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Baseline Survey for Akhalkalaki LDS Development Study of the Community Problems and Needs



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Appendix 1: Baseline Survey for Akhalkalaki LDS Development Study of the Community Problems and Needs

1. Background of the baseline survey

The baseline survey has been conducted in order to support the Local Action Group (LAG) of Akhalkalaki during the elaboration process of the Local Development Strategy (LDS). The survey was organized within the framework of the EU-ENPARD financed project *Promoting a New Rural Development Approach in Akhalkalaki* implemented by the Georgian Rural Development Department of the Georgian Institute of Public Affairs (GIPA) in partnership with Mercy Corps, Elva Community Engagement and West Cork Development Partnership (WCDP). The survey aims to contribute in the identification of local problems and needs through the enquiry sessions of the local residents. This survey ensures that activities related to the LDS development and implementation process are fully in line with the European Union's *LEADER* approach, which seeks to encourage a bottom-up approach to local decision-making via local partnerships. The baseline survey serves to find out as what is the local communities' understanding about local problems; their perceptions about the local needs, priorities and their expectations about local development. The outputs from the survey will support the conceptualization of the LDS and its strategic priorities of local actions, which represent the wishes of the local communities.

2. Survey design and methodology

2.1. Overall baseline survey design and methodology

The survey was carried out by the Georgian Institute of Public Affairs (GIPA) in July 2017. The survey concept and discussion topics/questions were elaborated based on the thematic framework of the Local Development Strategy. The survey design was prepared specifically according to the topics included in the LDS. The goal of the survey is to source this strategic document with the primary information.

Research Methodology

Method	Qualitative
Technique	Focus group interview
Target Group	11 focus groups of the neighboring communities from 22 municipal units of Akhalkalaki municipality. Each focus group includes local citizens with different competences and experience grouped into 11 units.
Sample Size	209 local citizens of Akhalkalaki municipality
Sampling Method	Non-probability - purposive sampling
Research Region (Geography)	Municipality of Akhalkalaki, Samtskhe-Javakheti region, Georgia
Interview Duration	60-90 minutes

2.2. Survey sites

The survey was conducted in 11 locations, which covered entire territory of Akhalkalaki municipality. More specifically, 22 territorial units were grouped into 11 locations according to the geographic principle of territorial neighborhood as follows:

# of meetings	Community Grouping		Population
1	Kochio	Azavreti	(Armenian)
2	Alastani	Khando	Aragva (Armenian)
3	Baraleti	Kotelia	(Armenian and Georgian)
4	Gogasheni	Okami	(Georgian and Armenian)
5	Kartsakhi	Khaveti	(Armenian)
6	Sulda	Vachiani	(Armenian)
7	Zakvi	Turtskhi	(Armenian)
8	Kartikami	Khospio	(Armenian, Greek and Georgian)
9	Ptena	Chunchkha	(Georgian)
10	Diliska	Kumurdo	(Armenian)
11	Akhalkalaki		(Armenian and Georgian)

Table 1: Number of interviews and community grouping

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2.3. Data Collection

2.3.1. Study population and sampling strategy

Study population comprised entire population of the Akhalkalaki municipality, which includes 22 municipal units: Azavreti, Alastani, Aragva, Baraleti, Vachiani, Gogasheni, Kumurdo, Diliska, Zakvi, Kartsakhi, Kartikami, Kotelia, Kochio, Okami, Ptena, Sulda, Turtskhi, Khaveti, Khando, Khospio, Chunchkha and Akhalkalaki town itself. These territorial units include 64 villages and 1 town.

Sampling strategy: A qualitative survey was carried out in a form of *focus group* interviews within the above mentioned 11 community grouping. The target group of the focus groups from the following neighboring territorial units included local citizens, which share common problems. The average number of the focus group varied from 10-15 people. The focus group included respondents representing or operating in the following areas:

Agriculture: Farmers, Members of the cooperatives, etc.

Local business: Entrepreneurs, processors, manufacturers, service providers

Education and culture: Teacher, lecturers, experts, etc.

Health care and social affairs: Doctors, nurses, etc.

Environment, bio-diversity and cultural heritage

Infrastructure, engineering and energy

Local authority

Local NGOs

Vulnerable groups, Elderly and People with Disabilities

Active females, ethnic minorities and new communities

Sport and youth activities

The number of participants from different spheres of activity and qualifications varied between communities however agriculture was strongly represented as the majority of the population is engaged in that sphere.

Total participants:	209 People
Sphere of Activity/Profession and Qualification of the Interviewees	Number
1. Agriculture	173
2. Sports, leisure and youth activities	57
3. Local business	37
4. Education and culture	34
5. Infrastructure, engineering and energy	28
6. Active females, ethnic minorities and new communities	28
7. Local authority	28
8. Local NGOs	24
9. Environment, bio-diversity and cultural heritage	23
10. Health care and social affairs	21
11. Vulnerable groups, Elderly and People with Disabilities	16
Gender	
Male:	166
Female:	43
Age	
< 26 year	49
> 26 year	160

Table 2: Interview participants

The composition of the focus group took account of participation the local youth and gender balance. Due to the multiple spheres of activities, professions and qualifications of the interviewees this number varies and exceeds total number of participants.

