

Economic Resilience Roadmap for Ijevan Consolidated Community

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Executive Summary:

The "IJEVAN INFOTUN" NGO, through a series of meetings led by expert Gharib Harutyunyan, outlined a comprehensive roadmap to enhance the economic resilience of the Ijevan consolidated community. This roadmap, drawing upon diverse insights from local government, business sectors, civil society organizations, youth, and media, emphasizes the community's capacity to withstand and adapt to economic challenges by leveraging its geographical location, agricultural potential, and cultural heritage. It underscores the necessity of a cohesive approach that includes government policies, community engagement, infrastructure development, legal and regulatory compliance, and environmental sustainability.

Drawing from the extensive discussions held with stakeholders throughout November and December 2023, the introduction to the Ijevan Economic Resilience Roadmap delves deeply into the community's journey towards sustainable economic development. This roadmap is crafted from the collective wisdom and insights of the community's fabric-government officials, business leaders, civil society, and youth—all unified in their vision for Ijevan. The roadmap outlines strategies that leverage Ijevan's geographical and cultural richness, agricultural and tourism potential, and innovative capacities. The roadmap not only identifies current infrastructural and educational challenges, but also proposes a transformative approach that incorporates smart agricultural practices, infrastructure enhancement, and the revitalization of the tourism sector as keystones for building economic resilience. This detailed narrative underscores a commitment to an inclusive, adaptive planning process that harnesses local strengths, addresses systemic challenges, and fosters a cohesive, economically vibrant community prepared to navigate and thrive in the face of future uncertainties.

Key strategies for bolstering economic resilience identified include a diversified funding approach for the community, enhancing community engagement through targeted communication and incentives, proactive planning in infrastructure development and regulatory compliance, and integrating sustainable practices to minimize ecological impact. The impact of the consolidation process on the community's economic situation was examined, which highlighted the need for inclusive strategic planning that addresses specific needs of the community and leverages the strengths of all community settlements.

The envisioned future for Ijevan includes a vibrant cultural life, advanced agricultural practices, developed tourism, robust infrastructure, and enhanced educational opportunities. This vision aims to promote innovation and technology in key sectors like agriculture and tourism, improving job opportunities and professional development for youth. Successful implementation of the roadmap requires collaboration among stakeholders, including local businesses, governmental bodies, NGOs, and the community at large.

Background

From November 2023 - December 2023, the "IJEVAN INFOTUN" NGO, [with support from the Center for International Private Enterprise \(CIPE\)](#), convened a series of four meetings with stakeholders such as stakeholders from the local government, business sectors, civil society organizations, youth, and media to formulate a comprehensive roadmap for enhancing the economic resilience of the Ijevan consolidated community. The discussions aimed to address the multifaceted aspects of economic resilience, including funding, community engagement, infrastructure development, regulatory challenges, and environmental sustainability.

Key Findings

- ✓ Economic resilience in Ijevan encompasses the ability to adapt to economic challenges, leveraging geographic, agricultural, and cultural strengths.
- ✓ The consolidation process has led to some infrastructure improvements and better resource allocation. However, challenges in strategic planning, infrastructure development, and utilization of the community's potential were identified.
- ✓ Stakeholders envision an economically resilient Ijevan characterized by vibrant cultural life, advanced agriculture, developed tourism, robust infrastructure, and enhanced educational and professional opportunities.

Strategic Directions

Strengthening Community Engagement: Implement targeted communication strategies and develop programs to foster a sense of ownership among residents.

Infrastructure and Regulatory Proactivity: Focus on proactive planning and early engagement with local government and contractors to avoid delays in infrastructure development.

Sustainability and Environmental Protection: Conduct environmental assessments and adopt sustainable practices to minimize ecological impact.

Inclusive Strategic Planning: Involve all community settlements in strategic planning to address specific needs and leverage strengths.

Stakeholder Roles and Resource Mobilization

- ✓ A collaborative approach involving local businesses, governmental bodies, NGOs, and the community is crucial for resilience building.
- ✓ Diversification of financial and non-financial resources through public-private partnerships and community initiatives is essential.
- ✓ Raising awareness and preparing the community through education and proactive engagement are key to ensuring readiness for economic challenges.

