy Association [APE, from the Romanian language acronym] five years ago [in 2018] as an expert and last year I became APE's director. BREN was the first project I embarked on as a manager, together with my team. It focused on the Ukrainian refugee crisis. With the help of the Centre for Organisational Consultancy and Training (CICO), we developed a two-year strategy, with three directions, and identified partners and target groups, with greater emphasis on youth and gender.

We have been able to increase our visibility in local provinces such as Comrat, Transnistria and northern areas of the Republic of Moldova.

One of the key ways in which we made a difference is by identifying different modalities to resolve issues. We have communicated our findings through policy

briefs, resources, webinars, and videocasts, which have had significant reach. Through these channels, we have not only been able to resolve specific issues related to hybrid threats but also tackle broader risks refugees face. This has enabled us to broaden our scope of work and make a bigger impact.

We have also established partnerships in provinces that were difficult to break into due to strong support for Russia or the common use of the Russian language. This was not an easy task, but we persevered, and it has allowed us to make a significant impact in these regions [through raising awareness against disinformation and fostering dialogue].

For me, the most significant change has been the increased visibility of our work, which we have gained through press conferences as well as publishing and sharing our work online. We have reached thousands of people through online webinars, podcasts, and our website; this has helped us to show that we deliver excellent work that sparks interest in a large number of people.

This increased visibility is really important to me because it is the first project I have managed, and it makes me professionally proud. It gives me the energy to continue, knowing that I am making a real difference in people's lives."

“

"This increased visibility is really important to me because it is the first project I have managed, and it makes me professionally proud."

The Power of Change! | Georgian Democratic Initiative (GDI) | Georgia

This story was shared by Eka Subeliani, GDI Lawyer, Project Officer

"GDI has an extensive experience in organising camps to mobilise and communicate with the LGBTIQ+ community in partnership with Tbilisi Pride. In collaboration with BREN, we developed a program to meet the request from camp participants for concrete action to tackle homophobia and support the LGBTIQ+ communities.

Although we were only able to fund four out of seven project ideas, we are proud of the achievements made by our awardees in a short period of time. Our sub-granting program has brought about significant changes in our organisation, including an enhanced coordination with Tbilisi Pride to support awardees, a more effective communication with them, and a greater focus on change rather than activities.

The most significant change has been our ability to shift the focus of our discussions and planning from activities to change. Attending the MSC training in January 2022 was an eye-opening experience that allowed us to alter our perspective when engaging with beneficiaries and internally [among ourselves]. We now focus on capturing impact stories and collecting evidence of progress rather than simply focusing on activities.



Capturing impact stories has been a powerful tool for us, bringing emotional messages that have helped us to see and discuss the changes we are making. This change was not difficult to implement and felt natural. We will continue to prioritise change in all our future interventions."

Nurturing Trust and Connection for Sustainable Youth Civic Engagement. | Prevention for Progress | Georgia

This story was shared by Anton Kelbakiani, Chairman of the Board and BREN coordinator at Prevention for Progress (PfP)

"Our organisation has been operating since 2013. In 2021 we implemented a major reorganisation of our priorities, which led to the development of a new strategy and a change in our name. Our new strategy focuses on three main areas: the penitentiary and probation system, gender and youth; I am leading the youth component. While we have had extensive experience in programmatic work related to juvenile justice, child welfare, penitentiary and probation systems, working with young people and connecting

with civil activism is a new focus [for us]. The BRENproject specifically focused on youth.

The processes and results of this project have been instrumental in setting a strong foundation for our vision about young people. We have been able to tap into the expertise gained from our penitentiary and juvenile justice advocacy efforts, but we have also had to adapt to a completely new group, which required a new approach.

Together with a group of young people in the Marneuli municipality, some of whom were my previous students, we defined an intervention that focused on strengthening their nascent organisation and initiating youth integration into decision-making processes, mainly in the formulation of the municipal budget. While there is still much work to be done, we are amazed by the changes we observed in both the organisational strengthening of the Civil Activism and Engagement Centre (CEAC) and the capacity to influence decision-making in the budgeting process.

I can think of many significant changes for our organisation through the project implementation. First, we have been able to adapt and transfer our advocacy, organisational strengthening, and research expertise to a completely new and different target group and in an area where we had never worked before. We have captured a lot of evidence and knowledge on how to continue working at the municipal level on these topics and we have outlined plans to continue our efforts, including obtaining funds for our local partner to continue working.

