

Advancing sustainable resource management through community engagement in Eastern Partnership Countries

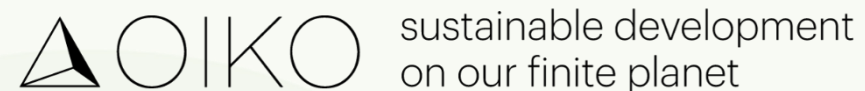
EMPs for 8 communities in Armenia

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Advancing sustainable resource management through community engagement in Eastern Partnership Countries

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Why Ecotourism Now: Armenia's Strategic Opportunity

Armenia combines mountain landscapes, forest ecosystems, protected areas, biodiversity-rich habitats, cultural heritage, traditional settlements and rural communities seeking diversified income opportunities.

Ecotourism can become a strategic bridge between:

**Biodiversity
conservation**

**Landscape
restoration**

**Local
livelihoods**

**Visitor
education**

**Sustainable
management**

The opportunity is not volume-based tourism growth. It is higher-value, lower-impact tourism that supports conservation and community benefits.

higher value • lower impact • local benefits

Advancing Ecotourism in Armenia

From Strategic Assessment to Practical Development

ROADMAP

A roadmap based on strategic review, spatial and territorial analysis, participatory consultation and applied tools.

RESULT

Armenia's ecotourism opportunity is not simply to promote attractive places. It is to convert natural and cultural assets into managed, conservation-compatible, locally beneficial visitor experiences.



Dilijan National Park, Tavush Region, Armenia



The Core Problem

Strong Assets, Weak Management Systems

Armenia's pilot destinations demonstrate strong ecotourism potential, but the main constraint is not the absence of assets. It is the absence of a consistent site-level management system. Key gaps include:

- weak or missing visitor monitoring;
- uneven signage and route orientation;
- limited visitor centers or interpretation points;
- incomplete governance and revenue-sharing mechanisms;
- inconsistent linkages between conservation, tourism services and local products;
- limited use of zoning to guide where tourism should or should not take place.

Core message

The central development gap is operational, not how to move from attractive landscapes and monuments to planned, managed and investable ecotourism destinations.



Dilijan National Park, Tavush Region, Armenia

Methodology

From Assessment to Operational Tool

The approach is based on a phased and iterative methodology that combines:

- 1 **Strategic review** of tourism, biodiversity, protected areas, forest governance, local development and safeguards.
- 2 **Spatial and territorial analysis** of natural assets, conservation areas, accessibility, tourism resources and socio-economic conditions.
- 3 **Stakeholder consultations** with municipalities, communities, tourism actors, conservation institutions and supporting organizations.
- 4 **Development** of the Ecotourism Management Plan Template Tool.
- 5

Evidence and consultation translated into planning decisions and pilot packages

Output: Ecotourism Management Plan Template Tool + eight pilot community EMPs

Application through eight pilot community EMPs

The methodology is not a desk exercise. It is a practical translation process: From evidence and consultation to planning decisions and pilot packages.

Spatial Logic: Armenia as a Portfolio of Ecotourism Landscapes

The eight pilot communities represent a national portfolio of ecotourism landscape types:

Dilijan	Protected forest resort and national park gateway.
Ijevan	Forest-product and river-linked destination.
Vanadzor	Urban-nature and cultural service gateway.
Alaverdi and Tumanyan	Debed Gorge eco-cultural and industrial heritage corridor.
Vardenis	Highland lake-basin, grassland and wetland landscape.
Goris	Cave-cultural and southern tourism gateway.
Kapan	Mountain-biodiversity and industrial transition landscape.



The pilots should not be presented as separate local cases only. They demonstrate different Armenian ecotourism typologies and management models.

Different landscapes → different management models

Pilot Typology Matrix: Readiness versus Sensitivity

The pilots/EMPs show different combinations of ecological sensitivity, tourism demand and implementation readiness.

Differentiated planning responses by pilot type

High demand + high sensitivity:

Dilijan, Goris, Kapan

Planning response:

controlled access, visitor management, service quality, safeguards.

Medium demand + corridor complexity:

Alaverdi and Tumanyan

Planning response:

route-based development, climate-aware visitor movement.

