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Aragvi Development Potential Report



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The list of acronyms

ACDA – Agricultural Cooperatives Development Agency

EU – European Union

FG – Focus Group

HPP – Hydro-electric Power Plant

LAG – Local Action Group

MRDI – Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure

PiN – People in Need

PRA – Participatory Rural Appraisal

PL – Protected Landscape

RDP - Regional Development Programme

SSA – Social Service Agency

SUV – Sport Utility Vehicle

1. Executive summary

This study we prepared in advance of the Aragvi Local Action Group (LAG) activities in the three target areas: Gudamakari (all of the villages of the Gudamakari territorial unit), Piraketa Khevsureti (all villages of Barisakho territorial unit) and Pshavi (all villages of Magharoskari and Ukanapshavi territorial units, and three villages of Zhinvali territorial unit). The exact list of villages was provided to GeoWel Research by PiN. The objective of the study was to assess the potential of development in the target communities in a participatory manner. This will help the Aragvi LAG to plan more effective and sustainable project activities.

The study used the Participatory Rural Appraisal approach to capture the knowledge and opinions of the population from target communities that later can be incorporated in the LAG project activities. Throughout the research process, People in Need (PiN) provided much needed support and assistance to the GeoWel team to expedite the process and to have the first results before the end of October. The research combined extensive desk research (including the quantitative analysis of the government data) and field work (including 5 focus groups for different types of target groups).

The study provides an overview of the target areas (section 3), including geographic location and conditions. We then provided detailed analysis of the demographics, which has important implications for project activities (section 4). The section 5 on socio-economic structure looks at source of income and economic activities. The section 6 on gender looks at the roles and responsibilities of men and women in families and communities. We discuss the existing and planned infrastructure situation in section 7. Short overview on the awareness and attitudes toward the Aragvi Protected Landscape is provided in section 8. Section 9 is a gender sensitive community asset mapping which was done during the fieldwork. The final section summarizes the findings and provides analysis on opportunities for development in the target areas.

Overall, the three target areas of the Aragvi LAG share many similarities and all have important assets for further development. However, the needs and the directions for development in each of the regions are significantly different and will require different approach from the LAG. Increasing tourism and improving roads (especially the central road connecting Zhinvali to Shatili) is expected to make the whole region more easily accessible, creating new opportunities for business and development.

With slightly over 200 people, Gudamakari has the smallest population among the three target areas. There is no settlement in the entire valley with more than 15 households. Average age in Gudamakari is 55, which is significantly higher than in Khevsureti and Pshavi. There is only one school with 6 students. The school is also almost the only employer in the whole valley. Situated off Pasaauri, most of the Gudamakari settlements can be easily accessed from Tbilisi once the planned road is constructed in 2020.

The target areas in Pshavi include settlements from three territorial units: Magharoskari, Zhinvali and Ukanapshavi. The population in these settlements exceeds 800, which is more than the total population in target settlements of Gudamakari and Khevsureti. Pshavi is also closest to Tbilisi and has a relatively large settlement of Magharoskari. Situated on the road to Shatili,

Magharoskari has several guest-houses and other related businesses. Small scale agriculture is also more developed in Pshavi compared other target areas. Remote villages of the Ukanapshavi territorial entity are situated further away from the main road, and face bigger out-migration challenges.

In Khevsureti (the Piraketa part), Barisakho acts as a small-scale regional center for other settlements. The Border Police Department provides high level of employment. Small scale private sector (guest-houses, shops, cafes) and social facilities (large school, ambulatory) are also present. On the other hand, Khevsureti has a large number of remote villages with only few families, without access to basic facilities.

Apart from basic tourism business in Barisakho and Magharoskari, there is not much of business activity in the target areas. Agriculture is also not well developed. However, some settlements have population with nomadic lifestyle who bring cattle or sheep in summer, and leave to winter pasture areas before winter. In all areas, especially Gudamakari, there are very few young people. They usually leave for study and then work, and come back to their ancestral homes only for summer.

The division of responsibilities between men and women is quite similar to other traditional rural communities in Georgia. There are distinct 'men jobs' that usually require physical strength and 'women jobs' that could include washing dishes or clothes, for example. Men also seem to have more say in deciding large agricultural or financial matters. However, women are in charge of daily financial expenditures. Women also have slightly higher level of university education compared to men.

In all three communities, there are assets that locals believe can act as foundation for further development. In Gudamakari, this includes beautiful mountains and interesting location that connect to other mountainous regions. In Khevsureti it includes local traditional craft activities and proximity to Shatili. In Pshavi it includes proximity to Tbilisi and connecting paths to Tusheti.

2. Methodology

The study used the Participatory Rural Appraisal approach to identify the knowledge and opinions of the population from target communities that later can be incorporated in the LAG project activities. To achieve this, the field work had to be carried out in a roughly one month period. The main reason for such short timeline was that some areas in Khevsureti, Gudamakari and Ukana Pshavi could soon become inaccessible due to an early and long winter season. Therefore, it was agreed with the project team that study would prioritize remote areas. In addition, PiN needed inputs for starting planning activities by the end of October. However, it was agreed that the report could be finalized at a later time.

The research process was guided by ADA's manual for Environmental, Gender and Social Impact management.¹ It is anticipated that the LAG activities will have positive impacts on target communities. However, incorporating the ADA principles from the initial phases will ensure enhancing environmental and social outcomes of the project. Particular focus on gender aspects of the target communities will also help to strengthen potential for gender equality and women's empowerment. The study also had active stakeholder participation components as we went to the field to have focus group discussions in all types of target communities.

The research process can be divided into three broad phases. PiN's project team was closely involved at all levels to expedite the research process. PiN shared initial information on target areas, provided feedback on research plan and questionnaires, set up focus group, and continuously provided any support that was needed during the research process.

The first phase of the research included meeting with the project team, gaining detailed understanding of the project objectives and tasks, developing questionnaire, and planning the activities. Two main objectives were emphasized during the discussions with PiN: gained detailed baseline data that would inform and help PiN's future activities, and conducting community asset mapping with particular focus on gender issues and local context. The idea was that, where possible, field work to be interactive.

The second phase included desk research. It covered extensive review of the relevant data and reports. Two sources of information for desk research should be particularly highlighted. First is the detailed data on mountain regions, primarily based on 2014 census and other government data, such as the Social Services Agency (SSA). In particular, GeoWel was able to provide analysis on:

- population distribution by location, gender and age groups
- employment by gender and sector
- education by gender
- social statistics, such as recipients of pensions, additions to teacher salaries, and benefits for children
- altitude data for each village
- registered and active businesses
- the data on infrastructure projects
- the list of villages without electricity

Some of the census data is considered as outdated, especially in relation to remote villages where the out-migration level is high. We triangulated the data with other sources, including the municipality and local people. It appears that there is no better systematic data than provided by the 2014 census. Given that the scope of this study didn't allow a representative baseline survey, we decided to use the 2014 census data.

¹ Austrian Development Agency. (2018). Manual: Environmental, Gender and Social Impact Management

The second set of data came from the report prepared for the development of the Aragvi Protected Landscape project. Most documents for this project are from 2017 and include:

- Background Study for Project within Preparation of the Management Plan for Protected Landscape Aragvi in Georgia (Michael Hošek, Jindřich Chlapek, Jiří Flousek, Eva Knižátková, Vojtěch Kubec)
- Eco-Tourism Development Strategy for Pshav-Khevsureti (Steffen Schülein)
- Pshav-Khevsureti Protected Areas: Baseline Report (GIS and Remote Sensing Consulting Center “GeoGraphic”)
- Awareness raising and visibility of Pshav-Khevsureti National Park, Roshka Natural Monument and Asa Managed Reserve: Communication Strategy and Action Plan 2016-2017 (GFA Consulting Group)
- Assessment of current Perception of Protected Areas by Public (Mariam Batlidze and Natia Kikacheishvili)
- Assessment of initial socio-economic indices and development potential in support zones of protected areas: Pshav-Khevsureti (GFA Consulting group)

Other desk research data came from the materials on land registration reform, National Agency on Public registry, and various report related to the target areas.

