Field Research on the Implementation of the LEADER Approach in Georgia

2020

**PROMOTING LINKS BETWEEN THE
RURAL ECONOMY AND DEVELOPMENT ACTIONS:
 LEADER APPROACH IN EAP REGION**

**Field Research Report on the Implementation
of the LEADER Approach in Georgia**

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WeResearch Non-governmental organization (NGO)

Preface

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Abbreviations

AAH - Action Against Hunger

EB – Executive Board

ED – Executive Director

ENPARD – European Neighborhood Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development

EU – European Union

GA – General Assembly

GALAG – Georgian Association of Local Action Groups

KII – Key Informant Interview

LAG – Local Action Group

LDS – Local Development Strategy

LEADER – Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'Économique Rurale

PAC – Project Assessment Committee

FGD – Focus Group Discussion

1. Executive Summary

The aim of the research was to study the adoption and implementation process of LEADER approach in Georgia and to reveal the main obstacles as well as identify best practices. In particular, the study examined the following core pillars: 1) Motivation of participants to actively engage in the strategic development of their locality; 2) Composition and cooperation of sectors/interest groups within the LAGs; 3) LAG structure and management and leadership processes / models; 4) Sustainability of Local Action Groups (LAG). With this aim the research team applied a desk review and qualitative research methods – focus group discussions and key informant interviews.

The research revealed that **motivating local community members to participate in the project activities is a challenge** at the initial stage of the project. Several reasons were identified behind this low level of motivation, which are: 1) the LEADER methodology and particularly bottom-up approach is rather new for Georgian community; 2) There is a general pessimism among the community members, who do not believe that their voices matter; 3) lack of trust towards international organizations; 4) No possibilities of personal economic gain. However, these attitudes change over the time with active information campaigns and transparent grant program implementation. Besides, there are notable differences among the generations, specifically, youth are more devoted to voluntary work and they express more interest to be engaged for the development of their community.

Sectoral cooperation is assessed positively. **LAGs have become a space for the public, private and civil sectors to intersect and to collaborate while addressing local problems**. A variety of interest groups such as women, youth, IDPs, people with disabilities, eco-migrants and people from the remote villages are represented in the LAGs. **Youth and Women are the best represented groups compared to other groups, while people with disabilities are the least represented**.

Sub-grant programmes are the largest component of the LAG's activities. LAG members make a significant effort to spread information about the grant programme in their respective municipalities/districts. The grant programmes aim to give equal opportunities for all the groups. however **due to the structural inequalities already existing in the society some groups have less access to the programme**. This might deepen existing social and economic inequalities.

The structure and the membership of the LAG is regulated by the LAG charter. **Although there are slight differences in terms of structure, management and decision making within the LAGs, this does not influence the results of the LAG actions.** The practice shows that for the LAG's successful operation it requires strong leaders. Once the most active and engaged people are identified within the group, the work performance is high.

The Study revealed that in general the **LAG members have ownership over the process and are willing to continue working**. However, there are several significant issues that challenge the sustainability of the LAGs: 1) Lack of financial means; 2) The need to further develop skills; and most importantly 3) A lack of special legal status, which is the biggest hindering factor for the sustainability of the LAGs.

2. Introduction

Action Against Hunger (AAH), in partnership with "WINNET Armenia" Network of Women Resource Centers and the National LEADER Network in the Republic of Moldova, is implementing the project *"Promoting Links between the Rural Economy and Development actions - LEADER approach in EaP region"* that is financed by the EaP Civil Society Forum. The main goal of the project is to promote the implementation of the LEADER approach in the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries, through the establishment of an Open Work Platform for the collaboration of interested partners in LEADER implementation. A cornerstone of the project is the development of a guide for the implementation of the LEADER approach in EaP countries, which will be based upon the results of country-level field studies and research.

The LEADER approach was introduced into Georgia[1] in 2015 under the European Neighborhood Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development (ENPARD).[2] Through the ENPARD programme EU aims to a) build capacity and support government institutions in the reform of the agriculture and rural development sector; b) to improve employment and living conditions of rural populations by strengthening farmers' cooperation skills and access to resources; c) to promote diversified social and economic opportunities in rural areas, particularly for women and youth, in due respect to the environment and the cultural heritage[3].

LEADER is a methodological approach established in the European Union that derives from the French words *"Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'Économique Rurale"* and is translated as: 'Links between the rural economy and development actions'. The idea of LEADER is to support rural development by forming partnerships at sub-regional level among public, private and civil sectors. Initially the LEADER approach focused only on disadvantaged rural areas, however, later the scope of the approach was expanded, and it now covers all rural areas and has become an integral part of EU's rural development policy. The main tool for the application of the LEADER approach for rural development and engaging local community representatives in decision-making is the Local Action Group (LAG).

The LEADER approach is associated with local empowerment through local strategy development and resource allocation. It has a decentralized approach and is based on seven principles:

1. **Bottom-up:** local actors design the strategy and choose the actions;
2. **Area-based:** project takes place in a small, homogeneous socially cohesive territory characterized by common traditions and needs;
3. **Public-Private Partnership:** LAGs are balanced groups involving public and private-sector actors, which can mobilize all available skills and resources;
4. **Innovation:** LAGs have the flexibility to introduce new ideas and methods;
5. **Integration:** between economic, social, cultural and environmental actions, as distinct from a sectoral approach;

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[1] Including breakaway territory of Abkhazia region in Georgia.
[2] The information about ENPARD is derived from the web-pages: http://enpard.ge/ and http://www.euenpardabh.org/
[3] The information about LEADER approach is derived from the web-pages: Georgian Rural Development Network and The European Network for Rural Development (ENRD)

6. **Networking:** allows learning among people, organizations and institutions at local, regional, national and European levels;
7. **Co-operation:** among LEADER groups, to share experiences.

Initially, ENPARD assisted the implementation of the approach in three municipalities in Georgia, but in subsequent ENPARD programmes the LEADER approach has been expanded to cover a further nine municipalities in Georgia, and five districts in the breakaway region of Abkhazia.

The proposed research aims to study the implementation process of the LEADER approach in Georgia and develop recommendations for improving this process in the future. In particular, the study has examined the following core pillars:

1. Motivation of participants to actively engage in the strategic development of their locality;
2. Composition and cooperation of sectors/interest groups within the LAGs;
3. LAG structure and management and leadership processes / models;
4. Sustainability of Local Action Groups (LAG).

Overall, the study aims to identify lessons learned and best practices as well as the main obstacles faced during all phases of adoption and implementation of the LEADER approach in Georgia.

3. Research Design and Methodology

The proposed research design and methodology was provided by AAH. The study applies a combination of desk research and qualitative methodology by using focus group discussions (FGD) and key informant interview (KII) techniques

3.1 Desk Review

Initially, the research team applied a critical desk review of all materials related to the LEADER approach including project documents, final reports, studies, evaluation reports and other relevant materials (see Annex # 1 The list of the reviewed documents). The aim of the desk research was to provide a thorough review of the ENPARD projects applying the LEADER approach in Georgia. Based on desk review findings, the research team elaborated guides for the field phase. Furthermore, the desk review phase was used to identify key informants for interviewing.

3.2 Qualitative Study

Preparation of the Research Instruments

At the field stage the research team utilized qualitative methods for data collection, in particular FGDs and KII were applied. Prior to conducting the FGDs and KIIs the research team developed a semi-structured guide. The guides were developed according to the questions provided by AAH and were modified per research target group. The guides included several demographic questions and covered the following topics: motivation of participants, the structure, management and leadership models at LAGs, cooperation between the sectors and the issues of sustainability.

The open-ended questions offered participants an opportunity to elaborate on their responses based upon their knowledge and experience. Furthermore, open-ended questions allowed the moderator not to lose the focus of the interview/discussion and simultaneously gave the respondents an opportunity to lead the discussion towards the matters that were of particular importance to them (see Annex # 2 The KII and FGD guides).

