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Faculty of Tropical AgriSciences



**Agricultural Development initiatives under EU
ENPARD in Georgia, Moldova and a
comparative assessment of Producer groups**

BACHELOR'S THESIS

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Declaration

I hereby declare that I have done this thesis entitled Agricultural Development Initiatives under EU ENPARD in Georgia, Moldova, and a comparative assessment of Producer groups independently, all texts in this thesis are original, and all the sources have been quoted and acknowledged using complete references and according to Citation rules of the FTA.

In Prague, 2024

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Ana Luarsabishvili

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Abstract

The European Neighbourhood Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development (ENPARD) significantly shapes rural development and sustainable agricultural practices in EU neighbouring countries. This bachelor's thesis focused on Georgia and Moldova, delves into the EU-supported initiatives on their respective agricultural lands. Georgia and Moldova, as recipients of ENPARD assistance, showcase unique socio-economic backgrounds, challenges, and agricultural traditions. Despite the strategic importance of these interventions, there is a discernible knowledge gap following the comparative dynamics of the producer groups in the two nations. Limited research has systematically explored the challenges and outcomes these groups face in the context of EU-supported agricultural development. This study aims to conduct a comprehensive comparative assessment of producer groups in Georgia and Moldova. The research examines sociocultural factors, organizational structures, and economic impacts, influencing these groups, and providing nuanced insights into the effectiveness of EU interventions. The thesis contributes to the refinement of agricultural development strategies and enhances our understanding of the challenges faced by producer groups. The outcomes are anticipated to inform policymakers, stakeholders, and aid agencies in optimizing the effects of EU ENPARD initiatives for sustainable agricultural development.

Keywords: Agricultural cooperatives, Rural empowerment, Agrarian policy, Livelihood improvement.

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List of the abbreviations used in the thesis

ENPARD - European Neighbourhood Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development

USAID – United States Agency for International Development

FAO - Food and Agriculture Organization

MEPA - Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture

RDS - Rural Development Strategy

SPS - Sanitary and phytosanitary

1. Introduction

Agricultural development initiatives are important in promoting sustainable practices and improving productivity in the farming sector. These initiatives catalyse positive change, offering a global perspective on advancing agriculture. The World Bank's publication on Agriculture for development underscores the strategic importance of such endeavours in achieving sustainable development goals (World Bank 2007). The history of the Eastern European region, including post-soviet countries like Georgia, and Moldova is marked by a complex relationship with the rural cooperative movement. The memory of forced state-controlled and collectivization collective farms still lingers among many farmers. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the abrupt privatization of former collective farms led to high land fragmentation and land ownership, making it challenging for individual farmers to achieve economies of scale (Hartvigsen 2014). A lack of knowledge, resources increased production costs and transactions, and low bargaining power have hindered small farmers in improving their businesses. In the context of agricultural and developing countries cooperatives are most of the time considered important for achieving rural development and agriculture and reducing poverty in rural areas (Altman 2015; Abate 2018).

As Georgia and Moldova work toward becoming part of the European Union, they are not only embracing new opportunities but also managing their relationships with Russia. Formerly part of the Soviet Union, both countries are actively pursuing ties with the EU, signalling a desire for shared progress and values. Negotiating this path involves considering the historical context and ensuring a balance between regional dynamics and the goals for European integration.

The European integration process is a comprehensive effort that requires both domestic and foreign commitment, involving important adjustments to align with European standards. It means making a lot of changes back home to meet EU standards in areas like society, politics, and the economy. Both countries have prioritized European integration in their policies, emphasizing positive internal transformations to adjust to European standards and values. This involves societal engagement, and collaboration with foreign neighbouring countries to position these nations as European states with prospects for EU membership (Morari 2015).

The European Neighbourhood Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development (ENPARD), is an EU program established in 2011, which represents an important political initiative fostering the development of agriculture, improving food security, enhancing rural employment, and promoting sustainable production. The program focuses on the core principles of aligning with national development strategies, ensuring effective collaboration among the different ministries, and coordinating with regional development programs. ENPARD operates within a specific cycle, covering the period from 2013 to 2025 (Okhrimenko & Okhrimenko 2017). Georgia and Moldova recognizing the opportunities presented by ENPARD, actively engaged with the program. This initiative was a response to the multifaceted challenges that those countries faced following their independence from the Soviet Union. These challenges included instability arising from military conflicts, civil wars, occupied territories, trade problems, economic structural issues, and Russian embargos. The global economic crisis further increased these challenges, leading to a decline in agricultural production, particularly in livestock, restricting market access and high-quality food products (Oedl-Wieser et al. 2017).

This paper aims to delve into the Agricultural Development initiatives under the EU ENPARD in Georgia and Moldova, specifically concentrating on the comparison of producer groups. The overarching objectives encompass a comprehensive exploration of their contributions to agricultural development, the execution of a comparative study, and a review investigation into challenges encountered during ENPARD implementation. The thesis is divided into 6 main chapters, each serving a distinct purpose. The literature review sets the stage by providing context for the historical background, introduction, and ongoing situation in Georgia and Moldova. Chapter two outlines the specific aims of the Bachelor thesis, establishing the study objectives. The third chapter explains the applied methodology utilized in the research process. Moving forward chapter four reveals a comprehensive review, providing an in-depth analysis of the findings. Chapter Five is about results and the final chapter concludes the thesis, summarizing key insights and drawing conclusions based on the study's outcomes. In essence, this paper aims to unravel the multifaceted dimensions of producer groups within the framework of the EU ENPARD program in these countries.