The second phase of the study included was 5 focus groups which took place over 4 days across the region. This included 44 participants (23 male, 21 female). The age of the participants ranged from 19 to 91, with 25% of the participants below 35, 55% between 36 and 55, and 25% older than 55. Below are the details of focus groups:

Figure 1: The list of focus groups

Focus group description and location	Date	Number of participants
Women only, Kitokhi, Gudamakari	October 4	15
Men only, Kitokhi, Gudamakari	October 4	10
Large settlement, Barisakho, Khevsureti	October 19	6
Remote settlement, Shuapkho, Pshavi	October 28	5
Students and professionals living in Tbilisi	October 25	8

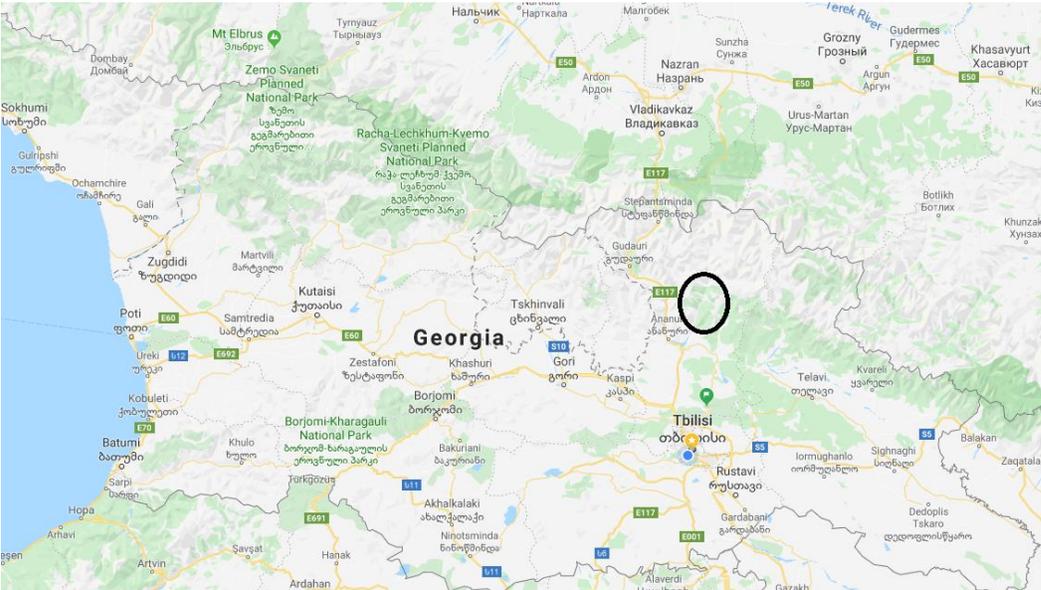
For focus group discussions, GeoWel had developed an interactive exercise for community asset mapping. However, in some focus groups PiN advised to use a brain-storming session instead, as it would be more suitable for the participants. As focus groups were being organized by PiN on a very tight time-frame, surprises were common. For example, in Gudamakari, 25 people came, so GeoWel team had to divide the group in two and run parallel focus group sessions. In Shuapkho, the place where focus group was supposed to take place (old ambulatory building) was closed, so the session was held outside instead. In Tbilisi, as students and professionals are busy during day-time, the focus group took place well after 8 pm. Despite such ad hoc situations, focus group participants provided very valuable inputs on the way of life, gender roles, sources of income, challenges, community assets and potential for development in their areas.

We provided short questionnaires to focus group participants and received 26 completed forms. While this is not a representative sample, it does provide indication on issues of our interest and are useful in combination with other data.

3. Overview of the target areas

The target area is located in the Northern part of Georgia and includes three distinct mountain regions: Pshavi, Khevsureti and Gudamakari. All of the settlements in the target area are mountainous and are located at an elevation of between 800m (Gudrukhi village) and 2,100m (villages of Okherkhevi, Ache and Chimgha).

Figure 2: Approximate location of the project target area



Source: OpenStreetMaps

Roughly 1,200 people (84% of the entire population in target area) live in 37 villages below 1,500 meters elevation.

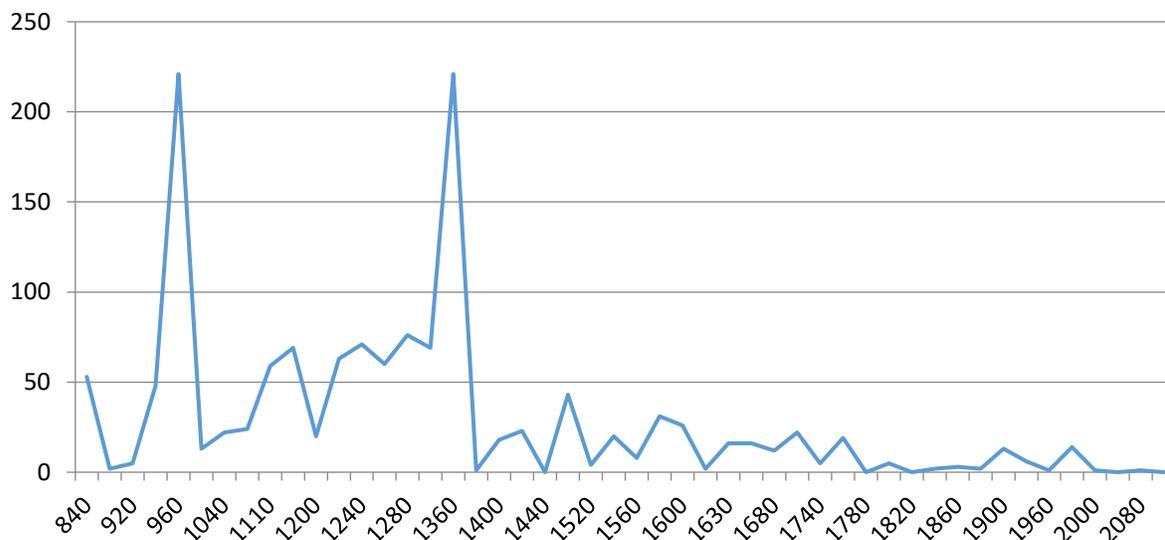
Figure 3: The distribution of villages, by altitude

Altitude	Number of villages	Total population	Average village population
Below 1,000 meters	7	342	49
Between 1,000 and 1,500 meters	30	839	28
Above 1,500 meters	53	229	4

Source: Geostat 2014 Census data. MRDI data

Not surprisingly, the villages which are located at higher altitude have lower population density. The out-migration level in such villages is especially high as elder people prefer to be relocated in lowlands for more accessible medical care and proximity to family.

Figure 4: The population of settlements, by altitude



Source: Geostat 2014 Census data. MRDI data.

The graph shows two spikes at 960 and 1,360 meters above the sea level. This is because the two largest settlements in the entire area Magharoskari in Pshavi and Barisakho in Khevsureti are located at these altitudes. The graph shows that very few people who are living higher than Barisakho are spread out amongst a fairly large number of villages with very low numbers of people in each village.

Pshavians, Khevsurs, or Gudamakarians, while distinct in many ways, have significant cultural and social overlaps. This includes celebration of mountain holidays, cuisine, and folklore.² Most importantly, there is a strong attachment to land, which serves as basis for identity formation. This has potential implication on project activities. For example, locals often feel strongly about who can do business in their village.

