



Report on the Assessment Study of services of the information and consulting service centres of the Ministry of Agriculture of Georgia



ASSOCIATION OF YOUNG
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Research Methodology

The study of the farmers' needs and demands for the services of the information-consulting entities was conducted under the framework of the project "Enhancing Small Farmer's Cooperatives' Productivity In Imereti And Racha-Lechkhumi Region". The project is implemented with the financial support of the European Neighborhood Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development in Georgia (ENPARD).

European Neighborhood Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development (ENPARD) is a policy initiative, which acknowledges the importance of agriculture with regard to food safety, sustainable production and rural employment.

The program duration is five years (January 2012 – January 2016) and is focused on: formation of information and consulting centers for village farmers, supporting the government in adoption of the laws, which support the cooperation between farmers and distribution of rural development grants for scale-oriented economic growth for the purposes of development of agriculture.

Under the ENPARD program 15 million Euros has been issued as grants, which has been distributed among 4 consortiums. One of the above organizations is PIN – consortium of organizations "People in need", which is comprised of the following organizations: "People in Need" (PIN), biodiversity association "Elkana" and the Association of Young Economists of Georgia. All four of the consortiums has its own area of work. The above consortium is focused on the following municipalities: **Oni, Ambrolauri, Kharagauli, Tkibuli, Zestaponi, Baghdati, Terjola, Tskaltubo and Khoni**. The project aims to achieve the following results:

- Increase of the farmers' income through using of more efficient business practice and successful development of business-oriented small farmers' and entrepreneur groups;
- Increased agricultural income and volume of sales based on usage of the modern and improved farming, production, processing and marketing techniques;
- Improved agribusiness environment and agriculture sector regulating legislation as a result of direct participation of farmers and rural populations in policymaking processes.

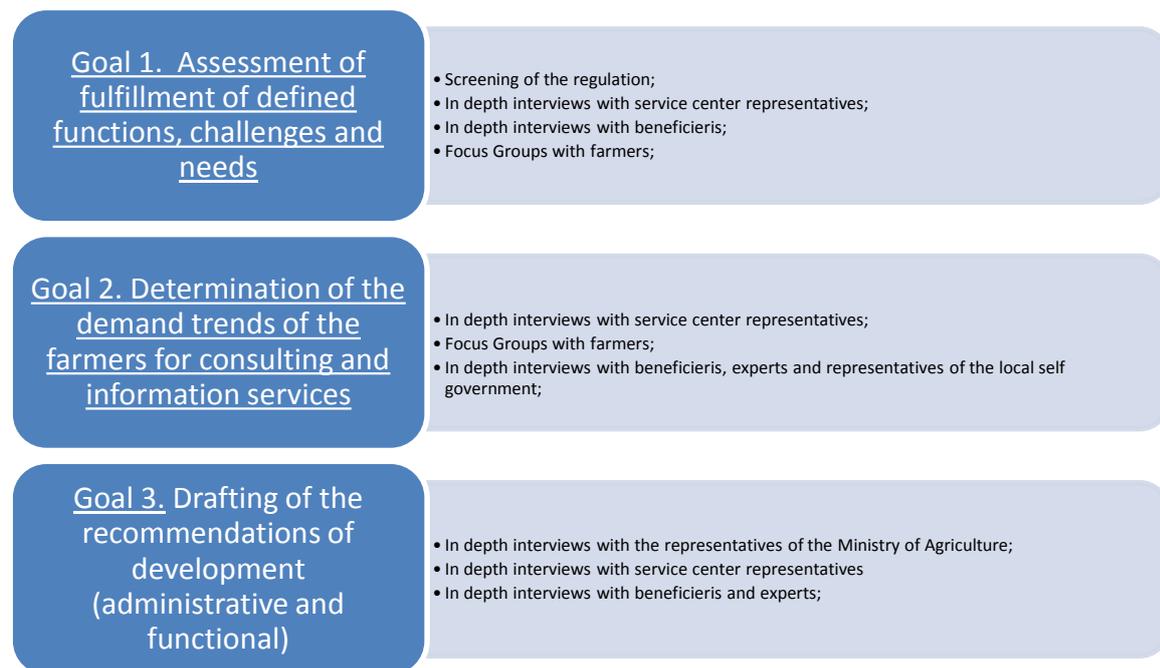
The aim of this study is the following: The qualitative assessment of the rights and duties determined by the regulation of the information and consulting entities of the territorial bodies of the Ministry of Agriculture of Georgia, determination of the trends in the demands for agro-consulting services by farmers and preparation of appropriate recommendations.

The study covered the farmers, representatives from the local self-government, Agronomists and representatives of the local consulting service centers of the target municipalities of the project - "Enhancing Small Farmer's Cooperatives' Productivity In Imereti And Racha-Lechkhumi Region".

In addition, it is important to note that the study is focused on the identification of issues and needs raised by the farmers.

Regardless of the fact that consulting entities operate in all regions of Georgia, the area of the study was focused on the nine target municipalities determined by the project - "Enhancing Small Farmer's Cooperatives' Productivity In Imereti And Racha-Lechkhumi Region". Although the achieved results and prepared recommendations can be generalized and regarded as relevant for a qualitative assessment of the demand on the entities and their services.

Research objectives and tools



Two directions were determined as study tools:

(1) Focus groups with the participation of farmers

In total, 9 focus groups were conducted, 1 group in each target municipality; the number of participant farmers was 10-12. Sectoral and geographical diversification was ensured during the selection of farmers. In addition, all the participants were the existing consumers of one or more services provided by the center. Additionally, the following criteria was taken into consideration during the group recruitment process: a minimum of 3 and maximum of 5 farmers, who are also the active beneficiaries of relevant regional units.

Focus groups were held in accordance with determined Guidelines (Appendix 1), audio recordings and relevant transcripts were prepared. In addition, the participants filled in a 1-page survey, with the goal of determining a list of demanded services.

(2) In-depth interviews with interested parties

Category	Amount	Task #
Regional Office	2	1, 2, 3
Municipal Service	9	1,3
Ministry of Agriculture	1	3
Active beneficiary farmer of the service centers	9	1,2,3
Field expert	1	2,3
Agricultural Cooperative	2	1,2
Representatives of the Municipality	3	2,3

A framework guideline (Appendix 2) was prepared for in-depth interviews, which was adapted in accordance with the respondent's competence and profile.

Review of the regulation of the Information - Consultation Services

Order №2-63 of the Minister of Agriculture of Georgia on the Approval of the Typical Regulation of the Information - Consultation Service Units of the Territorial Authorities of the Ministry of Agriculture of Georgia defined the rights and responsibilities which shall be carried out by the above service units.

