

Georgia Roads Project Improves Connectivity of Kakheti Region

Inga Paichadze, Communications Officer in the Tbilisi Office, offers this story.

Enticing tourists to Georgia's cultural heritage sites and vineyards around Kakheti used to be a hard sell. The road from the capital was in such bad shape that people took detours, turning a 65 kilometer journey into a 122 kilometer one. A new road has reversed that. It allows tourists in—a boost to the local economy. And it allows farm products out—increasing farmers' incomes.

"Lopota is one of the best places for vacation. I often come here with my wife and kids. They provide the best conditions in summer: a swimming pool, a lake where you can swim and go fishing at the same time. Last year I caught a 4 kilo fish here," says Ilia Berdzenishvili, a guest at the Lopota hotel.

"This is one of the best places to have a rest. Being surrounded by the mountains, one can breathe in the fresh air. And it's a relatively short drive from Tbilisi thanks to the new Vaziani–Gombori–Telavi road. Just a little bit more than one hour and you are here!," says Berdzenishvili.

Natural diversity defines the region's farm country. Grape-growing and winemaking is not accidental: the main share of the region's well developed food industry is wine production. Because of the critical role of the Vaziani-Gombori-Telavi (VGT) road in the region's economic development, rehabilitating it was a government priority.



Ilia Berdzenishvili

The road is an important link between Kakheti, the capital Tbilisi, and the rest of the country. The road was in disrepair for several years because it wasn't being maintained. Its rehabilitation has halved the time and distance needed to travel its length and has already contributed to the economic rejuvenation of the region, especially agriculture.

The World Bank approved a US\$30 million loan for the Kakheti Regional Roads Improvement project for Georgia in November 2009. Today, the results are clear—transport costs have been reduced and access and traffic safety for the Kakheti regional roads have been improved.



Ghia Zatiashvili

"We cultivate the land, and sell the most of the harvest. We grow cucumbers, tomatoes, onions, garlic, peppers, and eggplant. Everybody has a small kitchen garden in our village. Taking these vegetables to market and selling them is our only source of income. We also have a small vineyard, only for home use, for ourselves. But many farmers in the region mostly grow grapes and take them to market. With the new road this has become easier and much faster," says Ghia Zatiashvili, a farmer from Napareuli village.

The new road has also created jobs locally, even in the current economic crisis. Traffic on the road increased from 362 vehicles per day in April 2010 to 1,904 vehicles per day in October 2010. And more cars means more business.

"My restaurant opened a long time ago, but was not functioning properly. Because of the lack of the visitors due to the poor road quality, it was closed. But now, when the new road has been built, I decided to expand and redesign it, to meet the visitor's needs, the number of which is growing. Everybody is welcome here for a brief stop-over and a good meal," says Gocha Lashkarashvili, a small restaurant owner in the Sasadilo village.

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Gocha Lashkarashvili

The Gombori-Telavi section of the road is prone to landslides, such as the ones that recently occurred. They are due to unstable mountain slopes which have long caused soil to shift. Both the Government and the World Bank were fully aware of the possibility of future landslides on this short section of road before rehabilitation started. The Roads Department is monitoring the situation with a view to finding a permanent solution. Measures have been put in place to improve traffic safety here and along other regional roads. In addition, the capacity of a regional state roads department was also improved, thanks to the project.

The project is part of the framework guiding the World Bank Group's assistance to Georgia for 2010-2013. It supports investments in transport infrastructure, focusing on helping to reduce transport costs, improve internal connectivity, and strengthen Georgia's role as a transport corridor within the South Caucasus. Road investments will also help create much needed temporary jobs and, over time, will boost competitiveness, growth, and job creation prospects.