'Roshkioni should do business in Roshka, Shatiloni should do business in Shatili and so forth. There are only two families in my village, and none of us are being really active in terms of business or development. But if a stranger comes to my village, of course, I will not like it and oppose' (students and professionals focus group, male, 22)

² Hošek, M., Chlapek, J., Flousek., Knižátková, E., Kubec, V. (2017). *Background Study for Project within Preparation of the Management Plan for Protected Landscape Aragvi in Georgia*

What such opposition might mean is hard to predict. However, important implication for project activities is to have a thorough citizen engagement and consultation plan in place, as had been the case during the early phases in the Kazbegi LAG.

In the rest of the report, we provide comparisons between the three sub-groups where we think such distinction makes sense.

4. Demography

According to the 2014 census data, there are 333 registered villages in 18 territorial units in Dusheti municipality. But the target area includes only three historic areas, which covers 90 villages in 5 administrative units: Barisakho (Khevsureti historical area), Gudamakari (Gudamakari historical area), Magharoskari, Ukanapshavi and three villages of Zhinvali (all belonging to Pshavi historical area).³

Figure 5: The list of territorial entities in target areas

Historic area	Admin. Entity	# of villages	# of population
Khevsureti	Barisakho	35	340
Gudamakari	Gudamakari	22	234
Pshavi	Magharoskari	17	579
Pshavi	Ukanapshavi	13	143
Pshavi	Zhinvali	3	114

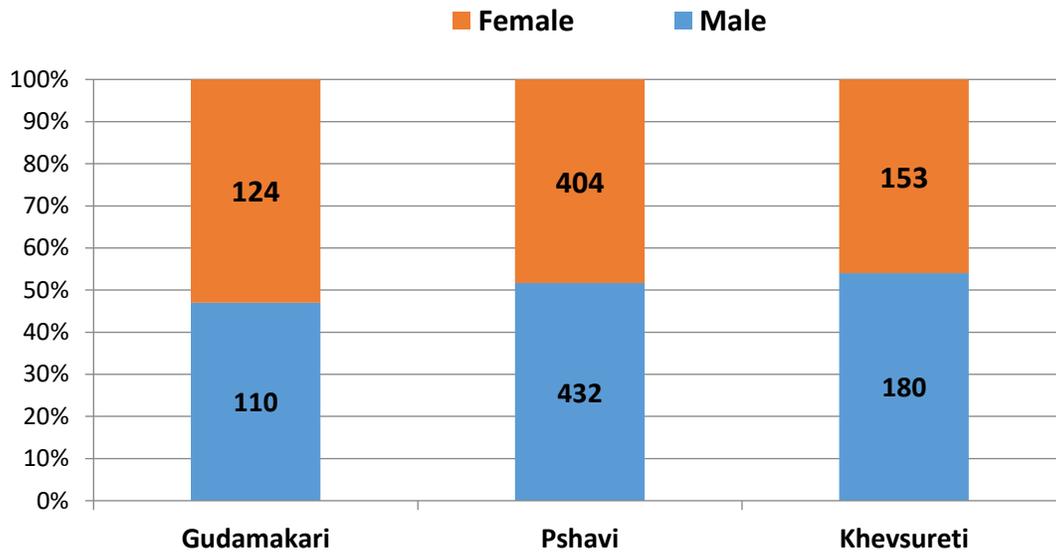
Source: Geostat 2014 Census data

Pshavi cluster is the largest among the three clusters both in terms of the number of villages and the number of population. It is also closest to Tbilisi and most of its villages (except Ukanapshavi) had been accessible all year round, unlike Khevsureti where the main road is only now being rehabilitated, and Gudamakari, where road construction is still in plans.

Out of 90 target villages in all three clusters, 15 were completely deserted, according to the 2014 census, and 47 villages have population of 10 or fewer.

³ Zhinvali administrative unit includes 22 villages in total, but only 3 were selected at target areas by the project due to their proximity to the Aragvi Protected Landscape.

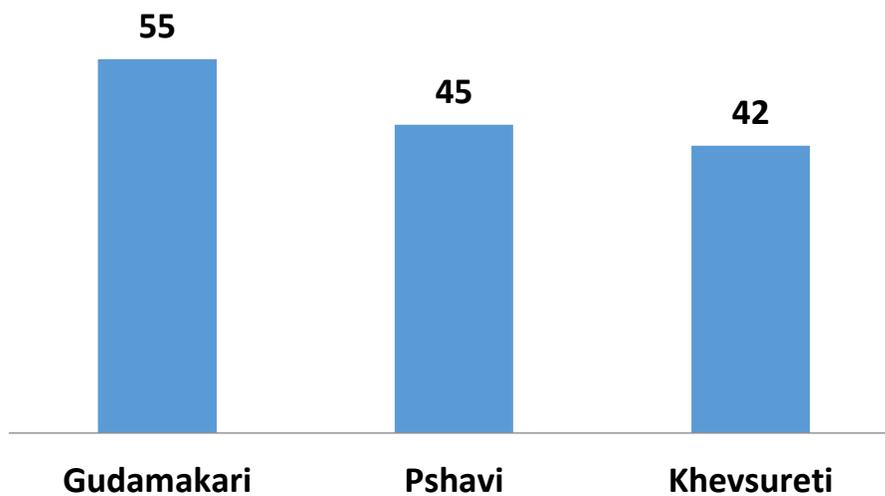
Figure 6: Population in target areas, by gender



Source: Geostat 2014 Census data

In terms of gender distribution, the population is almost exactly 50% for males and 50% for females. However, there are slightly more females in Gudamakari, and slightly more males in Khevsureti.

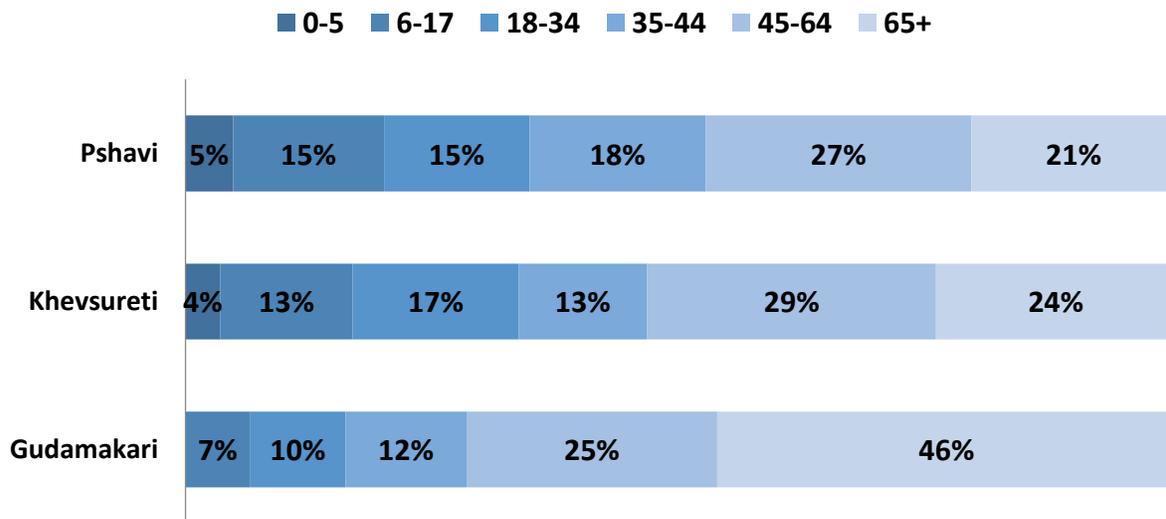
Figure 7: Average age of people living in target areas



Source: Geostat 2014 Census data

Average age in Gudamakari is significantly higher than in Pshavi and Khevsureti. This makes sense, because many people in Barisakho are border police employees, which reduces the average age down, and most of Pshavi villages are not so drained from youth the proximity to Tbilisi translates into less urgency for out-migration compared to more remote areas.