For the purpose of the study "Article 2. Rights of the Units" was listed under basic functions.

Collection of information - Analysis

- Creation of **updated informational database for the total number of area of planted agricultural crops** in existing **farm lands** during the year;
- A **preliminary estimate of harvest** for each crop, receipt and processing of operational information;
- **Active participation in selecting**, consulting and monitoring of target projects to be implemented by the Ministry;
- Collection, processing and analysis of the information regarding the **agricultural product prices** on the local market and **the value of the means of production**;
- **Study of the existing potential of warehouse and processing enterprises with regard to plant and animal primary product production**;
- Submitting information to the Ministry in a timely manner regarding the **revealed problems and existing situation** in the field of agriculture;

Consultations, information

- Active participation, **consulting** and monitoring in the selection process of **target projects** to be performed by the ministry;
- Giving information to interested parties concerning the **effective legal and taxation obligations** in the field of agriculture; Timely submission of information to the community about the **policy and programs of the Ministry**;
- **Economic assessment** (including production costs rendered for the production means used) of the plant and animal **product production technological process** and provision of recommendations to the interested parties;
- Gathering and processing of information about **plant and seed materials** available on the market, issuance of the consultations to the interested parties in respect of their specifications;
- Provision of the information to the interested parties about the **access to mechanization** and their rational use;
- Collection of the information regarding **plant protection mechanisms** available on the market and provision of the information to the interested parties about their proper usage;
- Issuance of consultations to the interested parties on technical measures related to preparation for **harvesting** and other organizational issues;
- Give recommendations to the interested parties on **storage conditions and timing of harvested crop**;
- Giving consultations to the interested parties for the purpose of **effective use of pastures**;

- Provision of consultations to the interested persons regarding **mandatory veterinary and sanitary measures** during the year in order to protect animal health;
- Provision of the recommendations **on the feed ration for meat and dairy** cattle in order to maintain the growth and stability of their productivity;

Trainings and teaching

- Arrangement of a variety of trainings and informational meetings;

Popularization

- Popularization of **modern methods** of **planting-care** of agricultural crops and the support of its implementation;
- Popularization of **modern methods and technologies of animal breeding-care** for their implementation;

Cooperation with different parties, etc.

- Active cooperation with state and local self-government bodies, international donor organizations, extension centers and participation in the meetings;
- Participation in commissions and work groups for liquidation activity of the consequences of natural disasters in accordance with the law, analysis and assessment of the emergency situations in separate fields and areas of agriculture;
- participation in the creation of a database in the field of statistics within its competence and coordinated activity;
- Performance of other rights and obligations envisaged under the Georgian law.

Assessment of the services provided by the Information - consulting entities

It is doubtless that the formation of information consultation entities at local levels played and will continue to play an important role in terms of development of the field of agriculture in Georgia. This is confirmed by objective results as well as by the opinion of beneficiary farmers, local self-government representatives and experts of the agricultural field.

Territorial units also play an important role in development and implementation of agricultural policy.

According to the farmers, the most important role of the consultation entity is the opportunity to receive consultation and information. The study results show that on the one hand, **in most cases farmers receive the desired information, and on the other hand, the entities are also well-equipped to deal with tasks, such as the implementation of innovations and new features and they provide information to local farmers and convince them that extensive methods should be applied.**

The focus group participant farmers state the following opinion in respect of the above issues:

- „I have frequent communication with this entity, for example I can recall the consultations in respect of tea, as well as in connection with the issues related to

watermelon and potatoes. Anytime I need to perform some agricultural activity I contact to this entity and they give me advice on issues such as which seed is better to use";

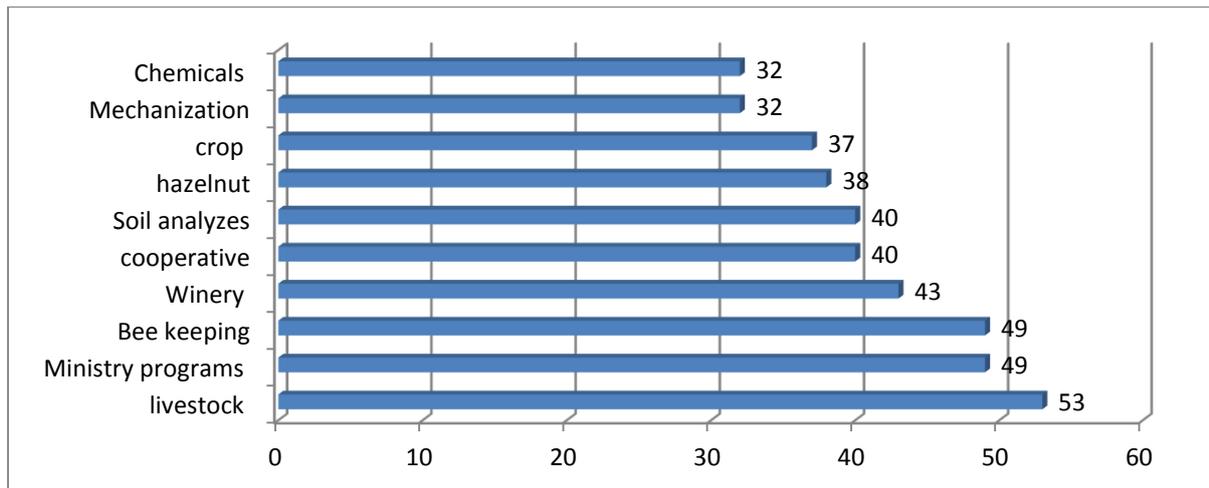
- „E.g. The service center helped me with suggestions about potato crops, this entity suggested various types of seeds in respect of which we had discussions and I have gone through these issues. Even more, in respect of mechanization this entity assisted me with finding the machinery, which I needed. As regards seminars and courses, I am always informed about seminars and trainings and attend whenever I have the time;
- “It is difficult to numerate the number of the consultations they have provided to, we obtained the first consultation in respect of creation of a cooperative. We run a greenhouse cooperative and always communicate with the service center regarding questions. The representatives of consultation entity met the whole village in connection with corn, the people received consultations and they offered the chemicals which appeared very effective.”

Consultations

The focus group participants of the target regions stated the fields, for which they most often apply to representatives of the entity for consultation and also they rated their level of satisfaction. The focus group participants mostly apply to the center for more information in relation to the issues, such as cattle, various support programs of the Ministry of Agriculture, viticulture, cooperatives, etc.