The sustainable integration of young people in decision-making is a long and challenging process that cannot be done alone. Therefore, we have expanded our engagement at the regional, national, and local levels. At the regional level, we have identified colleagues in Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia with whom we may continue to cooperate. At the central level, we have maintained good dialogue with the youth coalition [it unites about 40 organisations across Georgia working with young people].

However, the most significant change for us has been establishing a good connection and collaboration with the Marneuli municipality, which is home to sizable ethnic and religious minorities. We gained the trust of CEAC, a local youth organisation, engaged in dialogue [with them], and initiated planning with local CSOs. We had been wanting to work in the Marneuli municipality for a long time, but in seven years, we managed to have only one meeting. With our approach and continuous dialogue with actors at the local level (CSOs) and support for the nascent youth organisation CEAC, we have established trust and set the basis for joint planning among local actors, which is crucial to



“Joint efforts are necessary to deliver significant, long-lasting change for youth civic engagement at the local level, and we are now a step further.”



overcoming silos/duplication and competition for resources.

This achievement led to good results and will give even more results going forward. Toward the end of the five-month grant, we realised that this joint effort was so crucial to the long-lasting efforts and our partner's capacity to impact that we revised our activities to allow for more networking efforts, which in turn set the basis for future collaboration, a key step to move away from competitive CSOs competing for funding.

Today our local partner is organisationally stronger, it has funds to continue working, and is connected and involved with local CSOs. We have learnt a great deal about how to work on this new theme and what challenges come with it at the local level. We now know who does what and where in the Marneuli municipality, and we are able to collaborate and to dialogue with them about future activities. Joint efforts are necessary to deliver significant, long-lasting change for youth civic engagement at the local level, and we are now a step further.

From Gender-Based Violence to Peace and Security: Our Journey with IWPR's BREN Project | Gender Hub | Azerbaijan

This story was shared by Maryam Majidova Co-founder of Gender Hub Azerbaijan



"Our involvement with IWPR's BREN project has positively impacted our resilience as an organisation. We received technical capacity and equipment to document stories of people affected by war, engaged in new topics, expanded our portfolio, and increased our awareness on peace and security issues. These changes have enhanced our ability to adapt to changing circumstances, to respond to emerging issues, and to advocate for marginalised communities.

As the most significant change we can underline our increased awareness on peace and security issues, which has given us a better understanding of the needs of conflict-affected women and girls and it has improved our ability to advocate for their rights and needs.

Before joining the BREN project, our organisation mainly focused on gender-related issues, such as domestic violence and sex-selective abortions. We did not address these issues from a peace and security perspective. We were also unaware of the general situation in Azerbaijan regarding women's participation in peace processes.

Since we did not work in this area, we lacked a clear vision and the necessary capacity to address this

topic, including sufficient staff and equipment. Therefore, our involvement with the BREN project has been instrumental in expanding our understanding of the broader peace and security issues in Azerbaijan, increasing our capacity to address them, and improving our ability to adapt to changing circumstances and challenges. As a result, we have been able to expand our scope [of work] and incorporate peace and security into our overall activities. This has allowed us to broaden our reach and impact, and has also helped us to better understand the connections between different issues affecting our communities. In short, the BREN project has been transformative and it has helped us to evolve into a more dynamic and effective organisation.

We have built capacity and network, enhanced advocacy and developed thematic workshops and mentoring: these efforts have allowed us to expand our reach and impact, connect with new partners, and deepen our understanding of the issues we address. Our engagement in these activities has also given us opportunities to learn from other organisations and experts in the field, exchange best practices, and identify areas for improvement. These capacity-building efforts provided us with skills and knowledge needed to enhance our programs and services, and better serve the women and communities we work with.

In addition, we conducted mapping exercises to identify areas where we could have the greatest impact on peace and security issues in the country. This allowed us to better focus our resources and efforts and ensure that we were targeting the most pressing needs of affected communities.

Furthermore, we translated relevant materials into our local language, which helped to extend our awareness and understanding of the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda. This has been a crucial step in enhancing our capacity to engage in advocacy and raise awareness of the needs and rights of women affected by conflict and violence. By doing so, we have been able to amplify the voices of women in our communities and advocate for their meaningful participation in decision-making processes related to peace and security.