Figure 8: Distribution of age-groups in target areas



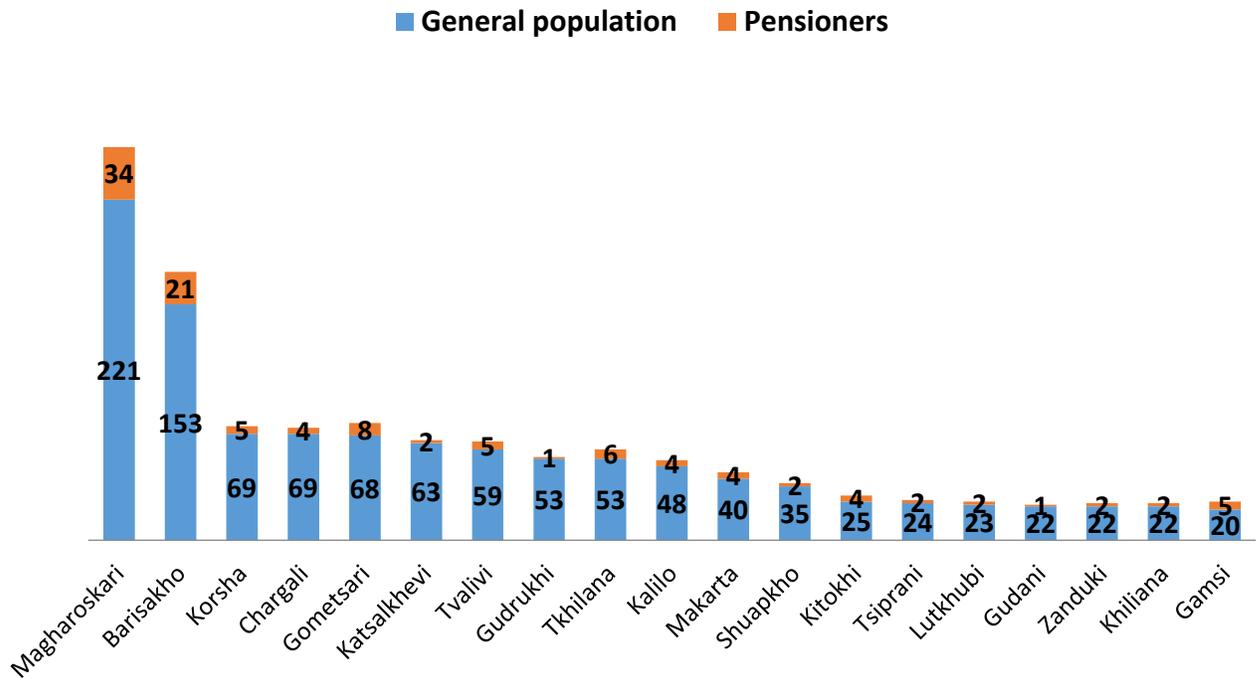
Source: Geostat 2014 Census data

In terms of age groups, Gudamakari doesn't have data for 0-5 group, because Geostat doesn't provide breakdown for villages where the quantity is fewer than 10. The above graph shows that Gudamakari has the largest population of people who are 65 or older. In all three areas, people under 34 are very few, compared to other regions of Georgia.

'Children need to go to university and learn a profession. After they do that, there is little incentive to come back to the village. What would they do here with their university degree? There is nothing available in our area: no jobs, no entertainment' (female only focus group, female, 44)

To verify the 2014 census data, we can use the pensioners' data as a proxy. Pensions are being paid on a monthly basis, so the data should be more reliable than census.

Figure 9: The number of general population and pensioners in the villages with at least 20 inhabitants



Source: Geostat 2014 census; 2018 Social Services Agency data

The graph shows that the two largest settlements are Magharoskari in Pshavi and Barisakho in Khevsureti. They also have the largest number of pensioners. The graph also shows that there are almost 20 villages with population of 20 or more (however, there are 49 villages which have at least 1 pensioner). This is probably most of the LAG’s project activities will be concentrated.

5. Socio-economic structure

While all of the target area is mountainous and falls under the law on development of mountain regions (the so-call ‘Mountain Law’), there are significant differences between the target settlements.

Breeding cattle on minor individual farms is the main form of livelihood in all three communities. Most farmers have two to five dairy cows and primarily focus on dairy products (cheese, cottage cheese, butter, and partly special Pshavian mildewed cheese called Dambalkhacho).

In the Gudamakari community, villages have very small population and there is only one school for the entire area (which currently has only 6 students).⁴ There is no other source of formal employment. Recently one family in the village of Gamsi started a guesthouse, with support from the government. Young people are almost all gone to Tbilisi and elsewhere, but keep connections with the ancestral land. In terms of agriculture, there are few families who have

⁴ For comparison, 30 years ago the school use to have more than a thousand students. The building is quite large and there is also a boarding facility next to it so that students from remote areas could stay.

significant number of livestock. Families who have more than 10 cows (about 100 families in the entire valley who are not considered as permanent residents), usually bring the livestock for grazing in Spring, and leave for winter pastures in Autumn. 12 families also have significant number of sheep. They also follow a nomadic lifestyle, following the sheep to summer and winter pastures. Some people also have started producing honey. About 20 families have bee-hives. This mostly was supported from the government's cooperatives program. In terms of plant-based agriculture, people mostly use residential land plots, which is only enough for home consumption. Locals only produce potatoes in relatively significant quantities, which they mostly store for winter. Seeds and other inputs are usually obtained in agricultural shops in Tbilisi.

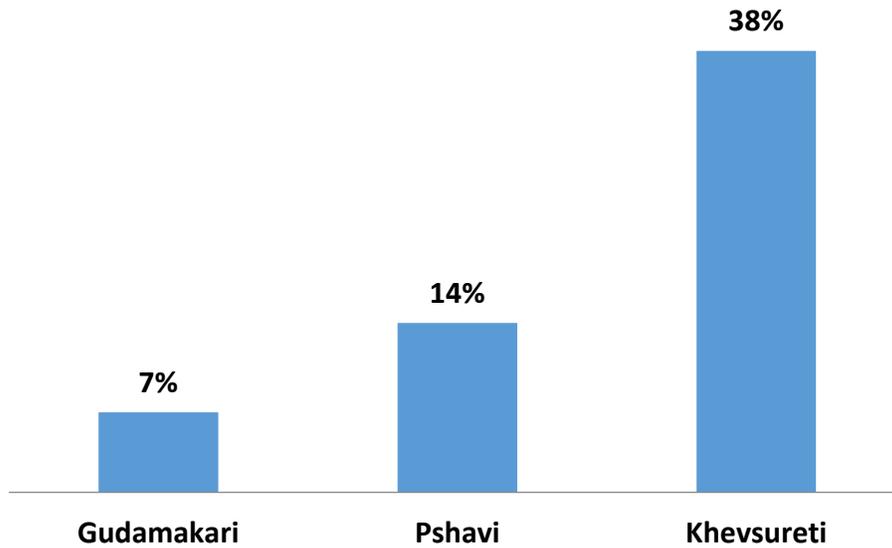
Khevsureti also has many remote villages with only few people and almost no activity, but unlike Gudamakari, there is a relatively large settlement in Barisakho, which has an office of the department of the border police. This creates significant employment and subsequent economic activities. There is a relatively large school, a pre-school, a number of guest-houses, 2 cafes and even an NGO promoting women activism. Naturally, population from neighboring villages are also connected to Barisakho, while using their ancestral villages as places for agricultural activities. In terms of live animal, local population often has local breed of livestock ("Khevsuruli"), not so much sheep. From crops, potatoes are most wide-spread.

Like Khevsureti, Pshavi also has one relatively large settlement: Magharoskari. While it doesn't have one large source of employment, the advantage of Magharoskari is that it is located nearer to Tbilisi, right next to the Aragvi river. There are some small businesses supported by the government's 'Enterprise Georgia' program. In addition to few guest-houses, there are also agricultural cooperatives, like the start-up which is producing local variety of cheeses: dambalkhacho.

