

Tskaltubo Local Development Strategy

2020-2024



The European Union
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ENPARD



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საპარამეტრო
საზოგადოებრივი
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In hoc signo vinces

The Tskaltubo Local Development Strategy has been developed by the Local Action Group Tskaltubo with the support of the international non-profit organization People in Need and in partnership with the Georgian Institute of Public Affairs under the EU-funded European Neighborhood Program for Agriculture and Rural Development (ENPARD). Local Action Group Tskaltubo is fully responsible for the contents of the strategy. The information and vision presented herein may not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

LAG Tskaltubo	Local Action Group Tskaltubo
ENPARD	European Neighborhood Program for Agriculture and Rural Development
LEADER	Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'Économie Rurale
PIN	People in Need
GIPA	Georgian Institute of Public Affairs
GALAG	Georgian Association of Local Action Groups
EHTTA	The European Historic Thermal Towns Association
UNWTO	United Nations World Tourism Organization
SWOT analysis	Analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats
COVID-19	Novel Coronavirus(2019-nCoV)

LIST OF ANNEXES

Annex 1: List of administrative units and villages in Tskaltubo Municipality

Annex 2: Sectoral SWOT Analysis

Annex 3: LAG Action Plan 2020-2021

Annex 4: Charter of LAG Tskaltubo

FOREWORD

The Tskaltubo Local Development Strategy is a document developed by Local Action Group Tskaltubo for the period 2020-2024. It provides a roadmap for the sustainable development of Tskaltubo Municipality through the introduction and implementation of the LEADER approach.

The implementation of this strategy will help to strengthen the local economy and overcome the impacts of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions imposed to control it. A Local Development Strategy action plan has also been developed to turn this strategic vision into reality by supporting small and medium-sized businesses, agriculture and tourism, social and community services.

The Tskaltubo Local Development Strategy was developed based on the needs identified by local communities. The following document describes the resources available in Tskaltubo Municipality, the resulting opportunities, and development priorities defined through sectoral analyses.

While working on the strategic document, LAG Tskaltubo drew from the findings of the baseline study conducted within the scope of the People in Need project. In addition, consultations were held with community members and institutions in the municipality.

The goals and objectives defined by the Tskaltubo Local Development Strategy are fully in line with the various sectoral strategic visions at the national and local level. The strategy envisages the development of Tskaltubo Municipality through coordinated cooperation between various institutions.

The implementation of the action plan to reach these strategic goals will be subject to an annual evaluation. In case new needs are identified, appropriate changes will be made.

This strategy document may be used as a guide by any stakeholder.

SUMMARY OF TSKALTUBO LOCAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY VISION, GOALS AND OBJECTIVES



Strategic vision

Enhancing the quality of life of Tskaltubo Municipality residents and promoting sustainable economic development using local resources.

Goal – A strong and diverse local economy

Objectives:

1. Support the creation of new/innovative products in agriculture
2. Improve the quality of agricultural products by using new technologies and equipment
3. Support the creation of new/innovative tourism services and products in Tskaltubo
4. Support and improve the provision of various services, especially in remote villages
5. Increase awareness of existing/new products and services, support joint marketing, and increase production of quality products

Goal – Improved social and public (community) services

Objectives:

1. Support the creation of new social and community services
2. Support the institutional development of social and community services, improving the material and technical base and accessibility, especially in villages far from the center
3. Create, rehabilitate, and equip sports-cultural and recreational infrastructure and support sustainable, viable and long-term services
4. Create opportunities for young people to acquire professional knowledge and practice

Goal – Positive environmental practices

Objectives:

1. Increase awareness of environmental issues
2. Share and apply best environmental practices in agriculture and tourism
3. Support environmentally friendly services and production

Goal – LAG Tskaltubo is a strong and sustainable local actor

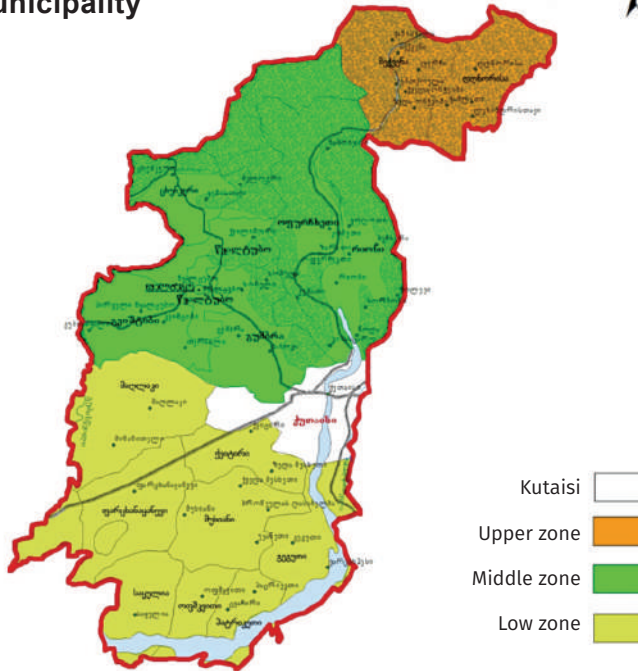
Objectives:

1. Promote the LEADER approach
2. Strengthen partnerships with members of the Georgian Association of Local Action Groups (GALAG)
3. Establish international links and cooperation
4. Organizational development of LAG Tskaltubo

1. GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF TSKALTUBO MUNICIPALITY



TSKALTUBO
Municipality



Region:	Imereti
Density:	116.9 people/km ²
Area:	632.3 km ²
Population:	56 883 people (2014)
Ethnicity:	Georgians 96.75%
	Greeks 2.35%
	Russians 0.7%
	Armenians 0.2%
	Azerbaijanians 0.1%
	Ukrainians 0.1%

The Tskaltubo Local Development Strategy covers the entire area within the administrative boundaries of Tskaltubo Municipality.

Tskaltubo Municipality is located east of the Kolkheti lowlands, in the valley of the rivers Rioni and Gubistskali. It is bordered by the city of Kutaisi to the east, Samtredia and Khoni to the west, Tsageri and Ambrolauri to the north, and Baghdati and Vani to the south.

The area of Tskaltubo Municipality covers 632.9 km².

Tskaltubo Municipality is conventionally divided into lower, middle and upper zones. The Law of Georgia on the Development of Mountainous Regions applies to some of the villages in the upper zone. Accordingly, the benefits provided by this law apply there. There are 43 settlements in the municipality: 1 town and 42 villages.

