



Three Steps to Protect Nature

Ensuring Participatory
Local Sustainable
Development

2025

This brochure is designed to help Georgian citizens - local farmers and community members - understand their rights, responsibilities and opportunities when it comes to sustainable local development and environmental planning.

Inside, you will find information on the legal rights of Georgian citizens in relation to:

- ▶ accessing environmental information
- ▶ participating in local decision-making
- ▶ practical steps for engagement

This brochure equips rural communities with the knowledge to actively participate in shaping their future, ensuring that development works for people and environment alike.

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INTRODUCTION

NATURE IS OUR HOME

Nature is our home, heritage and foundation for the future. Any development, especially local development, must go hand in hand with environmental protection to ensure sustainability for generations to come. Local development and natural resource management are deeply interconnected, especially in rural areas where nature and livelihoods are closely intertwined.

In rural Georgia, people depend on nature for their daily lives — for growing crops, beekeeping, fishing, forestry, picking wild botanicals and feeding animals. Fertile soil, clean water, healthy forests and biodiversity are the foundation of the rural economy. If we manage these resources wisely they will continue to provide for us year after year.

Natural beauty and biodiversity also support rural tourism and provide alternative income opportunities for locals. They attract visitors seeking authentic experiences, from scenic landscapes and wildlife to traditional food and culture. By valuing and protecting these natural assets, rural communities can diversify their incomes, reduce dependence on agriculture and create new jobs. In this way, nature becomes both a source of pride and a driver of sustainable development.

Please see the [Farmer Handbook For Rural Tourism Ventures](#) which provides an introduction, guide and resources for anyone interested in developing a rural tourism enterprise.

HOW TO USE THIS BROCHURE

This brochure shows how you can take part in local development and environmental decision-making for your area. Here is a short summary of each section:

- **Introduction** (page 4)
Explains why protecting nature is essential for sustainable local development, especially in rural Georgia, where livelihoods and natural resources are closely connected.
- **Environmental Rights of Georgian Citizens** (page 6)
Introduces your three core environmental rights.
- **Three Steps for Engagement** (pages 8 - 14)
Presents a simple action framework: Ask, Participate, Protect.
Explains where and how to access environmental information and submit requests and how to protect the environment around you.
Describes how citizens can take part in public hearings, consultations and planning processes and provide feedback on projects and plans.
- **Conclusion** (page 15)
Summarizes key messages.
- **Bibliography** (page 16)
Provides references for further reading.
- **Annex 1. Key Terms and Definitions** (pages 17 - 18)
Defines essential environmental terms.
- **Annex 2. Who Does What** (pages 19)
Explains the roles and responsibilities of key institutions and stakeholders involved in environmental protection processes.
- **Annex 3. The Environmental Information Portal** (page 20)
Provides practical information on how to use the MEPA's Environmental Information Portal, where to find EIA/SEA documents, public hearing announcements, deadlines for public comments and contact details of responsible institutions.

THREE STEPS FOR ENGAGEMENT

KNOWING YOUR RIGHTS IN YOUR ENVIRONMENT

Understanding your environmental rights is a starting point for future engagement. The Georgian Constitution guarantees that every person has the right to live in a healthy environment. This includes access to information about the environment and participation in decisions that affect it. There are three types of procedural environmental rights:




 <p>ASK</p>	 <p>PARTICIPATE</p>	 <p>PROTECT</p>
<p>ACCESS TO ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION</p>	<p>PARTICIPATION IN ENVIRONMENTAL DECISION-MAKING</p>	<p>ACCESS TO ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE</p>
<p>Any citizen can request environmental information from public authorities and must get a timely, complete reply. No need to justify: Just ask - that's enough.</p>	<p>Any citizen has the right to be heard and contribute to decisions related to the environment, such as land, water, air, waste and natural resources.</p>	<p>Any citizen can act to protect the environment - whether by speaking out, participating in planning processes, or challenging harmful practices.</p>

Figure 1: The Three Aspects of Your Environmental Rights

Knowing and understanding key concepts such as sustainability, public participation and environmental impact help communities communicate effectively and make informed decisions, take better care of their environment and shape their own future. A shared understanding among all stakeholders involved in development activities, aids in planning and environmental management.