Lower/medium pressure + good access:

Ijevan and Vanadzor

Planning response:

structure the offer before pressure increases.

High ecological sensitivity + limited infrastructure:

Vardenis

Planning response:

strict conservation plus controlled low-impact use.

A single national tool is useful only if it supports differentiated local decisions.

Ecological Value and Visitor Use Must Be Planned Together

The pilot assessments show that several communities include critical habitats, endangered species, climate risks and sensitive landscapes.

Key habitat types include:

- Mixed deciduous forests;
- River and riparian corridors;
- Canyon slopes and rocky cliffs;
- Wetlands and lake-adjacent ecosystems;
- Mountain grasslands and highland areas;
- Forest-product landscapes.

Climate and physical risks are also relevant:

Fire

Landslides

Floods

Drought

Seasonal access limitations

Tourism cannot be planned after conservation.

Conservation sensitivity must define where, when and how tourism can take place.

Participatory Consultation From Local Information to Implementable Governance

Stakeholder consultations are not only a validation step.
They are the basis for realistic governance and implementation.

- Consultations help identify:
- Local priorities and constraints;
- Service capacity;
- Tourism product feasibility;
- Conservation concerns;
- Route and infrastructure gaps;
- Private sector readiness;
- Community willingness and benefit-sharing potential.

Ecotourism is delivered locally, but it fails without coordination among municipalities, protected area/forest institutions, communities, private businesses and supporting organizations.



The Ecotourism Management Plan Template Tool

A practical operating system for destination-level ecotourism

Purpose - The Tool helps municipalities, protected area administrations and local stakeholders prepare structured ecotourism plans that are:

- Conservation-compatible
- Locally beneficial
- Operationally realistic
- Investment-ready

What the Tool does

It translates policy, spatial analysis and consultation results into practical decisions on:

- Suitable tourism zones
- Ecotourism products
- Infrastructure needs
- Stakeholder roles
- Visitor management
- Safeguards and monitoring

Key message

The Tool moves Armenia from fragmented tourism initiatives toward a

consistent, site-level ecotourism planning system.



