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A Year of ENPARD Rural Development in Lagodekhi

“...people have gained the feeling that their opinion matters and they can participate in the development of Lagodekhi and they can do it themselves. This has really been a very important development and this has not happened here before.”

- CSO representative-board member of the Local Action group



Participatory Rural Development in Lagodekhi pilots the “LEADER” approach - widely used in EU countries - to stimulate rural development in Georgia. The methodology increases citizen participation and promotes a bottom up decision making approach. Based on a comprehensive process, a vision and useful strategy was set out for Lagodekhi’s development that will be used by the authorities.

All the funded projects employ 50% or more women

Up to 30 social and commercial projects will be supported

All 67 villages participate in the LAG and strategy development

In the first phase of the project, the Local Action Group (LAG) Lagodekhi was formed. This was preceded by community mobilization in all villages of Lagodekhi (67 in total), identification of local needs and priorities, nomination of LAG members by the people, and formation of a general assembly introducing the principles and mechanisms of participation. The LAG is already looking for ways to become sustainable and economically viable for the long term.

LOCAL ACTION GROUP LAGODEKHI

The Local Action Group (LAG) in Lagodekhi is an independent platform to stimulate the local development of Lagodekhi. It is part of the LEADER model used in the EU to stimulate rural development and is being adapted to Georgia. The Lagodekhi LAG combines representatives from all 15 communities of the municipality and represents people from the private sector, civil society and local authorities including the head of the municipal board. It acts as a platform that contributes to Lagodekhi’s development and provides participation of the local population.

The General Assembly is the representative body with supreme decision making rights which elects the Board of Directors that manages the LAG and ensures its impact and sustainability. The LAG managing board nominates the candidacy of the president, vice president and executive secretary. All three positions are approved by the General Assembly. Recently the Lagodekhi LAG elected its first female president.



LOCAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY LAGODEKHI

Elaboration of the local development strategy was a comprehensive process that consisted of several phases. At the second phase several methodologies, including a SWOT analysis were used to rank, analyze and group the main issues into meaningful categories. Overall, four objectives and 12 strategic directions were determined and indicators assigned for the implementation of necessary measures.

The LAG identified the main needs and priorities of local population. In total, 52 problems were grouped in 5 categories: 1. Agriculture, 2. Environment 3. Social/youth, Gender 4. Infrastructure. 5. Tourism.

Local Development Strategy

"The Strategic document was elaborated based on active participation of the local population and it gives a high legitimacy to the document. We will adopt the strategy as our official document and develop a budget planning process based on it"

- Head of Lagodekhi Municipality Board.-

An important accomplishment of the LAG in the first year has been the elaboration of the Local Development Strategy that sets out a **strategic vision for the social and economic development of Lagodekhi**. The strategy is based on rigorous research and large scale consultations with local communities, civil society, business sector and local authorities, approved by Lagodekhi Local Action Group (LAG).



"More than 100 people have already received business, capacity and management trainings in the first year. Besides technical trainings they perceive these capacities as the most important to start and run commercial and social initiatives."

- LAG member -



Study visit of Lagodekhi LAG to Spain

In cooperation with the partner organization: The ETEA Foundation (Spain), CARE organized a study tour to Spain, Cordoba. The goal was to improve the understanding of the LEADER approach by sharing experience of the Spanish LAGs, and build the capacity of the Lagodekhi LAG.

The program included visits to different workshops and businesses as well as an introduction to several rural development projects in Spain.

"The study tour showed us that the LEADER approach and the concept of LAGs are actually successful in Europe. We gained a lot of ideas on how to work more effective and make our LAG long term economically viable."

- LAG board member -

Incubating and facilitating Social and Economic Projects

Based on the priorities set in the local development strategy, commercial and social projects have been selected and supported after a rigorous competition and training program. The final projects were selected by a commission comprising of independent experts and the LAG board.

In the first round 107 project ideas were received of which 51 were selected to submit full proposals. Those who had their project ideas selected were provided with tailor-made trainings on business planning and proposal writing.

WOMEN FOR A HEALTHY FUTURE

(Improving reproductive health and tackling early marriage)

The analysis of social priority issues in Lagodekhi shows that women and gender issues are considered of crucial importance. Cases of early marriages are still high in many communities in Lagodekhi, and create problems together with reproductive health, gender imbalance and a lack of women participation in public life.