Administrative-territorial units:

12 communities: Gvishtibi, Gumbra, Dghnorisa, Maghlaki, Mekvena, Mukhiani, Opurchkheti, Patriketi, Rioni, Kvitiri, Tskaltubo, Tskhunkuri;

4 villages: Geguti, Opshkviti, Sakulia, Patskhanakanevi

Town: Tskaltubo

Tskaltubo (the administrative center of Tskaltubo Municipality) is also a balneological resort. The town is located 7 km away from Kutaisi, 24 km from Kutaisi International Airport, and 250 km from Tbilisi. For more details, please see Annex 1.

2. DEVELOPMENT NEEDS AND POTENTIAL

The information presented below is based on the results of a baseline study conducted within the scope of the People in Need project, consultations with organizations in the municipality, as well as public information requested from local authorities.

For further information on the issues covered in this chapter, please see the Tskaltubo Development Potential Report (www.tskaltubolag.ge).

2.1. Tourism

Tourism is one of the leading industries in Tskaltubo Municipality. In this regard, the balneological resort in Tskaltubo town plays an important role.

The main tourist niche of this resort is the healing thermal water, which has unique physical and chemical properties. The water is believed to cure up to 60 diseases, including disorders of limbs, skin, peripheral nervous, cardiovascular and endocrine systems as well as other pathologies. In Tskaltubo, medical spa procedures can be taken at any time of the year.

One of the attractions of Tskaltubo resort is a recreational park across 78 hectares, where one can find more than 150 different species of perennial deciduous and coniferous tree plants.

Natural monuments are one of the main tourist attractions in Tskaltubo Municipality: Sataplia State Reserve (cave, Colchis forest, dinosaur footprints) hosted 75,000 visitors in 2018, Prometheus Cave (which hosted 155,000 visitors in 2018) and Satsurblia Cave, which is reported to have natural healing properties (currently, the Agency of Protected Areas is looking for investors to start offering these services).

In addition to the above-mentioned tourist attractions, there are other interesting sights for visitors in Tskaltubo Municipality including the Museum of Local Lore (in Tskaltubo), Niko Lortkipanidze and Giorgi Akhvlediani House Museums (in villages Chunesi and Derchi respectively), Otia Ioseliani House Museum (in Tskaltubo), Geguti Fortress (in the village of Geguti), and architecture of the “Stalinist Era” (in Tskaltubo).

According to Tskaltubo Municipality Tourism Development Coordination Center, it is possible to accommodate up to 1,000 visitors in Tskaltubo for balneological purposes and up to 5,000 visitors for overnight stays in the Municipality. The majority of the hotels and guesthouses are located in the town of Tskaltubo.

In terms of medical tourism development, a substantial part of the required infrastructure is already available in Tskaltubo Municipality. There are 4 springs compliant with modern standards.

There is a shortage of qualified staff in almost all areas related to tourism and hospitality services.

According to the public information provided by the City Hall of Tskaltubo Municipality, Tskaltubo received a total of 339,196 tourists in 2019, a significant increase on 2018 when it hosted 315,000 visitors.

Tskaltubo Municipality is visited by both Georgian and foreign long-term balneological visitors, as well as short-term tourists, who visit Tskaltubo mainly for educational, cultural and entertainment tourism. In particular, visitors are interested in exploring the caves.

Foreign visitors (in the under 40 age group) mainly come from Israel, Poland, Germany, Russia and Azerbaijan. Most of them learn about Tskaltubo in Kutaisi or happen to come here by chance.

Although the resort can receive tourists coming for medical treatment at any time of the year, tourism activity is mainly observed in the period of August-September. Dissemination of information about the tourism services available in the Municipality is mainly coordinated by N(N)LE “Tskaltubo Municipality Tourism Development Coordination Center”, which participates in international tourism exhibitions and offers informational tours to foreign and local travel operators, media outlets, and travelers’ clubs. Private providers of tourism services are also involved in this process.

Tskaltubo, as a balneological resort, is a member of the European Historic Thermal Towns Association (EHTTA). The “Balneological Resort of Tskaltubo” is also an affiliated member of the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO).

Given the currently available resources, the Municipality has the opportunity to develop tourism in several directions. Namely: speleological and medical tourism (middle zone), ecotourism (upper and middle zones), adventure and extreme tourism on the Rioni River, agritourism (upper and middle zones), and wine tourism (upper zone).

According to the statistics presented in the Strategic Plan for Economic Development of Tskaltubo Municipality for 2019-2020, tourism accounts for 6% of gross municipal product. However, the total revenue generated from tourism is higher as the contribution from other services directly or indirectly related to tourism is not reflected in the document.

It is of the utmost importance to improve tourism-related infrastructure and develop services, as it will prompt private businesses to make more investments. For example, in many villages (especially in mountainous areas), roads are in bad condition and there are no gas, water supply and sewage systems in operation. In Tskaltubo town, public toilets do not work and there is a need to develop dedicated bicycle lanes in the central park (currently pedestrians and cyclers are using the same lane). If a wide-scale rehabilitation plan of Tskaltubo resort will be implemented, the infrastructure will be considerably improved in Tskaltubo and surrounding villages, more hotel and sanatorium rooms and services will be available, which will in turn attract more tourists and bring much needed impetus to the development of services adapted to the needs of tourists.

The development of tourism will be further facilitated by resolving challenges with municipal public transportation. At this stage, public transportation fails to meet modern requirements and is not available in villages remote from the center.

Entertainment and leisure facilities are lacking in Tskaltubo, which makes the town less attractive to tourists. It is necessary to elaborate a unified tourism marketing and sectoral development plan to address these gaps.

It is also necessary to focus on and plan specific tourism investments for upper zone villages, where far more efforts are required to create favorable conditions for development. The development of tourism programs will also help to prevent migration from these villages.

At this stage, the transfer of the ownership of property rights of inoperative sanatoriums and attracting investors are priority goals for Tskaltubo. This will contribute to the economic development of the municipality, increase employment opportunities for the local population, and create a comfortable environment for tourists. In the case of sanatoriums where Internally Displaced People (IDPs) from the occupied territories are still settled, it is advisable for the State to continue to address the issue of their accommodation and provide them with alternative housing.

2.2. Agriculture

Agriculture is one of the most important sectors for the economy of Tskaltubo Municipality. The major sub-sectors are fruit and vegetables, livestock, beekeeping, grains, and horticulture.