Introduction

Economic resilience is typically used in two distinct, but overlapping, ways (see for example, Hallegatte, 2014)¹. At one level it can be broadly defined as the ability of an economy as a whole to cope, recover from and reconstruct after a shock (Adapted from Hallegatte). At the same time, it is often used to refer to the economic resilience of individual households or firms, and their ability to cope with or recover from a shock and adapt to changing economic circumstances in the wider economy. In this case, it can relate to the distributional effects of a shock (who is affected and how) as well as the vulnerability of individuals to the shock and the nature of any welfare provisions that are in place. The two concepts are mutually inter-related as each can depend on, and influence, the other.

Economic resilience in Ijevan encompasses the community's ability to endure, adapt to, and recover from economic shocks and stresses. Situated in Armenia's Tavush region, Ijevan's unique blend of natural beauty, cultural heritage, and agricultural potential places it at the crossroads of opportunities and vulnerabilities in the face of economic challenges.

Recent years have underscored several key challenges for Ijevan:

- **Vulnerability to Economic Fluctuations:** Reliance on agriculture and tourism makes Ijevan susceptible to external economic shifts and environmental changes.
- **Infrastructure and Connectivity Limitations:** Insufficient development in transport and digital infrastructure restricts access to markets and information, hampering growth.
- **Human Capital Drain:** The migration of skilled labor and youth in search of better opportunities weakens the local economy and diminishes innovation potential.

In response, our roadmap seeks to enhance Ijevan's economic resilience by:

- **Diversifying the Economy:** Encouraging the development of new sectors and supporting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to reduce dependency on single industries.
- **Strengthening Infrastructure:** Upgrading physical and digital networks to improve connectivity and access to markets.
- **Retaining and Developing Talent:** Investing in education and vocational training to keep and attract skilled individuals, bolstering the local workforce.

¹ Hallegatte, Stephane. 2021. Economic Resilience : Definition and Measurement. Policy Research Working Paper;No. 6852. World Bank, Washington, DC. © World Bank. <https://www.openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/18341> License: CC BY 3.0 IGO.

By addressing these challenges with targeted strategies, Ijevan can fortify its economic resilience, ensuring a sustainable and prosperous future for its community.

The situational analysis of the Ijevan consolidated community encompasses a thorough examination of its current state, drawing upon its rich historical background, geographic and climatic advantages, economic activities, and the diverse insights shared by participants in the meetings. This analysis identifies the community's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT), aiming to leverage Ijevan's unique position for future development.

Strengths:

- **Geographic and Climatic Conditions:** Ijevan's location and climate are conducive to agriculture and tourism, with its fertile lands and scenic beauty attracting visitors. Ijevan's distinct seasonal climate offers unique tourism opportunities throughout the year. Its mild summers are ideal for eco-tourism and outdoor activities, while the colorful autumn landscape attracts cultural and heritage tourists. Even in winter, though milder compared to other regions, there's potential for developing winter sports or themed tourism experiences.
- **Historical and Cultural Heritage:** The presence of historical monuments and a rich cultural legacy enhances Ijevan's appeal as a tourist destination. There is a big potential to enhance the accessibility and information available for historical sites and monuments, creating thematic cultural tours that connect with the region's history and fall landscape.
- **Diverse Economic Activities:** Agriculture, handicrafts, and a budding tourism sector provide a solid economic base.
- **Community Engagement and Potential for Innovation:** Discussions reveal a community eager for development, innovation, and the fostering of an entrepreneurial spirit.

Weaknesses:

- **Infrastructure Development:** Participants noted the lack of infrastructure, particularly in transportation and accessibility to historical sites, which hampers tourism and economic growth.
- **Underutilized Agricultural Potential:** Despite fertile lands, there is a noticeable disengagement from agriculture among the youth, and high-value crops are not being fully exploited.
- **Lack of Coordination across the Business Community:** There is a need for a stronger collaboration among business leaders to drive collective improvement and economic resilience. To enhance economic resilience in Ijevan, the business community could benefit from increased collaboration in joint marketing initiatives to promote regional branding and from the integration of supply chains through local sourcing and shared

logistics. These concerted efforts would not only bolster the local economy but also ensure a unified approach to overcoming challenges and seizing growth opportunities.

Opportunities:

- **Tourism Development:** Leveraging historical sites and natural beauty to develop eco-tourism and cultural tourism.
- **Agricultural Innovation:** Introducing high-value crops and modern farming techniques to revitalize agriculture.
- **Youth Engagement and Non-Formal Education:** Utilizing the potential of the youth through education and volunteering to foster a culture of innovation and resilience.