'People come to Magharoskari because the road is good and it's just one hour from Tbilisi. It has beautiful mountains, river, and you can get ecologically clean local product, like fresh milk or vegetables. There are people who sell local produce and the guests like that it's available' (students and professionals focus group, male, 43)

In smaller and more remote places, the villages of Ukanapshavi, livestock owners make cheese which they then sell in winter. Bee-keepers, on the other hand, frequently take honey for sale to large settlements and markets, like Zhinvali, Dusheti and Tsitelsopeli. Unlike Khevsureti, sheep is also common in Pshavi. There is also a fishery, supported by a government program.

Figure 10: Salaried employees (above the age of 18) by target areas



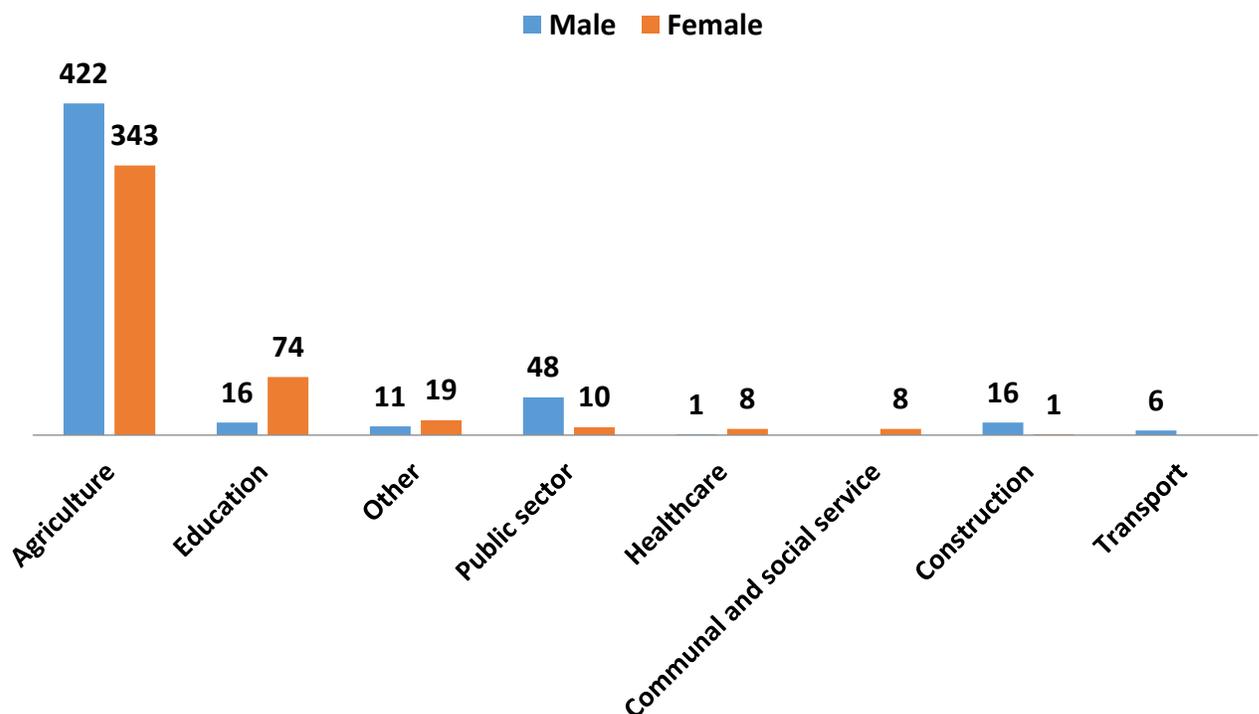
Source: Geostat 2014 Census data

The above graph shows that the employment level is lower in Gudamakari. Almost all formal employment comes from the one public school in the village of Kitokhi. Khevsureti, on the other hand, has the highest salaried employment because of the Barisakho border police department. Pshavi's employment is mostly coming from business activities.

According to Geostat's data on registered and active business, there are a total of 28 small businesses in the target area: 16 in Pshavi, 11 in Khevsureti, and only 1 in Gudamakari. In Pshavi and Khevsureti, they are almost exclusively concentrated in Magharoskari and Barisakho. The businesses are mostly small retailers, but there are also few guesthouses and construction related businesses.

Geostat's 2014 Census allows looking into more details of economic activities that people are involved in. The graph below breaks down data by gender.

Figure 11: The number of people involved in economic activities, by gender



About 50% of all females and 58% of all males have said that they are involved in agriculture. For women, generally the main source of employment is schools (74 teachers in total), while for men, the main source of formal employment is a border police department located in Barisakho.

The Law on the Development of Mountainous Regions ('the Mountain Law') seems to be well known among the local population in target areas. Some of the benefits of the law are not applicable in the target area (such as subsidy on gas), because there is no gas in the villages. Nevertheless, in combination with general support from the government, people consider this initiative as important. We met several people who went back to the ancestral villages and they were very actively pursuing to obtain the 'mountainous status'.

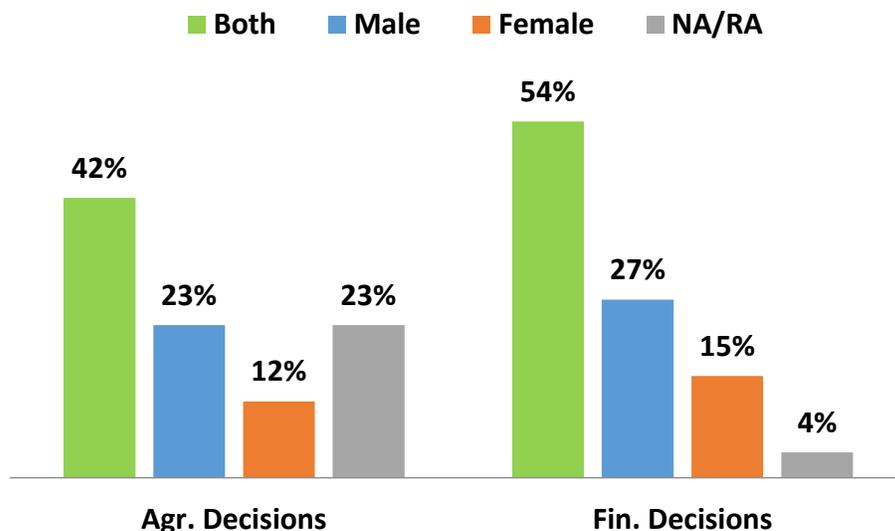
6. Gender roles

All target areas have quite conservative lifestyle when it comes to gender roles within households. Focus group respondents usually were making case that men and women have equal share of responsibility at home and these days require that everybody does everything at home. However, when asked more specific questions about tasks and responsibilities within families, it became apparent that there is a strong sense of what men should do and what women should do:

'Women don't do work that requires physical strength. What about men doing dishes?... It would be strange if there is a woman in a family and man does the dishes. Mountainous men are very traditional' (female only focus group, female, 47).

In assessing gender roles in local communities, both men and women generally have same ideas about how decisions are made, the importance of cooperation, and responsibilities of men and women.

Figure 12: Who takes decisions on agricultural and financial matters in the household?



Source: survey of focus group participants

The survey of focus group participants showed that when it comes to important decisions within a household, men usually have more say than women. However, most focus group participants assert that decisions are made jointly. While smaller, routine decisions are usually left to women, larger, less frequent and more unusual decisions are discussed within the household but ultimately decided by the men.

In general, there is a pattern of strong mutual accountability. Women and men know on what their income is being spent and often consult each other. When it comes to smaller issues, such as clothes for children or groceries, then women act independently and they don't need approval from a husband.

We also asked about property registration during focus groups discussions. Not surprisingly, property is usually registered on male members of a family. Land and houses are usually inherited by male members of a household. The inequality in property ownership shows the unequal power distribution between men and women. This can become particularly relevant at times of divorce, as women will be left without inheritance.

