



Local Economic Development Plan

Vani municipality

Georgia

March 2020

Preface from Mayor

Vani should become an interesting, attractive, small European municipality appropriate to live and relax. With relevant traditions and modern infrastructure, developed tourism, various sectors of agriculture and industry, economic stability, access to education, culture, sports, medical services and social security.

We have been given the opportunity to join the EU initiative "Mayors for Economic Growth" (M4EG). Within the framework of this initiative, the Local Economic Development Plan (LEDP) of Vani Municipality for 2020-2021 was developed, its implementation aims to promote the systemic development of the economy.

Representatives of the private and civil sector were involved in the process of creating the action plan together with the representatives of the self-government. Through this cooperation, it will be possible to expand its capabilities and develop technical skills.

The municipality and I personally thank all those who participated in the preparation of the plan and we express our readiness in the framework of the initiative "Mayors for Economic Growth" (M4EG). In close cooperation with the private and civil sectors, we will carry out the measures and monitoring envisaged in the plan, which will be an important step forward for the development of the municipality.

Respectfully,

Mayor of Vani Municipality
Alexander Gogorishvili



The document is public and available to all interested parties.

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1. Executive Summary

The main goal of the Vani Municipality Economic Development Plan is sustainable economic development, which can be achieved by expanding its capabilities through cooperation with the private sector and civil society.

Local economic development will actively contribute to the improvement of the business environment, the creation of new jobs and the provision of favorable conditions by the local self-government for economic, social and cultural participation, the well-being of the community and the improvement of living standards.

Increasing the tendency of tourist flows in the municipality and in the country as a whole, supporting programs for state and international organizations in the field of agriculture and state programs promoting entrepreneurship enable the municipality of Vani, considering its strengths, to become an attractive and convenient place for business development and visiting. To achieve this, Vani Municipality has set three objectives: Development of tourism potential, Development of entrepreneurial skills and workforce, Support for local entrepreneurship.

In order to accomplish the goals, the municipality has developed actions to be implemented for two years. The main activities are Creating a tourist-attractive environment; Disseminate information about opportunities in the municipality; Conducting trainings on agribusiness and tourism development; Conducting meetings for young people, women, people with disabilities and inclusive groups, to strengthen their entrepreneurial and work skills; Provide information on funding opportunities for startups and existing entrepreneurs in one space; Meetings of entrepreneurs with financial institutions.

Part of the activities will be implemented with the co-financing of the state, part of the activities are planned in the hope of finding a donor organizations and charitable funds.

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3.2. Abbreviations

- LED - local economic development
- SWOT - Strengths and Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

4. Introduction to the plan

EU Initiative-mayors for economic growth, Vani Municipality became a member of a club established within the framework of economic growth in March 2020. To fulfill its commitment and to become a member of the club, the Vani Municipality Local Economic Development Plan was developed in collaboration with the private sector and civil society and included the following three blocks: Land and Infrastructure; Human capital and inclusiveness; External positioning and marketing.

The working group was created for developing a plan and to discuss the needs for the development of the local economy with interested parties, took into consideration the views of each of them, and outlined with them the objectives that formed the basis of the activities envisaged by the plan.

Vani Municipality is 280 km away from the capital, the distance to the center of the region - Kutaisi is 45 km, the nearest seaport - Poti is 100 km, and the nearest airport - Kopitnari is 50 km.

25.4 thousand people live in 557 sq. Km of the municipality, in one city and 42 villages. 51.8% of them are women. The average age of the population is 42, the share of the urban population in the total population is 16.5%. The share of the able-bodied population in Vani Municipality is 58%.

Local Economic Development Plan is a plan created in close dialogue with the private and public sectors, which focuses on private sector development to ensure economic growth, development and employment in the municipality. The document is in accordance with the documents on the medium-term development of the municipality and the priorities for 2020-2022, the socio-economic development strategy of Georgia "Georgia 2020" and the development strategy of Imereti region 2014-2021, the pilot integrated regional development program of 2020-22, the tourism strategy of Georgia.

The Local Economic Development Plan was developed to address specific economic challenges through a private-public dialogue to strengthen the local economy.

