

MID-TERM EVALUATION OF THE WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS PROJECT IN SOUTH AFRICA



FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

Evaluation Commissioned by: United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), South Africa Multi-Country Office (SA MCO)

Project Co-operation Agreement: UN Women and Hand in Hand Southern Africa

Global partnership: UN Women and The-Coca-Cola Company global partnership “5 By 20 Strategy”

UN Women Strategic Plan Correspondence: Mainly with Impact Area 2 with impact on others, including Area 1

Tentative project timeframe: March 2013 - February 2016. 36 months

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This report presents the findings, views and recommendations of the evaluation consultant and does not necessarily represent the views of UN Women staff, the project partners or other organizations referred to in this document. The consultant would like to thank to all persons and organizations mentioned in the report for their valuable contribution to this action oriented consultative process. Without you this would have not been possible.

ACRONYMS

BPFA	Beijing Declaration and its Platform for Action
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CSOs	Civil society organizations
EWEP	Empowerment of Women Entrepreneurs
GATE	UN Women Global Accountability and Tracking of Evaluation Use System
HiH	Hand in Hand Southern Africa
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MIS	Management Information System
MSMEs	Micro, small and medium enterprises
NDP	National Development Plan
PCA	Project Co-operation Agreement
PSC	Project Steering Committee
SADC	Southern Africa Development Community
SA MCO	South Africa Multi-Country Office
SEDA	Small Enterprise Development Agency
SMEs	Small and Medium Size Enterprises
TCCC	The Coca-Cola Company
TORs	Terms of Reference
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

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1.- Executive summary

This evaluation is a mid-term evaluation report of The Empower Women Entrepreneurs (EWEP) project in South Africa implemented by UN Women in partnership with civil society (Hand in Hand Southern Africa, HiH) and private sector (The Coca-Cola Company, TCCC). The purpose of the evaluation is to provide an overall assessment of the project with regard to progress made since inception, what worked, and what did not work, distil lessons learned and recommend strategies that could enhance the overall results in the remaining live of the project where partners are able to take informed decisions.

Despite having an enabling legal and policy environment and a relatively developed economy, South Africa is one of the countries with highest inequalities in the world. These challenges are even more pronounced for low income women entrepreneurs. Hence, the project aims at addressing some of the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs by building capacity through training, post training support and promoting peer learning

During the evaluation, the challenges related to the backlog of the Management Information System (MIS) have to some extent been mitigated by utilizing a participatory triangular evaluation approach.

Partners with diverse backgrounds but a complementary vision on women empowerment have committed and succeeded partners in working together towards a common goal and impacting individual beneficiaries, implementing actions and developing systems that are providing tangible results to vulnerable women and their communities, and which may well serve as a model for other projects and sectors. However, corrective actions should be taken to improve partners' capacity to achieve the overall objective with a multiplicative approach since this pilot project proposed methodology, developed tools and lessons learned could well serve future initiatives. Efforts also need to be dedicated to putting in place the necessary means to adequately measure progress and enhance sustainability.

2.- Object of the evaluation

The EWEP project in South Africa is implemented by UN Women in partnership with civil society and private sector. In reaching its mandate, UN Women provides strong and coherent leadership in support of Member States' priorities and efforts in promotion of gender equality and building effective partnerships with Civil Society as implementing partners in support of government's effort to attain gender equality. These objectives align well with HiH objective, ethos and understanding that **supporting women entrepreneurs, builds sustainable communities**. UN Women also partners with private sector in objectives that are geared towards furtherance of gender equality. Globally, **UN Women has partnered with TCCC** in the context of **TCCC's 5 By 20 Strategy** which aims to **empower five million women across the company's value chain by 2020**. The programme fits within the economic empowerment flagship area of **UN Women**, which corresponds to **Impact Area 2**: "Women, specially the poorest and most excluded, are economically empowered and benefit from development" but results in other thematic areas is also expected, including Impact Area 1: "Women lead and participate in decision making at all levels".