Threats:

- **Economic Vulnerability:** Dependence on a limited number of economic activities makes Ijevan susceptible to external shocks.
- **Migration:** The lack of job opportunities could lead to brain drain, with skilled individuals leaving for better prospects elsewhere.
- **Environmental Degradation:** Unchecked development could threaten the natural and cultural heritage that forms the basis of Ijevan's appeal.

In light of these insights, the roadmap for Ijevan's economic resilience must prioritize infrastructure improvements, the promotion of sustainable tourism, agricultural innovation, and the creation of an engaging platform for businesses and the youth. This approach will not only address the current challenges but also harness the community's inherent strengths and opportunities for a resilient and prosperous future.

III. Vision and Goals

The vision statement of economic resilience in Ijevan is to evolve into a resilient and sustainable economic hub that integrates its rich cultural heritage and natural beauty with innovative potential. This approach aims to rejuvenate traditional industries, boost small business growth, and establish Ijevan as a leading destination for eco-tourism and agricultural innovation. By emphasizing sustainable practices, educational advancements, and infrastructure enhancements, we foster a diverse and dynamic economy that benefits the entire community, setting a benchmark for rural economic development in Armenia and beyond.

Long-Term Objectives:

- ✓ Establish Ijevan as a Center for Agricultural Innovation: Promote sustainable farming practices, introduce high-value crops, and support the development of agri-businesses to rejuvenate the agricultural sector.
- ✓ Enhance Educational Opportunities: Expand vocational training and higher education programs to align with the economic needs of the community, ensuring a skilled workforce for future growth.
- ✓ Improve Infrastructure and Connectivity: Upgrade transportation, communication, and utility networks to facilitate economic activities and enhance the quality of life for residents and visitors alike.
- ✓ Promote Sustainable Development: Implement policies and practices that balance economic growth with environmental conservation and cultural preservation, ensuring a vibrant and sustainable future for Ijevan.
- ✓ Aligning with broader development strategies, these goals are designed to enhance economic diversification, resilience, and sustainability. By focusing on education, infrastructure, and community involvement, we aim to build a foundation for lasting prosperity in Ijevan, making it an attractive destination for investment, tourism, and living.

Immediate Goals:

- ✓ Revitalize Traditional Industries: Enhance carpet-weaving, woodworking, and food processing industries through modernization and market expansion, both domestically and internationally.
- ✓ Foster Small Business Growth: Encourage entrepreneurship by simplifying business registration processes, offering tax incentives, and providing access to microfinance and business development services.
- ✓ Develop Eco-Tourism: Invest in infrastructure improvements, marketing campaigns, and training programs to promote Ijevan as a premier eco-tourism and cultural heritage destination.
- ✓ Strengthen Community Engagement: Create platforms for collaboration among businesses, government, NGOs, and the community to foster a culture of innovation, volunteering, and shared responsibility.
- ✓ **IV. Economic Development and Diversification Strategies for Ijevan**
- ✓ Through consultations with stakeholders, Ijevan's pathway to a prosperous future relies on multi-dimensional strategies that integrate agricultural innovation, tourism development, support for SMEs, infrastructure enhancements, and comprehensive community engagement.

Agricultural Innovation and Expansion

To revolutionize agriculture in Ijevan, leveraging its fertile lands and favorable climate is essential.

Recommendations:

- ✓ **Government (Ministry of Economy):** Implement subsidy programs to support the transition to organic farming and the cultivation of high-value crops, such as broccoli. These subsidies could cover costs related to acquiring organic certifications and purchasing necessary equipment.
- ✓ **Private Sector (Local Agribusiness companies):** Invest in smart agriculture technologies to optimize resource use and increase yields. Examples include precision farming equipment and sustainable water management systems, which can significantly boost productivity and sustainability.
- ✓ **Civil Society (Agricultural and other related NGOs):** Facilitate workshops and training sessions on innovative farming techniques and sustainable practices to educate and engage local farmers, enhancing their ability to implement these new approaches.

Support for SMEs and Entrepreneurship

Fostering a supportive environment for SMEs and entrepreneurs, particularly in tech and creative sectors, is crucial for economic diversification.

Recommendations:

1. **Local and international organizations in cooperation with state bodies:** Establish incubation and innovation centers that provide comprehensive support services, including mentorship, networking opportunities, and access to financing.
2. **Private Sector (Local Business companies):** Collaborate to create a cohesive support network that offers shared resources, such as marketing and logistics, to help SMEs scale their operations effectively.
3. **Civil Society (Local NGOs):** Organize regular entrepreneurship workshops and funding competitions to stimulate innovation and provide startups with the capital needed to grow.

