

About Machkhaani

The rural village of Kvemo Machkhaani is located in the Signaghi municipality of the Kakheti region, known for its unique architecture. Kvemo Machkhaani, a small village with an ancient buildings, is unique for its singular architecture and history of mobilisation. There are 2 buildings recognised as cultural heritage monuments in the village, but more than 10 buildings, also built by Machkhaani citizens, are waiting for entry into the Georgian national cultural heritage monuments list.

The most impressive is the theatre of Machkhaanitheatre, which plays an important role in village life with its singular history and stately architecture..

Local citizens built the Kvemo Machkhaani Theatre with their own resources. The Theatre opened in 1899. From the day of it opened, the theatre has been held in high esteem by the local population. Because of this, it is the only one of the 13 cultural buildings in Signaghi's municipality that survived robbery and looting in the 1990s. According to a survey we conducted of the 147 residents of Kvemo Machkhaani, one of the most important community challenges identified by the village population was the condition of and lack of resources available for the Machkhaani Theatre--this priority was second only to unemployment.

Our organisation, the Civic Initiative, has been working on popularising the history of Machkhaani Theatre since 2014 as a prime example of civic organisation in Georgia's history. This history of self-mobilised fundraising and prioritisation of culture within the community is confirmed by archives of the newspapers Iveria and Droeba.

Thanks to this recently-unearthed history and the community's interest and investment, we were able to open the theatre hall again for the first time in 2015. The Symphony of Georgia also organised a charity concert in Tbilisi in honor of Machkhaani Theatre. Since then, we have invited various groups to perform to raise awareness and funds for the Theatre.

We have organised 5 theatrical performances since 2015, and also have been able to replace electric wiring and windows, build a film screen, and add stage lights, an audio system, and heating.

In June and July, the "Civic Initiative", in collaboration with six performing choirs from 3 countries, organised the inaugural International Theatre Festival at Machkhaani Theatre.

The Festival greatly required human resources, and was executed on a very small budget. The festival enabled us to raise awareness of the Theatre's history, however, the funds raised through the festival and similar charity events is not enough to sustain permanent cultural programs for the Theatre. In addition, further rehabilitation of the building is greatly needed.

Our teams' efforts are not enough to sustain the cultural life of the theatre in the village. The local and central governments need to provide adequate financial and human resources for rural and economic development in the region.

The Civic Initiative set the first steps of development into motion. Now, we are working to do the same to revitalise cultural and educational life in other towns and villages within Signaghi municipality. To help support this, we have also opened "the Knowledge Café," a social enterprise focused on producing a space for culture, knowledge, and non-formal education in the center of Signaghi municipality.