South Africa has ratified the main international and regional women's rights protection instruments and has aligned the Constitution and the national laws with these commitments in respecting the principle of equality between women and men. Gender equality, as it is enshrined in the Bill of Rights and is domesticated within national legislation, is guided by a range of international human and women's rights instruments, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Declaration and its Platform for Action (BPFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The main guiding objectives of the South Africa National Development Plan (NPD): Vision 2030 published in 2011 is to eliminate poverty and inequality by 2030.

Despite having an enabling legal and policy environment and a relatively developed economy, development challenges persist. South Africa has one of the world's highest inequalities with Gini coefficient indicating that wealth exists alongside extreme levels of poverty¹. Macroeconomic indicators show that a substantive proportion of the population lives in poverty. Black women only constitute 14% of the formally employed compared to white women (34%) black men (21%) and white men (43%) despite a labour force participation rate of 73% against that of white women².

South African government has initiated interventions that seek to bridge inequality, create employment opportunities and combat poverty. Those investments in women empowerment are progressively leading to results, making South Africa one of the SADC countries with lower gender inequality. Among these measures, support is targeted at small businesses which are seen as engine of growth for the economy. MSMEs are identified as a priority where challenges include limited entrepreneurial and business management skills, limited access to market information and supply chains, limited access to appropriately packages finance and limited access to skilled labour among other challenges.

These challenges are even more pronounced for women entrepreneurs who generally have been less privileged to access education and training. Women also have limited access to networks that support MSMEs due to their gender roles. Women also have limited access to financial products due to the stringent requirements of the institutions rendering financial services and limited control over family assets.

The main elements of the ***Project document and log-frame. Annex 1***, are described below.

The project's ***overall objective*** is to contribute to increased economic empowerment of women, especially those who are most excluded through business training, capacity building and networking thus enhancing women opportunities to reach their potential, to support their families and to strengthen their communities.

The ***purpose of the project*** is to provide comprehensive enterprise development services aimed at establishing and growing sustainable business ventures that enhance the livelihoods of low-income women entrepreneurs. The project plans to employ a number of strategies that include business management skills, mentorship, linkages to finance and markets finances and financial literacy training and business network opportunities for women entrepreneurs

¹ National Development Plan, 2014. Accessible at <http://www.gov.za/documents/detail.php?cid=348761>

² See Access to Finance for Women entrepreneurs in South Africa: Opportunity and Challenges Accessible at: <http://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/d9b1840048855706bb4cfb6a6515bb18/Access+to+Finance+-+Women+in+South+Africa.pdf?MOD=AJPERES>

The interventions are expected to result in increased income at enterprise and household level which will in turn empower women with better purchasing power for improved livelihood.

The ultimate **project benefit** is to contribute to poverty reduction among the beneficiaries of the project and contributing to poverty reduction. The project is expected to train 25,000 women in all provinces of South Africa on financial and business management skills as well as socio and interpersonal skills. The beneficiaries will be assisted to support each other through working in Peer Support Groups.

Specific **results based benefits** include the following:

Outcome	Outputs	Indicators
1. Enhanced sustainability of business ventures which enhance the livelihoods of low-income women entrepreneurs	1. Capacities of local women entrepreneurs in terms of financial literacy and business management skills are strengthened to establish sustainable business ventures	1. Increase in business income over project period. 2. No. of women who report increased decision-making opportunities over use of business income. 3. 20 % increase in household income over project period 4. No. of women who report increased decision over use of household spending. 5. No. of existing businesses run/owned by low-income women
2. Low-income women entrepreneurs have increased access to networking and business support mechanisms.	1. Business network opportunities for (incl. emerging) women entrepreneurs provided	1.1. No. of women participating in business networks/Peer Support Groups.
	2. Knowledge-sharing, mentoring and coaching of women entrepreneurs	2.1. No. of women reporting increased access to business information
	3. Partnerships and linkages established between women entrepreneurs and markets and finance	3.1 No. of partnerships between women entrepreneurs/organizations and private sector/government entities in business ventures. 3.2. No. of women accessing markets 3.3 No. of women linked to financial services providers