2. Aims of the Thesis

2.1. Main Research Question

This bachelor thesis delved into analysing the roles of EU ENPARD-supported producer groups in Georgia and Moldova, the main goal was to review the literature about agricultural development initiatives and emphasize a comparative perspective of these countries. During the 1990s, countries like Georgia and Moldova went different ways with agriculture. The historical memory of the Soviet era played a significant role in shaping farmers' responses to both national and international incentives, impacting agriculture through a combination of their past experiences and current efforts. Presently, efforts are underway in both countries, along with other nations, to support and reintroduce producer groups and cooperatives.

This thesis refers to a picture of how these groups shaped the agricultural landscape. Primarily the study aimed to comprehend the social and economic transformations instigated by producer groups. The author evaluated the influence of EU ENPARD support affecting the farming system in Georgia and Moldova. The study set out to conduct a comparative analysis, not only assessing the effectiveness of agricultural sector development in both regions under the European Neighbourhood Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development but also drawing insightful comparisons between Georgia and Moldova in this regard.

2.2. Specific Aims

1. Examine the role of producer groups within the EU ENPARD programs in Moldova and Georgia, and explore how these groups contribute to the overall agricultural development objectives.

2. Conduct a comparative assessment of producer groups in Moldova and Georgia, and explore challenges faced by producer groups in implementing EU ENPARD initiatives in both countries.

3. Methodology

This thesis is based on an extensive literature review of the impact assessment of producer groups supported by the EU ENPARD program in Georgia and Moldova. The foundational approach is grounded in a thorough analysis of secondary sources that evaluate farmers' livelihoods in these countries. A literature review was inspired by (Millns 2013).

The author's process for selecting secondary sources was guided by three main criteria a) topic of the source, b) relevance to the overarching research subject, and c) availability of the full text. Throughout the research, the author strategically used keywords such as: *"EU ENPARD"*, *"ENPARD Georgia, Moldova"*, *"producer groups"*, *"Moldova"*, *"agricultural development"*, *"cooperatives in Georgia"*, *"rural communities"*, *"Rural Development in Moldova"*, *"Moldavian agriculture"*, *"Georgian agriculture"*, *"sustainability"*, *"livelihoods"*, *"agribusiness"*, *"economic impact"*, *"development priorities"*, *"social transformation"*, *"comparative assessment"*, *"sustainable farming"*, *"financial support"*. The term "cooperatives" on Google Scholar is associated with a broad spectrum of many sources, amounting to 17.200 results spanning the period from 2014-2023. A more refined focus on "Producer groups" significantly is almost similar to 17.800, but the keyword *"EU ENPARD"* shows only 475 results; more specifically *"ENPARD Georgia, Moldova"* shows only 92 results. Comparable results were found under their specifications and other keywords such as *"Agricultural practices in Georgia and Moldova"*. This keyword ensured a comprehensive exploration of relevant literature that not only evaluates the Agricultural Development initiatives under EU ENPARD in Georgia, Moldova but also connects these findings with the broader discourse on comparative assessment of producer groups in these countries.

Rigorous considerations for relevance to the thesis topic (Agricultural development initiatives under EU ENPARD in Georgia, Moldova, and comparative assessment of producer groups), geographical focus on these countries, publication date of the sources between 2012 and 2021, and methodological rigor are applied to ensure the literature selected aligns closely with the unique objectives of the thesis. Data extraction from the selected references follows a process where key themes such as

quality of life, job availability for farmers, challenges faced by cooperatives, tangible improvements in rural communities, empowerment, and sustainability are organized. The thematic analysis is specifically designed to categorize the sources in alignment with the study's aims, providing an understanding of the multifaceted Agricultural Development initiatives under EU ENPARD in Georgia, Moldova, and a comparative assessment of Producer groups.

Comparative analysis is conducted to assess the effectiveness of agricultural sector development initiatives under the EU ENPARD program in Georgia and Moldova. This involves a careful examination of differences and similarities in outcomes, development, and challenges in various studies, contributing to a comprehensive literature source.

The synthesis of the findings insights together a holistic overview of how EU ENPARD-supported producer groups have shaped the agricultural sector in Georgia and Moldova. This thesis includes a discussion of implications for farmers' livelihoods. A critical evaluation of the limitations and strengths of the reviewed literature is fixed in the methodology, considering factors like the methodologies employed in the original studies. Lastly, the methodology identifies research proposes and gaps areas for future exploration.

The sources cited in the references were gathered through scientific databases such as Web of Science, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar. The references collection process involved approximately 49 articles on the relevant topic, and all these sources are meticulously listed in the References section. Additionally, the author sought inspiration and a deeper understanding by consulting an important volume of grey literature. It's significant to note that despite a thorough search, the results obtained were relatively limited in number. The references provided follow the citation style of the Faculty of Tropical AgriSciences, specifically adhering to the norms that are outlined in the *Conservational Biology* journal.