Viticulture, beekeeping and fruit production are the main sources of income in upper zone villages. Out migration is a serious threat to sustainable development in these communities. Mostly, middle-aged and older people are living in the villages and are engaged in smallholder cultivation of a limited variety of agricultural products (corn, beans, fruits, etc.). In this zone, social and community services are lacking, and public transport is less developed.

In terms of agricultural development, low and middle zone villages share a number of common characteristics. For most of the villages, cultivation is the main field of agricultural activity, with the production of fruits and vegetables, mainly in greenhouses, as well as berries can be singled out as key directions.

In terms of crop production, vegetables, melons, corn, vines and fruits are among the priority crops in Tskaltubo municipality. The yield of vegetables is 20 t/ha, and melons is 30-40 t/ha. These crops are widespread in the lower zones of the municipality. The average yield of corn is 3 t/ha, and vines 10 t/ha.

Production of milk and dairy products is the main direction in animal husbandry. Large-scale meat production is less developed. Cattle breeding is mainly a household activity and there are no farms employing modern technologies. The inefficiency of the livestock sector (small farmers and households) is mainly due to the predominance of low productive breeds (excluding poultry).

Viticulture, beekeeping and fruit production are mostly developed in the high mountainous zone and are the main source of income for the local residents. However, these activities are pursued in the middle and lower zones as well. Products are sold in the domestic market only.

Viticulture has great prospects as there is a growing interest in traditional grape varieties. In addition, the introduction of the denomination of place of origin has increased commercial interest and demand. The development of agritourism and tourism in general is expected to further strengthen this direction.

Research into traditional agricultural sectors revealed the unprofitability of some areas: corn, greenhouses, and animal husbandry. With respect to corn growing and greenhouse farming, it was revealed that farmers do not use new hybrid varieties and fertilizers. For the most part, greenhouse owners use excessive pesticides, which results in crops being saturated with nitrates. In addition, farmers do not use modern technologies for several reasons, including: lack of access due to high prices, lack of knowledge and experience in new technologies, and no awareness of how to access training programs. Major constraints to livestock productivity are the interbreeding of low-yielding traditional breeds and the lack of artificial insemination practices.

A survey conducted in different communities revealed the following challenges to agricultural development: low levels of land reclamation; a shortage of pasture; the high price of fertilizer; poor road infrastructure connecting arable lands (especially in the upper zone); a lack of qualified agronomists; natural hazards, such as strong winds destroying greenhouses; the absence of large-scale processing enterprises; high competition in the foreign market; products perishing before reaching market; and some national and international regulations that put an additional burden on the cost of production and consequently affects its competitiveness. According to the farmers, the low price of imported products is the most problematic issue, as they also need to sell their production at unprofitable prices. The current regulations require farmers to have permission (the Global G.A.P. license) to export their products to the European market. In addition, farmers need to have an official one-year permission to sell their produce to the big supermarket chains and to big processors in Georgia. The high cost of the license and the need to meet certain requirements, make this accreditation accessible to a very low number of farmers.

In Tskaltubo Municipality, farmers can receive consulting and extension services on agricultural issues both in State (Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture) and in private farmer service centers. Moreover, there is a mechanization center in the municipality where farmers can rent equipment.

There are several crop cultivation enterprises operating in Tskaltubo, which use modern technologies. For example, there are farms using refrigeration systems in Tskaltubo, and in the villages of Tkachiri, Geguti and Maghlaki, where herbs are stored and packed for export. “Herbia” Ltd. is one of these which produces various types of herbs and vegetables and exports them to European markets. Another large greenhouse is the cooperative “Janelidzes”, which sells its products on the domestic wholesale market.

According to the baseline study conducted by GIPA, the promotion of agricultural cooperatives in Tskaltubo Municipality was identified as a top priority by the local population and local authorities. Co-operation facilitates the introduction of modern technologies, boosts farmer revenues, and increases the production of competitive agricultural products, which is a prerequisite for the replacement of imported products with local ones.

It is possible to increase the productivity of the main agricultural sub-sectors through optimizing the resources already available in Tskaltubo Municipality.

The Municipality has the potential to develop crop cultivation and horticulture (greenhouse farming), livestock (dairy and meat products), higher value fruit production, fisheries, winemaking, beekeeping, grain production and other industries, but there is no qualified staff to exploit this potential. To strengthen the development of existing and potential agricultural sub-sectors, it is necessary to raise the level of education in the field of agriculture and to promote the role of vocational schools.

It is necessary to raise the awareness of farmers engaged in smallholder activities on environmental issues, and provide technical assistance on modern technologies, optimizing the production cycle, standardization, safety requirements, marketing, and post-harvest management. It is possible to increase the yield of vegetables by supporting measures such as the introduction of highly productive seed varieties, increasing fertilizer use, and developing irrigation capacity.

Agricultural productivity can be increased through the development of the leading sectors in agriculture, and the introduction of new varieties and technologies. This, in turn, requires access to relevant knowledge and services, stimulation of alternative and diversified agricultural enterprises, and coordinated development of all actors in the value chain.

Today, the main goals for agriculture in Tskaltubo should be the production of high quality and competitive products and the creation of jobs. To this end, appropriate infrastructure and processing plants should be established, and technical equipment should be improved. This will in turn increase the interest of the local population to invest in their agricultural enterprises. Introducing new crop varieties will diversify local production and can provide alternative income sources to smallholder farmers.

Further development and improvement of consulting and technical services is a necessary requirement for responding to modern challenges in agriculture. This responsibility should be equally shared by both the public and private sectors. Possible activities that should be implemented in the near future with the involvement of all stakeholders are: increased access to information and consultations, raising awareness of modern methods and market requirements, introduction of climate-smart and ecological farming techniques, improvement of mechanization services, and technical assistance especially in the field of sales (post-harvest management, marketing, branding, access to markets).

2.3. Education, culture, sports and youth

Education: There are a total of 42 schools in Tskaltubo Municipality (30 secondary and 12 primary). 40 are public schools and 2 are private - “Dream” and “Theological Gymnasium”. In the town of Tskaltubo there are 6 schools: 2 private and 4 public. As of 2019, the number of students across the municipality is 5,446.

According to the Tskaltubo Municipality Education Resource Center, there has been a noticeable decrease in the number of students in recent years, which is primarily due to out migration from the Municipality.

As of 2020, all schools across the municipality need partial rehabilitation. Public schools are equipped with obsolete computer hardware and physics and chemistry laboratories have not been renovated since the Soviet era. Most libraries have not been updated for a long time and need to be replenished with new and up-to-date

textbooks and reading materials. The quality of internet access in schools is also poor, particularly in villages far from the center. Most of the schools, especially in remote villages, have no access to modern gyms and open sports fields. Across the municipality, only 5 educational institutions have their own school doctor.

