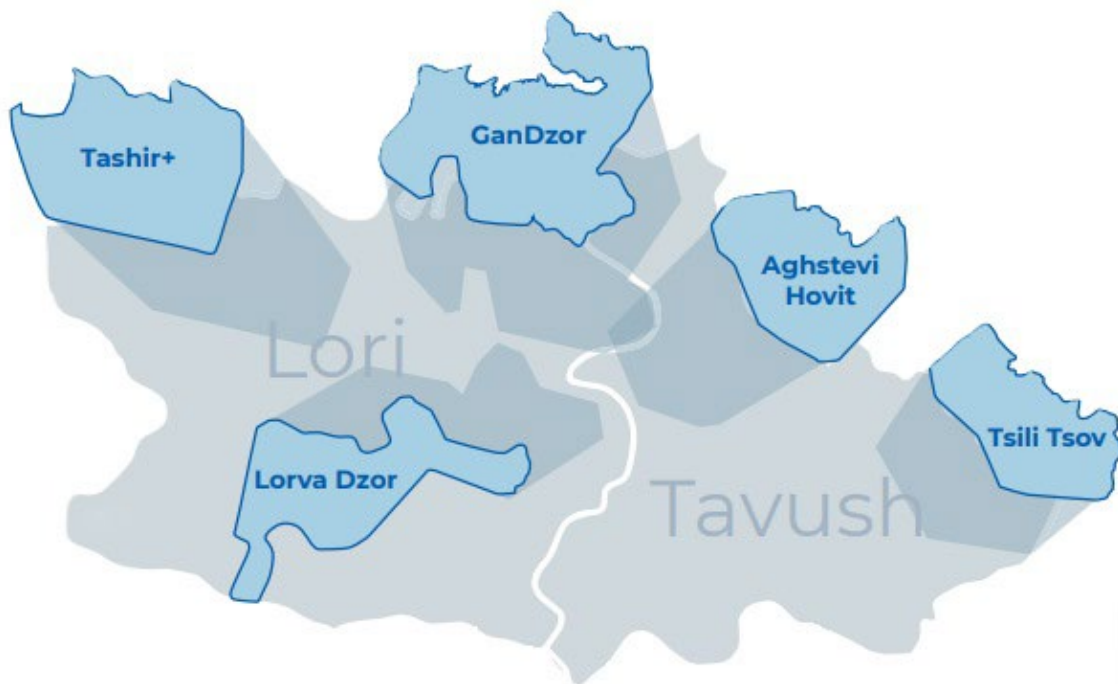




# Local Empowerment of Actors for Development (LEAD) in Lori and Tavush Regions MID-TERM EVALUATION REPORT



**For UNDP Armenia**

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**2024**

Project/outcome Information		
Project/outcome title	Local Empowerment of Actors for Development (LEAD) in Lori and Tavush Regions	
Atlas ID	Project ID: 00118827 / Output ID: 00115480	
Corporate outcome and output	<p>2016-2020 UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) and 2016-2020 UNDP Country Programme Document (CPD) Outcome 1: By 2020, Armenia’s competitiveness is improved and people, especially vulnerable groups, have greater access to sustainable economic opportunities.</p> <p>2021-2025 UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) Outcome 4 and 2021-2025 UNDP Country Programme Document (CPD) Outcome 1: People, communities, and regions benefit from equitable economic opportunities, decent work, and sustainable livelihoods, enabled through competitiveness and inclusive green growth. Output 1.2: Capacities at national and subnational levels strengthened to promote inclusive local economic development and deliver inclusive public services.</p> <p>2018-2021 UNDP Strategic Plan (SP) Output 1.1: National and sub-national systems and institutions enabled to achieve structural transformation of productive capacities that are sustainable and employment- and livelihoods-intensive.</p> <p>2022-2025 UNDP Strategic Plan (SP) Output 2.3: Responsive governance systems and local governance strengthened for socioeconomic opportunity, inclusive basic service delivery, community security, and peacebuilding.</p>	
Country	Armenia	
Region	Lori and Tavush regions	
Date project document signed	Signed – 07 September 2020. Revised – 02 February 2021	
Project dates	Start	Planned end
	01 October 2020	30 September 2024
Total committed budget	Total: USD 7,867,811.98	
Project expenditure at the time of evaluation	Total: USD 3,372,242.65 (30 September 2023) (FAO: USD 1,131,484.20 and UNDP: USD 2,229,410.11)	
Funding source	European Union	
Implementing party <sup>1</sup>	Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure of the Republic of Armenia; UNDP Armenia and FAO in Armenia	

Evaluation information		
Evaluation type (project/outcome/thematic/country programme, etc.)	Project evaluation for ‘Local Empowerment of Actors for Development (LEAD) in Lori and Tavush Regions’, Armenia	
Final/midterm review/ other	Midterm review	
Period under evaluation	Start	End
	01 October 2020	30 September 2023

<sup>1</sup> This is the entity that has overall responsibility for implementation of the project (award), effective use of resources and delivery of outputs in the signed project document and workplan.

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<b>Evaluation dates</b>	11/09/2023	29/02/2024

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## **List of Acronyms**

AB	Accountable Body
ADA	Austrian Development Agency
CAP	Common Agriculture Policy
CLLD	Community-Led Local Development
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DAD	Development Assistance Database
EC	European Commission
ENPARD	European Neighbourhood Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development
EU	European Union
ELARD	European LEADER Association for Rural Development
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
FSVA	Food Security and Vulnerability Assessment
IPARD	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance in Rural Development
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
LA	Local Authority
LAG	Local Action Group
LDS	Local Development Strategy
LEAD	Local Empowerment of Actors for Development
LEADER	European Union initiative to support rural development projects initiated at the local level in order to revitalize rural areas (an acronym in French – Liaison entre actions de développement de l'économie rurale – meaning Links between actions for the development of the rural economy)
MTAI	Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
RDS	Rural Development Strategy
SAP	Strategic Action Plan
SSC	Strategic Steering Committee
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

## Executive Summary

This report describes the approach and findings of the mid-term evaluation of the European Union (EU) funded Project on ‘Local Empowerment of Actors for Development (LEAD) in Lori and Tavush Regions’ of Armenia. The project is implemented through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) with the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure (MTAI) as the Armenian Government Implementing Partner.

The evaluation was conducted during the September 2023 - February 2024 period. The purpose of the evaluation was to provide a mid-term review of the project outcomes, to enable those implementing the project, as well as national level policy makers to have a better sense of the extent to which the project is meeting its objectives, identification of barriers to implementation, and opportunities for improved delivery. An evaluation of outcomes against project objectives before the end date also enables the implementing partners to explore the potential for altering the implementation approach and/or diverting resources to under-performing areas.

The LEAD project has three overarching Objectives:

- Objective 1: Mobilize, capacitate, and incentivize local actors to define community needs-driven strategies in Lori and Tavush regions
- Objective 2: Build supporting infrastructure to prioritize, implement and sustain local-grown initiatives in Lori and Tavush regions
- Objective 3: Improve the capacity of the relevant ministries and other bodies and develop policy mechanisms at the national level for successful piloting and sustainability of the LEADER approach in Armenia (policy component)

As of 30<sup>th</sup>. September 2023, the project had successfully achieved the outputs identified in the table below.

Results Framework Identification	Project Outputs	Outcome contribution
1.0 (a & b) 1.0.1(a & b)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support for businesses and individuals in the two regions affected by and the influx of Spontaneous Arrivals from the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict during September – November 2020 and more recently in 2023</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economic impacts mitigated</li> <li>• Economic inclusion of individuals and businesses affected by pandemic &amp; conflict</li> </ul>
1.1; 2.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fact finding missions in local communities and training of community coaches (5 UNDP and 5 FAO coaches trained)</li> <li>• The trained local coaches were involved in further research and mobilisation activities related to the development of the strategic action plans (SAPs) in all 5 LAGs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Objective 1</li> <li>• Objective 2</li> </ul>
1.2; 1.3; 2.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishment of 5 LAGs in two regions (one LAG cuts across the regional boundary)</li> <li>• Appointment of 4 Accountable Body organisations.</li> <li>• Training and appointment of 5 LAG Managers and 5 Assistant LAG Managers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Objective 1</li> <li>• Objective 2</li> <li>• Objective 2</li> </ul>
Sub-outputs 1.3; 2.3; 2.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appointment of 5 Farmers Association Specialist/Managers (FAO)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Objective 1</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Foundation laid for establishment of local Farmers Associations in all 5 LAGs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Objective 2</li> </ul>
1.2; 1.3; 2.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adoption of LAG Strategic Action Plans (SAPs) along with two-year implementation plans covering the 2024-26 period</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Objectives 1 &amp; 2</li> </ul>
1.2; 1.3; 2.1 & 2.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Training of approximately 30 people involved in LAG Boards</li> <li>25 people trained for their roles as Selection Committee Members</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Objective 1</li> <li>Objective 2</li> </ul>
1.1; 1.2; 1.3; 2.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>167 local residents mobilized and involved with local development plan discussions through the LAGs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Objectives 1 &amp; 2</li> </ul>
2.2; 2.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Two rounds of grant funding in the 5 LAG areas supporting 110 local initiatives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Objective 2</li> </ul>
1.1; 2.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Capacity building across the LAG areas reaching approximately 3,000 residents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Objectives 1 &amp; 2</li> </ul>
3.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consultation and meetings regarding adaptation of the LEADER approach to the territorial development strategy of Armenia</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Objective 3</li> </ul>
3.1.5 (a) 3.15(b)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DAD implementation</li> <li>Improved coordination efficiency</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Objective 3</li> </ul>

Source: Evaluation Team, 2023

Note: This is a summary overview of outputs which are described in greater detail in Tables 2.5, 2.6, 2.7 and 2.9 of this report.

The project is an exploration of the potential for improving rural development and enhancing the capacity for governance at both local and central government levels through application of the EU LEADER principles. What works in the EU may not work in the same way in Armenia, and/or require modifications to be effective. It is important to understand that the LEAD project is a **pilot programme of activities** to explore implementation of the LEADER approach in different local contexts within Armenia. The overall aim is to identify what works and how best to initiate and support ‘bottom-up’ sustainable rural development in Armenia.

This Mid-term evaluation examines Project activities across the period 01 October 2020 - 30 September 2023. The evaluation has completed the following elements:

- undertaken analysis of documentary evidence
- collected data through interviews and discussion groups held in all 5 LAG areas, and through interviews with UNDP and FAO implementing bodies, and with representatives of regional and central government
- analysed factors affecting outcome and outputs and made recommendations for the final period of Project implementation

The evaluation has taken a qualitative approach utilising LAG level discussion groups and face-to-face interviews with a range of stakeholders at local, regional, and central government levels. It was designed to ensure engagement with representative stakeholders at all levels across both operating and policy contexts through participatory approaches. A total of 64 interviews were conducted at LAG, regional and national levels including LAG Managers and members, grant beneficiaries, Regional Governor offices and Ministry personnel. In addition, five discussion groups were facilitated involving 47 participants from the LAGs. Empirical data were supported through analysis of documentary evidence and validated through triangulation of sources. Project outputs and outcomes have been evaluated against 5 criteria: Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Impact, and Sustainability.

## **Project Outcomes**

The LEAD Project has successfully introduced a completely new methodology to rural territorial development, and it has accomplished this under a demanding local context which includes the COVID-19 pandemic, conflict, and virtually no experience of rural community autonomy. Implementing agencies have had to establish, from scratch, a community-based approach using skilled experts to support the creation of a set of local LAG strategies that demonstrated how local objectives would help deliver national and regional priorities, using an approach that could be understood at local, regional, and national levels. The resulting Project design and formulation complement the National Programmes and Strategies particularly the Armenian Regional Development Strategy for 2016-2025, implemented by the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure (MTAI). The Project objectives are specifically aligned with the 2016-2025 Armenian Regional Development Strategy objectives on the sustainable use of resources, territorial development policy, and improvement of planning and implementation processes through a more active participation of regional and local players, which can also play a role in supporting modernisation of governance systems. Furthermore, the implementing agencies (UNDP and FAO) aligned their activities towards contributing to the goals set in the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA), the Government Programme 2019-2024, and Strategy for Sustainable Agricultural Development in the Republic of Armenia, as well as Agenda 2030.

Implementation involved an initial large-scale fact-finding and animation process to raise awareness of the LEAD project and provide detailed information to develop LAG boundaries. A local training organisation in the region provided an effective and efficient means of raising awareness of the project and building local capacity of ‘community coaches’, five of whom went on to become LAG Managers.

Project outcomes include significant positive impacts on residents of the LAG areas, LAG Managers, those involved as members of LAG Boards and selection committee, participants in the strategic plan development processes, and both grant funding applicants and beneficiaries. Two rounds of grant funding (an initial round of large grants and a 2<sup>nd</sup> round of smaller ‘seed’ grants) were carried out in 2023 resulting in funding a total of 110 projects across the five LAGs with \$548,606 of grant funding allocated. A total of 407 applications were received across the two calls for grant applications. Key outcomes include the following:

- Those most directly involved with LAG activities (e.g. managers, selection committee members, grant beneficiaries, strategic working group participants) indicate significant levels of improvement on a set of indicators measured on 5-point scales
- Interviews with LAG Managers and other stakeholders revealed improvements in knowledge and skills related to rural development and creation of local strategic plans
- LAG managers also indicated improvement in levels of confidence and ability to collaborate with others
- Grant beneficiaries indicated improvements in skills and knowledge and ability to collaborate with others
- In terms of wider impacts LAG Managers noted more positive attitudes towards the local self-view, increase in trust and cooperation, and a reduction in social exclusion

## **Project management**

Overall, the project has been efficiently managed and delivered key objectives despite very difficult operating conditions. Nevertheless, interviews with personnel involved in implementation (UNDP and FAO) along with LAG managers identified a small number of areas associated with grant application and project selection processes where there is scope for improvement. Funding criteria and application processes, for example, especially in the first round, were too complex and not best suited

for applicants with lower skill levels. LAG selection committees found the project selection process a steep learning curve and difficult, partially because of lack of experience of any similar kind of activity, and partially because they were making decisions on applications from neighbours. Validation of the first round of grant applications was delayed for a few months for a number of reasons including an initial approach involving in person presentation of projects by LAG managers, which ultimately proved too complex and time consuming and the process was subsequently simplified. Based on the lessons learned from the two initial rounds of project selection there are clear lessons for streamlining application and validation processes to improve efficiency.

Project delivery has been effective and efficient. Communications between the implementing bodies, however, have not always been smooth due to different expectations of project outcomes leading to some duplication of effort (e.g. in relation to coaches and capacity building). Communication between the implementing bodies and central government policymakers has been limited mainly to interaction at Strategic Steering Committee (SSC) meetings. The SSC is overseeing the entire “Local Empowerment of Actors for Development” (LEAD) Programme consisting of three independent projects<sup>2</sup>. The SCC is made up of representatives of the Donor and the implementing agencies as well as MTAI and Ministry of Economy. There is a diversified level of understanding among the SSC participants in relation to the LEAD4Lori and Tavush Regions project objectives, the role of LAGs, and insufficient level of awareness and understanding of LEADER principles in relation to Ministry of Economy representatives.

### **Sustainability**

Long term sustainability of the LAGs established by the LEAD Project remains a challenge at present time. While there is a generally positive attitude towards the new ‘bottom-up’ approach, a long(er)-term formal commitment of the Government to support and enhance further LEADER development processes, including financially sustaining the existing LAGs, is currently not in place. The Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure, as the main national implementing partner of the project has, however, taken an important step forward by requesting the UNDP project team to assist the Ministry in drafting the 2024-2030 Territorial Development Strategy of Armenia. The Strategy is to be adopted by the Government in 2024. It will have a separate section on LEADER programming in Armenia. The Strategy will propose approaches to enhance LAG sustainability and will also introduce relevant regulatory and legislative changes necessary for the purpose of opening opportunities for LAGs to apply and receive funding from subvention schemes to implement local projects. In addition, FAO is actively involved in mainstreaming the LEADER [and LAG] concept in agriculture policy documents. In recognition of these positive developments the project implementing bodies (UNDP and FAO) now need to focus attention on developing wider support within relevant policy communities over the remaining project period, to ensure LAG sustainability into the future.

### **Recommendations**

The evaluation concludes with a set of recommendations to focus action over the remaining two years of project funding. These focus on five main areas Governance, Advocacy, Capacity Building, Enhancing Processes and Procedures and Capturing outcomes.

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<sup>2</sup> The Programme consist of three independent projects- LEAD4Shirak – co-financed by the Austrian Development Cooperation and implemented by the Austrian Development Agency (ADA) ; LEAD4Lori and Tavush Regions – implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) and EU for Increasing Migrants’ Potential to Act for development of Armenia (EU4IMPACT) – implemented by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD).

Recommendation 1: Strengthen Governance Processes			
Number 1	Institutional focus	Tasks	Priority
	UNDP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Build stronger relationship among the implementation agencies and with national Ministries</li> </ul>	High
	SSC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage scheduling of more frequent meetings with a forward-looking agenda</li> </ul> <p><i>Strategic oversight - It is recommended that the SSC meetings take place more frequently (4 times per year) with a forward-looking agenda (rather than one that focuses on historic activity)</i></p>	High
	Implementing Agencies (UNDP; FAO)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enhance collaboration and transparency between LAG and FAO Farm Association activities. Actions should be integrated and coordinated</li> </ul>	Medium
	UNDP/LAGs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enhance implementation of the 7 LEADER/CLLD principles within LAGs and build LAG identities</li> </ul>	Medium
	LAGs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote integrated delivery of local projects (wider impact)</li> </ul>	Medium
	SSC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Circulate reports of past activity in advance of meetings, focus discussion on future action</li> </ul>	Low

Recommendation 2: Engage in and Enhance Advocacy Activity at National and Regional Level			
Number 2	Institutional focus	Tasks	Priority
	Implementing Agencies (UNDP; FAO)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase advocacy work with policy communities to gain national support for integrated rural development approaches like LEADER, based on bottom-up decision-making</li> </ul> <p><i>Positive endorsement and recent steps taken by the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure to engage UNDP in helping draft the 2024-2030 Territorial Development Strategy of Armenia is encouraging, but the LEAD implementing agencies need to engage in more systematic and coordinated advocacy work and develop a strategy for gaining additional support within the Armenian policy community for LEADER type approaches to rural development.</i></p> <p><i>Greater effort is required to demonstrate the effectiveness of the approach, and the wider benefits to communities in the LAG areas through control systems, monitoring, and evaluation. Both UNDP and FAO need to engage more strongly in advocacy work taking a strategic approach targeting key departments in multiple Ministries to raise the profile of the LEAD project, its benefits, and how it can be successfully managed and utilised as a development tool by central government and regional agencies.</i></p>	High

		<i>Short quarterly reports summarising LAG activity would assist in awareness raising and understanding of the LEAD approach. Targeted meetings with key Ministry personnel would assist UNDP/FAO to better understand central government views and policy direction.</i>	
Implementing Agencies (UNDP; FAO) & MTAI		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage LAGs to be involved in preparation of the regional/national territorial development strategies</li> </ul>	Medium
LAGs/UNDP		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote LAG activities at regional and national level (consider dedicated LAG website, share good practice examples, successful project stories, promote cross-sector partnership collaboration etc.)</li> </ul>	Medium

### Recommendation 3: Strengthen Capacity Development

Number 3	Institutional focus	Tasks	Priority
	Implementing Agencies (UNDP; FAO)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support LAGs to become financially sustainable and build sufficient capacity through flagship projects; LAGs can position themselves as local HUBs in respect of advice, and through pro-active collaboration with other organisations/ foundations / grant giving organisations and regional marzes</li> </ul>	High
	UNDP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Target training to those submitting applications and LAG Selection Committee Members. Use face-to-face training (especially with local stakeholders)</li> </ul>	High
	LAGs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strengthen role of women within LAG bodies and grant applicants</li> </ul>	High
	UNDP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure all LAGs have an independent office, as that strengthens their status within the territory, contributes to LAG identity and independence and provides a base for learning, knowledge exchange and an advisory 'hub'</li> </ul> <p><i>The evaluation has identified the importance and value created through presence of LAGs in defined office space in LAG areas. The existence of an office provides a physical presence and builds trust among the wider LAG area population. A physical space can operate as a 'hub' for dissemination of knowledge and information, and as a source of advice. Face-to-face interaction between LAG members will also improve the potential for collaboration and development of innovative solutions to local problems, and the 'hub' can act as a conduit of information between central and regional governments and local residents.</i></p>	High
	UNDP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop further capacity for decision-making among LAG Managers through training and advisory support</li> </ul> <p><i>LAG Managers measured lower scores on the improvement scale for their personal 'Ability to make decisions', 'Lack of</i></p>	Medium

		<i>trust, and 'Ability to collaborate'. These three outcomes, trust, collaboration, and the capacity for making decisions are closely linked. They tend to be skills based more on experience and learning from mistakes (i.e. learning what does not work, as well as what works through practice) than through formal study or training. These outcomes are ones that should receive additional attention over the remaining project period to improve the capacity to take action, a key element for sustainability, and should also be measured at the final evaluation</i>	
	UNDP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase networking activities within LAGs and among LAGs within Armenia as well as internationally</li> </ul>	Medium
	UNDP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Further capacity building is required at all levels from LAG members up to and including implementing partner organisations</li> </ul>	Medium

Recommendation 4: Enhance and Streamline Internal Processes & Procedures			
Number 4	Institutional focus	Tasks	Priority
	LAGs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve validation and checking procedures such that documentation is verified on submission</li> </ul>	High
	LAGs/UNDP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide longer application period for seed grants and consider lower co-financing level for start ups</li> </ul>	High
	LAGs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enlarge pool of trained Select committee members, consider amending the criteria in case of conflict of interest- [additional member should step in, always ensuring decision-making by 5 members]</li> </ul>	Medium
	UNDP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve decision making processes (increase speed at which decisions made)</li> </ul>	Medium
	UNDP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Undertake quality control/auditing of training delivery</li> </ul>	Medium
	UNDP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Streamline processes based on experience; build on what works</li> </ul> <p><i><u>Grant application criteria and requirements</u> - Improvements can be made through simplification of the requirements and criteria to be met. LEAD is a pilot programme with a key aim of building capacity. Small scale projects in particular should be made accessible to local individuals and organisations through simple application procedures and reasonable lead-in times to enable people first of all to find out about the funding programmes and secondly to get support to submit applications.</i></p> <p><i><u>Equitable spread of funding across the three sectors</u> - The participatory developed LAG SAPs clearly identify a range of strategic priorities including a focus on agricultural value chains and tourism, as well as improvements in local services and quality of life. These issues also appeared in the LAG</i></p>	Medium

	<p><i>discussion groups held as part of this evaluation. Spreading the funding more equally across public and civil society organisations as well as private business is important and will benefit a wider range of local population and develop capacity across the community, enhancing social inclusion and engagement.</i></p>	
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Recommendation 5: Enhance Techniques for Capturing Outcomes and Value Added			
Number 5	Institutional focus	Tasks	Priority
	UNDP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enhance monitoring and evaluation of LAG activities; develop indicators for assessing impact of LAG activities and projects. Introduce a set of new indicators to better capture project outcomes and value added. These should include:</li> </ul> <p><b>Social capital:</b> capacity-building, interactions, communication, voluntary work</p> <p><b>Governance:</b> participation of civil society, partnership with authorities</p> <p><b>Better results:</b> enhanced results compared to standard measures, more resilient communities</p> <p><i>Utilising a set of indicators to monitor the wider social impacts of LAG activities will help provide the evidence needed to convince those at all levels of governance of the value of the approach and its future sustainability. It will also contribute to advocacy actions needed by helping UNDP/FAO determine the key elements of support required beyond the end of the current project funding (e.g. type of support needed, funding requirements) and the potential benefits to be generated from sustainable programme delivery.</i></p>	High
	UNDP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Demonstrate value-added from implementing a LEADER type approach</li> </ul>	High
	Implementing Agencies (UNDP; FAO)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Examine project’s internal monitoring procedures/system and take steps to ensure all relevant data are collected with consistency and coherence</li> </ul>	Medium

## **Chapter I: Background, Aim, Objectives, and Methodology**

### **1.1 Introduction**

This report describes the approach and findings of the mid-term evaluation of the European Union (EU) funded Project on ‘Local Empowerment of Actors for Development (LEAD) in Lori and Tavush Regions’ of Armenia (hereafter referred to as, the Project).

The delivery and implementation context of this project is complex. The project is implemented in Armenia through a set of partner organisations with different roles. The EU is funding the project, the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure (MTAI) is the Implementing Partner; the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is the Delegated Body to the EU; and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) is the UN Partner for partially implementing key elements of the Action. In addition, other local, regional, and national bodies are involved as partners, including the local and regional administrations, the Ministry of Economy of the Republic of Armenia (MoE), business associations, civil society organisations (CSOs), and other stakeholders and beneficiaries (UNDP Terms of Reference).

The purpose of the evaluation is to provide a mid-term review of the project outcomes, to enable those implementing the project, as well as national level policy makers have a better sense of the extent to which the project is meeting its objectives, identification of barriers to implementation, and opportunities for improved delivery. An evaluation of outcomes against project objectives before the end date also enables the implementing partners to explore potential for altering the implementation approach and/or diverting resources to under-performing areas.

#### **Structure of the report**

Section 1 provides background and context to the LEAD project design and delivery, essential for understanding the conditions under which the project was (and continues to be) implemented. It also provides an overview of the evaluation scope, objectives, and methodology.

Section 2 is the main part of this report analysing the project impacts in relation to five evaluative criteria (Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Impact, Sustainability). Data are presented and analysed from a range of sources to determine the extent to which the project meets the criteria.

The final part of the report, Section 3, provides some concluding discussion and recommendations for the remaining period of project implementation.

### **1.2 Background and context of the Project**

The Project’s overall goal has been defined as:

*‘To promote local growth and development, leading to improved quality of life, through community engagement in economic and social activities, with particular focus on Lori and Tavush regions of Armenia.’*

The project has three overarching project Objectives (Table 1.1):

**Objective 1:** Mobilize, capacitate, and incentivize local actors to define community needs-driven strategies in Lori and Tavush regions.

**Objective 2:** Build supporting infrastructure to prioritize, implement and sustain local-grown initiatives in Lori and Tavush regions.



**Objective 3:** Improve the capacity of the relevant ministries and other bodies and develop policy mechanisms at the national level for successful piloting and sustainability of the LEADER approach in Armenia (policy component).

The project anticipates that successful implementation will generate the following ‘expected Project outputs’:

- At least 5 territorial strategic development plans created, and 5 LAGs established
- Around 1,000 local residents mobilized and capacitated for actively contributing to their local development
- 70 representatives from regional and central government capacitated
- 150 local initiatives funded during the course of the Project
- 160 businesses supported, 200 new employment opportunities created, and over 3,000 local residents benefited from the post recovery measures

The project aims to improve capacity for governance at both local and central government levels in recognition of the integrated nature of the LEADER approach and the need for support through all levels of government. The project design incorporates recognition of the need for improved understanding of the LEADER approach within relevant government ministries to ensure support beyond the end of the project funding period. Project outputs include the creation of 5 LAGs in two regions (Lori and Tavush), one of which crosses the regional boundary.

What works in the EU may not work so well in Armenia, and/or require modifications to be effective. The project is therefore very much a pilot to explore alternative forms of LEAD delivery. The project is not merely a replication of the EU LEADER Programme, but an attempt to identify what works and how best to initiate and support ‘bottom-up’ sustainable rural development in Armenia.

**Table 1.1 Summary of project objectives and key components**

<b>Overall goal</b>	<b>Promote local growth and development, leading to improved quality of life, through community engagement in economic and social activities, with particular focus on Lori and Tavush regions of Armenia.</b>	
<b>Objective 1</b>	Mobilize, capacitate, and incentivize local actors to define community needs-driven strategies in Lori and Tavush regions	
<b>Output 1.0</b>	Emergency response action to the socioeconomic crisis created by COVID-19 and humanitarian crisis in Armenia because of the war in Nagorno-Karabagh	UNDP
<b>Output 2.0.1</b>	Emergency response action to the socioeconomic crisis created by COVID-19 and humanitarian crisis in Armenia because of the war in Nagorno-Karabagh	FAO

<b>Objective 1</b>	<b>Outputs</b>	<b>Lead Agency</b>
Mobilize, capacitate, and incentivise local actors to define community needs-driven strategies in Lori and Tavush	1.1 Replicable mechanism for community mobilization, engagement, and animation established and operational	UNDP-FAO
	1.2 Improved capacity of local actors to develop and deliver community needs-driven vision and strategy	UNDP-FAO
	1.3 Community needs-driven strategies developed in an inclusive and evidence-based manner and promoted in the target regions of the Project	UNDP

regions	Sub-output 1.3 Agricultural section for community needs-driven strategies developed in an inclusive and evidence-based manner	FAO
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Objective 2	Outputs	Lead Agency
Build supporting infrastructure to prioritize, implement and sustain local-grown initiatives in the northern and other target territories	2.1. LAGs established, and applicants/ grantees capacitated	UNDP
	2.2 A pool of fundable initiatives created for further prioritization and implementation	UNDP
	2.3 A pool of initiatives financed through a result- based scheme established	UNDP
	Sub-output 2.3 Capacities of the applicants of the pool of fundable initiatives and evidence-based funding from the primary agricultural production sector are strengthened (if it relates also to agricultural processing, upon coordination with UNDP)	FAO
	2.4. Networking and cooperation established, and lessons learned shared and documented	UNDP-FAO
	Sub-output 2.4 Strengthen the cooperation between farmers through capacity building and consultancy	FAO

Objective 3	Outputs	Lead Agency
Capacity of ministries and other relevant bodies are improved and policy mechanisms at national level are developed for the successful piloting and sustainability of the LEADER approach in Armenia (policy component)	3.1 Policy framework for overall adaptation of the LEADER approach to the territorial development strategy of Armenia	UNDP
	3.2 Policy framework adjusted regarding Armenia's agricultural policy	FAO

Source: LEAD Project Document (signed) 2020

## Project context

The project was initiated in a context of global pandemic and influx of refugees from the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict during September – November 2020 and more recently in 2023. The project started a few months after the pandemic had impacted Armenia. The first cases occurred in March 2020 and increased rapidly resulting in declaration of a state of emergency which had significant social and economic impacts on the country (UNDP, 2020a). Concerns were expressed that the COVID-19 pandemic was impacting the most vulnerable sectors of society, affecting employment, education, increasing child poverty and malnutrition, and impacting women disproportionately. The LEAD4 Lori and Tavush Regions project provided emergency support to target communities during the first year of its implementation, to address the problems resulting from these two issues and consequently

attention was initially diverted from achieving the primary objectives of implementing rural development based on LEADER principles.

The LEAD project is being initiated in rural areas with high levels of deprivation, creating a challenging operational environment. Poverty is a major problem in Armenia where it is estimated that around one quarter of the population are affected by material and non-material deprivation (UNDP 2020a). Assessing poverty and changes in poverty is not straightforward and various measures exist. In 2021 an estimated 26.1% of the population lived below the national poverty level (Asian Development Bank, 2023). The World Bank reports that poverty declined from 35.8% to 23.5% over the period 2010-2018 but this was largely due to redistributive policies and not to improvements in productivity although GDP has risen (in 2022 GDP per capita growth was the highest in the region at 12.6%). Since the outbreak of a military conflict poverty has increased slightly. Inequality is significant with higher levels of wealth in Yerevan and greater levels of poverty in the rural areas with less access to employment opportunities, inadequate housing, and access to public services<sup>3</sup>. Inequality is reported to have increased slightly over the 2020-21 period (World Bank, 2023).

A slightly different approach by the World Food Programme to explore linkages between poverty and food insecurity undertook a Food Security and Vulnerability Assessment (FSVA) through a large household survey in mid-2022, measuring poverty rates in Armenia based on 'monthly food and non-food expenditures in households' (World Food Programme, 2023). The assessment suggested a 2% increase from the previous year in food insecurity (23% households) while food/extreme poverty increased to 9% and the average poverty rate revealed a 5% increase on the previous year to 32%. The analysis of survey data also suggested that 43% proportion of food insecure households eligible for inclusion in the Family Living Standards Enhancement Benefit Programme (FLSEBP) were not being supported 'as they did not fit within the poverty definition even if they were food insecure'. The report estimated overall poverty rate of 27% in 2021<sup>4</sup> with 21% of the population food insecure and 54% 'at risk of falling into food insecurity'. This is despite the existence of over one hundred social protection and poverty alleviation programmes within the country.

Further analysis in Lori and Tavush regions showed that, despite a general increase in poverty figures in most regions since 2021, Armstat measurements in 2021 and WFP measurements in 2022 present similar poverty rates and relative poverty rankings. The highest poverty rates were seen in Shirak (47%), Lori (46%), Gegharkunik (40%) and Tavush (39%) regions as per WFP calculations (World Food Programme, 2023). According to Armstat the poorest regions were Gegharkunik (48%), Shirak (43%) and Tavush (38%).

Economic development is largely focused on the capital, Yerevan which accounts for 70% of business employment and turnover (UNDP, 2020a) while the rural areas suffer from poor communications (roads, access to broadband), low wages and employment, and lack of access to public services. This is the context in which the LEAD project is operating and developing the potential for capacity building at community level.

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<sup>3</sup> The Government Statistical committee indicated the 2021 urban poverty rate was 21.8% and 33% for rural residents. Yerevan's 2021 poverty rate was 15.9%. Outside the Armenian capital, the poverty rate in the provinces of Gegharkunik and Shirak were the highest - 49.1% and 46.9%, respectively. <https://hetq.am/en/article/150676>

<sup>4</sup> The report notes that poverty levels in Armenia are calculated based on World Bank methodology using the Integrated Living Conditions Survey (ILCS) conducted by the National Statistical Committee of RA (Armstat) on annual basis.

### 1.3 Aim of the Evaluation

This report describes the Mid-term evaluation of the Local Empowerment of Actors for Development (LEAD) project that is being implemented in the Lori and Tavush Regions of Armenia over the 2020-24 period. Mid-term evaluations play a valuable role in programme and project implementation through enabling both local stakeholders and policymakers to look both backwards at progress achieved (summative) and forwards (formative) while there is still time to implement changes that can improve project delivery.

The proposed objectives and utilisation of evaluation findings require an emphasis on assessing the current level of progress and improving understanding of the processes and mechanisms that support and hinder implementation and achievement of objectives. There is an emphasis on ensuring information is captured from a wide range of stakeholders and utilised to validate the evaluation findings. This evaluation report is intended to provide evidence of strengths and weaknesses of the project implementation and identify scope for improvement. The primary audience for the evaluation includes the following:

- UNDP and FAO project personnel
- The EU delegation (funding body)
- Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure (MTAI) (the implementing partner)
- Members of the Strategic Steering Committee (SSC) which includes:
  - Representatives from Lori and Tavush Marzer<sup>5</sup>
  - Representatives from central government ministries (primarily MTAI and the Ministry of Economy (which includes agriculture)
  - Representative of other agencies
- LAG managers

Each organisation identified above has slightly different interests, though all will be interested in the project processes, the overall extent to which project objectives have been attained, and where difficulties exist.