The farmers stated that the issue of getting information and consultation on participation in the programs of the Ministry of Agriculture was discussed separately. Although, in general, they are satisfied with the quality and timing of receipt of the information, they consider that they need more support and assistance in order to be able to participate in these programs. Regardless of the above, they all state that these consultation entities are where they are able to, on the one hand, receive information on existing initiatives and on the other hand get practical advice for participation in the program. The main obstacles occur during the bureaucratic and documentation preparation phase of the process. The farmers do not have enough knowledge and qualification to prepare these documents and properly take part in the process.

Figure 1. The most frequently mentioned areas (consultations)



In addition, it should be taken into consideration that as a rule the beneficiary farmers indicate that they are either satisfied or very satisfied with the service received. They receive from the entity not only verbal consultations, but often multiple cases were stated, when specialists were hired for more specific advice.

In general, it is impossible for specialist of all fields to be presented at the offices. However, when the farmer faces a particular problem, he asks for consultation from the relevant experts. The entities could, at least partially, solve this problem and in many cases hired additional experts. The respondents shared their own experiences in this regard:

- „I have newly planted nut farms, I mainly got all information about nut farming from the service center, more specifically about diseases. The invited specialists and provided us with information in this fields and we got results".
- „I received all the information which I needed and apart from this they helped me conduct a land analysis in Zestaponi, they gave me recommendations and advices. I took their recommendations into consideration and I got better results this year".

As mentioned above, the main problem which farmers stated was the lack of specialists at the centers. In their opinion, additional staff should be provided to the centers in order for the personell to be able to visit to the land plots and farms and provide on site consultations. They deem that this type of working method for receiving information and specific advice is most effective. It is also necessary for business consultants to be provided in the centers, which will help them in the development of their business and financial plans: „it would be very beneficial if staff members were added to the service centers since more on-site consultations are needed for which there are not enough human resources at the moment." "Extension of the entities is required, there is lack of the consultants and therefore, I discuss the issue of addition of consultants. There are many new types of technologies and methods of producing crops therefore the farmers are in need of on-site consultations which is why additional staff would be very helpful"; "We have difficulty with financial accounting therefore economists and programists should be included in this service which could help us in this regard. There exists taxation system,

in respect of which the farmers has no information. Once the farmer gets knowledge in this regard then it can share the knowledge to others". - The farmers stated.

Popularization of modern methods and technologies

It is difficult to rank the list of authorities in respect of priority or importance. We can clearly conclude that all the functions are vital to the development of agriculture. However, it is noteworthy that implementation of modern methods and technologies are very important especially in order to achieve long term tangible results.

It is important to note that it is impossible the modern methods to be implemented in the whole country over a short term period. This can happen only with gradual, consistent work and over a long term period. Furthermore, there has to be initiative from both the state to provide opportunities and the farmers to be motivated in implementing them.

Two main directions can be distinguished from the center functions:

- Popularization of **modern methods of planting-care of agricultural crops** and support of its implementation;
- Popularization of **modern methods and technologies of cattle-breeding**, for their implementation;

For the time being we can conclude that the stated goals are partially fulfilled and further effort is still needed from different parties. Additionally, it is worth mentioning that the service center representatives have limited resources for implementing new technologies and therefore it is necessary to have further large-scale state programs in this field.

As for the farmers, some of them are ready to implement modern methods and technologies, and while others are already in the process of doing so and clearly recognize the role of the service centers in this regard. There were cases when new specific fields were explored as a result of the work of the service centers.

The focus group participants frequently mentioned that their neighbors, relatives had planted new varieties and that they were planning on doing the same the following year. Therefore, the service centers can use this approach for the popularization of their services, if they actively popularized the farmers which are the "pioneers" of the extension of service centers.

In addition, it is noteworthy that the studied agencies have active and direct communication with the village population, which is definitely a great asset for the successful implementation of the above-mentioned field and not only.

In this regard, the respondents shared their experiences and visions:

- „Our farmers are unable to adequately use modern technologies, the old methods of work are no longer cost-effective, so we need to work hard to persuade these people to switch to other technologies and new crops and not only corn, e.g. vegetables...“

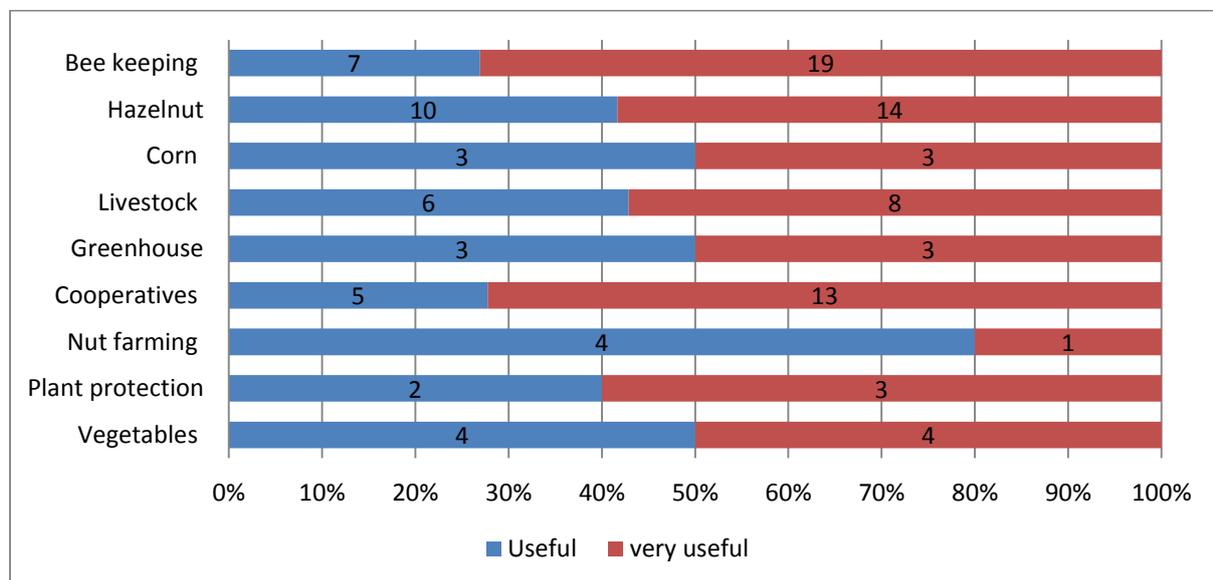
- "The participation of farmers in these processes is not active enough, this is sometimes due to their financial situation since farmers do not have the needed money, another reason is that awareness is needed in order for these farmers to become more involved, there are some who are actively involved"
- „One of the most important things is the invitation of experts, which we do systematically. We also conduct tours for interested farmers in order to show them successful farms. This has shown some results since after taking them to Saguramo and showing them vineyards a couple of farmers started using modern methods. Greenhouse farming has been developing at a rapid pace. There are up to 300 new greenhouses in the last 3 years, arched roofs and heating systems are being made step by step".

