



საქართველოს ახალგაზრდა
ეკონომისტთა ასოციაცია



**Assesment report of the "Small Farmers Spring Work Support Project
2014"**

2014

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Brief Review of the "Small Farmers Spring Work Support Project 2014"

The implementer of the "Small Farmers Spring Work Support Project 2014" is the Agricultural Projects Management Agency (APMA). The project receives financial support from the state budget, the agriculture and rural development fund. It was conducted from 1 February 2014 until 1 November of the same year.

The project aimed to further stimulate the work of small farmers through supporting agrotechnology activities for primary production in spring 2014 in order to achieve a sustainable and developed form of farming. The project intended to provide the means needed for agrotechnological activities (plowing) and provide the resources needed for annual agricultural crop production (fertilizer and / or seeds and / or plant protection products), as well as to support the work of the small-scale farmers (provide fertilizers and / or plant protection products) who produce only perennial crops on their lands.

The project beneficiaries were farmers, who own, use or possess a maximum of 1.25 ha of agricultural land and which they use for the production of annual or perennial crops. The total land area of the beneficiary was not to exceed 5 hectares.

The total number of potential beneficiaries for spring 2014 was 757,000 farmers.

After analyzing all of the stages of the project it was revealed that the best method for providing farmers with different benefits would be by bank cards. An Agro bank card is a plastic card on which points are accrued rather than money, which farmers can use to receive different types of benefits. They would also will be able to receive agricultural goods at different times and from different vendors and check the remaining amount of points on the card without going to the bank. The farmers would be able to use the Agro cards in the framework of different future programs. Agro cards are convenient for both farmers and also the agency since the agency would be able to fully control the means of spending and efficiently obtain information about the use of the card by the farmer.

Beneficiaries were to receive the following benefits in accordance with their land ownership categories:

- Beneficiaries, who own, use or possess up to 0.25 hectares of agricultural land and produce annual or perennial crops will receive benefits of the equivalent of 50 Lari in the form of agricultural goods;
- Beneficiaries, who own, use or possess from 0.25 hectares to 1.25 hectares of agricultural land and produce annual crops will receive benefits proportional to their land plots, the equivalent of 140 Lari for

land cultivation for each hectare and will receive benefits of the equivalent of 50 Lari in the form of agricultural goods;

- Beneficiaries, who own, use or possess from 0.25 hectares to 1.25 hectares of agricultural land, produce perennial crops and produce no annual crops will receive benefits proportional to their land plots, the equivalent of 140 Lari for each hectare and the equivalent of 50 Lari in the form of agricultural goods;
- Beneficiaries who possess two or more different agricultural plots of land and whose total area does not exceed 5 hectares, will benefit from only one plot. The beneficiary will receive benefits for the land with the largest area.

Research Methodology

Project Description:

The assessment study of the "Small Farmers Spring Work Support Project 2014" in the framework of the project "Strengthening the productivity of the cooperatives of small farmers in Imereti and Racha-Lechkhumi regions" was implemented with the financial support of the European Neighbourhood Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development (ENPARD).

ENPARD is a political initiative, which recognizes the importance of agriculture for food security, sustainable production and rural employment.

The program duration is four years (January 2012 - January 2016) and intends to form information and consulting centers for rural farmers, provide the government with assistance to adopt laws which will promote cooperation between farmers and to distribute rural development grants to farmers for the growth of a scale-oriented economy.

15 million euros have been issued in the form of grants in framework of the ENPARD program, which was divided among four consortiums. One of the consortiums is composed of the organization "People in Need" (PIN), Bio Farmers Association "Elkana" and the Association of Young Economists of Georgia. All four consortia have their own action areas which are distributed across different regions. The work area for the above mentioned coalition includes the following municipalities: Oni, Ambrolauri, Kharagauli, Tkibuli, Zestafoni, Bagdati, Terjola, Tskaltubo and Khoni. The project aims to achieve the following results:

- ❖ Increase farmers' income by using more efficient business methods oriented on the development of small farmer activities and entrepreneur groups;
- ❖ Increase agricultural income and sales volume by using modern methods of production, processing and marketing;
- ❖ Improving environment for agribusiness and the legislation of the field of agriculture as a result of the participation of farmers and rural residents in policy-making processes.

Research Methodology

The aim of the research was the development of a qualitative assessment of the outcomes of the Small Farmers Spring Work Support Project 2014 as well as recommendations for improvement.

The research covered farmers, local government representatives, agronomists and agricultural product providers living in the municipalities targeted by the "Strengthening the productivity of the cooperatives of small farmers in Imereti and Racha-Lechkhumi regions" project. In-depth interviews

were also conducted with the representatives of the Agriculture Project Management Agency and agricultural experts.

Although the Small Farmers Spring Work Support Project 2014 was carried out throughout Georgia, the nine target municipalities of the "Strengthening the productivity of the cooperatives of small farmers in Imereti and Racha-Lechkhumi regions" project were determined as the study areas. However, it is possible to generalize the findings and recommendations and consider them as relevant for the evaluation of the overall project.

Qualitative research methods were used for the evaluation of the cultivation program. Nine focus group meetings and 27 in-depth interviews were conducted.

Focus Group Meetings

#	Municipality	Number of focus group participants	Date
1	Oni	9	06/11/2014
2	Ambrolauri	13	06/11/2014
3	Kharagauli	10	17/11/2014
4	Tkibuli	9	18/11/2014
5	Zestaponi	9	17/11/2014
6	Baghdati	11	20/11/2014
7	Terjola	12	18/11/2014
8	Tskaltubo	11	19/11/2014
9	Khoni	10	19/11/2014

Recruitment of the participants for each group was carried out according to the following criteria:

- Recommended requirement - 1 participant, who wanted to, but did not receive or could not use the card;
- Mandatory requirement - the structure of the participants according to their land areas.