4. Literature Review

4.1. Historical Background and Ongoing Situation in Agriculture

4.1.1. Georgia

In a region where post-Soviet democracies often grapple with limited governmental accountability, Georgia stands as one of the unique examples of democratic progress. While it still confronts some hurdles and shortcomings, the country provides an environment where civil society, political and social movements, and individuals can actively shape government policies. In common with neighbouring nations, Georgia faces the challenge of increasing inequalities and governance issues. However, it distinguishes itself by its openness to development and its active engagement with both international and national mechanisms which holds the government responsible for social policies.

Administratively the country is divided into nine regions, with two autonomous republics- Adjara, and Abkhazia, and an autonomous region known as South Ossetia. The capital city is Tbilisi, which serves as the economic and political center. Other important cities include Batumi, Kutaisi, Rustavi, and Zugdidi see Figure 1. This together reflects the historical, cultural, and geopolitical complexity of the country (FAO 2012).

The country with rich agricultural potential including all regions faced challenges in its agricultural sector before the implementation of the European Neighborhood Program for Agriculture and Rural Development (EU ENPARD). Georgia faced difficulties during its transition to political independence due to ethnic conflicts and civil war, hindering its readiness for changes in market dynamics. The demographic situation, marked by population shifts and aging demographics, contributed to decreased economic motivation. In 2014, agriculture constituted 9.2% of the GDP, with 50% of the population employed in the agricultural sector (Chitanava 2015).



Figure 1 Administrative map of Georgia (Chitanava & Villanea 2017)

Agriculture in Georgia has always been important, but it's faced a slowdown, mirroring the challenges experienced in other Eastern European countries. Even though Georgia has wonderful weather and diverse climates, which makes it perfect for growing cash crops. However, farming often relied on more subsistence, marked by low productivity, and difficulties in competing. The land remained underutilized, and the soil quality dropped because farmers weren't rotating crops and appropriate agriculture methods (Millns 2013). Even with these challenges, Georgia has made significant advances in certain agricultural sectors, mostly in the export of hazelnuts, and wine. The county is known for its rich viticultural traditions (Ortmann King 2007).

In Georgia, agriculture plays a crucial role in providing employment opportunities. As of 2020, approximately 41.1% of the Georgian population found employment in the agricultural sector - see Table 1. This underscores the important reliance on agriculture as a source of livelihood for a substantial portion of the country's workforce (ILOSTAT 2020).

Table 1 The World Bank, Agricultural employment (% of total employment) (ILOSTAT 2020)

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Georgia	47.3	46.1	44.0	43.8	43.1	38.9	38.1	41.1

Poverty, predominantly concentrated in rural regions, places smallholder farmers in a precarious economic position. The smallholder farming sector experiences a multitude of obstacles, ranging from limited productivity to inadequate access to essential resources. Smallholder farmers are mostly faced with the challenge of exerting influence or adapting to market conditions that impact their overall well-being and competitiveness (Kharashvili 2016b). Smallholder farmers' ability to influence and adapt to market conditions, affecting both their livelihoods and competitiveness, is a pivotal concern at the heart of this review.

Until 2011, substantial systematic reforms aimed at improving the agricultural landscape in Georgia were lacking. The new administration of the country recognized the agricultural sector's importance as an important key driver for ensuring national security and food security. This policy shift also prompted the Ministry of Agriculture to engage with international donors and stakeholders, such as the EU, USAID, FAO, and the World Bank, among others, to advance its primary objectives of revitalizing the agricultural sector, with a specific focus on the inclusion of small-scale farmers (Manana Vasadze 2020).

This history and shifting economic landscapes have had important consequences for the agricultural sector. Georgia has experienced a decline in the production of key agricultural products, such as livestock, wine, and high-quality food items like citrus, tea, and meat. Furthermore, the weak economic conditions in rural regions and the low productivity of the agricultural sector have led to the need for long-term efforts and renewed strategies. In alignment with Georgia's economic and political orientation towards European integration and the European Union, a pivotal development occurred in June 2014 with the signing of an Association Agreement between the Georgia and EU. Concurrently the EU initiated the European Neighborhood Program for Rural Development (ENPARD) and Agriculture in 2013, with the overarching aim of alleviating poverty in rural areas and enhancing the competitiveness of the agricultural sector for both international and domestic markets.

In 2014, Georgia and the European Union started collaborating by signing the Association Agreement. This pivotal agreement not only strengthened political and economic ties but also aimed to enhance regulatory frameworks for trade with the EU.

This strategic partnership reflects Georgia's commitment to building bridges with the EU, fostering mutual growth, and contributing to the overarching goals of the European Neighborhood Policy (European Commission 2018a).

4.1.2. Republic of Moldova

In the case of Moldova, agriculture assumes an even more fundamental role as it stands as the cornerstone of the national economy. The inception of Moldova's agricultural reform post-independence marked a departure from the managed centralized system. This transition entailed a deliberate shift away from a large, centrally controlled structure towards a more market-oriented approach. Moldova experienced a series of transformations- some challenging, some promising, and some uncertain. The country's agricultural sector evolution represents a narrative of adaptation, ongoing, and resilience efforts to navigate obstacles while contributing to the nation's economic landscape (Ceratin, 2012).

