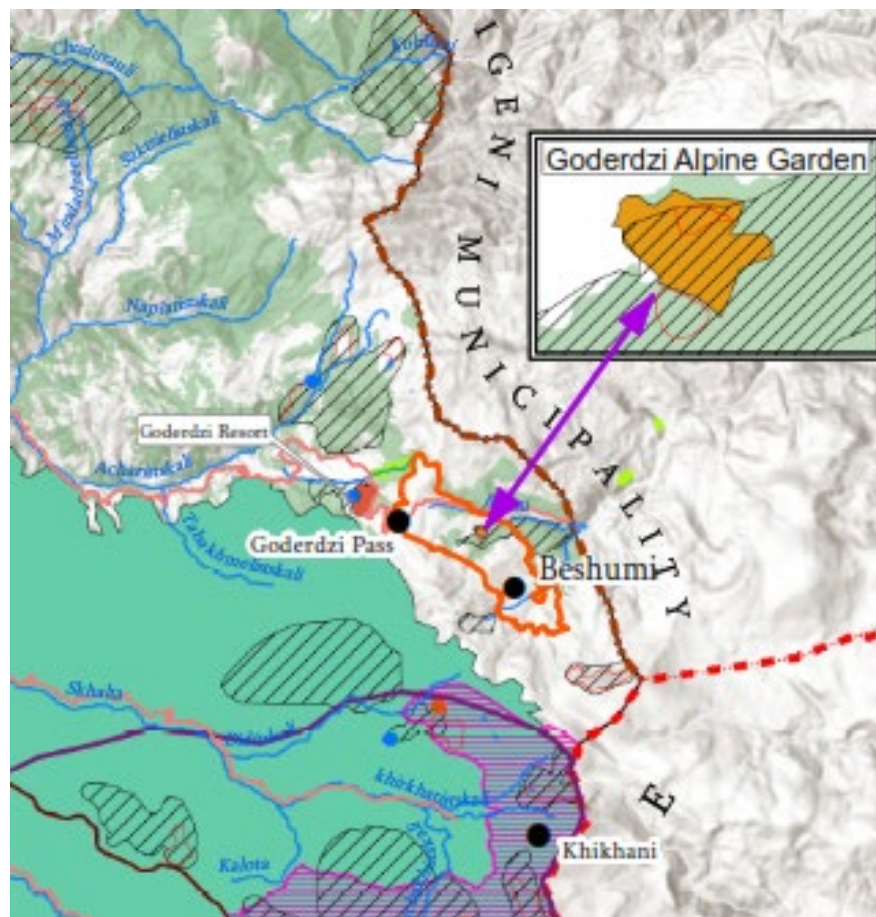


A QUALITATIVE IMPACT ASSESSMENT OF THE

ALCP2 GODERDZI SUSTAINABILITY Initiatives



JULY
2025

INTRODUCTION

Since 2022¹, the Goderdzi area in mountainous Ajara has become a focal point for testing more inclusive, locally driven models of sustainable development in Georgia. The region, rich in ecological value and increasingly targeted by tourism infrastructure projects, has seen a surge in citizen engagement and advocacy efforts - much of it catalyzed by the ALCP2 programme.

In response to the proposed Goderdzi Pass Development Master Plan, the ALCP2 facilitated the formation and capacity-building of local initiative group Goderdzi Friends, who have played a key role in influencing planning processes and advocating for environmentally responsible development. Their efforts have contributed to concrete amendments in development documents and helped prevent damaging construction near the Goderdzi Alpine Garden, a sensitive subalpine ecosystem.

ALCP2's work in Goderdzi is part of a broader approach to greening rural development by enabling citizens' environmental agency, establishing linkages with other grassroots movements like Save Bakhmaro, and improving biodiversity data to support sustainable land use planning. This included the creation of a [Biodiversity Map for Ajara](#) identifying thirty-one high conservation value zones. Additionally, the programme has supported institutional actors like Khulo Municipality and Ajara's Ministry of Finance and Economy in enhancing public participation mechanisms, especially among youth and rural women via the Women's Rooms network.

The Goderdzi initiative began with strong momentum, marked by active cooperation with local authorities and increasing citizen engagement. However, this progress slowed considerably from mid-2024 onward, following the adoption of the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence. The shifting political context created uncertainty for NGOs and civic initiative groups and affected cooperation with government bodies. While formal partnerships remained legally possible, the engagement process became less clear and responsive, disrupting the continuity of participatory efforts.

The following assessment builds on earlier efforts in Goderdzi by examining how rural inhabitants evaluate local development and the ALCP2 supported sustainability initiatives. Focusing on community-level perspectives, it explores what aspects of these efforts have endured and how people perceive their ability to influence decisions around natural resource use and sustainable development. The aim is to understand the current state of local participation amid a changing political environment.

¹ The ALCP2 programme runs from 2022-2027. In previous phases the ALCP facilitated the founding of the Goderdzi Alpine Garden and the Goderdzi Friends initiative group bringing together key stakeholders in environmental conservation and development.