Minimum Number	Land Area	Type of Card
1	0.25-1.25 Ha of arable land	Cultivation Card / Means of production
2	0-0.25 Ha of arable land	Cultivation Card / Means of production
1	0.25-1.25 Ha perennial	Means of production
2	0-0.25 Ha perennial	Means of production

It should also be noted that there was no participant who wanted to, but did not receive a card. Consequently, all the focus group participants are beneficiaries of the project.

At the initial stage, a basic version of guidelines for the conduct of focus groups was adopted which was later further developed into the final version taking into consideration the results of the in-depth interviews conducted with the beneficiaries. The guidelines are provided in Annex 1.

In-depth interviews

In-depth interviews were conducted with 27 respondents. Six target groups were studied which were directly or indirectly linked to the program implementation planning and evaluation processes. Each group was assigned a specific research task.

Distribution of interviews in accordance with the target group structures and the specific objectives of the study

#	Group	Ammount	Specific Task
1	Beneficiaries	5	Adoption of focus group guidelines with issues discussed by farmers
2	Suppliers	9	Identification of procedural matters; Demand - supply Conformity Assessment
3	Representatives of the local governments	5	Identify local needs; Assessment of the program challenges;
4	Agriculture Project Management Agency	2	Program evaluation in terms of procedure; Alternative opinions regarding problems and achievements.
5	Agronomists	2	Agricultural needs, identification of major problems, obtain recommendations
6	Agriculture Experts	4	Development of recommendations / improvements
	Total	27	

Frame guidelines were prepared for the in-depth interviews, to which specific topics were added according to the respondent's qualifications and categories, the information and issues recieved during the research process were also taken into consideration.

Interviews were conducted in the first phase with the beneficiaries for the development of the final version of the guidelines.

Interviews were held with representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture in the last stage of the study, when information was gathered from all other sources.

The In-Depth Interview Guidelines are given in Annexes 2-7.

Assessment of project goals

The declared goal of the "Small Farmers 2014 Spring Project" is to further stimulate the work of small farmers by supporting agrotechnology activities for primary production in spring 2014 in order to achieve a sustainable and developed form of farming.

The study showed that the part of the project which envisages the stimulation of the work of small farmers has already been achieved, and there has been some progress in achieving a sustainable form of farming, although this issue calls for more activities to be carried out over a longer period of time.

Although the program was not aimed at increasing the geographical availability of agricultural products and the development of retail sales in the field of agriculture, we can conclude that these issues are major achievements of the project.

For objective evaluation, it is necessary to focus on factors, which are not directly related to the project planning and organization processes, but directly affect the effectiveness of reaching objectives. This includes: Agricultural service quality and availability; Organizational issues of machinery services - machinery park, shortage of smaller size machinery being particularly problematic; Agricultural land registration; The lack of cooperatives and / or their very low level of

development. In addition, the perception, attitude, level of motivation and other factors of the rural population play a fairly large role.

In addition, it should be noted that the main reason for dissatisfaction during the evaluation of 2014 was the low budget and limited agricultural product list of the Agro cards. The local farmers compare these factors with the 2013 program, which had double the budget of that of the 2014 program. For that reason, farmers were not given the option to purchase equipment in the course of the 2014 project.

The perceptions of the farmers were analyzed for the purposes of the study - what was the purpose of the project and to what level was it achieved? Focus group participant farmers believe that, overall, the project was not able to have a substantial financial impact on farmers, but it did provide some financial benefits to small-scale farmers. One of the important results of the program is that the farmers realized the effect the use of machinery has, both financially and in terms of time, as well as in terms of productivity. The focus group participants from different regions gave the following feedback: "First of all, for me the program helped me to cultivate my land without having to bother my neighbors about providing assistance"; "Because this program envisaged free cultivation old traditional methods such as the use of bull and hoe were replaced by modern machinery"; "The aim of this program was for farmers to realize the importance of using modern machinery and gaining new information"; "The aim of this program was for the role of farmers to promote the role of farmers in agriculture. The population was not able to cultivate even half of their lands and they do not have the financial resources needed to buy tractors. They don't even have the money to buy fertilizer if the state does not provide them with it."

It can be concluded that the project facilitated the cultivation of agricultural lands which the population was unable to independently do before, while other farmers, who cultivated their land even before the program, were spared the costs of plowing.

As for the part of the program which envisaged the use of Agro cards, the perceptions of the beneficiaries were different. In the same project which was carried out in 2013, a much larger budget was provided and at the same time there was a virtually unlimited list of agricultural products which could be purchased. The vast majority of farmers believe that the project of the previous year was significantly better in this regard.

It is important to note that the project which was carried out in 2013 set high standards and therefore it does not come as a surprise that the expectations of the farmers were not met in this regard.

It is noteworthy that there was no demand for fertilizers in certain municipalities. The farmers stated that it would have been better if they had been given a choice as to which agricultural products they needed. For example, a focus group participant from Oni stated: "We have no use for so many chemicals, therefore the money which was on the Agro cards was returned to the state. What we needed were small tools, such as a shovel, therefore we should have the option to acquire the agricultural equipment which we need."

In general, most complaints about the project were in nearly almost all cases regarding the fact that the farmers were only able to purchase chemicals with the Agro cards and not tools, as had been the case in the program of the previous year. However, the Agriculture Projects' Management Agency explained that the priority of the project was for lands to be cultivated and later provided with

fertilizer and seeds, as a result of which the area of cultivated land increased significantly. The program did not aim to provide general assistance but was specifically to support cultivation activities.