Table 1: Project log frame

The project's **main strategies** include the following:

1. Identifying and mobilising women entrepreneurs into Peer Support Groups
2. Training of Peer Support Group entrepreneurs with similar characteristics in entrepreneurship, business management, financial management, social interpersonal and entrepreneurial skills
3. Targeted post-training support to address specific challenges or seize opportunities
4. Support in access to markets and finance
5. Networking, mentoring and knowledge sharing in peer support groups
6. Community advocacy activities

The **results** of this programme are to:

1. Contribute towards women's economic empowerment
2. Increase women's income therefore contributing towards job creation and reduction of poverty
3. Build sustainable communities which leads to sustainable livelihoods

Regarding **implementation process** of the project, a one year Project Co-operation Agreement (PCA) between UN Women and HiH was signed and then extended for one more year. The project tentatively is to be implemented over duration of three years and each year has a work plan. Implementation commenced in March 2013, initially covering sections of Gauteng and Northwest Province. In 2014, the project has scaled up to include sections of Mpumalanga and Eastern Cape Province. The Project Proposal refers to progressively escalating the project to all provinces of the country, although currently partners are discussing on the geographical scope of the project to guarantee a good use of resources considering needs and implementation challenges.

At the early stages of the project, it was **agreed among partners** that the project was to target women running micro and small businesses primarily in the retail sector, seeking to build capabilities of women to contribute to business development, growth and sustainability through training, mentorship and networking. In addition, the project was to create a greater public awareness of women's capability as entrepreneurs, business owners and mentors as while influencing government's policy and practice. The project has made an allowance to include men among the beneficiaries with a ratio of 80:20 (minimum 80% women and maximum 20% men) in order to seek the support from men and community in general by positioning the project as one of broader community benefit rather than a women's project per se.

Due to the magnitude of the project, the need to elaborate a complex Management Information System (MIS) to ease monitoring, distilling of results and reporting was identified and management information systems was designed and developed to respond to this need. Data on project beneficiaries was expected to be easily accessible through a MIS to be developed specifically to cater for the monitoring and evaluation needs of the project. Unfortunately, at the time of evaluation although the system was developed, the capturing of data into MIS was not completed.

During the implementation process, and in order to enhance project impact and sustainability, partners have agreed on different actions like advocacy efforts (launching of the project, meetings with government, etc...) that are expected to contribute to the overall results.

3.- Purpose of the evaluation

This evaluation is a mid-term evaluation whose main purpose is to provide an overall assessment of the project with regard to progress made since inception, what worked, and what did not work, distil lessons and recommend strategies that could enhance the overall results in the remaining life of the project where partners are to take informed decisions.

The evaluation could also serve to inform current or future similar projects and/or partnerships.

The evaluation covers the period from the beginning of the project in March 2013 until the time of the country visit, 17th-21st November 2014. **Country visit agenda, Annex 2**

This work is guided by the **Evaluation Terms of Reference (TORs), Annex 3.**

A brief inception report was submitted to UN Women following the preliminary desk review, and agreement reached with UN Women on main objectives and agenda priorities. The consultant proposed the terms of the country visit agenda that were discussed between the consultant and UN Women, and then UN Women with the partners in order to make feasible arrangements that would still meet the evaluation criteria.

The EWEP project has a Steering Committee comprising of UN Women, the Coca-Cola Company (TCCC) and Hand in Hand (HiH) South Africa. Members of the steering committee committed sufficient time to support the evaluation including guaranteeing that their organizations are familiar with the evaluation process and objectives; facilitating access to relevant interlocutors in their respective organizations; identifying and engaging external stakeholders and providing logistical support. All three organizations were fully available to support evaluation needs and provided relevant information to support planning and technical understanding of the project. Although some information that was needed to conduct the evaluation according to the proposed standards was not available (further details below on limitations of evaluation) and some documents could only be compiled after the country visit, it has never been the case of partners not willing to contribute to the evaluation process.

All project type of interventions (six main strategies described above) have been considered in the design of the evaluation aiming at identifying factors, internal and external, that are influencing the implementation of the programme.