Moldova, blessed with a nutrient-rich temperate soil and continental climate characterized by warm summers and mild winters, stands as one of Europe's most agriculturally productive regions. The extensive chernozem soil, covering 75% of the country's agricultural land spanning 2.48 million hectares, provides a fertile foundation for the cultivation of corn, wheat, barley, tobacco, sugar beets, and soybeans. The agricultural landscape also thrives with the rearing of beef cattle, widespread beekeeping activities, and the cultivation of sunflower seeds, walnuts, apples, and various fruits. This favourable environment not only makes Moldova an ideal hub for agricultural activities but also facilitates robust food-processing industries (Millns 2013).

The agricultural sector holds a key role in driving the country's economic development. From 2010 till 2019 it has made a substantial contribution, constituting approximately 12% of the GDP. (Cimpoieş 2021) Additionally, an important portion of Moldova's exports, accounting for 45%, comprises food and agricultural products. Despite a consistent overall trade balance, primarily influenced by substantial imports of gas and electricity resources, Moldova maintains a noteworthy status as a net food exporter (Cimpoieş 2021).

As of 2020, Agriculture is important in providing employment opportunities in Moldova. Approximately 57.8% of the Moldovan population was engaged in the agricultural sector, highlighting the sector’s importance in the country’s labour market (ILO. 2020). See Table 2.

Table 2 Agricultural employment (% of total employment) (ILO. 2020)

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Moldova	56.3	58.8	59.6	60.4	59.4	59.2	58.2	57.8

The European Union plays a significant role in helping Moldova become more integrated with Europe. It’s not only about official meetings, the EU actively supports Moldova’s progress and reforms. The EU uses a tool called “conditionality” to check how well Moldova is getting ready to be a Europe family member. The process includes the country’s meeting certain European standards, and the EU regularly evaluates Moldova’s progress through reports. The success of the country’s journey to join Europe depends on both external and local efforts. Moldova needs to follow European requirements to make this happen. The EU’s conditionality works well when it rewards Moldova for making progress. On the other hand, Moldova needs to prove to the EU that it’s serious about its European goals and fulfil all the commitments it makes rebuilding trust with the EU is the main key for the Republic of Moldova to move forward in its relationship with Europe (Morari 2016)

Moldova’s business environment exhibits potential for enhancement. while high interest rates and the banking sector pose challenges, the country operates as an open economy internationally, without imposing restrictions. Moldova has a complex relationship with Russia, mostly tied to politics (Ceratin 2012).

Importantly, it actively works on its partnership with the European Union through the Association Agreement (O’connell & Kiparisov 2018). The Republic of Moldova similar to Georgia, entered into the Association Agreement in 2014, enabling free trade following WTO principles. This agreement holds particular importance for the country, particularly in facilitating the trade of agricultural products - a cornerstone of Moldova’s exports (European Commission 2018b).

In 2015, the EU and Moldova initiated a €64 million program called ENPARD to improve agriculture and rural development. The main goal was Moldova is to boost competitiveness, elevate living standards, and modernize the agro-food sector. ENPARD program promoted long-term collaboration between civil society, government, farmers, and business. The main measures included refining agricultural policies, increasing investment in modernization, enhancing education, and improving access to the market for farmers. These efforts aimed to foster sustainable growth and improve agriculture in the Republic of Moldova (Ignat et al. 2017).

4.2. Unlocking the Potential: A close look at EU ENPARD

ENPARD program aimed at modernizing agriculture, combating rural poverty, and encouraging innovative initiatives in rural development in Georgia and Moldova. By drawing on European experiences, ENPARD emphasized the diversification of the rural economy. Overall, the goal of ENPARD was to drive a comprehensive transformation in the rural and agricultural sectors. This includes stimulating innovative and new approaches to rural development, modernizing agricultural practices, and mitigating rural poverty. Using European principles and experiences, the program seeks to diversify the rural economy, ensuring that rural regions in Georgia and Moldova can overcome historical challenges, and adapt to changing circumstances, as well as environmental, and social transitions. The basic parameters of the involvement in ENPARD are shown in Table 3.

Since 2013, ENPARD has collaborated with the governments to address financial obstacles hindering agricultural development. This partnership aims to foster rural development and the agricultural sector, aiming not only at economic growth but also environmental sustainability and social equity. The program plays an important role in bridging economic disparities between urban and rural areas by enhancing rural livelihoods. While the green economy is undoubtedly necessary, it's important to recognize that rural and agricultural development encompasses a range of priorities beyond environmental sustainability. Moreover, international cooperation and financial initiatives remain instrumental in advancing rural and agricultural development goals (Abuselidze et al. 2021).

Table 3 ENPARD for Agriculture and Rural Development (ENPARD 2015; Okhrimenko & Okhrimenko 2017)

Country, period	Project overview, financial plan	Expected results
Georgia 2013-2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce poverty. • Fostering the adoption of business-oriented farmers' cooperatives as an exemplary model for small-scale farmers, improving market access and enhancing their production capabilities. <p align="center">Budget: EUR 234.5 million.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhancing collaboration among small-scale farmers; • Expanding and enhancing services provided to small-scale farmers; • Enhancing the efficiency of agricultural institution • Encouraging diverse economic and social prospects in rural zones, with a specific focus on empowering youth and women, while upholding cultural and environmental values.
Moldova 2015-2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helping the Government to reduce poverty. • Ensure enough food. • Long-lasting economic growth. • Create jobs in rural areas. <p align="center">Budget: EUR 64.075 million.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boost key product exports to the EU. • Align product standards with the EU. • Sustainably manage resources. • Upgrade the agri-food sector. • Enhance working and rural living conditions. • Improve agricultural competitiveness.