There is the (NN)LE “Union of Kindergartens of Tskaltubo Municipality”, which oversees 23 kindergartens. Of these, 4 public kindergartens are located in the city and only 1 private kindergarten operates in Tskaltubo. The union is fully dependent on funding from the local municipal budget. There has been a positive and gradual increase in the number of kindergartens serving the villages of the Municipality. The kindergartens are mostly located in the old administrative buildings; however, they comply with basic standards: they have a separate entrance, a sufficient number of rooms, and each kindergarten has two nurses. There are regular inspections in terms of sanitation, food safety and water safety.

There is at least one kindergarten and one public school in almost every village in the lower and middle zones of the municipality. The shortage of educational institutions in villages of the upper zone is both influenced by, and accelerates, out migration.

The N(N)LE “Children and Youth Center” operating under the City Hall of Tskaltubo Municipality, brings together the “Children and Youth Center”, and music and art schools. There are 14 creative topics and sports provided, with 289 students aged between 6 and 18 enrolled in non-formal education classes. The center also organizes popular events throughout the city, and participates in regional and international music and choreography festivals, sports competitions, and educational-creative conferences. The center is constrained by low financial resources, and cannot implement its desired improvements in infrastructure, equipment, and technical supplies.

According to the information shared by the Tskaltubo Educational Resource Center, a study conducted within the framework of the “Vocational Orientation and Career Planning Program” revealed that a large number of students study to become lawyers, economists, doctors, teachers, and pharmacists. However, local labor market demand is for professions related to tourism and agriculture: agronomist, veterinarian, gardener, landscape designer, masseur, various specialists in the field of balneology, nurse assistant, cook, hotel and restaurant administrator, and so forth. Construction of a multi-profile vocational school started in Tskaltubo in 2020,

which will train specialists in the professions listed above and address the labor market imbalance.

The Municipality has an additional advantage as it is located close to Kutaisi, where both vocational and higher education institutions are available.

In almost all the villages of Tskaltubo, there is scope to develop different handicrafts, for example: weaving, embroidery, decorative items, and jewelry. Handicraft specialists exist in the region; premises for such enterprises are also available, but in most cases they will require capital for rehabilitation and equipment.

The Education, Culture, Sports and Youth Affairs Service of the City Hall of Tskaltubo Municipality operates in the field of culture. There is also the N(N)LE “Cultural Center of Tskaltubo Municipality” operating under the City Hall, which oversees the Museum and Library Associations of Tskaltubo Municipality. The book inventory and facilities of municipal libraries need to be upgraded to meet today’s needs.

Tskaltubo has a great asset in Iveria, the second largest concert hall in Georgia; however, as its technical facilities and infrastructure are extremely outdated, the hall cannot function at full capacity.

Sports infrastructure in the Municipality mainly comprises old playgrounds and buildings, which, in many cases, need to be reconstructed and furnished with appropriate equipment. For this reason, sport events cannot be organized well in the villages.

N(N)LE “Union of Tskaltubo Sports Clubs” operates under the supervision of the City Hall of Tskaltubo Municipality. Their main events are held at the Sports Palace in Tskaltubo centre. However, the infrastructure and equipment of this sports complex needs to be upgraded. Currently, the Union is comprised of 4 clubs, including handball, volleyball, rugby, and joint wrestling and judo clubs.

The N(N)LE “Tskaltubo Arena” also operates under supervision of the City Hall of Tskaltubo Municipality and owns the football club “Samgurali”. The 26 May Central Football Stadium is located in the city of Tskaltubo; the first stage of its rehabilitation ended in 2019.

Youth initiatives are rarely implemented in Tskaltubo municipality. However, the City Hall of Tskaltubo Municipality holds an annual youth festival in which young people from Tskaltubo and other municipalities of Imereti take part. Young people are also involved in other activities and events organized by the City Hall.

There is a Youth Council operating under the City Council of Tskaltubo Municipality, which carries out various activities and develops recommendations for the local authorities. Some of the recommendations suggested by the Youth Council are: organizing youth events with the support of local government bodies, establishing a youth education café, and providing free or discounted transportation for students from Tskaltubo to Kutaisi.

The scarcity of financial resources and poor infrastructure are the main challenges in the education, culture, sports and youth sectors.

The Municipality has taken some steps to ensure the sustainable development of the cultural sector. The Culture, Education, Tourism, Sports and Youth Committee of the Council of Tskaltubo Municipality has developed a three-year cultural development program that should deliver full rehabilitation of cultural and educational institutions.

2.4. Social and public (community) services

In Tskaltubo Municipality, social services are delivered by City Hall and the Social Service Agency.

According to November 2019 Social Service Agency data 57,100 people are registered in the Municipality. In addition to the host community, IDPs from the occupied territories have been living in Tskaltubo for many years. Some of the 4,670 IDPs have already been provided with permanent accommodation, while others are still waiting for durable housing solutions.

Residents of the Municipality benefit from various state-defined social packages. The amount allocated for social and health programs in the 2020 municipal budget totaled 1,550,600 GEL.

The N(N)LE “Public Health Care Center of Tskaltubo Municipality” is in charge of promoting public health and preventing disease. The functions of the health care center include: conducting epidemiological research and data collection; planning

anti-epidemic measures; supervision of the observance of sanitary and hygienic norms in educational institutions; diagnostics of parasitic diseases; provision of recommendations; supervision and systematic monitoring of the anti-rabies cabinet; vaccination and immunization; prevention of particularly dangerous infections and more. In the highland villages (Mekvena, Dghnorisa, Chashleti, Derchi), a doctor serves the population on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays.

The residents of Tskaltubo Municipality can receive medical care at: Tskaltubo District Hospital, 13 outpatient clinics, a clinic for IDPs from the occupied territories and an outpatient clinic in Geguti. The Scientific-Research Institute of Asthma and Clinical Immunology of the Georgian Academy of Sciences operates in the city of Tskaltubo. 3 mobile ambulance brigades serve the population.

The N(N)LE "Children Inclusive Center" operates with funding from the local budget, and provides services to children with disabilities such as rehabilitation therapies and building life and academic skills to support their integration into society. For now, the center has 14 clients. The children aged between 7 to 18 spend six hours a day at the center. They are provided with two meals, transportation, the services of a psychologist and speech therapist, and are assisted by a social worker. To make the service more effective, it needs to be expanded and the center faces a major challenge in providing services to remote villages. Due to the long distances and budget constraints, people with disabilities living in villages cannot access services in the center or at home.