### 1.4 Purpose, Objectives and Scope of the Evaluation

The Terms of Reference state that the purpose of the evaluation is to:

*'...make available independent evaluative evidence at the mid-point of the Project implementation to learn on 1) the actual progress made towards the planned targets and expected results and 2) the recommended course corrections or adjustments of approaches as applicable.'*

The objectives of the evaluation are described in the following manner:

- (i) Assess the continued relevance of the intervention to the changing local development context
- (ii) Measure the progress and fix the current achievement point coming from this independent external review on the Project's progress towards the planned targets and results in Results Framework vis-à-vis the baselines; discuss reasons behind, conducive and impeding factors
- (iii) Learn about effectiveness, efficiency, as well as, if available already at this stage, prospects for sustainability and impact of the interventions
- (iv) Review and, if needed, introduce adjustments to the Theory of Change behind this project
- (v) Identify and formulate lessons learned identified during the project implementation

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<sup>5</sup> Marz (մարզ), plural marzer (մարզեր) is usually translated as 'region' or 'province'.

- (vi) Validate overall approaches and identify new paths in area-based/territorial development

Evaluation criteria and guiding questions can be found in Table 1.2.

The scope of the evaluation is described as addressing Project activities undertaken over 01 October 2020 to 30 September 2023 period. The evaluation was required to:

- fix the actual values of the Results Framework output, sub-output, and outcome indicators
- make a comparison and discuss the progress from the baseline towards the planned values and the actual progress made
- discuss the results in place along with contribution and attribution aspects. The evaluation will extract lessons learned; diagnose and analyse issues, formulate concrete and viable set of recommendations

**Table 1.2 Evaluative Criteria and guiding questions utilised in the evaluation**

Criteria	Evaluation Guiding Questions
<b>Relevance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are Project activities/components relevant to actual/defined needs of beneficiaries?</li> <li>• Were the objectives clear and feasible?</li> <li>• How do main components of the Project contribute to planned objectives and are they logically interlinked?</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is the Project in line with the current priorities of the country?</li> <li>• How is the Project aligned with, and support the national, regional and community strategies/plans?</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has the Project involved relevant stakeholders through consultative processes or information-sharing during its preparation phase?</li> <li>• Were the territorial/rural development needs considered during the Project implementation and did it reflect the various needs of tripartite stakeholders of LAGs and different stakeholders? Are these needs still relevant?</li> <li>• Have any new/more relevant needs emerged the Project should consider / address?</li> </ul>
<b>Effectiveness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How effective has the Project been in establishing ownership by the stakeholders?</li> <li>• How has the Project encouraged ownership on behalf of the beneficiaries for learning and applying the newly acquired knowledge and skills in practice?</li> <li>• Can the Project management and implementation be considered as participatory?</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is the Project making sufficient progress towards planned objectives / outcomes / outputs?</li> <li>• What are the key achievements, challenges, and implementation lessons? How can these be applied to the Project?</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent has the capacity building work been effective and did it serve its purpose?</li> </ul>
<b>Efficiency</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent has the project implementing parties made good use of the human, financial and technical resources, and has used an appropriate combination of tools and approaches to pursue the achievement of Project results in a cost-effective manner?</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Was there a clear distribution of roles and responsibilities of key actors involved?</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent did the Project capitalize on other complementary initiatives to the Project to reinforce the results of the Project?</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have Project funds and activities been delivered in a timely manner?</li> <li>• If not, what were the bottlenecks encountered?</li> <li>• To what extent are the activities and achieved results cost-efficient?</li> </ul>

<b>Sustainability (to the extent possible)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To what extent has the Project been able to support the local underprivileged communities in identifying their local territorial development strategies and addressing their local needs of rural development, including economic development in this mid-term period?</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What are the possible sustainability prerequisites for each of the Project components?</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What are the hindering factors for ensuring the sustainability of Project outcomes?</li> </ul>
<b>Impact (to the extent possible)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Has the Project contributed, or is likely to contribute, to the long-term political / social changes for individuals, communities, and institutions in relation to its main development, national development agenda that the Project is aligned with, SDGs, etc?</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To what extent has the Project achieved its overarching goal of improved quality, transparency, and inclusiveness of area-based/territorial development local processes, operations?</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Has the Project had any intended or unintended secondary effect throughout the implementation?</li> </ul>

Source: Evaluation Team, 2023

## 1.5 Evaluation Methodology

The evaluation examined Project activities undertaken over the period 01 October 2020 - 30 September 2023. The evaluation has completed the following elements:

- identification of the actual values of the Results Framework output, sub-output, and outcome indicators
- compared and discussed the progress from the baseline towards the planned values and the actual progress made
- collected data through multiple methods, including document analysis; interviews and discussion groups held in all 5 LAG areas, interviews with UNDP and FAO implementing bodies, and through interviews with representatives of regional and central government agencies
- analysis of factors affecting outcome and outputs, generate lessons learned, and formulation of viable recommendations for the final period of Project implementation

### Evaluation approach

The evaluation approach was designed around the constraints of limited time and resources for collecting relevant information from key stakeholders within Armenia. The evaluation has taken a qualitative approach utilising LAG level discussion groups and face-to-face interviews with a range of stakeholders at local, regional, and central government levels. Evaluators needed to understand how a wide range of stakeholders (those involved in the project either as beneficiaries or implementers) have been impacted by the LEAD Project, how they perceive the challenges and opportunities, and the factors supporting and constraining action. Figure 1.1 provides a schematic overview illustrating the implementation context at local regional and central government levels. The evaluation was designed to ensure engagement with representative stakeholders at all levels across both operating and policy contexts through participatory approaches. Empirical data were supported through analysis of documentary evidence and validated through triangulation of sources.

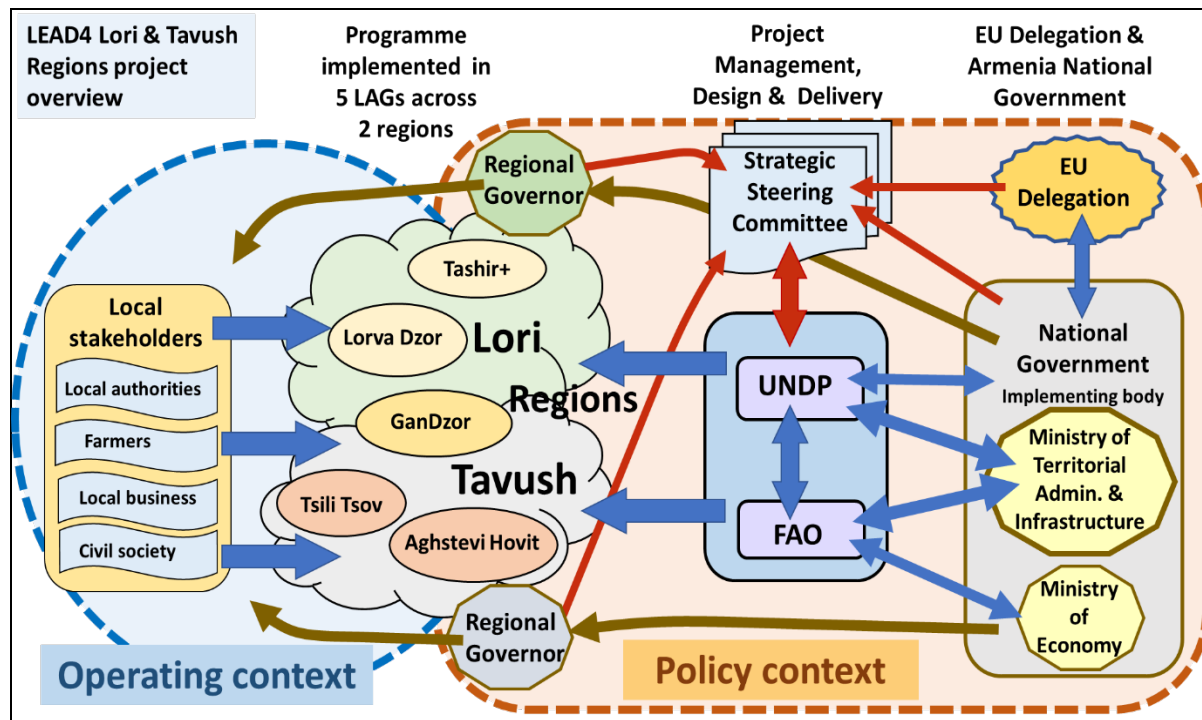
### Data sources, data collection procedures and instruments

The overall evaluation approach comprised a mix of methods to explore the following:

- qualitative techniques to assess changes in understanding, knowledge and skills, perceptions, socio-economic wellbeing and governance in the LAG areas
- quantitative indicators of data collected by LAGs, UNDP, and the FAO

- an analysis of key documents describing establishment, process, and operation of the LEAD project, and qualitative data from a range of key stakeholders through face-to-face semi-structured interviews and discussion groups at LAG level

**Figure 1.1 Schematic overview of the delivery context for the LEAD Project in Lori and Tavush Regions**



Source: Evaluation Team 2023 (Interpretation of the programme delivery context)

The aim of the evaluation was to assess impacts of the project on a range of stakeholder groups which required detailed understanding of how the LEAD Project has been implemented, the identified outcomes to date, process and local contextual factors affecting implementation, and the understanding and perceptions of those observing, implementing, and benefitting from the project.

The main methods utilised were:

Document analysis:

Analysis of annual UNDP and FAO project reports, budgetary information, SSC Meeting notes, LAG Strategy Documents, and other relevant papers relating to governance and policy development in Armenia.

Face-to-face interviews with the following:

- Each of the 5 LAGs was visited involving interviews with: the LAG Manager, Farmer Association Specialist/Manager, Accountable Body representative (4 LAGs), Members of Select Committee, UNDP and FAO study trip participants
- Regional Governor Offices in Lori and Tavush
- Representatives of implementing bodies (UNDP, FAO), EU Delegation, and central government (MTAI and Ministry of Economy)
- A sample of grant funding beneficiaries (N=15)
- Other stakeholders with a role in implementation (e.g. a representative of the training organisation)



#### In-person discussion groups:

- Facilitated discussion groups were held in each of the 5 LAGs with mixed groups of LAG members representing all 3 sectors of the partnership (total participants across 5 groups: N= 47)

#### **Sampling and stakeholder selection**

- All 5 LAGs were visited, and key personnel interviewed (i.e. LAG Manager, members of selection committee, Farmers Association Specialist/Manager, and representative of the accountable body)
- Discussion groups were assembled with support from UNDP and the LAG Managers to provide representation of different interests, groups, and sectors within each LAG. Groups consisted of 8 – 10 participants, mostly those that had been involved in some way with establishing the LAG, engaged in strategic planning, or had applied for/received grant funding. It was not deemed appropriate (or possible) to select a random sample of the LAG population for discussion as the evaluative focus was on how the LAG had affected different categories of stakeholder, and barriers to current and future LAG activity. Holding discussion groups in each LAG enabled comparison between LAG areas, and identification of common problems and issues
- Interviews with UNDP and FAO study trips participants were conducted in each LAG; participants were identified with the help of the LAG managers, in order to secure representation across all the study trips locations - Hungary, Georgia, Slovenia, Austria
- Representative stakeholders from regional and national policy arenas were identified with support from UNDP as those most closely involved with project implementation. Face-to-face interviews were conducted during the fieldwork mission in October 2024
- Implementing agency personnel managing the LEAD project were identified and interviewed
- Grant beneficiary interviewees were selected to represent a range of different project types, sectors, and operational scales (3 from each LAG). Interviews were conducted in November/ December by a local consultant contracted by UNDP and supported by the main evaluation team

#### **Ethical considerations**

The evaluation team have applied the Ethical Research Guidelines of the University of Gloucestershire and UNEG 'Ethical Guidelines for Evaluators'<sup>6</sup>. This includes protection of the rights and confidentiality of informants. Interviewee names are not linked to specific quotes or statements and where necessary attribution is through a coding system that is only available to the two members of the CCRI evaluation team. University ethical guidance<sup>7</sup> requires all researchers to maintain anonymity and privacy of research participants; personal information relating to participants is required to be kept confidential and secure. All researchers must comply with the provisions of current data protection and privacy legislation.

#### **Data collection procedures and instruments**

All interviews, apart from two, were face-to-face with key stakeholders at local, regional, and national level. Interviews were semi-structured with questions designed to elicit a range of information for answering evaluation questions. Interview questions were tailored to the knowledge and role of each

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<sup>6</sup> UNEG, 2020, Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation: <http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/2866>

<sup>7</sup> University of Gloucestershire (2023) Research Ethics: A Handbook of principles and procedures. <https://www.glos.ac.uk/information/knowledge-base/research-ethics-a-handbook-of-principles-and-procedures/#ConfidentialityAnonymity>



category of stakeholder. Where appropriate, rating scales were developed to provide quantitative measures for comparison across LAGs and across stakeholders with different perceptions of project implementation. Interview data is thus a mix of qualitative information supported by quantitative measures from rating scales.

Beneficiary interviews were conducted during November/December 2023 by a local consultant utilising questions designed by the evaluation team. Beneficiary interviews were shorter in length and contained a simplified set of rating scales. This was done for several reasons: the interviews were conducted by a local consultant; interview questions had to be translated into Armenian and the results translated back into English; the interview was more narrowly focused on how the interviewee had benefitted from grant funding, and experiences of the application process.

LAG Discussion groups were facilitated, supported by an interpreter, and designed to explore four broad themes (problems/issues, what worked/did not work; personal and community benefits, and future LAG activity).

Questionnaires were developed with guidance from UNDP project personnel prior to fieldwork taking place in Armenia and used as a guide during interviews and discussions. The lead evaluator was accompanied by an interpreter at majority of meetings (interviews and discussion groups). Extensive fieldwork was conducted during the period 24<sup>th</sup> October – 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2023 as demonstrated in the table below.

Type of stakeholder	Number of interviewees
LAG managers	5
FAO Farm Ass. Specialist/Manager	5
LAG Select Committee representatives	8
LAG Accountable Body representative	4
Community Coaches - training organisation (NGO)	1
Study trip participants (Austria, Hungary, Slovenia, Georgia)	14
Project beneficiaries- 5 LAGs	15
UNDP LEAD project team	3
FAO LEAD project team	2
EU Delegation	1
Ministry of Economy	1
Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure	3
Deputy PM office, DAD focal point	1
ICMPD	1
<b>Total no. of interviewees</b>	<b>64</b>
LAG Discussion Groups (5)	47
<b>TOTAL (Interviews + Discussion Group participants)</b>	<b>111</b>

Qualitative methods (discourse and thematic analysis) were utilised to analyse the interview and discussion group data to answer the questions outlined under each of the evaluative criteria identified in Table 1.2. Interviews tailored to different types of stakeholders contained similar questions to enable comparative analysis and triangulation of data sources.

The evaluation was designed to determine the extent to which the three over-arching objectives are being addressed, using the evaluative criteria to determine relevance, effectiveness, efficiency of

delivery, sustainability, and impact. A three-stage process was conducted to address the overarching project objectives (Figure 1.2).

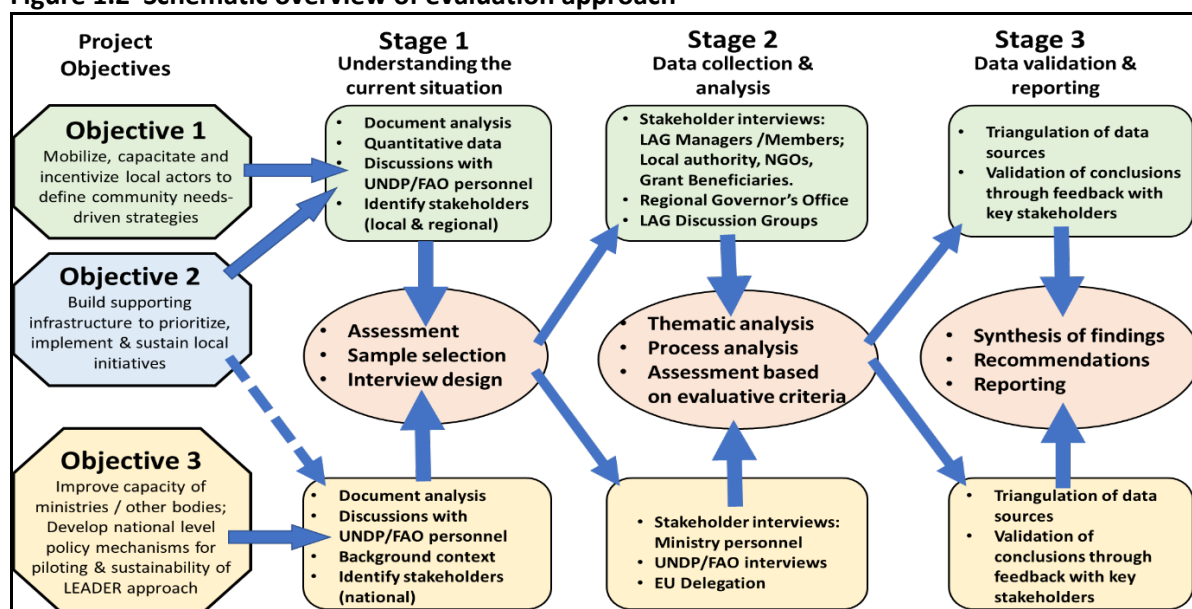
**Stage 1** incorporated the Inception phase of the evaluation (i.e. selection and contracting of the evaluation team; introductory meeting; introductory briefing, discussing timeline, Inception report, other TOR parameters and agreeing on the document sharing method). A rapid review of documents was conducted by the evaluation team to understand the project implementation context, the characteristics of outputs over the period 01 October 2020 - 30 June 2023 [initial evaluation timeline], the intervention logic and theory of change. Stage 1 also involved discussions with UNDP personnel along with document review to ascertain the current situation and improve understanding of the local operating context and national policy context in which the project is being implemented.

Assessment of evidence in Stage 1 was used to help design discussion group schedules and questionnaires to be used in the face-to-face interviews. Interviews were tailored to each category of stakeholder interviewed (e.g., LAG Manager, Farmers Associations Specialist/Manager, Accountable Body, Regional Governor Office, implementing agencies, etc.; see Figure 1.1) to ensure coverage of all relevant issues.

**Stage 2** focused on data collection and primary analysis to determine if sufficient evidence was being collected to answer the evaluation questions. Following on from the fieldwork conducted in October/ beginning of November it was decided that the evaluation period should be extended until the end of September 2023. Further evidence was therefore required from project grant beneficiaries and an additional round of face-to-face interviews with beneficiaries in each LAG was conducted by a local consultant.

Objectives 1 and 2 involved engagement with stakeholders at the local level and the data collection was conducted through face-to-face interviews and discussion groups. Objective 3 has a national focus and evidence was collected through a small number of face-to-face interviews with relevant personnel from central government ministries. These interviews also provided evidence regarding the extent to which the aims of Objective 2 are being delivered and to explore the potential for continued support for the LEADER approach beyond the project funding period.

**Figure 1.2 Schematic overview of evaluation approach**



Source: Evaluation team, 2023

**Stage 3** combined secondary analysis, synthesis and validation of findings, and report writing. The report writing activity included development of a set of recommendations for project implementation over the remaining time period up to 2024, along with recommendations for longer-term action where appropriate and where sufficient evidence was available to make judgements. Evaluation findings were validated through triangulation processes (comparing multiple relevant sources) and through feedback with key stakeholders where appropriate (and possible) to confirm understanding and clarify conflicting evidence.

### **Evaluation Limitations**

All possible efforts were made to minimize potential limitations in the evaluation process. One limitation encountered was the timing for fieldwork and data collection. The evaluation is heavily reliant on face-to-face interviews and discussion groups with a wide range of personnel including LAG Managers and other LAG members, Regional Governor offices, central government ministries personnel, and project implementing bodies. Due to the shift in timing of the fieldwork from summer to autumn the evaluation team was only able to put one person in the field for one week, which slightly limited the scope for in-depth discussions at both LAG and central government level. Despite the limitations more than 30 interviews and 5 discussion groups were held. The evaluation team was also able to use a local consultant to conduct beneficiary interviews in late November/ beginning of December 2023.

## **Chapter II: Analysis and Findings**

### **2.1 Relevance**

#### **2.1.1 Relevance of project components**

There are three major objectives to the LEAD project, each delivered through a number of specific activities (Table 1.1). The initial phase of project work in Year 1 (October 2020 - September 2021) and Year 2 (Oct. 2021 – September 2022) was heavily influenced by the social and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the humanitarian crisis caused by the war in Nagorno-Karabagh. In addition, snap elections (2021) in the National Assembly and local elections (due to territorial reform) delayed project delivery in particular with community engagement during political campaigning periods. Changes in government personnel also resulted in revised timetabling of certain activities due to the need to develop new relationships with government departments (UNDP, 2021).

Objective 1 of the Project (Mobilize, capacitate, and incentivize local actors to define community needs-driven strategies in Lori and Tavush regions) was put aside when the project started in order to focus on delivery of two outputs:

- Output 1.0 Emergency response action to the socioeconomic crisis created by COVID-19 and humanitarian crisis in Armenia because of the war in Nagorno-Karabagh (UNDP)
- Output 2.0.1 Emergency response action to the socioeconomic crisis created by COVID-19 and humanitarian crisis in Armenia because of the war in Nagorno-Karabagh (FAO)

These actions were undertaken to support national level strategic programmes providing support to deal with the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The main activities were attempts to mitigate the economic impacts in Tavush and Lori regions through inclusion of individuals and businesses affected by the pandemic.

Overall, as far as relevance is concerned, the LEAD Project design and formulation complement the National Programmes and Strategies, particularly the Armenian Regional Development Strategy for 2016-2025, implemented by the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure (MTAI), specifically its focus on the sustainable use of resources, improvement of territorial development through a more active participation of regional and local players in the planning and implementation of development processes, and modernisation of governance systems. Furthermore, it is contributing to the goals set in the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA), the Government Programme 2019-2024, and Strategy for Sustainable Agricultural Development in the Republic of Armenia, as well as Agenda 2030.

In addition, the Project objectives will contribute to the enhancement of more inclusive economic and social development in the targeted LAG areas of the Lori and Tavush marzes. There is a role for the LAGs to be actively involved in the preparation of the future Regional Development Strategy and contribute to the national Territorial Development Strategy of Armenia for the period 2024-2030, which is currently being prepared.

The LEAD Project has introduced a completely new methodology for rural territorial development in Armenia. While there exists a generally positive attitude towards this new approach, a lasting formal commitment from the Government to support and foster further LEADER development processes is not in place at present. Nevertheless, the MTAI has engaged UNDP to assist them with the drafting of the Territorial Development Strategy of Armenia for the period of 2024-2030. The Strategy is to be adopted by the Government later this year (2024). Moreover, the document is to include a dedicated section on the LEADER programme in Armenia, including a proposal for various approaches to support

the sustainability of Local Action Groups (LAGs). In addition, FAO is actively trying to incorporate the notion of LEADER approach and LAGs into agriculture related policies.

### 2.1.2 Clarity and feasibility of project objectives

The three main LEAD Project objectives are listed below:

**Objective 1:** Mobilize, capacitate, and incentivize local actors to define community needs-driven strategies in Lori and Tavush regions.

**Objective 2:** Build supporting infrastructure to prioritize, implement and sustain local-grown initiatives in Lori and Tavush regions.

**Objective 3:** Improve the capacity of the relevant ministries and other bodies and develop policy mechanisms at the national level for successful piloting and sustainability of the LEADER approach in Armenia (policy component).

As noted in the previous section, the LEAD4 Lori & Tavush Project objectives are clearly identified along with a phased strategy for implementation, but the initial project period was complicated by the requirement to respond to the perceived impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. This requirement slowed the LEAD project implementation in the two regions through diversion of UNDP and FAO resources and personnel to address local needs emanating from the pandemic.

The Project objectives are ambitious given the limited time frame for implementation, the local context of armed conflict resulting in significant inward migration, reform of territorial administration, unfamiliarity with community engagement and decision making, level of employment, poverty, lack of public services and outward emigration of young people from the two regions. The first two objectives focus on action within the regions. At the local level, the two main partners (UNDP, FAO) recognised the difficulties and established an effective strategy for implementation utilising local 'community coaches' to raise awareness among the wider population and engage with stakeholders. However, finding those with sufficient capacity for engagement as well as providing the basic infrastructure to support five LAGs (e.g. suitable office space, equipment, administrative support) have been challenging tasks.

### 2.1.3 Contribution of main project components to planned objectives

Project objectives involved establishment of 5 LAGS (Local Action Groups) which required a high level of preparation in terms of capacity building and field survey work to establish both the initial regional locations and identify individual LAG boundaries. It was decided early in the design phase to operate LAGs in more than one region to explore the extent to which the regional context influenced LAG operation and outcomes. Project time and available funding constraints limited the number of LAGs that could be established to five, to be situated in two neighbouring regions or provinces, (referred to as Marzes in Armenian):

- Lori Marz is in the North of the country covering 12.7% of total area of Armenia (3,789 km<sup>2</sup> with a population of 235,537 in 2011<sup>8</sup>)
- Tavush Marz is in the North-east of the country bordering Georgia and Azerbaijan and covering 9% of Armenia (2,704 km<sup>2</sup> with a population of 128,609 in 2011<sup>9</sup>)

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<sup>8</sup> Based on 2011 Census data. <https://armeniadiscovery.com/en/region/lori>

<sup>9</sup> Tavush Province. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tavush\\_Province](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tavush_Province)

There were several reasons for selecting the two regions. The EU as a funding body wanted to pilot the LEADER approach in Armenia following successful applications in Moldova and Georgia but the aim was to explore different approaches in three Marzes. Lori and Tavush Marzes are both very rural, relatively remote with poor communications, and both are mountainous regions with low density rural populations<sup>10</sup>, and thus suitable, if potentially difficult, areas for piloting an adapted LEADER programme. The Austrian Development Agency (ADA) was committed to piloting one approach in Shirak Marz in North-west Armenia while the UNDP and FAO had other projects and experience of working in Lori and Tavush Marzes and wanted to continue working there (Implementation Agency Interview, 2023).

Regional needs and objectives were taken into consideration through involvement of the Regional Governor Offices in establishing LAG areas and inclusion of Regional Governor's on the Strategic Steering Committee (SSC). Local needs were considered through the extensive field surveys and fact-finding missions carried out in the first phase of the project by local coaches. This initial evaluation of the local situations on the ground improved understanding of the local context and helped to identify and modify potential LAG areas and boundaries drawn up internally by UNDP and FAO experts (Implementation Agency Interview, 2023). LAG area selection was also influenced by the desire to test programme implementation in different local contexts (because it is a pilot programme, and this would provide greater insight into the impact of local context on project delivery). This resulted in two LAGs situated in Lori Marz, two in Tavush (one near the border with Azerbaijan) and one that straddles the two administrative regions. The intention being to explore what works and learn lessons for future governance (Implementation Agency Interview, 2023).

#### **2.1.4 Alignment with national priorities**

The concept of strategic planning for development is commonly understood and practiced across Armenia at national, regional, and municipal levels. The standard approach tends to be one of top-down delivery involving relevant authorities and government officials with expert input but limited regarding participation from the wide range of stakeholders potentially affected by the planning. The aim of the LEAD project, on the other hand is to implement a bottom-up rural development process based on LEADER principles (as applied across the EU) and directly involving participation by local stakeholders who will be affected. In order to do this UNDP/FAO had to establish, from a zero baseline, a community approach supported by skilled experts to create a set of local LAG strategies that demonstrated how locally developed objectives can help deliver national and regional priorities using an approach that can be understood at local, regional and national levels.

The LEAD programme undertook a wide-ranging data collection exercise at the local level throughout the two regions to improve the expert's understanding of issues at the local community level. This was considered essential since the LAGs would essentially be creating community development strategies more reliant on local stakeholder input as opposed to higher level regional or national plans (Implementation Agency Interview, 2023).

*“Experts worked with local people and facilitated the project. The process of developing strategic action plans went through a series of facilitated workshops with specific questions and specific parts of the assess strategic action plans directed at the local people*

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<sup>10</sup> Tavush is heavily forested with a high dependence on subsistence agriculture and low agricultural index (less than 5% share of national agricultural production) but with scope for tourism development based on the cultural heritage. Lori has more favourable conditions with around two-thirds of the land potentially available for arable production and higher level of industry than Tavush Marz (though still low at 6% of national industrial production) with some remnants of a former mining industry and some tourism.

*to come up with their own ideas, starting from local customary practice...which was then aligned with national priorities.” (Implementation Agency Interview, 2023).*

LAG strategies were developed through facilitated workshops in the LAG areas. The intention was to create local strategies for each LAG area that would be used to guide action over the period of the LEAD project and beyond. Expert input was required, however, due to the lower skills level, and the lack of experience and capacity for writing strategy and planning documents at the level of LAGs. Support was also required to enable identification of local objectives, alignment with national policy objectives, budgetary and financial limitations, and to create documents acceptable to national level policy makers. UNDP/FAO experts were involved in providing these elements of support for strategic development (incorporating statistical analysis of data and integration with national policy objectives) as this type of activity was beyond the capacity of local stakeholders to address within the limited time-frame available for strategy development. The intention was to provide evidence supporting LAG objectives demonstrating how they fit with national priorities, in an acceptable format.

*“...the territorial development strategies are for the LAGs to be used by the LAGs, but because we also need to present and justify the project at national level, we need also to speak...with the language of the national government to help them to understand how it fits into their operations and priorities.” (Implementation Agency Interview, 2023).*

Individual LAG strategies thus follow a standard template design and incorporate a mix of local knowledge and input in identifying locally important issues along with skilled data analysis and interpretation linking local objectives to national policy priorities. In this way the LEAD programme has created a new approach to strategic rural development that enables the integration of community level objectives with broader regional and national policy goals. Getting the local development strategies completed and adopted has been a major achievement of the LEAD programme. Making them operational has been more difficult; a key drawback in implementation of the LAG strategies being the initial delay in getting started due to COVID-19 pandemic and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which means that the LAGs had not been operating for as long as originally planned at the time this mid-term evaluation was carried out.

Overall, the Project design and formulation complement the National Programmes and Strategies particularly the Armenian Regional Development Strategy for 2016-2025, implemented by the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure (MTAI). The regional development strategies were scrapped by the national government in 2022, hence it is not possible to identify alignments at present. Furthermore, UNDP and FAO aligned their activities towards contributing to the goals set in the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA), the Government Programme 2019-2024, and Strategy for Sustainable Agricultural Development in the Republic of Armenia, as well as Agenda 2030.

### **2.1.5 Stakeholder involvement**

Under the LEAD for Lori & Tavush Regions Project a total of five LAGs were established through a process involving considerable levels of stakeholder engagement. Following the formal project launch (March 2021) regional events took place throughout the two regions to raise awareness. From the very beginning the project took a participatory and capacity building approach based on recognition that the local population would be unfamiliar with LEADER principles and the approach would be unlike any previous development approach. It was clear from the start that a high level of animation would be required. ‘Animation’, the term commonly used by those involved with implementing LEADER in the European Union, is a process of facilitating stakeholder involvement through building awareness and understanding of the need for an integrated approach to rural development from all

sectors of society, along with helping to create local 'ownership' of a development strategy that achieves local objectives that are in-line with government policies.

Initial animation activities using 'community coaches' were effectively achieved through a UNDP partnership with a local NGO (Youth Cooperation Centre of Dilijan) that provided personnel for this initial phase of activity (UNDP, 2021a) and FAO contracted agricultural experts to provide specialised coaching in the agricultural sector. Both UNDP and FAO engaged in a 'training-the-trainers' form of capacity building to develop knowledge and understanding of the LEADER approach and the aims of the LEAD project. On completion of training the participants undertook written tests and the coaches were selected based on performance.

A total of 5 UNDP and 5 FAO coaches were selected. In the first year 5 UNDP aligned coaches were employed by the Youth Cooperation Centre (operating in the region) and FAO contracted separately their coaches. The coaches employed by YCC later became LAG managers. The LAG Managers [former coaches] are currently employed by the Accountable Body (AB) for each LAG, and it is the AB that has a contract with UNDP for project delivery.

The trained coaches were assigned to clusters of communities to engage with the local population. A significant number of local people (over 3,000) attended the initial coaching meetings and mobilisation workshops while 167 individuals (41% women) gained a higher level of capacity building through involvement with the LAG working groups engaged in strategy development (Table 2.4). Progress reports and interviews indicate that the 'Fact-finding missions' involving discussions with local people (an inclusive process involving all sectors of society) fed into the decision-making regarding delineation of LAG boundaries (UNDP, 2021a; UNDP, 2022, stakeholder interviews).

Further stakeholder involvement took place as part of the process for developing each LAG Strategic Action Plan (SAP). The SAP guides LAG activities over the initial five-year period, with a more detailed two-year implementation plan utilising project funding. At every stage, the process involved a level of stakeholder engagement drawing from public and private (business) sectors of society and from local civil society organisations. As part of the process LAGs developed working groups (Table 2.1) made up of those more willing to be engaged in SAP development. Each of the five LAGs engaged in a similar process:

- Awareness campaigns run by UNDP & FAO to raise awareness
- Fact-finding missions undertaken by Community Coaches
- Criteria developed by UNDP under LEADER principles for delineating LAG areas
- Circulation of proposed area among residents for discussion
- Signing of a local partnership cooperation agreement among the communities to establish a LAG area
- Creation of a Strategic Working Group with representatives from public, private and civil society organisations to produce a development strategy

#### **2.1.6 Consideration and relevance of local needs**

To develop the SAPs each LAG created a working group and went through a process of (5) meetings conducted by UNDP personnel, who facilitated the meetings which developed the key elements of the strategic plans. FAO provided supporting contributions regarding agricultural issues. In addition to the UNDP activities, FAO utilised an additional set of 'coaches' to focus on issues in the agricultural sector of the LAG areas and identify farmers willing to take part in the SWGs and become LAG members. Approximately 220 LAG Members signed the partnership agreements in July 2022, including 35 farmers. The five LAGs indicated a total of 198 members (30.3% female) in their SAPs (Table 2.1) with an overall population of just under 100,00 people. Agricultural assessments by FAO personnel



were also completed in each of the five LAGs enabling agricultural concerns to be taken into account during the SAP preparation process (FAO, 2022a).

**Table 2.1 LAG details, Lori and Tavush Regions (2022)**

LAG Title	Area Population	LAG Membership (number)	Proportional Representation	Number of initial development project ideas generated
Lorva Dzor	23,870	51 (38 M; 13 F)	Public Sector: 33% Private Sector: 43% Civil Society: 24%	65
Aghstevi Hovit	19,654	27 (21 M; 6 F)	Public Sector: 33% Private Sector: 33% Civil Society: 33%	57
Tsili Tsov	13,304	18 (12 M; 6 F)	Public Sector: 33% Private Sector: 34% Civil Society: 33%	82
Tashir +	17,261	51 (31 M; 20 F)	Public Sector: 33% Private Sector: 33% Civil Society: 33%	32
Gandzor	23,799	51 (36 M; 15 F)	Public Sector: 33% Private Sector: 33% Civil Society: 33%	56
<b>Total</b>	<b>97,888</b>	<b>198 (138 M; 60 F)</b>		<b>292</b>

Source: Evaluation team, based on the LAGs Strategic Action Plans 2022-26

The SAP process itself was a capacity building activity which included looking at documents produced by LAGs in the EU, a SWOT analysis of the local area, and identification and prioritisation of challenges by the local stakeholders involved in the SAP process. Study visits to other countries (e.g. Hungary; Austria, Slovenia, Georgia) enabled some participants to see successful LAG operation, and collect potential project ideas from public, private and civil society organisations, and individuals (Lorva Dzor Local Active Group, 2022). The outcome was adoption of a set of strategic action plans based on local needs considering local and national policies.