The evaluation has used criteria for evaluations applied by UN Women (**relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, impact, sustainability**) including questions that address issues of **gender** and **human rights**.

4.- Evaluation scope and methodology

United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Norms and Standards for Evaluation in the UN system and the UNEG Ethical Guidelines and Code of Conduct are the main guiding principles

of the evaluation process. The evaluation has guaranteed that gender and human rights are mainstreamed in the proposed methodology.

The evaluation covers the period from the beginning of the project in March 2013 until the time of the country visit, November 2014. The country visit took place between 17th and 21st November 2014. ***Country visit agenda, Annex 1***

A consultative and participatory process

The evaluation has been planned in a consultative and participatory manner, with a triangulation and complementarity of methods and approach, entailing a combination of comprehensive desk reviews, interviews, observations, focus groups, and site visits actively engaging stakeholders. Site visits were conducted enabling interaction with core groups but also with the environment where the action takes place.

Evaluation's stakeholders fully correspond to these identified in the TORs, including but are not limited to: all three project partners, government departments, current and potential civil society and private sector stakeholders, the communities and direct beneficiaries. Stakeholder and partners participation was fostered through individual and small group interviews and focus groups. Reference to interlocutors, including names, functions and organizations is available in the attached evaluation agenda.

The proposed methodology was presented in the Inception Report, providing space for comments and improvements at inception meeting held during country visit.

Evaluation challenges

The only significant constraints or limitations encountered when planning and conducting the evaluation have been:

1.- *Limited time from contract signature to country visit and for field visit itself.* This challenged the capacity to confirm participation from all proposed stakeholders beforehand and identification of new ones in case of unavailability. The five days country visit including internal traveling by road and air covering fairly distant locations limited the time to be dedicated to each group of interlocutors.

2.- *Data management.* While MIS if complete would have provided information easily, this was not the case. At the time of the evaluation, the system did not provide sufficient and updated information to adequately understand the population dynamics of beneficiaries and the progress beneficiaries are making in their businesses, among other appropriate uses.

3.- *Selection of participating beneficiaries.* As part of the evaluation methodology, the consultant proposed her to make a selection of participating beneficiaries (former and current participants). This was aimed at obtaining a balanced and uncontaminated sample. However, it was not assessed as feasible due first to the status of MIS and, secondly, in regards to time constraints when communicating in the field. As a mitigation measure, the consultant selected beneficiaries to conduct individual interviews from among these participating in the focus groups.

4.- *Language.* Each of the meetings was conducted in one or two official local languages different to English, with some parts in English. Although challenging due to time requirements, language was not a major constraint.

Evaluation phases and deliverables

The evaluation has been conducted with an allocation of 15 working days distributed during the months of October – December 2014, including a five days country mission. **Annex 4** presents a **table with the evaluation phases, activities and products**.

In order to make effective use of resources, Soweto in Gauteng province and Nelspruit area (Nelspruit and the villages up to 150 kms around Nelspruit) in Mpumalanga province were identified as **project sites for the evaluation visits** according to technical (date when the project started considering both areas where the project has been implemented since 2013 and as part of the 2014 scaling up, progress made so far, balanced sample of urban and rural environments) and logistical considerations (sufficient coverage with the less time consumption).

Meetings with UN Women management and PSC members took place in Pretoria and Johannesburg respectively.

Evaluation Questions

The mid-term evaluation is focused on the programme design and implementation process. In particular, methodology and terminology were adapted and explained according to the capacities of the interlocutors.

The evaluation was guided by a set of questions that are a combination of these identified in the TORs and additional questions proposed by the consultant to fulfil the UNEG evaluation standards, UN Women evaluation priorities including gender considerations and the specific needs of the project at this time of implementation.

The evaluation is based on five standard dimensions/criteria of analysis. In the attached document, **Evaluation Questions; Annex 6**, paragraphs addressing each of the five dimensions in each dimension, the questions proposed in the TOR are presented first, followed by the questions added to the final evaluation methodology.