Target Groups and Sampling

A purposive sampling method was applied for identifying study participants. The principles of purposive sampling are often applied in qualitative research, as it implies reaching out and selecting study participants by specific characteristics, that is based on the research objectives.

The KIIs were conducted with the AAH project team and other LEADER implementing agencies. A total of 6 KIIs were conducted. The research team applied two criteria for the interviewee selection: the location of the LAGs and ENPARD phases. The research made sure that the interviewees represented LAGs from different regions of Georgia and were established in different ENPARD phases.

The FGDs were conducted with representatives of all 17 LAGs. In total, six FGDs were conducted during the research. The table below summarizes the selection of the municipalities / districts per each focus group discussion:

#	Selection of Municipalities / Districts
1	**Lagodekhi, Kazbegi and Borjomi**
2	**Dedoplistskaro, Akhmeta and Tetritskaro**
3	**Keda, Khulo and Akhalkalaki**
4	**Tsalka, Mestia and Tskaltubo**
5	**Tkvarcheli, Gali and Ochamchire**
6	**Gagra and Gudauta**

To ensure the diversity of the FGD participants, the representation of the different sectors – public, private and civic – as well as sex were considered during the selection of the focus group participants. In total, 45 people participated in the FGDs, 25 (56%) out of them were women and 20 (44%) were men. As for the sectoral division of the FGD participants, it was almost equal, with each sector represented with about 30% of the FGD members.

Data Collection

Considering the COVID 19 situation, the data collection was conducted online using the Zoom platform. In order to minimize the technical problems related to using online meeting platforms the FGD moderator prepared detailed instructions on downloading and using the Zoom application and e-mailed instructions to all FGD participants. Besides, the participants were asked to join the meeting 10 minutes prior to the FGD to check their devices and make sure everybody could be involved.

Prior to conducting the FGDs and KIIs, the moderator ensured that participants/interviewees had a clear understanding of the study objectives, the questions to be asked, and an understanding of the data collection methodology as a whole. The focus group were informed about confidentiality and the approximate length of the discussion/interview. After receiving verbal consent regarding participation and recording the discussion/interview, the moderator started the meetings. After the interviews/discussions the research team developed detailed write-ups of the meetings.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data was analyzed using thematic analysis, which implies transforming qualitative data into themes and sub-themes and allows for the analysis of data from various angles. A combination of deductive and inductive approaches was applied, and a semi-open coding method was used for thematic analysis. This approach implies that the key themes were identified prior to data analysis. Particularly, the four core pillars of the study – 1. motivation of the LAG members, 2. composition and cooperation of the LAG sectors and interest groups, 3. LAG structure, management and leadership models and 4. sustainability served as the key themes for the analysis. The sub-themes were not pre-defined and were identified based upon the discussions with the FGD participants and interviewees.

For data validation purposes, after the fieldwork and initial data analysis was conducted, the research team organized a meeting and discussed their observations on the group dynamics and key issues identified.

3.3 Ethical Considerations

To ensure the ethical treatment of participants in this research and the benefits of the study, the following steps were undertaken:

- ✓ Prior to the KII/FGD, verbal informed consent was obtained from the respondents/participants. The researcher provided the respondents with all information regarding the objectives of the research and the interview/discussion. The respondents were also informed of the process and that they could terminate the interview/discussion at any point they wished to.
- ✓ The research team maintained the confidentiality of the respondents/participants by not disclosing their name and surname. The information was analyzed and presented in a way that all characteristics that might make the respondents/participants identifiable, were minimized.
- ✓ The data obtained was shared with other researchers for validation purposes based upon the consent of the respondents. Audio recordings of the meetings will be stored until the end of the research for verification purposes and will be destroyed afterwards.

3.4 Limitations

The proposed methodology has several limitations. Firstly, the nature of the qualitative research implies that the research findings are not representative and cannot be generalized. Furthermore, due to limited resources, only a small number of LAG representatives were approached and, therefore, not every existing perspective might be reflected. Finally, several limitations were identified with regards to online data collection. Particularly, several group members had technical problems and either they could not hear the other group members, or it was hard to hear their voices. This fact hindered their full participation in the discussion and limited the possibilities to express their opinion. Conducting online FGDs is influenced by the group dynamics and the intensity of discussions, therefore, the moderator needed to manage the discussion to ensure the lively engagement of all FGD members. Lastly, using online tools for data collection complicated observations on the group dynamics.

Despite the limitations, the research provides an overview the LEADER implementation from different angles. It also identifies the lessons learned/best practices and constraints.

4. Main findings

4.1 Motivation of participants to actively engage in the strategic development of their locality

There are 17 LAGs in Georgia including Abkhazia.[4] The LAGs were established during phases I, II and III of the ENPARD programme in the period between 2015 and 2019 and they represent the main tool of the LEADER approach to support rural development and involve a broad range of local representatives in the decision-making processes (see Annex #3 The list of the LAGs). LAG membership is voluntary and is based on civic self-consciousness. The LAG is a connection point for private, public and civil sectors and its main function is to promote social-economic development in their locality through various development activities. The process for the LAG establishment includes a) information/awareness raising; b) receiving applications and conducting interviews; c) LAG formation and determining the statute/regulations.

Initially, a large information campaign is held with the aim of making community members aware of the LEADER approach and the LAG and gaining their interest to participate. Information dissemination meetings are held with the local authorities, private sector stakeholders and civil society actors. The information dissemination process to support the establishment of Tkvarcheli LAG can serve as an example:

> "*During the dissemination, all community members were encouraged to submit an application, and the information on the key roles and responsibilities of LAG members were provided by the project team members, so that people fully understood the commitment they would take. Emphasis was placed on the voluntary nature of LAG membership. It was also explained that capacity-building activities and trainings on different topics would require their commitment and regular participation." (European Neighbourhood Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development in Abkhazia, Final Report)*

In the majority of cases, the people who show interest and are motivated during the meetings are identified and are requested to fill in the application forms for LAG membership. The applicants are invited to the interviews later and finally a decision about their membership is made.

The interviews with the LEADER implementing agencies revealed that it is difficult to persuade community members to participate. According to the interviews conducted with the project representatives, this process is quite challenging. It was difficult to persuade community members, because on the one hand they are not used to a bottom-up approach and, on the other hand, they were skeptical that their perspectives/ideas mattered and that their voices would be heard.

> *"It is very difficult to persuade the community members that their voices matter during decision making. However, we conducted so many information meetings that their attitude changed, and their trust increased. This was reflected in their*

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[4] Additional information about LAGs in Georgia can be found here and here.

Besides, it was not easy to persuade the public sector representatives either. A low level of decentralization hinders the involvement of the representatives of local governments. According to the LEADER implementing agencies it was especially difficult as often public representatives did not see the need and importance of LAGs in local development processes and in some cases even considered them as their competitors. Additionally, there is a low or no trust in NGOs and this is especially visible in the LAGs in Abkhazia.

The above challenges are addressed by conducting awareness raising meetings with community members as well as with public representatives. The information meetings were successful as a result of several reasons: The project staff members covered most of the local municipality territorial units (cities, towns, villages) through information meetings. Therefore, they managed to reach out to a vast amount of local community members. Furthermore, the meetings were conducted in person, directly with the community members, and the project staff provided detailed information about the LAG concept and its operation model. Besides, individual meetings were held with the representatives of local municipality and other relevant stakeholders. The study participants agree that a high number of information meetings led to a change of attitudes towards LAGs and increased interest and participation level.