## 2.2 Effectiveness

### 2.2.1 Effectiveness of the Project in establishing ownership by the stakeholders

The role of local stakeholders is apparent in the SAPs adopted by each LAG. Although guided by UNDP/FAO experts the groups involved in the strategy development process were analysing their own territorial areas, identifying the strengths and weaknesses, and coming up with lists of potential projects (which far exceeded available funding). Strategic priorities vary between LAGs depending on the local context and how stakeholders viewed the local resources, future challenges, and priorities (Table 2.2 provides some examples from each LAG). Promoting tourism and agricultural produce value chains are key aspects of all strategies but it is also worth noting that improvements in infrastructure and quality of life are seen as key goals. Each strategy is also supported by a set of priority actions and proposed project ideas developed by the working group participants and indicating a high level of stakeholder ownership of the strategic plan outcomes.

**Table 2.2 LAG strategic priorities, Lori and Tavush Regions (2022)**

LAG Title	Strategic Goals
Lorva Dzor	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Increasing access to agricultural and environmental resources and improving infrastructure</li> <li>2. Maximising local tourism potential</li> <li>3. Sustainable development of local economy and increased revenues</li> <li>4. Improvement of the population's living standards and diversification of service provision</li> </ol>
Aghstevi Hovit	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Promotion of tourism visibility and appeal</li> <li>2. Maximising opportunities for improvement of living standards of the population</li> <li>3. Use of innovative technologies in agricultural and non-agricultural value chains and for the development of entrepreneurship</li> </ol>
Tsili Tsov	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Sustainable inclusive development of the diversified value chains of the local economy</li> <li>2. Decent quality of life conditions for the local population</li> <li>3. Visibility of the territory and tourist attractions</li> </ol>
Tashir +	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Sustain, harness and maximise local tourism potential</li> <li>2. Boost income, improve livelihood and quality of life of the population</li> <li>3. Promotion, and inclusive development of green agriculture value chains</li> </ol>
Gandzor	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Supporting green agricultural value chains</li> <li>2. Energising tourism and escalating visibility</li> <li>3. Improvement and retrofitting of public infrastructure</li> </ol>

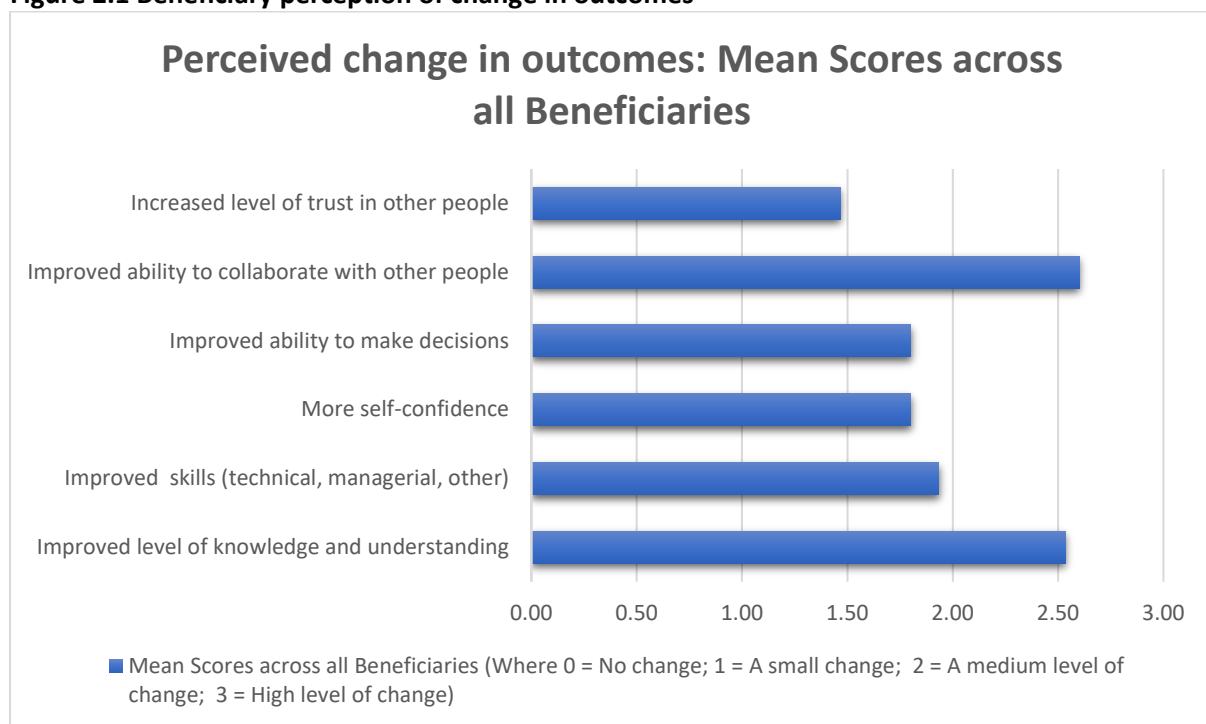
Source: Evaluation Team based on LAGs Strategic Action Plans 2022-26

As noted in Section 2.1.5 and Table 2.4 of this report a large number of local stakeholders were involved through attending initial meetings with coaches (>3,000) while 167 individuals (41% women) were involved with the LAG working groups engaged in strategy development. In a separate set of activities, focusing more on agricultural development, a large number of local stakeholders (>900) engaged with the FAO coaches in more than 100 meetings. This high level of activity has continued into the LAG operational phase with a significant number of stakeholders in each LAG generating ideas and submitting proposals for funding (Table 2.1). The high number of submissions for grant funding in the second funding round indicates a sustained level of interest in LAG activities in each area, even though the maximum grant size is smaller.

## Project beneficiaries

Figure 2.1 summarises the change in outcomes identified by project beneficiaries (defined as those receiving grant funding by October 30<sup>th</sup>, 2023). A small sample of 15 beneficiaries were interviewed (3 from each LAG) by local consultant in November/December 2023 to explore perceptions on the value of LAG activities in their area. Six outcomes were measured on a 0-3 scale and the mean scores across all 15 beneficiaries calculated. Figure 2.1 indicates that, on average, highest scores were allocated to improvements in ‘knowledge and understanding’ (Mean score = 2.53) and ‘Improved ability to collaborate with other people’ (Mean = 2.60) suggesting a medium-to-high impact on beneficiaries. In face-to-face interviews respondents indicated that the grant application process had required deeper investigation through internet searches than they had done before, and/or discussions with knowledgeable people, resulting in learning more about the proposed activity as well as contacting a wider range of people and developing skills related to writing funding applications and computer use.

**Figure 2.1 Beneficiary perception of change in outcomes**



Source: Evaluation team, based on project beneficiary interviews (N = 15)

The lowest score was allocated to an ‘Increased level of trust in other people’ (Mean = 1.47) suggesting a relatively minor change in this outcome for project beneficiaries. This is not surprising given that the respondents were engaged in a competitive bidding process to gain funding. However, qualitative interview data collected also suggest a wide range of reasons for the score, including that fact that in some cases respondents indicated an existing high level of trust in others, and the very act of involvement with the LAG and engaging with others has contributed to positive changes in the level of trust. Beneficiaries also indicated small-medium changes in ‘self-confidence’ and ‘Improved ability to make decisions’ (both with a Mean score of 1.80).

## Discussion groups

A similar set of outcomes were reported in the discussion groups held within each LAG. Discussion groups explored local problems, what worked in terms of LAG activities, and personal benefits.

In terms of personal and family benefits resulting from LAG engagement, the focus is largely on 'learning, knowledge, and skills acquisition'. The study tours abroad clearly had a beneficial impact in terms of knowledge exchange, understanding LEADER operation, and networking.

Participants in all LAG discussion groups indicated improvements in terms of experiences, learning, and skills development. One category of benefits relates to improvements in management and leadership (Table 2.3). Discussion participants list a range of benefits including improved communication with people, experience in management and strategic planning, organisational skills and working with wider groups of people, understanding other people's problems, improvements in personal knowledge, changes in 'mindset' and increased cooperation.

**Table 2.3 Personal benefits from LAG involvement identified by discussion groups**

Outcome category	Description
<b>Enhanced management and leadership capacity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LAG helped to open new horizons in all areas</li> <li>• As the AB Financial Director, I have worked with LAG participants and learned about their problems</li> <li>• Gained experience in management and communication with local people</li> <li>• I had a big growth in mindset and cooperation</li> <li>• I am a Board Member; I took part in strategy planning</li> <li>• Gained personal knowledge and management experience</li> <li>• Self-realization; talking to each other/ discussing issues</li> <li>• I am a founding member of LAG, involved in all activities, I have organized meetings in communities, prepared business plans &amp; applied for a grant</li> </ul>
<b>New contacts and collaborative activity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developed a team mentality and teamworking skills</li> <li>• Made new contacts and partnerships</li> <li>• Found partners in Georgia during the study visit, we have a joined project now</li> <li>• New contacts thanks to study trips</li> <li>• New cooperation, new resources to implement ideas</li> <li>• Development of personal contacts and connections between communities</li> <li>• There is more active involvement of community members</li> <li>• It gave us more solidarity and a possibility to discuss projects for the most important areas of agriculture, such as cattle breeding and land cultivation</li> </ul>
<b>Learning, Knowledge, and skills acquisition</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work experience and knowledge; Work experience in a new area and capacity development</li> <li>• New skills; New competencies due to consultancy of FAO experts</li> <li>• From coach to manager - learned a lot about agriculture and developed my skills</li> <li>• I have acquired skills to evaluate grant projects</li> <li>• New partnerships, experience, education</li> <li>• Study trip to Hungary, exchange of experience, new knowledge; I visited Georgia as part of the LAG activities and returned with great impressions; Study visits to Austria and Slovenia</li> <li>• Learning about the experience of LAGs in other countries; we had an opportunity to examine the experience in other countries</li> <li>• This allowed us to develop new ties, gain new experiences and skills</li> <li>• I am a Board member</li> <li>• I have gained knowledge that I have never dreamed of</li> </ul>

Source: Evaluation team, based on a summary of benefits from the 47 participants involved in the 5 LAG discussion groups, 2023

The evidence from group discussions suggests that overall, the effects of the processes involved in establishing the LAGs and undergoing extensive participatory work to engage people in strategic planning have had a range of positive impacts, leading to improvements in human and social capital, which they were clearly applying to improve their livelihoods. Development of new contacts and collaborative activity within LAGs were closely aligned to these benefits. Participants indicated development of skills and 'mentality' for teamwork within their LAGs and the development of 'new partnerships', personal contacts, and connections between communities, suggesting a significant increase in community social capital among those involved in LAG development and activities, and not just improvements to their businesses.

### **2.2.2 Project progress towards planned objectives and barriers to progress**

As noted earlier in this report the first year of project delivery was impacted by the military conflict in Nagorno Karabagh region and COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the challenging delivery environment, Objective 1 activities were implemented and largely achieved within the original time frame. Five LAGs were established as legal entities by September 2022 and funding enabled through partnering with accountable bodies (established Non-Governmental Organisations) that had the capacity that met UNDP requirements for managing grant funding. By September 2023, four LAGs had linked up with suitable organisations that could operate as accountable bodies, one LAG had been registered as an NGO (meaning it did not require partnership with an accountable body) and 15 individuals had undergone relevant training.

The initial delay and diversion of resources during the first year of project implementation due to emergency response activities pushed back the time frame for establishment of the LAGs, development of strategic plans and capacity building to the point where calls for grant proposals could be made and local projects funded. A range of implementation challenges have also been identified through stakeholder interviews (Table 2.4). These include some issues associated with the grant application and selection processes. During the first round of grant funding, LAG selection committees had made their decisions by April 2023 and project validation for two LAGs had occurred with decisions being communicated to Tahir Plus and Gandzor LAGs at the end of May (2023). Validation of projects from the remaining three LAGs, however, did not occur until September, almost a six-month delay. This was due to a number of issues including submission of incomplete documentation at LAG level, lack of clarity over committee membership, and difficulty in agreeing dates for meetings. In addition, the initial approach was for LAG Managers to attend the Validation Committee meetings in person, but this quickly proved too time consuming, and the approach had to be modified. The second round of grant approvals operated more efficiently due to the changes made.

More difficult to address are the linked issues of limited understanding of the (LEADER) principles underlying the LEAD project design, particularly among some central government stakeholders, and different outcome expectations from project delivery among the implementing partners. One issue, for example, relates to of the way in which agency expertise is applied within implementation processes. In this instance, the UNDP focus is on promoting integrated rural development according to LEADER principles implemented through the LAGs, while the FAO concentrates more on providing support for agriculture related projects and establishment of farmers associations. A second key issue, common across many EU Member States, as well as in Armenia and in large aid agencies, is a reluctance to allocate grant funding decision-making to the local level. Instead, there is a tendency to rely on nationally centralised experts to determine the 'best' utilisation of scarce resources (European Commission, 2022). This institutionalised perception of how rural development 'should' occur, makes it more challenging to implement a programme based on LEADER principles. LEADER principles take the view that bottom-up development processes, driven by networking, partnership working, and cooperation, are far more effective in terms of achieving sustainable rural development, even though

the initial investment in capacity building is greater, and the risk of failure is higher. Interview and document analysis identified a number of challenges relating to project implementation along with potential areas for improvement (summarised in Table 2.4).

**Table 2.4 Challenges to project implementation identified through interviews and analysis of documentation**

Implementation Challenges	Description/Rationale	Evidence	Potential for improvement
<b>Infrequent communication between partner implementation agencies (UNDP, FAO)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Emergency situations resulting cancelled meetings or repetition of meetings</li> </ul>	Interviews with Implementation Agencies 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Streamlining of processes; learning from experience what works and what is necessary</li> </ul>
<b>Incomplete documentation for grant funding (LAG)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>LAGs submitted incomplete documentation due to lack of familiarity with requirements and changes due to policy changes and territorial reform</li> <li>Validation of project funding delayed due to non-involvement of internal experts and failure to verify if documentation was complete and accurate</li> <li>Limited capacity building due to constrained time frame, providing training to large numbers of potential applicants, and use of on-line training methods to deliver complex information</li> </ul>	Interviews with Implementation Agencies and LAG managers 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Familiarity with processes and local capacity building will improve response quality and timing</li> <li>Improve the validation and checking procedures such that documentation is verified on submission</li> <li>Target training to those submitting applications and to LAG Selection Committee Members</li> <li>Use face-to-face training methods</li> <li>Undertake quality control/auditing of training delivery</li> </ul>
<b>Managing partner expectations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Balancing expectations of partners is a challenge</li> <li>EU Delegation, UNDP, FAO, Ministry of Territorial Administration and Min. of Economy have different expectations and focus in respect of project delivery</li> <li>Animation &amp; capacity building takes time – outputs are less apparent and slower to appear</li> </ul>	Implementation Agencies and Donor Interviews 2023 SSC minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regular face-to-face meetings chaired by senior personnel</li> <li>Memorandum of understanding</li> <li>Lower expectations to be realistic and in line with achieving local capacity building at all levels (local to national)</li> </ul>
<b>Varied level of understanding of LEADER principles and LEAD programme objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tendency to view the LEAD programme only as an approach to economic development in rural areas</li> <li>A tendency for top-down control of local strategies and project selection for funding</li> </ul>	Implementation Agency Interviews; LAG interviews 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enhance monitoring and evaluation of LAG activities</li> <li>Develop suitable set of indicators for assessing impact of LAG activities and local projects</li> <li>Demonstrate value-added from implementing a LEADER type approach</li> </ul>

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<p><b>Strategic Steering Committee</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Infrequent meetings (twice yearly)</li> <li>• Limited comprehension of the objectives of the LEAD project among the involved stakeholders, especially from Ministry of Economy</li> <li>• Backward looking with a focus on previous achievements rather than forward looking</li> <li>• Constant change in participants reduces institutional memory and effectiveness</li> </ul>	<p>SSC Minutes of meetings 2020-23</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quarterly meetings</li> <li>• Require report circulation prior to meetings</li> <li>• Focus meetings on action to be undertaken over the coming 3 – 6 months</li> </ul>
<p><b>Financial management and funding procedures</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementing partners have different expectations and organisational objectives, which sometimes leads to insufficient communications and sharing information effectively</li> <li>• Complex decision-making processes have been established around funding procedures related to LAG projects to ensure that the [limited] LAG financial resources are utilised efficiently and effectively. However, the additional layers of oversight and validation that have developed also create potential hurdles and slow down project implementation. Efficiency could be improved by streamlining some of the procedures and strengthening further the capacity of the LAG selection committees</li> <li>• FAO declined to participate in the Validation committee citing concerns over a possible conflict of interest</li> </ul>	<p>Interviews with Implementation Agencies 2023</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regular face-to-face meetings chaired by senior personnel</li> <li>• Memorandum of understanding.</li> <li>• Agreed objectives</li> <li>• Build stronger relationships among the implementation agencies and with national Ministries</li> <li>• Examine the processes and information requirements around decision making regarding LAG project funding</li> <li>• Seek to have in place procedures that are simple to follow and reduce the burden on both project proposers and those making decisions, without compromising organisational financial integrity. Inform LAG management and project applicants on timeline and any delays that occur re validation of projects and provide feedback to unsuccessful applicants (important part of learning/capacity and trust building process)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Complex internal decision-making processes</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The LEAD project is a pilot designed to test the potential for a LEADER-type approach to integrated rural development but has overly complex requirements creating barriers and slowing down in implementation</li> <li>• Delays in approval of LAG project funding due to coordinating meetings with multiple organisations and trying to get MTAI involved in a Validation committee</li> </ul>	<p>Implementation Agency Interviews 2023 SSC Minutes of Meetings</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Further capacity building is required at all levels from LAGs and LAG members up to and including implementing partner organisations</li> <li>• Validation process was partly altered by getting LAG managers to present at meetings</li> </ul>



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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Varied levels of understanding of LEADER principles and the nature of integrated and sustainable rural development at all levels</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Streamline the project approval process and separate political input to the LEAD project from administrative input which is based on clear criteria and guidance</li> </ul>
<p><b>COVID-19 Pandemic and regional conflict</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project started during the COVID-19 pandemic, and three days before the 2020 Nagorno Karabagh conflict</li> <li>• Required contract amendment at the start to include assistance [as a result of COVID-19 pandemic and military conflict] for impacted people arriving in Armenia to address non-LEAD issues. Slowed down implementation by approximately one year</li> <li>• Reduced the budget for implementing the LEAD project</li> </ul>	<p>Annual Progress Reports UNDP and FAO 2020-23 Implementation Agency Interviews 2023</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contract was amended and assistance provided, but not as much as was originally anticipated due to rapidly changing needs and environment</li> <li>• Request extension for delivery</li> <li>• Improve decision making processes (increase speed at which decisions made)</li> </ul>

Source: Evaluation Team, 2023

### 2.2.3 Key project achievements

Project Objective 1 -Mobilize, capacitate, and incentivize local actors to define community needs-driven strategies in Lori and Tavush regions was put aside at the start of the project implementation in order to focus on delivery of COVID-19 emergency response via two outputs by UNDP and FAO entitled “Emergency response action to the socioeconomic crisis created by COVID-19 and humanitarian crisis in Armenia because of the war in Nagorno-Karabagh”. These actions were undertaken to support national level strategic programmes providing support to deal with the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The main activities were designed to mitigate the economic impacts in Tavush and Lori regions through inclusion of individuals and businesses affected by the pandemic. The Project provided significant levels of material support to small business and individuals. FAO action, for example, supported 67 ‘vulnerable beneficiaries’ through provision of livestock feed, ensuring the survival of their farm business followed up with advisory support from a livestock specialist (UNDP, 2022). The findings, however, also indicate that some of the planned emergency response activities could not be implemented within the given time frame due to constantly changing circumstances. Specifically, support for local supply chains and psycho-social support for refugees were put on hold by the end of 2022.

**Table 2.5 Combined results from Objective 1 COVID-19 emergency response across the period 2020-2023**

COVID-19 emergency response Economic impacts of COVID-19 are mitigated in Tavush and Lori regions through economic inclusion of individuals and businesses affected by the pandemic and humanitarian crisis in Armenia because of the war in Nagorno-Karabagh.		Overall project targets	Cumulative targets for 3 years	Actual results
Outputs	Indicator	Overall project targets	Targets	2020-2023
<b>COVID-19 emergency response Economic impacts of COVID-19 are mitigated in Tavush and Lori regions through economic inclusion of individuals and businesses affected by the pandemic and humanitarian crisis in Armenia because of the war in Nagorno-Karabagh.</b>	1.0 a) Number of businesses reporting restored economic activity	100	100	<b>51</b>
	-Out of which women-owned/led businesses	50w 50m	50w 50m	<b>25w 26m</b>
	b) Number of new employment opportunities created, including self-employment	200	200	<b>174</b>
	-Out of which for women	100w	100w	<b>92w</b>
	1.0.1a) Number of businesses accessing Project support	60	60	<b>28</b>
	-women-owned/led businesses -Out of which technical support	30w 30t	30w 30t	<b>16w 0t</b>
b) Number of individuals accessing Project support, including SAs	300	300	<b>293</b>	
-Out of which women	150w	150w	<b>132w</b>	
-Out of which technical support	150t	150t	<b>178t</b>	

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c) Number of businesses accessing state support facilitated by the Project -Out of which women-owned/led businesses	20	13	<b>2</b>
	10w	10w	<b>0w</b>
1.0.1 a) Number of supply centres established by the Project	2	2	<b>0</b>
1.0.2 b) Number of local populations with access to safe supply services	3000 1500w	3000 1500w	<b>0</b>
1.0.3 Number of communities with green and energy saving option	1	1	<b>1</b>
1.0.4 Number of SAs and veterans who received psycho-social support	50	50	<b>0</b>
2.0 a) Number of businesses reporting restored economic activity -Out of which women-owned/led businesses	30	30	<b>67</b>
	15w	15w	
b) Number of households/vulnerable families benefiting of non-cash grants -Out of which women	60	60	<b>67</b>
	20w	20w	<b>0w</b>
c) Number of the assessments on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic	1	1	<b>1</b>

Source: UNDP Annual Progress Reports 2021, 2022, 2023<sup>11</sup>, internal UNDP/FAO monitoring reports 2023/2024

Note: m- men; w-women; t-technical

The official launch of the LEAD project took place in March 2021 (as a hybrid event due to COVID-19 restrictions) and regional launches to raise awareness took place in 10 clusters but were delayed due to government elections and harvesting season and were eventually completed in November 2021.

A major achievement of the project was the establishment of 5 LAGs in Lori and Tavush Regions. This represents a significant level of work to engage the local population, delineate and agree LAG areas, build skills and capacity to engage in strategic planning, develop strategic action plans, select, and train LAG managers, and work on Rural Development Strategies.

In 2021-2022 the LAG working groups not only completed Strategic Action Plans but also worked in partnership with UNDP and FAO experts to generate Rural Development Strategies (RDS) that take into

<sup>11</sup> Local Empowerment of Actors for Development (LEAD) in Lori and Tavush Regions Project Progress Report 3 was made available to the Evaluation Team in May 2024

consideration and align with national policy objectives. The intention is that the RDS for each LAG ensures LAG objectives contribute to wider policy goals and the SAP is the key tool for supporting project selection and day-to-day management decisions made by the LAG. The SAPs incorporate the key components of the RDS and the fact that the LAGs were able to complete and agree these plans relatively quickly enabled the LAGs to make the first and second call for proposals in 2023.

Objective 1 of the LEAD project consisted of activities to generate three main outputs and one sub-output, relating to capacity building and LAG development in the two regions. Each of the three outputs involved multiple activities and indicators quantify some of the results in terms of numbers of individuals involved (Table 2.6). Progress reports indicate a high level of capacity building on issues such as ‘formulating a LAG vision’ identifying objectives, local assets and financing and compliance (UNDP, 2021a; UNDP, 2022). A total of 145 individuals (41.3% women) were trained in planning methods and 162 (37.6% women) took part in developing strategies. Those involved identified 282 potential projects across the five LAGS and five agricultural associations were formed (one in each LAG). In addition, FAO coaches organised data collection for the agricultural sector assessment engaging with 900 individuals across the 5 LAGs (over 100 meetings) and identifying 23 farmers to represent farming interests in the LAG Working Groups (UNDP, 2022).

Other activities related to this output included developing a Strategic Action Plan (SAP) and capacity building in preparation to become LAG members, drawing up and signing of LAG Partnership Agreements (completed in July 2022 at an International LEADER Conference held in the Lori and Tavush regions). A number of study tours were carried out to Hungary (UNDP), and to Austria, Georgia and Slovenia (FAO) as part of the capacity building work. These enabled the participants to improve their understanding of how LEADER operates, the practical aspects of LAG management, and the range of projects funded. The FAO study tour (Austria, Georgia, and Slovenia) also focused on the role of LAGs in improving the agricultural sector of an area.

**Table 2.6 Combined results for Objective 1 activities across the period 01 October 2020- 30 September 2023**

Objective 1: Mobilize, capacitate, and incentivise local actors to define community needs-driven strategies in Lori and Tavush regions		Overall project targets	Cumulative targets for 3 years	Actual results
Outputs	Indicator	Overall Target	Target	2020-2023
<b>1.1 Replicable mechanism for community mobilization, engagement and animation established and operational (UNDP-FAO)</b>	1.0 a) Community members attending coaching meetings	3000 1600w 1400m	3000 1600w 1400m	<b>3030</b> <b>1646w</b> <b>1384m</b>
	1.1 Replicable mechanism for community mobilization established	YES	YES	<b>YES</b>
	1.1.1 Opening conference participants	100	100	<b>191</b>
	1.1.2 Number of media post featuring the opening conference	40	40	<b>20</b>

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	1.1.3 Number of mobilisation workshops, field visits, interviews, expert/coach fact finding missions	150	150	<b>237</b>
	1.1.4 Number of LAG working group members mobilised and capacitated	600	600	<b>167</b>
<b>1.2 Improved capacity of local actors to develop and deliver community needs-driven vision and strategy (UNDP-FAO)</b>	1.2 a) Number of LAG members capacitated in strategy development	200 100w	200 100w	<b>167</b> <b>69w</b>
	1.2.1 Number of formalised LAGs	5	5	<b>5</b>
	1.2.2 a) Number of LAG representatives who participated in study trip	30 15w	30 15w	<b>61</b> <b>15w</b>
	1.2.3 a) Number of established LAG strategic planning groups	5	5	<b>5</b>
	b) Number of strategic planning group members	30 15w	30 15w	<b>45</b> <b>20w</b>
	1.2.4 a) Number of LAG Working Group members capacitated in strategic planning methods	120 60w	120 60w	<b>145</b> <b>60w</b>
	<b>1.3 Community needs-driven strategies developed in an inclusive and evidence-based manner and promoted in the target regions of the Project (UNDP)</b>	1.3 LAG strategies developed (Yes/No)	YES	YES
1.3.1 Number of LAG members who participated in strategy development		100 50w	100	<b>162</b> <b>61w</b>
1.3.2 a) Number of developed Territorial Development Strategies		5	5	<b>5</b>
1.3.2 b) Number of identified projects in each Folder		350	350	<b>282</b>
1.3.3 Number of approved Strategies by LAGs		5	5	<b>5</b>
<b>Sub-output 1.3 Agricultural section for community needs-driven strategies developed in an inclusive and evidence-based manner (FAO)</b>	Number of agricultural sections per LAG developed and feeding in the community needs-driven strategies	1	1	<b>1</b>

Source: UNDP Annual Progress Reports 2021, 2022, 2023, internal UNDP/FAO monitoring reports 2023/2024

Note: m- men; w-women; t-technical

Objective 2 builds upon the LAG establishment through further capacity development and undertakes calls for project proposals, funding, and implementation of local projects. Indicators for Output 2.1 focus on measuring the number of individuals and organisations involved in the LAG partnership a mix of (public, private, and civil society organisations). Data up to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2023 indicate a total of 97 CSOs, 71 local businesses and 31 individuals in partnerships across the five LAGs (Table 2.7). Apart from 132 local population benefitting from LAG support, all those living in the LAG areas could potentially benefit through being able to apply for project funding, and/or indirectly from the improvements generated by the projects implemented. The average population per LAG area is 19,500 persons (which would indicate a potential total population of 97,500 beneficiaries across the 5 LAGs) (UNDP, 2021b).

**Table 2.7 Combined results for Objective 2 activities across the period 01 October 2020 - 30 September 2023**

Objective 2: Build supporting infrastructure to prioritize, implement and sustain local-grown initiatives in Lori and Tavush regions		Overall project targets	Cumulative targets for 3 years	Actual results
Outputs	Indicator	Overall target	Target	2020-2023
<b>2.1. LAGs established, and applicants/grantees capacitated (UNDP)</b>	2. a) Number of locally operating CSOs engaged in LAG partnership	100	100	<b>97</b>
	b) Number of locally operating business engaged in LAG partnership	65	65	<b>71</b>
	c) Number of individual actors engaged in LAG Partnership	30	30	<b>31</b>
	d) Number of local population benefitting from LAG support	500	500	<b>0<sup>12</sup></b>
	2.1 a) Number of established LAG Accountable Bodies	5	5	<b>5</b>
	2.1.1 Suggested models for establishing LAG Accountable Body based on EU and non-EU experience	3	3	<b>3</b>
	2.1.2 Number of implemented models for establishing LAG Accountable Body	5	5	<b>5</b>
	2.1.3 Number of capacitated accountable body members	25 13w	25 13w	<b>15 8w</b>

<sup>12</sup> Figure for the actual results is missing, there is an indication in the Progress Reports that approximately 132 people benefited from the support. This figure could not be verified by evaluation team, therefore is not included in the table.

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	2.1.4 Number of Accountable body representatives who participated in the study tour	30 15w	30 15w	<b>0<sup>13</sup></b>
<b>2.2 A pool of fundable initiatives created for further prioritization and implementation (UNDP)</b>	2.2.1 Number of selection committees formed	5	5	<b>5</b>
	2.2.2 a) Number of local calls for proposals announced by LAGs	5	5	<b>5</b>
	2.2.2 b) Number of projects awarded with grants	150 75w	150 75w	<b>110 33w</b>
	2.2.3) Number of independent expertise reports	15	15	<b>0</b>
	2.2.4 a) Number of applicants who received technical support	50	50	<b>50</b>
<b>2.3 A pool of initiatives financed through a results- based scheme established (UNDP)</b>	2.3 a) Number of results-based initiatives that received financing	60	50	<b>0</b>
	b) Share of financed results-based initiatives led by women (%)	50%	50%	<b>0</b>
	2.3.1 a) Number of calls for evidence-based financing announced	5	5	<b>0</b>
	b) Number of applications received -out of which women-led initiatives (%)	50%	50%	<b>0</b>
	2.3.2 a) Number of grantees who received training	50	50	<b>0</b>
	b) Share of grantees who report the trainings as useful (%)	50%	50%	<b>0</b>
	2.3.3 a) Number of sustainability mechanisms piloted	5	5	<b>0</b>
	b) Number of innovative financing mechanisms piloted	2	1	<b>0</b>
	2.3.4 a) Number of grantees who participated in study tour	30	Planned for 2024	<b>0</b>
	b) Share of grantees who report it as effective (%)	50%	Planned for 2024	<b>0</b>
	<b>Sub-output 2.3 Capacities of</b>	FAO sub-output 2.3: Number of stakeholders, men and women,	400	300

<sup>13</sup> Postponed to 2024

<b>the applicants of the pool of fundable initiatives from the primary agricultural production sector are strengthened. (FAO)</b>	trained at gender sensitive tailor-made trainings organized on local development processes and agriculture (disaggregated by sex, at least 35% are women)			
<b>2.4. Networking and cooperation, lessons learned shared and documented (UNDP-FAO)</b>	2.4 a) Functional regional networking scheme established	1	Planned for 2024	<b>0</b>
	b) Functional international networking scheme established	1	Planned for 2024	<b>0</b>
	2.4.1 a) Number of local stakeholders involved in networking scheme	500	Planned for 2024	<b>0</b>
	2.4.2 a) Number of local product fairs organized	5	0	<b>3</b>
	b) Number of participants to the local fairs	250 130w	0	<b>380</b> <b>22w</b>
	2.4.3 Number of participants at closing conference	200	Planned for 2024	<b>0</b>
	<b>Sub-output 2.4: Strengthen cooperation between farmers through capacity building and consultancy (FAO)</b>	FAO sub-output 2.4 (a)Number of established and / or supported AAs per LAG (1)	5	5
(b)Number of methodologies for cooperating with “external businesses”		1	1	<b>0</b>

Source: UNDP Annual Progress Reports 2021, 2022, 2023, internal UNDP/FAO monitoring reports 2023/2024

Note: m- men; w-women; t-technical

Under Sub-output 2.4: Strengthen cooperation between farmers through capacity building and consultancy (FAO), 5 Farmer Association Specialist/Managers were selected and contracted by FAO, one per LAG. As of November 2023, 11 Farm Associations across 5 LAGs were being established and are in process of registering. The number of associations is well above the target value and is the result of the Farmer Association Specialist/Managers proactive engagement with farmers across the LAG communities.

Under Output 2.2 all 5 LAGs had made their first calls for proposals and selected projects for funding. This aspect of work was slightly delayed, but all projects were validated and funded by the end of September 2023. This element of the project is indicative of further capacity building for LAG Managers and Selection Working Group members involved in learning how to make a call for projects, adopt criteria for selection, and go through the process of project selection. In addition, those applying for project funding were also developing skills. A total of 316 LAG residents submitted applications in the first round of grant funding



in 2023, of which 46 projects were funded (Table 2.8). These were larger projects with a mean grant size of slightly over \$10,000. The high number of applications, 80% of which met the technical criteria is indicative of project success in building capacity among LAG residents, both for submitting applications and making decisions within LAG selection committees. LAG financial constraints resulted in only 46 projects (14.5% of applications) receiving funding (and two of these dropped out later on).

A second call for projects was made in the Autumn of 2023. These were for much smaller amounts of grant funding ('seed' funding) which may partially account for the reduced number of applications compared to the first round. There was also a limited time frame available for developing and submitting applications. A total of 92% of applications met the technical criteria and all of these were approved for funding by LAG bodies but only 66 were funded (i.e. 72.5% of applications).

