



**Program:**  
Strengthening Rural Development Models in Georgia

**Partners:**  
Mercy Corps, People in Need, European Leader Association (ELARD)

**Donor:**  
European Union

**Duration:**  
October 2017- October 2019

Project “Strengthening Rural Development Models in Georgia”(RDP) is the second phase of the pilot rural development project that is being implemented in Lagodekhi municipality since 2015 by CARE. The project is funded within the framework of the European Neighborhood Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development (ENPARD II).



## LAGODEKHI LOCAL ACTION GROUP TODAY



in Lagodekhi Local Action Group (LAG) is the General Assembly, composed by 140 members that represent people from civil society, as well as public and private sectors. This promotes the establishment of intersectoral collaboration practices, trust building and responsibility sharing.

*“It is always efficient to have a platform where representatives from all sectors can gather to talk about the development of the Municipality. This guarantees information exchange, cooperation, coordination, agreement of new decisions and correct planning,”* - Giorgi Bokeria, Lagodekhi LAG President

The Rural Development Project in Lagodekhi is based on LEADER approach, and implies the engagement of local actors in making crucial decisions for the development of the municipality. It gives tangible results to introduce good governance practices, to diversify the local economy, to ensure social equality, engagement of youth groups, women and ethnic minorities and to improve collaboration and people’s capacity building. The representative body that has supreme decision-making rights

The LAG members hold regular meetings with local people to address local needs and identify different ways to solve them. High social responsibility, acceptability and support are the advantages related to the present type of planning activities.



### LAG capacity building is a necessary condition for sustainability

Most of Phase 2 of the Rural Development Project was dedicated to the capacity building of LAG members in different domains: project monitoring and evaluation, communication and media relations, project assessment, fund rising, accounting and taxation, participatory civic monitoring, Gender equality

### Updating Local Development Strategy

LAG annually updates the Local Development Strategy through intensive information campaign with local population, to support local, social and economic initiatives

Under the financial support of both the project and the municipality, the Lagodekhi Park development plan will be elaborated, in order to contribute to the improvement of park infrastructure and tourist services. The given plan, together with the Youth Needs Assessment will be incorporated in the updated version of the Local Development Strategy.



## GENDER AND YOUTH SUPPORT

*“What can be better than improving infrastructure and support employment? But our village needs more mental changes”, - a girl from Kabali public school.*

LAG had a female president for two years. The gender balance of the managing board is maintained. As the LAG members state, *“This is the place where we all agree that gender balance is preserved and consolidated within all activities. However, there is still much to do to improve women’s engagement. Women participation in decision-making, employment opportunities for women, economic empowerment, and early marriage prevention - are a special concern for women, especially for women in villages with ethnical minorities.”*

## YOUTH NEED RESEARCH

Within the scope of the Grant Project, “Youth Need Research” was accomplished in Lagodekhi by the Georgian Civil Development Association. 1000 Young people (over half of them women) aged 14 to 25 were interviewed for identifying their needs, problems and interests. Based on the obtained results, a 5-year-long problem-solving strategy and action plan will be developed and incorporated into the Lagodekhi Local Development Strategy.

The LAG Gender Group is implementing its first independent project aiming at conducting women needs assessment of Lagodekhi Municipality and developing a gender-based policy document with partnership of local municipality Gender Council. Particular attention will be paid to the engagement of ethnic minorities in project activities. The initiative received financial support from the “Women Fund in Georgia”.



Many things changed during four years of LAG operation. The members of the LAG youth group actively work to popularize Lagodekhi’s tourism potential. Together with European volunteers, they put up the website [www.visit-lagodekhi.com](http://www.visit-lagodekhi.com).



*“The information given on the website will help you to get to know Lagodekhi better and learn about the types of tourist services the municipality offers to its visitors.”*  
– a German volunteer

## SUPPORTING LOCAL SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC INITIATIVES

The EU’s financial support and LAG efforts laid a foundation for many positive changes. For four years, the number of project proposals has increased and their quality has considerably improved, evidencing better skills and capacity of the local population. LAG members try to maintain a balanced approach and support multisectoral development in the municipality.

More than 200 proposals were submitted within the framework of Phase 2 of the Grant Competitions, among which 59 were selected for the second stage. Following the expert consultations, LAG selected 33 local social and economic initiatives, including projects for agricultural and tourism development, as well as social and social-infrastructure, environmental and other business projects. As a result, an additional 131 permanent, and 141 seasonal jobs were generated.

## SUPPORTING LOCAL PRODUCTION INITIATIVES



### Greenhouse cultivation to grow sweet potato seedlings

Shota Eriashvili, a biologist by profession, started to grow sweet potato in Georgia in 2017, when he was 81.

