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## EU/ENPARD III/CARE PROJECT

**“Implementing LEADER in Mestia municipality for better livelihoods in high mountainous regions of Georgia”** (CONTRACT NO.: ENI/2018/402-469)

***Thematic Discussion (Virtual/Zoom) on  
Territorial branding –  
an option to enhance local development in mountain contexts:  
Learning from international experience, for application through  
LAG Mestia and in networking activities of Georgia***

**Date and Time: AUG/27/2021; 11AM-2PM Hrs. (+2 CET)**

### **Background**

Place branding (or territorial branding) has acquired particular attention in local development strategies as a means to shed light on place-specificity of assets and development action. Brands are ubiquitous in our lives, and the multitude of different place marketing and branding initiatives enhances expectations for beneficial outcomes. The application of the concept suggests that challenges of fragmentation of local spaces and lack of critical mass might be overcome and “branding” might lead via product promotion to increased awareness and valuation of local assets. The thematic discussion is designed to learn from the manifold international examples of place branding activities in mountain regions, by presenting conceptual aspects, challenges faced and beneficial outcomes realized through engagement of local actors in such strategies.

By referring to lessons learnt all territorial branding strategies underscore that “place matters” and place aspects take a sensitive role in it. Action might extend to all the different sectors and local activities. They refer to a high degree to historical achievements and regional identity creation that is bound both to nature and socio-economic factors. Local production origin, in agriculture but also for other non-agricultural products, quality development, geographical indications and linkages to cultural heritage are often an initial source for branding strategies. Presenting place-specific assets, areas as “destinations” for tourism flows, and linkages of attractiveness to landscape development and quality of life perceptions, all these aspects contribute to an integrated view on acknowledging local assets and nurturing local development.

With increasing inter-relation of spaces and global integration also remote, mountain regions are under pressure to market forces. Programmes like LEADER/CLLD and other local development action are conceived as means to mitigate some of the weaknesses of rural locations and fragmented settlement. The workshop is planned to provide a forum of discussion how the LEADER application in Mestia can respond to the specific challenges of that region. Beyond that, the discussion with other LAGs from Georgia and administration and donor experts on rural development should help to draw general conclusions for local strategy elaboration that focus on local assets and place-sensitive valuation.

\*) Due to technical problems, these presentations could not be given at the workshop.



## AGENDA

<b>Workshop overview</b>	Aims and contents	Levan Dadiani CARE ENPARD III Project Manager	Time: 10
<b>Thematic introduction</b>	LEADER action based on local and specific assets: focus on local specificity, from a territorial perspective	Goran Soster, SLO *)	Max. 15
<b>Conceptual background</b>			
	Potential for “territorial branding”: opportunities and main aspects	Thomas Dax, BAB; AT	Max. 10
	European mountain examples: EU “mountain products”	Marie Clotteau, Euromontana, B	Max. 15
	Local mountain example: 100% Val Poschiavo	Diego Rinallo, Valposchiavo, CH *)	Max. 15
	Organic farming and tourism potential;	Birgitt Boor; Bioherb, DE	Max. 15
<b>National concepts on place branding</b>	Short inputs		
	Administrative view; Rural development support	Ministry of Agriculture	10
	Relevance for rural development approach	Rural Development Communities' Agency (RCDA)	10
	LEADER network	GALAG	10
<b>Round table discussion</b>			60
	Mestia LAG perspectives	LAG Coordinator	
	Stakeholder input	CENN; GALAG; Georgia LAGs;	
	International interventions	Action Against Hunger; Mercy Corps; PIN; UNDP, FAO, REDD...	
<b>Conclusion</b>		Levan Dadiani, CARE	5

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## Minutes of the meeting

Territorial branding has been selected as the topic for the workshop to draw on existing international activities, analysis related to mountain regions implementation and to discuss potential for application in Georgian mountain contexts. Following the invitation sent out by CARE almost 40 people from different Georgian and international backgrounds participated in this online event to consider applicability of the emerging options for strengthening territorial branding activities.

The meeting was opened by Levan Dadiani, CARE, who explained the rationale for preparing this thematic workshop as a supporting activity to LAG Mestia's implementation of the LEADER concept and discussion forum to consider contents and feasibility of place branding approaches for mountain regions in Georgia, in general. This networking aim was addressed by the wide group of local, national and international actors of rural and mountain regions development in Georgia. A first brief round of introduction of participants revealed the wide set of actors of participants, underscoring the intensive interest in the issue (see participants list). The meeting provided two different sections, the first with a number of thematic presentations, the second with a focus on national and regional aspects of implementation and interest in applying the concept.

The first thematic intervention by Thomas Dax, BAB (Austria), explored the rising concern for tapping into the potential for territorial branding. It highlighted that LEADER activities through the need to conceive place-based development approaches and to provide Local Development Strategies (LDS) can be a strong link for action that builds on local and regional branding strategies. Its push for integrative local action emphasizes activities that are anchored in place-based linkages, sustainable natural resource use and high socio-cultural dependence. While there are manifold options for utilizing branding in mountain contexts it was not concealed that substantial obstacles for effective branding have to be realized and overcome by such development efforts. Beyond stressing the inherent potential, the presentation also sought to raise awareness for preconditions of local institutional structures, involvement levels and linkages to policy programmes and comprehensive views on policy interrelations with potential support for mountain regions' activities.