The motivation of those interested to participate in the project varies too. According to the LEADER approach the motivation for LAG membership derives from civic consciousness. The Georgian case illustrates that economic factors also dominate as an initial motivator. This is why, often the initial motivation of the community members to join the LAG is the grant program. Many community members who expressed their willingness to participate initially, changed their opinion later as they found out that participation did not automatically implied receiving grants. Considering the high level of unemployment in the country and the economic hardships of the people from rural areas, the above is not surprising.

Notably, many FGD participants could not identify a strong motivation for becoming LAG members during the discussions. This could be explained by the fact that there are not many opportunities for people living in rural areas, therefore, a new project was seen as a new opportunity and without searching for further information, people decided to participate.

The analysis of the motivating factors revealed generational differences. The data shows that compared to other age groups, youth is more devoted to voluntary work and they express more interest to be engaged in the development of their community without prioritizing the economic aspects of the participation Therefore, LEADER became a space for their civic engagement and their motivation to participate was strong.

"When I received information about the project at the information meeting, I saw myself in this project" (Mestia LAG, FGD).

"I thought that my involvement in the LAG activities would be important for my development as well as for municipal development" (Tsalka LAG, FGD).

To sum up, it is hard to motivate people to participate in the initial stage of the project. This is due to the general pessimism of the society members, who do not believe that their voices mater and that their action can bring actual change. These attitudes create challenges to the bottom-up approach, that is one the key principles of LEADER.

Besides, there is a lack of civic consciousness among the community members. The personal economic gain is still the key motivation for participation in different activities and/or projects implemented in the communities. However, these attitudes change over the time with active information campaigns and transparent grant program implementation. Furthermore, there is a notable generational difference, with young people who have high civic consciousness and are willing to work on voluntary bases for their community (More information about different interest groups will be provided in the chapter "Interest groups in the LAGs").

4.2   Composition and cooperation of sectors/interest groups within the LAGs

The following chapter provides an overview of the composition of the LAGs. Particularly, it looks at the Public, Private and Civil sectoral division and analyses what are the collaborative practices between these groups. Besides, it reviews different interest groups that are represented in the LAGs. Finally, it provides a thorough description of the two key LAG activities: Local Development Strategy (LDS) elaboration and the implementation of the Sub-Grant Programme.

Private, Public and Civil Sector collaboration

The LAG members represent the Public, Private and Civil Sectors. Collaboration between these sectors is one of the key principles of LEADER and the idea is to join the forces and mobilize all the resources available in the community. According to the LEADER approach, the representation of public sector must not be more than 49%. All LAGs in Georgia utilize this approach. However, there are small differences among the LAGs The differences in most of the cases are defined by the international LEADER consultants/experts who support the implementing agencies to develop the model by considering the local context and international best practice. Some LAGs follow 49%/51% principle, with 49% public sector representatives and 51% of private and civil representatives. While in other LAGs the share of public sector might be lower. For example, at Khulo LAG the public sector is represented only by 26.8%, and civil and private sectors represent 49.1% and 24.1% respectively.

The table below shows the percentage of sector representatives per LAG. There are several LAGs with relatively high representation of a particular sector. For example, the number of public and private sector representatives are high in Keda LAG, while Tetritskaro LAG has highest number of civic representatives. On average across the LAGs the share of each sector constitutes about one third of total number, with the highest share being the private sector representatives - 37%, followed by the civic sector – 35% and the public sector with 28%.

	Akhalkalaki	Akhmeta	Borjomi	Dedoplistskaro	Gagra	Gali	Gudauta	Kazbegi	Keda	Khulo	Lagodekhi	Mestia	Ochamchire	Tetritskaro	Tkvarcheli	Tsalka	Tskaltubo
Private	33%	43%	50%	62%	40%	20%	55%	6%	54%	25%	42%	17%	54%	23%	65%	35%	31%
Public	43%	36%	36%	28%	40%	40%	36%	10%	32%	29%	30%	24%	29%	29%	27%	33%	23%
Civic	23%	21%	14%	11%	20%	40%	9%	84%	14%	47%	28%	59%	17%	45%	8%	32%	46%

Generally, the inter-sectoral approach is assessed positively by the LAG members. According to the FGD discussions usually the public and private sectors do not intersect very much while working and making decisions. Therefore, the LAGs have become a space that unites representatives of different sectors around a single problem. However, the attitude of the LAG members towards the high share of public sector representatives varies. On the one hand, there is an argument in support of a high number of public sector representatives, because it is crucial to involve the local government representatives when solving local problems. On the other hand, the respondents argue that public sector representatives often influence the LAG's overall decisions due to their higher representation. Therefore, they believe that their share should be lower. Furthermore, the experience shows that the inclusion of high-level officials from the public sector creates a risk that their higher status, defined by the positions they hold in local municipal bodies (i.e. mayors, deputy mayors, etc.), will have a direct or indirect influence on the group dynamics and the final decisions made.

The sectoral identity is not very strong among the LAG members. During the FGDs the participants discussed different issues as LAG members in general and not as representatives of any specific sector. This means that their actions might not be defined by their sectoral belongingness either. However, this issue needs further exploration to reveal the actual causes.

Besides the above sectors the LAG members represent different thematic groups. They are created based on the priority areas defined by the LAG members in the LDS document, that will be discussed below. The representatives of thematic groups contribute to the identification of the different needs and development of respective actions. The thematic groups in the LAGs are as follows: agriculture/rural development, infrastructure improvement, environment protection, education and culture, youth issues, tourism etc. The thematic directions are usually quite similar in the LAGs. The table below represents the thematic groups of Khulo and Tkvarcheli LAGs as an illustration of a variety of directions:

Khulo	**Tkvarcheli**
1. **Tourism;** 2. **Agriculture/Rural economic development;** 3. **Education, culture, sport and youth affairs;** 4. **Social infrastructure and social affairs;** 5. **Environmental protection and sustainable management of natural resources.**	1. Development of agriculture and encouragement of diversification of agriculture 2. Improvement of infrastructure, through promotion of community initiatives 3. Development of micro and small-scale business 4. Development of tourism sector 5. Improvement of the education, training and awareness of population 6. Support for youth activities 7. Promotion of ecology and clean environment

Interest groups in the LAGs

Including interest groups in the LAG activities is a significant part of the project. According to the description of the ENPARD III, the programme aims *"to support communities in rural areas, with special emphasis on women, youth and excluded/vulnerable groups (elderly, people facing social exclusion, ethnic and religious minorities and persons with disabilities)"*[5];

The diversity of the interest groups is related to the specificity of the location and is defined in the LDS of the LAGs. For example, Tetritskaro LDS stresses the importance of involving socially vulnerable groups, for Lagodekhi LAG it is important to include ethnic minorities who constitute one fifth of the municipality, while for Kazbegi LAG it is a challenge to reach people living in remote villages:

> *"Youth and female participation, migration, employment, accessibility to vocational education and innovation were identified as cross cutting themes for all four strategic directions"* (Tetritskaro LAG, LDS).
>
> *"We encourage ethnic minority groups, who represent 20% of Lagodekhi municipality to participate. Gender and youth thematic groups are also very active. Involvement of the socially vulnerable groups were also considered in the project"* (Lagodekhi LAG, FGD).
>
> *"We assessed and addressed the need of the remote villages, because it was hard to include them. As a result, they became more active and eventually their projects were financed"* (Kazbegi LAG, FGD).

Women, youth, ethnic minorities, internally displaced people (IDPs), migrants, people with disabilities and people residing in the remote villages are the interest groups represented in the LAGs. Notably, out of a variety of interest groups women and youth seem to be mostly well represented in the LAGs. Their inclusion is usually a crosscutting issue in the project activities. The LAG members especially stress that youth are very active:

> *"A variety of activities were implemented by the youth. For example, managing the social media page. We believe that the youth should be involved even more, and their potential should be used"* (Lagodekhi LAG, FGD).
>
> *"The youth saw opportunities and now they are involved in almost all activities. They approach us with ideas for new activities"* (Akhalkalaki LAG, FGD).