Trainings and teaching

It is noteworthy that if years ago, public or non-governmental organizations and representatives had to convince farmers that it would be beneficial and necessary for them to gain new knowledge and implement innovations, this challenge has been overcome and now the farmers have an increasing demand for knowledge and to replace outdated approaches. In this regard, the role of these service centers are irreplaceable.

The focus group participants of the target regions stated which trainings they participated in. It should be noted that the participants assessed the trainings as useful or very useful.

Figure 2. Assessment of the most frequently stated trainings



In regard to learning, farmers underline the importance of participating in exhibitions and visits to demonstration land plots. Additionally, despite the fact that the farmers are generally pleased with the provided learning courses they feel that the service centers should do more in the direction of teaching and offer more diverse opportunities, for example the preparation of particular farmer groups; study visits to demonstration or already well developed farms and etc. „The service centers should have a determined number of farmers which will be trained each

year, for example in other countries where they would work on a farm for free in order to gain experience. This is very important in our circumstances. The service center has information regarding what field of agriculture where each farmer works and therefore should be able to determine the type of trainings which are needed. This will increase the work effectiveness". "I work in the field of bee farming, I have attended a couple of trainings but still feel that practical trainings are also needed together with the theoretical ones. It would be beneficial for experimental farms to be created in leading fields of agriculture."

In addition, it is important to note that local services pay great attention to the farmers' education and awareness issues, however, although as they state themselves they devote less time on training issues, which is reasonable since there is a far greater demand for consultations and data collection requires a lot of time and effort. The center employees agree with the views of farmers that they lack the human resources in order to fulfill these functions. However, the Ministry plays an important role in organizing and providing trainings for the farmers. On its part the service centers provide information to the Ministry in relation to the fields of agriculture which are in greatest demand. Furthermore, the centers are also in close partnership with international and non-governmental organizations and they share information about fields which are in demand. The service center representatives have shared the following experiences in regard to these issues:

- The teaching topics are usually defined during the meetings. Last year we had a German specialist, who spoke regarding cattle. The farmers met with Israeli representatives regarding vegetable popularization. We have contact with the Ministry's science center and we conduct on-site lectures for animal farmers.
- We conducted 6 meetings together with the non-governmental organization PIN, which aimed to reveal the needs of the farmers, on which intensive trainings will be conducted in the future. Specific fields groups, interested in certain directions, will be created and trainings will be conducted in observance of relevant fields.
- We ask the farmers about their field of interest based on which the Ministry later organizes trainings, there are also fields tours, demonstration farm visits, etc.
- I can provide an example, nut farming is becoming very popular in the region therefore we asked the Ministry to provide trainings concerning growing nut trees. In response to this request, the Ministry sent the representatives from the scientific-research institution, and we organized the trainings. Next year we will probably do the same regarding Aqua cultures since there are not many specialists and about 60 hectares of pools. We are planning a number of trainings next year not only in respect of nut and one-day trainings, but several day trainings, since the farmer become able to observe personally the culture and we provide relevant explanations.

Gathering of information, cooperation, etc.

The information consultation entities have the important obligation of collecting information on a variety of agricultural issues, including agricultural land, productivity, common varieties and crops, current challenges, etc.

The in-depth interviews with respondents of the local service center representative revealed that an estimate of an average of 50% of their work is concentrated on collecting information and formation of the data bases. However, when it's planting and / or harvesting period, the center representatives are mostly engaged in consulting.

The information collected by the entities are of great importance and play a significant role in the planning and implementation of different projects and programs. The study revealed that Service Center Representatives actively cooperate with farmers.

However, the service center representatives also believe that it is possible to increase their role in this regard, which will require more coordination with the management of the different programs of the Ministry of Agriculture. Although, they have communication, they believe that the communication can be improved provided that it takes a more of official shape. The in-depth interviews with respondents stated following positions in regard to the collection of information:

1. The collection of information and consultations both are main functions, we receive the information from the framers regarding the general situation and in what ways we can provide help and provide it to the Ministry, for example, we chose a place for the primary processing factory. In relation to mechanization, I consider that there is lack of coordination but I strongly believe that serious coordination is needed.
2. The creation of the database and the collection of information takes up the most work time, although we acknowledge that this is very important. We often lack the time and resource to fully pay adequate attention to all farmers. We also get a lot of phone calls which we always answer.
3. If there is a specific task assigned from the Ministry then everyone is focused on the assignment although if a farmer comes for a consultation I put aside everything and pay attention to him. When we go out to the villages we give consultations, distribute booklets, provide information about Ministry programs, everything is done simultaneously.

It is also worth mentioning that the information collected by the service center is really important, for both the public sector as well as international and civil organizations. At the current stage, the data is mostly used by the Ministry. It would significantly increase the efficiency of the work of various local and international projects and experts if the data was available to the public, for example through a web portal. The database would also help various agricultural sector business operators.

One of the most important purposes of the information consulting entity is the introduction of the extension. In this regard, cooperation with science and international organizations is of paramount importance. Additionally, such organizations set up additional facilities to provide local farmers with agricultural services, whether it is trainings or business consultations. The study revealed that the service centers have had successful cooperation with these organizations. In this regard, the initiator for partnership with different parties is both the service centers and the Ministry. Moreover, many international projects are conducted with the support of representatives from the service centers. „I want to underline the participation of USAID, FAO, ENPARD and different non-governmental organizations in these processes. We are directly involved with ENPARD since three cooperatives won in a competition. We also had close cooperation with World Vision, concerning drip irrigation systems, USAID is always active in terms of trainings. We also cooperate with education institutions, the University of Kutaisi, professors in the field of agriculture, we ask them to come for visits to meet with the farmers"; „If an organization is thinking about carrying out a project in the region it always comes to us first and we provide assistance in any way we can - this is also in our interests so that the farmers receive more knowledge, financial means and etc."; „A German specialist visited us last year and spoke about cattle. The farmers also met with Israeli representatives regarding vegetable popularization. We have contact with the Ministry science center and we conduct on-site lectures for animal farmers." - The center representatives stated.