The following presentation by Marie Clotteau, Euromontana (Belgium), achieved to detail this potential by explaining the long trajectory of elaboration of the EU term and branding option for "mountain products". This optional quality scheme for mountain products (Reg. CE 1151/2012, art.31; and Delegated Act 665/2014) is characterized by country specific implementation and so far started to be applied by more than half of concerned EU Member States. The most interesting aspect is the great variance in applying the scheme, with examples being provided for such different contexts as Romania, France and Italy. Many detailed issues with regard to notification, legislation, certification and logo creation were addressed through exemplary cases, revealing the potential for place-based strategies and country specific influences on selected approaches. Interrelations to other branding schemes

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of geographical indications are important in this respect and can either enhance or reduce use of specific place brands.

The third presentation focused on organic farming and linked rural tourism potential for mountain regions. Birgitt Boor, Bio-Herb (Germany), explained fundamental aspects of organic farming as a method particularly appropriate for application in mountain regions implying chances to link demand for regional origin and organic production patterns. Examples of high shares of organic farming in mountain regions of Austria and Switzerland underpinned the emergent trend and realisation of this shift in agricultural management in European contexts. Moreover, synergies to local and regional tourism sectors have been shown and indicate the overall effects for the regional economy. Finally, certification status in Georgia for organic products was highlighted and recommendations concluded call for a review of the certification system (to lower costs for involved farmers) and the set-up of logistic operators to improve farmer-guesthouse interlinkages. This reconsideration should impact on higher relevance of organic farming for national market developments.

The second part on the national perspectives started with an intervention by the representative of the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia, Head of Division at Policy Coordination and Analysis Department, Lasha Zivzivadze who referred to territorial brands as being tightly connected with rural development. This was and is important in its efforts to promote implementation of international standards, certification of products and branding schemes. The enhancement of respective quality schemes will require indicators development which will support future ENPARD 4 activities and LAGs in LEADER application.

Further aspects of Georgian regional examples were presented by participants. Rural Development Programme Manager Salome Bakashvili (People in Need) reported on previous attempts to elaborate the territorial branding approach for Kazbegi, and currently ongoing activities for Aragvi. She described the activities involving local production fields beyond agriculture and including also relevant services and mentioned numerous difficulties encountered and aggravated through restrictions of COVID-pandemic. In particular, the need for raising awareness for quality enhancement, long-term development processes and understanding for regional effects by branding should be fostered and efforts between LAGs strengthened. Pascal Bernardoni, REDD (Switzerland), based his view on ample experience on quality product development in Georgia over the last years. He clarified that contrary to many existing activities on food quality this workshop started from a different view, i.e. the focus on territorial assets. Nevertheless, he underlined that promoting product development (with geographical indication) that fit with the image in the region would provide important pieces in the puzzle to contribute to the whole picture for a regional plan. Mariam Jorjadze, the Director of Biological Farming Association Elkana, continued in this vein and argued on food safety issues and the need for product specific adaptations. This implies coping with detailed restrictions and the tensions of standardizing regulations and enabling continuation of traditional production patterns. Later in the discussion it was noted that including consumer needs would be another pivotal aspect for successful branding action. This link to consumers (and tourists) requires dedicated action for empowerment and awareness raising of consumers (Buba Jafarli, freelancer).

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Expert advice by Mechthild Donner, INRAE Montpellier (France), extended the perspective to look at place branding issues not just as initiatives to enhance production and marketing, but to conceive them as “development project”. In this regard it implies an extended participation of local/regional stakeholders, tourists and consumers, and is highly dependent on the institutional framework. Beyond LEADER which enables appropriate action, a specific exemplary project (“A Taste of West Cork”, Ireland) linking particularly strongly local food with regional image and development activities. The recognition that many international examples of activities to make use of geographical indications and to link them to place and territorial development was wide-spread throughout the workshop. The representative from the EU Delegation to Georgia, Georges Dehoux, also emphasized the local implications and need for consumer orientation of place branding, and dynamic shifts in consumer attitudes towards food valuation.

In his concluding remarks Levan Dadiani, built on these aspects of consumer linkages and the high complexity on securing value and recognition for local products, for different demand groups (local, national consumers, tourists and export). He further recalled the high incidence of mountain contexts for LEADER groups in Georgia (with 8 out of 12 LAGs being located in mountains) and thus a strong relevance of this topic for national discussions and exchange. Territorial branding will be an important issue for the upcoming ENPARD 4 programme and respective priorities. As food operators are increasingly trained and getting familiar with respecting HACCP standards it seems crucial to extend those activities to “local branding” efforts and to achieve synergies from applying this territorial perspective.

The LEADER project of Mestia will continue to engage in discussions on this aspect and other development issues relevant for the implementation of the place-based approach. Further similar workshops are hence intended to deepen the workshop’s discussion and extend to further crucial issues.

Annex:

Participants list

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