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2.3.2. Group discussion

The group discussion was carried out according to the questionnaire design, the design of which was open ended. It comprised themes and subthemes brought from the framework of the Local Development Strategy and included:

Theme 1: Socio-Economic Profile

Sub themes: Demographics; Rural Towns and Villages; Deprivation and Disadvantage; Elderly People; Lone Parent Families; Ethnicity and New Communities; Health/People with Disabilities; Labor market Profile/Unemployment; Use of land and natural resources; Environment Protection, Biodiversity, Climate Change and Carbon Emission; Renewable Energy and Climate Adaptation; Food, Wellbeing and Nutrition.

Theme 2: Economic Development

*Sub themes: Agriculture (animal husbandry – meat and dairy, horticulture – fruits and vegetables, arable farming, apiculture, Fishing & Aquaculture)
Enterprises; Manufacturing and processing; Services: Tourism and recreation; Social Enterprises; Knowledge Intensive Services; Creative industries, arts and Crafts;
Economic Activity Profile (Including Market access, Logistics and Distribution; Specialist Business Services and Suppliers; Sectorial Networks and Associations; Technical Services and Regulatory Compliance).*

Theme 3: Education, Culture, Sport and Social Inclusion

*Sub themes: Education and qualification/skills development;
Civic engagement, Equality and Social Inclusion (Youth/Female/Gender/Vulnerable Groups);
Sports and leisure activities;
Cultural Heritage/ Social and Cultural Environment (facilities and activities).*

Theme 4: Infrastructure and Welfare

*Sub themes: Rural Infrastructure and Public transport
Communications infrastructure (TV and Radio, broadband, Mobile phone)*

Theme 5: Key Services & Programs in Akhalkalaki Municipality

Theme 6: Local Government

2.3.3. Key informant interview

Discussion themes were optional. The focus groups were flexible to choose those topics, which they thought were most important for the community, relevant in terms of the priority to be discussed and urgency to be solved. At the beginning of the interview each interviewee was requested to introduce himself/herself and according to his/her competence and occupation share views about the problems and the needs in the community and the municipality in general. After completing the introduction process, interviewer facilitated the group to open the historical discourse about the communities, local life etc., which they valued and remember well. At the following stage interviewer moderated the themes and sub-themes of the discussion according to the interests and priorities of the groups. The group was instructed to build a discussion according to the following structure:

Discussion: problems, needs, advantages, disadvantages, opportunities, threats.

Objectives:

Actions: What can be done? Where? Who are the primary target groups? Who will deliver the action? When shall the action start? Collaborative organizations?

2.3.4. Data collection, registration, processing, and analysis

The discussions of the interviews were voice recorded with the discussion facilitated by the interviewer and noted on the flip chart. Interview participants were registered in the participants list with full name, address, contact details and signature. Collected information was processed and analyzed via *NVivo software* that supports qualitative and mixed research methods as well as *MS Office software*.

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2.3.5. Survey team and organization

The survey team was comprised of three people:

Field work coordinator – who was responsible for scheduling and grouping community meetings, organizing meetings venue and participation of the local residents, providing transportation of the team for fieldwork trips;

Researcher – who was responsible firstly for the field data collection by interviewing participants individually and facilitate group discussions noting interviews process and retrieved information on the flip charts; secondly for the on desk data analysis and final research paper;

Fieldwork research assistant – was responsible for the minutes of the meeting, voice recording and registering interview participants.

3. Discussion

The enquiry intended to find out community needs and problems to be solved that were common for all citizens of Akhalkalaki municipality. The enquiry also intended to explore the most extreme needs which were specific to certain communities but did not occur in other locations.

The mostly discussed themes of the communities were:

1. Economic Development including subthemes: Agriculture; Enterprises; Services, tourism and recreation; Manufacturing and Processing; Market Access; Specialist Business Services and Suppliers; Technical Services and Regulatory Compliance; Logistics and Distribution.
2. Infrastructure and Welfare including subthemes: Rural Infrastructure and Public Transport; Communications (TV, Radio, Broadband, Mobile Phone).
3. Socio-Economic Profile including subthemes: Health; Environment Protection; Labor Market Profile and Unemployment; Use of Land and Natural Resources; Demographics; Elderly People; Food, Wellbeing and Nutrition; Renewable Energy and Climate Adaptation.
4. Education, Culture and Social Inclusion including subthemes: Education and qualification or skills development; Cultural Heritage or Social and Cultural Environment; Sport leisure activities; Civic engagement, Equality and Social Inclusion.
5. Key Services and Programs
6. Local Government

The following discussion will be developed according to the mostly discussed themes and referred sub-themes. Discussion showed that several themes and sub-themes were crosscutting in terms of the issues discussed. In this sense, analysis will try to avoid duplication of judgements and provide references in relevant sections.