Giuli Giguashvili has a study that highlights a detailed analysis of Georgia's summary of achievements considered to be done in the ENPARD program. While discussions often encompass both Georgia and Moldova, focussing on Georgia at this juncture allows a deeper examination of specific goals. ENPARD program addresses the country's challenges and unemployment, particularly among women and youth, contributing to Georgia's stability through a soft security lens. Having four periods' budgets, ENPARD plays a vital role in aligning European and Georgia standards.

ENPARD I (2014-2017): 52 million Euro

ENPARD II (2016-2019): 50 million Euro

ENPARD III (2018-2021): 77.5 million Euro

ENPARD IV (2021-2025): 55 million Euro (FAO 2018).

The table below captures the essence of each ENPARD phase, showcasing their key focus areas and the main achievements to consider in the Georgian agrarian sector see Table 4.

Table 4 Summary of Achievements Across ENPARD Phases in Georgia (Giuli Giguashvili)

Phase	Duration	Achievements consider to be done
ENPARD I	2013-2017	Rural development pilot projects in Lagodekhi, Kazbegi, Borjomi; Improvement of consulting services; Support of the Ministry of Agriculture; Strengthening cooperation between farmers.
ENPARD II	2016-2020	Promotion of rural development; Improvement of agriculture; Advancement in food safety standards; Introduction of environmentally sustainable agricultural practices; Creation of farmer database, and seed material certification system.

ENPARD III	2018-2021	Support for environmental protection and sustainable management; Improved living conditions in rural areas; Increased competitiveness of agriculture.
ENPARD IV	2021-2025	Enhancement of export potential to EU member states; Protection of consumers rights; Focus on sanitary, food safety, and phytosanitary standards.

4.3. Agricultural Cooperatives

In Some development studies, agricultural cooperatives are most of the time regarded as vital instruments for poverty alleviation in rural communities, serving as pivotal policy mechanisms for improving rural and agricultural development in developing countries (Altman 2015; Abate 2018). Both developing and developed nations have shown a resurgence of interest in the cooperative movement. This is mainly attributed to the perception that cooperative organizations offer greater adaptability compared to corporations and demonstrate heightened resilience during periods of economic turbulence (Birchall et al. 2009).

Some authors highlight the advantages of farmers' groups, while others point out their drawbacks. These include such problems as lack of trust, members not contributing equally, issues with property rights and leadership efficiency, and higher management expenses (Nilsson 2001).

Agricultural cooperatives in certain countries or regions, provide a successful business model for medium-sized and small farmers in certain sectors. However, in other sectors cooperatives struggle to survive or are non-existent. The Eastern European region, including former Soviet countries, has a challenging and unique history with rural cooperatives. Many farmers still recall the era of state-controlled and forced collectivization farms (Hartvigsen 2014).

In analyzing the agricultural cooperatives for example in Georgia SWOT analysis was conducted drawing insights from the ENPARD project. This analysis informed by the works of (Kochlamazashvili I 2017) aimed to assess both external and internal factors. Presented below is a summarized Table outlining the key findings of the SWOT analysis, shedding light on the important factors shaping the landscape of agricultural cooperative development in Georgia, see Table 5.

**Table 5 SWOT Analysis of ENPARD Agricultural Cooperatives in Georgia
(Kochlamazashvili I 2017)**

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Establishment of cooperatives, boosting commercialization among farmers;	Lack of experience in modern cooperation;	A large number of small farms for cooperative development;	Compliance difficulties with safety standards;
Conducted training sessions for members;	Lack of trust between farmers;	Support from state and donors;	Negative attitude towards;
Built market linkages and brand awareness;	Low knowledge of cooperative principles;	Capacity for tailored training programs;	Climate change and land deterioration;
Accumulated agricultural assets and knowledge;	Disorganized documentation;	Promotion of exemplary cooperatives;	Product losses due to pests and diseases;
	Focus on production cooperatives;	Potential for agricultural tourism;	Trade embargos and restrictions.
	Lack of youth involvement;	Diversification of revenue sources;	
	Lack of access to high-quality products;	Consumer awareness campaigns;	
	Lack of contract based on relations.	Opportunity for organic and high-value products;	

4.4. Comparative Assessment of Producer Groups in Georgia and Moldova

4.4.1. Challenges in Georgia's Producer Groups

Georgian producer groups grapple with distinct challenges in agricultural development, starting from unemployment to outdated technologies. The agricultural sector's limited competitiveness and low productivity stem from challenges in acquiring new land, suitable technologies, deficiency in modern expertise, and elevated expenses associated with imported inputs (FAO 2012). ‘‘Regional Development Programme of Georgia’’ points out that in 2018-2021 several key challenges of the country including the limited expanse of arable lands, a lack of agricultural practices and modernization, outdated equipment, machinery, and technologies, deficiency in logistical infrastructure, and high unemployment rate. These all are numerous challenges that the Georgian regions were facing, See Table 6 (Ministry for Regional Development and Infrastructure 2018).