Inclusion of different ethnic groups is crucial for LAGs too. Especially in the locations where there is ethnic diversity, i.e. Gali, Tkvarcheli, Akhalkalaki, Tsalka, Lagodekhi, etc. Notably, in order to ensure the inclusion of ethnic minorities Akhalkalaki LAG created a webpage in the Armenian and Russian languages, as well as in Georgian.

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[5] Further information can be found here.

A big challenge is to include the people with disabilities in the project. People with disabilities often have less possibilities to engage in community development activities and the LAGs need to offer them environment adapted to their special needs.

> *"People with disabilities are not actively involved, because the space is not adapted for their needs. We plan to work in this direction" (Tsalka LAG, FGD)*

Finally, the lack of infrastructure and transportation makes it is difficult to reach the community members living in the remote villages/locations. Firstly, it is hard to deliver information to remote locations and secondly, even if they are informed and are willing to take part in the project, lack of transportation hinders their involvement.

> *"It is very difficult to be involved on voluntary basis considering the [mountainous] geography of our municipality and the lack of local transportation system" (LEADER Implementing Agency, KII).*
>
> *"There is no public transport in the villages and, therefore, they cannot be reached [by the LAG members]. Tsalka needs municipal transport for development" (Tsalka LAG, FGD).*

To increase the opportunities for vulnerable groups to get involved, the LAG members have taken certain measures. For example, the inclusion of vulnerable groups in the sub-grant application is considered as a plus and the projects are assessed with extra points. "*In the process of application assessment an extra 10 points will be given to the projects*", says the Keda sub-grant programme announcement.[6]

By applying the above measure, the LAG members attempt to increase participation opportunities for different vulnerable groups. The table below shows the share of interest groups represented in the LAGs.

LAG	Total number	Women	Youth	Ethnic minorities	IDPs	Eco migrants	Disabled people	From Remote villages
Akhalkalaki	30	27%	13%	83%	0	0	0	0
Akhmeta	67	52%	18%	10%	2%	0	3%	0
Borjomi	28	46%	32%	7%	0	0	0	0
Dedoplistskaro	94	29%	6%	4%	0	17%	0	0
Gagra	15	33%	20%	33%	0	0	0	13%
Gali	40	38%	25%	98%	0	0	3%	0
Gudauta	22	32%	18%	9%	0	0	0	14%
Kazbegi	146	67%	22%	0	0	0	0	7%
Keda	322	37%	24%	0	0	0	0	0

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[6] More information about Keda's grant programme can be found here in Georgian.

Khulo	78	32%	22%	0	0	0	0	1%
Lagodekhi	120	43%	16%	10%	5%	4%	8%	0
Mestia	115	50%	28%	0	10%	0	0	0
Ochamchire	24	21%	13%	8%	0	0	0	17%
Tetritskaro	96	44%	19%	5%	7%	18%	1%	0
Tkvarcheli	49	35%	12%	43%	0	0	0	0
Tsalka	176	36%	26%	0	20%	56%	0	0
Tskaltubo	249	49%	16%	0	12%	1%	1%	13%
Total:	1671	41%	20%	7%	5%	8%	1%	3%

The analysis of the number of interest group members, illustrate that in relation to the total number of LAG members, women have highest share with 41.1%. The highest representation of women is in Kazbegi with 61.6%. This is the only LAG where the share of women exceeds the share of men. The lowest representation is in Ochamchire (20.8%), Akhalkalaki (26.7) and Dedoplistskaro (28.7%). Women's interest group is followed by youth who are represented by 20.2% with the lowest representation Dedoplistskaro (6.4%) and with the highest representation in Mestia 0. The representation of other interest groups is relatively low with eco-migrants – 8.3%, Ethnic minorities – 7.4%, IDPs - 5.4%, people from remote villages - 3.1%. The lowest is the representation of the people with disabilities who constitute only 0.4% of the total number of LAG members.

Lagodekhi, Tetritskaro and Tskaltubo LAGs are most diverse with respect to interest groups. The least diverse are Kazbegi, Keda and Khulo LAGs with only women and youth groups.

## 4.3 LAG structure and management and leadership processes / models

This chapter gives an overview of the LAG structures and analyses the management models of the LAGs. The structure and the membership of the LAG are regulated by the LAG charter. Therefore, the management might differ between LAGs, as well as the terms of membership. The structure and leadership model used by the LAGs often depends on which EU country's model they adopted. At the initial stage of the project, study visits to see European LAGs were organized. The aim of the visits was to provide a better understanding of LAG's structure, management models and activities. The LAG members had an opportunity to learn about the benefits and challenges of the LEADER process in the European context and to build connections. Often the host European LAGs become partners and Georgian LAGs built their management structure around the model of this European LAG.

> "*Our head office collaborated with the Association of LAGs of the Czech Republic. The [LEADER] approach was very successful in Czech Republic and we decided to choose a country which belonged to the Socialist Bloc in the past and adapt their model, because it is difficult to adapt a model from very developed countries, where the context is totally different*"(LEADER implementing agency, KII)
>
> "*The Akhalkalaki LAG repeats the Scotland-Irish model of a LAG, where LAG membership is limited. There are only 30 members*" (Akhalkalaki LAG, FGD).

Besides the study visits, at the initial stage of the project, all LAG members attended introductory trainings delivered by international experts on the LEADER/CLLD (Community-led Local Development) approach, LAG management, LDS development and implementation that also influence the structure and management models.

Despite the existing differences, the general management structure of the LAGs is as follows:
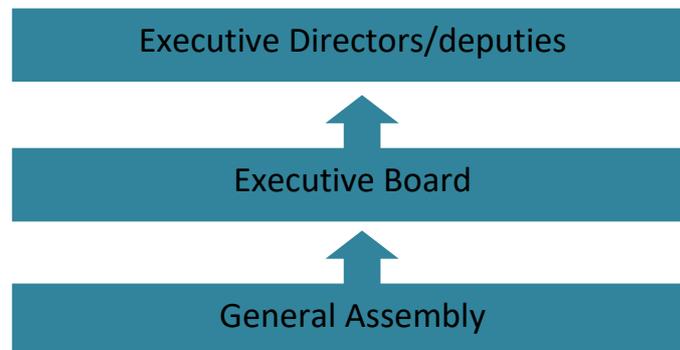
The selection process of the **Executive Director (ED)**[7] is regulated by the LAG statute. Though there might be slight difference among the LAGs, in most of the cases the ED is selected by the LAG members for a two-year time period. Two **Deputy Directors** are either selected by the LAG members or are assigned by the ED. Notably, in order to keep the diversity of the sectors, the ED and Deputy Directors must represent three different sectors. For example, if the ED represents the private sector, one deputy director should be from the civil sector and the other should be from the public sector.

The LAGs have **Management/Executive Boards (EB)** which is the main decision-making body of the LAG. The LAG members select the board by anonymous voting. It is mandatory that the board members represent all three sectors as well as the different thematic groups with at least one member from each group.

It must be highlighted that in Gagra, Ochamchire and Gudauta LAGs, there are no Executive and Deputy Directors. Therefore, the EB, which consists of 5 members, is the highest management organ. There is no evidence to show whether this approach has a better outcome compared to having EDs and deputies, however it was assessed positively by the LEADER implementing agency.

> "*The fact that there are no presidents and the vice-presidents, intensifies the discussions and supports more involvement of the members. There are members with different characteristics, some are strong, others are less strong. Therefore, the discussions might develop in diverse forms. Overall, the system is efficient. We believe that the hierarchical division among the members is not necessary*" (LEADER Implementing Agency, KII)

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[7] In several LAGs the position of Executive Director might be called Chairperson or President. Deputy Directors are called Deputy Chairs or Deputy Presidents respectively.