N(N)LE "Tskaltubo Municipality House of Virtues" is funded from the local budget and serves 190 beneficiaries (including a very small number of IDPs). A specialist committee selects the beneficiaries based on set criteria. In addition, beneficiaries can be included following a personal application. The N(N)LE provides services such as food distribution on a daily basis, but services need to be expanded to meet all the needs. It is necessary to launch a home care program that can deliver food and meet other household needs for beneficiaries with limited mobility.

Access to health, social and emergency services remains a challenge for residents of remote villages. Due to the long distances from Tskaltubo center, ambulance and fire brigades are unable to arrive on time. According to residents, establishing modern outpatient clinics in the villages would partially address their barriers to medical care.

In addition, villages have virtually no access to medicines and pharmacies. Private sector engagement can play an important role in meeting this need.

2.5 Environmental Issues

Tskaltubo Municipality has a humid subtropical sea climate, characterized by short winters and hot summers. Tskaltubo is one of the warmest municipalities across Georgia; the average annual temperature is 15°C, average annual humidity of 76%, and average precipitation of 1420mm per year.

The main environmental threats in Tskaltubo Municipality include climate change impacts, reduced water supplies, strong winds, heavy rains, riverbank erosion, earthquakes and, in certain areas, drought.

To mitigate and prevent these environmental risks, it is necessary to develop environmental policies and action plans at regional and municipal levels, compliant with national and international legal frameworks.

The lack of a comprehensive system for monitoring the degree of environmental pollution remains a challenge. According to the Meteorological Service, water and air conditions have never been studied in Tskaltubo, and there is no system for recording natural disasters. Consequently, it is impossible to analyze the dynamics of the processes. The response of the central Government to natural disasters is weak and prevention mechanisms are ineffective.

Tskaltubo Municipality has approved the **“Tskaltubo Municipal Waste Management Plan 2018-2022”**, which will help to establish sustainable and effective waste management systems.

Currently, household waste is managed by the N(N)LE “Tskaltubo Municipality Cleaning Service”, which is responsible for waste collection, volume registration, and disposal at landfill. About 40% of the population use the municipal waste management services. However, there are no waste containers in the upper zone villages of the Municipality, and waste management services are unavailable. With no access to municipal services, residents dispose of waste in the river and along the roadside, or burn it, which pollutes the environment. There are many illegal small landfills, alongside the legal site in Geguti, where solid waste is dumped. Raising awareness and changing public behavior remains one of the biggest challenges to environmental protection and waste management.

As the Batumi-Tbilisi highway, the main transport corridor of Georgia, passes through Tskaltubo Municipality the concentration of air pollutants in the municipality exceeds

recommended levels. To protect this area from vehicle exhaust, it is recommended to install an appropriate protective strip along the entire length of the road.

Municipality water resources are sufficient to meet current demands, but the authorities do not hold information on the volume of surface water and groundwater resources, or the amount of water consumed. As there is no hydrological station in the Municipality, surface water and pollution levels cannot be monitored.

There are three hydropower reservoirs on the Rioni River within municipal boundaries: Gumati, Rioni and Vartsikhe. These reservoirs cause significant erosion of riverbanks, inflicting damage to public infrastructure. In order to eliminate this problem, riverbanks are gradually being reinforced, bridges are being restored and the accumulated sediments are being removed. 45% of the electricity produced in Imereti region is generated by Tskaltubo hydropower facilities.

The planned construction of the Namakhvani HPP Cascade on Rioni River could have significant impacts on the local environment. Clean Energy Group Georgia Ltd was granted the right to implement this project by the State, following an international tender. Currently, it operates on behalf of “Enka Renewables” Ltd. The capacity of the Namakhvani HPP Cascade project will be 433 MW, and the estimated annual output 1496 GWh. The HPP is expected to start operations in 2023; however, environmental organizations oppose the project. Campaigners question the validity of the environmental impact assessment document submitted by the investor and claim that the project will not only harm the environment, but also jeopardize the existence of villages in and around the coverage area. However, the State and the company do not share this position. Construction of the hydropower plant had not started at the time of this document.

Forests are the natural riches of Tskaltubo. Commercial, sub-alpine, floodplain and protected area (Sataplia Nature Reserve) forests are all present in the municipality. A public survey revealed that deforestation is still taking place in the area, although the intensity has dropped substantially due to stricter controls and the introduction of gas to some villages. Due to a lack of data, landslides, mudslides and soil erosion cannot be definitively linked to deforestation.

Every year, 2-3 small fires are reported in the forests. No information is available on the affected areas.

3. SWOT ANALYSIS AND SECTOR DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL

In order to identify municipal resources, needs and priorities, LAG Tskaltubo, in coordination with the Georgian Institute of Public Affairs, prepared a SWOT analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in each of the above sectors. For more detailed information on the SWOT analysis of individual sectors, please see Annex 2.

Multi-sector SWOT analysis	
Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Rich in natural resources and climate ✓ Geographic location ✓ An international airport within municipal borders ✓ Various tourism destinations ✓ Growing demand for local services and products ✓ Basic infrastructure ✓ Regular and one-off events ✓ Experienced human resources ✓ NGOs and youth initiative groups working on diverse issues ✓ Services and programs funded from the local budget 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Low levels of municipal funding ✓ Inadequate infrastructure and communication systems ✓ Low standard of services and products ✓ Lack of marketing strategy and adequate investment ✓ Lack of community and social services, including for vulnerable groups ✓ Out migration ✓ Inadequate public transport ✓ Outdated technologies and resources (e.g. laboratories, books) ✓ Minimal engagement of vulnerable groups ✓ Low awareness and motivation of actors in different sectors ✓ Shortage of qualified staff ✓ Lack of innovations, modern approaches and perspectives ✓ Low interest in vocational education ✓ Few youth initiatives

Multi-sector SWOT analysis

Opportunities

- ✓ Creating innovative (new for Tskaltubo) services in different directions
- ✓ Creating services exploiting the existing natural, tourism, traditional, cultural, heritage potential
- ✓ Lobbying for environmentally friendly, appropriate public transportation
- ✓ Holding regular events to promote local services and products
- ✓ Improving the infrastructure and equipment necessary for organizing events
- ✓ Introduction of modern approaches, technologies and innovations in all sectors
- ✓ Improving municipal services in all areas
- ✓ Training of staff for professional development

Threats

- ✓ Environmental pollution
- ✓ Climate and environmental change
- ✓ Inadequate waste management
- ✓ Political, financial and economic instability
- ✓ Uniformity of services in different sectors and dependence on the same markets
- ✓ Inadequate provision of health care, risk of spreading disease
- ✓ Loss of traditional artisanal heritage
- ✓ Low interest and engagement of young people
- ✓ Out migration

4. TSKALTUBO LOCAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY VISION, GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND ACTION PLAN

Using the baseline research and sectoral SWOT analyses, the members of LAG Tskaltubo identified priority areas which have the potential for development using existing resources. On the basis of these priorities, a strategic vision and goals were developed and objectives outlined to guide their achievement. The objectives were then used by LAG Tskaltubo members to develop an action plan for 2020-2021.