Armenia Ecotourism Portfolio

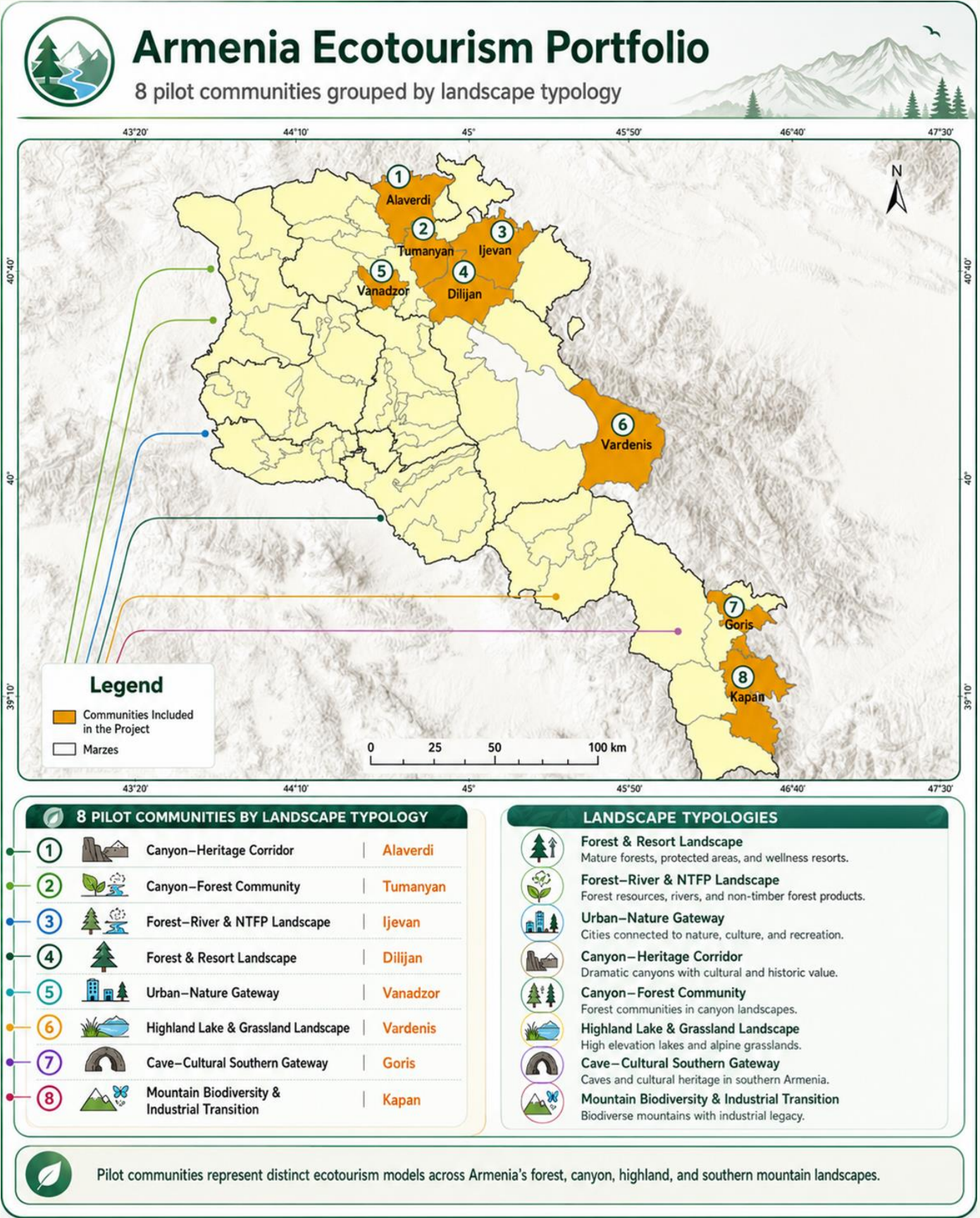
Pilot Municipalities as a National Demonstration Portfolio

The pilots should be presented as a portfolio of Armenian ecotourism typologies, not as separate municipalities.

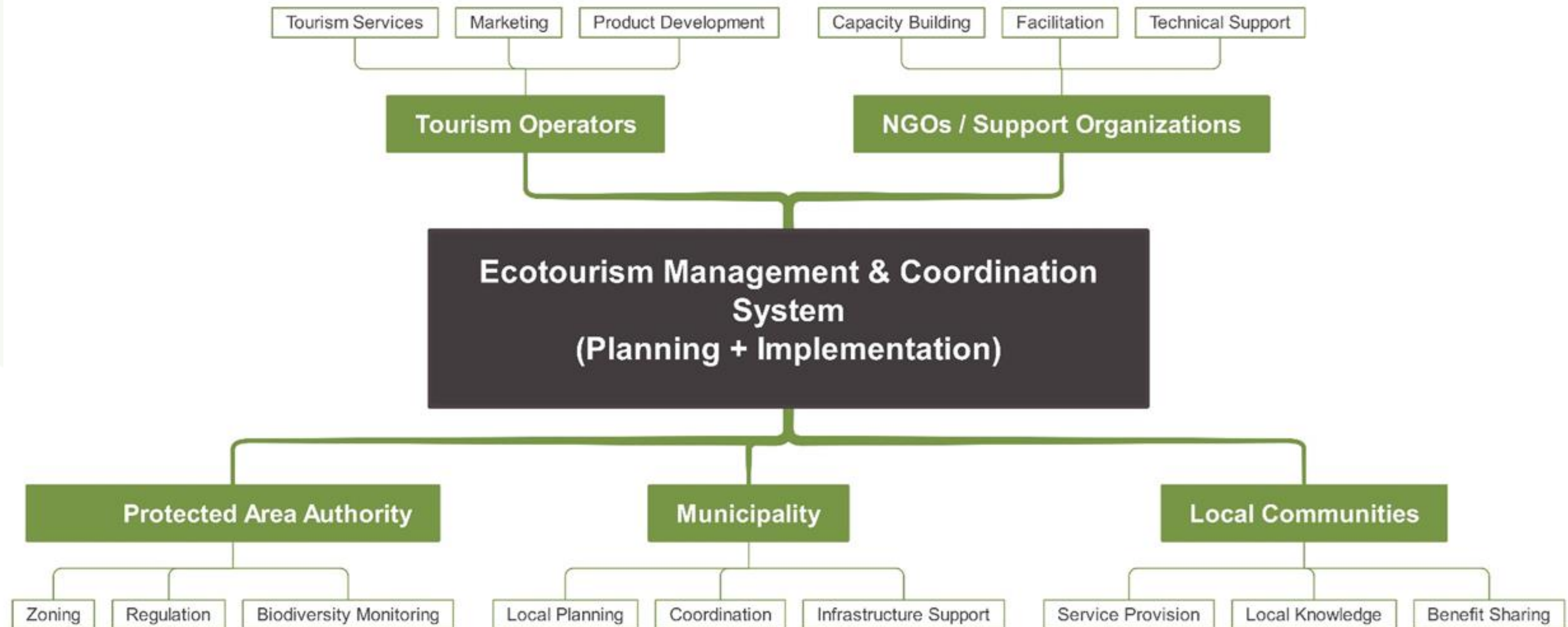
The eight pilot packages demonstrate different investment and management models:

Portfolio models and planning focus

1	Dilijan • Managed high-demand forest destination	Protected area + high tourism demand + hospitality ecosystem → focus on visitor management, zoning, interpretation, service standards.
2	Debed Gorge / Alaverdi Tumanyan Canyon, forest and heritage corridor	Cultural monuments + river corridor + forest patches → focus on route development, heritage interpretation, community services, industrial heritage reuse.
3	Ijevan • Forest–river & NTFP landscape	Forest resources, river setting and non-timber forest products → focus on nature access, local products and visitor orientation.
4	Vanadzor • Urban-nature gateway	City services + surrounding forests → focus on regional hub function, youth/cultural tourism and nature access.
5	Goris • Southern cave-cultural landscape and tourism gateway	Cave settlements + Tatev corridor + rural hospitality → focus on packaging, local guiding, visitor dispersal, value-chain linkages.
6	Kapan • Biodiversity and mountain-industrial landscape	Zangezur ecological setting + mining identity + mountain trails → focus on controlled nature tourism, heritage transition narrative, safeguards.
7	Vardenis • Highland lake and grassland landscape	Lake Sevan proximity + highland ecosystems → focus on low-impact nature tourism and birdwatching.



Institutional Roles and Functional Responsibilities



Tool Architecture

Technical structure of the Tool

The Tool follows a full ecotourism management cycle:



From screening → baseline → zoning → products → infrastructure → governance → safeguards → investment

Integrating MEET and Emerald Frameworks

Combining tourism planning with ecological safeguards



Combined value

- ✓ MEET defines how ecotourism is planned.
- ✓ Emerald defines where and under what conditions tourism can take place.

Key message: The Tool ensures that ecotourism development is both market-oriented and conservation-compliant.

MEET Synergies with Armenia and Roadmap for Joining

MEET Synergies with Armenia and Roadmap for Joining

From pilot destinations to international ecotourism standards

Why MEET fits Armenia

- ✓ Strengthens protected area and community-based tourism planning
- ✓ Supports destination-level governance
- ✓ Improves product quality and visitor management
- ✓ Links biodiversity conservation with local economic benefits
- ✓ Creates a pathway to international recognition

Roadmap

- 1 Select suitable pilot destinations
- 2 Establish local coordination platforms
- 3 Prepare baseline and suitability assessments
- 4 Develop MEET-aligned ecotourism products
- 5 Train guides, communities and service providers
- 6 Implement visitor management and safeguards
- 7 Prepare for MEET certification
- 8 Monitor, improve and scale

From Fragmented Assets to Bankable Ecotourism Packages

Investment Readiness

Prioritizing small, catalytic investments before large infrastructure

Core message

The first phase of ecotourism investment in Armenia should not focus on large facilities. It should focus on making pilot destinations organized, safe, visible, conservation-compatible and locally beneficial.