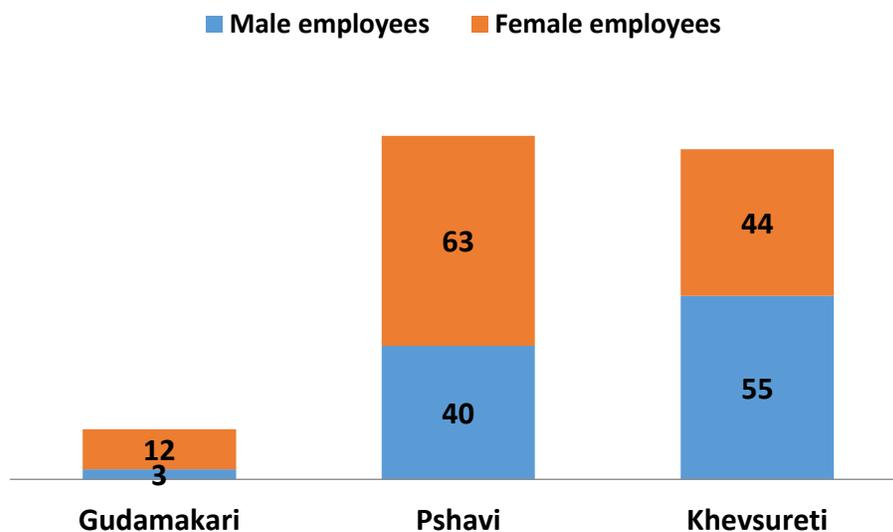
Some of the focus group participants showed that they fully understand the discrepancy in gender roles in mountainous communities, and it should change to give more power to women. We heard such positions from young and elder participants of focus groups.

'In the mountain, men have privilege. Women should not go in front of men. Maybe this is because historically men were going forward to protect the village from nomadic enemies. Washing dishes is not a men's job, neither is milking a cow. But many men do it now.

Husband and wife means that they should manage the family together. It is very primitive to have different roles. We should move on (focus group in a remote village, female, 91).

Beyond the roles within families, women are quite active in social and economic life in all three target areas. In Gudamakari, for example, there is a strong youth activism which includes Tbilisi based youth. They oppose the construction of an HPP that could negatively affect the Shavi Aragvi valley and kill the tourism potential. Barisakho also has women civic activism that promotes women activism and healthy lifestyle. In all target areas, women have equal or more employment than men. Although rare, there are even women shepherds in Khevsureti (encountered near Roshka village) and Pshavi (in Ukanapshavi area) in target areas. This shows that breaking gender stereotypes is not uncommon, and is also part of a traditional narrative on strong-willed, mountainous women.

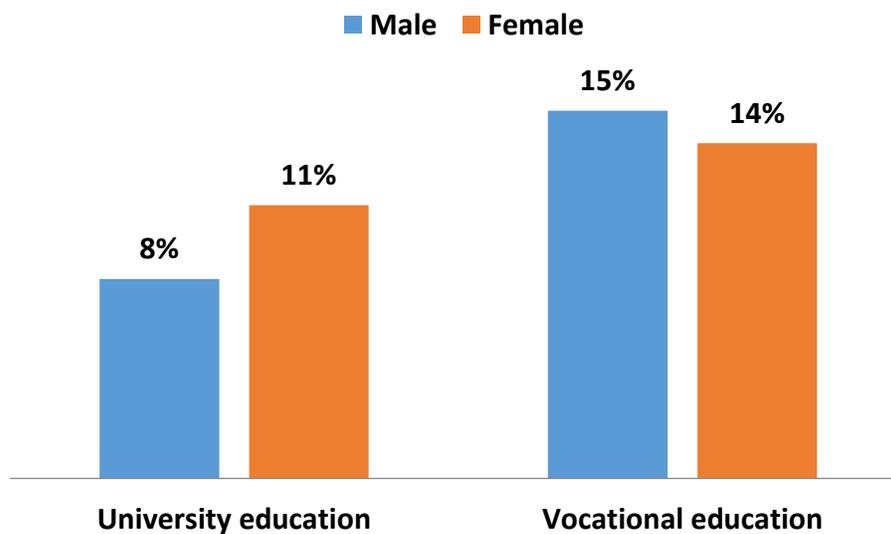
Figure 13: The number of employed people in target areas, by gender.



Source: Geostat 2014 Census data

In Gudamakari there are significantly more employed women. This is because the largest employer is one school, and teachers are mostly women. On the other hand, the border police department in Barisakho employs more men than women. Nevertheless, for a police department the share of employed women is quite high.

Figure 14: The highest attained level of education, by gender



Source: Geostat 2014 Census data

That females have slightly higher levels of university education makes sense as women are mostly employed at school, where university education is required.

In summary, although the target area exhibit the same gender patterns as many other rural regions in Georgia, it is clear that they can actively participate in project activities.

7. Infrastructure

The central piece of infrastructure that the locals (except the Gudamakari valley) are concerned about is the road connecting Zhinvali to Shatili. The road rehabilitation works are funded by the World Bank and are expected to be completed in 2020. This will significantly ease access to Khevsureti and Pshavi, and will bring more tourists, economic activity and development.

'Increased traffic to Shatili means that roadside places will have a better chance to attract tourist for a small lunch or coffee. Some tourists will not be able to stay in Shatili as it is very busy during the high season, so they will naturally stay in Barisakho or Korsha, for example' (large settlement focus group, female, 39).

The fate of secondary and tertiary roads that lead to higher elevation villages, however, is less clear. While it is the formal responsibility of local government to fix local roads, dues to lack of funds, large improvements are usually directed by the central government. For example, the Oshpiteli-Gudamakari road was funded from the 'Mountain Fund' of MRDI. A good will of a local Gamgebeli seems to be very important factor in deciding which roads are being financed.

'When I moved to a Datvisi, there was no road going to my house. So I went to a Gamgebeli, who was a nice, honest man. He assigned a tractor which cut the road for about 300 meters, so that I could reach my house' (students and professionals focus group, male, 45).

Supporting the newly returned families is, of course, commendable. However, there could be more robust process to the existing community-driven development at the municipality. The role of LAG in promoting fair advocacy and decision-making practices in target communities is, thus, quite apparent.

In Gudamakari, the road is paved only to the lower part. However, there are plans that the road will be paved all the way to the Chokhi village.

In terms of transport, most villages have assigned minibuses ('Marshrutkas'), but people often rely on own or neighbor's old cars.

'The Marshrutka goes to Tbilisi twice a week. Now the driver is from our village so we can leave in the morning and come back on the same day. Few years ago we would have to stay two or three nights in Tbilisi' (remote village focus group, male, 67)

The villages above Shuapkho (in Pshavi) and the villages of Piraketa Khevsureti located off the main road do not have public transport.

There is no natural gas in target areas, so people rely on wood. In terms of electricity, most villages are electrified, except Biso, Zeistecho, Ukakhadu, Tsinkhadu, Khakhmati (form barisakho territorial entity), Dikhco and Bursachiri (from Gudamakari territorial entity), and villages above Shuapkho (Ukanapshavi territorial entity). The village of Roshka (Barisakho territorial entity) makes use of a small hydroelectric power plant, while in other places the local inhabitants depend on diesel generators in case of necessity.

Mobile network coverage is another major issue in the entire Ukana Pshavi valley above Shuapkho and the depopulating villages in the small side valleys of Piraketa Khevsureti, except Roshka. Pshavi also lacks social facilities - there is a club and a school in Magharoskari (for about 50 students) and schools in Chargali and Shuapkho (around 10 students). Piraketa Khevsureti has the only school in Barisakho (medium size for about 60 students). Gudamakari has one school for 6 students in the Kitokhi village.