LAG Tskaltubo conducted a survey and collected feedback from the local population of the Municipality to validate the priority goals and objectives. Given the state of emergency and remote work modalities introduced in the country due to COVID-19, the feedback survey was conducted via an online questionnaire. Approximately 450 residents were surveyed across the Municipality. The great majority of the respondents positively assessed the strategic goals and objectives developed by LAG Tskaltubo.

Strategic vision

Enhancing the quality of life of Tskaltubo Municipality residents and promoting sustainable economic development using local resources.

Goal – A strong and diverse local economy

Objectives:

1. Support the creation of new/innovative products in agriculture
2. Improve the quality of agricultural products by using new technologies and equipment
3. Support the creation of new/innovative tourism services and products in Tskaltubo
4. Support and improve the provision of various services, especially in remote villages
5. Increase awareness of existing/new products and services, support joint marketing, and increase production of quality products

Goal – Improved social and public (community) services

Objectives:

1. Support the creation of new social and community services
2. Support the institutional development of social and community services, improving the material and technical base and accessibility, especially in villages far from the center
3. Create, rehabilitate, and equip sports-cultural and recreational infrastructure and support sustainable, viable and long-term services
4. Create opportunities for young people to acquire professional knowledge and practice

Goal – Positive environmental practices

Objectives:

1. Increased awareness of environmental issues
2. Share and apply best environmental practices in agriculture and tourism
3. Support environmentally friendly services and production

Goal – LAG Tskaltubo is a strong and sustainable local actor

Objectives:

1. Promote the LEADER approach
2. Strengthen partnerships with members of the Georgian Association of Local Action Groups (GALAG)
3. Establish international links and cooperation
4. Organizational development of LAG Tskaltubo

5. CLASSIFICATION OF OBJECTIVES DURING THE COVID-19 PERIOD (2020)

It should be noted that the strategic objectives and action plan do not include specific means to address the COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, in the process of implementing the strategy, priority will be given to areas and activities that help to overcome the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis.

LAG Tskaltubo discussed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on various development areas in the Municipality. As a result, LAG members identified those objectives which will be given more attention in the current COVID 19 period (2020).

During this period, priority will be given to improving the quality of agricultural products and supporting diversification. Priority will also be given to resolving important issues for the sustainable development of tourism in Tskaltubo, in order to fully utilize the tourism potential after overcoming the crisis. With respect to social and community services, the COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted that lack of such services in remote villages as a grave problem. Accordingly, work in this area will be considered a priority.

The activities outlined in the strategy paper will be evaluated annually. In case of new needs, they will be subject to appropriate changes.

Goal N1	A strong and diverse local economy	
Strategic objectives	Priority	
Improve the quality of agricultural products by using new technologies and equipment	High	
Support and improve the provision of various services, especially in remote villages	High	
Support the creation of new/innovative products in agriculture	Moderate	
Support the creation of new/innovative tourism services and products in Tskaltubo	Moderate	
Increase awareness of existing / new products and services, support joint marketing, and increase production of quality products	Low*	

Goal N2	Improved social and public (community) services	
Strategic objectives	Priority	
Create, rehabilitate, and equip sports-cultural and recreational infrastructure and support sustainable, viable, and long-term services	High	
Support the institutional development of social and community services, improving the material and technical base and accessibility, especially in villages far from the center	High	
Create opportunities for young people to acquire professional knowledge and practice	Moderate*	
Support the creation of new social and public (community) services	Low	

Goal N3	Positive environmental practices	
Strategic objectives	Priority	
Support environmentally friendly services and production	High	
Increase awareness of environmental issues	Moderate*	
Share and apply best environmental practices in agriculture and tourism	Low	

Goal N4	LAG Tskaltubo is a strong and sustainable local actor	
Strategic objectives	Priority	
Organizational development of LAG Tskaltubo	High*	
Promote the LEADER approach (implementation has been hindered by the COVID-19 pandemic)	High*	
Strengthen partnerships with members of the Georgian Association for Local Action Groups (GALAG) (implementation has been hindered by the COVID-19 pandemic)	High*	
Establish international links and partnerships (implementation has been hindered by the COVID-19 pandemic)	High*	

* marks objectives not supported under the grant call

6. ACTION PLAN 2020 AND 2021

To achieve the strategic goals set by LAG Tskaltubo, an action plan has been developed, which envisages cooperation with various structures and organizations. At the same time, certain objectives will be achieved through the provision of grants. LAG Tskaltubo has developed two action plans:

- A) Tskaltubo Local Development Strategy annual action plan for the implementation of the strategy
- B) LAG Tskaltubo annual action plan for implementation of internal organizational activities.

Detailed information on the implementation of the LDS Action Plan can be found in Annex 3.

7. LOCAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY RISK ANALYSIS

LAG Tskaltubo members identified and analyzed potential risks to strategy implementation. They reviewed and measured all risk factors that might hinder the implementation of the strategy as planned.