32 thousand GEL (9 250 EUR) will be allocated from the local budget for the implementation of the action plan, the total budget is 5,172,000 GEL (1 494 805 EUR).

5. The process of local economic development plan development

During the development of the local economic development plan, with the direct involvement of the mayor, an online meeting was held between the local government, business sector and civil society, the concept of the initiative was introduced. Remote meetings were held with individual sectors of economic actors. By order of the mayor of the municipality, a 4-member working group was set up to prepare the LED plan, which was composed of representatives from the private sector, civil society and local self-government. The working group consisted of two men and two women, the working group was led by a local LED partnership, composed of representatives from local government, civil society, the private sector, educational and health institutions, with a total of 13 members. 3 of them are women. 23% Public Sector, Remaining Public Service Representatives.

The working group prepared the issues in advance for meetings and discussions with various stakeholders, and then discussed with the partner group the opinions agreed with them, the analysis of them led to making conclusions. Representatives of the construction business, medium and small entrepreneurs, representatives of the agricultural sector, persons interested in tourism, various public and civil organizations, in particular, local representatives of agriculture, representatives of the local resource center, representatives of local tourism and teachers, interested population were actively involved in the process.

Online meetings were held 2-3 times a month. The process of elaborating the plan was to exchange views with the representatives of other municipalities of Imereti region and to form point of views on the same activities.

Apart from online meetings and public hearings, online surveys and interviews were used in the development of the plan. Consequently, the concept of using the existing potential and overcoming the challenges was revealed, which resulted in the formation of a development vision, main goals, and main measures for the development of the municipality.

6. Local economic analysis

6.1 Analysis of local economic structure:

Agriculture, trade, tourism and services are leader fields of the Vani Municipality.

The geographical location of the municipality and the distance from the main roads allow the agricultural development in the bio direction, which is also contributed by the rich local agricultural resources.

34% of the total area (19268 ha) is for agricultural purposes. Of these, 9213 ha are pastures, 4800 ha are arable, and 5245 ha are perennial crops. The population owns 10028 hectares.

Perennial plant areas are distributed as follows: vineyard 950 ha, fruit trees 450 ha, subtropical and technical (laurel) crops 376 ha. Citrus 125 ha, tea 45 ha, walnut crops 2653 ha, other rest 646 ha. In recent years, there has been a massive increase in the area of hazelnuts, which is due to the growing demand for hazelnuts and favorable prices. New varieties of hazelnut seedlings are imported and new gardens are planted.

The tea plantation cultivated on 45 hectares has survived from the previous century, which is almost completely degraded today, the area currently is not used for agricultural purposes.

The diversity and quantity of vegetation in the municipality creates a serious resource for the development of beekeeping. The population owns 6100 ska bees. In 2018, 69 tons of honey was produced.

The number of farms has increased significantly in the last three years. In total, 1064 farms are registered throughout the municipality, which can be distributed according to the leading sectors: Fruit growing 574, livestock 149, beekeeping 143, cereals 130, horticulture-vegetable and vegetable production 77, citrus growing 14 and poultry 11 (For information, see Annex B). Fruit growing occupies an important place. Gradually, the old gardens are restored and new crops are planted. There is noticeable increase in fruit production and the development of the canning production.

Economic development in the municipality is facing a serious challenge. The number of operating medium and small enterprises is small comparing to other municipalities. All this is due to the social status of the population and the high level of migration.

Light and heavy industry is less developed in Vani municipality. Despite the tourist attractiveness of the municipality, the amount of restaurants and hotels is small.

The most famous tourist attraction of Vani Municipality is the ancient settlement of Vani and the Archaeological Museum. On the territory of the municipality there is a climatic-balneological resort "Sulori" and a balneological resort –“Amaghleba”. The resorts are known for their thermal radioactive mineral and weak sulfide sulfate-hydrocarbonate sodium mineral water with low mineralization, the temperature reaches 38 degrees in both winter and summer. They are used for baths in the treatment of musculoskeletal disorders, peripheral nervous system and gynecological diseases.