A **scoring criteria** was used to rate the performance against each criteria as follows;

Score	Rating
A	Very strong with negligible weaknesses
B	Strong with a few minor weaknesses
C	Strong with some minor weaknesses
D	Fair with some moderate weaknesses
E	Marginal with serious deficiencies

Table 2: Score Criteria

5.- Findings & Analysis

This section summarizes evaluation findings and analysis in response to the evaluation questions and sub-questions.

Relevance:

The evaluation found several significant strengths and a few minor to moderate weaknesses in the overall design and objectives of the project. If action is taken, weaknesses can be overcome for the remaining period.

The project's objective to contribute to increase economic empowerment of women, especially those who are most excluded is relevant to the situation in South Africa and fully in line with the government's national development objectives in a country where the legal and policy frameworks are compliant with international standards but there are gaps in the implementation. All consulted partners, stakeholders, potential stakeholders, target groups and beneficiaries agree on the relevance of the project. Partners are relevant and complementary. The project plans to engage additional relevant stakeholders.

At this stage, although limited in scope, the project's almost exclusive focus on economic empowerment is convincing since there is a need in this field and this type of projects can be used as an entry point to identify and address more sensitive complex issues (i.e. UN Women "Leadership and Political Participation" and "Ending Violence against Women" thematic areas). The project may well serve UN Women and other stakeholders, including the government, identify and address other community needs, including complex issues and challenges that women face and that are not just economic but include their leadership skills and social challenges such as Gender Based Violence, etc. that can be aligned with other UN Women and government thematic areas. Nevertheless, a more strategic approach to learn about the situation in the communities and/or to address cases of, for instance, Violence against Women when they arise is desirable. The need to consider other needs, at least when they arise, has been discussed among project partners but so far no action has been taken in this regard.

In addition, , while all national indicators fully demonstrate the relevance of the project, a more detailed situation analysis would be needed to fine tune the overall design to the provincial and local contexts while been able to better monitor progress. The baseline study developed in the context of the project would have been expected to be tailored to the scope of the project, providing enhanced support to planning and progress monitoring.

Unfortunately, during the project implementation phase, a **Baseline Study, Annex 5** has only been conducted for the province of Gauteng. The purpose of the baseline study was to profile the Gauteng province's three metros and two district municipalities to provide the basis for selecting pilot areas to roll out the EWEP programme by establishing the socio-economic profile of three metropolitan cities and two district municipalities in the province. The report provides an overview of the economic sectors in the province together with reference to The Gauteng government's economic strategy that refers to the sectors where emphasis should be put. The document presents a labour and economic profile of the region that unfortunately does not address gender, missing the opportunity to further assess relevance and adequately monitor progress towards results. A more focused scope in relation to the economic empowerment needs and capacities of project's target groups and broader market analysis for potential new MSMEs would have been expected. Situation assessment in other provinces has not been supported by a baseline survey, which would have provided further guidance on local priorities and facilitated assessment towards results.

Data gathered from the field supports alignment of strategies when required but is not fully consolidated and organized in a timely accessible manner (i.e. reports, meetings, MIS).

Project design is clear. It includes well interconnected project outcomes, outputs, indicators and strategies. Feasible and overall relevant strategies have been identified to serve the project purposes; indicators are measurable. Relevant national stakeholders were identified in the project proposal. Although the project is focused on women, a limited number of men (80:20 ratio, minimum 80% women and maximum 20%men) entrepreneurs are also participating as an adequate strategy to promote development, build trust and engage the community.

The project proposal aimed at covering the entire country, reaching two provinces the first year and three more provinces each of the following years.

The project structure is rather good, all evaluation participants assess the project as relevant, partners are fully engaged and the teams both in the capital and in the field are knowledgeable. Therefore, it can be considered that relevance can be further improved if prompt action is taken to overcome the identified weaknesses. For instance, priority can be given to the development of a comprehensive and structured project management and monitoring system between project management and field staff, availability of sufficient baseline information to prioritize actions and monitor progress as well as mapping and promotion of active engagement of stakeholders with interfaces between national and local levels.. This will not only improve relevance but also sustainability.