3.1. Economic Development

The principal economic activity in the municipality is agriculture. The leading agricultural activities are firstly potato growing and secondly livestock farming - mostly cattle breeding (50% of dairy and 50% meat production) and a lesser amount of sheep breeding. Climate conditions in the area does not permit an opportunity for the growth of various agricultural products but still the land can yield fruits, such as apple, pear, cherry, also wild rose, different berries and walnut. In terms of vegetables there is potential to grow beet, garlic, onions, cabbage, beans, turnip and carrot. Farmers also crop barley, wheat and oats. Although production volumes are not big as there is little commercial interest yet.

The majority of the population are self-employed farmers running the family farms holding less than 1.5 hectare of land. Income from potato growing activity is not sufficient and is low due to the poor productivity and efficiency of the farming. Besides, the cost of the potato production is high due to the expensive price on the seeds, watering costs and expensive fertilizers as well as pesticides. There is a problem of predation from crows and rodents in the fields which damages plants. In addition to that there is always risk of hailstorm which can obliterate an entire harvest.

In terms of the cattle breeding there is a need to improve cattle breeds as the local livestock is not productive. The average milking capacity estimates 10 liters, with herds estimated to range from 2 to 10 head. Farmers have feeding problem of the livestock. There are no distinctive milk or meat producing breeds. Along with that cost of the livestock farming is high. A veterinary service is highly needed locally. Other than state vaccination there is no sufficient availability to the private veterinary services. However, some private preventive, therapeutically and other veterinary services are requested. There is a lack of veterinary specialists in the municipality.

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Farmers have difficulty in accessing markets and in selling their harvest at desirable prices. Realization of the agro-products are not stable. There is no organized marketplace locally where the farmers could sell agricultural products locally at wholesale and retail prices. Also they require wholesale collection points/hubs for agricultural products where they could deliver and sell agricultural products to the wholesale buyers locally. That also would eliminate costs of transportation to the markets outside municipality or region. Farmers complain about stability of agricultural prices. As a result a large amount of the potato harvest remains unsold, spoiled and dumped into the rivers and surrounding areas of the communities.

Productivity in agriculture is low with farmers finding it difficult to decrease costs of production and increase income. They do not have stable buyers of the agricultural products. Farmers produce dairy products mostly for private consumption with a smaller proportion of production sold commercially. They also have quality and scale disadvantages. In addition, local agro-products are not competitive with imported products in terms of prices and marketable appearance. Suppliers of the seeds are not reliable therefore there is a need for the local potato seeds producers which will increase reliability and competitiveness of price.

Traders are benefiting more than farmers because they buy agricultural products at bargain prices locally and sell for much higher price margin in wholesale and retail markets. Generally, farmers complain about price instability. The same situation exists with milk production as well. 70% of the farmers sell and exchange agriculture products produced by themselves into those goods (mostly food, fruits and vegetables and clothes) which are not produced by them locally. Hence, the small scale traders bring some goods locally for door-to-door barter trading with farmers. Communities require livestock market place where they could sell the cattle.

Residents of the local communities outlined importance of developing the following agribusinesses: in terms of primary production, other than potato growing there is possibility for developing energy efficient green housing. Some communities have potential for trout farming due to the unique water quality and proximity to the wild environment. Also, beekeeping is a good potential for farming as they can produce alpine honey. In terms of secondary production and value chain development there is potential for developing a cheese factory based on the milk production; a sugar factory based on the beet production; a starch and spirit factory based on the potato production; animal food production plant and a slaughter house which will be built in accordance to the regulatory standards. In addition, respondents mentioned storage facilities and procession units for grading and packaging potato.

Local residents noted that there is a lack of information about agriculture related issues and ongoing programs or activities. Young farmers operating in the agriculture sphere do not have knowledge about modern agricultural practices. Farmers find potential of organic farming and they are interested about use of bio pesticides and fertilizers. However, they do not have knowledge, confidence and experience in that. Farmers require experience sharing activities including demo-plots to see the tangible results to grow confidence and improve knowledge in potato growing but that relates also to other cultures of agriculture farming. Farmers need consultation in terms of certification mostly for potato. They also need to see best practices using agro-chemicals.

Farmers require laboratory service (including mobile laboratories and clinics) in order to check safety of food products - milk and meat, quality of fruits and vegetables, animal health, soil consistence. In addition to that farmers require agriculture research centers which would test the new breeds of agricultural plants locally.

There are no agriculture technologies and machinery in used. Technologies require modernization. Agriculture machinery is outdated and not appropriate to current need. There is a need for two additional agro-service centers as existing centers do not have sufficient number of machinery and cannot serve the farmers on time. The biggest need is for combine-harvesters.