V. Infrastructure and Investment

Addressing infrastructural deficits is crucial for unleashing Ijevan's tourism and economic potential.

Recommendations:

- ✓ **Local Government (Projects Development and Transport Department):** Develop a strategic tourism development plan that includes enhancing transportation and accommodation facilities, making tourist sites more accessible and accommodating.

- ✓ Private Sector (Construction, telecom, and other interested companies): Invest in building and upgrading digital infrastructure, such as reliable internet access, which supports e-commerce and digital entrepreneurship vital for modern business operations.
- ✓ Municipality Cultural Departments: Improve infrastructure around historical and cultural sites, including roads and visitor facilities, to enhance the overall tourist experience.

Improving Public Transport and Connectivity

Developing a reliable and efficient public transportation network is essential for facilitating economic activities and enhancing accessibility.

Recommendations:

1. Local Government (Transport Department): Lead the development of a unified public transportation system that caters to the needs of all community sectors, including remote villages.
2. Private Sector (Transport Companies): Collaborate with the government to provide services that complement the public transport system, such as shuttle services to and from major tourist and employment centers.
3. Community Organizations (Civic Groups): Engage in dialogue with transport planners to ensure that the transportation network meets the broad needs of the community, including accessibility for the elderly and disabled.

VI. Workforce Development in Ijevan: Building Economic Resilience through Education and Skills Enhancement

Workforce Development in Ijevan: Building Economic Resilience through Education and Skills Enhancement

Participants highlighted a significant gap between the current skills and education levels within the community and the emerging demands of Ijevan's economic sectors. This gap is particularly evident in agriculture, tourism, and small business development, areas identified as crucial for Ijevan's economic resilience and growth. The lack of vocational training programs tailored to these sectors and a disconnection between educational institutions and industry needs were pinpointed as critical issues.

Recommendations:

1. Local educational institutions, industry-specific associations, and the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sport: Initiate sector-specific vocational training programs in collaboration with local agricultural co-ops, hospitality businesses, and SMEs.
2. Universities and vocational schools, local government, and business leaders in key sectors: Formalize partnerships to co-create curricula that integrate practical industry skills, ensuring programs meet current market needs.
3. Tech companies, educational institutions, and community centers: Develop and promote online learning platforms offering courses and workshops to extend educational reach.
4. Local entrepreneurs, private sector companies, and the Department of Economic Development of the Municipality: Establish incubators and mentorship programs, coupled with innovation contests and funding opportunities for startups.
5. Educational institutions and NGOs specializing in workforce development: Integrate soft skills training into all vocational and educational programs, offering dedicated modules on leadership, teamwork, and digital proficiency.
6. Local media, schools, and community leaders: Launch awareness campaigns via media, schools, and public forums, highlighting the importance and opportunities of vocational training.
7. Municipality finance and project department, international and local NGOs, private sector partners: Identify funding sources including government grants, international aid, and private-sector partnerships to finance training initiatives.

VII. Financial Stability and Access to Capital

Ijevan faces financial challenges including high loan interest rates and insufficient support for businesses during crises, such as natural disasters and economic downturns. Addressing these challenges is crucial for enhancing economic resilience and promoting sustainable development.

Recommendations:

1. Banks and Financial Institutions:
 - a. Develop financial products (loans, leasing, etc.) with lower interest rates specifically for small businesses and agricultural enterprises which will improve access to capital, enabling businesses to invest in growth and stability, even during economic downturns.
 - b. Implement flexible repayment terms for loans during crises. This will support business continuity and stability, reducing bankruptcies and maintaining employment levels.
2. Civil Society (NGOs focusing on Economic Development): Facilitate workshops on financial literacy and crisis management for local businesses which will enhance skills in

financial management and resilience, preparing businesses to handle economic fluctuations effectively.

Innovation and Technology Integration in Ijevan

Fostering a culture of innovation and embracing new technologies are key to Ijevan's future economic resilience and growth, leveraging its unique natural and cultural assets.

Recommendations:

1. Private Sector Representatives, Government, and International Financial Institutions: Establish technology hubs and business incubators to support local entrepreneurs. This will promote innovation and support the development of new enterprises, enhancing job creation and economic diversity.
2. Education Sector (Local Schools and Universities):
 - a. Update curricula and invest in STEM education to nurture a tech-savvy generation.
 - b. Equip the future workforce with the necessary technological skills, ensuring they are prepared for tomorrow's job market.