Investment logic

The eight pilot EMPs show that most communities already have valuable natural and cultural assets, but many lack the basic systems that convert these assets into manageable visitor experiences.

In short: invest first in organization, safety, visibility and management capacity.

Priority investment package

Five practical investment areas can turn fragmented assets into visitor-ready packages:

1. Visitor organization and safety — Route mapping, trail marking, risk signage, basic safety information, seasonal access guidance.
2. Interpretation and visitor awareness — Information boards, digital materials, biodiversity and Red Book species awareness, visitor conduct rules.
3. Local service integration — Linking routes with guesthouses, food points, guides, local product sellers, transport providers and community-based services.
4. Conservation-compatible infrastructure — Low-impact trail improvements, viewpoints, rest points, waste-management points and visitor information corners in existing public or private buildings.
5. Monitoring and adaptive management — Simple indicators for visitor numbers, route condition, biodiversity disturbance, local income and women/youth participation.

Investment should prepare destinations for use — before building more infrastructure.

Investment Readiness

From Fragmented Assets to Bankable Ecotourism Packages

Financing approach

Early-stage investment should combine:

- public financing for route organization,
- signage,
- visitor information and safeguards;
- donor/project financing for piloting tools, training, interpretation and monitoring;
- private micro-investment for guesthouses, food services, guiding, transport and local products;
- PPP only selectively, where demand, governance and maintenance capacity are already proven.

Key message for decision-makers

Investment should follow the sequence:

Organize the destination → connect local services → manage visitor use → then scale facilities where demand and safeguards justify it.



Product Innovation From Attractions to Experience Clusters

The next generation of Armenian ecotourism should be based on experience clusters, not isolated attractions.

FROM
single
attractions



TO
connected
experience clusters

- 1 Forest ecology and local food experiences: Dilijan, Ijevan, Vanadzor**
Examples: forest walks, biodiversity awareness, herbs, mushrooms, honey, berries, local gastronomy.
- 2 Canyon and river corridor experiences: Alaverdi, Tumanyan**
Examples: Debed Gorge trails, monastery-to-landscape routes, industrial heritage storytelling, riparian ecology.
- 3 Highland lake and grassland experiences: Vardenis**
Examples: birdwatching, highland landscapes, Lake Sevan basin, rural food and seasonal nature observation.
- 4 Southern mountain and cave-cultural experiences: Goris, Kapan**
Examples: cave settlements, mountain trails, Khustup and Zangezur landscapes, heritage and biodiversity interpretation.

One package should link nature, culture, service and learning.

Data and Monitoring Gap

The Missing Layer in Local Tourism Management

A major finding across the pilot portfolio is the absence of reliable community-level tourism and impact data.

Current gaps

- No verified visitor counting for routes or attractions
- Incomplete local income baselines from ecotourism
- Limited biodiversity monitoring linked to tourism use
- Weak tracking of local enterprise participation
- No clear women and youth inclusion indicators

Simple monitoring protocol

- Visitor use
- Route condition
- Biodiversity disturbance
- Local economic participation
- Women and youth inclusion

Conclusion

Armenia's ecotourism opportunity is strategic, but it must be managed.

The eight pilot EMPs demonstrate that Armenia has strong potential to develop ecotourism across diverse landscapes — forests, canyons, highlands, lake-basin areas, cave-cultural systems and southern mountain ecosystems.

Core conclusions

1. Armenia already has significant natural, cultural and community assets for ecotourism development.
2. The main gap is not the lack of attractions, but the lack of structured site-level management systems.
3. Ecotourism planning must start from conservation sensitivity, not only from tourism demand.
4. Local communities, municipalities, protected area/forest institutions and private actors need a shared coordination platform.
5. Small, catalytic investments should first make destinations safe, organized, visible and locally beneficial.
6. Monitoring of visitors, biodiversity impacts and local benefits is essential for adaptive management.

Final message

The Ecotourism Management Plan Tool provides Armenia with a practical pathway to move from fragmented initiatives toward a coherent, conservation-compatible and community-based national ecotourism model.

Result

From pilot EMPs to National Ecotourism Model



Thank you



sustainable development
on our finite planet



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