6.2 Local cooperation and networking:

The role of Vani Municipality in promoting the development of the business sector can be expressed through measures such as providing access to natural resources, privatizing municipal property, and supporting participation in various state programs. There is no structural mechanism for cooperation and communication in the municipality, and a low level of awareness of the importance of cooperation

particularly in private sector is noticeable. In the recent years, we have been actively promoting the development of agricultural cooperatives and encouraging cooperation between the private sector. Government programs and international organizations assist agricultural cooperatives not only in financial empowerment but also in professional development through various trainings and educational events. Accordingly, a kind of platform is created, where the representatives of different cooperatives are given the opportunity to talk to each other and share experiences. As for the cooperation between business companies and the municipality - there is some experience in the relationship. Meetings initiated by the mayor are frequent with various sectors, in particular:

- In the field of environment and agriculture, through the representatives of the counseling center, with the participation and benefit of the grant program representatives, the counseling center temporarily meets special groups of children, for entertainment and agromata, you can create and also use the opportunity.
- Meetings are held with representatives of the construction business, as well as small and medium-sized businesses, issues related to planned infrastructure projects, large-scale projects and ideas to raise awareness of the municipality, as well as issues of privatization and leasing of municipal property, participation in various state programs.
- Meetings are held with youth groups and the private sector on tourism potential and professional skills development issues.
- Meetings are held with representatives of natural gas and water supply companies in the industrial sector.

6.3 Business friendly and transparent administration:

The municipality has no experience in providing information and services to business companies. Information is provided on demand, which gives the impression that approaches to them are in some cases subjective. Start-up entrepreneurs in particular find it difficult to find information on existing legislation and regulations. The local representation of the Ministry of Agriculture periodically holds informational meetings with local farmers and also individual consultations with farmers, but this is not enough.

Despite numerous attempts by the municipal council, the level of public, private and civil sector involvement in council sessions is still low. The website of the City Hall and the Information Service of the City Hall cover the activities implemented with the involvement of the local government. Information about the tenders announced by the municipality is posted on the website of the State Procurement Agency and all interested persons can submit their own tender proposals. The activities of the tender commission are transparent and all decisions are uploaded on the website of the agency. The official website of the municipality contains information about the current normative acts, auctions and tenders.

Issuance or privatization of the right to use municipal property is carried out through an electronic auction, data on the property to be privatized and used with the right of use are posted on the official website of the Service Agency of the Ministry of Finance. Anyone can participate in the electronic auction.

6.4 Access to finance:

There are two banks and two microfinance organizations operating in the municipality, which provide loans to small companies and the agricultural sector without collateral up to GEL 5,000, but the loan interest rate is high. The situation is complicated by the fact that the issue of lending is considered in the regional and head offices of banks, which is an additional barrier for the business sector.

In addition to the banking sector, there are various opportunities for access to finance for start-ups and existing businesses, including state programs in the field of agriculture, the program "Produce Georgia" of the Ministry of Economy, credit organizations, business support programs.

Despite the fact there are various government programs in the field of agriculture and innovative entrepreneurship, under which start-ups, small and medium-sized businesses have the opportunity to obtain state funding, they can not receive funding due to lack of knowledge and experience in developing business plans. Furthermore, the main problems in access to finance were the lack of information on state programs to support entrepreneurs and grants and assistance from local and international donor organizations.

6.5 Land and infrastructure:

Demand for land and buildings is growing in Vani Municipality. Demand is mainly fixed for isolated retail, warehousing and refrigeration areas suitable for micro-companies, the municipality partially meets these requirements. The area of agricultural lands in the municipality is 19258 ha, of which 10028 ha are private property, the rest is state property and 20% of it is unused. Most of the privately owned areas are 70% small plots (up to one hectare).

Some of the buildings in the municipality are owned by various ministries, which makes it difficult for businesses to use the property. The state places a high, inadequate privatization price on the property it owns, which is why there are few cases of alienation of property by them on the territory of the municipality.

6.6 Regulatory and Institutional Frameworks:

Unregulated outside trade, land reclamation, and lack of general plan for land usage remain a problem in the municipality. Privatization and transfer of rights for usage procedures of municipality's property, land and infrastructure gets delayed, that poses certain difficulties for private businesses.

