

Omalo Women Initiative Group - Sewing Activities

Pankisi, Georgia



“Wool washing and processing is also part of our project. Local people have sheep, so they also have wool. They bring it here for processing and we give them back the threads they need for knitting”.

- **Zairah Setiva**

Chechen refugee and leader of the project

LOCATION

Omalo Village, Pankisi
Georgia

DURATION

8 months
(May 2008-January 2009)

IMPLEMENTING PARTNER

Norwegian Refugee Council
www.nrc.no

DONOR

Princess Haya Bint Al Hussein of Jordan

BUDGET

US \$15,500

OVERVIEW

Omalo is an isolated village with a significant population of refugees displaced by the violence in neighbouring Chechnya. There are no income-generating activities in Omalo besides animal husbandry and agriculture, and therefore women refugees - the principal caregivers in their families - have almost no opportunities to gain income. The Omalo sewing workshop is the first attempt at creating a viable commercial enterprise in the village. Entirely staffed and managed by women, its purpose is to meet a demand for various items that to date has not been met by local production capacity.

AIM OF PROJECT

- Improve self-reliance among refugee women by encouraging income generating activities
- Creation of new job opportunities for refugee and local women
- Mobilisation of women resources and empowerment of their capacities
- The workshop aims to produce bed linen, mattresses, blankets, prayer carpets, prayer gowns, and dresses – all items which are in high demand in the Pankisi region.

RESULTS

- 10 Chechen and Kist refugee women, 4 local women, 1 local man found employment and receive regular, monthly income which helps to improve their living conditions
- Refugee and local women resources mobilized and empowered for further activities
- Relations between the host community and refugees have improved
- The grant money allowed the initiative group to purchase 5 sewing machines, 1 loom, tables, chairs, wool and cloth. The premise was renovated and the electricity system redone, and a stone pool was prepared for washing wool.
- Soon after starting the activity, the women received a large order to sew 300 bed linen sets for a IDP collective centre in Rustavi, which they completed successfully.

IMPACTS

The immediate impacts of Omalo sewing workshops are following:

- 15 refugee and local women found employment and received income
- The material state of the women involved and their families improved
- Various useful production will be available at lower prices

The following long-term impacts on individuals, households and the community must also be mentioned:

- **Approximately 6 months after the project was completed**, 13 employees were still employed and continued to receive a regular monthly income (11 female

workers, 1 male guard, and 1 female housekeeper).

- Six of these employees are refugees, the rest are locals. Only two workers left the project since the start – one moved to Grozny and one got married and moved to the Russian Federation.
- According to the UNHCR monitoring mission, each worker (refugees and locals) received an average **income of 80GEL per month** (= USD \$48). Taking into account the current economic conditions of Pankisi Gorge, 160GEL is considered to be an average income.
- **Female workers have become more independent** and better respected within the community. The leader of the project, Zaira Tsatieva is one of the most respected members of the Chechen community.
- The sewing activities were expected to involve more women over time, however 6 months after the project started, no new workers had been employed. However, those who remained employed were enjoying using their newly-learned (lifelong) skills.
- The reason why **relations between the host country and refugees have improved** is due to the project involving both refugees and locals. From the UNHCR monitoring mission, an extremely friendly, harmonious and relaxed atmosphere has been observed among the workers.
- **Handicrafts are widely popular** among the visitors of Pankisi Gorge, and females from this project have consequently participated in various trade shows in Tiblisi and elsewhere in the area. Very positive feedback from the project participants was received in regards to the treatment and attitude of the host country population towards Qist and Chechen participants of the project.
- Traditional crafts are preserved and developed as women incorporate traditional sewing methods in their activities.
- 6 months after the project had been completed, it was noted that the project would greatly benefit from newer sewing equipment (e.g. a sewing machine that could handle large sheets for curtain making), and extra funds for obtaining traditional/ethnic sewing devices.

LESSONS LEARNED

One of the main lessons learned is that the project done jointly with refugees and local communities has a huge impact on community because it contributes greatly to local integration.

It is also worth mentioning that participants of the projects knew each other from the Women's club – UNHCR project which aimed in women empowerment by vocational trainings. The success of sewing workshop project might have some roots in the women's club which prepared women to work jointly, give them skills and empower them to become more self-sustainable.