Criteria	A	B	C	D	E
Relevance					

Effectiveness:

The project has made progress towards all of its envisaged outputs, and made contributions to both of its planned outcomes. Although capacity to monitor progress is challenged by availability of baseline information in an easily accessible format, triangulation of information from different data sources demonstrates that particularly strong contributions have been made in relation to capacity strengthening in terms of financial literacy and business management skills (Output 1.1) and business network opportunities (Output 2.1).

Up to date, the project reporting system that is fully in use is mostly qualitative (i.e. progress reports), and when it comes to quantitative data, the system focuses to number of participants per activity (i.e. participation in trainings) at provincial level but fails at adequately monitoring progress when the core project activities, trainings, have been finalized (i.e. indicators on business run/owned by low –income women, business income, decision making opportunities, women that remain in Peer Support Groups, partnerships, access to markets and beneficiaries linkage to financial services providers).

Unfortunately, long term support beyond training is provided to training participants differs from location to location and varies depending on the capacities and engagement of the field staff deployed in different locations rather than to the project needs. Although interactions during the in-country visit offer positive feed-back on the actions at field level, a project approach needs to be further defined to optimize the results of the trainings, actively engage relevant stakeholders and provide extended support while easily and timely being able to monitor progress.

In partnership with IBM Corporate Service Corps, a MIS for Monitoring and Evaluation has been designed. The system has received contributions from mid to senior level IBM staff

seconded to the project. All project partners have dedicated enormous efforts to develop the system, jointly identifying the relevant parameters to be considered and aiming at developing a solid system that could well serve future projects. Additionally, both UN Women and HIH have compiled international best practices to effectively contribute to this system. The system will be fully functional later than planned, with a significant impact in the current capacity to plan, monitor and assess progress. The MIS over the next months it is likely to become a strong monitoring tool that would also serve to take informed decisions. This is likely to be one of the main project assets that could well be shared with other offices for learning and implementation purposes.

Considering that an effective and balanced use of resources is needed, the process to develop this system could have been further benefited from a better knowledge management strategy, with timely access to international best practices and further consultations within the participating organizations and their networks.

For ethics and data protection reasons, there is a need to revise the type of information compiled in the data management system, the purpose each type of data serves within the scope of the project, the level of access that each partner/person has to the information and make agreements in terms of data property rights (i.e. project data to be used only for development purposes, identification of data that needs/could be shared externally). At this stage, the system refers to data that is not priority for the purpose of the evaluation and which is time consuming to gather and upload although, at the time of the evaluation, the team was reviewing data needs and considering required workload to collect the different type of data. This challenges the capacity to upload the information, monitor progress and timely take informed decisions.

In the context of the project, only a Baseline Survey for the province of Gauteng has been conducted in June 2013, which to some extent validates the need of this type of project in this province, where Johannesburg and Pretoria are located. Unfortunately, a harmonized baseline data system is not in place; a comprehensive set of data has not been strategically gathered in the other provinces that may face rather different realities, challenging capacity to conduct evidence based planning and monitor progress. This could partially be solved by searching for basic comparative data. Otherwise it will not be possible to adequately validate the project steps based on actual evidence. The data to be uploaded to the data management system will also contribute to that purpose and the effort made is acknowledged.

Although relevant stakeholders are identified in the project proposal (i.e. economic development, local municipality and district municipality managers, various government departments and local provincial implementing agencies like LIMDEV in Limpopo, SEDA at a national level, Khula / SEFA. Women in Environment) and the document reads that HIH will use its networks such as municipalities, government agencies like SEDA to identify key players in the communities where the project is operating, limited actions have been conducted in this regard both at national and local levels. At field level, except in very few occasions (i.e. in Mpumalanga province on youth employment), when partnerships are available, they are often limited to logistical and operational arrangements (i.e. provision of venues in kind). At national level, meetings with government are taking place in the process of drawing joint action plan on advocacy and knowledge sharing activities. Although it is acknowledge, that is expected result is work in progress, and taking into consideration the timeframe required to promote active engagement and sustainability in this regard, there is a need for a stronger partnership strategy and a definition of actions to be implemented by each of the partners that may well commit their complementary expertise to gain as a group (i.e. UN Women on institutional

engagement, TCCC on employment and access to market, HiH on capacity to access and remain within the communities).