Table 6 Summary of Georgian region's needs (Ministry for Regional Development and Infrastructure 2018)

Regions	Challenges that demand resolution
Kakheti	Unemployment among educated people and high self-employment; Poor conditions of locals, roads, sewage systems, and gas supply shortages; Touristic services are low quality, The absence of clear regulations in land registration; Lack of gas supply in villages.
Kvemo Kartli	Lack of agricultural extension centers; Lack of water supply.
Guria	Youth Migration and Unemployment; A small acreage of arable lands, old technologies, and machinery for agriculture;

	Access to water and its quality.
Racha Lechkhumi - Kvemo Svaneti	Unemployment and Diversification; Access to education, Undeveloped logistic, and agro-processing; Lack of agricultural machinery and Economic development.
Shida Kartli	Lack of education, Access to public transport, and living conditions; old agriculture methods.
Samtskhe - Javakheti	unsatisfied with locals about roads, sewage systems, and gas supply shortages; school infrastructure.
Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti	Poverty and Unemployment; Living conditions Low agricultural modernization and Low qualifications of the workforce.
Imereti	Youth migration, Limited access to preschool education, and Agriculture equipment.
Mtskheta Mtianeti	Lack of schools and education; Unemployment and Lack of Logistics.
Adjara	Urban transport and Local importance roads.
Tbilisi	Immigration and Unemployment; Heavy transport, lack of parking space, traffic; and Lack of capital investments.

The summary underscores the need for improved support for agricultural development in Georgia, pointing to the importance of assistance to empower producer groups and provide resources. Without sufficient support mechanisms in place, producer

groups from those regions might find themselves unable to overcome various obstacles hindering their competitiveness and productivity.

Despite the importance of wine as a main sector and important contributor to exports, producer groups encounter obstacles in enhancing productivity, accessing markets, and fostering sustainable growth. As highlighted by Ghvanidze and Kvariani (2015), wine production ranks as the second-largest export community in Georgia (Kvariani & Ghvanidze 2015). However, the ENPARD program, while acknowledging the significance of agriculture, prioritizes cooperation in other sectors, potentially overlooking the needs of wine producers. Apiculture takes the lead, followed by cereal, hazelnut production, potato, and viticulture are last from the top five sectors, as highlighted by (Kochlamazashvili I 2017). This underscores the challenges faced by Georgian producer groups in resources tailored and accessing support to their specific needs.

Additionally, the limited engagement of producer groups in international markets, as discovered by Kochlamazashvili's study in 2017, represents the barriers hindering the expansion of Georgia's agricultural exports. Despite the agricultural potential, only a small percentage of producer groups are actively involved in exporting products such as wine, citrus, and hazelnuts. The majority of farmers sell locally, indicating challenges in distribution channels, market access, and export readiness (Kochlamazashvili I 2017).

In response to the country's agricultural challenges, the Georgian government has taken important measures to support the horizontal integration of small farmers through cooperatives. In 2014, the Ministry of Agriculture of Georgia approved the strategy for Agricultural development spanning the years 2014 to 2020. This strategy led to the foundation for encouraging the growth of farmer group organizations

To address these issues region-specific approach is important. Collaboration with local communities, government bodies, and international partners like EU ENPARD, is significant for sustainable solutions. Recognizing the agricultural potential for Georgian economic growth the country must invest in infrastructure, education, and technology to unlock its full potential.

4.4.2. Challenges In Moldova's Producer Groups

Producer groups in Moldova are important for the agricultural sector's sustainable development, contributing to local economic growth and acting as a safety net for rural residents. While specializing in high-value-added production, the sustainability of the farms depends on factors like farmers' education, modernization, age, and efficient use of working time (Cimpoieş 2021).

Establishing producer associations is suggested for market penetration, shortening the value chain, enabling direct access, and diversifying marketing channels. Most of the farmers expressing a desire to invest in their farms are facing some challenges which are insufficient mechanization, migration, labor shortages, and inadequate rural infrastructure. Specific public support programs, improved access to financial services, including subsidies, and rural development initiatives are necessary for addressing these challenges (Certain & Certan 2015).

A comprehensive examination of policies for rural development and agriculture is important for improving sustainable growth in rural areas. Utilizing a SWOT analysis can provide valuable insights into the current state of rural development initiatives. The National Strategy on Agriculture and Rural Development for the period 2014-2020 in Moldova, provides an overview of the external and internal factors that can influence the policies for rural and agricultural development, see Table 7 below (FAO 2014).

Table 7 Overview of rural development by SWOT analysis (FAO 2014)

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strong traditional practices and rich cultural heritage;• Bilingual proficiency in both Russian and Romanian among rural residents;• Robust internal mobility within the rural workforce.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A considerable population of young undereducated rural residents;• Modest wages are prevalent in rural locales;• Inadequate physical infrastructure in rural regions;• Subdued rural employment rates and substantial emigration.

Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilizing remittances for investment purposes; • Elevated wages in rural areas during economic upturns; • Creation of rural jobs through the establishment of foreign-owned businesses (services, manufacturing, etc.). • Potential for expansion of Agri-tourism ventures; • The emergence of young entrepreneurs in the agricultural sector. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Villages facing depopulation due to outmigration and an aging population; • Declining opportunities for agricultural employment; • A widening income gap between urban and rural areas; • Reduction in pension benefits due to budget constraints; • Escalation of poverty and social exclusion in rural regions.

With the complexities of agricultural development, it becomes apparent that regional strategies must be responsive, dynamic, and informed by a deep understanding of both external and internal factors. The collaborative efforts of different stakeholders, informed by the lessons learned from agricultural initiatives and challenges faced, can contribute to fostering sustainable growth. In this dynamic landscape, continuous adaptive and assessment strategies are crucial.

5. Results and Discussions

The first research objective of this thesis regards the examination of the role of producer groups within the EU ENPARD programs in Georgia and Moldova demonstrating multifaceted dynamics in agricultural development. Both countries having emerged from the collapse of the Soviet Union, have distinctive agricultural landscapes and face unique challenges. Through the lens of the European Union ENPARD program, which aims to support agricultural development in Eastern Partnership countries, Georgia and Moldova have witnessed efforts to strengthen their contributions to overall agricultural development objectives. According to the sources used in this thesis, we can identify the challenges Georgian regions are facing which are deeply rooted in socio-economic, historical, and instructional deficiencies. The limited expanse of arable lands, outdated equipment, and deficient logistical infrastructure present formidable obstacles to agricultural development. We also need to highlight the fact that before 2014 Georgia had not actively pursued a comprehensive agricultural development plan, which reflects a lack of strategic direction in this vital sector. However, with the approval of the Agricultural Development Strategy (2014-2020) by the Ministry of Agriculture in that year, it signified a deliberate shift towards implementing and prioritizing measures to make changes in agricultural practices (Ministry of Agriculture of Georgia 2014).

According to the SWOT Analysis of ENPARD Agricultural Cooperatives in Georgia (Kochlamazashvili I 2017) Table 5 presented before, shows interesting strengths such as cooperative establishment and market linkages foster optimism, while weaknesses like financial constraints and limited modernization pose challenges. Opportunities, including support from agencies and the potential for diversification, offer avenues for growth. However, threats such as negative perceptions and climate-related risks loom. These insights provide efforts to leverage strengths, address weaknesses, and capitalize on opportunities to enhance agricultural development in Georgia. Also, it's interesting that (Kochlamazashvili I 2017) study showed in Georgia between 2014 and 2017, numerous cooperatives doubled their paid workforce, with women actively engaged at all levels. Overall, 53% of cooperative members or paid employees are women, with 21% holding leading managerial roles. In my opinion, having an important representation of women in the agricultural sector is beneficial as it brings diverse

perspectives, promotes economic empowerment, enhances decision-making, contributes to sustainability, and fosters community development

In my opinion, addressing the challenges facing the Georgian agricultural sector is crucial for sustainable development. Updating technologies, improving infrastructure, and expanding market access are some of the main steps to enhance economic resilience and productivity. Diversifying export markets beyond wine production can reduce vulnerability and promote sectoral growth. Modernizing agricultural practices not only fosters efficiency but also ensures environmental sustainability. In the end, tackling these challenges is important for Georgia to unlock the full potential of its agricultural sector and achieve long-term prosperity.

In the context of Georgia's rural development policy, I need to mention a study on supported cooperative groups that highlights their positive impacts on net returns and farm revenue, aligning with similar studies in China, Mozambique, and Rwanda. High expectations and peer networks from cooperatives negatively affect farm outcomes. Farmer age and education influence productivity, while factors like social networks, household size, and trust influence cooperative membership. Despite initial success, many cooperatives face issues like low commitment and free-riding, hindering long-term sustainability. Policy interventions targeting farmer attitudes and infrastructure improvement for extension services can enhance cooperative effectiveness in improving small farmers' overall economic performance (Ahado et al. 2022a)

Evaluation of the European Union's cooperation with the Republic of Moldova (2014-2020) final report (European Union 2021) highlights that EU support to Moldova has enhanced competitiveness in the agri-food sector, leading to notable growth in production and exports to the EU. However, the report also underscores that rural economic diversification remains limited, and challenges persist in meeting EU standards. Despite progress in horticulture, low-value agricultural exports still dominate. Productivity growth is impeded by limited access to resources, and institutional frameworks require strengthening. Efforts to diversify rural activities are ongoing, but the impact is gradual, especially for small farmers facing productivity challenges.

Despite the availability of policy documents and strategic frameworks, producer groups in Moldova continue to encounter important challenges that hinder their sustainability and growth. Factors such as labour shortages, insufficient mechanization, and inadequate

rural infrastructure pose formidable obstacles to the success of Moldovian producer groups (FAO 2014; Certan & Certan 2015).

Moldova's rural development strengths, bilingual proficiency, rich cultural heritage, and internal workforce mobility, present opportunities for addressing the country's challenges effectively. For example, cultural heritage and traditional practices fostering can promote sustainable agricultural practices and improve community resilience. Bilingual proficiency among rural residents opens doors for international cooperation and trade. By capitalizing on these strengths, the country can create incentives for migrants to return to their homes and contribute to the agricultural sector, potentially through Moldavian government support programs aimed at skill development, creation, job, and infrastructure enhancement in the country's rural areas.