This understanding is particularly important for rural populations, whose daily lives and livelihoods are closely tied to natural resources. Informed communities can better protect their environment, use resources efficiently and contribute to the long-term well-being and resilience of their local area. They can actively participate in planning, manage their land, water and other resources wisely and help create opportunities for sustainable economic growth - such as eco-tourism, organic farming and local product development.



Figure 2: Georgian village with sustainable tourism and responsible use of natural resources

STEP 1 ASK

REQUESTING ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION

Being aware of local developments and becoming informed about them is the important first step in curating the local environment. Any citizen of Georgia has the right to request and receive environmental information related to planned development projects or economic activities anywhere in the country.

Environmental information may include Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) documents, decisions of environmental authorities, data on water use, waste management, land allocation and other information that helps communities understand how planned activities may affect their environment and livelihoods.

1. WHERE TO FIND ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION

Many environmental documents are publicly available online:

- ▶ Municipal websites - publish draft and final versions of local development plans and environmental assessments.
- ▶ MEPA's Environmental Information Portal (www.ei.gov.ge) - search by region or municipality to access EIA and SEA documents, public hearing announcements, deadlines for submitting comments and decisions of the National Environmental Agency.
- ▶ National Environmental Agency (NEA) website - provides official environmental decisions and related information. Follow this link Nea.Gov.Ge/Applications to see the NEA environmental decisions.

If the information you need is not available online, you have the right to request it directly from the relevant public authority.

2. HOW TO REQUEST INFORMATION

You can request environmental information:

- ▶ Electronically, through official websites or email or
- ▶ In person, from your local municipality or from institutions such as the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture, the National Environmental Agency, the Environmental Information and Education Centre.

NO NEED TO JUSTIFY

You don't have to explain why you need environmental information. Simply asking is enough.

FREE ACCESS

Public institutions must provide environmental information for free, with fees allowed only for copying or printing.

3. HOW TO SUBMIT YOUR COMMENTS

Once you receive or download the documents:

- ▶ Read them carefully and note any questions or concerns.
- ▶ Seek help from experts or civil society organizations if the documents are complex.
- ▶ Find out how much time you have to submit comments, as public participation deadlines are defined by law. See Figure 4: EIA & SEA Procedures Page 12.

USEFUL TIPS:

IF YOUR REQUEST IS DENIED OR DELAYED: If the authority you requested information from doesn't have it, they are required to forward your request to the appropriate body within 5 days. The authority must tell you who holds the information and redirect your request, ensuring you still get the information you need.

IF INFORMATION IS CONFIDENTIAL: If the document contains sensitive information or personal data, it will be redacted before being released to you. You can still receive a version of the document that doesn't include the protected information, so you won't be left without access.

IF REFUSED: If your request is refused, the authority must provide a written explanation within 3 days, detailing why the request was denied. If your request is wrongfully denied, you can challenge it and still get the information you requested.

STEP 2 PARTICIPATE

INVOLVEMENT IN ENVIRONMENTAL DECISIONS

Public participation is a crucial part of sustainable development. Any citizen can attend municipal meetings, public hearings and provide input on projects affecting their lives and environment. **Engaging in discussions with local authorities and stakeholders ensures that community interests are considered in development plans.**

WHY PARTICIPATION MATTERS



When you participate in the decision-making process, your voice helps ensure that local projects and environmental rules reflect community priorities, protect your land and water and safeguard your way of life for the future.

The existing legislation ensures that any citizen of Georgia can participate in decisions related to:

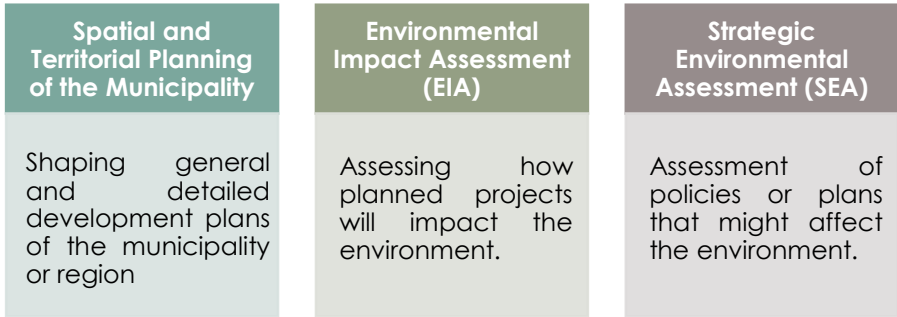


Figure 3: Types of Environmental Documents

HOW YOU CAN PARTICIPATE:

Attend Public Hearings: Attend meetings or consultations organized by government agencies where they present and discuss Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA), Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEA), public/private development projects and municipal Master Plans.