It can be concluded that, despite the fact that the population expressed dissatisfaction towards the list of agricultural goods from which they were able to purchase using the Agro cards, this does not represent a negative factor during the assessment of the accomplishment of the overall aims of the project. However, revision of the list might be useful in future cases.

In-depth interviews were conducted with the providers of agricultural products for the evaluation of the cultivation project. They stated that, overall, the project had an impact on farmers, especially on small-scale farmers who own small lands and needed assistance in cultivation. In addition, these farmers were able to purchase seeds and fertilizer, as for farmers with larger land the project did not have much of an impact. Nevertheless another important impact of the project was revealed, which relates to the development of the business sector. The study showed that, as a result of the project, geographical access to agricultural retail stores was increased. One of the farmers participating in the focus group stated "Three shops were opened as a result of this program. Before we would have had to have gone to the regional center to purchase necessary products, now it is possible locally even if they are not on the list of products which the Agro cards can purchase." In addition, the suppliers study itself has shown two important positive results: (1) increased sales in existing stores: (2) due to the program, new stores were opened in geographic areas where it was previously not profitable for them to operate. The supplier stated that "The demand on our products has grown. Many who did not cultivate their lands in the past received this card and therefore they also became our clients. The number of our clients increased, people came from the cities to cultivate their lands and bought products from us. I have a mixed shop where I sell both food and other products. When the farmers came to use their Agro cards they also purchased other products from me, we have guaranteed clients. We opened a store because of this program and it became very profitable. This program increased sales because one client informed another about our store and word of mouth played a big role in the realization of our products."

Consequently, the program undoubtedly played a positive role in agricultural goods retail - both in terms of formation and development of a profitable business field.

Interestingly, the ideas, attitudes and perceptions of the beneficiaries of the project about the purpose of the program were most frequently mentioned in the following manner:

- "show and teach farmers work techniques";
- "teach farmers how to use new planting seeds";
- "teach farmers how to use chemicals";
- "develop the skills necessary for agricultural activities";
- "Those who were not able to plow or only owned a hoe were able to cultivate their land";
- "open new stores where the purchase of chemicals is possible";
- "to provide relief for poor farmers in order for them to cultivate the land."

Accordingly, we can conclude that the project has changed the habits and attitudes of the involved farmers towards modern approaches and methods of agriculture production. If in the past, as a rule, farmers preferred to cultivate the land using traditional methods, now they are actually aware of the advantages of modern facilities, they have started asking questions and seeking information, which is partly the result of the implementation of the project. In addition, the project provided small farmers with the opportunity to cultivate their land (in some cases, they still were not able to grow crops because of other problems, such as lack of information on the technologies of seed use), but, in any case, their farming activities were stimulated.

Assessment of the project and its implementation process

The project implementation process assessment revealed no significant breaches and / or no major violations were committed. The farmers mainly assessed substantive issues negatively rather than procedural matters.

The focus group meetings and in-depth interviews revealed that there were no serious problems in regard to farmers receiving the status of beneficiary and being issued an Agro card. All farmers received the relevant beneficiary status. There were a couple of cases when farmers were not on the participant list, but, due to the efforts of the local governments, additional lists were made and all farmers were able to receive cards for land cultivation. There were cases where farmers who live in rural areas were not satisfied due to the fact that the Agro cards were distributed to individuals who do not live in rural areas but are land owners and visit the land on holidays. The farmers believe that such individuals should be given cards and subsequently their funding would be directly increased but they could not state a mechanism which could objectively divide the land owners into relevant categories. It was also revealed that the queues at the Liberty Banks were very long. There were cases when the cards were subscribed to elderly people who were not physically able to wait in long lines.

As focus group participant stated: "Here everyone was able to receive a card without any difficulties, only people who are living abroad were not able to do so. The lists were sent a couple of times and everybody was provided with a card"; "Everyone who wanted to, received a card, the local governments were very helpful"; "We received the cards for cultivation without any difficulties although the same cannot be said about the Agro cards which were distributed at Liberty Banks. About 90% of our population and farmers are over 80 years old and therefore they have great difficulty standing in lines where there are more than 1000 beneficiaries, this issue should be taken into consideration. Also some of the cards were distributed with delay since they were given out to legally trusted persons"; "Registration was not a problem but it would have been better if the local government distributed the cards since the lines were very long."

We can conclude that the reach of the cultivation project was complete, although there were certain technical difficulties in regard to the farmers receiving Agro cards.

Also the registration process for agricultural goods producers for the status of "supplier" was made very easy and did not generate any additional business barriers. "Supplier" status was given to existing trade facilities, as well as those entities who decided to open a retail store due to the program. The

candidate companies received all necessary information and did not have to pay any additional costs for registration. In regard to these issues, the respondents of the in depth interviews gave the following feedback: "We did not encounter any problems while registering for the status of "supplier" and we did not have to pay any additional fees. Also all of our questions were answered."; "Registration was very easy. There was no fee or any difficult procedures, all I had to do was go to Tbilisi once."; "The suppliers did not encounter any problems while participating in this program, on the contrary, we were given good advice."

It should also be noted that the range of agricultural goods which the suppliers provided met all the needs of the farmers. Farmers participating in the focus groups said that there was never a case when the products which could be purchased using the Agro cards (seeds and / or chemicals) were not physically available in the agro-shop. In addition, we have not identified any other technical or procedural problems related to the use of the card. With regard to Agro cards, the Agriculture Projects Management Agency, as well as suppliers, worked smoothly and efficiently. However, once again it should be noted that the farmers stated that it would be better to diversify the list of agricultural products which can be purchased using the Agro card.