Farmers complain about the irrigation system. Majority of lands are not watered but there are enough water resources. Some areas may require water pumps but most areas could be supplied with self-

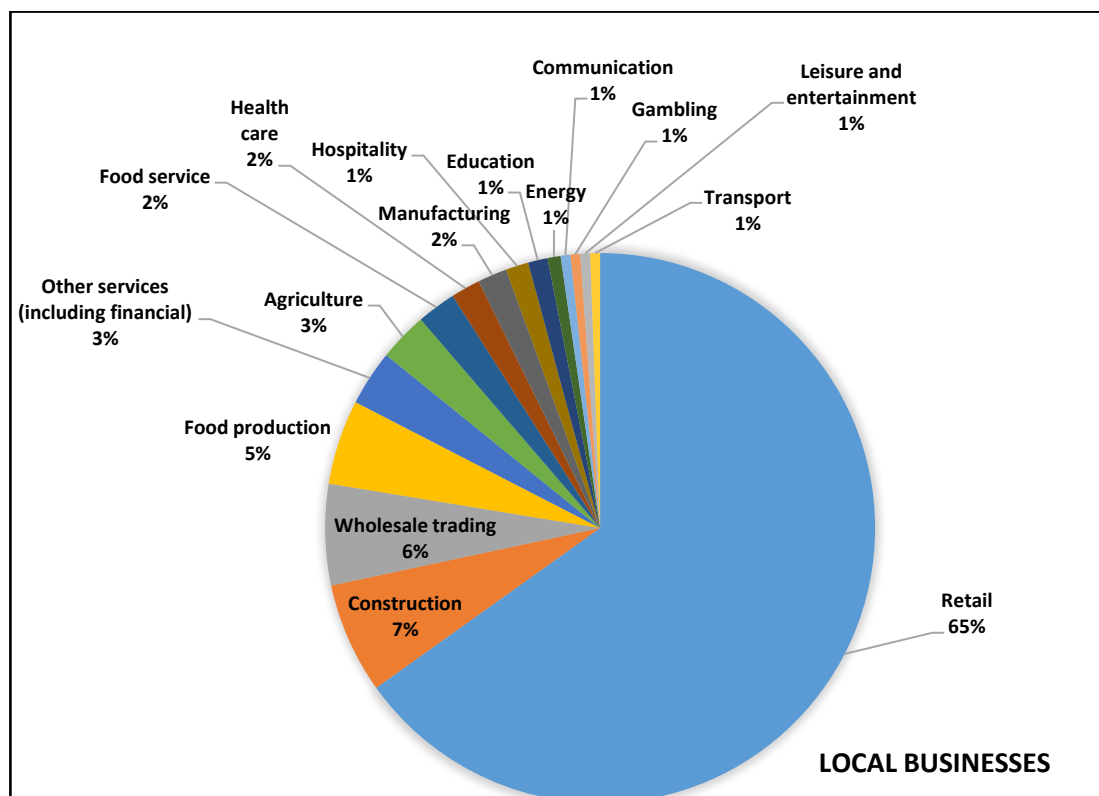
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running water. Unfortunately, the infrastructure of the irrigation system is not sufficient. In order to provide water to the fields and farming plots wellsprings, water ponds, reservoirs, artificial lakes and water channels must be developed, which requires rehabilitation and engineering works. Communities are willing to participate in this process and provide free labor resources.

People have poor cooperative experience and wrong perceptions about the cooperation and joint activities. Farmers do not have knowledge about benefits and do not have clear understanding about an importance of the cooperatives. Poor awareness and lack of understanding of cooperation among farmers is mostly caused due to the soviet experience and lack of real cooperative practices. Also, knowledge and skills on cooperation is poor. Despite the fact that the attitude about cooperation is not good, there are some emerging farmers who can see cooperation as a means of competing in the market and in decreasing production costs.

Farmers have a poor understanding about the agribusiness management and modern farming; farmers having obtained knowledge and skills through self-education and practical experience. There is a need for vocational educational and training programs mostly related to agriculture such as agronomy, animal breeding, mechanization, accounting, veterinary, welding, carpentry, and agro-business management, accounting, sales and marketing, etc., but these are not provided locally.

According to the information retrieved from the National Statistics Office of Georgia as of August 2017, there are 523 companies in Akhalkalaki municipality operating in the following areas: Retail; Construction; Wholesale trading; Food production; Other services (including financial); Agriculture; Food service; Health care; Manufacturing; Hospitality; Education; Energy; Communication; Gambling; Leisure and entertainment and Transport. The chart below shows that the greater proportion – 65% (340 business entities) of the business activity is retail, represented mostly by small scale enterprises. Agriculture shows only 3% (15 business entities) of registered enterprises in the municipality. However, it should be noted that this figure represents only registered companies and not self-employed farmers. Employment in other sectors is minimal.