Risk	Description	Probability of occurrence	Impact magnitude	Preventive measures	Mitigation measures
Political factors	Lack of support for LEADER approach/deteriorated attitude	Moderate	High	Cooperation with different decision-making structures and partners, staying informed about the changes	Make appropriate changes
	Change of representation in local institutions	Moderate	Moderate	Close cooperation with local institutions and conclusion of a MoU	Revision of the strategy/action plan
	Changes in rural development policy	Moderate	Moderate	Permanent, close cooperation with the policy makers	Revision of strategy/action plan
Economic factors	Cardinal changes in tourism and related fields	Moderate	High	Development of various plans based on implemented changes	Strategy adaptation considering the impact of implemented changes
	Prolongation of economic crisis and increase in inflation	Moderate	Low		Prioritization of the action plan on annual basis

Risk	Description	Probability of occurrence	Impact magnitude	Preventive measures	Mitigation measures
Social factors	Sharp difference in development levels in Tskaitubo municipality	Moderate	Moderate	Particular attention should be paid to settlements located far from the center	Provision of information, participation of stakeholders
	Low effectiveness of universal social services	Moderate	Moderate	Special attention should be paid to provision of services to vulnerable groups	Provision of information to stakeholders
Internal risks	Turnover of qualified staff from the organization	Moderate	High	Focus on building staff capacities, introduction of various motivation mechanisms	Attraction and training of new members
	Low quality of proposed projects	Moderate	High	Specific project evaluation criteria outlined in the grant manual	Active communication with potential applicants
	Negative attitude and lack of trust on the part of the authors of unsuccessful projects	High	Moderate	Justified arguments for evaluation result 3	Information meetings with potential and former applicants / sharing of successful examples by authors of successful projects
	Weak financial and institutional sustainability of LAG Tskaitubo	Moderate	High	Application of planned measures for sustainability / establishment of links with potential partners	Transition of LAG Tskaitubo to the stage of independence, development of an effective plan

Risk	Description	Probability of occurrence	Impact magnitude	Preventive measures	Mitigation measures
Factors related to COVID-19 pandemic (further infections)	Restrictions for holding public meetings, travelling	Moderate	High	Effective work on online communication platform/ development of online communication skills	Revision of approaches and implementation mechanisms
Environmental factors	Natural disasters	Moderate	High	Moving relevant amendments to the strategic development document, revision of priorities	Changes to the action plan
	Namakhvani HPP project	Moderate	Moderate	Study and analysis of the environmental impact document	Advocacy on the issues, if necessary

8. LOCAL ACTION GROUP TSKALTUBO

The Tskaltubo Local Development Strategy is being implemented by LAG Tskaltubo. Local Action Group Tskaltubo was established on the basis of the EU-acknowledged LEADER approach to rural development, which aims to mobilize rural communities and promote their development.

Brief information about the project:

Project title: Local Action Group Tskaltubo

Implementation period: December 2018 - December 2022

Donor: European Union, Czech Development Agency

Implementing organization: People in Need (PIN)

Partner: Georgian Institute of Public Affairs (GIPA)

8.1 What is the LEADER approach?

LEADER (Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'Économie Rurale) is an EU approach to rural development, which was first implemented in rural areas in 1991.

This approach helps to improve the living conditions of rural populations, responds to challenges in rural areas, and tries to find new ways to solve problems. Experience has demonstrated the effectiveness of the LEADER approach, and that is why it has become an integral part of European rural development policy.

The LEADER approach encourages the participation of local people in the development of strategies and action plans.

The key idea of the LEADER approach is that the population, business and public services at the local level should take responsibility for identifying the real resources and needs of the municipality and work in concert to ensure the development of the municipality.



8.2 What is a Local Action Group (LAG)?

It is the desire of one or more people to form a group. As a rule, representatives of the public, private and civil sectors have the opportunity to join this type of organization.

From the early stage of formation, a local action group can be officially registered in several ways according to the local legislation; however, considering the local and international experience, organizations mostly register as a non-profit, non-commercial legal entity, which allows any person residing in a particular area to join the group.

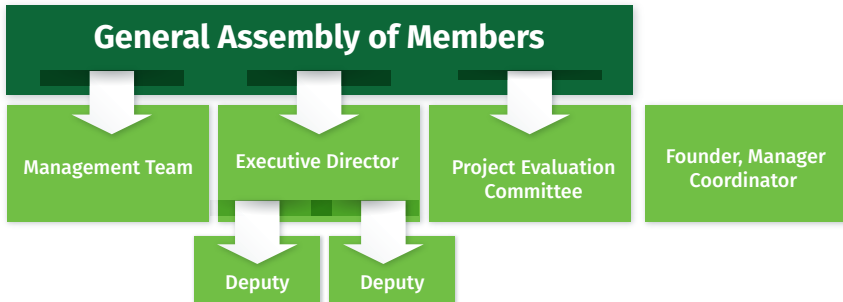
The Local Action Group is fully guided by the LEADER approach. That is why it is created on the basis of the “bottom-up” approach. Potential members are attracted and empowered by experts/specialists. The General Assembly of Members bears the function of a decision-making body.

8.3 Structure of LAG Tskaltubo

The target area of the Local Action Group Tskaltubo includes the territory within the administrative boundaries of Tskaltubo Municipality. Any resident of Tskaltubo Municipality is free to join the group. At the first meeting, the General Assembly of LAG Tskaltubo approved the Charter of the organization, where its structure is defined. The General Assembly of Member is the supreme decision-making and governing body, which elects the Executive Director and Deputies, the Project Evaluation Committee, and the Management Team. To ensure the effective work of the thematic subgroups, the General Assembly of Members also elects a contact person - a coordinator and an assistant coordinator. Local Action Group Tskaltubo has four thematic subgroups:

- ▶ Tourism
- ▶ Agriculture
- ▶ Social and community services
- ▶ Education, culture, sports and youth

For more information on legal regulation of the organization activities, see the “Charter of LAG Tskaltubo” (Annex 4).



8.4 Activities implemented by the LAG to develop the strategy

Within the framework of the LAG Tskaltubo project, the staff of People in Need (PIN) carried out various activities with the target audience, including information meetings to disseminate information about the project and the LEADER approach.

- ✓ 202 information meetings were held about the LEADER approach, attended by 2570 residents of Tskaltubo Municipality. Participants included 1226 women, 1344 men, 335 young people, 195 internally displaced persons, 42 eco-migrants, 238 people living in high mountainous areas, and 9 people with disabilities.
- ✓ To involve the project target groups in the LAG activities, 15 meetings were held with IDPs from the occupied territories, which were attended by 195 people, including 137 women, 58 men, 14 young people; 35 from the business sector, 7 from the public sector and 3 from civil society.
- ✓ 30 LEADER approach workshops were held, which were attended by 359 local people interested in joining the group. Attendees included 149 women, 210 men, 45 young people, 31 IDPs, 3 eco-migrants, 44 people living in high mountainous areas, and one person with disabilities.
- ✓ In total, 249 people joined the LAG as members.
- ✓ With the involvement of LAG Tskaltubo members, GIPA, the project partner organization, conducted a baseline survey and prepared a report on the potential of Tskaltubo Municipality (the document is available on the website: www.tskaltubolag.ge).
- ✓ LAG Tskaltubo members prepared sectoral SWOT analyses.
- ✓ To establish priorities, members of LAG Tskaltubo held meetings. Based on the identified priorities, the strategic vision, goals and objectives were developed.