As for cultivation services, with regard to this issue the assessments vary. Problems were detected in two main directions:

- (1) Low availability of machinery of small dimensions;
- (2) Long queues for the use of machinery and services which in some cases resulted in violating Agro terms.

This issue is further complicated by small, split areas of agricultural land. **The farmers stated the following opinions with regard to the improvement of cultivation services:**

Although the equipment available at the machinery park and relevant services are beyond the scope of the project, this issue is directly linked to the quality of the plowing activities which must be carried out in the framework of the project and therefore has a direct impact on its results. This issue is further complicated by small, split areas of agricultural land. When assessing the quality of plowing services, the farmers stated the following:

- "We had great problems with the Ltd "Mechanizator", only 3 out of 10 of their machinery is in good working condition, the rest would run for 3 days and then be out of order for 5. The company did not know where to get the parts to fix the machinery. There was a case when the local government authority spent its own money to fix a tractor. The work of the center was very unorganized and the local authorities and managers where the ones left to fix the problems."
- "The Ltd "Mechanizator" gave us a timetable for the cultivation of village lands beforehand. This timetable got mixed up. It would have been better if we had been given the opportunity to devise this timetable in order for land characteristics and other factors to have been taken into consideration. They did not agree with this idea and only took our help when the timetable got mixed up."
- "We are very dissatisfied. They will not plow the land which is less than 2500 meters. 800 families live in our village, out of which about 5 have lands which are more than 2500 meters. The second problem which we encountered was that there is not enough appropriate machinery, sometimes we might need the machinery for a couple of days because of external factors and at other

times the provided machinery is useless because of the characteristics of the land. Therefore it would be good if the state were to provide more machinery".

- "One of the biggest problems was that the machinery was not provided at the right time. This project was planned in an office and was very far from reality, since it did not take into consideration the time periods of farming activities. There was snow and the Ltd Mehanizatori was forcing the population to plow their lands, when in reality the land was not ready for this yet."

- "We have about 5200 hectares of arable land in our village, therefore it is important for the land to be processed at the right time. For this, about 50 machines are needed from about the end of March until the end of April for the work to be conducted at the right time. The Ltd Mehanizatori provided us with 20 machines, this wasn't enough half of the sufficient amount. This resulted in the lands being cultivated but the crops were not growing because of wrong timing."

Accordingly, we can conclude that a range of activities should be conducted in order to increase and upgrade the equipment available in the machinery park, while services and management should also be improved.

Also, it should be noted that the project did not consider harrowing, which the farmers stated had a negative impact on the yields. In addition, farmers in mountainous regions expressed the opinion that they did not need plowing services, but cutting services would have been beneficial, which was not envisaged by the project. Also, access to the combine harvester needed for harvesting was an issue. The following opinions were given by various farmers in regard to these matters: "First of all, sowing must be restored, even if this means that the 50 Lari cards are no longer distributed. Sowing gives us the final result, sowing and harrowing are most important although of course plowing is also necessary"; "This year, many of the lands were cultivated but seeds were not planted. The farmers will be able to buy products so that the crops are not destroyed, sowing is more of a difficulty."

The survey revealed the agriculture-trade needs of the farmers, which can be provided with the assistance of similar projects.

The following are the most frequently stated needs which can be accommodated by assistance:

- **Registration of Agricultural Land.** The issue of land registration is a problem in the whole country and goes beyond the competency of the cultivation project, although it must be stated that the planning, implementation and assessment process of such projects would greatly improve if lands were properly registered. The current beneficiary list is compiled by the representatives of the local authorities, and the farmers provide details of the land which they possess but do not own legally. In addition, in a number of cases, when the farmers did not know the purpose of the study they hid information regarding the area of land which they possessed/owned. One of the focus group farmers stated: "We thought that we would have to pay additional fees, we later corrected the information in the additional lists." This issue is also directly proportionate to the component of increasing financial resources. In reality, the farmers, who own a vast amount of land, but have not had it legally registered, are not able to benefit from banking services, including cheap credit programs. One of the farmers stated the following with regard to this issue: "The best thing which the state can do for us is to help us to legally register our lands. For example, if I could receive financial support for land registration rather than the Agro card, otherwise we are not able to cover the needed

costs. This is the first thing which should have been done before such projects were implemented. This would help to avoid many complications and would benefit almost all programs which are implemented in the field of agriculture."

- **Land Analysis.** We should consider that if this type of study were to have been conducted a few years earlier the farmers would most probably not have announced the need for land analysis. Although the project itself did not envisage these type of laboratory services, we should see it as a result of the project that the farmers realized what type of services they were in need of in order for them to receive a better yield. It is very important that farmers started to realize the importance of modern methods. They stated that when a project envisages the distribution of chemicals it should also consider the need for land analysis. They also stated that it would be very beneficial if the state would conduct a study of the different regions and give recommendations about what types of crops should be planted and where. The focus group farmers offered the following opinions: "you are distributing chemicals but since I don't have any knowledge about what my land needs I might be using the wrong ones. An analysis of the land is necessary. I know that this is related to great costs although I am not sure about the amount." "In the city, some house owners are given the opportunity to fix their roofs by cofinancing; it would good if the same type of opportunity for cofinancing could be provided for land analysis. The other issue in which I would like support from the state would be recommendations regarding the crops which would be most optimal for me to grow on my land and later support in the realization of the crops." "Agronomists also believe that it would be beneficial if land analysis could be conducted using the Agro cards. In this way, all farmers would be able to conduct an analysis of their lands."