Local residents could provide little information in terms of specific agro-diversification enterprises to be developed; concentrating mostly on mainstream agriculture development and in solving these most urgent needs. Focus group discussions showed that farmers logically were aware of the need to

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develop and promote farmers' cooperatives, but they still were not fully confident and were skeptical of its mechanisms.

As mentioned, agriculture related industries and related services require development to help increase productivity, efficiency and competitiveness. In this regard, local enterprises should be developed in accordance to the above-mentioned agriculture and agro-service needs. A local market place with sufficient warehousing and storage, logistics, processing and packaging units is required.

Alternatively, services for tourists should be developed including guest accommodations; also beauty salons, barbers shop, shoemakers, car wash, auto service, pharmacy and similar services should be available locally. There is also potential to build factory of the building and decorative stones as the municipality has locations of basalt stone mines.

The municipality of Akhalkalaki is situated in alpine zone on the volcanic plateau (the height range is 1500 to 3300 meters above sea level) within the Caucasus Mountain that covers Samtskhe-Javakheti region of Georgia and bordering Armenia and Turkey. The surface of the plateau is represented by wavy planes on eastern part of which resides Samsari ridge (the highest point is the mountain great Abuli – 3301m).

In the municipality there are following rivers - Paravani, Chobareti and Baraleti and the lakes – Abuli, Vachiani, Levani, Paskia (Zreki), Tabatskuri, Khozapini (Kartsakhi), Sulda. The municipality has cultural heritage including such historic objects as Akhalkalaki castle, Abuli castle, Kumurdo domed church, Samsari caves, Chunchkha ancient settlement and houses, Vank temple, Alastani church, Azavreti church, Burnashet church, Kochio church, etc. The municipality includes the Javakheti national park and the National reserves of Kartsakhi, Sulda, Tetrobi and Ktsia-Tabatskuri. Sightseeing and recreation destinations to different places as mentioned should be identified and developed for visitors as well as local population. There is potential to attract tourists looking for recreation, bird watching, fishing, hiking, biking, horse riding, etc. In addition to that there is potential to develop agro-tourism. In addition to that some communities have potential to develop sky resort. Some communities requested to build a ski rope.

Tourism infrastructure does not exist and requires development with few, if any information services, camping places, guesthouses, family hotels or hotels. There is no direction signage, route guiding and markings for the visitors. Along with the developing infrastructure and local services there is a need for popularization of the municipality among the tour operating companies. It is important to organize info tours for the tour operators and place some destinations in the touristic route packages. It is essential to prepare special route maps, brochures and develop a web site which containing the relevant information about the municipality.

The tourism initiative - Khertvisi-Vardzia-Oloda rehabilitation plan is under process in Aspindza municipality. Similar to that project it is possible to extend the rehabilitation plan to the Akhalkalaki municipality. From Gogasheni village it is possible to develop touristic landscape site overlooking Vardzia cave monastery.

Local residents of Akhalkalaki municipality lack awareness of local cultural or heritage sites which could have tourism potential.

3.2. Infrastructure and Welfare

Infrastructural development was another big concern of the local communities. It is important to notice that infrastructure related issues cross-cut with other issues such as economic development, education, healthcare and other socio-economic aspects. Its importance was referred in almost every aspect of the local consultation.

One of the biggest problems for the community is the public road infrastructure with the first priority to complete the main roads connecting communities with the city and the second priority is to complete those roads that connect villages within the municipality. There is ongoing process of the

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road construction in some parts of municipality, however people are not familiar with the strategic plan or when works will be completed.

Another frequently mentioned problem is natural gas distribution to the villages. Most of the non-urban population are still not supplied with natural gas.

It was already mentioned that tourism shall become one of the priorities for economic diversification and development. However, in terms of the infrastructure there are two basic priority issues to be tackled. Firstly, it is necessary to address the main infrastructural problems such as roads, natural gas, electricity and lighting and water supply. Secondly, it is necessary to develop or rehabilitate local spots/amenities such as parks, squares, cultural heritages, architecture, including info-centers, markings, road mapping, developing recreation zones, etc.

Community residents, especially youth are dissatisfied with the sports infrastructure. Sport activities are poor in the villages. In order to promote and support healthy lifestyle or sport activities residents require outdoor sports infrastructure such as football stadiums and other playgrounds with tribunes and lighting. Apart from that it is important to build halls for gym, wrestling, football, basketball and other indoor activities. Some communities have sufficient spaces in the old state owned buildings which require rehabilitation works, although the majority of the communities will need to build new ones. There are no indoor or outdoor swimming pools in the municipality.

Another problem was related to the nursery schools with people dissatisfied with access and quality. It is also necessary to develop outdoor playgrounds for children including recreation areas such as gardens and squares.

Community members require places for cultural activities, preferably an events hall for community gathering and interaction and where local youth could perform singing, dancing, playing music, etc. There is also a need for a local library, and center for knowledge and trainings.

