

IN BRIEF

EVALUATION OF THE TANZANIA WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP AND ECONOMIC RIGHTS PROJECT (WLER) (2021-2025)

Photo: UN Women/Phil Kabuje

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Women's Leadership and Economic Rights (WLER) project (2022–2025) was a four-year initiative with the overall goal of ensuring '**Women's and girls' meaningful participation, leadership and economic rights are strengthened at local levels in Tanzania**' through four specific outcomes:

- **Outcome 1:** Data and evidence-based gender and disability responsive strategies, practices, and participatory research action is built on women's meaningful participation at local levels.
- **Outcome 2:** Laws, procedures and practices at LGA levels promote women's (with and without disabilities) voices, leadership and economic rights and justice.
- **Outcome 3:** Gender norms and discriminatory behaviors and practices at LGA levels are transformed to promote women and girls' voices, meaningful participation and leadership; and
- **Outcome 4:** Gender norms and discriminatory behaviours and practices at LGA levels are transformed to promote women and girls' voices, meaningful participation and leadership.

The total resources mobilized for the project was US$7,000,000

SUPPORT BY: SUOMI FINLAND

EVALUATION'S PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The main purposes of the evaluation were to: take stock of the programme's achievements; distil lessons and identify recommendations that can inform the development of the next phase of the project (WLER Phase II/successor project) and the new UN Women Strategic Note (2028-2032). The evaluation encompassed all components, outcomes and geographic locations covering 18 districts and 36 wards in six regions of Tanzania, mainly Pwani, Dar-es-Salaam, Singida, Arusha, Mtwara, and Lindi, through primary data collection and deep dives review from the period December 2021 to November 2025.

The specific objectives of the evaluation were to:

i. Assess the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability of the WLER project approach; and the project design, results framework, strategies, and implementation arrangements;
ii. Evaluate the Country Office's comparative advantage/added value in the thematic area;
iii. Assess how gender equality principles and the LNOB approach are integrated into the design and implementation;
iv. Present key findings, draw lessons learned and good practices, and provide practical recommendations for sustainability, replication, and scaling-up.

METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

This evaluation utilized the Theory of Change (ToC) and a mixed-methods approach to assess the design validity and project contribution. Quantitative and qualitative data analyses were applied, focusing on project progress towards set targets. The evaluation adhered to UN Women policies and guidelines, including the Evaluation Policy, Evaluation Handbook, and UNEG's Guidance, and OCDE evaluation criteria. It was guided by principles of independence, impartiality, credibility, transparency, quality, inclusiveness, and honesty, with a strong emphasis on gender and human rights.

Data was collected from both primary and secondary sources, including document reviews (project documents, financial studies, monitoring reports and national surveys), key informant interviews (KIIs), In-depth Interviews (IDIs), results workshops, and focus group discussions (FGDs). Informants were selected from all project stakeholder categories, with FGDs comprising 6–10 participants targeting community volunteers and leaders in all regions. The data collection process involved interviewing 45 key informants and conducting 12 IDIs and 12 FGDs.

KEY EVALUATION QUESTIONS

Relevance and Coherence: To what extent the project results and approaches of implementation are consistent with beneficiary requirements that is, women leadership and Political Participation; Has the project addressed the relevant needs in the country, including the special needs of disabled and young women? Have new, more relevant needs emerged that the project should address? If so, what can be done to address these new needs and priorities? what added value does the WLER project have to initiatives by other UN agencies, and local governments? and what partnerships have been established?

Effectiveness: Did the project make sufficient progress towards its planned outputs and outcomes spelled out in the AWP? How have stakeholders been involved in project implementation? Have the quantity and quality of the outputs produced so far been satisfactory? If not, what were the bottlenecks encountered? Do the benefits accrue equally to men and women? How effectively has the project engaged males? How did the project help empower stakeholder or prevent further discrimination and/or exacerbation of existing power relations?