One of the projects that CARE supports in Lagodekhi, addresses early marriage and reproductive health for young women. "Women for a healthy future" will work in all 67 villages, and aims to reach 650 women between the age of 16-25. Early marriages are a problem in Lagodekhi, that prevents girls and women to develop themselves and make full use of their potential, Tamar Mumladze, Head of the Georgian Civil Development Association states. Linked to this is the immense problem of reproductive health for young women who often fail to visit a doctor or go to a clinic when pregnant causing unnecessary complications for both mother and child.

The project aims to promote a different attitude towards early marriage. It provides information, support and encourages discussions about reproductive health for young women. It provides information about the consequences of early marriages for the women, men and families targeting not only girls but also boys and elders.

The project activities include informational campaigns on local radio and TV, educational meetings, seminars and discussions with young girls, and cultural creative activities. Through these efforts it aims to encourage more discussion about reproductive health, disease prevention, psychological and the negative consequences of early marriage.

ROSE GREENHOUSE IN LAGODEKHI



"The trainings CARE provided taught us a lot. We learned how to think commercially, become more successful and grow higher quantities."

- Vasil Aptsiauri, Rose farmer in Lagodekhi-

Vasil Aptsiauri, a rose farmer in Lagodekhi, shows us a row of young rose sprouts which have been frozen. "You see, he says with regret, *such a large amount of roses have gone bad after I opened an old greenhouse*".

In the past it wasn't freezing this much before January, and by January the sprouts would be already grown and could survive"-he explains.

Vasil's family has a long history of growing roses "My parents started with roses as early as 1985-1986....I started again from 2006"-says Vasil, as he's looking over a small yard which has thousands of implants of over 7 types of roses he manages with his family.

Vasil's project is one of the eight winners for the first round competition for social and commercial projects.

Vasil and his family will have to worry less in the future after being selected as one of the winners for commercial projects. The new greenhouse with innovative technology will protect young roses from frosty winters and allow him to grow roses the whole year round at a higher quantity and quality. Vasil told us about his cooperation with CARE.

“It wasn’t difficult to find out about CARE’s work in Lagodekhi, since many people were talking about the project. I got information and attended business and capacity trainings.”

We asked how CARE trainings changed something for Vasil, since he is already an experienced farmer:

“I gained a lot. before I started the trainings, I wasn’t even thinking about what I should plan...they helped me to think more about how markets work and how to plan.” Before I was just producing, without planning thinking-it’s what it is, but as I see now, it’s much better when you have a concrete plan”.

Vasil is already working on the implementation of his business and marketing plan he made as part of the trainings and application. He established links with sellers of the roses, as he’s been sending roses to Telavi, to Tbilisi and Eastern Georgia for their promotion. About his changed ways of doing business he states:

“I know a seller who I collaborate with for several years. What I did now, is sign a contract with her, so she takes exclusively roses from me. On my side I will then be obliged to distribute high quality roses. As a result we will all be more secured and insured”.

The roses greenhouse will not just benefit Vasil’s family but people around him as well. He’s been employing his neighbors for spring/autumn work. A Larger greenhouse will require more work and at least two more people will be employed to cut and pack 60.000 to 80.000 roses.

Vasil is optimistic and thinks that projects like this are extremely important:

This means strengthening our economy, regional development, farmers will have their own work; What I’ll do now is that I’ll think practically how to develop, how to produce more quality roses, how to enlarge my business”

Vasil has positive expectations because he knows how it’s done. With skills and knowledge he got in CARE he’s better equipped and more confident; and it means more profit and better future for his family and village.

A THIEF IN LAGODEKHI

The book “A thief in Lagodekhi”, illustrates the unique and beautiful nature of Lagodekhi, and is a simple but effective way to enhance environmental awareness in children and promote Lagodekhi natural reserve. The idea for the book was enthusiastically received by the LAG and supported by CARE and Lagodekhi LAG. Currently The Environmental Information and Education Centre, Peacecorps, schools, volunteers are promoting the book and using it to teach environmental awareness, teach English and promote Lagodekhi.

The book tells the story of a little girl who loses her teddy bear during her trip in Lagodekhi and visits the different animals from Lagodekhi Park to help her find the toy. It includes games for children of different ages to help them learn about nature, pollution and environment in general. The book is a great way to stimulate civic education in children and make them aware about environmental issues. Besides, with its creative manner, the book promotes Lagodekhi and Georgia’s beautiful national parks and wildlife.

The authors of the book-Emmanuelle Chevallier, Julia Böttger, Raphela Holzer arrived in August to do a three-month internship supported by german-french cooperation program GLEN.