The LAG **General Assembly (GA)** is formed from all members of the LAG. As will be discussed in the chapter 'Composition and cooperation of sectors/interest groups within the LAGs', the GA members represent public, private and civil sectors and are united in different thematic groups. In the case of several LAGs (e.g. Kazbegi) each thematic group has a respective coordinator.

There are two approaches to LAG membership. The most common approach is that any person can become a part GA and the maximum number of LAG members is not predefined. For example, according to the Khulo Local Development Strategy: "*Any Khulo municipality resident over 18 years old can apply for the membership and become a member if they share LAG principles and values and will contribute to the work of LAG*". There are 112 members at Khulo LAG.

Another approach is to predefine the number of LAG members and though LAG membership is open for everybody, and applications are received from all interested people, only a certain amount of people are selected as GA members. This was the case in Akhalkalaki, where there are only 30 LAG members. The differences are based on the different European models that the LAGs decide to use. During the KIIs it was noted that "the more the better" approach does not always work in the case of the LAGs. On the contrary, it was argued that when the LAGs have many members it makes decision-making and LAG management harder, because it is more difficult to gather all LAG members. This is especially problematic for the LAGs located in the high mountainous regions where transportation from one place to another is often a challenge.

Some of the LAGs also have a **Steering Board** which is a LAG supporting organ is responsible to provide technical support to the LAG. Also, many LAGs have a committee whose responsibility is to assess the grant applications. The **Project Assessment Committee** (PAC)[8] is part of the LAG and members are selected among, and by, the GA members. In certain cases, each thematic group in the LAG has their own PAC. In other cases, membership of PAC is based upon the rotation principle. Several LAGs also have a group of supporting thematic **experts,** who provide their assessment of the grant applications and share their opinion to the LAG members.

Georgian LAGs are members of the local association **GALAG** (Georgian Association of LAGs). GALAG is a conduit for information exchange and learning across the country and acts as an advocate for community-led local development with key state and non-state actors, facilitating the development of participatory and sustainable rural development in Georgia. However, the LAG members did not mention the role of GALAG during the discussions. It seems that LAG members do not see the role and importance of the GALAG in the overall process, especially in term of advocacy. Abkhazia LAGs are not part of GALAG and there is not LAG association in Abkhazia.

Despite the fact that the LAGs utilize different approaches regarding their structure and management models, no major differences were identified in the results. What makes a difference in the successful functioning of a LAG is a so-called "Core" group. The "Core" is a self-identified group of active people from who are involved in most of the LAG activities and are

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[8] This body is called differently in different LAGs: For example, it is called the Project Assessment Committee (PAC) in Akhalkalaki and the Project Appraisal Advisory Group (PAAG) in Borjomi.

identifiable in the majority of LAGs. The "Core" members are not only from the EB, but from LAGs in general.

Also, not every LAG member has the same opportunity to be engaged in the activities to the same extent. For example, those who live a long distance away from the LAG meeting locations, or those who have full time job, are less involved. Therefore, existing of the "Core" is crucial for the LAGs, as a large amount of work is performed by them.

To sum up, although there are slight differences in terms of structure, management and decision making within the LAGs, this does not influence the results of the LAG actions. Once the most active and engaged people are identified, the work performance is high.

Elaboration of the Local Development Strategy (LDS)

Elaboration of the LDS is one of the initial major activities that is undertaken by the LAG members. This is the process where the representatives of different sectors and thematic groups come together and join their forces to determine the strategic goals and actions that the LAG wishes to support. International experts are usually invited by the project implementing agencies to support the LAG to develop the LDS. The experts share their knowledge and experience and guide the LAG members to carry out all activities related to LDS development. The activities include desk review, needs assessment and elaboration of the LDS final document.

The LDS is developed according to the core principles of the LEADER methodology, but at the same time it needs to reflect the specificity of the municipality/locality and to meet its needs. Therefore, it is necessary to collect all relevant contextual information at the initial stage of the LDS development. With this aim, LAG members held public consultations with the community members which, besides collecting the information, ensures the involvement of the broader society.

LAG members conduct research applying different methodological approaches. All LAGs conduct desk research to have a thorough overview of the socio-economic situation in the municipality and identify the needs and local priorities. The desk research implies the analysis of national, regional and local documents, such as strategies, action plans, programmes and projects implemented in the area, management plans, etc. Often the desk research is also used to identify local stakeholders.

Besides the desk research, several LAGs apply qualitative and quantitative research methods to obtain more information. Mostly qualitative interviews are used. However, in some cases LAGs apply quantitative surveys too. For example, a survey was conducted at Tetritskaro where 403 people were interviewed. The aim of survey was to reveal the needs of local community members This was the highest number of people interviewed compared to the needs assessment conducted by other LAGs. The research process is well described in the Tetritskaro LAG LDS that said:

> *"To have ensured the maximum engagement of the target communities in the identification of the strategy priorities, Tetritskaro LAG decided to carry out quantitative research in the municipality. The LAG developed a questionnaire and surveyed 403 persons living in Tetritskaro municipality.*
>
> *To support the strategy development process 41 meetings were organized, during*

Based on the information received, the LAG members start developing the LDS. The LDS regulates all the activities of the LAGs related to its membership, the strategic priorities, the sub-grant programme, propriety fields, etc.

The LDS of all LAGs include following information:

- ➢ Description of the LAGs;
- ➢ Socio-Economic profile of the location
- ➢ Local Development Strategy;
- ➢ Future development challenges.

LAG description gives information about the LAG management structure, main bodies of the LAG, its members and their share.

The socio-economic profile of a municipality presents a thorough description of the municipality or the region.

The strategy part includes information on the priority fields identified during the conducted research and consultations. The strategy goals, objectives, activities and indicators are defined based on the priority fields. LDS priority fields are shared with community members and all stakeholders.

Future development challenges includes information on challenges and opportunities. The LAG members conducted SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis and identified potential areas for development as well as existing risks. With the assistance of field experts, they assessed the risks and provided analysis for each priority areas.

Some of the strategies also include parts on **LDS development methodology**, process of the **selection of grant applications**, and **monitoring and evaluation**.

Since LDS development is the first major tasks for the LAG members, they often measure their success by the quality of the LDS:

> **"***It was a very pleasant feeling for me that we managed and reached almost every community. I think while developing the LDS, we defined the community needs correctly. We managed to go down to the community and identified the most essential problems. (Akhmeta LAG, FGD).*

The Georgian case shows that the process of LDS development follows the LEADER principles successfully. Particularly, the element of the Private-Public Partnership is achieved, as different sectors are involved in the process. Besides, all measures were taken to utilize a Bottom-up Approach.

It should be noted here that during the outbreak of COVID 19, when meetings in physical spaces were prohibited, working on the LDS became a challenge for the LAGs. Consequently, they

carried out online workshops and moved the whole LDS development process from physical to online spaces.

Sub-Grant Programme

The sub-grant programme constitutes one of the major components of the LAG activities. The aim of the grant programme is to improve rural development conditions in the municipality and support the implementation of innovative projects. Legal business entities, rural cooperatives, legal entities under public law (LEPL) as well as non-commercial organizations (NGOs, community groups etc.) and private individuals can apply for a grant.

The LAG is responsible to spread information about the grant programme and with this aim they have conducted large information campaigns, which includes community meetings, as well as targeted meetings with specific groups. Information dissemination was made online (Facebook, Instagram, LAG websites), through TV and radio, as well as through information meetings and leaflets/posters. Interested individuals/organizations were then invited to fill in the application and the budget forms.

During the information campaign the core actions that are to be supported are announced that are in line with the priorities defined in the LDS. The grant application can be for commercial or social reasons. The main difference between the two is that commercial grants are for business activities and are income oriented. Any person with a business idea may apply for the grant. In this case material contribution from the applicant is required. Social projects are not-for-profit and for the community good. The applicants are usually local NGOs, representatives of public entities (i.e. schools, colleges, kindergartens) or individuals partnering local governments. The contribution in this case can be material as well as non-material.