“For 25 years, I grew kiwi plantings. Now, for 2 years, I have been growing sweet potato. I learned about sweet potato from the internet. It is imported to Georgia from foreign countries. As I did not have a greenhouse, I decided to grow it in my own house.”

*“Sweet potato has many useful properties. It is rich in vitamins and is particularly useful for little babies. It has certain curative properties as well. In Georgia, they do not even know the real name of sweet potato. When I learned about the EU project, I applied to build a greenhouse and even took the trainings. However, at the first stage, I made a mistake in calculating the budget so my project was rejected. At the second stage, I improved my business plan and received the grant.”*

Within the framework of the project, a greenhouse was built to grow sweet potato seedlings. Shota Eriashvili rented 2 ha land to plant the seedlings in open ground. He plans to sell a part of the seedlings to popularize the vegetable. “The sweet potato I grow costs much less than the imported product. They often reprimand me for undercutting. I think the stores selling my sweet potato will never import it from abroad. Lots of people have tasted my product, which is 100% ecologically pure, without any nitrates or chemical agents. I undercut it consciously. I profit from it anyway.”



### Cold Storage Facility in Village Apeni

For a long time, Elizbar’s family had thought about having a cold storage facility: *“It has been 15 years now, we have been doing business exporting persimmon to Ukraine. As the season drew to the close, the product was very expensive. We bought the product from other cold storage facilities or rented fridges to store our product. We wanted to have our own cold storage facility.”* He learned about the project at the information meeting. Then, he met the group at the village’s Sakrebulo (village administration body) and read the information leaflet. *“It is a very successful and people-oriented project. Besides, it is immediately linked to agriculture and rural development.”*

In Lagodekhi, there is a great demand for cold storage facilities. During harvesting, the farmers have to sell their products at low prices in order to evade losses. As for other seasons of the year, imported products are expensive which has a negative impact on economic development. Cold storage facilities allow local people to store excess production safely and sell it at favorable time.

*“The production will be distributed during the year and gradually, there will be no need to import products from other countries. We will have our own healthy products”.*

Within the framework of the Phase Two Grant component, the cold storage facilities equipped in line with modern standards were provided to the villages of Apeni, Heretiskari, Pona and Leliani with a total storage capacity of 370 tons of fruit and vegetables. As a result, an additional 31 permanent and 39 seasonal jobs were generated for local people.

## SOCIAL INITIATIVE

“Supporting business in the region is very important, but without active work to improve social activity the society will never develop. I am happy LAG realizes the importance of social projects.”



## POSITIVE PARENTHOOD

Modern parents often do not have time to thoroughly understand their children’s needs at different ages. By fostering healthy parenting practices, the Positive Parenthood Project aims to support the right personal development of the young generation, and thus supporting them in realizing their abilities.

The project target groups are parents, who receive more information about the stages of a child’s development, age crises and ways to overcome them. Working with school and kindergarten teachers is also crucial, since the children find themselves in different environments as they leave their familiar surroundings. Besides, the project helps the children to comprehend their age, emotions and how others respond to their behaviour. This job is done by the project’s professional coaches (educators) and psychologists using various exercises and body therapy. The parents show readiness to attend the same training for several times.

*“Quite often, parents come to the meeting repeatedly to attend post-training answer and question session. Sometimes, the group is so open that they even give personal examples,” – says Nana Nersezashvili, Director of Leliani Adult Education Center and a LAG member.*



*“Following the training, I pay more attention to the relationship between my child and me and I try to control my behavior. In the past we, the parents, often asked each other why our children misbehaved, because the relevant information is not always easily available. It will be really good to see similar trainings in the future,” - a parent*

## COORDINATION IN THE LEADING MUNICIPALITIES OF GEORGIA

With the aim of sharing experience and good practices, LAG has exchange visits to other leading municipalities of Georgia. The Local Action Groups have developed a joint policy document regarding the LEADER institutionalization and LAG authorization support by the state.

The LAG members, alongside representatives of governmental and non-governmental sectors, participated in meetings and discussions about the development of the Rural Development Strategy document.



## Lagodekhi LAG implementing a transnational project jointly with Latvian and Georgian partners.

Lagodekhi LAG hosted the representatives from Latvian and Borjomi LAGs and horse-riding businesses! The visit was organized within the framework of a four-sided cooperation between Borjomi, Lagodekhi, Tetrtskaro, and Latvian LAGs. The project aims to improve the competitiveness of the horse-riding industry by sharing good practices and establishing relationships. The development of such programs and cooperation with different countries offers LAG new

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