- **Increase accessibility to information and training courses.** The fact that the farmers are motivated to receive more information is a very important achievement. They realized that the level of their knowledge is not enough for agricultural management and development. First of all, they must receive information with regard to the use of chemicals. For the time being, they receive necessary information from the suppliers themselves. It should be noted that retail stores and their personnel play a key role in accessibility of information of the farmers. It is possible for informational brochures and other materials to be distributed by these personnel. The same can be said about seeding materials. The farmers would like to use better seed material but do not have enough knowledge in this regard. Also, the farmers mentioned the idea of demonstration farms multiple times. They believe that the best method for them to learn is for them to witness and observe first hand a certain technology or approach in order to know what results they should expect. As farmers stated: "Personally, I am very interested in learning which crops should be cultivated together, but where can I go to get answers?"; "It would be very beneficial for us to be able to go for a study visit to a farm or agricultural plot. I have been to a demonstration farm. It was a cattle and bird farm which was being very well managed and was very profitable. It would be nice if a project were implemented which would have the goal of developing a demonstration farm. It would motivate farmers."; "Our most pressing need right now is a consultation center. The farmers are in need of consultation regarding which crops they should grow and the technologies of the ways they should be grown"; "Farmers should receive more information. When a farmer is told how to complete the work and is given the resources it gives the farmers motivation." It should be noted that if these issues are

considered properly, better results can be achieved in the state, nongovernmental and international sectors.

- **Opportunity to purchase agricultural tools and seedlings within the project.** As mentioned above, in a similar project in 2013 (which had a bigger budget and covered the presumption of acquisition of the agricultural tools) has become the contributor for the low assessment for the following 2014 year project. Farmers had certain expectations and maybe even thought out a list of what would they buy in the next year, but the listing of goods to be purchased by the card was limited, and with a much smaller budget. As a result, the overwhelming majority of participants believes that this change was negative. It is noteworthy that their discontent was due to the limitations of the list in the first place, rather than the reduced amount. However, other associated considerations, which fit within the frames of the program, are interesting. Part of the farmers who do not grow crops, consider that it would be very favorable and effective way to allow seedlings to be purchased with the Agro card. In this way, they would be able to find out the prospect of the development of new breeds. The farmers stated the following opinions: "Everything which is available in agricultural shops should be included in the Agro cards since the needs of the farmers are very different from another. What is the point of giving chemicals to farmers if they have no use for it? This is why they should be free to choose so the money is spent appropriately"; "Personally, I would have kept the option of buying tools with the Agro cards. Many lands were cultivated this year which haven't been touched in 20 years, now different tools are needed for maintenance, later wire fences need to be put up. This is why we should have had the option to buy tools using the cards"; "Seedlings should definitely be included. I have no knowledge with regard to seedlings and the ones which I should buy if this issue were to be included in the program it would give me some information and direction"; "It would be nice if I had the opportunity to purchase seedlings using the Agro cards and if the program also provided informational assistance with regard to the seedlings. If they turn out to be better plants I would use it in the future."

- **Increasing access to various types of technical services.** It is an accomplishment of the cultivation project that the farmers fully realized the role which modern machinery plays in farm work. Although, at the same time the demand for such services, including cutting, seeding, harvesting, etc has grown. Although most farmers expect and have the desire to receive state-funded services there are some who realize the economic efficiency of modern machinery and are ready to purchase the services with their own income. In their case, the main problem is accessibility to this machinery. This can be improved, not in the framework of the cultivation program, but by some other other state programs. However, it should also be noted that this would be connected with large financial expenditures. In addition to the training of personnel, it is rather a long-term and financially burdensome task. As farmers stated: "Harrowing was not included in this year's program, but there were farmers who wanted to conduct the work at their own expense, but encountered the problem of the delay of machinery, which resulted in very low harvest"; "There is no machinery for seeding in Baghdati, we don't understand why it is so difficult for this machinery to be transported. It is possible to sow Georgian and Hybrid corn with the machinery"; "There was a need for the land to be mowed. If the meadows are not mowed then the grass grows to be very rough. We do not have the

same needs as someone in Gori or Kakheti and our lands are not in need of cultivation, mowing is just as important, therefore this should be taken into consideration.”

- **Conduct of agriculture development activities, including the support of cooperative development and accessibility to insurance.** It should be taken into consideration that since the farmers realize that they are not able to manage large farms individually and find that they have problems in selling their products. Therefore, they are open to the idea of forming a cooperative. However, they have difficulties in conducting, organizing and dividing work. The cultivation program played a role in raising awareness towards this issue, even in the components which were assessed negatively. For example, when a farmer plowed his land but was not able to receive any yield, or the land area was too small and therefore not economically efficient. Subsequently, the farmer realized that he should take additional measures which, in the first place, would entail the enlargement of his farm land. The farmers also observed that their neighbors, who are members of cooperatives, were able to receive better results and therefore make more profit. It is important to note that several years ago, if you had mentioned insurance to a farmer it would have been of no interest to him. Although the farmers participating in the study expressed their interest and demonstrated that they fully understand the positive impact which insurance would have on their farming. They have the expectation that in the near future the state will launch a widespread agricultural insurance program. The farmers have the following opinions with regard to these issues: "The state policy is very important in this regard and is going in the right direction in my opinion, the only way for the agricultural sector to develop is for it to expand and for cooperatives to be created at this stage. It might not even be in the form of a cooperative but the main thing is for the lands to be united in order for them to be cultivated together, which will cost less"; "The largest problem which we face is that we have small lands. A couple of cooperatives have been established but they are still not able to function properly"; "It is a bit difficult to find 5 people who have the same ideas as you. Also, almost all families have loans and therefore cannot take out any additional loans. Therefore we need more support and more knowledge in order for us to carry out this task"; "In places where cooperatives are functions the local population learned about the specifics of loans and cooperatives. These type of places are Kvemo Kartli and Imereti, Tskaltubo, Vani. They have been selling on the market for years now and if they had 10,000 Lari profit per year not as a result of a cooperative receive 2,500 – 3,000 more"; "This program helped farmers to cultivate their lands and purchase the products by which they can protect their crops, but other external factors do not foster farming. There are some very good insurance programs which should be carried out extensively since this is one of the best ways of combating natural disasters.”

