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GEORGIA

SUCCESS STORY

Community Connections

CC Alumna Introduces Town Hall Meetings



During the town hall meeting

Theme: Management of Regional Media Outlets

From: Adjara, Kakheti, Imereti Regions

Program Dates: October 29 –
November 19, 2008

Host Organization: Foundation for
Russian American Economic Cooperation,
Seattle, Washington

Success

Community Connections alumna Laura Gogoladze, Founder and Senior Editor of the regional newspaper *My Kharaguli*, piloted the town hall meeting project “Come and Discuss”, inspired by her experience in the Community Connections exchange. In October of 2008, Gogoladze participated in the Regional Media Management program in Seattle, WA that focused on media advocacy and the relationships between mass media, government and public institutions.

Overview

Upon returning to Georgia, Gogoladze began exploring ways in which media can engage with local government and enhance relationships between local community and government in her home town of Kaharaguli, in the Imereti region of Georgia. She started to conduct town hall meetings, inviting local government representatives, community members, and journalists to discuss issues that have received little attention in Kaharaguli.

The town hall meetings are now conducted either monthly or biweekly and focus on a number of issues varying from local municipality budgets to human rights and child care. Discussions encourage community members to take an active role in the decision making process, connect with local government representatives and increase the accountability of state authorities. Highlights of the meetings are published in *My Kharaguli* every month.

The Community Connections program in Seattle, WA, showed Gogoladze how media can be instrumental in establishing strong partnerships between communities and government. Highlights of the program included visits to *Seattle Weekly*, *Seattle Times*, *Olympian Newspaper* and the Washington Newspaper Publishers Association, as well as meetings with Seattle Mayor Greg Nickels and City Council member Nick Licata. These meetings helped Gogoladze realize the vital role the media plays in contributing to a more accountable, transparent and engaged government.

In Laura Gogoladze’ words, “The Community Connections program truly helped me see “democracy in action”. I learned how newspapers can encourage local governments and the public to find a shared vision to addressing community problems in an open and collaborative way.”