The issue of cooperation of the local entities with local self-government authorities should be discussed separately. As the study showed, in some cases the cooperation is very successful but in others it is far from good. An example of a successful partnership would be the Khoni municipality, where the local government although the amount was not high sponsored one of the initiates of the service centers. „Consulting services are very important and at the same time help us in disseminating information. A land analysis was conducted with the co-financing from farmers and the local self-government, 80% from the government and 20% from farmers. An inventory of the agricultural land was conducted. In our region, agricultural issues are decided mutually by cooperation between the local self-government and service centers. In some municipalities this kind of communication is nonexistent but this has a very negative effect on the work. Therefore, our role as a link between the government and the farmers is very important. - A representative from the Khoni municipality stated.

In some of the study locations, the consulting entities as well as the local self-government think that more had to be done for the improvement of cooperation: „the local self-government administrations have agricultural departments which are equipped with the same functions as the service centers. Therefore, the work being carried out is cooperate with the local self-governments, but I still consider that further development is needed. Last year, we offered them to allocate certain amount from the budget. We developed the program, which was heard by the city council and was financed with GEL 15.000.00, we invited experts, conducted tours, conducted trainings for 2 specialists in artificial insemination, conducted land analysis for cooperatives. This is only a minimal contribution and more is needed." - The respondents stated.

One of the aims of the study was for us to determine if the measures were being made in order to raise the qualification of employees. The employees note that the existing staff has high qualification and that the Ministry frequently conducts relevant study courses for them. Although, the farmers deem that, there should be additional accessibility to experts specialized in specific fields. The main problem which the respondents stated in this regard is the lack of human resources. Additionally the staff members frequently attend trainings and study tours organized by different international organizations:

- „The Ministry frequently sends us to attend different seminars on the care of different crop cultures, pruning of perennial crops. Foreign experts have conducted a number of trainings for us. At the time being it is planned for us to attend a couple of trainings and conferences. We attend approximately 10 seminars each year."
- „We are planning to attend a two week training in a couple of days. This training is organized by the Ministry and will be in regard to the direction of the development of agriculture and what methods should be implemented in providing services for farmers. Although there are many issues which necessitate refinement."
- „We are given many opportunities to raise our qualification level. One of my coworkers was in china. We periodically travel to different parts of Georgia for trainings. We are going to attend a UN training tomorrow regarding the development of extension in agriculture."
- "We frequently have the opportunity to attend trainings but since new technologies are being developed every minute it would be beneficial if we had even more access to information; therefore, even if a person is very qualified she must have information about all the new technologies in order to carry out sufficient consulting."
- "We are in need of further training; regardless of the fact that we have issued more than 1800 consultations in one year we need to be up to date on recent developments and technologies. A hands on approach and exchange of experience would be very beneficial."

Farmers demand on consulting and learning services

One of the aims of the study was to identify the needs and demands of the farmers in relation to agricultural services. Naturally, all the stated issues are not directly linked to the entitlements of the service centers but it is possible for their functions to be extended.

The issues stated by the farmers can be categorized in the following way: consultations, trainings, learning based on the exchange of experience;

Consulting

We can analyze the farmers consulting demands in two ways: 1 - availability of experts specialized in specific fields; 2 - Increased opportunities for onsite (farms, lands) consulting.

As for the fields in which the farmers most are in need of systematic consultation, the top 10 are the following:

Table 2: Mostly demanded fields of consultation

#	Stated field
1	Livestock (breeds, veterinary)
2	Participation in Grant/Loan programs
3	Viticulture / Winery
4	Horticulture
5	Bee farming
6	Nut farming
7	Greenhouse farms
8	Drip systems
9	Cooperatives
10	Use of chemicals and plant protection

The focus group meetings revealed that the biggest deficit is in qualified veterinarians, also the farmers have changed their opinions and believe that varietal improvement is necessary, although they also state that such process is associated with certain financial expenditures and therefore would not be able to carry out this activity widely in villages at the time being. It is noteworthy that the issue of adding a veterinary to the staff of the service centers has been raised many times during interviews with center representatives.

In addition, the programs of the Ministry of Agriculture is distinguished as the most frequently applied, however the study revealed that the farmers think that they need more information and support for participation. One of the biggest barriers for them is preparing the needed documents and business plans.

It is interesting that as a result of the study, demand (varied by municipality) was revealed in respect of the topics, such as: blueberry cultivation; pond farm; modern varieties of lettuce; wine tourism, tea production; dried fruit production, etc.

The farmers believe that it is necessary to improve accessibility to specialized consultants. It would be beneficial if these type of specialists were to visit the municipalities with a predetermined schedule. "Unfortunately, it is not enough for us to speak with a good agronomists, we are frequently facing specific problems for which we need a specialists' opinion. There are various fields, which necessitate the same field specialist, e.g. cattle breeding, silkworm breeding, corn harvesting, etc., therefore, it would be helpful if a person, specialized in specific fields, visited for even a month" - a farmer stated.

Trainings

The focus group participant farmers stated which topics they would like trainings to be conducted on. In most cases they wanted to gain additional knowledge in the fields in which they were already working in. There was a small group of farmers which expressed desire to learn about new fields. Although, they believe that simply trainings are not enough in this case and that they

should be provided with information regarding what fields would have more potential in their villages as well as what would sell on the market.

Table 3. The most demanded topics for trainings

#	Topic Names
1	Livestock
2	Crop Production
3	Business and management/ plan preparation
4	Bee farming
5	Greenhouse farms
6	Wine technologies
7	Nut farm care
8	Creation of cooperatives
9	Nut crops
10	Agricultural Product Sales

The most popular field is still animal farming. Farmers are mainly interested in the issues regarding disease prevention, increase of productivity and information about different varieties.

It should be taken into consideration that a number of farmers have realized that they need certain business skills in order to plan their work effectively. However, it is worth mentioning that this is mainly the product of their interaction with different opportunities initiated by the government and international organizations, where they had to prepare business and financial plans. Also, already existing cooperatives have a high demand on business trainings, since they need to conduct financial accounting, sales and etc.

Learning based on the sharing of experience

It should be noted that the highest demand of learning method was for experience sharing. Although, it is clear that such approach is associated with larger financial means. All respondents stated that the most effective method of receiving information, consulting and learning is on site demonstration. A couple of groups can be categorized in this respect:

1. Demonstration lands, learning farms. The farmers aren't asking for demonstration land plots to be created in all municipalities, but they think that there should be at least one in each region. Also, it should be noted that in almost all municipalities at least a couple of farmers have been to demonstration or successful farms, which had a big impact on them and raised their level of motivation. Although, they believe that it would be beneficial if the service center paid more attention in this regard. The service centers themselves will not be able to create and manage demonstration land plots although it would be very effective to create a public database, online registry were any interested party could look up information about demonstration lands and farms. Study visits could be organized inside the region. In any case the farmers have a very high demand on this issue.