After completing the project, we are more equipped to address the challenges of women's rights and peacebuilding. We have developed a stronger sense of sensitivity, motivation, and political awareness, which enables us to be more effective advocates for these issues. By forming strong partnerships with feminist organisations, we have been able to leverage our collective expertise and resources to achieve greater impact. Our outreach and education efforts have been successful in engaging with teachers and increasing their knowledge and tools to educate students about these issues. As a result, we are becoming more recognised as an NGO in this area, raising our profile, and increasing our influence in policy and decision-making processes.

In addition, we also developed our advocacy skills, which has allowed us to amplify our message and make our voices heard at the local and national levels. We have created a digital hub to provide a platform



for sharing information, resources, and ideas on women's rights and peacebuilding issues. Through this platform, we have connected with a strong network of like-minded individuals and organisations interested in this topic, enabling us to collaborate on joint initiatives and projects.

Overall, our involvement in the BREN project has enabled us to become a more effective and influential organisation in promoting women's rights and peacebuilding in Azerbaijan.

As an organisation that is committed to making positive change, we chose this particular story of change because it reflects our journey and growth. Through the BREN project, we were able to gain new experiences, build our capacity, and expand our network of partners and allies. This has been significant to us because it has enabled us to become more effective advocates for women's rights and peacebuilding. We are now better equipped to tackle complex issues and make a meaningful impact in the communities we serve. Additionally, by sharing this story, we hope to inspire others to join us in this important work and contribute to a more just and peaceful world."



"As an organisation that is committed to making positive change, we chose this particular story of change because it reflects our journey and growth."

The Locomotive of Awareness | YIDPW4P | Azerbaijan

This story was shared by Leyla Jahangirova, Founder of Young IDP Women for Peace Initiative Group

“Our organisation has existed for seven years and, before BREN, we didn’t implement projects of this scale. The cooperation with IWPR gave us the opportunity to attract women from the community to work with us for the duration of the project and provided us with new experts as members of our team, which increased the capacity of our staff to implement the activities. In the frame of the project we managed to enter the schools of marginalised communities, such as Ramana and Yeni Xocavand, that helped us to gain new experience and widen the network for our future projects.

The project gave us an opportunity to raise awareness of school girls on the existing social challenges, such as gender equality, early marriages, selective abortions, gender-based violence (GBV) and other topics, which are not covered or discussed in the [school] curriculum. It also gave us a chance to learn about the needs and concerns of the young female population in marginalised communities, which we plan to integrate into our future projects. As a result we have clearer vision and plans regarding this component of our activities. This experience contributed to our portfolio and expanded our network and visibility, and as a consequence made us more competitive during future fundraising.

The most significant change for our organisation was the opportunity to enter marginalised communities, be [considered] a trustful source of information, build the trust and create a network within these communities.



“Our project involved spreading awareness throughout all communities, like a locomotive that travelled from one end of the country to the other without stopping.”

We raised girls’ awareness about their rights and the tools to combat social and gender inequalities, which motivate them to achieve their goals.

In previous projects implemented in schools we didn’t have the chance to cover sensitive topics such as early marriages and GBV. Also the number of direct beneficiaries and their affiliation to the marginalised communities marked was a significant improvement of our organisation’s activities.

BREN also provided us with the resources to implement the project, helped us to increase our visibility and widen our network, and, as a result, to get a buy-in from the state authorities for implementing the planned activities. The administrative requirements and mentorship helped us to identify gaps in organisational development, which we plan to eliminate in future.

The BREN project also stimulated us to create social media accounts where we promote our activities; we also use them as a way to contact our beneficiaries. Some of them are writing to us, asking for advice or psychological support, which we provide. This contributes to the sustainability of our activities.

Our project involved spreading awareness throughout all communities, like a locomotive that travelled from one end of the country to the other without stopping. We visited schools and were met with great enthusiasm by the girls. We believe our story can be titled ‘The Awareness Locomotive’. Our hope is that the girls we trained will grow up to join us in training future generations, expanding our ‘locomotive’ to add many ‘wagons’, forming a long train that will traverse the country, bringing positive changes along the way.”