It is expected that target areas will soon have internet. The 'internetization of mountains' has started from Tusheti and already covers part of Khevsureti. It is not clear when exactly Gudamakari and Pshavi will be covered as well.

In terms of medical care, one general practitioner and a nurse offer services in each of the major villages. Buildings are often outdated, although rehabilitation works are on-going in some villages.

Figure 15: Old ambulatory building in the village of Shuapkho, Ukanapshavi territorial unit



For remote villages, absence of ambulatory services in the village is a serious problem, especially in winter. The emergency might take up to 1.5-2 hours to reach, and transportation on bad roads will pose additional problems for the patients. This is one of the reasons why elderly people prefer to spend winter in a town, where medical care is more accessible. In contrast to Kazbegi, there is no operating rescue station whether for locals or tourists; in case of need, such service is provided by rescuers from the municipal center.

8. Awareness of the Aragvi Protected Landscape

Focus group participants were generally aware of the Protected Landscape and the restrictions that it imposes on local villages. But they also realize the opportunities that the Protected Landscape provides for them.

'We used to have many illegal hunters and fishermen coming up our valley few years ago, but now that has changed. On the other hand, we get a lot of bears and wolves that attack our livestock, and we are not allowed to kill them' (remote village focus group, male, 67).

However, there also seem to be some confusion on what and where can be done:

'I can't cut trees in the PL area for wood anymore, but it's ok to cut trees somewhere else... The PL might turn a blind eye on some activities though' (remote village focus group, male, 57).

- *'I have the Aragvi river rechanneled a little bit in my backyard, so I can grow some pretty fancy fish. My guests love it!'* (Male, 43)
- *'You shouldn't talk about this in public!'* (Male, 22)

It is apparent that the local population and the PL will have much to work out between themselves in the near future.

Local population also believes that the PL will mark the trekking routes, and help the villages in attracting and maintaining tourism flows.

9. Community Asset Mapping

The idea of the community asset mapping was to understand what local population perceives as assets for the community. It is also important to look at the gender dimension of these assets: what are priorities for men and women, who controls these assets, and what are their impacts on men and women in target communities. These are important considerations for achieving sustainable positive impacts by project activities.

Gudamakari

Gudamakari boasts beautiful nature. There is 'Shavi' (black) Aragvi going through impressive mountains. There are remnants of approximately 70 cultural heritage sites in the valley, including remnants from old churches and fortresses. Gudamakari is also ideally located for trekking tourism: there are paths connecting to Khevsureti, Khevi and Mtiuleti. It is hoped in local communities that local young men will be trained and employed as trekking guides if tourism increases.

Civic activism and Tbilisi-based youth is also a resource for local people. The activism was established for preventing construction of a small HPP, but it helped to develop social network among young people who had not met each other before. This type of social capital can play important role for developing project activities. The network includes both men and women from the community. In fact, one of the leaders of the movement is a young woman.

The central place in the Gudamakari village is Kitokhi, which has the only school available in the valley (with only 6 students). The school boarding facility is now empty, but could be an important asset for certain type of community projects. Almost all employees at the Kitoskhi school are women. Women also have highest attained education level in the whole valley. On the other hand, most power in the local community is concentrated in an official representative from Dusheti municipality. This person is responsible of representing local needs to the municipality level, collecting the necessary information, and coordinating municipality activities in the valley. This powerful position is usually occupied by men.

The valley also has a recently opened museum in the Chokhi village at the house of famous Georgian writer, Goderdzi Chokheli. While it is not a major tourist destination, locals consider it an important cultural asset.

Pshavi

Pshavi is the most populous among the three target areas and has most business and economic activities concentrated in Magharoskari. This opens up opportunity for further economic activities both for men and women.

Most of Pshavi (except the Ukanapshavi community) is also very close to Tbilisi and is easy to access all year round. On the other hand, the Ukanapshavi valley provides excellent trekking potential as it connects to Tusheti through the Borbalo pass. Local people also believe that attributes of Ukanapshavi Mountains provide excellent potential for making the area an appealing ski-resort destination, much like Gudauri. This can provide opportunities for mostly male inhabitants of the target area.

Pshavi also has distinct culinary attributes. Local variety of cheese, Dambalkhacho enjoys great popularity in Easter Georgia. Pshavians also have their own variety of khinkali. Both men and women are involved in culinary activities with men often dealing with khinkali and other meat dishes, while women deal dairy products. In terms of cultural assets, the Vazha Pshavela museum in the village of Chargali is a very important destination.

Khevsureti

In Khevsureti, focus group participants emphasized the beautiful nature and mineral waters. They also stressed the importance of traditional craft skills, such as sewing. This is mostly considered as women's job. In Barisakho, high employment level (mostly males at the border police department), large population and social services are also important assets that can serve as basis for further development of the region. Another resource for Barisakho is that it is located on the way to Shatili, and can become a tourism destination by itself. Khevsuri people take pride in active youth that can grow further and be involved in interesting projects. Khevsurians also mention local livestock breed as an asset as it provides unique concentration of fat concentration in milk, and is adapted to living in mountainous areas with very steep slopes.

10. Opportunities for development

There are several directions for potential development in the target area. Because the characteristics of settlements significantly vary, opportunities for development might be different. However, there are also broader development ideas that can simultaneously benefit different kinds of settlements. While exploring feasibility of each potential investment opportunity is well beyond the scope of this study, it is still possible to outline a few general directions, based on the discussions in focus groups, interactions with the PiN project team, and the desk research.

The two broad areas where local population see development potential is tourism and, to a lesser extent, agriculture. Tourists mainly visit the areas along the main road to Shatili: Magharoskari, Korsha, Barisakho. The exception is the pass from Roshka to Juta in the Chaukhi massif and around the Abudelaury lakes. This place attracts numerous foreign, as well as local tourists.

Magharoskari and Barisakho (and to a lesser extent, Korsha), are already well placed for further development. Unlike most other settlements, they are easily accessible, have basic infrastructure in place, and already have on-going business activities. In Barisakho there is also high level of employment, which makes it easier for the local population to come up with co-financing. These settlements mainly attract two types of tourists: 1) tourists going to Shatili and Mutso and preferring to stay somewhere overnight, to make the road more bearable; 2) families with small children who like to rest in the mountains and nature, but in proximity of Tbilisi. Potentially, in the coming years there will be a third group of tourists who will use Barisakho and Magharoskari as service hubs and then will go on trekking on new paths that lead to many interesting destinations of the Aragvi National Landscape.

Barisakho mostly targets the first group of tourists. Currently, it takes around 5 hours to reach Mutso from Tbilisi, so sometimes tourists opt to stay overnight in one of the road-side villages to make the travel easier. However, with the repair of the road which is anticipated to be finished in 2020, the number of such tourists is expected to decrease. On the other hand, while the Shatili and Mutso will gain tourists due to easier access there will be need for more lodging. Barisakho will be well-placed to accommodate excess tourists from Shatili as it will take only about an hour to travel between the two settlements.

Magharoskari mostly targets the families with small children, who also tend to stay for longer periods of time. With better roads and general economic growth, it is expected that the share of such tourists will grow. Proximity of Aragvi and mountains also allows developing extreme sports near Magharoskari, such as rafting, horse and mountain biking.

The remote villages in target areas do not have potential of Barisakho and Magharoskari to transform into small hubs for different tourist segments. However, there are already some important trekking paths that are drawing increasing attention. With development of marked pathways, coordinated logistics, and targeted marketing, some remote villages might get a chance of development from increased tourism. For example, one of the most under-appreciated tourist paths that is expected to draw attention is the Borbalo pass which connects Ukana Pshavi to Tusheti.⁵ As very few people have information about the cross-over trail leading through the Borbalo pass to Tusheti (or Pankisi), there is no lodging facility in the Ukana Pshavi valley.⁶

'I had French visitors and they enjoyed staying at my house very much. But they were not random tourists. They were colleagues of my son, who invited them here' (Shuapkho focus group, female, 91)

'If there were tourists crossing this valley, then there also would be interest in the local population to run guest houses and related businesses. I think there would be quite a bit of development' (Shuapkho focus group, male, 67).