Community members complain about the school infrastructure. At some places there are no schools (for instance in the village Sulda) and pupils have to walk long distances to the schools. Some schools are residing in the state buildings which are not fit for purpose. There is a need to build some new schools at some villages while others require rehabilitation. There is also problem with electricity, heating, water supply and toilets.

Private transport exists but public transport is not provided in the municipality. People use private cars with private taxi and mini-bus services popular. There is no information facility where visitors or travelers could access information about transport timetables and schedules. People also have broadband problems; it being of very poor quality and expensive. Communities watch satellite channels in Armenian and Russian languages. They do not watch national - Georgian language channels due to the poor knowledge of the Georgian language. However, it was apparent that there is also poor terrestrial coverage and use of national channels in the villages. In some villages the electricity supply is unstable due to old cables and transformers that require updating. Villages do not have sewage system and waste collection points, which creates sanitary and environmental problems.

Community members are not satisfied with the water supply. There are two major problems: one is related to the drinking water and another is related to the irrigation system for watering. Drinking water is not delivered to the families in some of the villages (e.g. Sulda and Dadeshi). Water supply decreases in the summer time and it is unavailable to the households due to the two reasons; one is scarcity of supply and secondly farmers use drinking water for irrigation purposes. The first problem can be solved by increasing water supply through the rehabilitation of water sources and reservoirs. Unfortunately, the second problem is less easily solved.

Drinking water reservoirs are not filtered. They need proper filtration system as people consume dirty and polluted water. According to that water needs to be checked in the laboratories in terms of the quality. Bejano and Alatumani water is provided through the asbestos pipes which needs replacement. Water collection points should be extended and rehabilitated in order to increase supply. Some

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villages require new routes for water pipelines in order to avoid farmlands where supplies are misused for irrigation. The community of Chunchkha requires rehabilitation of its drinking water system. The water runs from 15km where in the middle some residents use drinking water for irrigation. It is noteworthy that local residents are willing to work physically in the water rehabilitation projects because in some villages (Okami and Gogasheni) they are not satisfied with the quality of water rehabilitation works implemented by the companies where the drinking water system was only partly rehabilitated.

As regards irrigation, the majority of lands are not watered. Communities need a watering system for the irrigation of farmlands as well as to provide drinking water to the livestock. In this sense the watering system needs to be rehabilitated or in major cases developed. Collection for the watering water has to be extended. Irrigation channels or pipelines need to be built. There are not too much places where use of the electric pumps is required. According to the farmers they are prepared to pay the fee to maintain the watering system. Most of the irrigation systems could ensure water supply to the farmlands of more than 3 villages. Solving problem of the irrigation system will also solve an issue of misuse drinking water for watering purposes.

Another problem found to be crucial was the healthcare infrastructure. The majority of the communities require medical clinics and pharmacies. Most of the clinics could operate within proximity of 2-3-4 villages. In some places where the medical clinics exist people complain about poor conditions as they need to be rehabilitated. However, in some places there is no existing medical clinic and it needs to be built or accommodated in the community state buildings, which themselves require reconstruction or rehabilitation. In addition, there are a significant number of elderly people who require special care and supervision. In this sense community residents requested retirement homes for elderly people to include facilities for meals, gatherings, recreation activities, and some form of health/medical or hospice care.

3.3. Socio-Economic Profile

Community's say the number of local families has decreased compared to the previous years. Approximately 20% of the families are abandoned. According to estimates the population has decreased by 40%.; the biggest reason being migration in search of employment opportunities abroad – mostly to Russia. 80% of migrants are labor workers. The Majority of the migrants are youth with only secondary education. There is no local employment opportunity for youth other than farming. Adults complain that youth cannot be engaged in other socio-economic activities in the community. As they tend to gamble, waste their time online or idle. There is a problem and therefore a communications barrier regarding the use of the Georgian language in the youth and female population. The situation is better for male adults however the majority of them are comfortable speaking Russian. Literacy is poor. Awareness raising about the importance of education is greatly needed. People are demotivated about vocational and higher education due to the poor employment opportunities locally on graduation. However, it was found that some parents are motivated to provide a Georgian language education to their children as this will assist in securing better local employment. Early marriage is a big problem which needs awareness rising and educational intervention as well.

Arising from the discussion it can be seen that unemployment is a significant problem. The majority are employed in agriculture locally with the migrants employed in construction abroad so for the most part the skills and knowledge of the local population is agriculture and construction. However, despite proficiency in the agriculture and construction sectors they do not have vocational or higher educational qualifications in the related fields. There is a scarcity of competences in other economic activities but that is mostly determined by the job market and the poor economic performance of the region and municipality.

