

Local and regional planning in Georgia

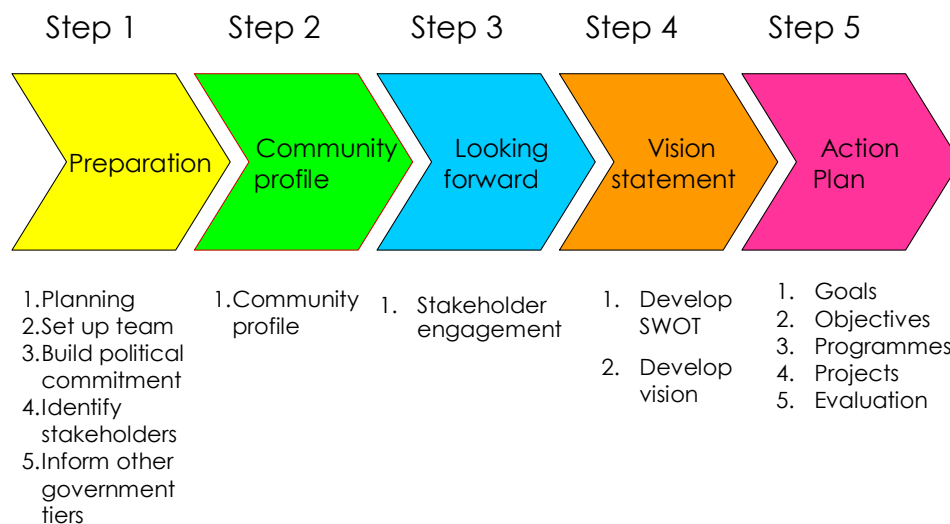
KS has worked with the National Association of Local Authorities in Georgia (NALAG) and the Council of Europe (CoE) Centre of Expertise for Local Government Reform to enable NALAG promote for its members a bottom-up, inclusive, needs oriented approach to local and regional planning in Georgia. The programme ran in Guria, a rural region in Western Georgia on the Black Sea Coast from 2008 through 2012. This experience has become a Georgian national standard for local planning.

The objectives were to enable the planning of appropriate services to reflect the needs and aspirations of local people and to equip communities to address the challenges of global to local change. Guria, like other regions in Eastern Europe, is still adapting to the opening of their economies to the rest of the world. For example, Guria was a major supplier of tea and citrus fruits to the former Soviet Union. This market closed, leaving a critical need for new products, fresh markets and new infrastructure investment.

The programme ran in two stages. The first stage, 2008 to 2011, involved developing five year strategic municipal plans for the three local municipalities within Guria: Ozurgeti; Lanchkhuti and Chokhatauri. During 2011 and 2012, these municipal strategies became building blocks for developing a broader outward looking strategy for Guria region.

The local plans have been developed by adapting to Georgian needs, a methodology developed by the CoE and piloted in Albania. It is based on a straight forward five step process, as illustrated in figure one.

Figure One – Framework for local planning



The programme provided considerable benefits. It was strongly owned by the regional and local leadership in Guria, all of whom signed a memorandum of understanding with KS, NALAG and CoE to commit to the programme. It built local capacity. For the first time councillors and officials participated in bottom-up, participatory planning, involving the public, businesses and NGOs. Previously, local municipalities were used to top-down Soviet style planning.

Work on the plans was led by a local project leader. The first appointee was so successful, he was elected as the local Member of Parliament! The external international input was limited to methodology, funding and training support.

The programme enabled the municipalities to identify a clear set of strategic priorities with their communities. By documenting these priorities into a plan, it enabled the municipalities and region to access extra government and international donor funding for infrastructure investment in Guria.

It was the catalyst for a pilot e-government project to electronically connect nine villages (three in each municipality) with the municipality head offices. Citizens improved access to information and better capacity to communicate with their elected representatives.



The project received considerable local and national media coverage in Georgia. It generated interest within the government of Georgia. From 2012, municipal planning and programme budgeting is obligatory for all Georgian municipalities.

Since late 2010, Georgian experts are involved in the implementation of a Council of Europe Strategic Municipal Planning project in Armenia, so to favour exchange of know-how and experience, with Armenian counterparts.

The conclusions and lessons learnt from the Georgia planning project are also being used in the framework of the drafting of a new Council of Europe tool on strategic municipal planning and performance management, published and disseminated to all European local authorities in 2011.

Table One - Lessons from Guria

What to do	What not to do
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on a successful planning process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on the paper output
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build local human capital and capacity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work on the paper work as the primary objective
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local project leadership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outside project leadership
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognise local ownership and citizen participation is crucial 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Value professional planning skills from outside

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop small practical project wins along-side the planning process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus only on planning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build on incremental change, realising established strengths and opportunities and learning from history 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Go for a revolution and try to start all over again
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate change using local skills and building local expertise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • import external skills and expertise
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Celebrate success by valuing the local contributions made to the process and the outputs from it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take local contributions to the planning process for granted
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask how have the people changed? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask how has the paper work changed?