**Table 2.8 Project application for grant funding and selection outcomes**

1st round of project grants				
LAG	Received applications	Applications that were technically responsive	Approved projects by the LAG Council	Validation by Donor committee
Tashir Plus	33	29	6	4
Lorva Dzor	95	75	10	10
Gandzor	44	29	11	10
Agstevi Hovit	51	47	14	10
Tsili Tsov	93	73	13	12
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>316</b>	<b>253</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>46</b>

2 <sup>nd</sup> Round of project grants: Seed funding				
LAG	Received applications	Applications that were technically responsive	Approved projects by LAG Council	Validation by Donor Committee
Tashir Plus	15	14	14	7
Lorva Dzor	11	11	11	10
Gandzor	18	18	18	14
Agstevi Hovit	34	34	34	28
Tsili Tsov	13	7	7	7
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>66</b>

Source: UNDP Project Documents 2023

Adaptive strategy was applied to 2.3: A pool of initiatives financed through a result- based scheme established, relevant activities were postponed and will now take place in 2024 (Implementation Agency interview and UNDP internal monitoring reports).

Sub-output 2.3: Capacities of the applicants of the pool of fundable initiatives from the primary agricultural production sector are strengthened (FAO) has been delayed, however with Farmers Association Managers in place and a pool of FAO experts continuing to offer advice to primary agriculture sector applicant capacity development activities could now be accelerated.

Table 2.9 provides a limited set of results for Objective 3 on developing central government capacity for sustainability of the LEADER approach. Activity 3.1.5 under Output 3.1 to create a development assistance database (DAD) was delayed due to changes in government and a need to re-engage with new personnel and ensure commitment. Based on the interview conducted in October 2023, the database was piloted to coordinate international emergency response to refugees among respective ministries triggered by military conflict in Nagorno Karabakh.

Objective 3 addresses aspects of the project largely targeted for the final year of project implementation. Activities related to achievement of Objective 3 lie largely outside the scope of this Mid-term evaluation. For example, Ministry personnel visited the LAGs in November 2023 to improve understanding of operational effectiveness and outcomes (Stakeholders Interviews, 2023) but this evaluation was not able to assess the outcomes from that action. At the same time, Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure asked the UNDP project team to assist the Ministry in drafting the 2024-2030 Territorial Development Strategy of Armenia. The Strategy is to be adopted by the Government in 2024. It will have a separate section on LEADER programming in Armenia. These actions are in accordance to address concerns that were expressed during the 5th SSC meeting (July 2023) regarding the lack of engagement with relevant central government policy makers and subsequent decisions to engage in activities to increase awareness and understanding through LAG visits and a workshop in December 2023. This proposal was also favourably supported during stakeholder interviews.

**Table 2.9 Combined results for Objective 3 activities across the period 01 October 2020- 30 September 2023**

Objective 3: Capacity of ministries and other relevant bodies are improved and policy mechanisms at national level are developed for the successful piloting and sustainability of the LEADER approach in Armenia (policy component)		Overall project targets	Cumulative targets for 3 years	Actual results
Outputs	Indicator	Overall project targets	Targets	2020 - 2023
<b>3.1 Policy framework for overall adaptation of the LEADER approach to the territorial development strategy of Armenia (UNDP)</b>	3.1.1 a) Number of meetings and consultations held for overall adaptation of the LEADER approach to the territorial development strategy of Armenia	15	5	0
	b) Relevant expert analysis is conducted to prepare the policy recommendation package	1	0	0
	3.1.2 a) Number of participants capacitated from the MTAI	45 12w	15 10w	0 0w
	b) Number of participants capacitated from regional and local administrations	25 13w	0 0w	0 0w

	3.1.3 a) Number of MTAI representatives who learned from EU experience through study trips, conferences, and workshops	30 15w	Planned for 2024	<b>0</b>
	3.1.4 Concept note prepared	1	Planned for 2024	<b>0</b>
	3.1.5 a) DAD established by the Project	1	1	<b>0</b>
	b) Improved coordination efficiency as reported by the Government (%)	20%	20%	<b>0</b>
<b>3.2 Policy framework adjusted in regard to Armenia's agricultural policy (FAO)</b>	FAO output 3.2			
	a) Number of stakeholders participated at workshops, study tours and capacity development trainings on the agricultural component of the LEADER approach	200	100	<b>0</b>
	b) Number of policy packages prepared in light of Armenia's agricultural policy	1	0	<b>0</b>

Source: UNDP Annual Progress Reports 2021, 2022, 2023, internal UNDP/FAO monitoring reports 2023/2024

Note: m- men; w-women; t-technical

#### 2.2.4 Extent to which the capacity building work has been effective

Although significant numbers benefitted from some form of training and/or skills development it is not possible to assess the effectiveness of the capacity building approach from the output tables of data (which for the most part only identify numbers of person involved). Interviews with representatives of each LAG (LAG Managers, Accountable bodies, LAG Selection Committee Members; FAO farmers association specialists) were thus conducted to assess the impact of the LAG establishment, strategic development, and capacity building processes.

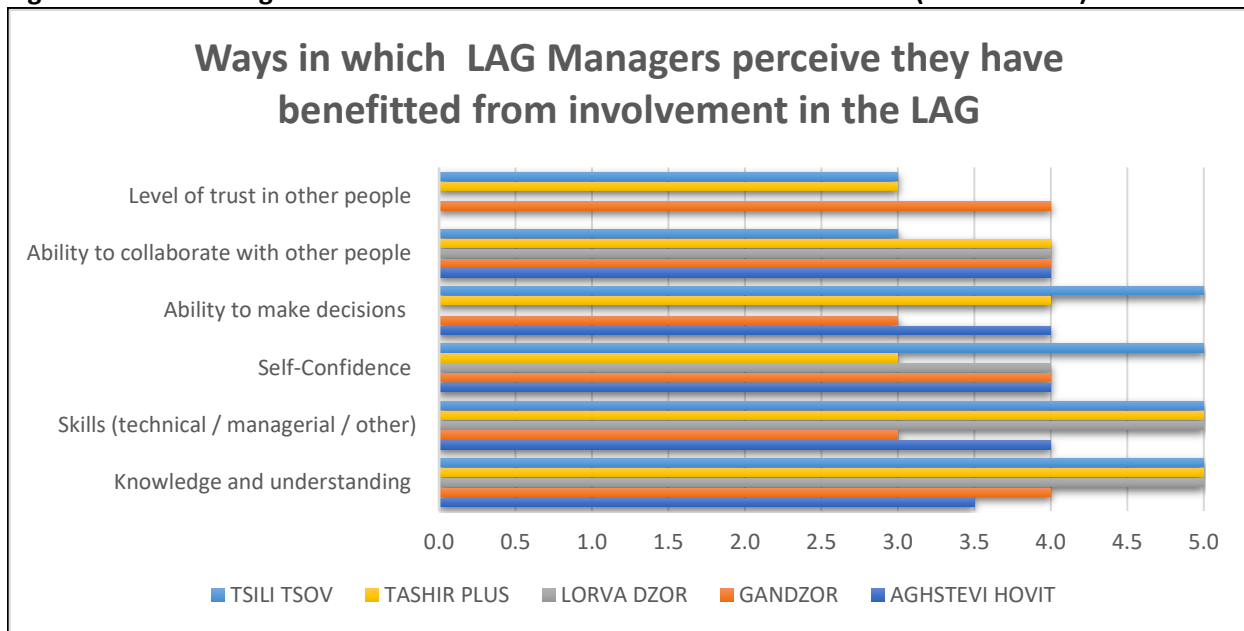
Figures 2.2 and 2.3 summarise the LAG Manager scoring on a 5-point scale assessing personal changes experienced as a result of their involvement in the LAG. Outcome scores are relatively high.

Highest scores for most of the LAG Managers are allocated to improvements in 'Knowledge and understanding' and 'Skills (technical / managerial / other', both indicating a high level of improvement. This is not surprising given that all the LAG managers were initially community coaches who received training, undertook field surveys, helped develop the LAG strategies, and benefitted from field trips abroad. They thus have had a high level of involvement and have acquired significant understanding and skills related to the LEADER approach to rural development. In general, highest scores on the improvement scale occur for Lorva Dzor, Tashir Plus and Tsili Tsov, while lower scores appear for Aghstevi Hovit and Gandzor.

The differences can be partially explained by the local context of each LAG. LAG Aghstevi Hovit experienced a level of delays in establishing the LAG as a legal entity due to not being able to find a suitable organisation to take on the role of an Accountable Body. The LAG (with support from UNDP) had to undergo a lengthy process of registering as an NGO and taking on the required tasks of an Accountable Body itself. This resulted in further delays in respect of project calls and final decisions on project selection (LAG and Implementing Agency Interviews 2023). LAG Gandzor, on the other hand, is the only

interregional LAG among the five LAGs and it took more time to build trust and effective collaboration between stakeholders/communities within the LAG territory (LAG interviews 2023).

**Figure 2.2 LAG Managers: Perceived benefits from involvement in the LAG (for each LAG)**



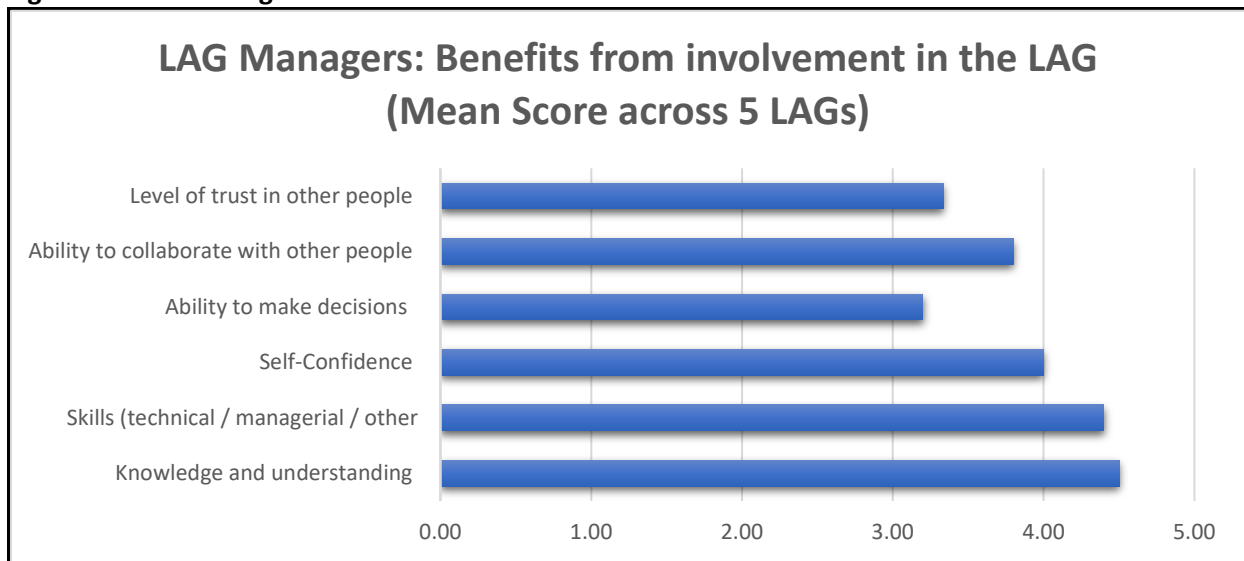
Source: Evaluation team, 2023

NOTE: The 5-point scale measures the perceived extent of change in the outcome: Where 1 = Very low level of improvement; 3 = Medium level of improvement; 5 = Very high level of improvement

Lowest scores are seen for ‘Ability to make decisions’ and ‘Level of trust in other people’ although these are still above the mid-point of the scale (above 3 for all LAGs, indicating a medium level of improvement). The missing-coloured bars in Figure 2.2 for the ‘Level of trust in other people’ score is due to respondents feeling they could not make a judgement on this outcome.

Figure 2.3 suggests that overall, the LAG Managers perceive lower levels of improvement for their personal ‘Ability to make decisions’, ‘Lack of trust, and ‘Ability to collaborate’ (although the Mean scores are above 3.0 in all cases). These three outcomes, trust, collaboration, and the capacity for making decisions are closely linked. They tend to be skills based more on experience and learning from mistakes (i.e. learning what does not work, as well as what works through practice) than through formal study or training. We would therefore expect to see a lower level of perceived improvement as the LAG managers have been in post a relatively short time and have not yet had much opportunity to make decisions, nor gained sufficient experience in how to develop trust and collaborate.

**Figure 2.3 LAG Managers: Perceived benefits from involvement in the LAG**



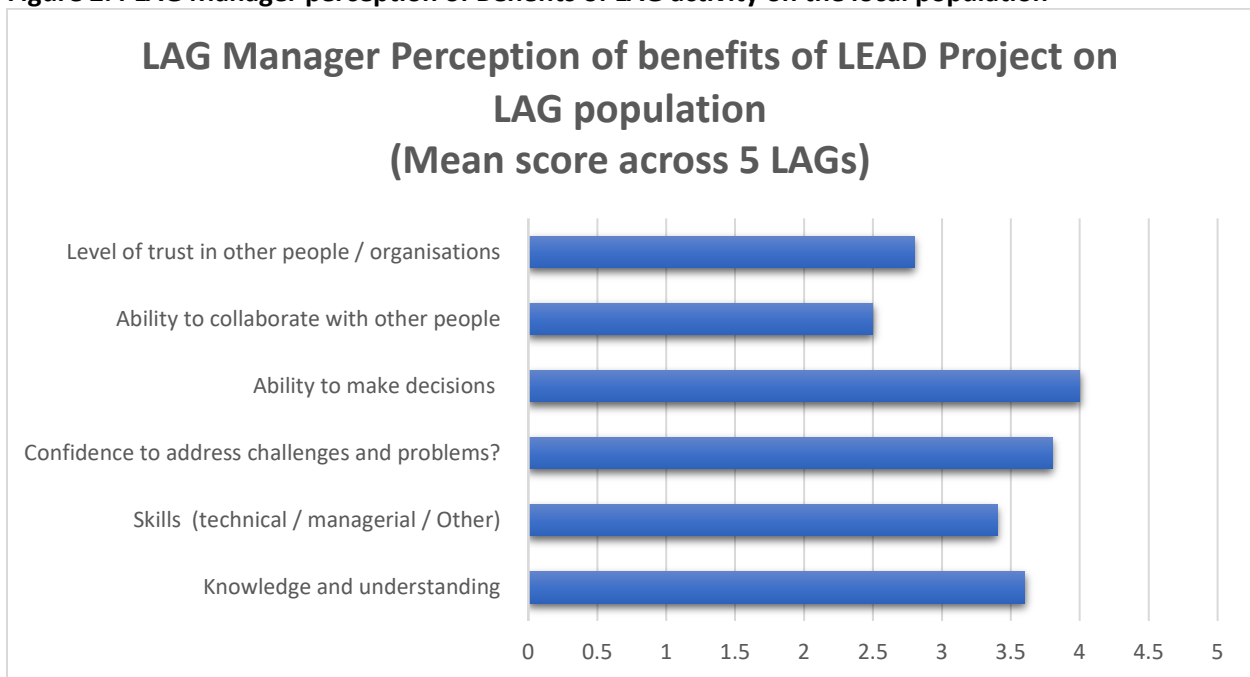
Source: Evaluation Team 2023

NOTE: The 5-point scale measures the perceived extent of change in the outcome: Where 1 = Very low level of improvement; 3 = Medium level of improvement; 5 = Very high level of improvement

In terms of capacity building among the wider population LAG Managers were asked for their perception of the impact of the LEAD project on the residents of their LAG area (Figure 2.4). The mean scores across all five LAG Managers suggest that the outcomes with lowest level of improvement are 'Level of trust in other people' and 'Ability to cooperate with others' (both scoring below the mid-point of the scale). Highest levels of improvement were noted for 'Ability to make decisions' and 'Confidence in addressing challenges and problems. These perceptions of improvement are likely to relate to those more closely involved with LAG development and operation rather than a view across the entire resident population, but they do suggest that a wider group of residents have benefitted from LAG activity in their areas.

Evidence from the beneficiary interviews carried out in December 2023 support these findings (Figure 2.5). A small sample (N=15 persons, 3 from each LAG) who had been successful in winning grant funding were asked how they had personally benefitted from their involvement (beyond the financial benefit). Using a set of outcomes similar to that utilised for LAG Managers (except measured on a 3-point scale rather than a 5-point scale) the average scores indicated highest levels of positive change in relation to 'Improved ability to collaborate with other people' and 'Improved level of knowledge and understanding'.

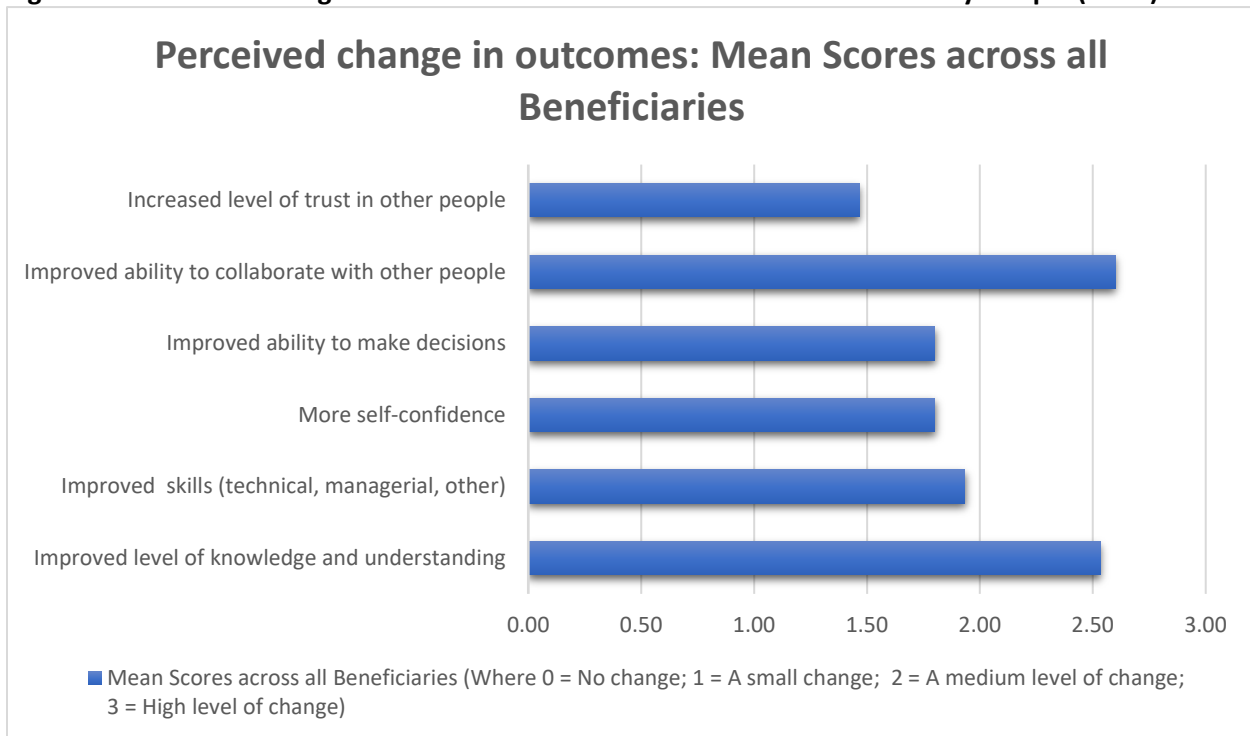
**Figure 2.4 LAG Manager perception of Benefits of LAG activity on the local population**



Source: Evaluation Team, 2023

NOTE: The 5-point scale measures the perceived extent of change in the outcome: Where 1 = Very low level of improvement; 3 = Medium level of improvement; 5 = Very high level of improvement

**Figure 2.5 Perceived change in outcomes: Mean Scores across Grant Beneficiary sample (N=15)**



Source: Evaluation Team, 2023

Sample mean scores were also above 1.5 for 'Improved skills', 'More self-confidence', and 'Improved ability to make decisions' (indicating a small to medium positive change). When asked to provide a rationale for their scoring the sample of grant beneficiaries identified a wide range of benefits, including:

- Gained some knowledge in writing a proposal for funding, developed computer skills
- Improved communication skills; gained wider network of contacts
- As a result of the project, I started to cooperate with other organizations implementing programmes in agriculture
- Feel more capable of weighing benefits and deciding on best option
- Have made beneficial contacts with LAG members and partners; greater level of interaction with various individuals in the region; more collaboration with others in village
- Made new contacts with some development in trust among us; we have come together around shared challenges and common concerns
- Increased technical knowledge; Skills in construction and repair works have increased
- Due to increased knowledge and acquired skills, my self-confidence has increased; after this experience, I am ready for new challenges; I am more willing to take a risk; Success in getting grant has increased confidence to apply to other programmes

Discussion groups held in each LAG also noted a wide range of personal benefits from involvement with the LAG (see Table 2.2 and Figure 2.6). Participants included those who were board members, part of selection committees, or accountable bodies whose personal benefits could be grouped into 3 main categories:

- Learning, Knowledge, and skills acquisition
- Enhanced management and leadership capacity
- New contacts and collaborative activity

Wider benefits to local communities were also described during the group discussion sessions relating to 'Learning, knowledge exchange', and 'Empowerment & social change'.

## 2.3 Efficiency

### 2.3.1 Extent to which the project implementing parties have used an appropriate combination of tools and approaches in a cost-effective manner

As of 30<sup>th</sup> September 2023, LEAD Project expenditure totalled \$3,869, 035, accounting for 42.86% of the total budget of \$7.857 million (Table 2.9). During the first year of operation funding was diverted to provide assistance in the two regions to mitigate the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g. through support for individuals, groups, micro-enterprises; provision of inputs and machinery, technical support and consultancy). Just over 6% of the total project budget was made available but annual accounts indicate that only 61% of this funding (\$301,927) was utilised by 30<sup>th</sup> September 2022. Savings were also made during the inception phase with less expenditure on training to identify coaches, international expertise input, and the legal research for establishing a LAG partnership model. Annual accounts reveal that as of 30<sup>th</sup> September 2023 expenditure on the inception Phase was only 33.58% of planned expenditure. However, this is likely to have been partially due to the delayed start to the project as well as efficiency savings in the initial phases of data collection and capacity building.

The largest proportion of expenditure (43.26%) is allocated to activities associated with ‘Building supporting infrastructure to implement and sustain locally grown initiatives in the target regions’ (Table 2.9). In other words, the major focus of project expenditure is targeted at creating LAGs and making them operational and sustainable through building local capacity. This includes significant elements of planned expenditure, including:

- Creation and establishment of Local Action Groups (LAGs) and LAG Accountable Bodies; development and testing of institutional mechanisms to formalize the accountable body
- Capacity building (LAG Managers and members, accountable body representatives) including foreign study tours
- Participatory meetings and workshops in LAG areas to support needs identification, and strategy and action plan development
- Grant funding mechanisms to support locally developed LAG projects and capacity development for grant recipients and LAG Networking support

As of 30<sup>th</sup> September 2023, just over two-thirds (68.27%) of the planned expenditure on ‘Mobilisation and capacity building to define community needs driven strategies in Lori and Tavush Regions’ had been achieved. The proportion of expenditure on the other categories is lower reflecting the phased nature of project implementation. Thus, expenditure on ‘Build supporting infrastructure to prioritize, implement and sustain local-grown initiatives in the Northern and other target territories’ is 30% of that planned, while expenditure on developing ‘Capacity of the Ministries and other relevant bodies...’ is only 5% of the total planned spending. As of September 2023, just over one third (36.95%) of planned expenditure on Total Direct Intervention, and 42.86% of total expenditure had been achieved.

### **Strengths of the approach**

Capacity building at local, regional, and central government levels comprises a significant element of activity, accounting for an estimated 17.6% of the total project budget (including activities at local, regional, and central government levels). This is a necessary element of activity given the need to build basic business management and grant application skills at the local level, management and leadership skills at LAG and accountable body levels, and to engage with central government policy personnel to raise awareness of the LEADER approach and the nature of integrated rural development. Some elements, particularly the foreign study tours, have been very cost-effective, raising awareness, understanding and knowledge of how LAGs can lead and provide leadership and influence local economic and social development, and exposing participants to new ideas. Participants in the discussion groups, LAG Managers and study trip participants all indicated (in interviews and discussion groups) a high level of value derived from the tours. Capacity building undertaken at the local level also appears to have been effective in terms of attracting a high level of involvement in LAG activity and enabling formation of LAGs, development of 5-year strategies and action plans, and delivery of local grant funding.

Approximately 15% of the total budget is allocated to provision of grant support through competitive mechanisms to those living in LAG areas. These consist of a mix of large and small grants and operate as a means of building capacity in accessing and managing grant funding at the very local level as well as supporting local economic development and improving the efficiency and capacity of local businesses and micro-enterprises. As of 30<sup>th</sup> September 2023, a total of 110 projects were supported with \$548,606 allocated in two rounds of grant funding. An additional 13.7% of funding has been allocated to support large scale ‘macro-projects’ (planned for 2024-25) in each LAG as a means of providing sustainability beyond the project period.



Efficiencies have been achieved through multiple strategies. In terms of project delivery, the budget allocates approximately 28% of planned expenditure to management costs. This is an acceptable proportion given the need for office rental, publications, drivers, translators, internal and foreign travel, and expert support in delivering the objectives. Efficiencies are achieved through utilising administrative support currently existing within the UNDP (e.g. IT, Finance and Budget, Communications, Reporting).

During the inception Phase UNDP utilised a local organisation (Youth Cooperation Centre of Dilijan) already based in and operating in one of the regions to deliver the initial training and capacity building of those who would become 'community coaches' (i.e. training the trainers). This included developing and delivering a rigorous selection process, which has been cost effective and successful as five of the original coaches went on to become LAG Managers.

**Table 2.10 Summary of LEAD Project planned expenditure**

Cost category	Planned Project expenditure	Proportion of planned total expenditure (%)	Proportion of planned expenditure per category to 30 September 2023
Total project management cost	\$2,231,840.00	28.37%	56.47%
Inception phase	\$139,800.00	1.78%	33.58%
Mobilized, capacitated, and incentivized local actors to define community needs driven strategies in Lori and Tavush	\$1,232,121.00	15.66%	68.27%
Build supporting infrastructure to prioritize, implement and sustain local-grown initiatives in the Northern and other target territories	\$3,403,355.00	43.26%	28.99%
Capacity of the Ministries and other relevant bodies are improved and policy mechanisms at national level are developed for successful pilot and sustainability of LEADER approach in Armenia	\$345,980.00	4.40%	5.02%
Total Direct Intervention	\$5,121,256.00	65.09%	36.95%
Total Direct Costs	\$7,353,095.00		42.87%
Indirect costs, 7%	\$514,717.00	6.54%	42.72%
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>\$7,867,811.98</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>42.86%</b>

Source: Evaluation Team 2023, based on the Initial LEAD Planned Budget, UNDP

Project delivery through partnership between FAO and UNDP has enabled cost-effective action through providing access to a wider range of expertise, in particular FAO agricultural experts familiar with the conditions in Lori and Tavush regions. Getting farmer representation in LAG activities has been an important objective given the importance of agriculture in the local economy. Local and in-house experts

and liaising with Regional Governors and MTAI personnel have also been utilised to support a range of activities, including identification of suitable areas for LAG boundaries, and partnering LAGs with accountable bodies.

### **Challenges of the approach**

The original European LEADER approach is based on seven specific principles, which need to be present simultaneously to ensure the methodology is applied correctly. These principles as well as the process-based development approach and the creation and operation of the Local Action Group define LEADER as a methodology and distinguish it from other local development programmes. Implementing the LEADER approach means investing in local rural development, not only by providing funds but also by expanding the knowledge, skills, self-organization, networking, and cooperation, hence strengthening the voice of local communities/ people. The LEAD programme aims to follow this methodology, however, some challenges regarding the approach and its effectiveness have been identified during the evaluation.

FAO utilised their agricultural expertise to support establishment of Farmer's Associations and consultants to provide individual support to those applying for grant funding. The Farmers Association Specialists/Managers have done valuable work across all 5 LAGs in approaching and working with farmers to establish a base for future Farmers Associations (11 in place in November 2023, across the 5 LAGs at various stages of registering as legal entities). However, there is some suggestion that this access to experts and free advice gave advantage to some farmers submitting grant applications. LEADER principles aim to ensure a balanced development in terms of social capital, community development as well as support for private businesses. While agriculture plays a key role in respect of economic development in the five LAG areas, it would be beneficial to create a more balanced level playing field for representatives of all three sectors to access grant funding in line with the LAG development strategies priorities. Further capacity building at the LAG level might also be more cost-effective through joint activities from UNDP and FAO which bring together public, private, and civil society organisations. A positive example would be the range of training activities delivered by UNDP, which were available to any person from all economic sectors. Integrated approaches are likely to generate wider benefits within communities, through the potential for enhanced networking and generation of innovative solutions to local issues.

The grant funding processes tended to be rather complex for a pilot project in areas where the local population has little or no experience of responding to competitive tendering and skill levels are low. It would have been more efficient to start with small scale 'seed grants' to develop tendering and grant management skills using a simple set of selection criteria, rather than start with larger grants which tend to benefit larger businesses where grant application skills already exist. This approach would increase the number of grant beneficiaries and enable a wider spread of limited funding across the three sectors, addressing social and environmental, as well as economic issues. An additional issue relates to the extremely short time frame available to applicants to respond to the 'seed' grant call, and limited time in which to spend the funds. This was driven by LAG contractual requirements, but in future funding rounds it would be more effective to provide longer periods for applicant response, enabling time for development and improvement of project proposals. It may be worth considering a longer open call period (with perhaps monthly or bi-monthly LAG selection committee decisions). This would enable applicants to refine or improve project applications for re-submission if initially rejected, building skills and capacity among the wider population, as well as further developing the decision-making experience of selection committee members.

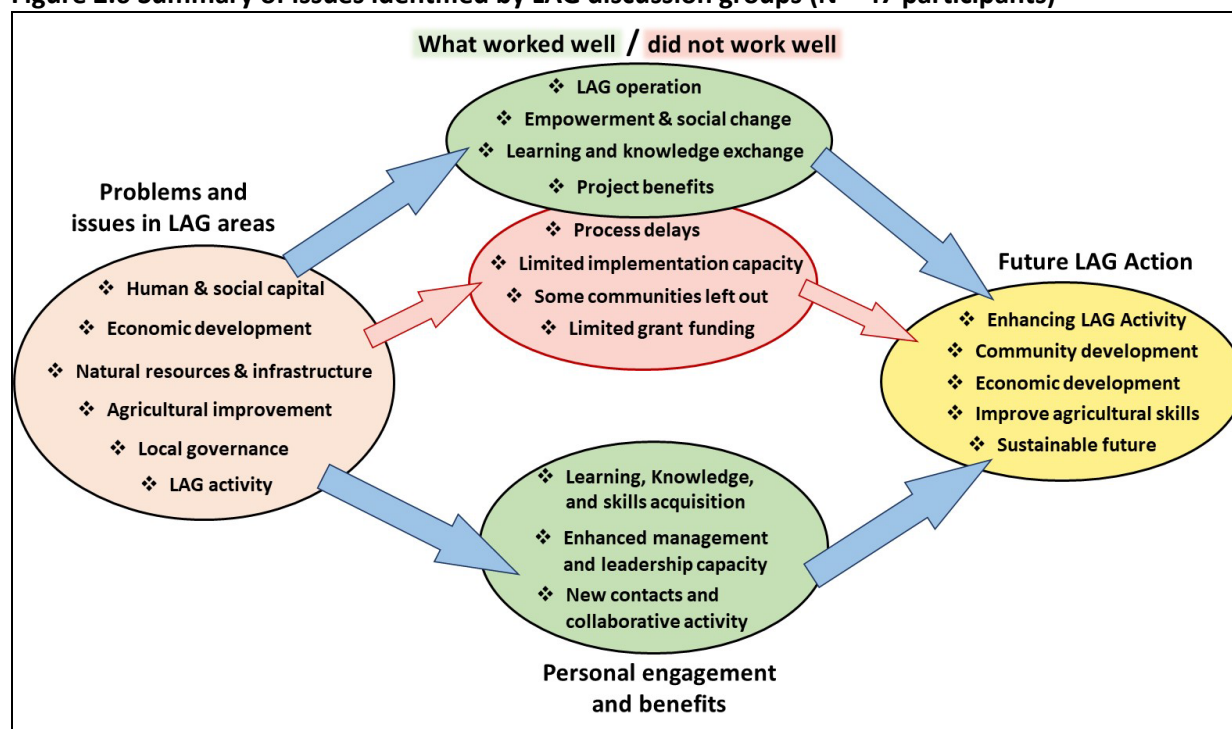
### **2.3.2 Clarity in roles and responsibilities of key actors involved**

Implementing the LEAD Project through UNDP and FAO requires a clear division of responsibilities, which was undertaken at the project design stage. The initial set of project Objectives clearly divided the roles with the two organisations playing to their strengths (i.e. FAO concentrating on agricultural issues and farmer support; UNDP on wider rural issues, strategy development, and both organisations engaged in capacity building). FAO has had a very clear focus on supporting farmers and agricultural development and has operated in-line with the Project Document throughout the period addressed by this evaluation, but this appears to have led to some duplication of effort in relation to capacity building. Actions included hiring a separate set of five coaches targeted at primarily building capacity among the farming community and encouraging the formation of local farm associations to ensure a stronger representation of farmer views within local government and the new LAGs. Given the importance of agriculture (and low skills level) in the local economies of the regions, this approach can be understood, but to a certain extent it can also be viewed as not fully working in line with the LEADER principles of balanced and integrated rural development by providing more resources for agricultural support, especially in relation to assisting farmers make grant applications. On this latter point the level of FAO input meant that the organisation pro-actively decided not to take part in the final validation of project selection due to a potential conflict of interest.

The LAG discussion groups (November 2023) identified a range of issues affecting the LAG areas (Figure 2.6). Across the five LAGs discussion group participants identified problems with human & social capital, local governance, local service infrastructure, economic development, and agricultural improvement. Agricultural issues included: inefficient production, outdated machinery, lack of knowledge and problems with collection, storage, and sales of agricultural products. But the same group also identified key problems relating to the lack of human & social capital, such as a low level of literacy, lack of skills and education, a lack of motivation, apathy, a lack of trust which reduces the level of involvement, high levels of poverty and social vulnerability, and out-migration of young people. The combined effect of these factors results in weak local governance, a lack of competence of public sector actors, poor infrastructure, and weak cooperation between local governments, all of which create barriers to development.

Discussion of the negative aspects of LAG activity addressed concerns over the limited level of funding available, the large number of project applications that were not funded, and a perceived concentration of funding on agriculture by the participants. When it came to making suggestions for future LAG activity the importance of funding for agricultural processes was identified, but participants also indicated this needed to take place alongside other areas important to community development, such as culture and education.

**Figure 2.6 Summary of issues identified by LAG discussion groups (N = 47 participants)**



Source: Evaluation Team: LAG Discussion Group analysis, 2023

**2.3.3 Extent to which the activities and results achieved are cost-efficient.**

The rural context in which LAGs are operating has been described (in Section 1 of this report) as one of weak communications, poor access to markets, limited or missing service infrastructure, low employment, social exclusion, lower education and literacy rates and low skills. To ensure future sustainability, communities require development of human, social and economic capital. Projects are required that broaden out the economic base (e.g. through tourism development), provide training and skills development, and support basic services delivery and infrastructure improvement.