Efficiency: Have resources been used efficiently? Have the project activities been cost-effective? How has the project monitored the cost-effectiveness throughout the project cycle? Have project funds and activities been delivered in a timely manner? If not, what were the bottlenecks encountered? Are there sufficient resources (financial, time, people) allocated to integrate human rights and gender equality, including needs of disabled and young women, in project design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

Sustainability: Does the project design include an appropriate sustainability and exit strategy (including promoting national/local ownership, use of national capacity, etc.) to support positive changes in gender and human rights after the end of the project? To what extent were stakeholders involved in the preparation of the sustainability strategy? How do stakeholders show ownership of the project? To what degree did partners change their policies or practices to improve human rights and gender equality fulfillment (e.g., new services, greater responsiveness, resource re-allocation, improved quality etc.) If not, why not and what are the major obstacles?

Gender equality and LNOB (new): To what extent were LNOB principles implemented by partners during implementation and considered during the project design? What were the barriers and facilitating factors to implement these principles? And which groups have the WLER project successfully reached, and which groups may require additional targeting in future phases?

Design of and progress in the implementation of the 2021-2025 Wanawake Wanaweza Project and Annual Work Plan and future planning for Phase 2: How can the project improve upon areas that were less effective in the current phase? Should the project consider new approaches, tools, or partnerships to better meet evolving needs or respond to emerging priorities? What partnerships maybe required? Are there strategic decisions, such as choosing between different approaches (option X or Y), that could shape the design of Phase 2?

CONCLUSIONS

WLER project strengthened women's leadership and economic rights by linking policy reforms with local implementation through gender-responsive budgeting, government systems, and community platforms. It achieved important gains in women's participation, norm change, and institutional integration, with strong relevance, coherence, and emerging sustainability, while highlighting the need for continued support to address financing constraints, inclusion gaps, and scaling

Relevance and coherence: The project was strongly aligned with Tanzania's national priorities on women's leadership, economic rights and gender equality. Through support to LGAs on gender-responsive budgeting, women's access to economic resources, unpaid care work and women's leadership development, the project addressed key structural barriers to women's participation. Its participatory design, including the use of Participatory Action Research to inform micro-plans, strengthened local ownership and responsiveness. Implementation through LGAs, in partnership with CSOs, traditional and religious leaders, gender equality and women's empowerment working groups, universities, community structures and UN agencies; was appropriate and helped build local collaboration and synergies. The project also intentionally included women and girls with disabilities, although reach remained limited by accessibility and cost barriers.

Effectiveness: The project delivered significant and tangible results across all four outcomes. It strengthened the foundations for evidence-based planning and helped translate these gains into budgeted actions, although the completeness and routine use of data remain uneven across regions. At national level, the project contributed to important 2024 reforms recognizing violence against women in politics as an electoral offense and introducing new obligations for political parties to adopt gender and social inclusion policies, establish gender desks and strengthen institutional accountability. At local level, it supported the development of by-laws on harmful practices and advanced gender-responsive planning and budgeting, though formal adoption and implementation vary. The project also influenced community power relations, with more women gaining space to take up leadership roles and use their voices, supported by increased confidence, skills and intent to lead. Family and spousal support has grown in some communities, but safety concerns, control and resistance linked to fears of losing tradition or authority persist. Under Outcome 4, interventions helped councils and communities move from awareness to practical responses, particularly through childcare and clean cooking solutions that reduced women's unpaid care and time burdens where implemented.

Efficiency: The project demonstrated commendable efficiency by leveraging existing LGA structures, providing logistical support to frontline officers and adapting financial strategies such as direct transfers and no-cost extensions to manage delays. Regional GEWE working groups and capacity-building for LGA officers improved coordination, reduced duplication, and enhanced value for money. However, long disbursement chains slowed activity rollout, and compressed delivery timelines occasionally affected the depth and quality of engagement at community level. UN Women and partners applied flexible work planning and adjusted activity sequencing to accommodate revised timelines, successfully addressing implementation bottlenecks and ensuring completion of outputs.