2. Participation / Attendance in / at agricultural exhibitions. As the study results showed the farmers are interested in taking part in exhibitions, where on the one hand they will be able to present their products, and on the other hand get to know new products, technologies, techniques, etc. A number of farmers have already attended with the help of the service centers and they all stated that they received important knowledge and information.

3. On-site consultations on the land or farm. This issue has been stated several times, when the farmers are facing very specific problems they wish to get specific answers. When they get consultations in the office or over the phone they sometimes are unable to fully explain the issue and therefore don't receive the needed answer. They frequently state plant diseases as an example and if the expert is unable to check such disease on site, he/she may fail to provide an accurate way of resolving the problem.

4. Arrangement of festivals and similar events. The arrangement of a platform at the local level to raise the quality of experience and communication between farmers is an effective way. One of the services shared the successful example of such experience. The main function of the service center is extension-consulting, transfer of the modern technologies to the farmer. Last year we organized a "field day". One of the farmers planted hybrid and harvested 10 tons, which is quite a high indicator for Khoni municipality. This farmer was able to share his successful experience of planting hybrids with other farmers.

Service center sustainability and sustainability of development opportunities

Sustainability

The farmers as well as all other respondents clearly state the importance of the creation of the service centers for the development of agriculture. They believe that its importance will be even more significant when modern technologies and methods will be implemented over a long term period. The most farmers frequently state that these centers are their only connection in terms of receiving the information about government and other donor initiatives.

All parties believe that these types of services are essential and should evolve along with the new technologies.

- „Everyone knows the condition of the field of agriculture here - these service centers mean everything to us. Agriculture is very well developed in Europe but these types of services still exist since technology is always evolving" (farmers)
- „As long as there are farmers these types of services will always be necessary, the more we develop the bigger the need" (cooperative representative)
- „I believe that the need for these services is greater each day, 80% of the population works in agriculture but since more and more cooperatives are being created this number will go up and there will be a greater need for extension, therefore it is important for these services to develop as well" (service center representative)

- „These services disseminate the information in to community. If we want to develop the field of agriculture providing information and conducting frequent meetings about future plans and goals is important therefore the role of these centers will be become even bigger" (representative of the local government)

Subsequently, there is no question in relation to the importance of the existence of these service centers, the issue of sustainability is to increase accessibility and expansion to the services and adjust them to local needs.

Opportunities for development and recommendations

Local services need to be developed and adapted in accordance with the long-term formation and development of modern technologies of farming. In addition, there are some challenges which the farmers believe need to be addressed at the current stage. The study respondents named different development opportunities of the service center, which they believe will significantly increase the effectiveness of their work.

1. **Increase of staff in local offices, periodic visits to the office of more specialized consultants.** The farmers, as well as service center employees agree that it is very important to increase the staff, both in quantity as well as specialty in specific fields. Naturally, this is directly related to financial matters, and requires further evaluation to determine the realistic needs. However, it is possible for experts to visit the region from time to time. The study has shown that such a practice exists, but it is not systematic and as respondents noted a longer presence of the experts is needed in order for the expert to have enough time to provide practical training.
2. **Provision of the local offices with minimum equipment.** This issue was mainly raised by the service center employees. "One of our most important functions is consulting, which we conduct both at the office and on site. It would very helpful if we had some small tools such as a microscope, land measurement utensils"- stated one of the respondents. On their part the farmers stress the importance of conducting on site consulting. Therefore, any steps that increase the capacity and efficiency of these consultations will have a positive impact on the service centers performance.
3. **Increasing frequency of raising qualification of the service center employees and more focus on local prioritized fields.** It is clear that great attention is paid to the improvement of qualification level of employees, but as the employees indicate the qualification process has to be more intense and systematic, since technology is constantly changing and all it is important that they have information about all innovations. In addition, it is important that their knowledge be relevant to the priority fields of agriculture in the municipalities and / or the fields which have strong

potential for development. In this regard the following activities are very important: trainings, equipment with informational materials, study visits and visits to the offices of international experts, when they share their knowledge and methods of consultation with employees as well as the interested farmers.

- 4. Support the creation of demonstration land plots and learning farms and increase the number of visits of farmers.** One of the biggest demands, which farmers have is for demonstration farms, in order to see firsthand how they should conduct their agricultural work and farm management. "The service center is aware of the fields of agriculture we work. One of the most beneficial things that it can do for us is to show us first hand successful farms which will enable us to conduct our work much more effectively." „I work in the field of bee farming, I have attended a couple of trainings but still feel that practical trainings are also needed together with the theoretical ones. It would be beneficial for experimental farms to be created in leading fields of agriculture". "We have more obstacles and problems in the field of agriculture than we do results. This would be the most realistic method of development. The farmers need to see real live examples or farms, cooperatives in order to create them themselves." - The respondents stated.

In all the studied municipalities at least a couple of farmers had been given an opportunity by the service centers to visit successful farms which had a big impact on them a raised their motivation.

The service centers themselves will not be able to create and manage demonstration land plots although it would be very effective to have a public database, online registry where any interested party could look up information about demonstration lands and farms. This would also be beneficial for non-governmental and donor organizations for the effective implementation of their projects.

Therefore it is necessary for the centers to increase their cooperation with demonstration farms and conduct more frequent study visits for the farmers.

- 5. Increase the level of coordination between the programs of the Ministry of Agriculture.** The Service center representatives stated that the farmers apply them first for information regarding agricultural issues and state programs. Therefore, although they have communication with other entities, they believe that a formal obligation which would require the exchange of information and data would be helpful. "It would be helpful if we had better coordination with relevant services of the Ministry , for example, with Ltd. Mechanization, Food Safety Agency, the formalization of relations may take place under the same statute." "It would be desirable if the services subordinated to the Ministry of Agriculture, such as amelioration, veterinary, etc., integrated under the same umbrella. We all are working in the same field and require more information about each other's work "- the respondents stated.

6. More involvement of the service center in the process of the elaboration of programs and services of the Ministry of Agriculture. Part of the local service officials believe that the increase of their involvement and role in various programs would be beneficial. They perform the role of the distributor in connection with the programs, but at the same time, they see the prospect of the development of programs to fulfill the advisory role as well as their implementation in the process. Furthermore, it would be effective for the programs to be elaborated at regional levels, which would adequately reflect the local needs. „We think that it would be beneficial if we could provide recommendations in relation to the programs since we have detailed information regarding what specific needs the farmers have in the area. We believe that we can issues recommendations, we can assess the existing situation, give recommendations and be a middle link to the finance organizations, in order to fulfill informative-consultative role within the framework of state programs" - the respondent stated.