The LEAD project activities related to capacity building appear to have resulted in significant improvements in management skills and capabilities, and resulted in a large number of grant applications, the majority of which met the required technical criteria. LAG Strategies based on local needs assessment have been adopted by all 5 LAGs in Lori and Tavush Regions along with Action Plans covering the next two years. UNDP and FAO experts worked closely with LAGs members providing assistance to ensure the strategy documents were in line with national policy developments. These joint activities, using internal experts to work with and build skills at the local level proved to be a cost-effective approach linking local knowledge with expert understanding of the wider policy context. Given the lower level of skills and education in some LAG areas the capacity-building activities, including the foreign study tours, have achieved a high level of cost-efficiency. As noted earlier (Section 2.1.5) over 3,000 local residents attended the initial coaching meetings, FAO coaches engaged over 900 people in the LAG areas, and 167 individuals gained a higher level of capacity building through involvement with the LAG working groups. Less effective were some of the early on-line training courses (developed initially when COVID-19 restrictions were in place).

In 2023 a total of \$533,645 of grant funding was awarded across 110 projects in the five LAG areas. The majority (\$443,984) was allocated to 44 projects in the first round of funding. The second round of funding allocated a total of \$89,662 to 66 projects. Average size of a First-round grant was \$10,090 compared to an average of \$1,350 per seed grant in the second round (Table 2.11). Initial selection of projects was undertaken at LAG level, providing a cost-efficient approach, while final validation was undertaken by a national level committee made up of UNDP experts and MTAI personnel. This latter element was slow to respond to the first round of grant-funded projects delaying the decision for several months and to some extent undoing the level of trust that had been built up over the previous two years. Delays were caused by a number of factors including an initial attempt requiring LAG managers to attend the committee meetings (which proved too time consuming), and difficulties on agreeing committee membership. Oversight of grant funding is essential, and the process could be undertaken much more quickly by document checking through internal UNDP procedures and liaising on-line with LAG Managers and accountable bodies where necessary.

At this point in time, it is not possible to determine the value-added of the investment in the area as few projects have been completed and no benefit estimates have been made. However, the two rounds of grant funding have leveraged additional private and public sector funds that would not have been available without the grant support and resulted in total expenditure of \$1.267 million across the 5 LAG areas. It is also clear that the initial round of larger grants was more narrowly focused on agricultural activities than the smaller seed grants. Just over 60% of the number of projects (and 59.8% of the funding) were related to agricultural production, processing, or service support, and 20% to tourism infrastructure (Figure 2.7). There may be multiple reasons for the pattern of funding, including limited submissions from public or civil society organisations, or other economic sectors but relatively few projects supported cultural, community services, or other forms of economic development.

The pattern of investment so far suggests an unbalanced approach to rural development. While this may benefit farm businesses in the short term and result in some additional employment, it is unlikely to generate significant long-term benefits for the wider communities in the LAG areas. If the prime focus on private sector investment continues it may work against sustainable rural development and turn the wider community away from future LAG involvement. More balanced approach regarding LAG project funding distribution e.g. one supporting all three sectors would be beneficial going forward.

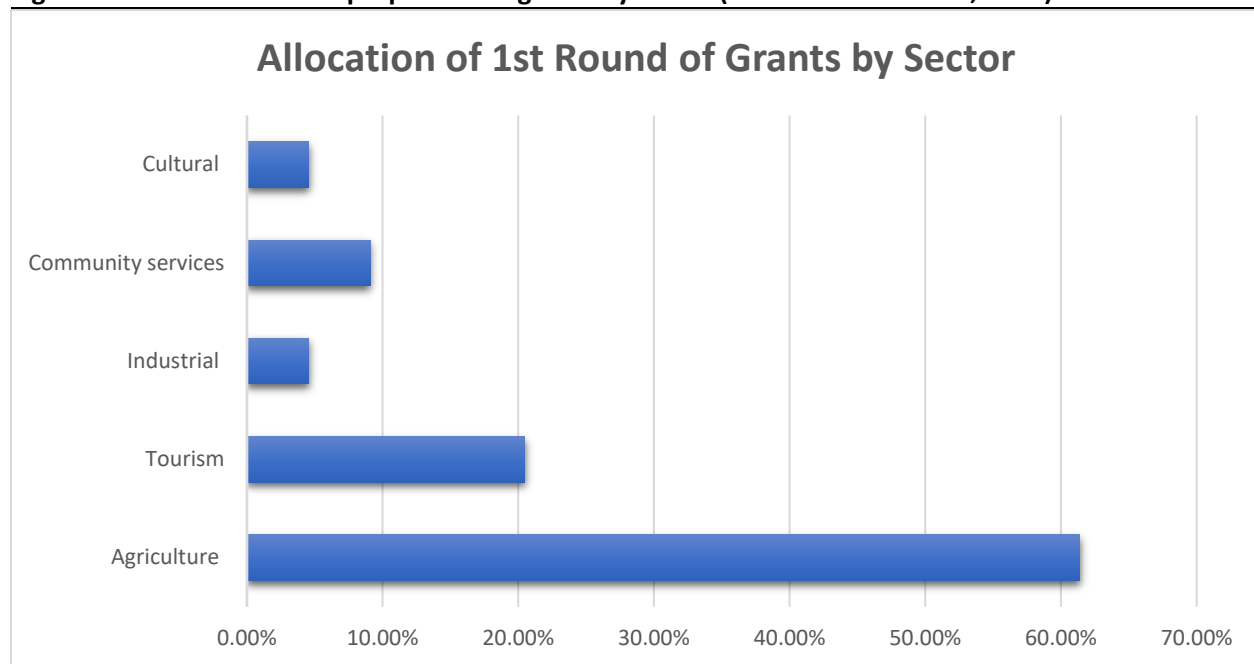
**Table 2.11 Summary of Grant funding allocation across the five LAG areas in 2023**

LAG	First Grant projects (Number)	1st Grant project funding (USD)	Seed grant projects (Number)	Seed Grant project funding (USD)	Total number of projects	Total grant funding (USD)
Tashir +	4	\$94,205	7	\$8,750	11	\$102,955
Gandzor	10	\$87,089	14	\$19,948	24	\$107,037
Lorva Dzor	9	\$109,151	10	\$13,540	19	\$122,691
Tsili Tsov	12	\$101,824	7	\$9,950	19	\$111,774
Aghstevi Hovit	9	\$65,678	28	\$38,471	37	\$104,149

<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>\$457,947</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>\$90,659</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>\$548,606</b>
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Source: UNDP Reports 2023

**Figure 2.7 Allocation of the proportion of grants by sector (1st Round of Grants, 2023)**



Source: Evaluation Team summary of expenditure data 2023

## 2.4 Impact

### 2.4.1 Extent to which the Project has achieved its overarching goal of improved quality, transparency, and inclusiveness of area-based/territorial development local processes and operations.

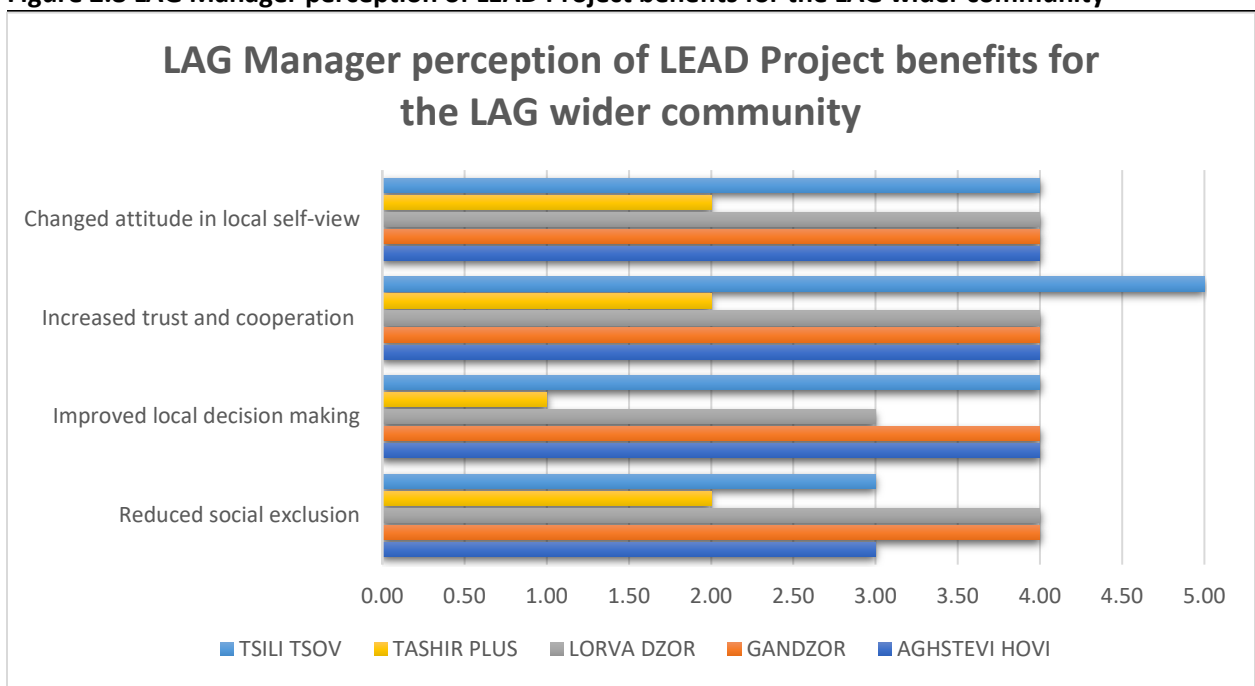
The LEAD project has had significant positive and far-reaching impacts in terms of building the skills, knowledge, and awareness of residents in the five LAG areas. Taking a LEADER-based approach based on principles of bottom-up decision making, networking, and integrated rural development it has succeeded in initiating the potential for transparent and more inclusive rural development at the local level. LAG managers have received training and developed management skills, LAG members have got involved in strategy development, and project selection while the wider communities in the LAG areas have benefitted from increased awareness of rural development, and some have developed skills in applying for grant funding.

LAG managers have benefitted in particular through improvements in management skills and knowledge and also in terms of confidence and ability to collaborate with other people (Figures 2.2 and 2.3). LAG Managers have also indicated that there are perceptible changes within the wider communities of the LAG areas, including a change in attitude of how the community views itself, and improvements in trust and cooperation. There were also smaller improvements noticed in reducing social exclusion (Figures 2.8 and 2.9). The pattern of change across LAGs is uneven, but that would be expected given that the local governance and socio-economic context within each LAG area is different (for example, Tashir Plus scores lower than other LAGs on all four areas of improvement, while Tsili Tsov consistently scores high).

Overall, these indicators suggest a capacity for change that can lead to higher levels of partnership working and a willingness to engage in networking and collaborative activities, which are basic requirements for more sustainable and integrated social and economic development.

The identified changes are similar to indicator scores provided by a range of policy level stakeholders from implementing bodies, central, and regional government, who also indicate a perceived level of improvement in community attitudes, local decision making, trust and cooperation, and in reducing social inclusion and (Figures 2.10 and 2.11). The pattern of Mean scores is similar (but slightly higher) to that of the Mean scores across the five LAG Managers. It is interesting to note that, in general, the implementing agency (UNDP and FAO) scores are lower than for the other stakeholder representatives in the sample. However, this is only a small sample (n=5) of stakeholders most closely involved with the LEAD project implementation, so care must be taken not to generalise too widely based on the scores presented here. The overall impression, however, is one of recognised positive change in the four aspects of territorial governance that were scored on a 5-point scale.

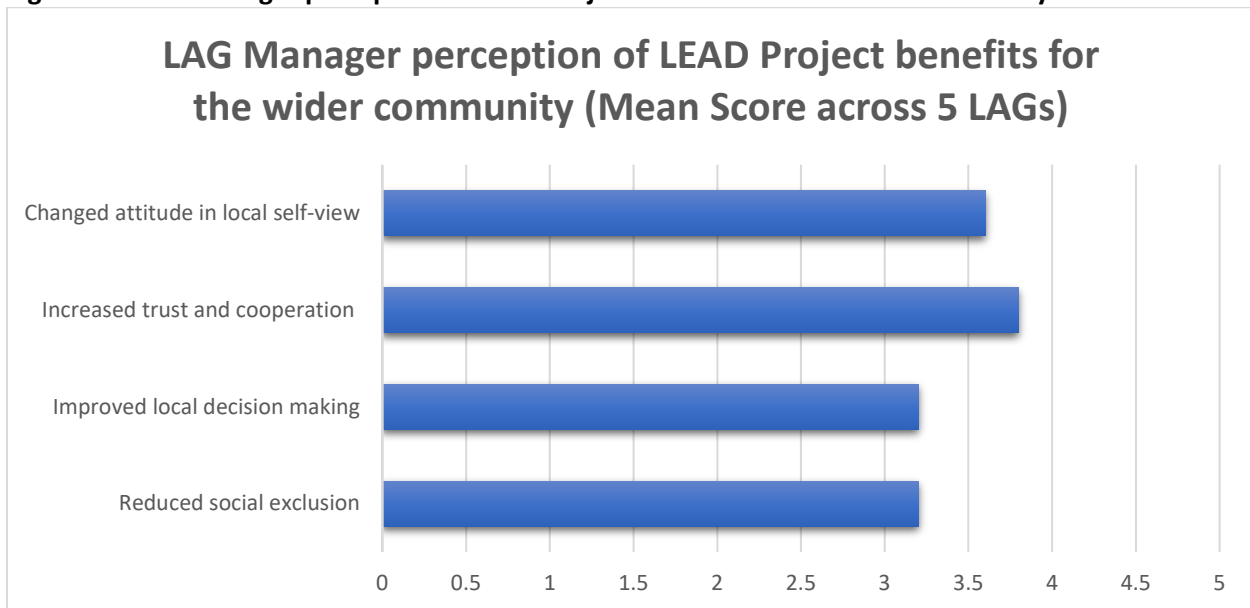
**Figure 2.8 LAG Manager perception of LEAD Project benefits for the LAG wider community**



Source: Evaluation team, 2023

NOTE: The 5-point scale measures the perceived extent of change in the outcome: Where 1 = Very low level of improvement; 3 = Medium level of improvement; 5 = Very high level of improvement

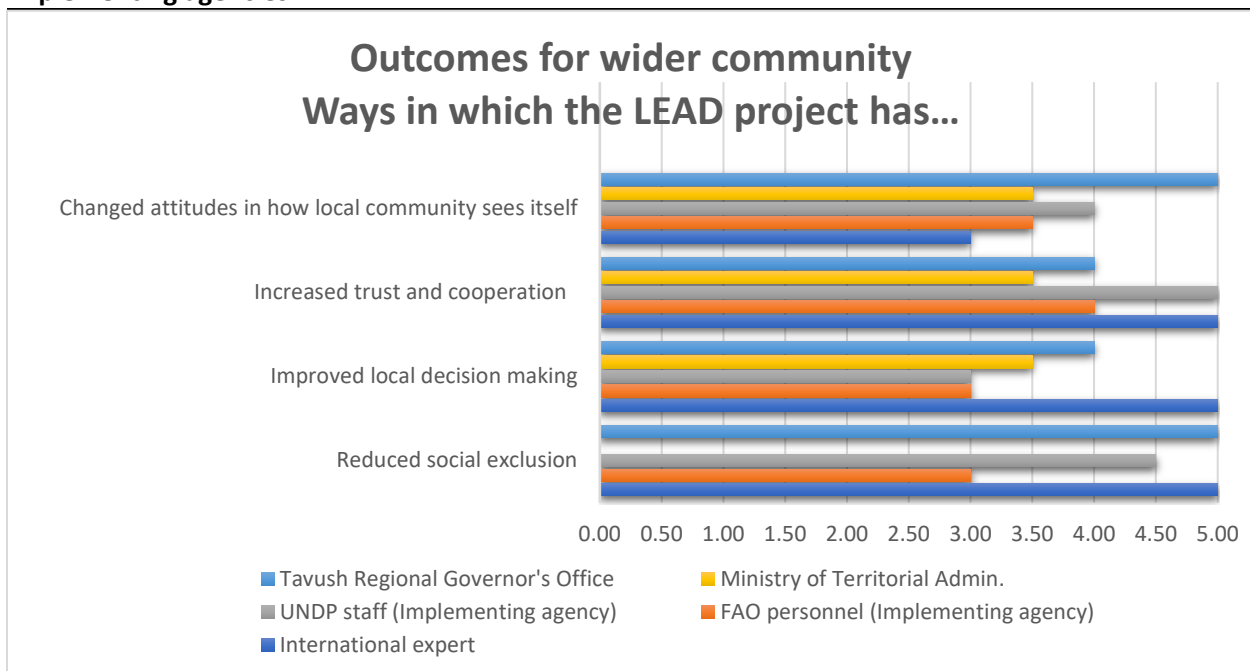
**Figure 2.9 LAG Manager perception of LEAD Project benefits for the wider community**



Source: Evaluation Team, 2023

NOTE: The 5-point scale measures the perceived extent of change in the outcome: Where 1 = Very low level of improvement; 3 = Medium level of improvement; 5 = Very high level of improvement

**Figure 2.10 Outcomes for wider community: Scores from 5 representatives of government bodies and implementing agencies**

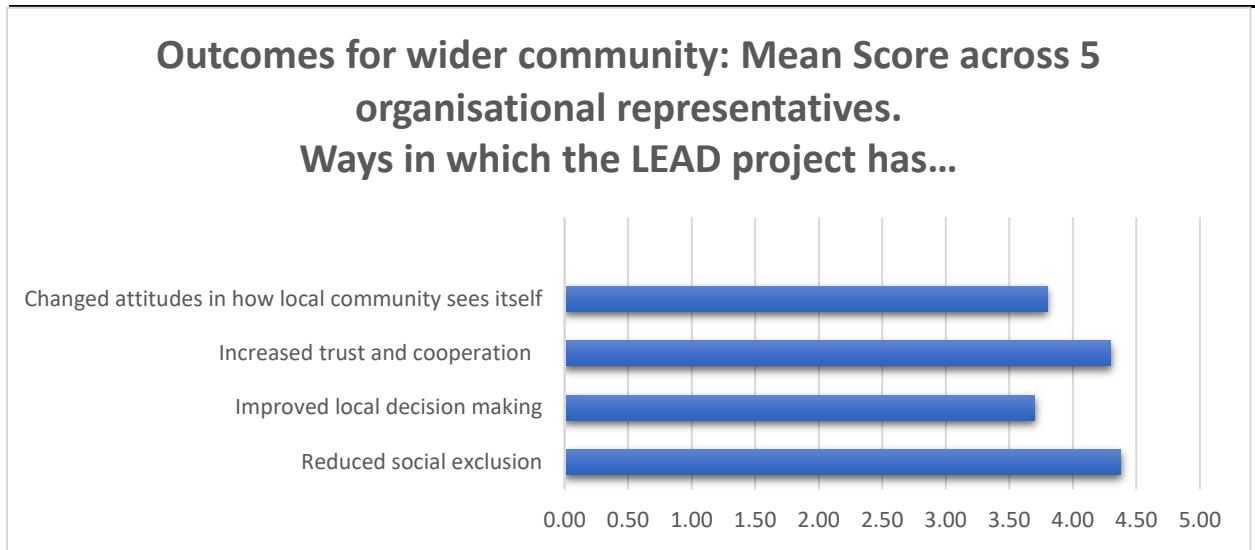


Source: Evaluation Team, 2023

NOTE: The 5-point scale measures the perceived extent of change in the outcome: Where 1 = Very low level of improvement; 3 = Medium level of improvement; 5 = Very high level of improvement



**Figure 2.11 Outcomes for wider community: Mean score across 5 representatives of government bodies and implementing agencies**



Source: Evaluation Team, 2023

NOTE: The 5-point scale measures the perceived extent of change in the outcome: Where 1 = Very low level of improvement; 3 = Medium level of improvement; 5 = Very high level of improvement

The discussion groups undertaken in each LAG also identified a number of improvements as a result of the capacity building activities. The main issues identified when discussing what worked well / did not work well in terms of LAG operation are summarised across all 5 discussion groups in Table 2.12.

**Table 2.12 Identified changes resulting from LAG Activity**

Category of change	Description
<b>LAG visibility</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having a LAG office – has been very important (4 offices were opened in 2023 and in all cases were an important factor - bringing visibility and as well serving as a hub for advice and assistance)</li> <li>• Direct meetings in communities – helped to get communities on board (“now we have people from each community involved”)</li> <li>• Transparency- everyone can see what the LAG is working on</li> <li>• LAG is starting to be recognised, “people come to us”; “people turn to us for advice”</li> </ul>
<b>Perception</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perception of the LAG has changed- LAG is perceived as a platform for all 3 sectors</li> <li>• LAG is a good example of how border between regions is no barrier to development- “people work together”, there is collaboration, and “it is beneficial for business”</li> </ul>

<b>Leadership and Professionalism</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional LAG management team- and dedicated LAG members; LAG manager respected in the communities</li> <li>• LAG played an important role in identifying problems and finding ways how to address them</li> <li>• LAG bringing people together, networking, generation of new ideas. LAG brought together 3 sectors for discussion on the strategy; Good collaboration, LAG generates ideas</li> <li>• Before, people were waiting for someone to tell them what they can do, now we have our own strategy, and we are trying to generate resources from bottom up</li> <li>• LAG members are active and speak on behalf of their communities &amp; on other issues as well (e.g. new mining activities in the area)</li> </ul>
<b>Local support</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LAG provided new opportunities for investment (since 2020 there was a decrease in investment into the area)</li> <li>• LAG assisted people displaced from Nagorno Karabakh</li> </ul>

Source: Evaluation Team based on the analysis of 5 LAG Discussion Groups, Discussion Groups (N=47), 2023.

The discussion indicated wider recognition that the LAG was bringing people from different sectors together, of the potential for increased collaboration, provision of investment opportunities and respect for LAG Managers. Participants also suggested an enhanced leadership role with references to local people ‘coming to us’, generating ideas, and the significance of having a development strategy created by those living in the area.

In terms of the benefits arising from locally funded projects the participants indicated the following were relevant:

- Projects will have visible impact in the communities and changes can be seen; Projects will benefit communities in the LAG area
- Small producers will benefit from projects
- Projects will have synergistic effects as a result of LAG activity
- There is an increased level of engagement - especially from project beneficiaries
- Grant funding is bringing new ideas, vision, and motivation
- Grant funding- brings economic benefit to the areas, some projects will create new jobs

## 2.5 Sustainability

### 2.5.1 Extent to which the Project has been able to support local communities in identifying local development strategies and addressing local needs, including economic development.

In the 5 LAG areas the project has achieved a significant level of support from local residents. A large number of residents were involved in the participatory approaches that created the local development strategies and implementation plans. Although these processes involved UNDP and FAO expert support it was the local people that identified local issues and helped determine the priority needs for their areas.

To date, the extent to which local needs (which are extensive and wide ranging) have been addressed is limited by the relatively small amounts of funding available across the five LAG areas. There was never any expectation that around \$2 million of grant funding would be able to fully address local needs and deliver a step-change in economic development. As of September 2023, \$547,370 has been allocated

across 110 projects (an average of 22 projects per LAG), although this has also leveraged private sector in the form of the required proportions of match funding. It is too soon to determine what the effects this funding might have as most of the projects only started during the second half of 2023.

It must be borne in mind, that any investment in the area is welcome as these are some of the most deprived regions of the country. The issue is whether the investments will enhance community social and economic resilience, and the extent to which they provide a foundation for improving quality of life (thus contributing to reduced out-migration) and building a foundation for a sustainable local economy. The scale of grant funding is not sufficient to solve all the local development issues. More valuable in terms of sustainability, is the LEAD project's contribution to building the capacity and optimism of local people by developing skills that will enable them to network and collaborate, develop local solutions to local problems, and apply for other sources of funding.

### 2.5.2 Project implementation

Project implementation has been challenging given the local and national contexts in which the project is operating. Figure 1.1 illustrates two action arenas for LEAD implementation: the local territorial operating context, and the policy context, which have different challenges. Chapters 1 and 2 of this report have largely focused on the operating context – the LAG areas where the project is being implemented but the implementing agencies (UNDP/FAO) are also operating in a wider national policy arena, where government policy changes and reactions to external influences (outside Armenia) can have implications for project sustainability. A key issue for the implementing bodies has been the difference in approach based on LEADER principles, which generate social, environmental, and economic changes that are not captured by standard monitoring metrics (such as number of jobs created).

Discussion with representatives from MTAI indicate involvement of three personnel with the LEAD project, an active level of engagement including participation in meetings in the Marzes and with Project management, and a high level of support for the LEADER concept and for the LAGs which have been established in the three northern regions. MTAI, however, does not view itself as a main partner in the project, rather, it identifies local governments and Regional Governor offices as the key partners. MTAI is a member of the SSC, and sees its role as one of contributing information, rather than being involved in implementation. On balance the LAGs are perceived by MTAI as an additional asset for development in rural areas and providing support in working towards Sustainable Development Goals.

*“Any additional value in the community is good for the community, for the region and for the country as a whole. So, we have two very important priorities that are Sustainable development of communities and supporting businesses in communities.”*

*“... the Community should see LEADER as part of their sustainable development because otherwise when the project ends, the money ends and everything ends. So that's why we want to include LEADER in the national strategy, in local strategies, and in regional strategies also so that they can see them as potential for future sustainable development.”*  
(CG2 interview, 2023)

Although LAGs were identified for inclusion as a 'priority' in future development strategies at national and regional levels, it is not clear at present how they might be funded, or what role they might play. Suggestions were made regarding extending the LEAD approach across all rural areas of Armenia but again there was no indication of a specific funding stream yet. It was suggested that LAGs could apply to local or central governments or to international organisations for funding. There were also indications

that LAGs could play a stronger role in the economic development of rural communities through developing industrial areas (mining for example) and new technologies, taking on larger projects and cooperating together across larger areas, though this suggests some level of misunderstanding of LEADER principles and how LAGs operate in practice. Nevertheless, the MTAI has engaged UNDP to assist with the drafting of the Territorial Development Strategy of Armenia for the period of 2024-2030. The Strategy is to be adopted by the Government later this year (2024). The document is to include a dedicated section on the LEADER programme in Armenia, including a proposal for various approaches to support the sustainability of Local Action Groups (LAGs). At the same time FAO is actively advocating for LEADER approach to be included in agriculture related policies.

The EU Delegation has suggested some of the difficulties in engaging with the relevant Armenian Government ministries might stem from the limited scale of the approach being taken with only 8 LAGs being funded (5 in Lori and Tavush, 3 in Shirak), which has made it appear to have limited impact with lower levels of funding for projects. In terms of evaluative evidence, the need for indicators to measure the more intangible outcomes from the LEAD project was emphasised.

Additional complicating factors include a government focused on security and border issues and dealing with the in-migration following the conflict with Azerbaijan to the extent that other issues now take second place.

At the Regional level the LAG offices, funding and capacity building activities are viewed favourably. Discussions with the Regional Governor Offices in Lori and Tavush revealed a high level of interest in the LEAD project. These Offices do not have separate budgets for project implementation but must make specific requests to central government for funding. Although their main role is to ensure implementation of central government policy the regional government offices were aware of the LEAD project and noted the potentially valuable role played by LAGs in their regions and involvement of LAGs in the preparation of the future regional development strategies.

### **2.5.3 Factors hindering the sustainability of Project outcomes**

Table 2.3 summarises some of the key factors affecting project implementation. Some of these are external and beyond the control of project implementing bodies, including the initial situation at the start of the project with military conflict and the COVID-19 pandemic limiting travel and a wide range of activities. It also led to a diversion of funds and resources away from the primary objectives of developing a bottom-up integrated approach to rural development during the first year of operation. The effects of the pandemic will not influence sustainability of project outcomes but the unsettled nature along the border with Azerbaijan and the need to support recent arrivals is likely to continue having an impact. In particular it is diverting attention and resources away from any form of innovative approaches to rural and economic development, creating a more difficult policy context for longer term funding for the LEAD project (CG1, 2023). Project implementing bodies will have to demonstrate the value added of project outcomes and raise awareness of the approach among a range of central government policy makers in order to support future sustainability.

There are also a range of factors linked to project management processes which have potential to adversely affect sustainability. These include the following:

Complex funding application procedures: can turn people away from further involvement (especially where current skills and educational levels are low, and available fund amounts are small)

Relatively slow decision processes in relation to grant funding: results in loss of trust; people seek alternative sources.

Lesser support for community focused projects: the LEAD project is based on achieving integrated development through networking, partnership working, and collaboration across public, private, and civil society. If funded projects are primarily concentrated on the private sector, or on specific types of activity (such as agriculture) then other stakeholders will not get involved, reducing the scope for developing innovative solutions to shared local problems.

Monitoring and measuring project outcomes: A project such as LEAD, taking an innovative approach to rural development that relies heavily on building local capacity, is inherently high risk. Not only does the approach require significant investment in capacity building, but also in changed attitudes and perceptions among experts and policy personnel about implementation processes and what works. Identifying outcomes and the social and economic benefits flowing from an approach based on LEADER principles requires going beyond measuring standard outputs (e.g. number of people involved, number of training events held, number of projects funded). Implementing partners need to capture the changes to human and social capital as a result of capacity building (animation or 'coaching') and involvement in LAG activities. This requires additional effort to develop indicators for monitoring and measuring change.

## **2.6 Project processes and procedures**

### **2.6.1 Project management**

The project is delivered through two partner organisations: UNDP and FAO. Roles are clearly identified in project documentation with FAO using its expertise to take the lead on agricultural issues and providing training and advisory support to farmers in the LAG areas.

The arrangement has worked well with a clear division of responsibilities. During the first year of operation FAO identified key issues affecting farmers across the two regions (as a result of COVID-19, the conflict in the Border area and influx of displaced persons) and provided targeted and effective support. In terms of delivery of key objectives for the LEAD project FAO have concentrated on supporting the agricultural sector through hiring of five coaches (in operate in parallel to the UNDP coaches) to provide training and support development of local 'farmer associations' across the LAG areas. The aim of the farmer associations is to provide a stronger voice representing agricultural concerns within LAG areas. Farmers have also been supported by FAO experts in development of grant funding applications in both rounds of funding that have taken place in the five LAGs.

UNDP have taken the lead in capacity building among the resident populations in order to establish the LAGs, identify accountable bodies, and provided support for development of strategic plans (over 5 years) and action plans (2-year time frame). UNDP have also run training programmes and organised two rounds of grant funding.

### **2.6.2 Project Strategic Oversight**

The project is overseen by a Strategic Steering Committee (SSC) consisting of seven voting members (drawn from the EU Delegation to Armenia; Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure; Ministry of Economy; Austrian Development Agency/Austrian Development Cooperation; United Nations

Development Programme; Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations; International Centre for Migration Policy Development). The SSC also includes 'Observing' members representing structures within the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure. These consist of:

- Regional Administration of Shirak
- Regional Administration of Tavush
- Regional Administration of Lori
- State Migration Service

Along with relevant technical support personnel.

The terms of reference indicate the SSC is: *'the steering and strategic decision-making body of the Programme. It aims to ensure the coordination, planning, implementation and transparency of the Programme and facilitation of synergies between the implementing agencies and stakeholders involved.'* (UNDP, 2019). The main tasks of the SSC are described as:

- providing strategic guidance to the Programme;
- advising on policy and legal framework relevant for implementation of the Programme; including relevant legal framework for institutionalisation of the LEADER approach
- approving the annual work plans of the Programme;
- overseeing the overall implementation/progress of the programme.

The SSC has met five times (as of 31<sup>st</sup> October 2023 with the next meeting planned for early 2024) with 6 to 8-month intervals between meetings and the first meeting taking place in April 2021 (6 months after project initiation). There is no doubt that, the fallout from military conflict, and governmental changes from elections limited the potential for early engagement by SSC members with the LEAD Project. This might also account for the extended time periods (beyond 6 months) between meetings, and lack of understanding of Project characteristics among some of the participants present at the first three meetings (SSC Meeting notes 2021-22).

Although the SSC is identified as a decision-making body the meetings appear to consist largely of presentations from project personnel regarding activities occurring in the previous 6-8 months, followed by an unfocused question and answer form of discussion. There are no action points arising from meetings and no indication that strategic decisions are being made. Meeting minutes suggest that the only decisions made occurred during the third meeting (July 2022). At this meeting, the SSC concluded there was a strong need to deepen understanding of the LEADER among central government bodies, as they will play a key role for developing a framework for adoption of LEADER across Armenia and integrating the concept into territorial development policy. However, the minutes from the 4<sup>th</sup> Meeting (February 2023) indicate no follow-up on the decisions made in July 2022 and no indication of what actions had been implemented.

At the 5<sup>th</sup> meeting (July 2023) SSC participants were focusing on the legacy and future sustainability of the LAGs with realisation of a finite amount of time left for project implementation, and recognition of the need to influence central government policy. Meeting notes suggest that limited progress had been made regarding discussions with relevant departments in central government ministries (Strategic Steering Committee, 2023). The meeting participants agreed on the need for more focus on developing a policy dialogue with central government bodies, a workshop on the project outcomes, and development of process indicators to evaluate achievements. The EU Delegation also suggested more frequent meetings to address future sustainability of the LEAD project.

The operation of the SSC with limited meetings and frequent changes in participants suggests the LEAD Project might not be a high priority, for some organisational representatives. Policy stakeholders (CG1, 2023) have suggested the SSC, which was established to address two very different projects (LEAD and CPMD) is not the best format for providing oversight and guidance. More frequent meetings would enable increased awareness and understanding of the project and greater scope for strategic oversight.

## **Chapter III: Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **3.1 Conclusions and Lessons Learned**

The LEAD Project is being implemented as a pilot to explore the potential for improving conditions in rural areas of Armenia, and in particular as an approach that builds local capacity for addressing problems at the community level. In this sense it is very much an exploration of the potential for improved rural development through focusing on integrated projects that enable social, environmental, and economic issues to be addressed together as inter-related problems. Conclusions are presented below.