This challenge requires a multi-faceted approach that combines policy reforms, targeted interventions, and stakeholder collaboration. Moldova's association agreement with the European Union provides another avenue for utilizing its rural development strengths. Through partnerships with the EU and support programs, Moldova can access technical assistance, funding, and market opportunities to strengthen the country's agricultural sector (Morari 2016).

As we can see results show that both countries Moldova and Georgia 2014 have Agricultural development strategy plans onwards to provide a structured approach towards enhancing agricultural sustainability, productivity, and economic growth in their respective countries (FAO 2014; Ministry of Agriculture of Georgia 2014).

The comparative assessment of producer groups in Moldova and Georgia underscores the diverse array of opportunities and challenges within each country's agricultural sector. While both countries share a history of Soviet-era collectivization, their trajectories post-independence have diverged, resulting in distinct agricultural landscapes and development pathways.

Table 8 below is a general overview, and specific details of each country's agricultural landscape and the dynamics of producer groups involved in the ENPARD EU programs.

Table 8 Comparative Overview of Agricultural Development and Producer Groups in Georgia and Moldova

Aspects	Georgia	Moldova
Agricultural challenges	Dealing with limited competitiveness and low productivity due to challenges in suitable technologies, acquiring new land, and deficiency in modern expertise (FAO 2012).	Facing challenges which are increased competition, production fluctuations price volatility in the grape products and grapes market (Certan & Certan 2015).
Strategies for Development	Focusing on encouraging the growth of farmer group organizations through legislative measures and specialized extension services (Ministry of Agriculture of Georgia 2014).	Establishing producer associations is suggested for market penetration and diversifying marketing channels (Certain & Certan 2015)
Political and Social Landscape	Facing challenges in post-Soviet overcoming and transitioning the historical legacy of the Soviet Union (Henrik Larsen 2021).	Struggling with a complex political balancing landscape between domestic aspirations and global alignments (Henrik Larsen 2021).

Economic Opportunities	Recognizes the agricultural potential for economic growth, particularly in sectors like hazelnut and apiculture production (Kochlamazashvili I 2017).	Utilizing remittances for investment purposes for expansion of Agri-tourism ventures (FAO 2014).
Rural Development SWOT Analysis	Bilingual proficiency in both Georgian and Russian among rural residents, but challenges by inadequate rural employment rates and physical infrastructure (Ministry for Regional Development and Infrastructure 2018).	Rich cultural heritage and strong traditional practices, but facing challenges like substantial emigration and subdued rural employment rates (FAO 2014).

Despite existing challenges both countries Georgia and Moldova exhibit strength in their agricultural sectors, including bilingual proficiency, cultural heritage, and internal mobility within the rural workforce. Growth opportunities abound, such as expanding agri-tourism ventures, utilizing remittances for investment, and improving the emergence of young entrepreneurs in the agricultural sector.

Moldova and Georgia both country grapple with a distinctive blend of global internal and political challenges. Their journey towards inclusive growth and accountable governance faces hurdles particularly due to the tug-of-war between self-serving elites and societies pushing for greater responsibility. Aligning with Western ideals, while seen as a path to progress, simultaneously triggers geopolitical consequences and internal divisions. Striking a balance between global alignments and domestic aspirations remains a complex undertaking for both nations (Henrik Larsen 2021). They are working hard, but overcoming the historical legacy of the Soviet Union is still challenging for them.

6. Conclusions

Through the ENPARD program, both countries have received support aimed at improving agricultural productivity, strengthening producer groups, and promoting rural development. A comparative assessment of the producer groups in these countries provides valuable insights into the effectiveness of ENPARD initiatives and the challenges faced by agricultural communities.

In Georgia, ENPARD has focused on addressing longstanding challenges which are limited competitiveness, inadequate modernization, and low productivity in the agricultural sector. Initiatives under the program included market linkages, training sessions, and support for cooperative establishment, aiming to build the capacity of producer groups and improve their market access. The Agricultural Development Strategy (2014-2020) reflects a concerted effort by the Georgian government to prioritize measures and provide strategic direction measures for agricultural development, with ENPARD playing an important role in its implementation.

Meanwhile, in Moldova, the program initiatives have contributed to enhancing competitiveness in the agri-food sector and promoting rural economic diversification. Despite progress in areas which as horticulture, challenges persist in meeting EU standards, addressing productivity constraints faced by small farmers, and diversifying agricultural exports.

A comparative assessment of the producer groups in Moldova and Georgia reveals both differences and similarities in their development pathways and agricultural landscapes. Both countries share a history of Soviet-era collectivization but have diverged in their post-independence trajectories, leading to distinct opportunities and challenges in their agricultural sectors. Georgia focuses on encouraging the growth of farmer group organizations while Moldova emphasized the establishment of producer associations for market diversifying and penetration marketing channels.

However, challenges remain, and a comparative assessment of producer groups underscores the need for tailored approaches that address the specific contexts and needs of each country. By addressing external and internal factors and adopting adaptive strategies, Georgia and Moldova can navigate their respective agricultural landscapes toward the path of sustainable development of prosperity.

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