7. Review of the existing practices of cooperation with the local self-government and the establishment of a certain system. As the study revealed although in some instances the cooperation with the local self-government is successful although this is not always the case. „The country is in need of well-established farmers. This can be achieved through our help, consultations, frequent experience sharing, demonstration farms, learning, trainings and more support from the state and more target programs from the local governments. - one of the respondents stated. It is important for this to be a joint effort from all sides of the public sector, since the effort of the service centers will not be sufficient. Naturally, the central government is not able to give directives to the local government, for implementation of the programs from their budget, but some type of communication between the service centers and local government is needed in this regard.

8. Gradually addition and strengthen of business consultation components and marketing function. Both the farmers and center representatives believe that in a long-term perspective, the farmers will need more support in selling their products and the demand for business consulting is already high at the moment. The farmers are not equipped with the needed skills and experience e.g. to prepare the documentation necessary to participate in state programs. Furthermore, already existing cooperatives are facing challenges in respect of business processes - being this farm planning, financial accounting, sales, etc. „For instance, when I go to Khoni I write down what I am planning on selling and buying but there are farmers who don't know how to read and write, don't have access to accounting programs, computers etc. Therefore, certain group should be added, which collects and concentrate the business ideas to assist the farmers in writing business plans, registering their ideas and development of business plan“. “There are many different programs but we need to have the skills to write down business ideas and prepare business plans. The exchange of information between farmers and communication is essential and good for development. It would be very beneficial if the

service center had specialist who would be able to help out in this regard and support the farmers to participate in the state programs". "Even if we increase our production we will still have problems in relation to sales. We would really like to receive consulting regarding marketing and sales." - The farmers stated.

The functions of the service center could expand to include the development of the farmers' business skills and creation of a platform for the farmers to communicate; this will help in experience exchange and the support of the realization of agricultural products.

9. **The active use of media, including the local media.** It is true that the Ministry does not have the authority to assign the media to cover any initiative, especially an educational program. However, the study revealed that in some cases the local media and the service centers were in active cooperation and that the media was systematically providing information to the farmers. In addition, the farmers expressed their desire the media periodically to show educational programs on agricultural issues. This initiative would be really useful and effective, and it is really worthy of the attention from both the public and international organizations. „It would be really beneficial if an agricultural program were showed at least once a week on the public broadcast channel, which would show both Georgian and European farmers"; „Even half an hour television programs in which specialists would be shown would be very useful for the farmers, since the farmers receive the information" - one of the respondents stated.
10. **Preparation of an agricultural information web portal.** Local Service center employees are conducting massive work, and collecting information and data regarding the conditions, needs, etc., in the municipalities. This information may not be statistically accurate, but access to this information will be beneficial for almost all sectors. (1) nongovernmental and donor organizations would be able to prepare various analytical reports more accurately and they will have opportunity to make the projects more focused and targeted. (2) the private sector - companies and farmers get equipped with an easily accessible database which tells them what type of farm is available in specific region, what crops they grow, what they produce, etc. (3) various parties in the public sector;

Appendix

Appendix 1. Focus Group Manual

Focus Group Manual

The Study Aim: The qualitative assessment of the rights and duties determined by the regulation of information and consulting entities of the territorial bodies of the Ministry of Agriculture of Georgia, determination of the trends in the demands for agro-consulting services by farmers and preparation of the appropriate recommendations.

This document has a specific aim of: the qualitative assessment of the rights and duties determined by the regulation of information and consulting entities, **which include consultations, providing information to farmers, trainings, teaching and the popularization of modern technologies, also defining the trends of farmer demands, identification of farmer assessment, subjective opinions, perception and main expectations.**

Moderator: Introduce the group members to the study objectives and ask them to introduce themselves and to indicate how often and in what form they have come in contact with the service centers.

It is important to assess not only existing services, but to form a list of needed services. Therefore, when the participants speak about the existing situation, always ask them to provide recommendations on what can be done for improvement, what they need (only within the framework of consulting/receipt of information!)

Task # 1. Assessment of the work of the Service centers / offered services. Position regarding the main functions and purpose

Important: they should state specific examples, explain/provide arguments; Please obtain as much evaluative statements, epithets as possible, reveal their attitudes and expectations.

#	Question / issue
1	In general what experience have you had with the consulting centers and how would you assess their work?
2	What is the importance of these service centers for your agricultural activities?
3	What do you think what is the reason for the creation of these entities and how well do they fulfill their functions?
4	Which service do you use mostly and how satisfied are you?



5	Could you please recall the cases when you used the recommendations and information received during a consultation to implement something new in your business or followed a new activity? (Moderator: the respondent should describe such cases in details as far as possible)
6	Have the service center representatives come to you and what activity have they performed? (Moderator: divide into 3 parts: receipt of the information, issuance of the consultation, popularization of the issue), try to ask for specific cases.
7	Please list the weaknesses and strengths of the service center and elaborate why do you think so?

Notes for the moderator:

Task # 2 farmers' demands and needs

Moderator: Ask the participants to imagine that there is a new service center opening and they have to make a decision regarding the services they will offer to the population.

#	question/issue
1	Are there any services, which in your opinion this type of entity should provide (and is not available at the moment). Explain what type and why.
2	Do you remember a case when you applied to the consultation center for advice (agricultural) and were not provided with an adequate answer?
3	Please list if there are any agricultural issues in your village for which consultation, information services is needed (Moderator: Please indicate if this type of service is available in the local office for the time being)
4	Apart from issuance of the consultations and information, please indicate what type of functions can be combined with the functions of this type of center, or what initiatives it should carry out in order to support agriculture significantly?

Notes for the moderator:



Task#3 Sustainability of the service center, the main risks and thoughts for improvement

This block has to identify personal, subjective perceptions and attitudes. Therefore, their all opinions are interesting. However, it is necessary for them to explain their positions: for example, a specific experience, just a feeling, or lack of trust, etc.

#	question/issue
1	In general, if such services were not free, would you pay any minimal amount for Agro-consultations?
2	In your opinion, what would change in your circumstances if these type of services did not exist? What additional obstacles would you face? Please explain your position.
3	In your opinion, what should be done or included in the regulation of the center in order to be more efficient and sustainable in the long-term perspective? What would you add or remove from a Procedural or substantive point of view?
4	Do you think the service centers will be needed in the next three years? Please explain your answer.
5	What would be your main recommendation to the service centers?
6	Is there any other issue, which you would like to add in respect of this issue, which you would like to share with us (which we did not discuss today)?
7	Ask the participants to fill out the assessment forms.