Nr.	Conclusions
1	The LEAD Project design and formulation complement the National Programmes and Strategies, particularly the Armenian Regional Development Strategy for 2016-2025, implemented by the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure (MTAI). It is also contributing to the goals set in the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA), the Government Programme 2019-2024, and Strategy for Sustainable Agricultural Development in the Republic of Armenia, as well as Agenda 2030.
2	LAG Strategic Action Plans complement national rural policy objectives and contribute to SDGs.
3	Individual LAG strategies follow a standard template design and incorporate a mix of local knowledge and input in identifying locally important issues along with skilled data analysis and interpretation linking local objectives to national policy priorities. In this way the LEAD programme has created a new approach to strategic rural development through integrating objectives at the community level in LAG territories with broader regional and national policy goals.
4	The LEAD4 Lori & Tavush Project objectives are clearly identified along with a phased strategy for implementation, however the initial project period was complicated by the requirement to respond to the perceived impacts of the COVID -19 pandemic. The Project objectives are ambitious, but the project is on track to achieve them.
5	The implementation processes for the most part have been effective. There is some room for improvement, particularly in relation to grant funding and project selection procedures. In terms of effectiveness the capacity building and ‘animation’ activities have been very effective in contributing to project outcomes but there are areas for potential improvement, for example, an enhanced working relationship between the implementing bodies leading to more integrated delivery.
6	<p>The assessment of the actual achievements vs. planned at specific outputs level shows no major deviations from the plan for most of the indicators with few exceptions. Several indicators show figures that exceed the target value, most of them are related to the high level of participation of the local stakeholders in the project’s activities.</p> <p><u>Objectives 1 and 2</u> rightly focus on building the basic structures to support rural development based on LEADER principles and as the data evaluation reveal, have been successful. Establishment of 5 LAGs through animation of the rural population and capacity building of sufficient local stakeholders to enable creation and adoption of 5 LAG Strategies and Action Plans represents significant achievements within less than three years (given the delay in starting, and local context). High level of capacity building on issues such as ‘formulating a LAG vision’ identifying objectives, local assets and financing and compliance was reported as well as increased awareness, skills &amp; knowledge of LAG area residents; raised awareness of rural development opportunities through study tours. The LAG activities initiated first steps towards increased collaboration and integration between different sectors at a local level.</p> <p>Successful selection of local projects (a total of 110 projects were supported with \$548,606 allocated in two rounds of grant funding as of September 2023) raised capacity to apply for grant funding and provided grant funding support for small enterprises and community development. LAG activities in general changed attitudes among local population and identified opportunities for further development.</p>



	<p>On a hindsight final LAG project selection process was delayed by several months and focus should be on streamlining application process and further training/ capacity building at the level of LAG Select Committees. There has also been limited level of integrated development projects and strong focus on agriculture, more sectoral balanced focus should be considered.</p> <p><u>Objective 3</u> addresses aspects of the project largely targeted for the final year of project implementation and majority of targets are yet to be fulfilled. Progress has been made in 2023 especially in respect of Output 3.1 Policy framework for overall adaptation of the LEADER approach to the territorial development strategy of Armenia (UNDP).</p>
7	Efficient use of resources. Efficiencies are achieved through utilising administrative support currently existing within the UNDP (e.g. IT, Finance and Budget, Communications, Reporting) as well as resorting to a local organisation (Youth Cooperation Centre of Dilijan) already based in and operating in one of the regions to deliver the initial training and capacity building of “community coaches.” This provided value for money (e.g. training/coaching).
8	Relevance and Impact criteria achieved at a high level. This was accomplished through significant involvement of local levels of stakeholder participation achieved through linking UNDP and FAO expertise and a high level of local capacity building.
9	Impact on the populations of the LAG areas is high. The evaluation evidence reveals changes in attitude, in confidence and for some stakeholders (such as LAG Managers, selection committee members, those involved in strategy development) significant and recognisable improvements in awareness, knowledge and skills. For the wider population of the areas there are indications of increased respect for LAGs, improvements in social inclusion, and scope for wider change and opportunities.
10	Large scale ‘flagship’ projects that are to provide enhanced resilience and sustainability for the LAGs after the project funding ends are yet to be implemented. Their aim is to provide support for LAG sustainability and provide a foundation for planning and income generation. Building human and social capital through training and collaborative action will be vital to enable realisation of the long-term benefits of flagship projects and create secure foundations for the sustainability of LAGs.
11	There is a generally positive attitude towards the LEADER approach, but a longer-term formal commitment of the Government to support and enhance further LEADER development processes, including financially sustaining the existing LAGs is currently not in place. The Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure, as the main national implementing partner of the project has, however requested the UNDP project team to assist the Ministry in drafting the 2024-2030 Territorial Development Strategy of Armenia. The Strategy is to be adopted by the Government this year (2024). It will have a separate section on LEADER programming in Armenia. The Strategy will propose approaches to enhance LAG sustainability and will also introduce relevant regulatory and legislative changes necessary for the purpose of opening opportunities for LAGs to apply and receive funding from subvention schemes to implement local projects. In addition, FAO is actively involved in mainstreaming LEADER [and LAG] concept in agriculture policy documents.
12	Systematic advocacy work at national level by UNDP and FAO is needed to develop wider support within relevant policy communities over the remaining project period, to ensure LAG sustainability into the future.

### 3.2. Recommendations

Based on the evaluation findings a set of recommendations are suggested in order to improve project delivery and enhance efficiency, impact and sustainability over the remaining two years of implementation. Recommendations are summarised in relation to improving project delivery against the evaluative criteria and are divided into five areas- Governance, Advocacy, Capacity Building, Enhancing Processes and Procedures and Capturing Outcomes.

Recommendation 1: Strengthen Governance Processes			
Number 1	Institutional focus	Tasks	Priority
	UNDP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Build stronger relationship among the implementation agencies and with the national Ministries</li> </ul>	High
	SSC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage scheduling of more frequent meetings with a forward-looking agenda</li> </ul> <p><i>Strategic oversight - It is recommended that the SSC meetings take place more frequently (4 times per year) with a forward-looking agenda (rather than one that focuses on historic activity).</i></p>	High
	Implementing Agencies (UNDP; FAO)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enhance collaboration and transparency between LAG and FAO Farm Association activities. Actions should be integrated and coordinated</li> </ul>	Medium
	UNDP/LAGs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enhance implementation of the 7 LEADER/CLLD principles within LAGs and build LAG identities</li> </ul>	Medium
	LAGs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote integrated delivery of local projects (wider impact)</li> </ul>	Medium
	SSC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Circulate reports of past activity in advance of meetings, focus discussion on future action</li> </ul>	Low

Recommendation 2: Engage in and Enhance Advocacy Activity at National and Regional Level			
Number 2	Institutional focus	Task	Priority
	Implementing Agencies (UNDP; FAO)	<p>Increase advocacy work with policy communities to gain national support for integrated rural development approaches like LEADER, based on bottom-up decision-making</p> <p><i>Positive endorsement and recent steps taken by the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure to engage UNDP in helping draft the 2024-2030 Territorial Development Strategy of Armenia is encouraging, but the LEAD implementing agencies need to engage in more systematic and coordinated advocacy work and develop a strategy for gaining additional support within the Armenian policy community for LEADER type approaches to rural development.</i></p> <p><i>Greater effort is required to demonstrate the effectiveness of the approach, and the wider benefits to communities in the LAG areas through control systems, monitoring, and evaluation. Both UNDP and FAO need to engage more strongly in advocacy work taking a strategic approach targeting key departments in multiple Ministries to raise the profile of the LEAD project, its benefits, and how it can be successfully managed and utilised as</i></p>	High

		<p><i>a development tool by central government and regional agencies.</i></p> <p><i>Short quarterly reports summarising LAG activity would assist in awareness raising and understanding of the LEAD approach. Targeted meetings with key Ministry personnel would assist UNDP/FAO to better understand central government views and policy direction.</i></p>	
Implementing Agencies (UNDP; FAO) & MTAI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage LAGs to be involved in preparation of the Regional/National territorial development strategies</li> </ul>		Medium
LAGs/UNDP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote LAG activities at regional and national level (consider dedicated LAG website, share good practice examples, successful project stories, promote cross-sector partnership collaboration etc.)</li> </ul>		Medium

Recommendation 3: Strengthen Capacity Development			
Number 3	Institutional focus	Tasks	Priority
	Implementing Agencies (UNDP; FAO)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support LAGs to become financially sustainable and build sufficient capacity through flagship projects; LAGs can position themselves as local HUBs in respect of advice, and through pro-active collaboration with other organisations/ foundations / grant giving organisations and regional marzes</li> </ul>	High
	UNDP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Target training to those submitting applications and LAG Selection Committee Members. Use face-to-face training (especially with local stakeholders)</li> </ul>	High
	LAGs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strengthen role of women within LAG bodies and grant applicants</li> </ul>	High
	UNDP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure all LAGs have an independent office, as that strengthens their status within the territory, contributes to LAG identity and independence and provides a base for learning, knowledge exchange and an advisory 'hub'</li> </ul> <p><i>The evaluation has identified the importance and value created through presence of LAGs in defined office space in LAG areas. The existence of an office provides a physical presence and builds trust among the wider LAG area population. A physical space can operate as a 'hub' for dissemination of knowledge and information, and as a source of advice. Face-to-face interaction between LAG members will also improve the potential for collaboration and development of innovative solutions to local problems, and the 'hub' can act as a conduit of information between central and regional governments and local residents.</i></p>	High

	UNDP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop further capacity for decision-making among LAG Managers through training and advisory support</li> </ul> <p><i>LAG Managers measured lower scores on the improvement scale for their personal 'Ability to make decisions', 'Lack of trust, and 'Ability to collaborate'. These three outcomes, trust, collaboration, and the capacity for making decisions are closely linked. They tend to be skills based more on experience and learning from mistakes (i.e. learning what does not work, as well as what works through practice) than through formal study or training. These outcomes are ones that should receive additional attention over the remaining project period to improve the capacity to take action, a key element for sustainability, and should also be measured at the final evaluation.</i></p>	Medium
	UNDP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase networking activities within LAGs and among LAGs within Armenia as well as internationally</li> </ul>	Medium
	UNDP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Further capacity building is required at all levels from LAG members up to and including implementing partner organisations</li> </ul>	Medium

#### Recommendation 4: Enhance and Streamline Internal Processes & Procedures

Number 4	Institutional focus	Tasks	Priority
	LAGs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve validation and checking procedures such that documentation is verified on submission</li> </ul>	High
	LAGs/UNDP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide longer application period for seed grants and consider lower co-financing level for start ups</li> </ul>	High
	LAGs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enlarge pool of trained Select committee members, consider amending the criteria in case of conflict of interest- [additional member should step in, always ensuring decision-making by 5 members]</li> </ul>	Medium
	UNDP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve decision making processes (increase speed at which decisions made)</li> </ul>	Medium
	UNDP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Undertake quality control/auditing of training delivery</li> </ul>	Medium
	UNDP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Streamline processes based on experience; build on what works</li> </ul> <p><i>Grant application criteria and requirements - Improvements can be made through simplification of the requirements and criteria to be met. LEAD is a pilot programme with a key aim of building capacity. Small scale projects in particular should be made accessible to local individuals and organisations through simple application procedures and reasonable lead-in times to enable</i></p>	Medium

	<p><i>people first of all to find out about the funding programmes and secondly to get support to submit applications.</i></p> <p><i><u>Equitable spread of funding across the three sectors</u> - The participatory lead SAPs clearly identify a range of strategic priorities including a focus on agricultural value chains and tourism, as well as improvements in local services and quality of life. These issues also appeared in the LAG discussion groups held as part of this evaluation. Spreading the funding more equally across public and civil society organisations as well as private business is important and will benefit a wider range of the local population and develop capacity across the community, enhancing social inclusion and engagement.</i></p>
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Recommendation 5: Enhance Techniques for Capturing Outcomes and Value Added			
Number 5	Institutional focus	Tasks	Priority
	UNDP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enhance monitoring and evaluation of LAG activities; develop indicators for assessing impact of LAG activities and projects. Introduction of new indicators to better capture project outcomes and value added. These should include:                             <p><b>Social capital:</b> capacity-building, interactions, communication, voluntary work</p> <p><b>Governance:</b> participation of civil society, partnership with authorities</p> <p><b>Better results:</b> enhanced results compared to standard measures, more resilient communities.</p> <p><i>Utilising a set of indicators to monitor the wider social impacts of LAG activities will help provide the evidence needed to convince those at all levels of governance of the value of the approach and its future sustainability. It will also contribute to advocacy actions needed by helping UNDP/FAO determine the key elements of support required beyond the end of the current project funding (e.g. type of support needed, funding requirements) and the potential benefits to be generated from sustainable programme delivery.</i></p> </li> </ul>	High
	UNDP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Demonstrate value-added from implementing a LEADER type approach</li> </ul>	High
	Implementing Agencies (UNDP; FAO)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Examine project’s internal monitoring procedures/system and take steps to ensure all relevant data are collected with consistency and coherence</li> </ul>	Medium

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Local Empowerment of Actors for Development in Lori and Tavush Regions: Mid-Term Evaluation Report

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## **Annex 1: Terms of Reference**

### **Terms of Reference**

**Post Title: International Consultant/Lead Evaluator for Project Mid-term Evaluation**

**Project Title:** Local Empowerment of Actors for Development (LEAD) in Lori and Tavush Regions

**Project number:** Project ID: 00118827 / Output ID: 00115480

**Contract modality:** Individual Contract (IC)

**Starting Date:** 11 September 2023

**Duration:** 11 September – 29 February 2024 (26 consultancy days)

**Duty Station:** Home-based with one week mission to Armenia

#### **1. Evaluation background, context, and details:**



[The European Union's \(EU\) funded Project on Local Empowerment of Actors for Development \(LEAD\) in Lori and Tavush Regions](#) (hereinafter the Project) focuses on overcoming complex place-based development challenges associated with the growing territorial disparities in Armenia. LEADER is an EU initiative, a method, and a programme (since 1991) for supporting locally driven rural development to reinvent rural areas and create local businesses, jobs, and better living

conditions. Since 2013 LEADER approach-based programmes have been extended to urban development under the name of Community-Led Local Development (CLLD). The key actor in LEADER/CLLD is a group of empowered local change-makers which emerge throughout community coaching and enter into a partnership as Local Action Group (LAG) and function as a local development initiator, representing local public institutions, businesses and civil society.

This Project in Armenia aims at bolstering the participation of a wide range of local stakeholders in sustainable and inclusive socioeconomic development of their communities through pilot implementation of the above-mentioned EU LEADER/CLLD approaches in Lori and Tavush Regions. The novelty of the LEADER/CLLD methodology is the way it differs from other development efforts – in its alignment with the integrated development paradigm, in placing the mobilization of local social capital at the centre of developmental efforts, and in giving voice and visibility to local people and their development ideas. The Project in Armenia helps localize and design LEAD territorial development models in Lori and Tavush regions, in which women and men, youth, elderly and citizen groups, including minorities, are involved in setting development agenda, decision-making and implementation.

More specifically, the Project helps the local population in Lori and Tavush to play active role in inclusive, resilient, and sustainable local development by strengthening mechanisms of partnership building, territorial cooperation, organizational and service development and creating better local governance through applying the principles and mechanisms of the EU LEADER approach. On the ground this is



happening through building trust and self-confidence, developing entrepreneur attitudes, and encouraging a sense of group cohesion within communities and between regions. The Project's backbone is the strong partnership between different stakeholders (public, private, civil society), which eventually leads to cross-sectoral multistakeholder cooperation through LAGs, the key actors of LEADER/CLLD initiatives formed by local partners in a bottom-up way, responsible for local development, functioning on a certain territory delineated based on economic, sociocultural or other commonalities, who prepare and agree on territorial development strategies, and facilitate the local development process on a long term basis.

As defined in the EU Contribution Agreement ENI/2020/418-150 [Description of the Action](#), the Project is implemented by the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure (MTAI) of the Republic of Armenia (RA) as the Implementing Partner; the United Nations Development Programme as Delegated Body to EU; and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) as the UN Partner for partially implementing key elements of the Action. Through this Action implementation, the Project has been collaborating with local, regional, and national partners, including the local and regional administrations, the Ministry of Economy of the Republic of Armenia (MoE), business associations, civil society organisations (CSOs), and other stakeholders and beneficiaries.

The Project rolled out in the times of big uncertainty and the socioeconomic crisis that new coronavirus disease created in Armenia and worldwide. Beyond the economic impact, the social harm inflicted by was profound. Year one of the Project was adjusted to new reality with adaptation of the Project approach as an emergency response in the target communities. Further to this, in relation to the war in Nagorno-Karabakh in September-November 2020, Armenia faced another humanitarian crisis and provided urgent response to the needs of Displaced population and Spontaneous arrivals - mostly women, elderly and children who were hosted in different communities, hotels, host families, etc. and provided with support of food, shelter, non-food items, psychological assistance, etc.

Delivery of public services remained one of the main challenges for the local communities in Armenia. The local democratic processes driven by community and citizens require additional efforts. UNDP in Armenia has been active in the field of community development from day one, but more actively during the last decade. UNDP is a trusted and well-known partner in the local communities, among the international and local organizations, as well as private sector and civil society organizations. There are strong partnerships formed throughout the years of work in Lori and Tavush marzes.

In response to the Action Document for Local Empowerment of Actors for Development (LEAD), UNDP jointed efforts with FAO having strong track records of agricultural programmes in Armenia, to contribute to the Project within FAO mandate. UNDP and FAO dimensions of work see in [Action Results Chain](#) on page 12 and in the narrative of outputs and activities. The agencies have built their intervention logic based on the approach of the Action and aligned their efforts towards contributing to the goals set in the UN programmatic frameworks in Armenia (UNDAF, UNSDCF, CPD, etc), Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA), the Government Programme 2019-2024, the Armenian Regional Development Strategy 2019-2025, and Strategy for Sustainable Agricultural Development in the Republic of Armenia, as well as the Agenda 2030 and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In relation to the above-mentioned Armenia-UN programmatic framework and the UNDP Country Programme Document (CPD), the Project's Results Framework contributes to the Socioeconomic Pillar Outcome and Outputs during the two programme cycles of 2016-2020 and 2021-2025 (see details in the table at the end of this section).

### **The Project Goal and Objectives:**

The Project's overall goal is to promote local growth and development, leading to improved quality of life, through community engagement in economic and social activities, with particular focus on Lori and Tavush regions of Armenia.

**Objective 1:** Mobilize, capacitate, and incentivize local actors to define community needs-driven strategies in Lori and Tavush regions.

**Objective 2:** Build supporting infrastructure to prioritize, implement and sustain local-grown initiatives in Lori and Tavush regions.

**Objective 3:** Improve the capacity of the relevant ministries and other bodies and develop policy mechanisms at the national level for successful piloting and sustainability of the LEADER approach in Armenia (policy component).

See the Results Framework in the Description of the Action in Appendix 2, Annex 1 of this TOR (yellow marking is for the revision as of 02 February 2021).

### **The Theory of Change:**

The theory of change of the Project hinges on the main assumption that real progress takes place only **when** the local communities are actively involved in laying out their development agenda and working towards its realisation, **when** the local resources are maximised through uniting the assets, knowledge, talents and leveraging the power on different levels beyond the administrative limitations and for public good, and **when** the real results for resilient and sustainable growth are achieved through investments towards expanding people's knowledge, skills and ownership of the process. (See further details in the Action, page 9).

### **Expected impact formulation in the Description of the Action:**

The Project works towards the following impact - the social cohesion in the target territories is increased and the local initiatives are emerging backed up by strong territorial partnerships and local ownership, to offer new paths of sustainable and resilient territorial growth.

### **Expected Project outputs:**

- At least 5 territorial strategic development plans created, and 5 LAGs established;
- Around 1000 local residents mobilized and capacitated for actively contributing to their local development;
- 70 representatives from regional and central government capacitated;
- 150 local initiatives funded in the course of the Project;
- 160 businesses supported, 200 new employment opportunities created, and over 3000 local residents benefited from the post recovery measures.

### **Project stakeholders and partnership approaches in line with 7 features of LEADER:**

**Local partnership** is focused on LAG, which brings together public, private, and civil society partners. The legal form of the LAGs varies from country to country, but partnerships often have a non-profit status. The LAG partnership will be formalized within the framework of a territorial partnership agreement signed by all members.

**Bottom-up** approach is aimed at local stakeholders' participation in decision-making, and in the selection of the priorities to be pursued in local area through strategic planning and implementation.

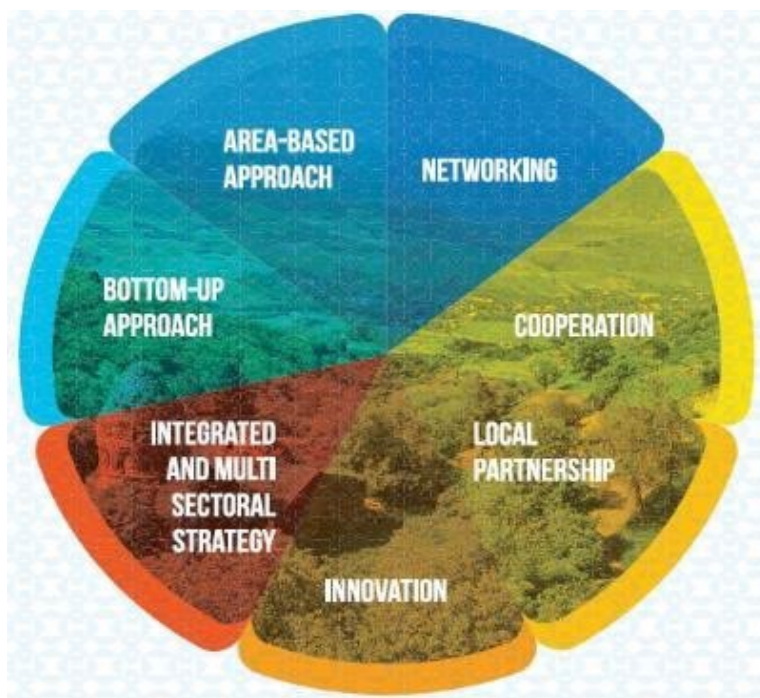
**Multi-sectoral integration** - LEADER is not a sectoral development programme; the LAG strategy must have a multi-sectoral rationale, integrating several dimensions of territorial growth.

**Innovation** - the innovative character of LEADER/CLLD can be seen as a way of promoting development of new solutions for organizing/reorganizing local/rural communities. The approach aims at (re)discovering local resources by the community and revisiting them with new knowledge and technologies. The method aims to bring new local development opportunities to light and build new partnerships. This is an important basis for further innovation and prosperity.

**Local management**, including the financial management, is entrusted to the LAGs. The benefits of this local management arise primarily due to their proximity and their direct relation to local development stakeholders in the given territory.

**Networking and cooperation** - LEAD will support networking and cooperation activities of the Armenian LAG initiatives at the regional, national, and European level. Networking is a means of transferring good practice, of disseminating innovation and building on the lessons learned from local development.

**Local mobilization and animation** – community coaching to ignite the spirit of change, as familiar with the local development challenges, but external to the given communities.



#### **The Project beneficiaries:**

**Background:** Still Armenia is a country where every fourth person - women and men, children, elderly, people with disabilities and minority population both working and unemployed, suffer from material and non-material deprivation. Extreme poverty is decreasing at a slower rate in the rural communities than in urban (0.3% compared to 0.9%). The RA Government Programme (2019) highlights the urgency of fighting extreme poverty through inclusive growth, entrepreneurship, and job creation. Employment is viewed as the primary poverty reduction tool. To attain this goal, promoting new skillset and employment among the poor population and implementing programs encouraging entrepreneurship are of key importance, as well as creation of non-agricultural jobs in rural areas. The Government has been tackling this issue through administrative reform since 2015

via community consolidation, fiscal and administrative decentralization, and unification of communities from 915 to 502.

**Beneficiaries:** Taking into account the above-mentioned background, the Project focuses on local population of women and men, youth, elderly, different citizen, social, and vulnerable groups, minorities, farmers, and other stakeholders in Lori and Tavush to play active role in inclusive, resilient and sustainable local development by strengthening mechanisms of partnership building, territorial cooperation, organizational and service development and creating better local governance.

**The Project key information in a table format:**

Project title	Local Empowerment of Actors for Development (LEAD) in Lori and Tavush Regions
Project number	Project ID: 00118827 / Output ID: 00115480
Corporate outcomes and outputs:	<p>2016-2020 UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) and 2016-2020 UNDP Country Programme Document (CPD) Outcome 1: <b>By 2020, Armenia’s competitiveness is improved and people, especially vulnerable groups, have greater access to sustainable economic opportunities.</b></p> <p>2021-2025 UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) Outcome 4 and 2021-2025 UNDP Country Programme Document (CPD) Outcome 1: <b>People, communities and regions benefit from equitable economic opportunities, decent work, and sustainable livelihoods, enabled through competitiveness and inclusive green growth.</b> Output 1.2: <i>Capacities at national and subnational levels strengthened to promote inclusive local economic development and deliver inclusive public services.</i></p> <p>2018-2021 UNDP Strategic Plan (SP) Output 1.1: <i>National and sub-national systems and institutions enabled to achieve structural transformation of productive capacities that are sustainable and employment- and livelihoods-intensive.</i></p> <p>2022-2025 UNDP Strategic Plan (SP) Output 2.3: <i>Responsive governance systems and local governance strengthened for socioeconomic opportunity, inclusive basic service delivery, community security, and peacebuilding.</i></p>
SDGs supported by the Project:	SDG 17, also 5, 8, 9, 10, 13, 15, 1, 2
Gender Marker	UNDP GEN 2 - significant contribution
Country	Armenia
Region	UNDP Europe and the CIS Region
Date project document signed	Signed – 07 September 2020. Revised – 02 February 2021

Project Dates	Start 01 October 2020	End 30 September 2024
Project budget (resources required)	Total: USD 7,867,812 (FAO: USD 1,878,881.81 and UNDP: USD 5,988,930.19)	
Project budget (resources allocated)	Total: USD 5,842,297	
Project expenditure at the time of evaluation	Total: USD 2,787,384.53 (30 June 2023) (FAO: USD 1,002,319 and UNDP: USD 1,785,065.53)	
Funding source	European Union	
Implementing Party	Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure of the Republic of Armenia	

UNDP in Armenia, as the commissioning unit of this Project mid-term evaluation, hereby seeks the services of international consultant with the profound knowledge and experience of evaluating development results in area-based/territorial development – who in a capacity of Lead Evaluator of the team of two international evaluators will conduct the Project Mid-Term Evaluation of the Local Empowerment of Actors for Development (LEAD) in Lori and Tavush Regions, and present strategic findings, conclusions, and actionable recommendations in the evaluation report (see the full list of deliverables in Section 9). **The Evaluator cannot** have participated in the Project preparation, formulation and/or implementation, writing the Project document, and shall not have a conflict of interest with the Project’s related activities.

## 2. Evaluation purpose, scope, and objectives:

The Description of the Action of the EU Contribution Agreement ENI/2020/418-150 defines that monitoring and evaluation of the Project shall be carried out in line with each UN Organizations policies, rules and requirements, and that parties shall cooperate to avoid duplication of efforts. UNDP commissions this mid-term evaluation since according to UNDP evaluations policy, the project with a planned budget or actual expenditure of more than US\$5 million shall undergo both mid-term and final evaluations. The final evaluation of the Projects will be commissioned by the donor (EU). This evaluation is part of [UNDP Armenia Country Programme \(CPD\) Evaluation Plan 2021-2025](#) and the 2021-2025 UNSDCF Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Plan.

The **purpose** of this evaluation is to make available independent evaluative evidence at this mid-point of the Project implementation to learn on 1) the actual progress made towards the planned targets and expected results and 2) the recommended course corrections or adjustments of approaches as applicable. The Project aims to apply the recommendations from this mid-point towards the end of the Project implementation in September 2024.

Specifically, the **objectives** of the evaluation include:

- i. Assess the continued relevance of the intervention to the changing local development context;
- ii. Measure the progress and fix the current achievement point coming from this independent external review on the Project’s progress towards the planned targets and results in Results Framework vis-à-vis the baselines; discuss reasons behind, conducive and impeding factors;
- iii. Learn about effectiveness, efficiency, as well as, if available already at this stage, prospects for sustainability and impact of the interventions;
- iv. Review and, if needed, introduce adjustments to the Theory of Change behind this project;

- v. Identify and formulate lessons learned identified during the project implementation;
- vi. Validate overall approaches and identify new paths in area-based/territorial development.

This evaluation findings are aimed to be **used** for, but not limited to the following:

- a. Learn about the Project's actual progress and results achieved at this interim stage;
- b. Internalize knowledge coming from the lessons learned and the recommendations towards the end of the Project implementation period;
- c. Learn well well-synthesized and triangulated feedback from grassroots, stakeholders, partners, donor, beneficiaries, etc from local, regional, national and other levels, as applicable;
- d. Embed new knowledge on area-based/territorial development, and update the Theory of Change if necessary.

The **scope** of the evaluation will cover the Project activities undertaken within the framework of this Project from its start in October 2020 until 31 October 2023, with a deeper review of UNDP-supported components as the commissioning unit of this evaluation. The evaluation will: (i) fix the actual values of the Results Framework output, sub-output, and outcome indicators; (ii) make a comparison and discuss the progress from the baseline towards the planned values and the actual progress made, (iii) discuss the results in place along with contribution and attribution aspects. The evaluation will extract lessons learned; diagnose and analyse issues, formulate concrete and viable set of recommendations.

The evaluation will be undertaken in Armenia. Field visits to Lori/Tavush selected communities will be conducted as part of this evaluation. The field visits will be coordinated with the stakeholders and beneficiaries with the support of the Project team, if requested by the evaluators. Specifically, the project staff will assist the evaluation team in organizing the meetings, focus group discussions, interviews with key informants, dissemination of questionnaires, and other support as may be requested by the evaluation team, but the Project staff will not be part of the meetings and /or have any relevance to the content of evaluation team works. The Project team will provide transportation and translation services from external translators, as may be requested by the evaluators.

Interviews will be held by the Evaluators live, unless in some cases when respondents are out of the country or in other circumstances - the interviews may be organized online, as priorly discussed/agreed with the Project team or fixed in the Inception Report. As a minimum, the interviews will be held with the representatives from the following organizations (the final list of key informants will be agreed in the Inception Report):

Key Stakeholders:

- Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure
- Ministry of Economy
- Tavush and Lori Marzpetarans
- Local business owners and civil society representatives
- Local Self-Government (LSG) bodies representatives
- Donor - Delegation of the European Union in Yerevan
- UNDP, FAO

Other stakeholders:

- CSOs (COAF, World Vision, etc.)
- LAG members.

### 3. Evaluation Criteria and Key guiding questions:

The evaluation will mostly focus on the OECD DAC five evaluation criteria such as relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, as well as (to the extent possible) sustainability and impact. The coherence criteria will be additionally discussed and, if necessary, added during the planning phase of the evaluation and respectively reflected in the Inception Report.

The evaluation shall apply the [Norms and Standards of the United Nations Evaluation Group \(UNEG\)](#) and be conducted based on the [UNDP Evaluation Guidelines](#). All Project related documents and materials will be thoroughly reviewed in the inception phase by the evaluation team. The Lead Evaluator will finalize the evaluation design in the Inception Report with a clear Evaluation Matrix, logic and workplan of the evaluation, and specific evaluation questions. The Inception Report will be shared with the evaluation parties and shall be accepted/approved by the commissioning unit before the start of evaluation fieldworks.

#### **The evaluation key guiding questions:**

(Specific evaluation questions will be finalized in the Inception Report).

#### **Relevance**

- Are the Project activities/components relevant to the actual/defined needs of the beneficiaries? Were the objectives clear and feasible? How do the main components of the Project contribute to the planned objectives and are logically interlinked?
- Is the Project in line with the current priorities of the country? How is the Project aligned with, and support the national, regional and community strategies/plans?
- Has the Project involved relevant stakeholders through consultative processes or information-sharing during its preparation phase? Were the territorial/rural development needs considered during the Project implementation and did it reflect the various needs of tripartite stakeholders of LAGs and different stakeholders? Are these needs still relevant? Have there any new, more relevant needs emerged that the Project should consider/address?

#### **Effectiveness**

- How effective has the Project been in establishing ownership by the stakeholders? How has the Project encouraged ownership on behalf of the beneficiaries for learning and applying the newly acquired knowledge and skills in practice? Can the Project management and implementation be considered as participatory?
- Is the Project making sufficient progress towards its planned objectives/outcomes/outputs? What are the key achievements, challenges, and implementation lessons? How can these be applied to the Project?
- To what extent has the capacity building work been effective and did it serve its purpose?

#### **Efficiency**

- To what extent has the project implementing parties made good use of the human, financial and technical resources, and has used an appropriate combination of tools and approaches to pursue the achievement of Project results in a cost-effective manner?
- Was there a clear distribution of roles and responsibilities of key actors involved?
- To what extent did the Project capitalize on other complementary initiatives to the Project to reinforce the results of the Project?

- Have Project funds and activities been delivered in a timely manner? If not, what were the bottlenecks encountered? To what extent are the activities and achieved results cost-efficient?

***Sustainability (to the extent possible)***

- To what extent has the Project been able to support the local underprivileged communities in identifying their local territorial development strategies and addressing their local needs of rural development, including economic development in this mid-term period?
- What are the possible sustainability prerequisites for each of the Project components? What are the hindering factors for ensuring the sustainability of Project outcomes?

***Impact (to the extent possible)***

- Has the Project contributed or is likely to contribute to the long-term political or social changes for individuals, communities, and institutions in relation to its main development course, national development agenda that the Project is aligned with, SDGs, etc?
- To what extent has the Project achieved its overarching goal of improved quality, transparency, and inclusiveness of area-based/territorial development local processes, operations?
- Has the Project had any intended or unintended secondary effect throughout the implementation?

**Cross-cutting aspects**

The Lead Evaluator shall present with sufficient granularity in the Inception Report and later in the Evaluation Report, the methods and approaches, and later findings, conclusions, and recommendations on cross-cutting aspects of the Project – to learn about underlying factors related to gender inequality, vulnerable groups, disability dimension, human rights-based approach, leaving no one behind, innovation, etc. For that the evaluation team with leadership of Lead Evaluator is requested to apply necessary methodology, tools, and data analysis. Please consult UNDP Methodology Guidance Note on Gender Results Effectiveness Scale (GRES) , UN Evaluation Group Guidance Document on Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluations, UNDP Independent Evaluations Office (IEO) Integration of the Principles of Leaving No One Behind (LNOB) in UNDP IEO Methods Centre [here](#).

Cross-cutting guiding questions:

**Participatory deliberation**

- To what extent are the participatory themes integrated into the Project’s activities?
- To what extent did the Project contribute to raising the dialogue culture and public participation in the lives of communities?

**Innovation**

- To what extent has the Project contributed to innovative approaches in community initiatives aimed to strengthen dialogue between civil society and local authorities in relation to e.g., democratic governance, community issues, inclusive local development strategies, etc?

**Human rights, leaving no one behind**

- To what extent have disadvantaged/marginalized groups such as poor, persons with disabilities, etc. had access to and benefited from the Project?



- How were vulnerable groups (including people with disabilities) involved in the project? Have any vulnerable groups been inadvertently excluded of the opportunity to benefit from project activities (during online or offline work)?

**Gender equality, social inclusion conflict sensitivity, capacity building, partnership:**

- To what extent cross-cutting themes were integrated into the Project's activities?
- To what extent have gender equality and the empowerment of women been addressed in the design, implementation, and monitoring of the Project?
- To what extent has the project promoted positive changes in gender equality and the empowerment of women? Were there any unintended effects?
- To what extent the Project addresses discriminatory issues, inequality and/or exclusion of marginalized and vulnerable groups? Were vulnerable groups' needs and priorities reflected in the Project design, interventions, monitoring, and reporting (i.e., via disaggregated data)?
- To what extent did the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure and other stakeholders enhance their capacities on addressing cross-cutting topics?

**4. Evaluation methodology**

The Lead Evaluator in the Inception Report should propose the methodology to be used to conduct the evaluation. The evaluation methodology should be guided by the Norms and Standards of the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) and be based on UNDP Evaluations Guidelines (see in **UNDP Independence Evaluations Office Methods Centre [here](#)**). The proposed methodology should address sufficiently the evaluation specific questions in the Inception report via clearly presenting the methods of data collection and analysis. The Evaluator should base the analysis on triangulation of qualitative and quantitative methods and data. The exact method and data to be used shall be described in the Inception Report. Evaluation will be conducted in a participatory manner involving/sharing information with stakeholders.