Provide Verbal Feedback: Participate in local public discussions about draft environmental assessment documents or local development plans before they are finalized,

Written Feedback on Draft Plans and Documents: write down your opinion and submit it to the relevant governmental agencies.

The Diagram below describes all the steps of the **environmental impact assessment** or **strategic environmental assesment** process showing where the public can participate.

The EIA procedure begins with Screening

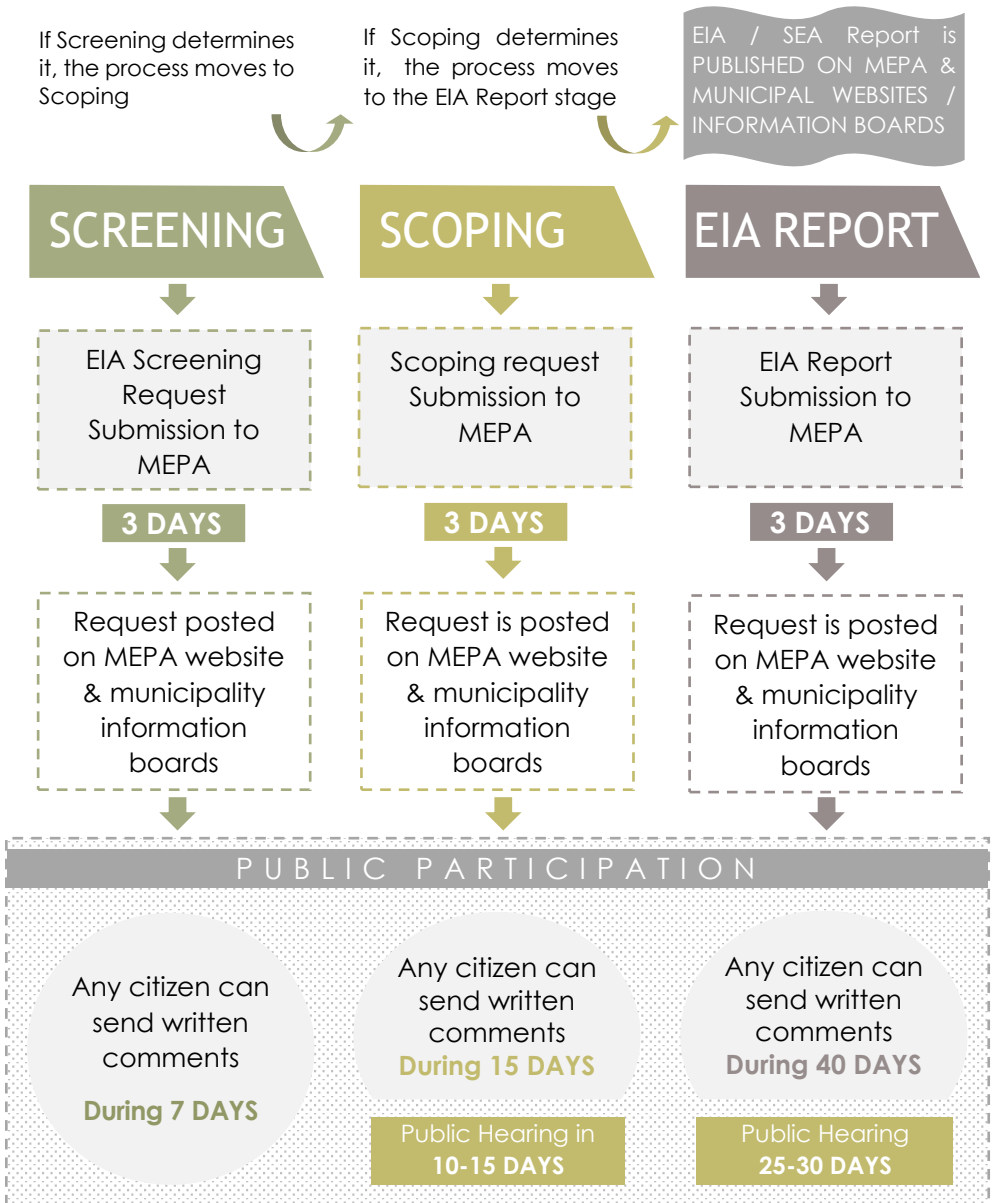


Figure 4: EIA / SEA Process Diagram

STEP-BY-STEP INSTRUCTIONS FOR PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC HEARINGS:

1. Go to the local municipality city hall and ask about the dates of upcoming public hearings, or;
2. Submit a written request online on MEPA's Environmental Information and Education [portal](https://www.eiec.gov.ge) (go to the website <https://www.eiec.gov.ge> and choose >Public Information > Request Public information [See Annex 3: The Environmental Information Portal](#)).
3. Frequently check information on local development in your area; including the official website and information desk at your local municipal administration building, on social network and webpages of your municipality and the National Environmental Agency and the EIEC Environmental Information Portal. this is where you will find announcement about public hearings.
4. Ask the local municipality representative in your village to inform you about local development plans and when public hearings are planned.
5. When the date of a public hearing is known, inform your family members, neighbors and other villagers, encourage them to attend.
6. Feel free to ask questions and make comments during the hearings, it might be the only opportunity for you to make changes and protect the environment around you.
7. Ask how much time you have for a written feedback submission if you want to provide it, the law specifies public participation timeframes for each procedure.
8. If you have some observations from the public hearing, you can submit them in a written form to the organizers (e.g. local municipality, sectoral ministry, regional government, national environmental Agency, etc.) for future consideration.
9. Consider contacting local and national non-governmental environmental, urban planning organizations, as well as initiative groups who may have specialist knowledge of the topic being discussed.

STEP 3 PROTECT

ADVOCATING FOR ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

What Is Environmental Justice?

If your request for environmental information is ignored or wrongly denied and/or you were not allowed to participate in a decision-making process.

You have the right to :

Appeal to a Superior Administrative Body

You can appeal to a higher administrative body, such as the Administration of the Government of Georgia. You have one month to appeal the decision.

Take It to Court

If no higher body exists, or if your appeal is not addressed, you can go to court within a month

IMPORTANT NOTE: Georgia's *actio popularis*¹ system allows anyone to challenge a decision, not just those directly affected. This means you don't need to prove personal harm - you just need to show that the decision violated environmental laws.

¹ *Actio popularis* is the right to make a judicial claim on behalf of others in protection of a public legal interest.

CONCLUSION

The intersection of local livelihoods, natural resource management and local development presents both significant opportunities and complex challenges. Rural communities in Georgia are situated at the frontline of ecological and socio-economic transformations driven by infrastructural expansion and tourism development.

Sustainable local development in these contexts requires more than policy frameworks—it demands active, informed citizen engagement grounded in a balanced approach to development—one that values natural capital alongside sustainable economic progress. It requires a collaborative effort among policymakers, planners, civil society and rural communities. Through informed participation and rights-based advocacy, Georgian citizens can contribute meaningfully to shaping a resilient and environmentally beneficial future.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. *Georgian Law on Environment Protection, 1996*
2. *Environmental Assessment Code (EA Code) of Georgia, 2018*
3. *Rule on Conduction of Public Hearings, 2018*
4. *Public Participation in Spatial Planning, Green Alternative, 2021*
5. *Environmental Impact Assessment Guideline, the EIEC, 2022*
6. *Spatial Planning, Architectural and Construction Activities Code of Georgia, 2018*
7. *Environmental Protection Democracy, the EIEC, 2019*

ANNEX 1: KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

This section provides definitions of terms related to local economic development and environmental protection

SUSTAINABLE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT:

- ▶ A system that balances economic growth with environmental protection, ensuring well-being and improved quality of life. It promotes the sustainable, efficient use of local natural resources and fair distribution of public goods and economic benefits across the municipality. It also safeguards natural resources and a healthy environment for future generations, protecting them from irreversible changes.

GENERAL AND DETAILED DEVELOPMENT PLANS:

- ▶ To ensure sustainable development and a safe, healthy living environment, central and local governments must prepare general and detailed spatial and urban development plans. These include infrastructure, cultural heritage and environmental protection. Most Georgian municipalities have begun this complex, long-term process.

PUBLIC INFORMATION:

- ▶ An official document (including drawings, models, plans, schemes, photographs, electronic information, video and audio recordings), information stored in a public institution as well as information received, processed, created or sent by a public institution.

ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION:

- ▶ Public information about the state of environmental elements (air, water, soil, land, biodiversity and ecosystems); factors impacting them (pollution, land degradation, climate change); health and safety data (impacts on human health, cultural sites, or communities); and environmental policies, regulations and development strategies.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT:

- ▶ Any effect caused by a project or policy on human health, biodiversity, water, air, soil, climate, landscapes and protected areas. It also includes cultural heritage and socio-economic impacts resulting from environmental changes.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT (EIA):

- ▶ A decision-making tool for projects that may have a significant environmental impact. An Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) evaluates both positive and negative effects of proposed activities. It involves a formal process, public participation and assessment documentation. An EIA is required for projects like transport infrastructure, power plants, dams and mining. For full list of activities which are required to have environmental assessments see *Annex 1 and Annex 2 of the Environmental Protection Assessment Code of Georgia* ([Link](#)).

STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT (SEA):

- ▶ A tool for integrating environmental and public health considerations into national and sectoral planning. A Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) applies to government-prepared plans and programmes—like energy strategies, transport or waste management plans and spatial development plans. It involves stages such as scoping, SEA reporting, public participation, authority consultations and incorporating recommendations into the final document.

SCOPING REPORT:

- ▶ A preliminary document prepared by the project implementer and/or consultant, based on which [the National Environmental Agency](#) issues the scoping conclusion.

PUBLIC HEARINGS:

- ▶ a form of public participation in the process of making environmental decisions and in spatial and urban planning processes, organized by relevant governmental authorities. Important note: according to Georgian legislation, a public hearing is considered held even if no member of the public is present.

SCREENING:

A procedure that determines the need for an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)/Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA).

SCOPING:

A procedure that defines the list of information to be obtained and studied for the EIA/SEA and the means of including this information in the EIA report/SEA report.

Figure 5: Key Terms and Definitions

ANNEX 2: WHO DOES WHAT

Local development and environmental planning involve many different actors, each with specific roles, responsibilities and levels of influence. The section below outlines the key actors involved and explains their roles in protecting nature.



Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture (MEPA):

Exercising state control through its state subagency (the Department of Environmental Supervision) to ensure compliance by the operators with conditions determined by environmental decisions.



National Environmental Agency (NEA):

The main body responsible for implementing the Environmental Protection Code. NEA makes environmental decisions, oversees compliance and serves the government, businesses and the public to protect natural resources and public health



LEPL Environmental Information and Education Centre (EIEC):

Ensuring effective public participation at all stages of the EIA, holding public hearings and disseminating relevant information, including through its portals: <https://ei.gov.ge/>
See Annex 3: The Environmental Information Portal



Local Self-Governments:

Facilitates dissemination of information regarding the EIA/SEA procedure through placing the relevant information on its official website and on the notice board of the executive body and/or representative body of a respective municipality

OTHER STAKEHOLDERS:

Local Population

Participates in decision-making process to represent their own interests linked to the environment

Experts & NGOs


Ensure representation of community and environmental interests

Private Investors

Businesses investing in rural areas, who prepare all necessary documents for the **EIA** procedure and submit to the NEA

Figure 6: Who Does What to Protect Nature

ANNEX 3: ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION PORTAL



საგარეო ურთიერთობების
და საერთაშორისო
კავშირების სამსახური

ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION PORTAL

The Environmental Information Portal – www.ei.gov.ge in managed by the Environmental Information and Education Centre (EIEC) of MEPA to ensure public awareness of and to facilitate participation in the environmental decision-making process, in accordance with Georgian legislation². On this website you will find the following information:

- ▶ Documentation submitted to the agency for the purpose of undergoing EIA or SEA procedures.
- ▶ Deadlines for receiving public comments and opinions.
- ▶ Information about public hearings.
- ▶ Decisions made by the LEPL National Environmental Agency.

You may contact the Environmental Information and Education Center:

☎ (+995 322) 112023; Hotline: 1501;
✉ ph@eiec.gov.ge 32g, Marshal Gelovani Ave. Tbilisi

The authorized body responsible for making environmental decisions is MEPA. For ongoing administrative proceedings, you can submit comments and opinions to the Agency at:
150 D. Aghmashenebeli Ave.
Tbilisi; ✉ eia@mepa.gov.ge

Figure 7: Information about EIEC portal

² The Environmental Assessment Code and the Law of Georgia on Environmental Liability.

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