Individual form

1. Approximately, how many times did you apply to the local service centers in the last 6 months?

1. More than 10
2. 5-10
3. 1-5
4. Never

2. Please list the trainings organized by the local service centers which you have attended and assessed how valuable it was

		Not so useful	Useful	Very Useful
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				

3. Please list the issues for which you frequently contacted the service centers and assess the quality of service

	Issue	Frequency of contact			Quality of service		
		Rarely	Frequently	Very Frequently	Bad	Satisfactory	Good
1							
2							
3							
4							
5							
6							
7							

4. Please list the topics (by priority) in the table in relation to which you would like to obtain the consultation and trainings

Consultations		trainings	
1		1	
2		2	
3		3	
4		4	
5		5	
6		6	
7		7	

5. Additional Comments - Recommendations

Appendix 2.

In depth interview manual - service center study

The Study Aim: The qualitative assessment of the rights and duties determined by the regulation of information and consulting entities of the territorial bodies of the Ministry of Agriculture of Georgia, identification of the trends in the demands for agro-consulting services by farmers and development of appropriate recommendations.

Specific aim: Assessment of the execution process of the functions determined by the center regulation, challenges and needs. Provision of the recommendations for improvement (administrative and functional).

Task 1. The process of execution of the functions determined by the center regulation, challenges, strengths and weaknesses

1. We divided your regulation into principal functions, can you please tell us what percentage of your workday is spent on each category? In addition, please evaluate the important issues and challenges related to the execution process: (to the interviewer! Please have the categories on hand!)

group	%	Comment
Gathering of information		
Farmer Consultation/information		
Trainings and teaching		
Popularization		
Cooperation		
Other		

2. Please state and describe the strengths of your service.
3. What would you state as the weaknesses?
4. In your opinion, are there any administrative challenges, fixing of which, which would make the work process easier and effectiveness would be increased?
5. Let's go back to the regulation, I will list the same groups and please tell me about your experience in relation to each specific case more specifically (To interviewer!: use the grouped regulation)
 - Please state the most important, demanded functions in your opinion.
 - Are any of the functions fictitious or is there no demand or need for it; please explain.
 - Please list the 5 functions most demanded by the farmers.
6. Please share your experience in relation to the specific functions
 - t) Timely informing the community about the policies and programs of the Ministry - **How and through which resources this function is carried out, e.g. do you organize meeting, disseminate informational material, etc.**
 - r) Popularization of modern methods of animal breeding-care for their implementation; and
 - l) Popularization of modern methods of planting-care of agricultural crops and the support of its implementation;

How do carry out popularization? Are the farmers interested or how do you cause interest in them? Are there any supplementary resources available to fulfill this obligation? Are there any factors which would help you in the popularization and implementation process?

- p) Organization of different trainings and informational meetings;

Please explain in more detail how the above-mentioned functions are carried out? Is there any mechanism by which needed trainings can be revealed? How are they planned?

- u) Active cooperation and participation in the meetings with state and local self-government bodies, international donor organizations, extension centers;

Please state which extensive centers you cooperate with and in what way? Do you directly cooperate with international organization or is this mostly carried out via the Ministry?

Task 2. Popular needs of the farmers and demand trends

1. Mainly what category of farmers apply for advice?
2. In average, how many farmers apply each month and in relation to what issues?
3. In your opinion what are the 5 most challenging issues for farmer development.
4. Are there any topics in consulting, provision of the information or any other fields, which are not included in the centers' functions today, however you consider that the farmers need them and extension of the competence in this respect would be effective? Please explain.

Task 3. Opportunities for administrative and functional development

1. If the service centers were just being created what would you change in its regulation? In terms of administration?
2. In the same circumstances what would be your recommendation in terms of functional improvement?
3. Taking into consideration your experience, what should be paid most attention within the next three years? What innovations should be implemented in order to improve effectiveness?
4. Is there any system or method of raising the qualification of the staff members and introducing them to new technologies?

Task 4. Risks and sustainability

1. What main risks do you identify concerning the effective functioning of the service center?
2. Do you think the center will be sustainable and in demand over a long term period? What conditions should there be for this?
3. What would be your main recommendation?
4. Would you like to add something?

In depth interview manual - farmers and cooperatives

The Study Aim: The qualitative assessment of the rights and duties determined by the regulation of information and consulting entities of the territorial bodies of the Ministry of Agriculture of Georgia, determination of the trends in the demands for agro-consulting services by farmers and development of appropriate recommendations.

Specific aim: Assessment of the process of execution of the functions determined by the center regulation. Reveal of development opportunities and provision of recommendations on improvement.

Task #1. Assessment of the work of the Service centers / offered services. What are the main functions and purpose

1. In general, what experience have you had with the consulting centers and how would you assess their work?
2. What is the importance of these service centers for your agricultural activities?
3. In your opinion, what is the reason for the creation of these entities and how well do they fulfill their functions?
4. Which service do you use mostly and how satisfied are you?
5. Could you please recall the cases when you used the recommendations and information received during a consultation to implement something new in your business and/or followed a new activity?
6. Have the service center representatives come to you and for what reason? (**To the interviewer:** In the case of a positive answer divide it into 3 parts: receipt of information, issuance of consultation, popularization of the issue).
7. Please list the weaknesses and strengths of the service center and elaborate your response.

Task #2 Demands and needs of the farmer

1. Are there any service, which in your opinion this type of entity should provide (and is not available at the moment). Explain what type and why.
2. Please list if there are any agricultural issues in your village for which consultation, information services is needed (To the interviewer: Please indicate if this type of service is available in the local office at the time)
3. Do you remember a time when you apply to the consultation center for advice (agricultural) and were not provided with an adequate answer?
4. Apart from issuance of the consultations and information, please indicate what type of functions can be granted to this type of center, or what initiatives it should carry out in order to support agriculture significantly?

Task#3 Sustainability of the service center, the main risks and thoughts for improvement

1. In general, if such services were not free, would you pay any minimal amount for Agro-consultations?
2. In your opinion, what would change in your circumstances if these type of services did not exist? What additional obstacles would you face? Please explain.
3. In your opinion what should be done or which components should be included in the center regulation to make it more efficient and sustainable in the long-term perspective? What would add or remove from a procedural or substantive point of view?
4. Do you think the service centers will be needed in the next three years? Please explain your answer.
5. What would be your main recommendation to the service centers?
6. Is there any additional significant issue, which you would like to share with us (which we did not discuss today)?
7. Please fill out the given form.