The grant programmes also require co-financing and the applicants are required to provide their share of the financial contribution. There were two approaches observed to grant co-financing. In the first case the minimum and the maximum amount of grant is defined, and the applicants should provide the necessary contribution. For example, as it is defined in the Tkvarcheli LDS *"the grant amount requested cannot be more than 1,300,000 RUB and less than 200,000 RUB"*. The co-financing is similar for all applications and has to be 10% of the total grant amount.

The other approach implies, that the contributions share depends on the amount of the grant or the type of the applicant. For example, Keda[9] LAG announced a grant programme were the share of contribution is defined according to the grant amount as it is shown in the table below.

Amount of Grant:	Contribution Share
20,000 - 60,000 GEL	20%
60,000 – 120,000 GEL	30%
120,000-180,000 GEL	40%

While with Borjomi LAG the share of contribution depends on the type of applicant:

Type of Applicant	Contribution Share

[9] Keda LA

Commercial Entities (LTD, I.E etc.)	minimum 40%
Municipal and government agencies – minimum	minimum 40%
Agricultural Cooperatives	minimum 25%
NGO, associations and other organizations	minimum 10%
Local Communities and Individuals (Physical persons)	minimum 10%

Having differentiated amounts of co-financing might support better inclusion of economically vulnerable groups into the grant programme. Also, a significant difference was observed between commercial and social grants in that applicants for social grants could provide an in-kind contribution rather than a financial contribution. As stated by the FGD participants, the in-kind contributions are extremely important for economically vulnerable applicants.

After receiving the applications, the selection process starts. Generally, decisions at LAGs are made based on the majority of votes, however the process is different in the case of the sub-grant programme and decision making is defined by the LAG structure and the grant competition regulations (often determined in the LDS). Several differences will be discussed below.

Most of the LAGs have Project Assessment Committees (PACs)[10]. Their responsibility is to review the applications and provide recommendations. Some of the LAGs invite field experts to evaluate the applications too and these also provide recommendation about the applications. The final decision on project selection is then most often made by the LAG, often by anonymous voting. Though this approach is the common form of assessment and selection, it was observed that the LAGs had several variations. With Keda LAG the PAC makes the final decision by a majority of vote, while in Akhalkalaki LAG, the LAG General Assembly makes the decision. At the Dedoplistskaro LAG the EB members adopted PAC functions. Initially there were both bodies working at the LAG and decisions regarding the grant application made by the PAC were approved by the EB. However, the EB members had some concerns, therefore they decided that EB would assess and make decision about the grants.

In Gali LAG, in addition to the Executive Board members and experts, the applications are assessed by the project implementing organization to reduce any subjective assessments of the project.

The FGDs revealed that some of LAG members believe that LAGs should have primary power on decision-making in grant component. The LAGs in Georgia are created at the municipal or district level and are located in towns or villages where most of the people know each other. In a collectivist culture like Georgia, this might challenge the issue of objectivity during the decision making. Therefore, special measures have to be undertaken. Involvement of field experts or project staff during decision making as well as keeping voting anonymous could be a good solution for minimizing subjectivity.

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[10] More information about PACs will be provided in the chapter: LAG structure and management and leadership processes / models

The qualitative interviews and FGDs revealed several challenges with regards to sub-grant programme. The research respondents stated that attitudes of non-LAG members towards the grant-programme was a challenge. Often, the motivation to apply for the grant was to improve a person's own economic conditions by developing a business. The motivational factor was therefore for individual rather than community development reasons. This could also be seen in the types of projects proposed where people were more interested in grants for commercial purposes rather than for social purposes and could not see the importance of the later.

> "*The community wants the focus to be on businesses. It is difficult for them to see the importance of social grants*" (LEADER Implementing Agency, KII).
>
> "*It took a lot of effort to change the public's attitude towards the grant programme. Particularly, to make them see that involvement in the project does not automatically mean that they will receive that grants. This challenge still continues*" (LEADER Implementing Agency, KII)

Besides, most of the community members lacked the skills for writing the application and later for managing the project. Trainings were held for the community members and even though the respondents agree that the quality of the projects improved over time, the challenge still exists and it still needs to be addressed.

> "*The problem of project writing is with every LAG. The first and the second phases showed us what had to be corrected. We conducted trainings [on project writing] with different groups. However, since the topic is a novelty for the community, filling in the grant application is still a problem*" (Keda LAG, FGD).

Another significant challenge is related to creating equal opportunities for community members to participate in the grant programme. The KIIs and the FGDs revealed that there are some groups who have less opportunities to participate in the programme and receive grants. These inequalities are connected with the ethnicity, place of residence and socio-economic status.

Inequalities derived from ethnicity is related to the fact that ethnic minorities often do not speak Georgian or Russian (in case of Abkhazia) and therefore understanding and filling in the application is a challenge for them. According to the LAG representatives, even if they apply for the grant, their applications are not strong enough and, in some cases, they are not able to receive the grant.

Place of residence seems to be important too. Community members who live farther from municipal center, or from the place where the LAG is located, have less opportunity to receive the information and consequently to participate not only in the grant programme but in the project in general.

Finally, the economic conditions and education of the community members can have an influence as there is a connection between one's economic conditions and level of education/skills. Those who applied with larger scale projects were often able to contribute higher material or cash contributions. Also having higher economic capital allowed them to develop their skills better in the past and consequently managed to send in higher quality grant applications. Socially vulnerable groups with less economic capital and less education/skills therefore may have a lower chance of receiving a grant. This fact creates a threat that the sub-

grant programme might unintentionally deepen the social and economic inequality already existing in the society.

> *"There was a negative attitude from the community members with the small-scale projects during the third phase of the grant programme. Because previously mostly large-scale grant projects were approved. The reason behind this was that the applications for the large-scale projects were significantly better" (Dedoplistskaro LAG, FGD).*

The table below shows the number of grants per LAG and the number of women and youth employed as a result of grant. The share of employed women in relation to the total number of employed people is 42%. As for the youth their share constitutes 33 %. This might be explained by the fact that according to the FGD participants many LAGs have identified women and youth as priority interest groups and have special criteria during the selection of grant applications.

LAG[11]	Number of Grant Projects	Total number of employed people	Share of Employed Women	Share of Employed Youth
Akhalkalaki	42	141	51%	62%
Borjomi	50	59	20%	29%
Dedo-plistskaro	110	379	39%	64%
Gagra	21	65	23%	31%
Gali	42	42	19%	24%
Gudauta	17	32	25%	38%
Kazbegi	112	313	44%	56%
Keda	91	390	41%	0
Khulo	73	250	33%	8.0%
Lagodekhi	64	230	50%	16%
Ochamchire	24	52	23%	31%
Tetritskaro	83	431	53%	34%
Tkvarcheli	43	44	34%	20%

To sum up, the LAGs have become a space for the public, private and civil sectors to intersect and to collaborate while addressing local problems. The LDS jointly developed by them can serve as an example of a successful collaboration. However, the lack of resources and a lack of power within the decision-making process can creates obstacles to fully implement the inter-sectoral approach of the LEADER methodology.

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[11] Does not include the data from Akhmeta, Mestia, Tsalka and Tskaltubo LAGs, as they announced grant programs recently.

Due to the low civic consciousness of the local community members the grants are considered as a means for individual economic gain rather a means of municipal development. Besides, since there still are several groups which have less access and opportunity to receive grants the programme might unintentionally deepen existing social and economic inequalities. This issue should be carefully considered by the LAG members and supporting implementing agencies.