According to legislation of Georgia, competencies of the municipality in terms of supporting economic development and improving business environment are quite limited, and remains a competence of central government.

Business registration procedures are simple in comparison to other counties. Any interested individual may register their business in a one working day. Registrations are carried out by a public service hall.

6.7 Skills and Human Capital, inclusiveness:

One of the main priorities of Vani Municipality is tourism development, however, there is a shortage of qualified staff in this regard. Employees working in the given field have education in fields that are less in demand in labor market.

Education system does not meet real needs of a business sector. Capable of working and qualified individuals are flocking to a capital, center of the region or overseas. There is no internal municipality employment agency, job seekers discover work through personal connections or online resources. There is no coordination among Municipality, business sector and educational organizations. Only certain business companies provide training according to their needs, but not organized in nature and agreed between other companies working in the same field. No research is conducted on human resources, demanded professions and local business market needs.

During the 70-90s of the last century vocational-technical school of "Shuamta" was operated in Vani municipality, which possessed a strong material and technical base. It trained specialists in the field of agriculture and not only on the scale of Vani district. Even though the fact that there is a great demand for agribusiness development in Vani municipality and there is a need for agro-specialists in various fields, currently there is not a single vocational and higher education institutions in the municipality, which has a negative influence on development of the municipality. After receiving secondary education youth carries on their education in other municipalities, most of whom do not return. Majority of them are left without any education, which once again justifies need of adult vocational education mechanisms.

6.8 External Positioning and Marketing:

Mountains and forest massifs, historical-cultural monuments (churches and castle towers) and museums deliver opportunities for developing tourism sector in territory of Vani municipality. But a business card of Vani municipality is represented through Archeological Museum of Vani. It is located in vicinity of Vani's ancient settlement. Materials preserved in Vani museum covers a period from BC VIII to AC I century. Unique samples of goldsmithing, silver and bronze items, numismatics and more are kept there. Balneological climate and resorts in its territory are quite important for the municipality.

In order to popularize and raise awareness about the municipality, local cultural workers and representatives of various art segments participate in international exhibition-fairs and festivals. Additionally, the municipality also organizes various activities every year, such as Vaneloba, Galaktionoba, Titsianoba, where local entrepreneurs' products are exhibited. Preschool, school-age children, various public and civil society representatives are involved in given events. Many guests, both from Georgia and foreign countries visit these events.

By raising awareness on the history of Vani's ancient or medieval period as well the implementation of the proper economic policy, it's possible to attract the local and the foreign investors, which will promote raising the standard of cultural housholed and material life in the municipality.

7. SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rich historical past of antiquity and medieval, balneological resorts for tourism development; • Good natural climatic conditions for agricultural development; • Existence of a variety of agricultural crops (cereals, horticultural, walnut, peanut, citrus and all kinds of other crops); • Access to natural hot water for the development of greenhouses; • Richness of forest, water resources and biodiversity; • Richness of minerals; • Existence of alpine pastures; • Existence of examples of cooperation between the private sector; • Existence of examples of promoting business sector development; • Experience in providing information and services to the business. • Organizing tenders and auctions online to reduce corruption; • Increasing demand for real estate in the private sector; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scarce budget of the municipality, lack of funding from the central budget; • Defective utility infrastructure: road problems in mountainous villages and lack of sewerage system in the city; • Low level of employment mobility due to lack of municipal transport; • Access to finance; Particularly problematic for small and medium-sized businesses as well as start-ups; • High interest rates of banking and financial institutions; • Non-institutionalization of cooperation between business and the municipality; • Difficulty for start-up entrepreneurs to get information on legislative norms and regulations; • Level of population involvement; • Low level of access to finance in banking institutions due to high guarantee requirements and administrative barriers; • Low level of access to finance from government programs due to lack of business plan development skills by local businesses; • Lack of information on local and international business support programs among local entrepreneurs; • Unregulated foreign trade. Lack of development and land use plan;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of coordination between the business sector of the municipality and educational organizations;
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stimulating the processes of processing enterprises and farmers' cooperatives; Projects implemented by the state to raise the awareness of the tourism potential of the municipality; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Epidemics; Poor management of state-owned real estate in the municipality;

SWOT analysis demonstrates that the level of economic development of the municipality is still low, although the development opportunities are great considering the strengths.