Of course most of the above mentioned issues are beyond the competency of the cultivation project, although it is very important that they be considered in order for the farmers to be able to develop sustainable agriculture. In any case, the issues pose important challenges for the state. Therefore, in the future it might be good to consider integrating the cultivation project into other projects or for more components to be added to it.

The role of the local governments in the the planning, implementation and evaluation processes should be mentioned during the evaluation of the program. Local government officials said that more involvement from their side would have increased the efficiency and effectiveness of the project. They

are sure that not only the government, but also the population should be involved in the project planning stage, even through surveys. They play an important role in terms of providing information.

Project Sustainability and Risks

For the purposes of the study, an analysis was conducted into the changes the implementation of the project brought to the farmers and how they would be able to continue their work in the absence of such a project. Therefore, if the achieved result may be maintained independently, then it is safe to say that the project reached its goal and its results are sustainable for long-term.

Main Changes. The farmers' evaluation of the magnitude of the changes brought by the project vary. It is obvious that most of the benefits of the cultivation project were gained by small-scale farmers and low-income families. Accordingly, the individuals who are unable to cultivate even a small plot of land at their own expense or managed to do so by using a hoe. As for farmers with a relatively large amount of agricultural land (more than 0.25 hectares), they were able to save money.

The nature of the cultivation project was somewhat social. The objectives of the project itself encompassed economic challenges. More attention should be given to economic efficiency in order to ensure the sustainability of this type of projects. However, it should be noted that the social effects of the project were not insignificant.

An analysis of the results of the focus groups and in-depth interviews revealed that the implementation of the project resulted in many changes. We must assume that from the perspective of sustainability and in general for rural development the most important changes concerned behavior, awareness and attitudes of farmers. Clearly, there were economic changes, although their magnitude is not enough for the development of farming. The study has identified the major changes which the project directly and / or indirectly achieved:

- **Land which had been abandoned for years was cultivated; Farmer's costs of cultivation reduced.** However, there were a number of cases, when due to objective and subjective reasons the farmers were not able to receive a yield from the land. In purely economic terms, the money spent on the cultivation of these lands was wasted since it did not produce any income. However, this was significant for agricultural development. Overall, farmers were able to save money on the costs of cultivation. In this regard, the following opinions were shared: "Through this program, lands which were uncultivated for 25 years were finally cultivated. Now 95% of the population will tell you that this program has had a positive affect. All this has had a very positive impact on the farmer's pocket"; "With this program, the farmer did not have to spend money on land cultivation. Before we would have had to sell a cow for this. Now, we received a profit without expense."

- **Farmers gained knowledge and realized the importance of new technology and methods.** Regardless of the fact that the cultivation project was not educational, it played a major role in raising awareness and knowledge in farmers. From the free cultivation component of the program, the farmers realized the importance of using modern machinery and, as a result, the demand for the use of machinery for not only cultivation but for sowing, harvesting, etc. developed. By using Agro cards, the farmers learned about new methods of using seeds and chemicals. They realized that the level of their knowledge was not sufficient for agricultural management and development.

- **Increase in the geographical availability of agricultural products and the development of retail sales in the field of agriculture.** The field of retail sales in agriculture greatly developed as a result of the project. On one hand, a field which is of great importance for agricultural farming was established and on the other hand the geographical availability of agricultural products increased for farmers (tools, chemicals, seeds, etc.). Also the study determined that the personnel of these shops are also providing farmers with information about how to properly use their products.

In order to assess the sustainability of the project, aside from the specific results there was an examination into whether the farmers would be able to continue their work independently from the project. The answers varied. Most of the farmers with lower income stated they would not be able to earn a profit from their land independently and the farmers with higher income stated that although they would still be able to harvest crops their profits would reduce since the project covered the costs of cultivation.

Generally, the respondents felt that same amount of lands would be cultivated and the same amount of crops harvested even without the help of the project. Notably, there were cases when the farmers participating in the focus groups felt that the project was very beneficial. The focus group farmers had the following opinions in this regard: "If the project were discontinued I would have great difficulty in cultivating my land"; "I think this was a very nice support project but the farmers should cultivate their own lands in the future without the help of the government. The field of agriculture will not be able to develop with these types of projects"; "I believe that the discontinuation of these types of programs would be catastrophic for the population of the village. This program slowed the process of the population leaving the village to live in the city"; "We know that this project cannot go on forever but it already resulted in changing many things in the right direction. The farmers who were willing to work even before this project will continue to do so."

Main risks of the project. The cultivation project was without doubt very beneficial for the small-scale farmers living in villages. However, at the same time it resulted in creating certain risks. The most serious risks are the following:

- **Expectations were created about the free obtaining of products and services and there was imposed a "minimum" amount of aid.** As a result, any future initiative with a lower budget will be met with dissatisfaction. This is proved by the fact that the local farmers were comparing this year with the 2013 program, which had double the budget.
- **The farmers imposed a greater responsibility on the state for the development of agriculture and feel they must do less work.** Some of the focus group farmers stated that the farmers are already accustomed to the state providing tractors for cultivation, as well as additional support afterwards. Previously, the farmers would be working using the resources which they had at hand, now they are waiting for the state to do the work for them.