METHODOLOGY

In July 2025, ALCP2 conducted fifteen in-depth semi-structured interviews with rural inhabitants of Khulo Municipality to assess perceptions of local development and sustainability. The sample included eight men and seven women, aged between thirty and seventy-three years. Participants were selected to reflect a diversity of experiences across different villages.

Interviews focused on residents' views of past and current development efforts, their engagement in decision-making processes, and perceptions of natural resource use in the area. The data were recorded in an Excel spreadsheet and analysed using thematic analysis to identify key patterns and insights related to sustainable development and local participation. In this regard, the programme used **contribution not attribution** analysis, aiming to understand how its interventions, alongside other factors and actors, contributed to observed changes within the local system.

GENERAL PERCEPTIONS OF LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

Over the past three years, residents have observed a mixture of positive developments and ongoing challenges. Improvements cited include road construction, better electricity access in some areas, an increase in tourism and new services such as waste collection and kindergartens. However, unfinished infrastructure projects, irregular water supply, limited access to healthcare, declining agricultural activity and continued youth outmigration remain serious concerns. Women mainly talk about challenges related to water and wastewater systems, while men are more concerned about unstable electricity. While some viewed the pace of change as hopeful, others stressed a sense of stagnation and neglect, especially in more remote settlements.

GOVERNMENT REGULATION AND COMMUNITY INFLUENCE

Nine respondents (five men and four women) expressed generally positive or neutral views on how government bodies regulate local development and manage natural resources. Examples of effective oversight included forest protection measures, controls on illegal logging, enforcement of construction permits and pasture management. Some respondents, mainly men, described successful influence on decision-making, such as having input on infrastructure planning or negotiating changes to public projects.

In contrast, six respondents (three men and three women) were more critical, pointing to examples of poor planning, environmentally harmful activities (e.g. gravel extraction and hydropower development), inefficient use of municipal budgets and limited engagement with communities. Many described a sense of exclusion, citing delayed or inaccessible public information, lack of follow-up by authorities, and perceived favouritism towards investors or politically connected individuals.

PRESERVATION OF LOCAL LANDSCAPE AND CULTURAL HERITAGE

Views were also split on whether local natural and cultural features are taken into account in development planning. Seven respondents (four women and three men) believed such aspects are considered, referencing the suspension of uncontrolled construction on grasslands, preservation of traditional architecture and respect for local customs like the Shuamtoba festival. However, eight respondents, (five men and three women) , felt these aspects are largely neglected. According to the survey, men were more critical in evaluation and more open to speaking about concerns. Their concerns included unchecked construction booms, illegal tree cutting, use of outdated environmental data in planning and restricted building rights for locals. Many felt that development was increasingly driven by profit rather than environmental or cultural sensitivity and they questioned whether long-term sustainability was genuinely being considered.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Most respondents reported receiving information about local development and natural resource issues through informal channels such as neighbours and friends (93%), followed by TV reports (80%) and social media platforms (67%). It indicates that the Journalism Resource Centre(JRC) created content on TV and social media is also available for locals.. Fewer respondents, mainly men, cited formal sources, such as local municipality representatives (53%), the Ministry of Finance and Economy of Ajara (13%) or public hearings (7%). While both men and women get information mainly from informal networks, TV reports and social media, men have more access to information from formal sources such as local municipality and regional government representatives.

Table 1: Where do you get information about local development and natural resource usage?

#	INFORMATION SOURCE	PERCENTAGE (%)
1	Neighbors/friends/informal networks	93%
2	TV reports (Agro News, Ajara TV, TV25)	80%
3	Social media (Facebook)	67%
4	Local Municipality representatives	53%
5	Ministry of Finance and Economy of Ajara	13%
6	Public hearings at Khulo Municipality City Hall	7%

The Goderdzi Alpine Garden is widely recognized by both men and women respondents as a key asset for the area. Most saw it as a space for nature protection and recreation, with many also noting its value for plant conservation and environmental education.

Beyond its symbolic and ecological role, respondents described tangible benefits for local communities, especially for women. These include a rise in tourism, increased demand for local products (e.g. dairy, crafts), growth in guesthouse and cottage rentals and new employment opportunities. While respondents found it difficult to cite exact figures or attribute economic growth solely to the Alpine Garden, they clearly acknowledged that it has contributed to local economic activity.

Eight respondents (five men and three women) were aware of nearby construction activity around the garden. Five, mainly men, expressed concern or opposition, raising questions about fairness (e.g. why investors are permitted to build while locals are restricted) and potential environmental harm. All respondents agreed that the forests surrounding the garden should be protected, citing their ecological, medicinal and cultural value, as well as their importance in maintaining the area's beauty and appeal.

The respondents, especially women, also highlighted the garden's role in social interaction and community building and community pride emphasizing their feeling of ownership and a strong desire to protect it.