A New Way Forward in ADC's Communication | Armavir Development Center | Armenia

This story was shared by *Ani Tovmasyan*, BREN project Manager, Armavir Development Center



"Our BREN project goal is raising awareness on UNSCR 1325 [UN Security Council Resolution] about Women, Peace and Security, especially among women in local communities as we think that the National Action Plans will be more effective if being localised. This process we envision as a bottom-up process.

During the project, we had the opportunity to review our policies and procedures and receive capacity building and training. One of our biggest achievements was the increased impact on decision-making and the development of our communication strategy.

We were already resilient when it came to policy review and accountability, but the project helped us to further strengthen our collaboration with relevant government entities.

We worked closely with Karine Sujyan, the head of the Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Before the BREN project, we had already contributed to the creation of the Interagency Committee on UNSCR 1325 for the National

Action Plan, but with the help of the BREN project we could make the collaboration with the Committee members much stronger. We also formed partnerships with local self-governments and developed new opportunities for cooperation. Our advocacy capacity improved, and, as a result of our work, local self-governments committed to working on local action plans.

Another significant change we experienced was the development of our communication strategy. As an NGO with a wide working scope, we always had self-introduction issues and needed to speak the same language when it came to our image and area of intervention. The BREN project helped us create a generic image that all staff members could use, which was instrumental in delivering more understandable, comprehensive, and coherent messages about our organisation and activism.

For me, the most outstanding achievements of the BREN project are increased impact on decision-making and the development of our Communication Strategy. The products developed through the project, such as video materials and guidebooks, can be used for a long time, and the new local action plans open new prospects for future activities. However, I am aware that there is still much to do in terms of fully advocating for these results and ensuring their continuity.

I strongly believe that the long-lasting results of the BREN project will only appear when institutionalised grounds are created, and the project becomes an integral part of the state policy. This is the key to ensuring its efficiency and sustainability."

“

"I strongly believe that the long-lasting results of the BREN project will only appear when institutionalised grounds are created, and the project becomes an integral part of the state policy."

How to Scale it up? | Frontline Youth Network | Armenia

This story was shared by Lusine Kosakyan, BREN Project Peace Adviser and Trainer, co-founder of Frontline Youth Network



"The wider goal is to bring value and behavioural change among young people. Before creating value, it is important to create the knowledge that it is possible to achieve this goal through school education. Hence, the main project direction is to improve school education and bring the change top-down.

The BREN project appeared at the right time as it helped our organisation to mature and structured, BREN catalysed this process. FYN was already planning to review its policies, and during the project implementation period, we reviewed six [of them] and they are now in good shape. We learned that it is always important to adapt and refresh our policies to respond to actual realities.

The project also helped us to understand what we need in our strategies. An informal learning process from other BREN partners supported us to build organisational resilience, while capacity-building training guided us to understand how to move forward with the strategies.

[I say] 'Bravo' to the network that BREN has created as it is one of a kind, since in many other projects FYN is engaged with the networking component is not prioritised. The network created by six local BREN partner organisations, was a non-formal platform for learning – the [in-person] and online meetings and the experience sharing gave an exceptional learning and networking opportunity.

Through BREN, the NGO could widen its cooperation, with new partnerships, and adopt new working approaches. We could go out of our bubble to reach more stakeholders and target groups.

The main target group of our NGO is youth, but we work beyond this focus as we are also getting more experience in working with governmental stakeholders. We understood how to engage with the institutions [acquiring the soft skill of communication strategy]. It was a 'learning by doing' process. The main highlight is that we already know that we can do it, and now we have the ambition to do more, and even if some changes have to be applied, we at least know how to change it and do it.

[Before BREN, FYN worked on peace education, they named it "alternative" education. Their activity was successful as their "alternative" educational material was incorporated into the complementary educational materials for Armenian schools.]

With BREN FYN members developed their skills, becoming more confident; the organisation's work has become more solid and efficient. Now they know that they can reach the goal, they learned how to be flexible and what flexibility is when it comes adapting the project to new requirements and challenges.

Before the maturity ladder/level was different, we were at different levels of growth, which was more chaotic, and now everything is more targeted."



"Through BREN, the NGO could widen its cooperation, with new partnerships, and adopt new working approaches."

BREN

MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE STORY

PARTNERS RESILIENCE