In terms of healthcare it was mentioned earlier that infrastructure of the local clinics is in a very bad condition. Medical clinics in the communities are highly needed. Existing ones have to be rehabilitated, reconstructed and some new clinics have to be built. Except for the infrastructural issues medical clinics need to be equipped and furnished. There is a lack of doctors and nurses who can treat patients locally. Existing medical personnel needs to be requalified and trained. Health conditions of the kids are poor as they are not supervised by the local doctors. There are no first aid and mostly

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needed medicines, which could be used by the local doctor. Communities have insufficient pharmacy shops. In those communities where pharmacy shops exist residents complain about the qualifications of pharmacist. Regarding the emergency service, the local population is satisfied but they complain about the late coming. For diagnosis people go to the municipal hospital in Akhalkalaki from where they are redirected to Tbilisi if necessary.

In terms of food safety people lack knowledge and there are no food safety practices working in the communities. Drinking water is dangerous for consumption because water is not filtered and in during bad weather dirty water comes in the tap. Communities have problem with nutrition as the diet is not balanced with meat, fruits and vegetables; mostly potato, dairy products and bread are consumed.

Every community has elderly people whose family members are seasonally migrated abroad for work. According to local estimates, 25% of residents are elderly people living alone with family members returning seasonally from Russia. They require certain care which is mostly provided by the relatives or neighbors. Traditionally, it is a source of shame to place parents to retirement homes but in time this could be addressed if improved care and attention including decent food and medical care were provided. There is also another category of people such as lone mothers and disabled people who need certain social support. Disabled people should be socially integrated and supported to occupy stimulating jobs. In this sense, they require social and educational support.

There are no waste collection services operating in the communities. Moreover, there are no organized places where the residents could collect waste. Wastage and garbage is dispersed along the side roads because people take and dump it while traveling to the town Akhalkalaki. In addition, farmers misuse pesticides and agro-chemicals dump waste in the open environment. It is critical to solve this problem along with the public awareness campaign about the environmental protection issues. Some respondents mentioned about stray animal problem and the need for building shelter in the municipality but they said this issue might have lower social priority comparing to the other existing problems. It is difficult to find measurable estimates of the outputs and the negative effects of the ecological and sanitary problems in the municipality but the visible results emerging are crucial. It is highly expected that there may be existing health related problems due to these factors.

Community members mentioned that the climate has noticeably changed. Wind protection artificial forest lines needs to be developed, some new lines have to be planted and old ones extended. Community members require pine trees to be replanted from the forests to new places for artificial forestation purposes. The consultation showed that communities are not aware of the local biodiversity so they could not elaborate on these issues. Local residents noted that there is a potential to use renewable energy if developing micro hydroelectric stations and wind turbines.

Regarding the use of land and natural resources communities mentioned that land is scarce, farmers require state lands to be rented out to the local farmers not to the migrant herdsmen. Farmers complain about scarcity of arable lands and require privatization however changing the land structure is not permitted by the legal regulations. According to them “80% of state land is grazing but the land structure cannot be changed”. In terms of natural resources, the municipality has spring waters, decorative stones and gravel.

3.4. Education, Culture, Sports and Social Inclusion

Local residents noted that it is important that communities have place for cultural events and activities such events hall for dancing, singing, music, theatre, exhibitions, movies and other performances. It is mostly crucial for youth as they can be culturally involved. In Akhalkalaki house of culture is being rehabilitated and soon local artists can use for different events and performances. It is important to support and maintain museums and to preserve cultural heritage. Nearly all communities have halls for undertaking events, such as weddings but they are not in good condition. There are no indoor places for local gatherings where elderly people could play chess, backgammon, dominoes, cards or socialize. The same problem was referenced in relation to youth. Hence one building could be organized for social interaction and intellectual sports activities. It has to be added that communities are missing such places as community pubs or restaurants.

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As it was mentioned earlier in the infrastructural problems, communities are in need not only for indoor and outdoor sports facilities, but they are also required to be fully equipped with different sports equipment. As of now none of those existing gyms in the communities are fully equipped. Existing gyms are not suitable for training purposes as they are not clean and there are no showers. It is important to support and promote healthy lifestyle among young population. Development of the cultural and sports activities will support talented people to get trained and prepared locally for further progress and achievements in the national and international championships. It is important to support youth financially for preparation and championships.

In terms of education related issues there are variety of problems and needs, which could be discussed based on the different levels such as nursery education, secondary education, vocational education, higher education and trainings (including awareness rising). Besides infrastructural issues described in the above chapter there are additional problems specified in the following paragraphs.

Nursery education: The system of the nursery school management is poor and it needs to be improved. It is also important to improve eating condition and sanitary.

Secondary education: According to the estimation by the local population pupil numbers have decreased by around 40%. Nearly 80% pupil graduate high school. School teachers need to be trained in pedagogy and requalified in order to increase proficiency. Knowledge of languages of the graduates, particularly Georgian and English is very poor. It is needed to improve quality and hours of classes in Georgian and English languages. In addition to that there is a problem of Georgian language teaching quality in Armenian school.