Based on the overall assessment of the risks and changes resulting from the implementation of the project, as well as the level of accomplishment of the project objectives, we can conclude that the project has an average level of sustainability. In order to achieve very good results as well as a high level of sustainability, it is important for the field of agriculture to be developed as a whole, which in itself encompasses the type of activities which will expand the agricultural lands of the farmers,

deepen the knowledge and skills of the farmers, result in greater accessibility to financial resources and will implement modern technologies and methods in the country etc.

Main conclusions and recommendations

- The study revealed that the declared goal of the "Small Farmers 2014 Spring Project" has been mainly reached. The study showed that the part of the project which envisages the stimulation of the work of small-scale farmers has already been achieved, and there has been some progress in achieving a sustainable form of farming, although this issue calls for more activities to be carried out over a longer period of time. It also depends on the general economic situation in the country and level of agricultural development.
- Although the program was not aimed at increasing the geographical availability of agricultural products and the development of retail sales in the field of agriculture, we can conclude that these issues were major achievements of the project. In addition, the study revealed two important positive results: (1) increased sales in existing stores: (2) due to the program, new stores were opened in geographic areas where it was previously not profitable for them to operate.
- The project has changed the habits and attitudes of the farmers towards modern approaches and methods of agriculture production. If in the past, as a rule, farmers preferred to cultivate the land using traditional methods, now they are actually aware of the advantages of modern facilities. They started asking questions and seeking information, which is partly the result of the implementation of the project.
- The study revealed that there were no serious problems with regard to farmers receiving the status of beneficiary and being issued with an Agro card. All farmers received the relevant beneficiary status. There were a couple of cases where farmers were not on the participant list, but due to the efforts of the local governments, additional lists were made and all farmers were able to receive cards for land cultivation. The reach of the project was overall very good. The main problem with the Agro cards was the distance to banks and long queues therein.
- The registration process for agricultural goods producers for the status of "supplier" was made very easy and did not generate any additional business barriers. The "supplier" status was given to existing trade facilities, as well as those entities who decided to open a retail store due to the program. The candidate companies received all necessary information and did not have to pay any additional costs for registration. It should also be noted that the range of agricultural goods which the suppliers provided met all the needs of the farmers. With regard to Agro cards, the Agriculture Projects Management Agency, as well as suppliers, worked smoothly and efficiently.
- The main reason for dissatisfaction during the evaluation of the 2014 program was the low budget and limited agricultural product list covered by the Agro cards. The local farmers are comparing these factors with the 2013 program, which had double the budget of the 2014 program. For that reason, farmers were not given the option to purchase equipment in the course of the 2014 project.
- **Problems were detected in regard to cultivation services in two main directions:** (1) Low availability of machinery of small dimensions; (2) Long queues for the use of machinery and services

which in some cases resulted in violating Agro terms. Although the equipment available at the machinery park and relevant services are beyond the scope of the project, this issue is directly linked to the quality of the plowing activities which must be carried out in the framework of the project and therefore has a direct impact on its results. This issue is further complicated by small, split areas of agricultural land. **A range of activities should be conducted in order to increase and upgrade the equipment available in the machinery park, as well as the improvement of services and management.**

- It should also be noted that the project did not consider harrowing, which the farmers stated had a negative impact on the yields. In addition, farmers in mountainous regions expressed the opinion that they did not need plowing services, but cutting services would have been beneficial, which was not envisaged by the project. Also, access to a combine harvester needed for harvesting was a problematic issue.

- The survey revealed the agriculture-trade needs of the farmers, which can be provided with the assistance of similar projects. Among these, the most frequently stated issues are the following: (1) agricultural land registration; (2) analysis of the land; (3) provision of information and access to training courses; (4) the possibility to receive agriculture tools, seedlings in the framework of a project; (5) access to different technical services; (6) implementation of different rural development measures, including support for the development of cooperatives and access to insurance services.

- The changes brought about by the implementation of the project were identified and evaluated. The changes in the behavior, awareness and attitudes of the farmers were the most important in terms of sustainability. The main changes identified are as follows: (1) cultivation of lands, which had been abandoned for years and the reduction in farmer's costs for cultivation; (2) farmers received basic knowledge regarding the importance of new technologies and methods in agriculture; (3) increased number of retail stores and their geographic availability.

- The Spring Work Support Project was without doubt very beneficial for the small-scale farmers living in villages. However, at the same time it resulted in creating certain risks. The most serious risks are the following: (1) expectations were created about the free obtaining of products and services and the imposing of a minimum amount of aid; (2) the farmers imposed a greater responsibility on the state for the development of agriculture and, consequently, feel they must do less work.

- Based on the overall assessment of the risks and changes made as a result of the implementation of the project, as well as the level of accomplishment of the project objectives, we can conclude that the project has an average level of sustainability.

- In order to achieve very good results as well as a high level of sustainability it is important for the field of agriculture to be developed as a whole, which in itself encompasses the type of activities which will expand the agricultural lands of the farmers, deepen the knowledge and skills of the farmers, result in accessibility to financial resources and will implement modern technologies and methods in the country etc.

- In order to raise the effectiveness of similar projects it is important for the specific conditions of the regions to be taken into consideration. In this regard, it might be beneficial for projects to be planned at regional level, which will consider the needs of the population and the local agricultural characteristics.

Appendix

Appendix 1

Focus Group Guidelines - Last Adapted Version

The aim of the study: Collect qualitative data in order to evaluate and devise recommendations regarding the Small Farmers Spring Work Support Project 2014.