CONSTRUCTION PERMITS AND REGULATION

Most respondents had little or no personal experience with obtaining construction permits. Those who had tried, mainly men, described numerous barriers: frequent rejections (especially in Shkernali), high costs of drafting building plans, lack of land registration among locals, and perceived favouritism towards well-connected individuals or investors. Others (mainly women) reported not knowing how to apply at all. Nevertheless, several respondents, both men and women, observed that control over construction has recently tightened, with new regulations being enforced more strictly. Police and municipal officials were said to impose fines for unpermitted construction - some as high as 5,000 GEL - and to restrict access to construction materials, particularly in summer pasture areas like Beshumi and Shkernali.

KNOWLEDGE OF THE DEVELOPMENT MASTERPLAN

Four respondents, two men and two women, indicated that they had heard about the Goderdzi Pass, Shkernali and Beshumi development masterplan, and they also mentioned that they participated in the public discussion process. However, they did not possess detailed knowledge of its content or implementation status.

Despite some public discussions, most respondents felt that broader community awareness about natural resource management and local development remains limited. While a few described civic actions - like attending hearings, petitioning local authorities or protesting unwanted construction - many, both men and women, felt that their opinions were ignored or filtered. Some cited fear of losing state assistance as a reason for avoiding open criticism.

CONCLUSION

The Goderdzi initiative began with strong momentum, demonstrating the potential of locally driven sustainable development when supported by active civic engagement and responsive institutions. While the changing political climate since 2024 has limited public participation and disrupted cooperation, respondents' insights show that some positive changes - such as improved regulation of illegal construction, enhanced forest protection, expanded tourism opportunities and greater community pride around the Alpine Garden - have endured. Overall, results suggest that outcomes would likely have been stronger if not for the restrictive political environment, yet the foundations for more inclusive and sustainable development remain in place.

Annex 1: Questionnaire of a Qualitative Impact Assessment of the ALCP2 Goderdzi Sustainability Initiatives

D1. Municipality	
D2. Village (Pasture)	
D3. Age	
D4. Sex	
D5. Ethnicity	

General block

G1. Overall, thinking about the last 3 years, how would you evaluate the development at Goderdzi/Khulo Municipality?

- What is improving and what are the main challenges?

G2. In your opinion, how well do governmental bodies regulate local development and natural resource usage in your area?

G3. Do you think local landscape, natural resources, and traditions are considered in designing and implementing projects in your municipality?

1. yes.

2. No.

Why do you think so? [examples]

G3.1. Do you think that citizens like yourself can influence decisions about local development in your area?

1. Yes

2. No

Why or why not

G3.2. Where do you receive information about local development and natural resource usage and management in your municipality? [more than 1 answer can be accepted]

1. Local Municipality representatives [village reps, Women's Rooms, etc.]
2. Ministry of Finance and Economy of Ajara representatives
3. Architectural Company working on the plan
4. Environmental Specialists working on the plan
5. Local initiative group Khulo and its Perspectives (Jemal Saginadze)
6. TV reports (Agro News, Ajara TV, TV25)
7. Public hearings at Khulo Municipality City Hall
8. Social media (Facebook)
9. Neighbors/friends/informal networks
10. Other _____

Goderdzi Alpine Garden

G4. Now let's talk about the Goderdzi Alpine Garden, what do you think the purpose of the garden is?

1. Nature protection
2. Plant conservation
3. Environmental education
4. Recreational spot
5. I don't know

Other _____

G5. What has changed for you and your community after opening Goderdzi Alpine Garden?

G5.1. Did Goderdzi Alpine Garden affect your household income or income of your neighbors/community members? [how?]

- Increased number of tourists
- Increased sales of local products/crafts
- Increased economic activity in the area [e.g. new services, HoReCa]
- *Anything negative?*

G6. Have you seen/heard about construction next to Goderdzi Alpine Garden? What do you think about it?

G7. Do you think Goderdzi Alpine Garden surrounding forests needs to be protected? Why? Why not?

Construction Permits, Masterplan and Development

G8. Can you describe your experience or what you have heard about the process of getting a construction permit in your area? What makes it easy or difficult?

G9. How does the local government oversee or regulate construction permits in your area?

- In your opinion, how effectively does the local government preserve the cultural or architectural authenticity of the area?
- Are there any consequences, such as fines or penalties, for carrying out construction without official permits?

G10. Have you heard about the Beshumi, Shkernali and Goderdzi Pass development masterplan/planned development?

1. Yes
2. No

What do you know about it?

G11. Were you involved in discussions about the planned project?

1. Yes, I attended meetings in villages
2. Yes, I attended public hearings in City Hall
3. Yes, I discussed it with the village representative
4. Yes, I attended meetings held by Khulo and Its Perspectives
5. No

G13. In recent years, have you noticed any increase in local awareness or discussions about how natural resources are used or how local development decisions are made? If yes, what kind of changes or discussions have you seen?

31. What is the Access and Agency on local development (*please tick corresponding cell*):

	Access			Agency		
	Women (girls)	Men (boys)	Both	Women (girls)	Men (boys)	Both
Information about Planned/Ongoing development projects/constructions						
Information about laws, regulations, permits						
Attending Public hearing/village meetings						
Taking Construction permit						
Leasing Land from the Forestry or other government entity						
License/Permit on natural resource use						
Complaints on construction without permit, new project idea/design, insensible use of natural resources						