4.4. Sustainability of LAGs

The sustainability of the LAGs is a crucial issue for LAG members. Notably, the research results revealed that the LAG members have ownership over the project and are willing to continue working. However, FGD members identified several significant issues that challenge the sustainability of the LAGs. Financial means, competencies, and legal status of the LAGs are considered the key hindering factors.

After the accomplishment of the supporting project the LAGs will have to actively search for the grants and other financial sources. In the future LAG members feel that it is important to search for donor organizations and apply for their grants or implement projects as their partners. Also some believe that they can also provide services to the local municipality, i.e. conduct needs assessment of the local community members. It should be highlighted that many LAGs already have experience of applying for, and receiving, grants. However, it is argued that there are a lack of fundraising opportunities. Additionally, the LAGs will not be able to function with small grants. It is crucial for the LAG members that they do not transform into a typical NGO and keep their activities as defined by the LEADER methodological approach.

Lack of the office facilities also hinders the sustainability of the LAGs too. The LAG members approached local governments with the request for office space. However, not all of them were successful.

> *"It is very hard for us that we do not have an office. We are obliged to create messenger groups and communicate that way. We need office for meetings"*
> *(Kazbegi LAG, FGD).*
>
> *"It has been already four years that we are asking municipality for the space. In spite of this we still do not have an office to work" (Dedoplistskaro LAG, FGD).*

The skills and the competences of the LAG members should be enough for continuing activities after the projects are over. A variety of trainings were conducted for the LAG members during the projects. The interview respondents as well as FGD participants indicate that the knowledge and the skills of the LAG members have increased over the years:

> *"Their knowledge with regards to project writing has increased. They have experience of accountancy and reporting" (LEADER Implementing Agency, KII).*
>
> *"The experience of the people working at the LAGs, should not be lost"*
> *(Dedoplistskaro LAG, FGD)*

However, other interviewees are concerned. The LEADER implementing organizations have administrative and supportive functions within the framework of their projects. Besides they also hold funds for the sub-grants. Considering this the LAG members might not have enough capacity to manage future projects independently. In order to respond to this challenge, it might

be useful to focus on the *Core* group, discussed above. The implementing agency might identify their strengths and weaknesses and make special efforts to increase their skills and knowledge. Having a small group of active people with the skills of project management, financial management, grant allocation, human resources management, etc. can be a strong prerequisite for sustainability.

Finally, the biggest hindering factor for the sustainability of the LAGs is their legal status. For the time being the LAGs are established as NGOs – Non-entrepreneurial, Non-commercial Legal Entity (NNLE), which is problematic for LAGs. First of all, this status makes them a competitor with the local NGOs and even the local government bodies. Secondly, the idea behind the LAGs is that they become a body connecting the state and the community, which is not possible with the NGO status. Finally, the LAGs cannot collaborate with European LAGs, i.e. receive grants because they do not have the formal status.

> *"The Estonian LAG cannot give us a grant because we do not have an official status from the State" (LEADER Implementing Agency, KII)*

Differences between LAGs in Abkhazia and Georgia are visible with regards to legal status of the LAGs. Compared to Georgia the issue of the legal status is more problematic for Abkhazia, as the LAGs are not registered there officially at all. Besides, according to the KIIs advocacy on at the government level is more challenging in Abkhazia.

To sum up, financial and human resources are very important for the sustainability of the LAGs. However, it is crucial for the LAGs to have a special legal status and to become an independently functional body. At this point this is not possible.

5. Recommendations:

Challenge: The biggest challenge for the LAGs is the issue of sustainability. The lack of official status raises the question of whether the LAGs will be able to continue their activities according to the LEADER approach.

Recommendations: The issue of the LAG sustainability should be addressed at the very beginning of the project.

The visibility of the LAGs should be increased in the municipality/district as well as on national level.

Active advocacy should be done at the central governmental level. The LAG members, together with implementing and donor organizations, should participate in this advocacy work. Notably, the advocacy has already started in Georgia and should be continued more actively in the future.

Challenge: Besides the issues of the legal status, issues related to financial and administrative competencies are significant for the LAG sustainability.

Recommendations: The competencies of the LAG members should be strengthened especially in fundraising and project management.

The strengths and weaknesses of the most active members of the LAG should be identified, and their skills should be further developed.

Challenge: Inclusion of different interest groups is another challenge for LAG members. Women and youth are well represented in the LAG activities. However, other vulnerable groups are under-represented.

Recommendations: More proactive measures should be undertaken to increase participation opportunities for vulnerable groups such as people with disabilities, elderly people, ethnic minorities, people living in remote villages. This issue should be approached at the very beginning of the project and during the information dissemination process targeted meetings should be held to ensure their active participation in the LAGs.

More information should be gained about the characteristics of the vulnerable groups in the municipality/district. In order to ensure an inter-sectoral approach supporting all groups, the LDS of the LAGs could be updated and more activities could be added for the inclusion of vulnerable groups.

Challenge: Despite the fact that the LAGs support the inclusion of different groups in the sub-grant programme, there still are groups who find it difficult to engage in the programme. Thus, unintentionally the programme might deepen existing social and economic inequality.

Recommendation: More information – i.e. demographic data and key hindering factors, should be gathered about the groups for whom the grant programme is less accessible and proactive measures should be undertaken for their inclusion.

Challenge: A general pessimism among society members and a lack of trust in any new initiative leads to the fact that the community members have low, or no, trust towards the LAGs too.

Recommendation: The LAG members should regularly conduct information meetings about their activities in the municipalities and communities. It should be stressed that the LAG is neither an NGO nor a part of the local government and that the decisions made at LAGs are transparent and fair.

Challenge: The sub-grant programme constitutes the largest part of the LAG activities. There is a threat that because of programme LAG members will not have time for other activities.

Recommendation: The LAG members should be aware of the threat and take active measures to implement other activities that support the implementation of the LEADER approach.

Challenge: The lack of infrastructure and local public transport is an obstacle for those living in the remote villages. This hinders inclusion of people that live far from the LAG locations.

Recommendations: The implementing organizations should consider transportation problems while establishing LAGs in the future. The LAG meeting places should also be selected carefully. Besides, the transportation costs of the LAG members might be reimbursed if possible.

Annexes:

Annex #1: The list of the reviewed documents:

    a) Final Report - Participatory Integrated Community Development in Abkhazia (ENPARD II);
    b) Final Evaluation Report - Participatory Integrated Community Development in Abkhazia (ENPARD II);
    c) Final Report - Enhancing Competitiveness of Agriculture and Improving Rural Economic Diversification (ENPARD III);
    d) I Interim Narrative Report - Promoting Inclusive and Participatory Local Development in Akhmeta Municipality;
    e) Baseline Study - Support to the Development of the Livelihoods in Disadvantaged Rural Regions of Georgia. (Mestia, April, 2019)
    f) Evaluation of ENPARD I
    g) LAG evaluation reports
    h) Local Development Strategies of LAGs
    i) Newsletters/Factsheets of the LAGs

Additionally, information was obtained from the following web-pages:

    a) ENPARD in Georgia;
    b) ENPARD in Abkhazia;
    c) Georgian Rural Development Network.
    d) The European Network for Rural Development (ENRD)

Annex #2: Key Informant Interview and Focus Group Discussion Guides:

FGD Guide
(FDG with the members of the LAGs)

Demographic Questions:
1. Name/surname?
2. Municipality?
3. What is your role in the LAG?
4. How long have you been a member of the LAG?
5. Which sector are you representing in LAG (public, private or civic)?