In this evaluation, the mixed method approach should be applied by combining qualitative and quantitative components to ensure complementarity. The analysis will be built on triangulating information collected from different sources of informants (Project staff, Project partners, stakeholders, beneficiaries) through different methods including secondary data and documentation review and primary data. The Evaluator should critically examine the information gathered from the various sources and synthesize it in an objective manner. If contradictory information is obtained from different sources, additional efforts should be made to understand the reasons for such a difference, including any underlying gender or other factors.

The evaluation team shall receive and review the following documents for preparation of the Inception Report before the start of any interviews, completion of inception/planning stage of the evaluation: project documentation, progress reports, work plans, monitoring data, workshop reports, country data, policies, legal documents (see the minimum required list in Section 11).

Preliminary suggestions for data collection methods:

- Desk review including review and analysis of existing documents, legal and policy framework;
- Review of monitoring reports, and if available any relevant evaluation or other reports, or analysis generated through the Project;

- Key informant interviews with beneficiaries, duty-bearers, policy makers, community focal points, partner organisations, etc;
- Expert interviews with project implementing parties;
- Focus groups, where possible/relevant
- Questionnaires/surveys, where applicable.

As part of the overall evaluation strategy, methodology, and approach the Lead Evaluator will be responsible for the final list of key informants (including, but not limited to, the Project implementing parties, decision-makers, direct and indirect beneficiaries, etc.), and appropriate data collection methods for each informant category (e.g., semi-structured or in-depth interviews, expert interviews, focus groups, surveys, online questionnaires, etc), which will be done with support of the evaluation team and in consultation with the Project team. A combination of these methods and overall methodology should be clearly presented by the Lead Evaluator in the Inception Report and approved by the evaluation commissioning unit before the start of interviews/evaluation fieldworks. As part of this process, the Lead Evaluator will be responsible for the development of appropriate instruments for each of the methods selected. All materials and tools should be gender-sensitive in language and presentation, as well as shall take into consideration human rights and equality aspects.

The Evaluation will be conducted in the following phases – inception, data collection, analysis, and reporting.

### **The Evaluation Phases:**

#### **i. Inception phase:**

**Selection, contracting. Evaluation team in place. Introductory meeting:** Selection of evaluators from UNDP Global ExpRes Roster or open competition, as applicable. Contracting is completed. Introductory briefing/kick-off meeting presenting the teams and the project, discussing timeline, Inception report, other TOR parameters. Agreeing on documents sharing time and method.

**Documents screening and Inception Report:** Desk review by the evaluation team, reconstructing and analysing intervention logic, theory of change and its assumptions. Inception report with the Evaluation Matrix is provided by Lead Evaluator in line with UNDP [Inception Report Content Outline](#). In the Inception Report the detailed design of the evaluation should be described along with how information will be obtained and analysed. The field trip will only take place upon official approval of the Inception Report by the commissioning unit.

#### **ii. Data collection phase:**

**Field works, mission to the country:** Interviews, focus group discussions, etc with key informants. Data collection through other methods (online questionnaire, etc), other methods in line with Inception report. At this very early stage after the end of fieldworks, the Lead Evaluator may be requested to share the mission debriefing with initial observations, findings, etc.

#### **iii. Analysis phase:**

**Preliminary analysis and presentation/discussion of initial findings:** The collected data from all sources is analysed, synthesized, triangulated, and presented by the Lead Evaluator (format to be specified). All

presented data shall be disaggregated by sex, age, residence/geographic location, LNOB and other categories as applicable.

**iv. Reporting phase:**

**Evaluation Report:** The Lead Evaluator should submit the evaluation report in line with [UNDP Evaluation Report Template and Quality Standards](#) with clear, logically connected, grounded and well-articulated in the formulations evaluation findings, conclusions and recommendations. Provision of comments (i.e., factual errors, omitted evidence, insufficient logical connections or justifications, unclear formulations, etc) to the Lead Evaluator ([Audit trail](#)) shall be collated and dispatched by the Evaluation Manager. The cases of unduly pressure on the evaluator shall be avoided in line with UNDP evaluation policy. If any, unreconciled points exist, shall be discussed in the Management Response. According to UNDP evaluations policy, the recommendations can be fully accepted, partially accepted, or not accepted.

**Final Report:** The Lead Evaluator submits the final evaluation report in compliance with [UNDP Evaluation Report Quality Standards](#) (page 7, section 6.10). The report is a subject for final review and reconciliation by the evaluation commissioning unit according to the mentioned UNDP Evaluation Guidelines and quality standards. The Management response is finalised accordingly. UNDP IEO independently reviews and scores the quality of UNDP-commissioned decentralized evaluations vis-à-vis the mentioned quality standards.

**V. Evaluation products (key deliverables)**

Full information see in Section 9

1. **Evaluation Workplans and Inception Report (10-15 pages).**
2. **Mission to Armenia. Evaluation fieldworks and travel to Lori/Tavush.**
3. **Evaluation debriefing.**
4. **Evaluation Report (40-60 pages including tables, charts, executive summary).**
5. **Presentation of evaluation findings, conclusions, recommendations, etc (format tbc).**
6. **Evaluation briefing material – e.g., slides, 1-2 pages infographics for sharing with external audiences**
7. **Evaluation report audit trail.**
8. **Final evaluation report.**

**VI. Evaluation team composition and required competences:**

The evaluation will be undertaken by the team of two international external consultants/evaluators – the Lead Evaluator and the Evaluator to Support the Mid-Term Evaluation. The Evaluator reports to the Lead Evaluator, and also works in coordination with the Evaluation Manager and the Project Team.

The Lead Evaluator will prepare and be responsible for the overall evaluation process, methodology and all its products. In particular, the Lead Evaluator will be responsible for design of this mid-term evaluation, overseeing the quality of evaluation processes, its successful execution, including timely and quality data collection, analysis, reporting, etc, managing the team of two international consultants/evaluators and ensuring effective and smooth teamwork, submission of the evaluation final products. The Lead Evaluator responds to Audit trail showing how the comments were addressed.

The Evaluator will provide all necessary support to the Lead Evaluator to conduct the evaluation processes and produce the final products, including in relation to design of evaluation methodology and tools, data collection and analysis, synthesis, triangulation, drafting findings, conclusions, lessons learned, etc. The Evaluator will support the Lead Evaluator in quality assurance of evaluation products vis-à-vis UNDP Evaluation Guidelines and quality standards.

The evaluators/consultants **cannot** have participated in the project preparation, formulation, and/or implementation (including the writing of the Project Document) and should not have a conflict of interest with project's related activities.

The *Project team* will assist the evaluation team in organizing the meetings, etc with key informants, but will not be part of those sessions. The Project team will help distribute online questionnaires to the respondents, without any relevance to its content. The Project team will also provide transportation services, and translation from independent translators. Computer equipment and software must be provided by the consultants/evaluators.

### **Lead Evaluator – Required qualifications, competencies, and skills:**

#### **Education:**

- Advanced university degree (MA. PhD is an asset) in development studies in social sciences, law, public administration, or the related fields.

#### **Experience**

- At least 5 years of experience in leading evaluations of development results in area-based/territorial development. Overall, experience of Lead Evaluator/Evaluation Team Manager responsible for the final products in the mentioned areas (at least 3 cases).
- At least 7 years of professional working experience in relation to area-based, territorial, rural or similar development projects with a multidimensional focus on democratization and local governance, community development, gender equality, youth, inclusion of vulnerable groups, etc and functions related to design of development interventions, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, advisory or consulting services to international organizations, governments, regional or local actors, multi-donor funded projects, other players in the area.
- Proven experience in development and application of methodologies for evaluation and assessment, including tools and techniques, social science methods.
- Experience of evaluating UNDP Projects is an asset.
- Knowledge of environmental sustainability and social inclusion aspects is an asset.
- Knowledge of gender analysis, gender equality and women's empowerment frameworks.
- Knowledge of UN SDG and Leaving No One Behind frameworks, principles, approaches.
- Knowledge of concepts and principles of local development and governance processes, as well as subject-matter international instruments.
- Experience of work in relation to Armenia and understanding its development context is an asset.

#### **Skills:**

- Proficient in designing evaluation strategy and tactics, selection/design of appropriate tools.
- Proficient in evaluation data collection and analysis methodologies.
- Strong analytical capacity and creative thinking.
- Track records of writing top-notch analytical reports in development sector.

- Strong planning skills and ability to respect deadlines.
- Excellent writing skills in English. Native English editorial skills is an asset.
- Excellent communication and oral presentation skills in English.
- Excellent team leading and teamwork skills; ability to consult, involve and work with stakeholders of different backgrounds, points of view and interests.
- Demonstrated initiative, high sense of responsibility and discretion.
- High level of integrity, professionalism, and respect for diversity, and deadlines.
- Availability to travel.

FOR INFORMATION - Evaluator - required qualifications, competencies, skills.

- Advanced university degree (MA. PhD is an asset) in development studies in social sciences, law, public administration, or the related fields.
- At least 3 years of experience in conducting development evaluations as a team member or in relevant other roles in the evaluation team. Experience in area-based/territorial development evaluations is an asset. Experience of Lead Evaluator or Evaluation Team Manager is an asset.
- At least 5 years of professional working experience in relation to monitoring, project design or implementation, reporting preferable in area-based development, rural development, or the areas close to it with a multidimensional focus on democratization, local governance, community development, gender equality, youth, inclusion of vulnerable groups, etc.
- Experience in development and application of methodologies for evaluation and assessment, including tools and techniques, social science methods.
- Experience of evaluating UNDP Projects is an asset.
- Knowledge of environmental sustainability and social inclusion aspects is an asset.
- Knowledge of gender analysis, gender equality and women's empowerment frameworks.
- Knowledge of UN SDG and Leaving No One Behind frameworks, principles, approaches is an asset.
- Experience in carrying out development evaluations for government and civil society;
- Experience of work in relation to Armenia and understanding its development context is an asset.
- Strong communication and teamwork skills;
- Excellent writing skills in English. Native English editorial skills is an asset.

Indicative tasks by the Evaluator:

- Review documents;
- Participate in the design of the evaluation methodology;
- Assist in carrying out the evaluation in accordance with the proposed objectives and scope of the evaluation based on UNDP Evaluations Guidelines;
- Support Lead Evaluator in data collection and analysis;
- Produce draft evaluation products as requested by Lead Evaluator.
- Report to Lead Evaluator. Work in coordination with Evaluation Manager and the Project Team;
- Assist Lead Evaluator to quality assure evaluation products in line with UNDP evaluation standards;
- Perform any other relevant task.

## 7. Evaluation ethics

This evaluation will be conducted in accordance with the principles outlined in the UNEG ‘Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation’. The consultant must safeguard the rights and confidentiality of information providers, interviewees, and stakeholders through measures to ensure compliance with legal and other relevant codes governing collection of data and reporting on data. The consultant must also ensure security of collected information before and after the evaluation and protocols to ensure anonymity and confidentiality of sources of information where that is expected. The information knowledge and data gathered in the evaluation process must also be solely used for the evaluation and not for other uses with the express authorization of UNDP and partner.

## 8. Implementation arrangements

The principal responsibility for managing this LEAD4Lori and Tavush Regions Project mid-term evaluation resides with the Commissioning Unit, which is UNDP Armenia Office. The Commissioning Unit will contract the evaluation team – the Lead Evaluator and the Support Evaluator - and will ensure the timely payments in line with TOR/contract provisions.

UNDP Armenia Resident Representative is the Evaluation Commissioner (EC) of this evaluation and the Results-Based Management Programme Analyst will act as the Evaluation Manager (EM). EC will be supported by EM in safeguarding the independence of the evaluation exercise and ensuring production of quality evaluation in a timely manner. To ensure independence and impartiality, EM will serve as the focal person for this evaluation, ensuring that the evaluation is conducted as per the evaluation plan and in line with this ToR and the approved Inception Report. The Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructures, FAO and other key stakeholders will be involved/consulted through this evaluation process for comments, feedback, advisory, etc. After completion of the evaluation process, the Evaluation Report with the evaluation Terms of Reference and the Management Response are placed publicly on UNDP IEO [erc.undp.org](http://erc.undp.org). The status of implementation of the Management response key actions could be tracked online.

UNDP Socio-Economic Governance Portfolio Lead, who is also the co-chair of the UNSDCF Socioeconomic Pillar Results Group 2, together with the Project team will provide all necessary information and documents to the evaluation team. Before and during the assignment period and when requested by the evaluation team, the Project team will help with setting up interviews, arrange field visits, distribute the questionnaires, provide other facilitation support to the evaluation, without participating in the meeting or any relevance to the content of the works.

This TOR is the basis upon which the compliance with the assignment requirements and overall quality of services provided by the Lead Evaluator will be assessed by UNDP. Lead Evaluator will steer the overall mid-term review process and will be responsible for quality assurance and timely submission of the evaluation deliverables and the final report.

## 9. Timeline of evaluation process:

#	Description of deliverables by Lead Evaluator	Payment %	Delivery time

I	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Introductory briefing.</b></li> <li>▪ <b>Provision of documents.</b></li> </ul> <p>1. <b>Evaluation Workplans and Inception report (10-15 pages) received, commented, approved:</b> Evaluation methodology, including data collection tools/questionnaires, list of beneficiaries and stakeholders to be interviewed, interview schedules and reports. The Inception Report should be carried out following and based on preliminary discussions after the desk review and should be produced before the evaluation starts (before any formal evaluation interviews, survey distribution or field visits) and prior to the country visit in the case of international evaluators. Inception report shall correspond the requirements of UNDP <a href="#">Inception Report Content Outline</a></p>	<p>-</p> <p>-</p> <p>30%</p>	<p>11 September 2023</p> <p>11 September – 18 September 2023</p> <p>25 September – 10 October 2023</p>
<b>Payment 1 – 30%</b>			
II	<p>2. <b>Mission to Armenia for evaluation fieldworks, travel to Lori/Tavush regions.</b> Data collection conducted.</p> <p>3. <b>Evaluation debriefing.</b> After the evaluation mission preliminary presentation of initial findings, observations.</p> <p>6. <b>Evaluation Report is submitted, presented, discussed, commented, accepted:</b> After the field activities conducted (in person and online as applicable), the Evaluator will submit a draft evaluation report The Report highlights evaluation findings, conclusions, lessons learnt and recommendations, including on corrective measures if applicable. Evaluation briefing material in form of slides, 1-2 pages infographics, or other format, for sharing with external audiences.</p> <p>7. <b>Evaluation report Audit Trail is responded.</b> Comments and changes by Lead Evaluator in response to the evaluation report comments, showing how comments were addressed</p> <p>8. <b>Final evaluation report (40-60 pages including Executive summary, graphs, tables) is submitted, accepted:</b> Well-edited, proofread, and formatted Evaluation report in English in line with <a href="#">UNDP Evaluation Report Quality Standards</a> presented. The commissioning unit will accept the evaluation report based on its compliance with the provided UNDP evaluations quality standards, no factual errors, formatting/other inaccuracies; management response will be prepared accordingly.</p>	<p>20%</p> <p>30%</p> <p>20%</p>	<p>23 October – 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2023</p> <p>29 November – 07 December 2023</p> <p>08 December – 15 December 2023</p>

	Payment 2 - 70 %
	Total payment, 100%

\* N.B. UNDP reports are quality assessed by UNDP Independent Evaluation Office (IEO). Details of the IEO's quality assessment of decentralized evaluations can be found in Section 6 of the UNDP Evaluation Guidelines <http://web.undp.org/evaluation/guideline/section-6.shtml>

#### 10. Payment Mode:

The method of payment is output-based lump-sum scheme. The total amount quoted shall be all-inclusive lump sum and include all costs components required to perform the deliverables identified in the TOR for professional fee, travel costs, insurance, living allowance as applies, and any other applicable cost to be incurred by the service provider in completing the assignment. The contract price will be fixed output-based price regardless of extension of the herein specified duration.

Payments, deliverables:

- Payment 1 – Deliverable I (1 Inception Report) – 30%
- Payment 2 – Deliverable II (2-8 Final Report and other entries in the above table) – 70%

The payments will be made upon satisfactory delivery and acceptance of all the deliverables by the Commissioning Unit/Evaluations Manager, and operationally by LEAD4Lori and Tavush Regions Project Manager.

#### 11. Key Documents to review

- Project Document (the Description of the Action)
- Results Framework
- Annual and Progress/Monitoring Reports with annexes
- Other relevant documents provided by the implementing partner or requested by the Consultant
- Project Budget and Expenditure reports
- CCA and relevant UNDAF/UNSDCF Evaluations if available, other Evaluations (by stakeholders, UNDP, etc)
- UNDP Annual Results-Oriented Analysis Report
- UN Country Annual Results Reports for Armenia

#### 12. Indicative structure of the Evaluation Report:

**Contents page**

**Opening pages (acknowledgments, list of acronyms)**

**Executive Summary (5-6 pages)**

#### **Chapter I Background, Object and Methodology**

1. Introduction
2. Background and context of the Project
3. Object of the Evaluation
4. Purpose, Objectives and Scope of the Evaluation
5. Evaluation Methodology (short)
6. Major Limitations
7. Ethical considerations, Human Rights and Cross-cutting aspects



## **Chapter II Analysis and Findings**

- 2.1 Relevance
- 2.2 Effectiveness
- 2.3 Efficiency
- 2.4 Sustainability
- 2.5 Impact

## **Chapter III Conclusions and Recommendations**

- 3.1 Conclusions and Lessons Learned
- 3.2. Recommendations

## **ANNEXES**

- 1. Terms of Reference
- 2. Desk Review and Background Documents
- 3. List of Key Informants Interviewed
- 4. Detailed Methodology
- 5. Interview Guides and Survey Instruments
- 6. Output tables
- 7. Evaluation Matrix

### **13. Application**

Applications for this evaluation will be processed from UNDP global roster.

## **Annex 2: Results Framework**

**Results Framework**

Intended Outcome as stated in the UNDAF/Country Programme Results and Resource Framework: By 2020, Armenia’s competitiveness is improved and people, especially vulnerable groups, have greater access to sustainable economic opportunities.

Applicable Output(s) from the UNDP Strategic Plan: *Output 1.1. National and sub-national systems and institutions enabled to achieve structural transformation of productive capacities that are sustainable and employment- and livelihoods-intensive*

Project title and Atlas Project Number: Local Empowerment of Actors for Development (LEAD) Programme; 118827

EXPECTED <sup>14</sup> OUTPUTS	OUTPUT INDICATORS <sup>15</sup>	DATA SOURCE	BASELINE		TARGETS (by frequency of data collection)					DATA COLLECTION METHODS & RISKS
			Value	Year	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	FIN.	

<sup>14</sup> COVID-19 related urgent actions will be inserted into this table soon.

<sup>15</sup> It is recommended that projects use output indicators from the Strategic Plan IRRF, as relevant, in addition to project-specific results indicators. Indicators should be disaggregated by sex or for other targeted groups where relevant.

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<b>COVID-19 emergency response</b> <b>Economic impacts of COVID-19 are mitigated in Tavush and Lori regions through economic inclusion of individuals and businesses affected by the pandemic and humanitarian crisis in Armenia because of the war in Nagorno-Karabagh.</b>	1.0 a) Number of businesses reporting restored economic activity -Out of which women-owned/led businesses	Monitoring reports; Beneficiary lists Reports of the recipients on their projects Surveys	0	2020	a)50 -25w -25m b) 100 -50w	a)50 -25w -25m b)100 -50w	-	-	a)100 -50w -50m b)200 -100w	Project monitoring Beneficiary surveys Project evaluation
	1.0.1a) Number of businesses accessing Project support -women-owned/led businesses -Out of which technical support, w	Monitoring reports beneficiary lists	0	2020	a) 30 -15w -15t b) 150 -75w -75t c) 10 -5w	a)30 -15w -15t b) 150 -75w -75t c)10 -5w	-	-	a)60 -30w -30t b)300 -150w -150t c)20 -10w	Project monitoring Survey

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	1.0.1 a) Number of supply centres established by the Project	Project reports			a) 1	a)1			a)2	Project monitoring Reporting Survey
	1.0.2 b) Number of local populations with access to safe supply services. -w	Supporting/ evidence documentat ion Beneficiary reports			b) 1500 -750w	b)1500 -750w			b) 3000 -1500w	
	1.0.3 Number of communities with green and energy saving option		0	2020	1		0	0	1	
	1.0.4 number of SAs and veterans who received psycho-social support		0	2020	50	0	0	0	50	
	2.0 a) Number of businesses reporting restored economic activity -Out of which women-owned/led businesses	Monitoring reports; Beneficiary lists	0	2020	a) 30 -15w	0			a) 30 -15w	Project monitoring Survey
	b) Number of households/vulnerable families benefiting of non-cash grants				b) 60 -20w				b) 60 -20w	
					c) 1				c) 1	
1. a) Number of community members who attended coaching meetings	Participant lists; Monitoring reports; Partner maps	0	2020	1500 -800w -700m	1500 -800w -700m	-	-	3000 -1600w -1400m	Project reports, overall project monitoring Beneficiary surveys	

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<b>Component 1 - Mobilized, capacitated and incentivized local actors to define community needs driven strategies in Lori and Tavush regions</b>	1.1 Replicable mechanism for community mobilisation established (YES/NO)	Participation lists; Media	0	2020	YES				YES	Field monitoring visits and reports, overall project monitoring
	1.1.1 Number of opening conference participants	campaign report;	0	2020	100	-	-	-	100	
	1.1.2 Number of media posts featuring the opening conference (including digital and social media channels)	Field visit reports;	0	2020	40	-	-	-	40	
	1.1.3 Number of mobilisation workshops, field visits, interviews, expert/coach fact finding missions	Mobilization workshop reports;	0	2020	75	75	-	-	150	
	1.1.4 Number of LAG working group members mobilised and capacitated.	Partner and project idea maps	0	2020	300	300	-	-	600	
	1.2 (a) Number of LAG members capacitated in strategy development	Participant lists; LAG working group and workshop reports; Prepared partnership agreements ; Reports on capacity development, training activities	0	2020	a)60 -30w	a)140 -70w	-	-	a)200 -100w	Field monitoring visits and reports, project report, project monitoring
	1.2.1 Number of formalised LAGs	Signed LAG Partnership Agreements	0	2020	-	5	-	-	5	Project monitoring Project reporting\Beneficiary reporting

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	1.2.2 (a) Number of LAG representatives who participated in study trip -w	Visit agendas; lists of participants	0	2020	-	a)30 -15w	-	-	a)30 -15w	Project monitoring Project reporting
	1.2.3 a) Number of established LAG strategic planning groups b) Number of strategic planning group members -w	Reports of experts/coaches Lists of group members	0	2020	-	a)5 b)30 -15w	-	-	a)5 b)30 -15w	Project monitoring Expert reporting
	1.2.4 a) Number of LAG Working Group members capacitated in strategic planning methods -w	Participant lists; Expert reports	0	2020	-	120 -60w	-	-	120 -60w	Expert reporting Project monitoring
	1.3 LAG strategies developed (Yes/No)	Prepared LAG strategy drafts; workshop reports	0	2020	-	YES	-	-	YES	Independent experts' evaluation report of the strategy drafts
	1.3.1 Number of LAG members who participated in strategy development -w	Participant lists; meeting agendas	0	2020	-	100 -50w	-	-	100 -50w	Meeting reports Project monitoring

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	1.3.2 a) Number of developed Territorial Development Strategies b) Number of identified projects in each Folder	Territorial Development Strategies LAG reports Experts' reports	0	2020	-	a)5 b)350	-	-	a)5 b)350	LAG reporting scheme Expert reporting scheme Project monitoring scheme
	1.3.3 Number of approved Strategies by LAGs	Meeting minutes; LAG reports	0	2020	-	5	-	-	5	LAG reporting scheme Project monitoring scheme
	FAO sub-output 1.3 Number of agricultural sections per LAG developed and feeding in the community needs-driven strategies	Prepared sectoral analysis of agriculture in the LAG territories; reports of working meetings and community events	0	2020	-	-	1	-	1	Field assessments; working group meetings, interviews, focus group discussions with the communities



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<b>Component 2 - Built supporting infrastructure to prioritize, implement and sustain local-grown initiatives in Lori and Tavush regions</b>	2.(a) Number of locally operating CSOs engaged in LAG partnership (b) Number of locally operating business engaged in LAG partnership (c) Number of individual actors engaged in LAG Partnership (d) Number of local populations benefitting from LAG support  -w	Territorial Partnership Agreement LAG reports Monitoring reports LAG meeting records Grant reports Survey reports	0	2020	-	.a)TBC (b)TBC (c)TBC			.a)TBC (b)TBC (c)TBC	LAG reporting scheme Project monitoring scheme Grant reporting Survey
	2.1. (a) Number of established LAG Accountable Bodies	LAG formalisation documents Monitoring reports;	0	2020	-	-	a)5	-	a)5	Field monitoring visits LAG reporting Selection Committee reporting Grant reporting
	2.1.1 Suggested models for establishing LAG Accountable Body based on EU and non-EU experience.	Study report	0	2020	-	-	3	-	3	Study

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	2.1.2 Number of implemented models for establishing LAG Accountable Body	With Registration documentations Project progress reports Project monitoring reports	0	2020	-	2	3	-	5	Project reporting LAG reporting Office space refurbishment and furnishing reports
	2.1.3 Number of capacitated accountable body members -w	Participant lists, capacity development reports	0	2020	-	10 -5w	15 -8w	-	25 -13w	Surveys and monitoring reports
	2.1.4 Number of Accountable body representatives who participated in the study tour. -w	Visit agendas; lists of participants	0	2020	-	-	30 -15w	-	30 -15w	Surveys and monitoring reports.
	2.2 Number of initiatives funded	Selection Committee records Grant management report Local project reports	0	2020	-	-	150	-	150	Expert evaluation reports;

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	2.2.1 Number of selection committees formed.	Approved lists of committee members and selection criteria	0	2020	-	-	5	-	5	Surveys and monitoring reports.
	2.2.2 (a) Number of local calls for proposals announced by LAGs. b) Number of projects awarded with grants -out of which women-led	Announcement texts LAG Selecting committee decisions	0	2020	-	-	a)5 b) 150 -75w	-	a)5 b) 150 -75w	Monitoring reports
	2.2.3 Number of independent expertise reports.	Reports/expert's opinion on selected proposals	0	2020	-	-	15	-	15	Independent expert's evaluation report on selected proposals.
	2.2.4 (a) Number of applicants who received technical support	Participant lists Expert reports Monitoring report Survey	0	2020	-	-	a)50	-	a)50	Survey Monitoring Project reporting

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	2.3 a) Number of results-based initiatives that received financing  b) Share of financed results-based initiatives led by women (%)	Selection Committee records  Official documentat ions  Grant agreements	0	2020	-	-	a)50  b)50 %	a)10  b)50%	a)60  b)50%	Monitoring LAG reporting  Grant reporting
	2.3.1 (a) Number of calls for evidence-based financing announced.  (b) Number of applications received -out of which women-led initiatives	Minutes of selection committees ; recomm end list of the grantees	0	2020	-	-	a)5  b)50 %	-	a)5  b)50%	Reports
	2.3.2 a) Number of grantees who received training  b) Share of grantees who report the trainings as useful (%)	Participant lists, consulting summaries  Survey results	0	2020	-	-	a)50  b)50 %	-	a)50  b)50%	Expert reporting  Monitoring Survey
	2.3.3 a) Number of sustainability mechanisms piloted  (b) Number of innovative financing mechanisms piloted	Project reports  Official documentat ion  LAG reports	0	2020	-	-	a)5 b)1	a)0 b)1	a)5 b)2	Project reporting, monitoring, innovative financing evaluations

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	2.3.4 a) Number of grantees who participated in study tour. b) Share of grantees who report it as effective (%)	Visit agendas lists of participants	0	2020	-	-	-	a)30 b)50%	a)30 b)50%	Surveys monitoring Project reporting Beneficiary reporting
	FAO sub-output 2.3 Number of stakeholders, men, and women, trained at gender sensitive tailor-made trainings organized on local development processes and agriculture (disaggregated by sex, at least 35% are women)	Trainings materials and reports, list of participants	0	2020	-	200	100	100	400	Training needs assessments; reports of community events and other meetings
	2.4 (a) Functional regional networking scheme established (b) Functional international networking scheme established	Project records LAG documentation Stakeholder reports Formal documents						a) 1 b)1	a)1 b)1	Project reporting LAG reporting

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	2.4.1 (a) Number of local stakeholders involved in networking scheme	Participant lists; Event and working meeting agendas and reports; Documentation on formalized cooperation	0	2020	-	-		500	500	Project reporting, beneficiary reporting Survey
	2.4.2 (a) Number of local product fairs organized (b) Number of participants to the local fairs -w	Public announcements Registration lists	0	2020	-	-	-	a)5 b)250 -130w	a)5 b)250 -130w	Monitoring Project reporting Beneficiary reporting
	2.4.3 Number of participants of closing conference -w	Conference agenda, participant lists	0	2020	-	-	-	200	200	Project reporting
	FAO sub-output 2.4 (a)Number of established and / or supported AAs per LAG (1);  (b)Number of methodologies for cooperating with “external businesses”	List of participants at networking and training events; Trainings reports;	(a)0 (b)0	(a)2020 (b)2020	- -	- -	(a)5 (b)1	- -	(a)5 (b)1	Training needs assessments; mapping of stakeholders

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<p><b>Component 3 -</b> Capacity of the line ministries and other relevant bodies improved and policy mechanisms at national level developed for successful pilot and sustainability of LEADER approach implementation in Armenia</p>	<p>3.National policy framework for sustainability of LEADER developed. (YES/NO)</p>	<p>Normative acts accepted Project reports Experts reports</p>						YES	YES	<p>Project reporting Expert reporting Government records</p>
	<p>3.1 Policy recommendation developed on territorial development of Armenia</p>	<p>Policy analysis Expert report Project report</p>						1	1	<p>Project reporting Expert reporting Government records</p>
	<p>3.1.1 (a) Number of meetings and consultations held for overall adaptation of the LEADER approach to the territorial development strategy of Armenia (b) Relevant expert analysis is conducted to prepare the policy recommendation package</p>	<p>Meeting minutes; submitted recommendations Expert reports</p>	0	2020	-	-	a)5 b)0	a)10 b)1	a)15 b)1	<p>Project reporting, expert reporting</p>
	<p>3.1.2 (a) Number of participants capacitated from the MTAI -w (b) Number of participants capacitated from regional and local administrations -w</p>	<p>BTORS participant lists</p>	0	2020	0	0	a)15 -8w b)10 --5w	a)30 -15w b) 15 -8w	a)45 --12w b)25 -13w	<p>Beneficiary reporting Project reporting</p>

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	3.1.3 (a) Number of MTAI representatives who learned from EU experience through study trips, conferences, and workshops. -w	Visit agendas; lists of participants BTORs	0	2020	-	-	-	30 -15w	30 -15w	Project reporting Beneficiary reporting
	3.1.4 Concept note prepared	Finalized concept note	0	2020	-	-	-	1	1	Expert reporting Project reporting
	3.1.5 a) DAD established by the Project b) Improved coordination efficiency as reported by the Government (%)	Supporting/ evidence documentat ion Beneficiary reports			a)1 b)20%				a)1 (b) 20%	Project monitoring Reporting Survey



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	<p>FAO output 3.2                  (a)Number of stakeholders participated at workshops, study tours and capacity development trainings on the agricultural component of the LEADER approach                  (b); Number of policy packages prepared in light of Armenia’s agricultural policy (2)</p>	<p>List of participants of workshops, conferences , policy dialogues, study tours; Training materials; Technical reports; Reports on agriculture related LEADER/CLL D activities</p>	<p>0 0</p>	<p>(a)202 0 (b)202 0</p>	<p>- -</p>	<p>- -</p>	<p>(a)10 0 (b)-</p>	<p>(a)100 (b)-</p>	<p>(a)200 (b)1</p>	<p>Desk research; policy dialogues; technical workshops</p>
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## **Annex 3: Evaluation Matrix**

### **Evaluation Matrix**

<b><i>Relevance</i></b>			
<b><i>Guiding questions</i></b>	<b><i>Sources of information</i></b>	<b><i>Sample questions to be utilised in interviews</i></b>	<b><i>Target group for interview</i></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are the Project activities / components relevant to the actual / defined needs of the beneficiaries?</li> <li>• Were the objectives clear and feasible?</li> <li>• How do the main components of the Project contribute to the planned objectives and are logically interlinked?</li> </ul>	<p><i>Primary</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local stakeholder interviews</li> <li>• Project implementation personnel interviews</li> </ul> <p><i>Secondary</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LDS analysis</li> <li>• SCC meeting minutes</li> <li>• KPI monitoring data; Outputs delivered / planned</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How would you describe local priority needs?</li> <li>• How do needs vary across the LAG area (spatially, by demographic group?</li> <li>• Whose needs are being met/not being met.</li> <li>• To what extent do LEAD projects contribute to meeting local needs?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LAG Managers &amp; project Selection committee members</li> <li>• Local authorities</li> <li>• Farmers/Local businesses and NGOs</li> <li>• UNDP/FAO</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is the Project in line with the current priorities of the country?</li> <li>• How is the Project aligned with, and support the national, regional and community strategies/plans?</li> </ul>	<p><i>Primary</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regional &amp; Central government interviews</li> </ul> <p><i>Secondary</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LDS analysis</li> <li>• SCC meeting minutes</li> <li>• KPI monitoring data; Outputs delivered / planned</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does the LEAD project contribute to delivery of national level development priorities?</li> <li>• To what extent does the LEAD project support national and regional strategies?</li> <li>• Are there areas where the LEAD project conflicts with national programmes or plans?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regional Governors and/or the focal points in the Marzpetarans (Regional Governor offices)</li> <li>• Ministry of Territorial Administration &amp; Infrastructure</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has the Project involved relevant stakeholders through consultative processes or information-sharing during its preparation phase?</li> <li>• Were the territorial/rural development needs considered during the Project implementation and did it reflect the various needs of tripartite stakeholders of LAGs and different stakeholders?</li> </ul>	<p><i>Primary</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local stakeholder interviews</li> <li>• Regional and/or central government interviews</li> </ul> <p><i>Secondary</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LDS analysis</li> <li>• Strategic Steering Committee minutes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe how the initial consultation process worked? How did you engage with the people living in the LAG area?</li> <li>• Were there discussions with the regional governor about economic development of the area?</li> <li>• How did you identify local economic and social needs of the area? How were these prioritised?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LAG Managers &amp; project Selection committee members</li> <li>• Regional Governors and/or the focal points in the Marzpetarans (Regional Governor offices)</li> </ul>