8. Vision and objectives of Vani municipality

Vision:

Vani Municipality is an attractive place for business development and visiting.

The vision is long-term, but it can be achieved through the cooperation of the civil and public sectors of the municipality and joint efforts with state structures.

Objectives:

1. Development of tourism potential.
2. Development of entrepreneurial skills and workforce.
3. Support for local entrepreneurship

9. Action plan

The municipality is responsible for the implementation of the plan.

Table 1. Action Plan

<i>Thematic blocks</i>	<i>Main objectives</i>	<i>Action</i>	<i>Duration (Start/End)</i>	<i>Participating Partners</i>	<i>Orientation Value in National Currency (Euro Equivalent)</i>	<i>Monitoring Indicators/ Indicator of Final Outcomes</i>	<i>Outcomes/ Final Outcome Indicators</i>
5. External positioning and marketing.	1. Development of tourism potential.	1.1. Improving the tourist infrastructure on the territory of the municipality.	08/2020-08/2022	State RDF fund Municipality	5,000,000 GEL 1,445,090 EUR	Newly equipped tourist infrastructure. 1. The museum of the local lore is arranged. 2. The tourism center is functioned. 3. The access road and the pedestrian bridge to Labajouri Monastery are arranged.	The tourist infrastructure is arranged in accordance with the requirements set by the state regarding the pandemic.
		1.2. Disseminate information about the tourist opportunities of the municipality.	08/2020-07/2022	Municipality	135,000 GEL 39,020 EUR	Municipality Culture and Tourism Information Center is operational. Information about the tourism opportunities and celebrities of the municipality is disseminated annually through 5 information sources.	Awareness of the municipality's tourism opportunities will increase by 20%.

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2. Skills and human capital, involvement	2. Development of entrepreneurial skills and workforce.	2.1. Conduct trainings for representatives of agro business and tourism sector.	09.2020-08.2022	Municipality, Ministry of Environment Protection and Agriculture of Georgia, Vani Information-Consulting Service.	15,000 GEL 4,335 EUR	30 trained agro businesses and 25 representatives of the tourism sector.	The qualification of the employees in the agribusiness and tourism sector has been raised.
		2.2. Conduct trainings for entrepreneurship and skills development for the agriculture sector representatives. Conduct meetings with the farmers and the business sector.	10/2020-08/2022	Municipality	12,000 GEL 3,470 EUR	5 trainings were conducted for 200 participants, including 100 young people, 100 women, 50 people with disabilities.	100 participants started the business.
4. Financial accessibility	3. Support for local entrepreneurship	3.1 Provide information on start-up funding opportunities for startups, existing entrepreneurs and the agriculture sector representatives	01/2021-07/2022	Municipality	5,000 GEL 1,445 EUR	An appropriate unit has been set up in the municipality	Increased level of awareness of entrepreneurs about financial resources

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		3.2. Entrepreneurs' meetings with financial institutions	01/2021-07/2022	Municipality Donors	5,000 GEL 1,445 EUR	The first annual B2B meeting is held	Awareness of the conditions of entrepreneurial donation financing institutions.

10. Funding scheme

The approximate value of the measures provided for in the Local Economic Development Financing Scheme is given in the example of similar measures and reflects both capital and other costs. Management of high level budget funds included in the action plan for the implementation of the plan and the amount of these funds are agreed with the relevant state structures. The total amount of funding for the measures described in the Action Plan amounted to GEL 5,172,000. It is determined that 32,000 GEL will be financed from the local budget. There is no cut in funding.