The specific objective of the guidelines: To receive information regarding the evaluation, opinions, attitudes, subjective perception and expectations of the farmers participating in the Small Farmers Spring Work Support Project 2014. Also, to identify their opinions on how specific issues can be resolved.

Moderators: Introduce the objectives of the study to the group members. Ask them to introduce themselves and state which services / products they used with their card.

Additional Issues:

- The in-depth interviews revealed that the farmers were comparing the 2014 program with the 2013 program. We should ask for an additional comparative analysis in this regard in order to determine what factors were carried out better in the previous year and why.

- Machinery and its appropriate usage remains an issues. They should talk about these issues, but try to encourage the farmers to mention other issues in order for the conversation not to be concentrated only in the direction of machinery.

Task #1 Evaluation of the relevance of the objectives of the program. Expectations regarding the objectives of the program.

#	Question / Issue	Internal tasks
1	In your opinion, what is the main purpose of this program and to what extent does it meet your needs? Or what should be the main goals / objectives?	1. Do not state the declared objectives of the program. 2. They should reveal what they believe to be (1) the objective of the program (2) what the objective should be. 3. Ask them to provide specific examples. 4. Ask them to explain their opinions. 5. Try to refrain from using descriptive words in order for the farmers to state their own opinions. 6. We should get a list of products / services.
2	Are there any services / products which this type of program should include (and does not include at this stage)? What and why?	

Task #2 Assessment of the effectiveness and impact of the program

#	Question / Issue	Internal tasks
1	In your opinion what were the main changes which the program brought to you and your family?	1. Receive a full and comprehensive response; If the individual compares it to a different program this comparison should be based on specific factors and should not be politicized. If the individual states that the program did not bring any change then ask them to explain why they decided to use the card. 2. When asking about the weaknesses of the program, it is important to find out specifically in what components are the participants satisfied and dissatisfied. 3. You should obtain a list of needs. 4. It is important that the procedural aspects of the program are assessed. Also, find out the difficulties which these procedures pose and subsequently their accessibility.
2	What are the biggest flaws of the program?	
3	What other agricultural needs did you have which the program did not envisage?	
4	Was the process of receiving a card easy for you? Were there any procedural complications? Were you able to use the card in accordance with your needs? Generally, how would you assess the process of obtaining and using the card? Do you know about any case when a person was not able to obtain or use his card? What was the cause of this?	

Task #3 Assessment of the sustainability of the program and identification of the main risks

Moderator: This section should identify the personal, subjective attitudes and perceptions of the farmers. Therefore, every opinion is interesting. However, it is necessary to explain and justify their statement: for example, based on specific experiences, if it is only based on personal feelings, or if they lack trust, etc.

#	Question / Issue	Internal tasks
1	How objective and transparent is the process of the farmers' recognition as beneficiaries of the program?	1. Try to find out their opinion in regard to the program, if they see it to be fair and if it fits the needs of the farmers. What should be changed in the process of the farmers' recognition as beneficiary, who should and shouldn't be given a card? 2. Determine whether the farmers were able to increase their income and as a result if they are thinking about cultivating their lands. 3. While asking the final question ask them to think ahead and imagine what should be done in the framework of this program in order for the farmers to be able to conduct their work independently in the future.
2	In your opinion, if the program were to no longer be carried out in the current form, would you be able to process the same area of land and receive the same amount of yield? Please elaborate.	
3	In your opinion what component should be added to the program for it to be more effective and sustainable?	

Task #4 Recieve recommendations for the improvement of the program

#	Question / Issue	Internal tasks
1	What would you change in this program? What components would you add or exclude - either procedural and / or substantive?	It is the aim of this section to devise recommendations and to reveal if any important issues were overlooked. Examples should be cited; The farmers should justify and state the logic behind their opinions.
2	What would be your main advice?	
3	Are there any more important issues and / or opinions (which have not been discussed) in respect to the program which you would like to give us?	

5. Guidelines for in-depth interviews - Draft Version

The aim of the study: Collect qualitative data in order to evaluate and devise recommendations regarding the Small Farmers Spring Work Support Project 2014.

Task #1. Evaluation of the relevance of the objectives of the program. What the objectives of the program are and what they should be.

1. How would you assess the results of the program, are they relevant with challenges the small-scale farmers face?
2. What are the basic needs of the small-scale farmers, which they will not be able to meet independently? Please state the needs and provide an explanation.
3. In your opinion, what should the main goal of this type of program be?
4. In your opinion are there any services / products which this type of program should include (which are not included at this stage)? Explain which and why.

Task #2 Assessment of the effectiveness and impact of the program

1. In your opinion what main changes did the program bring to the farmers?
2. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the program?
3. What needs did the farmers have which the program did not envisage?
4. As far as you know, was the process of receiving a card easy? Were there any procedural complications? Were the farmers able to use the card in accordance with their needs? Generally, how would you assess the process of obtaining and using the card?
5. Do you know about any case when a person was not able to obtain or use his card? What was the cause of this?

Task #3 Assesment of the sustainability of the program and evaluation of the main risks

1. How objective and transparent is the process of the farmers' recognition as beneficiaries of the program? Is the program available for all farmers in reality?
2. **In your opinion, if the program were to no longer be carried out in the current form, would you be able to process the same area of land and receive the same amount of yield? Please elaborate.**
3. In your opinion what component should be added to the program for it to be more effective and sustainable?

Task #4 Obtain recomendations for the improvement of the project

1. What would you change in this program? What would you add or exclude - either procedural and / or substantive?
2. In your opinion, what other benefits can this type of program bring and under what circumstances?
3. What would be your main advice?

4. Are there any more important issues and / or opinions (which have not been discussed) in respect to the program which you would like to give us?