Sustainability: The project strengthened institutional capacities and created frameworks for sustainability by embedding GRB practices into LGA planning cycles, producing tools and knowledge products, and supporting national systems to better capture gender and disability data. Engagement of traditional leaders, the establishment of childcare corners, and the promotion of clean cooking solutions indicate emerging shifts that are likely to persist beyond the project's life. Sustaining these gains requires continued budget allocations at council level, ongoing mentorship for women leaders, and stronger integration of unpaid care work interventions into government plans.

Design, Gender Equality and LNOB: The project embedded gender-transformative and LNOB principles by strengthening LGA capacity on inclusive laws, gender-responsive budgeting, integrating gender and disability data systems, and supporting women's and those with disabilities participation in decision-making and planning. However, further participation of women with disabilities, young and rural women, and male allies remained limited. The M&E system was generally strong, though improvements are needed to reduce overlapping indicators, strengthen qualitative measurement over short timeframes, and improve timely access to sex-disaggregated administrative data.

LESSONS LEARNED

Lesson 1: Participatory design and implementation through LGAs and government institutions strengthened ownership, accelerated change, and supported long-term sustainability.

Lesson 2: Interventions embedded in government systems or rooted in community ownership have the strongest potential for scale and sustainability, but require adequate financing, capacity strengthening, and stronger MEL and operational research to generate evidence for replication and expansion.

Lesson 3: Results are strongest when integrated, evidence-driven approaches are used, combining policy and planning tools (e.g. GRB), Knowledge Centres, and participatory platforms such as GGTNs to strengthen accountability, service delivery, and women's participation.

Lesson 4: Fully realizing the LNOB approach requires dedicated and adequately resourced inclusion of women and girls with disabilities.

Recommendation 1: A new project should scale from participation to power, deepening economic empowerment beyond basic training, and applying a multi-pronged strategy to enhance male engagement for sustained social norm change.

Recommendation 2: A new project should institutionalise district-level coordination mechanisms and strengthen cross-departmental collaboration to ensure consistent implementation of gender-responsive planning, budgeting, and service delivery across sectors.

Recommendation 3: A new project needs to include dedicated resources for women with disabilities, covering accessibility costs such as assistive devices, interpreters, accessible infrastructure and flexible loan repayment. It should also create mentorship pathways for young women after secondary school and strengthen GBV protection in markets.

Recommendation 4: A new project requires strengthening a "research-to-use" approach that enhances useability of data for key objectives.

Recommendation 5: A new project should include a project Technical Coordination Platform alongside the JSC (e.g., a Technical Working Group) so national government counterparts can track progress and resolve delivery bottlenecks

Recommendation 6: A new project should expand structured male engagement and social and behavioural change strategies, including resourced male champions, intergenerational dialogues, structured family-level interventions, and sustained community platforms to promote positive masculinities and reduce resistance to gender equality.

Recommendation 7: UN Women should strengthen MEL systems through operational research for all pilot interventions (e.g. VICOBA, PAR, Knowledge Centres, model families) to generate evidence for scale-up and improve learning and adaptive programming.

Recommendation 8: The focus on GBV should move beyond awareness to stronger referral, resolution and case follow-up systems. A new project should also reinforce protection and accountability mechanisms to address sexual corruption and discrimination in political participation, including confidential reporting, institutional safeguards and gender-transformative political party reforms.

Recommendation 9: UN Women should scale and institutionalise Knowledge Centres and GGTNs as formal platforms for participatory governance and social norm change, ensuring stronger integration with LGAs and sustainable financing for long-term impact.

Recommendation 10: A new project should standardise LNOB reporting across all partners and strengthen compliance through capacity-building, monitoring, and accountability mechanisms to ensure consistent data on inclusion outcomes.

Recommendation 11: Scale the VICOBA model to increase women's access to micro-loans and advocate for policy change to reduce bureaucracy and costs of accessing LGA loans.

Recommendation 12: UN Women should provide financial and technical support to fully operationalise and update disability and gender data systems in collaboration with government institutions, and ensure integration of these tools into national planning, training curricula, and monitoring frameworks.