

Caucasus: Jan '08

Radio stations across the country broadcasting IWPR programme. A radio programme dealing with regional and national issues, produced by the IWPR Caucasus project, is being broadcast by a network of broadcasters across the country.

The programme, called Accents, is being funded as part of a US Department of State-funded project aimed at supporting local media and access to information in Georgia, as well as the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Accents is being aired four times a month by a number of Tbilisi-based and regional radio stations. The area covered by the participating channels spans most of the country.

There was strong competition to secure a place in the project's radio team, which includes nine journalists from radio stations in the Georgian regions of Ajara, Imereti, Kakheti, Samegrelo, Guria, Samtskhe-Javakheti, Kartli, and Kvemo-Kartli.

The journalists are taking part in a special continuous training scheme, and twice a month they will produce the 30-minute radio programme on a theme important for a number of the regions.

The topic for the first broadcast was inspired by an official statistic - which states that more than 75 per cent of Georgians are unable to afford a normal standard of living.

The programme had an immediate impact, said Giorgi Siradze, from radio Imedi in the Guria region of Georgia.

"I was surprised when the next day, after airing the programme, a few of my colleagues called me and asked for a meeting," he recalled.

"It turned then out that they had collected money, 200 laris [Georgian currency equivalent to 125 US dollars] and a huge bag of clothes for an old woman and her two small grandchildren who featured in the programme."

The theme for the second broadcast was prompted by a plebiscite conducted at the same time as the presidential election on January 5, in which the population voted on whether it wanted Georgia to join NATO.

During the recording of the shows, special attention was paid to two radio journalists from areas predominantly populated by ethnic minorities - Artur Arzumanyan from Samtskhe-Javakheti, which has a largely Armenian population, and Zaur Dargali from the mainly Azerbaijani Kvemo Kartli.

It is very rare for people from these places to be included in a country-wide project, as they don't tend to

speak the Georgian language.

However, after six weeks of intensive work within the project, and with the help of the trainers, both journalists managed to produce radio reports in Georgian.

"My most vivid memory of recording the first programme is that of ethnic Azerbaijani Zaur Dargali striving to produce his report in Georgian,"

recalled Bacho Gurabanidze, the reporter for Ajara radio in the Ajara region of Georgia.

"Never before in my work had I experienced such excitement, with the people pressing their ears against the door of the studio, while he recorded his programme. After half an hour's torture, Zaur came out drenched in sweat and absolutely happy."

Irakli Machitadze, director of the radio station Dzveli Kalaki, in the Imereti region of Georgia, and a project participant, was very positive about the quality of the programme.

"I am happy such a programme is aired on my radio [station]. I like its structure very much. By my own estimates, the reporters interview up to 50 respondents in various Georgian regions for each broadcast. And it's high-quality work too, both technically and from the point of view of content," he said.

Location: Caucasus
Stavropol
South Ossetia
North Ossetia

Topic: Reporting Impact

Focus: Caucasus

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