

The EU and Austrian Development Cooperation support the discussion on Georgia's Mountain Development

20.06.2022 [Press and information team of the Delegation to GEORGIA](#)

On June 18, Mestia- A Forum on Mountain Development was held with support from the European Union and Austrian Development Cooperation. The forum aimed to discuss challenges and opportunities for local development in mountainous regions, the role of LEADER approach and Local Action Groups (LAG) to drive sustainable rural (mountainous) development and elaborate policy recommendations for mountain development in Georgia.



The ENPARD III Mestia project has been promoting mountainous development agenda through Georgian LAGs and LEADER approach. Along with the common challenges faced by rural areas, mountainous areas deal with additional difficulties, including geographical isolation, limited access to services and markets, effects of climate change, outmigration. To address the challenges and also promote sustainable use of the opportunities and competitive advantages of mountainous areas, ENPARD III Mestia project initiated establishment of the mountainous LAG network on the platform of Georgian Association of LAGs. The forum was dedicated to summarize the work of the network and plan the next actions in mountain development agenda.

The event was organized by CARE Austria, under the ENPARD III Mestia project, which is funded by the European Union and co-funded by Austrian Development Cooperation in Mestia municipality and is implemented by CARE Austria with PMC-Research Center.

The representative of the EU delegation in Georgia, Mr. Georges Dehoux, Programme Manager for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food Safety the EU Delegation to Georgia, Mr. Alexander Karner, head of the coordination office for technical cooperation of the Austrian Embassy, Tbilisi, opened the event together with CARE Austria representatives. Central government representatives, including from the Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure and Agriculture and Environmental Protection attended the forum, delivered opening speeches and participated in the discussions. Multiple stakeholders, representatives of different international and national development actors were participating in the forum, including representatives of all 14 Local Action Groups operating in Georgia and ENPARD programme implementing organizations were active contributors of the event.

The opening was continued with discussion on challenges and opportunities for mountainous regions, where Regional director of Swiss Development Cooperation, Ms. Danielle Mewly, representatives of local and central government discussed common issues connected with mountain development and the best strategies to address them.

The role of LAGs in mountainous development and how GALAG and Lags drive mountainous agenda was another topic of discussion. The representatives of GALAG and different Georgian LAGs discussed the role GALAGs joint advocacy agenda with Georgian LAGs to drive rural and mountainous development, including adoption of the participatory monitoring of village support program, which was successfully implemented in Mestia municipality and is being replicated in other regions of Georgia. The stakeholders discussed that LAGs are important part of the rural development process and they have a potential to put mountainous development higher on the agenda of national stakeholders and implement different activities, through Association of Georgian LAGs.;

Territorial branding and promotion of mountainous product was the third main topic of discussion as it's one of the advocacy topic for GALAG. representatives from ADA-funded GRETA project, FAO, Mercy Corps and local producer of traditional cheese from Mestia discussed promoting food safety and quality product development and mountain product branding issues. The attendees were introduced with the importance of territorial branding, successful national and international examples, challenges and perspectives that accompany the advocacy process. The discussion was accompanied with introduction of Svanetian traditional cheese Narchvi, which is currently selected for territorial branding, under ENPARD III Mestia project.

The forum participants, through working groups also reviewed the advocacy agenda and elaborated policy recommendations for the government for further development of mountainous regions.

The forum was the good opportunity for the representatives of different Georgian LAGs to exchange information and views on the different topics of rural and mountainous development.

On the second day, the attendees had the opportunity to visit the socio-economic initiatives, funded under ENPARD program in Mestia, including local wood processing workshop,

producing Svanetian traditional furniture, women social enterprise, eco-guesthouses, rehabilitated sports field and cultural houses in Mestia and nearby communities.

The event was accompanied by exhibition and tasting of the local products, such as as Svanetian traiditonal cheese Narchvi, traditional Svanetian music instruments, and other product made by ENPARD III project participants.

The project, “Implementing LEADER in Mestia municipality for better livelihoods in high mountainous regions of Georgia”, under the EU-funded ENPARD program, and co-funded by Austrian Development Cooperation, is run in the municipality of Mestia by CARE Austria in partnership with PMC-Research Center. Based on the European LEADER approach, the project aims to improve diversification and competitiveness of the rural economy, supports the involvement of vulnerable groups, especially women and the youth, and the sustainable management of natural resources.

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