⁵ There had been government plans to construct a road in this area, which would alter the tourism potential and draw different types of tourists compared to multiple-day trekkers.

⁶ Schülein, S. (2017). Eco-Tourism Development Strategy for Pshav-Khevsureti. Prepared for GFA Consulting Group

Such areas, if developed, can have appealing campsites, mountain bike and trekking facilities. The Eco-tourism Development Strategy for Khevsureti also highlighted the importance of developing trekking routes:

*'Alternative hiking routes e.g. across Borbalo Pass are definitely interesting for Tour Operators. What they need is a well-marked and sign-posted trail with a detailed description, timings, altitude profiles, GPS tracks/coordinates and professional photos and probably some safety cables or bridges at difficult passages and river crossings.'*⁷

There is also potential of SUV tours from Roshka to Arkhoti/Amgha and Ukanapshavi. Other tourist attractions can include mountain bike rental, rafting and similar, which are already offered by the private sector in Pshavi. Trekking with pack horses is also arranged by the private sector in cooperation with local horse owners.

Overall, the Eco-Tourism Development Strategy assesses Pshav-Khevsureti as a good hiking/trekking destination, with cultural elements:

*'Other adventure activities would be rather concentrated on the Barisakho side. Here, a potential is also seen for winter sports (e.g. ski tours). A critical factor is the bad condition of the access road between Zhinali and Barisakho. ... For many European tourists Pshav Khevsureti will gain attraction because it is less crowded than Kazbegi and still much easier to reach than Tusheti.'*⁸

In terms of agriculture, it seems that there is little potential for large scale agricultural production. Most of the agriculture will be tied to the growing tourism sector where the demand for locally produced natural products is increasing. Local cattle breed ("Khevsurulli") can be a marketing advantage in this regard. However, milk yield and qualities of the Khevsuruli cattle breed is not competitive to more widespread breeds.

Local population lacks modern skills and knowledge for effective agricultural production. In recent years, government support helped many people to start their own bee-hives. However, local people are skeptical about introducing new agricultural products in the area:

'If we want to support locals in terms of agriculture, then it's better to invest in already existing practices, like buying more cattle or more bee-hives. New breeds or crops are risky. We should continue what our ancestors have tried for many generations' (remote village focus group, male, 53)

This opens up opportunity for introducing low-cost, but effective agricultural practices that could demonstrate the value of know-how to the local population. With the rise on natural agricultural products and services and its connection to technology, the role of young people could be particularly important here. The Aragvi LAG can also promote climate change awareness and sustainable agricultural development in its activities.

⁷ Schülein, S. (2017). Eco-Tourism Development Strategy for Pshav-Khevsureti. Prepared for GFA Consulting Group

⁸ Schülein, S. (2017). Eco-Tourism Development Strategy for Pshav-Khevsureti. Prepared for GFA Consulting Group

For community projects, marketing of local destinations and cultural heritage preservation, the LAG probably will benefit from coordinating work with the Dusheti Centre of Cultural Heritage and Tourism. Established and funded by the Dusheti municipality, this organization is quite active in organizing events and implementing small scale tourism and cultural heritage projects. From the past experience of LAG operations, it seems that involving municipalities in project activities might be challenging. Much depends on establishing personal relationships and clearly demonstrating the value of the project.

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Social Service Agency 2018 data

Annex 1: FG discussion guide

FG Discussion Guide

Hello, my name is _____ . I'm doing a study for the organization People in Need. PiN is starting to work in Aragvi area to promote economic opportunities. For the PiN project to be successful, it is crucial that we understand what is the situation on the ground, what do you think about different issues, and how to envisage cooperating with PiN.

This meeting will last about 1.5 hours. Format of our meeting will be a discussion, so please feel free to express your thoughts openly, but also let others to finish their ideas. Please put your telephones on silent so that our meeting is not interrupted.

Because we want to analyze your comments and ideas thoroughly, we would like to ask you permission for audio-recording of the meeting. Comments of particular participants will not be shared or publicized; we will only use these audio-files for analysis. Your names will not appear in any document.

If you don't have any questions, then we can proceed with our questions:

Introduction and family life

- Can you please introduce yourself? Please say your name and age.
- Who does live in your family? What would be a typical day like for your family?
 - o Division of responsibilities between family members?
 - o In your opinion, what could be classified as a strictly "man's" job or "women's" job?
- Please describe your community: how big it is? What people do for living?
 - o Is there agriculture? What kind?
 - o Is there seasonal migration? Do many people leave? When?
 - o What is age-composition?
 - o Any other activities: tourism, guest-houses, shops

Baseline data about the community

- Employment: what are the employment opportunities?
- Other livelihood activities. Examples?
- Socio-economic situation/poverty
 - o Has your family ever taken a loan from a bank or micro-finance organization? Who obtained the loan? Have you, personally (as opposed to family), applied for a loan?
- Land issues: size, usage, ownership/lease, registration challenges
- Environmental issues

Ideas for economic opportunities

- [if tourism comes up] – There is also responsibility from the community side/ For example, will be there better waste management?
- Agriculture can be challenging in such geography?
- Enterprises/factories might not be interested?

- Anything else?

Community asset mapping exercise: divide the group in two and ask to separately come up with community assets. Write them down on a flipchart paper. Then briefly discuss (5 minutes for explaining and organizing, 20 minutes brain-storming, 10 minutes presentation)

- Explainer: A community asset or a community resource is anything that can be used to improve the quality of community life. This can mean, for example, a person, physical infrastructure, place, community service, or business.

Or brainstorming, if advised differently.

Annex 2: Short questionnaire for FG participants

We would like to ask you to take about 10 minutes and answer this short questionnaire. This simple questionnaire is very important for us to collect information about this region. It will help PiN to design more effective interventions to foster development. In case you have questions about how to fill out this questionnaire, please don't hesitate to ask our researcher for directions.

Thank you for your time. Your input is very valuable for us.

Settlement/municipality	
Gender	
Age	

1. How many members live in your family?

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2. Can you please list the members of your household?

1	Me
2	
3	
4	
5	

3. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

1	Basic
2	Secondary
3	Vocational/technical
4	Higher
5	Other (Please specify):
99	Refuse to answer

4. Is anybody in your family formally employed?

1	Yes	Go to Q7
2	No	
99	Refuse to answer	

5. Who in your family is employed? [SELECT AS MANY AS APPLICABLE]

1	Me
2	Husband
3	Wife
4	Son
5	Daughter
6	Father

7	Mother
8	Other (Please specify):
9	Other (Please specify):
99	Refuse to answer

6. Where does the main formally employed person work?

7. What is the main agricultural product that your household produces? [List no more than three. Most popular first]

1	
2	
3	

8. Do you sell your agricultural products?

1	No
2	Yes: a. I sell directly to local customers (neighbors) b. I take agr. products to a market stall c. I sell to a wholesaler d. Other (please specify):
99	Refuse to answer

9. Are there particular sets of skills that you think would help you to increase your agricultural capacities

1	No
2	Yes (please list):
99	Refuse to answer

10. Who in the household makes the principle decisions on which crops to plant and animals to raise?

1	Me
2	Husband
3	Wife
4	Son
5	Daughter
6	Father
7	Mother
8	Other (Please specify):
9	Other (Please specify):

99	Refuse to answer
----	------------------

11. Is the land where you grow crops registered?

1	No
2	Yes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. On a male family member b. On a female family member c. On both male and female family member
99	Refuse to answer

12. Who decides how to spend money in your household?

1	Me
2	Husband
3	Wife
4	Son
5	Daughter
6	Father
7	Mother
8	Other (Please specify):
9	Other (Please specify):
99	Refuse to answer