- ✓ LAG Tskaltubo members conducted an online survey to collect feedback from the local population to determine whether the goals and objectives set by the group were acceptable for the community (due to the COVID-19 state of emergency declared in the country, the survey was conducted online. 414 residents took part in the survey on strategic goals and objectives).

- ✓ LAG Tskaltubo members developed a local development strategy and an action plan. In total, 137 members of the group took part in the development of the strategy. Among them:
 - a) 13% - internally displaced person, 1.5% - eco-migrant, 11% - people living in high mountains and 1.5% - persons with disabilities
 - b) 54% men, 46% - women, 12% - young people
 - c) 30% public sector representatives, 35% - private sector and 35% – civil society.

9. MONITORING IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

In order to assess progress against the set goals and objectives, it is planned to monitor and evaluate implementation of the strategy.

The purpose of monitoring and evaluation is to identify gaps in the strategy implementation process (if any), which will allow for timely intervention and modification of the document.

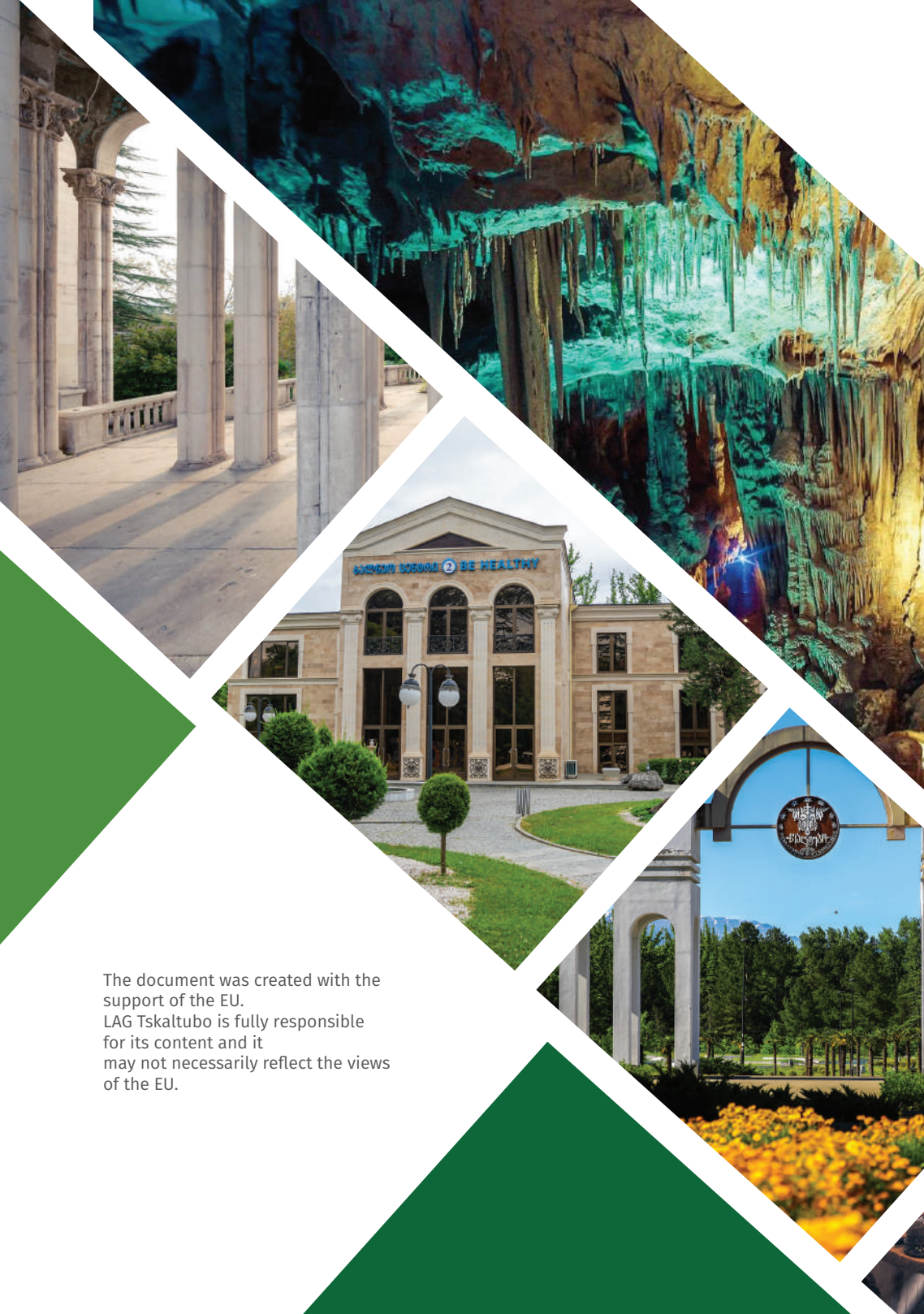
The implementation of the strategy will be monitored and evaluated by the LAG Tskaltubo Monitoring and Evaluation Group in accordance with a pre-defined monitoring and evaluation plan. Monitoring will be carried out once a year, on the basis of the indicators described in the action plan. The implementation of the strategy will be evaluated twice – an interim evaluation and a further evaluation in the final year of the strategy implementation.

	Strategy monitoring	Strategy evaluation
Organizer	Management Team of LAG Tskaltubo (prior to its election – Founder of LAG Tskaltubo, Executive Director)	Management Team of LAG Tskaltubo (prior to its election – Founder of LAG Tskaltubo, Executive Director)
Responsible entity	Monitoring Committee of LAG Tskaltubo	Employees of LAG Tskaltubo project / invited experts

10. RESOURCES USED IN THE COURSE OF THE STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

Several resources were used to develop the Tskaltubo Local Development Strategy, including the baseline survey conducted within the scope of the project and documents requested from the local authorities. Moreover, the document is compatible with the below-listed national and regional strategies:

- ✓ Rural Development Strategy of Georgia
- ✓ Imereti Regional Development Strategy
- ✓ Imereti Tourism Development Strategy
- ✓ Tskaltubo Economic Development Program
- ✓ Tskaltubo Municipality Passport
- ✓ Baseline survey – Tskaltubo Development Potential Report
- ✓ Public information requested from the local self-government



The document was created with the support of the EU. LAG Tskaltubo is fully responsible for its content and it may not necessarily reflect the views of the EU.