Scientific educational programs are poorly delivered, certainly physics, chemistry, mathematics, etc., which is stipulated by inexistence of teachers or poor level of qualification. Schools need libraries and educational training equipment. Resource centers provide funds for transportation the school kids to the schools from different villages and back home, but it needs to be monitored and controlled in terms of quality and safety standards. Educational programs provided in Armenian language to the ethnic minorities are not aligned with the Georgian language national program. It is required to rework and publish new editions of the school books in the Armenian language, which will be in compliance with the national teaching and examinational program.

Vocational education: Vocational education is poor. People with some professions do not have vocational qualification. They are self-educated. Now vocational education becomes demanding among youth. Families recognize an importance and advantage of the vocational education but it is not existed locally in Akhalkalaki municipality. The nearest vocational educational institution is in Akhaltsikhe. It is quite popular and well known among the respondents but for the local citizens it is quite far. There is a need for vocational professions, mostly of agricultural domain such as agronomy, carpentry, veterinary, animal breeding, electricity, mechanization, welding, plumbing, accounting, tailoring, agribusiness management, etc. A challenge is to prepare people in qualifications which will be required by the employers in the short and medium term. In addition, there is a train station and rail road development project underway in the region and this will require qualified specialists once operational.

Higher education: According to the estimates by the local population, 40% of secondary school graduates apply for higher education. Students go to study in Akhalkalaki, Erevan and Tbilisi universities. Now the trend is changing and there is a progress in terms of applying to the Georgian language universities.

Trainings and awareness raising: Teachers are needed for classes in dancing, singing and playing musical instruments. There are no trainers who can prepare sportsmen. Educational/training centers including libraries should be organized in the communities. Awareness raising has to be conducted including some training in order to address early marriages and family disputes. Farmers have poor understanding about the agribusiness and farming. There is no awareness and clear understanding of cooperation among farmers, which means they need more practical approaches and trainings in order to show mechanisms, tools, advantages and necessity of cooperation. Farmers have lack of experience, skills and knowledge in cooperation and management, such as accounting, sales, organizing etc. Hence there is a need for organizing trainings and consultancy for such audience. In addition to that there are a lot of technological and scientific achievement which farmers do not know and somehow they need to receive that knowledge and develop skills. There is a language problem, so there is a need for Georgian language training. Young farmers are working in the agricultural sphere

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but they do not have knowledge about modern approaches; they need experience sharing; farmers need demonstration plots to see the tangible results. Generally speaking, minority youth require more financial support in education.

3.5. Key Services and Programs

Residents of the communities were consulted about the key services and programs, which they think should be provided. Locals need the healthcare system to be operational. Specifically, on the community level they want medical clinics and pharmacies and on the municipal level they require hospital facilities; A second concern is about waste collection service available in the villages; Safety of the drinking water should be controlled by the state services; Irrigation system should be developed; Information sharing and consultations about ongoing projects, services and programs should be provided to the local communities through the micro-consultation service centers; Educational and training centers should be opened on the community level which will ensure organizing of different trainings and providing consultation to different audience of the residents; Web site of the municipality should be operational which will include information about the villages and communities as well as other information relevant to the tourists and local residents; Visitors info-centers should be operating in the town; Animal shelter should be operating in the municipality.

3.6. Local Government

It was found that local communities lack cooperative approaches to solving local problems in participation with local communities and businesses. Civil engagement on the local level is also very poor. Community representatives are weak in terms of their capacities to communicate, facilitate and act towards certain issues of problem solving and decision making. Hence, the engagement of municipality representatives with local residents in order to identify problems, raise issues, facilitate decision making and implementation is poor. In addition to that community members complain that they are not well informed about the local issues. The local authority is weak in decision making. Communication between communities and local government actors in terms of solving local problems are not effective, thus local citizens are de-motivated addressing local government regarding the local issues as they think there will be no result in terms of actions from the local government. Local authorities have poor qualification, management, facilitation and communication skills. Communities do not have sufficient experience where the local initiations could be raised and solved jointly by the local community and the local authorities.

4. Baseline data outcome

Based on the research findings it can be concluded that communities are suffering from many problems related to livelihood. The most challenging issues were related to the economic development and competitiveness. It has to be mentioned that as the municipality is mostly agriculture oriented, agricultural issues were raised extensively. It is apparent that communities find solutions to economic development are partly based on the solving the infrastructural problems. However, infrastructural issues are mentioned in the socio-economic discussions as well. Social conditions and living standards were another key points of discussion where the education, healthcare, culture, sport, employment, youth and may other issues were discussed, local problems were raised and needs outlined. Here needs to be mentioned that different levels of education programs and social as well as cultural activities were highly requested. Education also cross-cut with other economic aspects of discussion in terms of extension and modern experience sharing to be provide to the farmers and entrepreneurs. In the end environmental protection and waste management was the concern of the local residents. Hence, it can be said that communities gave priority to the following major strategic objectives: (1) economic development and competitiveness; (2) infrastructure and welfare; (3) social conditions and living standards, including education, sport, culture, health and social inclusion; (4) environmental protection and key services.