Motivation of participants to actively engage in the strategic development of their locality
6. How did you learn about the Local Action Group (LAG)?
7. Was it your own decision to become the member of LAG? if Yes. Can you name the most important reasons/motivations to become the member of the LAG? If no, who invited you and why?
8. What procedures did you go through to become a LAG member? Was it difficult to become a LAG member? If yes, in what way?
9. What are the key activities of the LAGs/LAG members? Are you actively involved in these activities?
10. Are there any specific issues/reasons that hinders you to be more actively engaged in LAG? Please, specify those issues/reasons.
11. From your experience, what do you consider as a strength of community engagement in local development? Please name specific examples.
12. From your experience, what do you consider as a weakness of community engagement in local development? Please name specific examples.
13. From your experience, please, name the most successful cases of community engagement in local development. Please, explain why they were successful, what were the main reasons/factors of success?
14. From your experience, please, name the most unsuccessful cases of community engagement in local development. Please, explain why they were unsuccessful, what were the main reasons/factors of failure?

LAG structure and management and leadership processes / models
15. What is the LAG management structure for the LAG that you are involved with? Please, describe.
16. How is your LAG governed? How are the LAG governing body and leaders (i.e. Executive Board, chair, president, vice president etc.) selected? What are the formal procedures?
17. How would you assess the management structure and leadership models of the LAGs? What are the strong sides of them? What are the weak sides? Would you change anything to improve the management structure and leadership models of the LAGs? If yes, what?
18. What grant application process/forms and systems are in place to assist the LAG members make decisions on funding?
19. From your experience are there any administrative/financial oversight requirements that constrains the LAG's ability to implement the LEADER approach?

Composition and cooperation of sectors/interest groups within the LAGs

20. Which sectors are represented in your LAG? Please, list them.
21. Which sectors are most represented? Why? Please specify.
22. Which sector is the least represented? Why? Please specify.
23. Are there any sectors which you think should be represented in LAG that are not? Which are those sectors, please, specify.

24. From your experience please describe what are the benefits of collaboration across different sectors?
25. From your experience, what are main obstacles during the cooperation between the different sectors? Please, specify.
26. What is the process of decision making? Please, describe step by step. What is the role and influence of the public sector/local authorities in the decision-making process?
27. Which different interest groups are involved in your LAG? (i.e. Persons from mountainous and remote locations; Ethnic minorities & eco-migrants; IDPs, Women, youth, the elderly and people with disabilities)
28. Are there any interest groups which you think should be represented in LAG that are not? Which are those groups, please, specify.
29. From your experience please describe what ways are utilized to bring together the different interest groups? Please, describe the best practices.
30. From your experience, please, describe what are the main challenges in bringing together different interest groups as LAG members? Please, give specific examples.
31. What were the enabling and hindering factors for successful cooperation of LAGs? Please, specify those factors. (i.e. financial/human/time resources, readiness for collaboration, and motivation of the members, etc.)
32. What are the lessons learnt in working together with different interest groups as LAG members? Please, tell specific examples.

Sustainability

33. Do you have any plans about alternative financial resources to implement your activities after donor funding has been withdrawn? Please, explain those plans. (i.e. have you searched for other donor funding?)
34. Does your LAG have enough capacity to seek alternative donor funding? If yes, in wat ways? If not, please explain what capacity you still need?
35. Will you be still willing to be part of LAG is there is no current donor funding? If yes, why? If no, why not?
36. What are the activities that your LAG will continue to implement after donor funding has been withdrawn? Please, specify those activities.
37. Do you consider continuing to work on further developing or supporting the local development strategy?
38. What are the activities that your LAG will not continue to implement after donor funding has been withdrawn? Please, specify those activities and explain why?
39. Do you use any of the skills/knowledge that you have developed in other ways outside of the LAG?
40. What are the main challenges foreseen for the future of LAGs?

Recommendations

41. Considering the successes and challenges of the project, what would your recommendations be for other organizations applying the LEADER approach and establishing a LAG?

KII Guide
(KII with implementing agencies)

Demographic Questions:

1. Name/surname?
2. Which organization do you represent?
3. What is your position?
4. How long have you been working in this position?

Reasons of applying LEADER approach/Identifying good practices and challenges

5. Please, briefly describe the project implemented by your organization. When was the project implemented and where? What was the aim? What were the key activities?
6. What was the main reason to apply the LEADER methodology under your project/s? Please, specify.
7. What do you consider to be the strengths and weaknesses of community engagement in local development?
8. What are the specific characteristics of (Name of LAG) _____ LAG that makes it distinctive from other LAG's? (i.e. location with ethnic minorities? Eco-migrants?) How were these distinctions addressed in the framework of the project?
9. What was the most successful component of the project? Can you give any LAG success stories?
10. What were the challenges that the LAG faced during the implementation of the project? How were the challenges addressed?

LAG structure and management and leadership processes / models

11. How were LAG members selected? What are the formal procedures?
12. What measures (if any) where taken in to ensure the participation of vulnerable groups, i.e. Persons from mountainous and remote locations; Ethnic minorities & eco-migrants; IDPs, Women, youth, the elderly and people with disabilities (PWD). (Note: not every group might be relevant for every project).
13. What is the LAG management structure? Please, describe.
14. How is the LAG governed? How are the LAG governing body (i.e. Executive Board) selected? What are the formal procedures?
15. How are the LAG leaders (chair, president, vice president etc.) selected? What are the formal procedures?
16. How would you assess the management structure and leadership models of the LAGs? What are the strong sides of them? What are the weak sides? Would you change anything to improve management structure and leadership models of the LAGs? If yes, what?
17. How are the sectoral/ interest groups diversity are ensured in your LAGs? Please, specify most and least represented sectors/interest groups under your LAG and explain the reasons.
18. How are the decisions made, including on funding sub-projects? Are there any formally defined rules for decision making procedures?
19. What grant application process/forms and systems are in place to assist the LAG members make decisions on funding?
20. In what ways did the implementing agency guide the process?
21. Are the LAGs registered and legally recognized?
22. From your experience are there any administrative/financial oversight requirements that constraints LAG's ability to implement the LEADER approach?

Sustainability

23. To what extent can the LAG continue its activities after donor funding has been withdrawn? What activities can be continued? What activities cannot be continued and why? Please, explain.
24. To what extent are the LAGs likely to find the financial resources to support their activities? From where? Please, specify.
25. To what extent has being in the LAG increased the capacity of its members? In what way have their capacities been increased?
26. What are the main challenges foreseen for the future of LAGs?

Recommendations

27. Considering the successes and challenges of the project, what would your recommendations be for other organizations applying the LEADER approach and establishing a LAG?

Annex #3: The list of LAGs

No:	Local Action Group	Supporting Organization	Project Duration	Web-Page
1	Akhalkalaki LAG	GIPA/DRDVE	2016-2020	https://akhalkalakilag.ge/
2	Akhmeta LAG	AAH	2019-2022	http://www.akhmetalag.ge/
3	Borjomi LAG	Mercy Corps	2015-2017 2018-2020	https://grdn.ge/ka/borjomi/55
4	Dedoplistskaro LAG	HEKS/EPER Georgia	2016-2020	http://dedoplistskarolag.ge
5	Gali LAG	AAH	2018-2020	
6	Gagra LAG	UNDP	2018-2021	
7	Gudauta LAG	UNDP	2018-2021	
8	Kazbegi LAG	People in Need	2015-2017 2018-2020	http://www.kazbegilag.ge/ge
9	Keda LAG	CENN	2017-2020	http://kedalag.ge/ka
10	Khulo LAG	Caritas Czech Republic	2017-2020	http://khulolag.ge
11	Lagodekhi LAG	CARE International	2015-2017 2018-2020	https://lagodekhilag.ge/
12	Mestia LAG	CARE	2018-2022	http://mestialag.ge/
13	Ochamchire LAG	UNDP	2018-2021	
14	Tetritskaro LAG	RDFG	2016-2020	http://tetritskarolag.ge
15	Tkvarcheli LAG	AAH	2016-2019 2018-2020	
16	Tsalka LAG	CENN	2018-2022	https://tsalkalag.ge/
17	Tskaltubo LAG	People in Need	2018-2022	http://www.tskaltubolag.ge/ge