Table 2. Funding scheme

Events	Indicative cost	Source of Funding				Loss in Funding	Notes
		Local Budget	High level budget	Business	Donors		
1. Creating a tourist-attractive environment on the territory of the municipality by regulating the infrastructure	5,000,000 GEL 1,445,090 EUR		5,000,000 GEL 1,445,090 EUR				
2. Disseminate information about opportunities on the territory of the municipality	135 000 GEL 39,020 EUR		135,000 GEL 39,020 EUR				
3. Conducting trainings on agribusiness and tourism development	15,000 GEL 4,335 EUR	15,000 GEL 4,335 EUR					
4. Conducting meetings for young people, women, people with disabilities and inclusive	12,000 GEL 3,470 EUR	12,000 GEL 3,470 EUR					

Events	Indicative cost	Source of Funding				Loss in Funding	Notes
		Local Budget	High level budget	Business	Donors		
groups, to strengthen their entrepreneurial and work skills							
5. Provide information on funding opportunities for startups and existing entrepreneurs in one space	5,000 GEL 1,445 EUR	5,000 GEL 1,445 EUR					
6. Meetings of entrepreneurs with financial institutions.	5,000 GEL 1,445 EUR				5,000 GEL 1,445 EUR		
Sum	5,172,000 GEL 1,494,805 EUR	32,000 GEL 9,250 EUR	5,135,000 GEL 1,484,110 EUR		5,000 GEL 1,445 EUR		

11. Monitoring indicators and mechanisms

The activities envisaged in the Local Economic Development Action Plan are divided into four reporting periods (each 6 months) with interim expected outcomes. When the plan is formally approved, a monitoring committee will be set up with the involvement of partners and stakeholders to ensure gender balance and represent local government, private and civil society representatives. The committee will monitor the implementation of the plan, organize quarterly meetings and prepare interim reports on the implementation of the plan.

Table 3. Monitoring indicators and mechanisms

Action	Duration (Start/)	Expected Results	Expected Results	Expect Results	Expected Results
1. Creating a tourist-attractive environment on the territory of the municipality by regulating the infrastructure	08/2020-08/2022	Procurement of works envisaged by the project for the design of the tourist-recreational zone, financed by the local budget	Funding is obtained from the RPDF fund	Construction works are underway	A well-organized tourist-attractive infrastructure has been created, taking into account the tourist needs
2. Disseminate information about the tourist opportunities of the municipality	08/2020-07/2022	Constantly, during the current project period	Constantly, during the current project period	Constantly, during the current project period	Constantly, during the current project period

Action	Duration (Start/End)	Expected Results	Expected Results	Expected Results	Expected Results
3. Conducting trainings on agribusiness and tourism development	09/2020-08/2021	Training topic and target groups have been selected, 30 people have been trained in agrotourism and 25 tourism representatives have been trained.	Training topic and target groups have been selected, 30 people have been trained in agrotourism and 25 tourism representatives have been trained.	Training topic and target groups have been selected, 30 people have been trained in agrotourism and 25 tourism representatives have been trained.	Training topic and target groups have been selected, 30 people have been trained in agrotourism and 25 tourism representatives have been trained.
4. Conducting meetings for young people, women, people with disabilities and inclusive groups, to strengthen their entrepreneurial and work skills	10/2020-08/2022	Training topic and target groups selected, training program compiled, workshops held, awareness raised 200 people	Training topic and target groups selected, training program compiled, workshops held, awareness raised 200 people	Training topic and target groups selected, training program compiled, workshops held, awareness raised 200 people	Training topic and target groups selected, training program compiled, workshops held, awareness raised 200 people
5. Providing information on funding opportunities for startups and existing entrepreneurs in one space	01/2021-07/2022	A structured unit has been set up at the City Hall and a person has been appointed to provide information on funding opportunities for existing entrepreneurs.	Training topic and target groups selected, training program compiled, workshops held, awareness raised 200 people	Training topic and target groups selected, training program compiled, workshops held, awareness raised 200 people	Financial access is provided to 70 people
6. Meetings of entrepreneurs with financial institutions.	01/2021-07/2021	Entrepreneurs are informed about the possibilities connecting the financial sector.	Financial access is provided to 30 people	Financial access is provided to 30 people	Entrepreneurs are informed about the possibilities connecting the financial sector.
% Of total budget spent (Indicative)	100%	10%	30%	30%	30%