Private Sector (Tech Companies): Partner with the government to provide public Wi-Fi and tech libraries. This will increase community access to digital resources, boosting technological literacy and innovation potential.

VIII. Sustainable Development in Ijevan

Integrating eco-friendly practices and enhancing social and cultural sustainability are vital for the long-term well-being and resilience of Ijevan.

Recommendations:

1. Environmental Agencies and Local Government:
 - a. Implement precision farming and sustainable resource management practices through subsidies and support programs.
 - b. Improve agricultural productivity and environmental sustainability, reducing the ecological footprint of farming practices.
2. Cultural Institutions and NGOs: Promote social enterprises and volunteerism to enhance community well-being and preserve cultural heritage. This will strengthen community ties and cultural identity, supporting social sustainability.
3. Private Sector (Investors and Tech Companies): Invest in green energy solutions and eco-friendly tourism infrastructure. This will reduce the environmental impact while fostering economic growth, aligning development with sustainability goals.

IX. Monitoring and Evaluation

Strengthening Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms

Effective monitoring and evaluation are crucial for assessing the progress of Ijevan's economic resilience initiatives, allowing stakeholders to make informed decisions and adapt strategies as needed. This ensures that the roadmap remains responsive to challenges and opportunities.

Recommendations:

1. Local Government (Economic Development Office):

Establish a dedicated Roadmap Oversight Committee to regularly review progress against key performance indicators.

Ensure alignment with local and national development goals, providing a structured approach to continuous improvement.

2. Business Associations:

Co-host regular stakeholder meetings to discuss economic impacts and gather feedback from the business community.

Foster a collaborative environment where business insights directly influence policy adjustments and roadmap strategies.

X. Risk Management

Enhancing Risk Management Strategies

Proactive risk management is essential to safeguard the roadmap's objectives against potential disruptions, ensuring the long-term sustainability and success of the economic resilience initiatives.

Recommendations:

1. Local Government (Legal and Regulatory Departments):

Develop phased project implementation plans and conduct regular risk assessments.

Minimize disruptions by adapting to regulatory changes and potential legal challenges promptly.

2. Environmental Agencies:

Integrate environmental impact assessments into all significant projects.

Promote sustainable development practices, reducing ecological disruption and ensuring long-term environmental health.

XI. Strategic Planning and Stakeholder Engagement

Strategic planning that involves comprehensive stakeholder engagement is crucial for the success of Ijevan's economic resilience efforts, ensuring that all actions are well-coordinated and community-aligned.

Recommendations:

1. Local Government (Strategic Planning Departments):

Organize interactive community forums and workshops to foster dialogue and gather diverse inputs.

Enhance community buy-in and ensure that resilience strategies reflect the broad spectrum of community needs and aspirations.

2. Civil society Organizations in Ijevan:

Lead campaigns to raise public awareness about the roadmap's goals and solicit community feedback through digital platforms.

Increase community engagement and participation, ensuring democratic and inclusive decision-making processes.

This multi-faceted engagement strategy underscores the importance of active and inclusive participation in forging a resilient and prosperous future for Ijevan, ensuring that decision-making is democratic, inclusive, and reflective of the entire community's aspirations and needs.

XII. Conclusion

In Ijevan, stakeholders from local government, businesses, civil society, youth, and media have collaboratively identified economic resilience as crucial for the community's ability to navigate economic challenges effectively. This resilience hinges on leveraging Ijevan's geographical advantages, agricultural potential, cultural heritage, and a unified approach that integrates government policy, community engagement, and sustainable practices. Key strategies for enhancing resilience include diversifying funding sources, prioritizing community involvement, addressing infrastructure and regulatory needs, and embedding environmental sustainability into all development projects. The discussions also highlighted the significant role of inclusive strategic planning that accounts for the entire community's needs, emphasizing the importance of collaboration among local businesses, governmental bodies, NGOs, and the community at large to foster a proactive, engaged community spirit.

Looking forward, Ijevan envisions a future marked by economic resilience, vibrant cultural life, innovative agricultural practices, flourishing tourism, and strong infrastructure. This vision encompasses improving educational opportunities, fostering innovation in key sectors, and enhancing job prospects for the youth. Through comprehensive resource mapping, public-private partnerships, and community-based initiatives, Ijevan is poised to build a sustainable and resilient economic future, leveraging its unique strengths and addressing challenges with innovative, inclusive solutions.

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