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are these needs still relevant? Have there any new, more relevant needs emerged that the Project should consider/address?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>KPI monitoring data; Outputs delivered / planned</li> <li>Government reports on refugee impacts in the Lori &amp; Tavush regions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To what extent were environmental / social/ economic needs considered and balanced?</li> <li>How has the local situation altered over the past two years? How would you describe the current priority needs of the area?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ministry of Territorial Administration &amp; Infrastructure</li> </ul>
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<b>Effectiveness</b>			
<b>Guiding questions</b>	<b>Sources of information</b>	<b>Sample questions utilised in interviews</b>	<b>Target group for interview</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How effective has the Project been in establishing ownership by the stakeholders?</li> <li>How has the Project encouraged ownership on behalf of the beneficiaries for learning and applying the newly acquired knowledge and skills in practice?</li> <li>Can the Project management and implementation be considered as participatory?</li> </ul>	<p><i>Primary</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local stakeholder interviews</li> </ul> <p><i>Secondary</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>LDS</li> <li>KPI monitoring data; Outputs delivered / planned</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Who was involved in developing the LDS, who were the key players?</li> <li>How many people would you say were involved in total?</li> <li>Were there any elements of the local community who were not involved in helping to design the LDS? Were there any groups left out of the process?</li> <li>Can you explain how decisions are made within the LAG partnership (e.g. funding of projects)?</li> <li>How have you benefitted from involvement in the LEAD project (probe for increased understanding, knowledge and skills development, increased confidence, and trust, etc.)</li> <li>To what extent do you think local people have gained knowledge and/or skills as a result of being involved in the LEAD project?</li> <li>Has there been a change in attitudes in relation to how the local community sees itself (e.g. changes in cooperation, trust, optimism for the future, wellbeing, anxiety, etc.)?</li> <li>In your opinion, do local people involved with the LEAD project feel they</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>LAG Managers and project Selection Committee Member</li> <li>Local authorities and NGOs</li> <li>Local business and farmers</li> </ul>

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		have a greater sense of control over their lives? Ownership concept – needs clarifying	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is the Project making sufficient progress towards its planned objectives/outcomes/outputs?</li> <li>What are the key achievements, challenges, and implementation lessons?</li> <li>How can these be applied to the Project?</li> </ul>	<p><i>Primary</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local stakeholder interviews</li> <li>Project implementation personnel interviews</li> </ul> <p><i>Secondary</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>KPI monitoring data; Outputs delivered / planned</li> <li>Annual Reports</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In your view what have been the main achievements of the LEAD project in this area?</li> <li>In what ways has the wider community benefitted from the LEAD project?</li> <li>What have been the main obstacles facing you in delivery of the LEAD project in this area (differentiate between different types of barrier and project process issues)?</li> <li>Looking forward, what do you see as the main challenges in meeting the project objectives in this area?</li> <li>What changes to the project management processes help you to achieve your objectives?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>LAG Managers &amp; project Selection committee members</li> <li>UNDP/FAO</li> <li>Regional Governors and/or the focal points in the Marzpetarans (Regional Governor offices)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To what extent has the capacity building work been effective and did it serve its purpose?</li> </ul>	<p><i>Primary</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local stakeholder interviews</li> <li>Project implementation personnel interviews</li> <li>Central government interviews</li> </ul> <p><i>Secondary</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>LDS document (only 1 translated)</li> <li>Annual Reports</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To what extent has involvement with the LEAD project improved your skills /knowledge/ awareness/ confidence/ collaboration with others/ ability to make decisions (set of scale questions producing numeric data with qualitative follow-up questions).</li> <li>What training or support did you have to help you implement the LEAD project?</li> <li>What additional support/training would be beneficial in helping to deliver the LEAD project?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>LAG Managers</li> <li>Supporting personnel ('coaches')</li> <li>UNDP/FAO</li> <li>Ministry of Territorial Administration &amp; Infrastructure</li> </ul>

<b>Efficiency</b>			
<b>Guiding questions</b>	<b>Sources of information</b>	<b>Sample questions utilised in interviews</b>	<b>Target group for interview</b>

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To what extent have the project implementing parties made good use of the human, financial and technical resources, and have used an appropriate combination of tools and approaches to pursue the achievement of Project results in a cost-effective manner?</li> </ul>	<p><i>Primary</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local stakeholder interviews</li> <li>Project implementation personnel interviews</li> <li>Central government interviews</li> </ul> <p><i>Secondary</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>KPI monitoring data; Outputs delivered / planned</li> <li>Annual Reports</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How many people are involved in project decision making in your area?</li> <li>In your view do you have sufficient technical and advisory skills to help delivery the LEAD project?</li> <li>Were the project selection processes efficient? How much time and resources are required for making decisions over project selection?</li> <li>Which are the most demanding tasks undertaken (in terms of time and resource costs)?</li> <li>Are there ways in which project management processes can be made more efficient?</li> <li>Is there any evidence from beneficiaries of how much time it takes them to apply for support?</li> <li>Are there demands for additional resources (financial, technical, advisory)?</li> <li>What resources (financial, technical, advisory) were previously available in the area?</li> <li>What would be the main priorities for improving project delivery in this area?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>LAG Managers &amp; project Selection committee members</li> <li>UNDP/FAO</li> <li>Ministry of Territorial Administration &amp; Infrastructure</li> <li>Regional Governors and/or the focal points in the Marzpetarans (Regional Governors offices)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Was there a clear distribution of roles and responsibilities of key actors involved?</li> </ul>	<p><i>Primary</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local stakeholder interviews</li> <li>Project implementation personnel interviews</li> <li>Central government interviews</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Who is involved in making key decisions on project implementation?</li> <li>In your view do these people work together in an efficient manner? Do they have clear responsibilities?</li> <li>What would be the best way to improve project implementation?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>LAG Managers &amp; project Selection committee members</li> <li>UNDP/FAO</li> <li>Ministry of Territorial Administration &amp; Infrastructure</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To what extent did the Project capitalize on other</li> </ul>	<p><i>Primary</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local stakeholder interviews</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are there any local community / national actions that support project</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>LAG Managers &amp; project Selection</li> </ul>

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<p>complementary initiatives to the Project to reinforce the results of the Project?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project implementation personnel interviews</li> <li>• Central government interviews</li> </ul>	<p>objectives? In what ways do they interact?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the outcomes of interaction with other policies/programmes?</li> <li>• Are there other policies/ programmes that conflict with attainment of the LEAD project objectives? In what ways do they conflict?</li> <li>• What local / national policy or programme changes would assist in delivery of the LEAD project objectives?</li> </ul>	<p>committee members</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UNDP/FAO</li> <li>• Ministry of Territorial Administration &amp; Infrastructure</li> <li>• Regional Governors and/or the focal points in the Marzpetarans (Regional Governor offices)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have Project funds and activities been delivered in a timely manner? If not, what were the bottlenecks encountered? To what extent are the activities and achieved results cost-efficient?</li> </ul>	<p><i>Primary</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local stakeholder interviews</li> <li>• Project implementation personnel interviews</li> <li>• Central government interviews</li> </ul> <p><i>Secondary</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• KPI monitoring data; Outputs delivered / planned</li> <li>• Annual Reports</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What factors have influenced project delivery in the area?</li> <li>• What were the impacts of these factors (in terms of timing; finances; resource implications; local support; project outcomes)? (Series of scaled questions to assess quantitative scale of impact, followed up with qualitative questions explaining rationale for the response.)</li> <li>• In your view what changes could be made to reduce project implementation costs?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LAG Managers &amp; project Selection committee members</li> <li>• UNDP/FAO</li> <li>• Ministry of Territorial Administration &amp; Infrastructure</li> </ul>

<b><i>Sustainability (to the extent possible)</i></b>			
<b><i>Guiding questions</i></b>	<b><i>Sources of information</i></b>	<b><i>Sample questions utilised in interviews</i></b>	<b><i>Target group for interview</i></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent has the Project been able to support the local underprivileged communities in identifying their local territorial development strategies and addressing their local needs of rural development, including</li> </ul>	<p><i>Primary</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local stakeholder interviews</li> <li>• Project implementation personnel interviews</li> </ul> <p><i>Secondary</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In your view, are the key local needs being addressed in the local development strategy for the LAG area?</li> <li>• To what extent are local needs addressed; are there any areas of need missing; are any communities/groups being excluded from development?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LAG Managers &amp; project Selection committee members</li> <li>• UNDP/FAO</li> </ul>

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economic development in this mid-term period?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• KPI monitoring data; Outputs delivered / planned</li> <li>• Annual Reports</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are project activities/funds sufficient to meet locally identified needs?</li> <li>• What will happen to development initiatives when the LEAD funding period comes to an end?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ministry of Territorial Administration &amp; Infrastructure</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the possible sustainability prerequisites for each of the Project components? What are the hindering factors for ensuring the sustainability of Project outcomes?</li> </ul>	<p><i>Primary</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local stakeholder interviews</li> <li>• Project implementation personnel interviews</li> <li>• Central government interviews</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• With reference to the key project outcomes (listed and explored in turn): what are the key requirements to ensure effective delivery?</li> <li>• Which factors are currently limiting effective delivery of project outcomes?</li> <li>• Over the next 2 – 3 years which factors will influence the effective delivery of project outcomes?</li> <li>• Over the next 2 – 3 years what opportunities do you see in this area for enhancing project outcomes?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LAG Managers &amp; project Selection committee members</li> <li>• UNDP/FAO</li> </ul>

<i>Impact (to the extent possible)</i>			
<b>Guiding questions</b>	<b>Sources of information</b>	<b>Sample questions utilised in interviews</b>	<b>Target group for interview</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has the Project contributed or is likely to contribute to the long-term political or social changes for individuals, communities, and institutions in relation to its main development course, national development agenda that the Project is aligned with, SDGs, etc?</li> </ul>	<p><i>Primary</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local stakeholder interviews</li> <li>• Project implementation personnel interviews</li> <li>• Central government interviews</li> </ul> <p><i>Secondary</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the most significant economic / social / cultural changes that have occurred as a result of implementation of the LEAD project?</li> <li>• To what extent is the project likely to influence economic / social / cultural conditions in the near future (1 – 3 yrs)?</li> <li>• How will the Project cause these changes?</li> <li>• Who/what will be affected?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LAG Managers &amp; project Selection committee members</li> <li>• UNDP/FAO</li> <li>• Ministry of Territorial Administration &amp; Infrastructure                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regional Governors and/or the focal points in the Marzpetarans (Regional Governors offices)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To what extent has the Project achieved its overarching goal of improved quality, transparency, and inclusiveness of area-based/territorial development local processes, operations?</li> </ul>	<p><i>Primary</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local stakeholder interviews</li> <li>Project implementation personnel interviews</li> <li>Central government interviews</li> </ul> <p><i>Secondary</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To what extent has the LEAD project reduced social exclusion?</li> <li>In what ways has the project improved local level decision making?</li> <li>In what ways has the project increased trust and cooperation among people and other organisations?</li> <li></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>LAG Managers &amp; project Selection committee members</li> <li>UNDP/FAO</li> <li>Ministry of Territorial Administration &amp; Infrastructure</li> <li>Regional Governors and/or the focal points in the Marzpetarans (Regional Governors offices)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Has the Project had any intended or unintended secondary effect throughout the implementation?</li> </ul>	<p><i>Primary</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local stakeholder interviews</li> <li>Project implementation personnel interviews</li> <li>Central government interviews</li> </ul> <p><i>Secondary</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Have you experienced any unexpected changes (+ve or -ve) in the community as a result of implementing the LEAD project?</li> <li>Please explain the nature of any changes, who/what was affected and in what ways.</li> <li>Have you noticed any unexpected changes in those working on the LEAD project, or any changes in policy design as a result of implementing the LEAD project?</li> <li>Please explain the nature of any changes, who/what was affected and in what ways.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>LAG Managers &amp; project Selection committee members</li> <li>UNDP/FAO</li> <li>Ministry of Territorial Administration &amp; Infrastructure</li> </ul>



## **Annex 4: LAG Manager Interview Schedule**

### **NOTE:**

The LAG Manager Interview Schedule can be found in this Annex. This is the baseline interview schedule containing all questions relevant to the evaluation. This interview schedule was modified (tailored questions) for use with all other stakeholders. The following interview schedules are based on this LAG Manager set of questions and customised as appropriate to reflect the context and role of the relevant stakeholder.

- LAG Accounting Body Member
- LAG Selection Committee Member
- LAG FAO Farmer Association Representative
- Regional government Office Interviews
- Central government Stakeholder Interviews (Ministry personnel)
- Implementing bodies (UNDP; FAO) Interviews
- EU Delegation Interview

The Grant Beneficiary Interview Schedule can be found in Annex 5.

### **UNDP ARMENIA: LEAD PROGRAMME LAG MANAGER INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

#### **General information**

Interview data	
<b>Interview number</b>	
<b>Date of the interview</b>	
<b>Country</b>	
<b>Region</b>	
<b>LAG NAME</b>	
<b>Interviewer name</b>	

Personal data of the interviewee			
<b>Type of interviewee</b>	O LAG manager/personnel	O Other: ..... ..... .....	
<b>Name:</b>			
<b>Position:</b>			
<b>e-mail/contact details</b>			

#### **Complete before interview:**

Basic LAG data	
When was the LAG formally recognised?	
What is the overall budget?	

Over what time period?	
What % of the total budget is allocated to animation and running costs?	
When did the LAG launch the first call for projects?	

**PART A: INTRO & LOCAL CONTEXT**

**A1. When were you appointed LAG Manager?**

**A2. What did you do before becoming LAG Manager?**

**PART B: RELEVANCE**

**GQ: Are the Project activities / components relevant to the actual / defined needs of the beneficiaries?**

**Were the objectives clear and feasible?**

**How do the main components of the Project contribute to the planned objectives and are logically interlinked?**

**Are these needs still relevant? Have there any new, more relevant needs emerged that the Project should consider/address?**

[Note: GQ = guiding Questions taken from the ToR]

**B1. How would you describe the priority needs in the LAG area? In terms of Economic, social, and environmental needs?**

(INTERVIEWER – TRY TO ASCERTAIN THE HIGHEST PRIORITY NEEDS)

Category	Description of need	Interviewee perspective on extent to which LEAD projects meet local priority needs
Economic		(Very Low/ Low/ Medium/ High/ Very high)
Social		(Very low/ Low Medium/ High /Very high)
Environm ental		(Very low/ Low/ Medium/ High/ Very high)

**B2. In your opinion, are there sectors of the community whose needs are not being supported by the LEAD projects?**

Probe: Whose needs are being met/not being met?

**B3. Are the needs, as identified in your RDS/SAP still significant?**

Probe: Have any new, more relevant needs recently emerged that the Project should consider/address going forward into the future (next 2 – 3 years)?

**Process**

**GQ:**

**Has the Project involved relevant stakeholders through consultative processes or information-sharing during its preparation phase?**

**Were the territorial/rural development needs considered during the Project implementation and did it reflect the various needs of tripartite stakeholders of LAGs and different stakeholders?**

**B4. Describe how the initial consultation process worked?**

Probe: How did you engage with the people living in the LAG area?

**B5. Were there discussions with the Regional Governor about the social and economic development of the area?**

**B6. How did you identify local priority needs of the area?**

Probe: How were these prioritised?

**B8. How has the local situation altered over the past two years?**

Probe: Have the priority needs of the area altered?

**GQ:**

**Is the Project in line with the current priorities of the country?**

**How is the Project aligned with, and supports the national, regional and community strategies/plans?**

**B9. Are there any other regional or national projects operating in the area trying to achieve the same or similar objectives as the LEAD project?**

If 'YES' please describe.

**B10. Are there any other regional or national projects operating in the area which conflict with the LEAD Project objectives?**

If 'YES', please describe which programmes/projects are affected and nature of the conflict.

**B.11. Are there any other forms of government or non-government support (technical / advice / financial / social welfare) available to communities in the LAG area?**

If 'YES', please describe and identify who benefits.

## **PART C: EFFECTIVENESS**

**GQ:**

- i. How effective has the Project been in establishing ownership by the stakeholders?
- ii. How has the Project encouraged ownership on behalf of the beneficiaries for learning and applying the newly acquired knowledge and skills in practice?
- iii. Can the Project management and implementation be considered as participatory?

**C1. I would like to talk about creation of the RDS and who was involved in helping to develop it.**

Probe:

- How did your LAG get started?
- Who was influential in helping the LAG get organised?

**C2. When you were developing the RDS - who were the key people involved?**

<b>Local people:</b>	<b>External support:</b>

**C3. Was there a high level of participation from local communities in the LAG area?**

Probe:

- How many people from communities in the local area would you say were involved in some way?
- Which sectors of the community were more influential in guiding the direction of the strategy (e.g. farmers, local business, NGOs)?

- Were there any elements of the local community who were not involved in helping to design the LDS? Were there any groups left out of the process

**C4. What role did the following organisations play in helping to develop the RDS?**

Regional Governor’s Office	
UNDP experts	
FAO experts	
Central Government Ministry Personnel	
Other external bodies	
Local community groups	
Local authority	

**Outcomes**

**C5. In your view what have been the main achievements of the LEAD project in this area?**

Probe: In what ways has the wider community benefitted from the LEAD project?

Identified achievement	How have people/communities in the LAG area benefitted

**C6. In your view – in what ways has the LEAD project benefitted people in the LAG area? For example, has it increased knowledge or skills in any way?**

Item	Describe the change and who benefits	Estimated number benefitting	Score 1 – 5 scale (1 = Very little change; 3 = some change; 5 = very high level of change)
Knowledge and understanding			
Skills (describe technical, managerial, communication, interpersonal, problem solving, etc)			
Confidence in ability to address challenges and problems?			
Level of trust in other people and /or organisations			
Other: .....			

**LAG DECISIONMAKING**

I would like to talk about LAG decision making and the role of the STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN (SAP)

**C7. What are the main differences between the LAG RDS and the SAP?**

**C8. Were the people involved in creating the RDS the same as those involved in developing the Strategic Action Plan and the IP?**

Probe: How did they differ?

**C9. In what ways did the process of developing the SAP differ from creating the RDS?**

**Progress towards objectives**

**GQ: Is the Project making sufficient progress towards its planned objectives/outcomes/outputs? What are the key achievements, challenges, and implementation lessons? How can these be applied to the Project?**

**C10. How would you describe the key objectives of the LAG for this area?**

Probe:

- what changes would you like to see as a result of the LEAD project implementation?
- Start with the objectives/changes you think are the highest priority:

**C11. What have been the main obstacles facing you in delivery of the LEAD project in this area?**

Nature of Obstacle	Impact (NOTE: (differentiate between different types of barrier and project process issues)	Perceived magnitude (1 – 5 scale where 1= very small; 3 = medium; 5 = very large)

**C12. Looking forward, what do you see as the main challenges (barriers/obstacles) to delivering the project objectives in this area?**

Nature of challenge	Impact (NOTE: (differentiate between different types of barrier and project process issues)	On a scale of 1 – 5 how difficult will it be to overcome the barrier/obstacle (where 1 = very low level of difficulty; 5 = Very high level of difficulty)

**C13. What changes to the project management processes would help you to achieve your objectives?**

**GQ: To what extent has the capacity building work been effective and did it serve its purpose?**

**C14. To what extent has your involvement with the LEAD project improved YOUR skills /knowledge/ awareness/ confidence/ collaboration with others/ ability to make decisions (set of scale questions producing numeric data with qualitative follow-up questions).**

Outcomes	Description of change	Extent of change

<b>gained</b>		(Where 1 = very low level of improvement; 3 = medium; 5 = Very high level of improvement)
Knowledge and understanding		
Skills (technical / managerial / Other)		
Self-Confidence		
Ability to make decisions		
Ability to collaborate with other people		
Level of trust in other people		
Other: .....		

**C15. What training or support did you have to help you implement the LEAD project?**

Probe:

- effectiveness of support
- timing
- sufficient

**C16. In your view do you have sufficient technical and advisory skills to help delivery the LEAD project?**

PROBE: What additional support/training would be beneficial in helping you to deliver the LEAD project?

**PART D: EFFICIENCY**

**GQ: To what extent have the project implementing parties made good use of the human, financial and technical resources, and have used an appropriate combination of tools and approaches to pursue the achievement of Project results in a cost-effective manner?**

**GQ: Is there a clear distribution of roles and responsibilities for key actors involved?**

**D1. Who is involved in making key decisions on project implementation in the LAG?**

Probe:

- key persons
- nature of role/activity

**D2. Do those involved have clear responsibilities?**

**D3. In your view do these people work together in an efficient manner?**

**D4. How many people sit on the project selection committee in your LAG?**

**D5. Is there a good level of representation from different sectors of the community?**

**D6. In your opinion are the project selection processes efficient?**

Using the table explore time and resources are required for making decisions over project selection and identify the most demanding tasks undertaken (in terms of time and resource costs).

Decision-making tasks	Time / resources required	Perceived level of efficiency (1 = very low level of efficiency; 5 = very high level of efficiency)
Identify the key decisions / tasks...		
Deciding what type of projects to fund		
Decisions on timing of calls		
Decisions on how to promote and raise awareness		

**D7. Is there any evidence from beneficiaries of how much time it takes them to apply for support?**

**Are there demands for additional resources (financial, technical, advisory)**

**D8. In your view, how could project management processes be made more efficient (i.e. reduce costs of delivery)?**

**D9. What else could be done to improve project implementation**

**GQ: Have Project funds and activities been delivered in a timely manner? If not, what were the bottlenecks encountered? To what extent are the activities and achieved results cost-efficient?**

**D10. What factors have influenced project delivery in the area?**

Probe:

- type of factors influencing project delivery (+ve or -ve)
- ways in which these factors hinder delivery (causal mechanisms, in terms of timing; finances; resource implications; local support; project outcomes, etc.).

Factors influencing project delivery	Causal mechanisms	Severity of impact on project delivery (Where 1 = Very Low; 5 = Very high)

**D11. In what ways are you able to address or overcome the issues described above?**

#### **PART E+F: SUSTAINABILITY**

**GQ: Has the Project contributed or is likely to contribute to the long-term political or social changes for individuals, communities, and institutions in relation to its main development course, national development agenda that the Project is aligned with, SDGs, etc?**

**GQ: To what extent has the Project been able to support the local underprivileged communities in identifying their local territorial development strategies and addressing their local needs of rural development, including economic development in this mid-term period?**

**GQ: What are the possible sustainability prerequisites for each of the Project components? What are the hindering factors for ensuring the sustainability of Project outcomes?**

**EF1. Over the long-term (next 3 - 5yrs), to what extent do you think the LEAD project will contribute to the following changes in your LAG area?**

**Economic Change**

- What changes are likely?
- To what extent might individuals change?
- To what extent might communities change?

**Social Change**

- What changes are likely?
- To what extent might individuals change?
- To what extent might communities change?

**Cultural change**

- What changes are likely?
- To what extent might individuals change?
- To what extent might communities change?

**Governance change**

- What changes are likely?
- To what extent might individuals change?
- To what extent might communities change?

**GQ: To what extent has the Project achieved its overarching goal of improved quality, transparency, and inclusiveness of area-based/territorial development local processes, operations?**

**GQ: Has the Project had any intended or unintended secondary effect throughout the implementation?**

**EF2. To what extent has the LEAD project contributed to changes in the LAG area?**

In what ways has the LEAD project...	Description	Level of change Score 1 – 5 scale (1 = Very little change; 3 = some change; 5 = very high level of change)
...reduced social exclusion?		
...improved local level decision making?		
... increased trust and cooperation among people and other organisations?		
...changed attitudes in relation to how the local community sees itself		

**EF3. Are you aware of any unexpected changes (+ve or -ve) in the LAG area as a result of implementing the LEAD project?**

IF 'YES': Please explain the nature of any changes, who/what was affected and in what ways.

**EF4. Have you noticed any unexpected changes in those working on the LEAD project (e.g. change in skills, level of understanding)?**

**EF6. In your view, how sustainable is the LAG (i.e. – explore whether it is likely to last beyond the funding period of the next 2 years)?**

**PROBE:**

- Are the key needs being addressed in the SAP for the LAG area?



- Are any communities/groups being excluded from development?
- Are project activities/funds sufficient to meet locally identified needs?

**EF7. In your view - what will happen to the LAG when the LEAD funding period comes to an end?**

**PROBE:**

- Will the project continue in some form?
- Will the capacity that has been developed in LAG areas have a lasting impact on local and community development

**EF8. Looking to the future (next 2 – 3 yrs), which factors do you feel will limit the effective delivery of project objectives (and outcomes) and which will provide opportunities/provide support?**

Objective (or Outcome)	Requirements to ensure delivery (i.e. sustainability requirements)	Factors that will limit effective delivery	Opportunities that might support or enhance delivery

**FINAL QUESTIONS**

**FQ1. Overall, do you feel the LEAD project has created benefits for local communities within the LAG area?**

**FQ2. In your opinion would Armenia benefit if the LEAD project was expanded to cover all rural areas of the country?**

**FQ3. Do you have any questions you would like to ask me?**

## **Annex 5: Grant Beneficiary Interview Schedule**

### **UNDP ARMENIA: EULEAD4 Lori and Tavush Regions LAG BENEFICIARY INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

General information

Interview data	
Interview number	
Date of the interview	
Region	
LAG name	
Interviewer name	

Personal data of the interviewee						
Type of interviewee	<input type="radio"/> public sector	<input type="radio"/> private sector	<input type="radio"/> 3 <sup>rd</sup> sector/NGO	<input type="radio"/> Social enterprise	<input type="radio"/> Other, please specify	
Name of interviewee						
Name of project supported						
Organisation/company/public institution name (if relevant)						

#### **1. Your project**

1. Can you please describe the project that has been funded by the LAG?
2. What are main objectives of your project?
3. What stage are you at with your project?

Project implementation stage	Tick relevant action	Reason for answer
Not started		
Started		Date Started:
Just beginning now		
About halfway through		
Nearly finished		
Finished		Start date: _____ Date of completion _____

4. If project is completed or nearly completed:  
How successful has your project been? Have you met all your objectives?

## 2. Access and Support

1. Can you tell me how you found out there was funding available from the LAG?

2. What were your reasons for approaching the LAG to fund your project?

**Probe:**

Did you consider alternative sources of funding for your project?

What were your reasons for applying for LAG funding rather than other sources?

3. Did you have any help to prepare your application? If yes who helped you?

4. What kind of support did you receive?

5. How easy or difficult was it to understand whether your project was eligible for the LAG funding?

6. How difficult was it for you to secure the financial resources needed for match funding?

[Probe for the level of match funding required- and if they have used combination of in kind and monetary]

7. How long did it take to go from:

- Project submission to approval? .....specify days/weeks/months
- Project approval to signing a contract? .....specify days/weeks/months
- Signing a contract to getting your payment? .....specify days/weeks/months

8. What have been the main obstacles/barriers that you have experienced regarding implementation of your project?

9. If there were delays, did they impact your ability to implement your project.

Please describe any problems.

10. Have you ever had funding from other sources?

**YES / NO**

**If yes, which ones?**

**Were they easier or more difficult to apply for than the LEADER funding?**

## 3. Personal benefits from the project

1. What has been the most significant impact of your project on the following:

Your family:

Your business (select based on the type of beneficiary):

Your organisation (select based on the type of beneficiary):

The local community:

2. In what ways has your project benefitted you personally?

Outcomes gained	Description of change	Extent of change (Where) = No change
-----------------	-----------------------	---

		1 = A small change 2 = A medium level of change; 3 = High level of change
Improved my level of knowledge and understanding		
Improved my skills (such as technical, Managerial, or other skills)		
More self-Confidence		
Improved my ability to make decisions		
Improved my ability to collaborate with other people		
Increased my level of trust in other people		

#### 4. Awareness of the LAG activities and LEADER

1. Have you been involved in any LAG activities (apart from applying for project funding)? If yes, please describe the type of involvement:

Type of activity	Yes/ No	Comment
<b>Board Member;</b>		
<b>Select Committee Member?</b>		
<b>Involved in developing the Strategic Action Plan</b>		
<b>Involved in developing ideas for how the LAG should develop</b>		
<b>Other</b> (Specify: .....)		

2. In your opinion what benefits is the LAG having on this area?

**Annex 6: Documentary Review****Table 1: UNDP - Documentary Review**

<b><u>Type of documents</u></b>	<b><u>Title</u></b>
<b>Annual Reports</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LEAD in Lori and Tavush Regions Project Inception Report and Progress Reports 2021, 2022</li> </ul>
<b>Methodological documents</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Election procedure LEAD LAG Board</li> <li>• National Roundtable in Armenia</li> <li>• LAG two-step project selection process</li> <li>• LEAD Gantt Charts 2021, 2022</li> <li>• LEAD Project Implementation Handbook</li> <li>• LEAD local implementation guideline, Phase 6-7</li> <li>• UNDP LEAD LAGs' Mode of Operation Template</li> <li>• Presentations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Methodological insides of LEADER approach</li> <li>• LAG level activities in LEAD in 2022</li> <li>• Methodological guide: individual, flagship and macro project in LEAD(ER)</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>Factsheet - EULEAD4 Lori &amp; Tavush regions</p>
<b>Strategic Steering Committee Meeting documents</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minutes of Steering Committee meetings 2021-2023</li> <li>• Presentations of meetings 1-5 across 2021-2023.</li> <li>• LEAD Programme Terms of Reference of the Strategic Steering Committee.</li> </ul>
<b>Development strategies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ganzor LAG SAP final</li> <li>• Tashir Plus LAG SAP final</li> <li>• Lorva Dzor LAG SAP final</li> <li>• Tsili Tsov LAG SAP final</li> <li>• Aghstevi Hovit LAG SAP final</li> </ul>
<b>LAG grants and project information</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First call- list of projects</li> <li>• Seed Grants- second call list of projects</li> <li>• LAG grants data</li> <li>• LAG grants timeline</li> </ul>

**Table 2: FAO - Documentary Review**

<b><u>Type of document</u></b>	<b><u>Title</u></b>
<b>Reports</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LEAD Project Progress Monitoring Report</li> <li>• LEAD Annual report 2020-2021 (1 &amp; 2 reporting periods)</li> <li>• Monitoring report: FAO Armenia - "EU-LEAD4Lori and Tavush Regions" Project Monitoring Results for Agriculture Equipment, reporting period: Feb-April 2023</li> <li>• Impact assessment of the pandemic in relation to food value chains in the Lori and Tavush regions</li> </ul>
<b>Publicity/Media documents</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gyulagarak Feedstuff Distribution Event (Coverage during reporting event)</li> </ul>

## **Annex 7: LAG Discussion Group Structure**

### **UNDP Armenia Mid-term Evaluation of the LEAD Programme – Lori and Tavush Regions**

#### **DISCUSSION GROUP STRUCTURE WITH ILLUSTRATIONS**

##### **Note on the structure:**

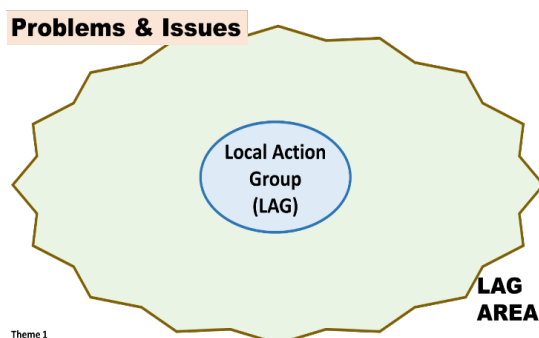
Illustrations – can be laid out on table, floor or stuck on wall/door, etc. – anywhere visible – to keep attention focused on one Thematic aspect at a time. See example of layout below. Can also write on these sheets as way of highlighting key points.

##### **Discussion design**

- Theme 1 - an easy entry to get people talking
- Themes 2 & 3 – the most important evidence to collect (20 mins each)
- Theme 4 – less important but useful information to have
- Theme 5 – winding down the session

TIMING:	Based on assumed 90-minute session
NUMBER:	Participants: Anticipate 10 - 12
FACILITATOR:	1
INTERPRETER:	1
REFRESHMENTS:	Provide if possible - encourage people to attend
LOCATION:	Location and room layout unknown.

Illustrations printed on large A1 size sheets and displayed within sight of the group participants (on a table or a wall) to help focus attention on the issues under discussion. ‘Post-it’ notes stuck onto the illustrations to summarise key points as the discussion progresses.



**Who has benefitted from LAG activity?**

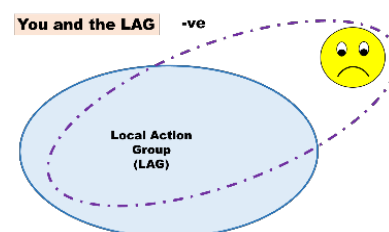
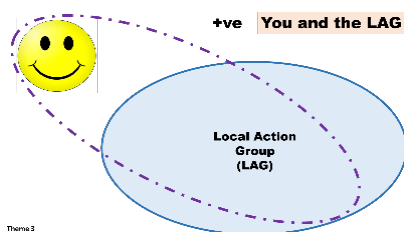
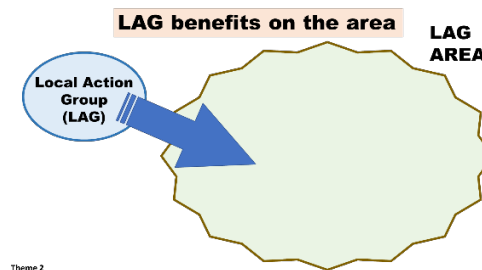


Theme 2

**Who has been left out – not benefitted?**



Theme 2



**2023–25 What else can the LAG do?**



**Proposed timing for discussion groups**

**Timing**

**0 – 10 mins**

**Subject focus**

Brief introduction of key personnel, focus of the meeting and how the information will be utilised.

**Quick summary of the next hour and a quarter:** We will discuss a number of issues. I will ask a question and we will ask for your opinions. There are no wrong answers, we want to know about your experiences, about the problems you are facing, and your opinions on the work or the LAG, good and bad.

**11 – 25 mins  
(15 mins)**

**Theme 1: The main problems in the (LAG) area**

What would you say are the biggest issues affecting development in the area?  
Who is affected? How are they affected?

What is preventing you from solving these problems?

**26 – 45 mins  
(20 mins)**

**Theme 2: How the LAG has benefitted the area**

Has the LAG been able to address the problems we just identified?

In what ways has the LAG helped improve your lives?

Since the LAG started what changes have you noticed:

- Improvements in the local economy; more jobs; more support for local business?
- Changes in the way people think about things?
- Changes in people's happiness/general wellbeing?
- Changes in the people's sense of optimism for the future?
- Changes in people's ability to tackle local problems?

Who has benefitted in the local area?

**46 – 65 mins  
(20 mins)**

**Theme 3: Your engagement with the LAG and Personal/family benefits**

How have you engaged with the LAG

(e.g. received grant funding; engaged in discussions or developing the SAP))

How has your engagement affected you personally or your families? Do you feel better or worse than before? Has anything changed? (e.g. improved wellbeing; less anxious/stressful; more confidence in the future, more willing to engage with others)

**66 – 80 mins  
(15 mins)**

**Theme 4: Additional LAG action**

What else could the LAG do, over the next 1 or 2 yrs. to support development of the area?

Are there issues that the LAG is not addressing?

Are there people in this area that are not benefitting/not engaging with the LAG?

**81 – 90 mins  
(10 mins)**

**Wrap up and Q & A session**

Reminder of how the information will be utilised.

Answer additional questions

**THANKS FOR COMING TODAY!**