So far, the project has been managed in a very participatory, dedicated and flexible manner that enables activities to be conducted in a trusted and collaborative way. During the remaining period specialized inputs (i.e. engagement of stakeholders and market access) will be required that will definitely call for specialised inputs from each organization according to their mandate and unique capacities.

Criteria	A	B	C	D	E
Effectiveness					

Efficiency:

The evaluation of this element is challenging due to the lack of updated project information on results (i.e. total number of women, partnerships and linkages established between women entrepreneurs and markets and finance, increased access to business information...) and their correspondence to the project outputs.

As a result of a triangulation methodology, it can be stated that there has been an impact in all three project results and that beneficiaries participating in Peer Support Groups (working on the same activity or not) actively contribute to knowledge sharing. Women participating in the focus groups have reported increase in their benefits, also improvement in their capacity to obtain benefits.

It can be affirmed that all project partners are fully involved in project management, and the project is managed in a dedicated manner. All partners demonstrate a good understanding of the overall project scope and current status towards results. All three partners have guaranteed that knowledgeable staff is available to dedicate sufficient time to strategic planning, systems design and project implementation.

At this stage, in order to use project and staff resources strategically to timely achieve all planned outputs and outcomes, some additional division of labour will be needed (i.e. HiH engaging stakeholders in the communities, UN Women on institutional engagement and linkages with existing programmes, TCCC on market research and communication). At field level, awareness on the support of all three organizations towards the project is needed since TCCC and HiH remain outstanding when communicating to local stakeholders and beneficiaries while the strong partnership of UN Women is not always acknowledged when communicating with the beneficiaries, even though UN Women’s strategic role of project planning, coordination, capacity building at institutional level, monitoring and reporting are primary key success factors of the project. Since contribution of HiH and TCCC is easier to understand to beneficiaries, a stronger effort should be made by the implementing partner to communicate on the role of UN Women at field level. Visits to project sites and interaction with beneficiaries should always be coordinated with HiH to avoid overlaps and misunderstandings.

A project approach on how to make the communities more participative in the project (i.e. raising awareness, providing information, promoting beneficiaries initiatives towards their own communities) is to be developed. Mapping of current local and national stakeholders and initiatives should be urgently strengthened and synergies created.

Criteria	A	B	C	D	E
Efficiency					

Potential sustainability:

While certain achievements (i.e. a percentage of strengthened SMEs to remain successful) are likely to be sustained without further support, others (i.e. creating new markets) will require revised strategic planning and additional financial and/or technical efforts from partners. At this stage full mapping and active engagement of key stakeholders at national and local level are required.

Although knowledge sharing, mentoring and coaching are among the project expected outputs, market assessment is not a priority since beneficiaries are supported to strengthen the type of business they have already started. The project lacks at offering sufficient guidance on the development and market trends in their communities (i.e. excess of individuals performing the same activity, identification of new business opportunities to complement the existing activities and promote community development). The approach to support beneficiaries that have already self-started some sort of business activity is a good sustainability indicator, same as it would also be the tendency to stay in the same type of business when the market allows for it.

At this stage it is urgent to reinforce the institutional and community dimensions of the project to enhance sustainability and promote ownership. The potential of the Peer Support Groups and the level of engagement of women in activities in their communities and beyond could be further explored. Further guidance should be given to strengthening the potential of peer learning activities (i.e. sharing experience with new comers, organizing guided discussion groups).

The fact that beneficiaries can choose the training modules they feel are more relevant to them generates adherence to the programme and allows for later interaction with project staff when they have questions or requests. This makes them owners of their own development and, even if they cannot or do not want to follow a given module, they can still obtain the certificates for the selected ones, and be recognized as full members of the programme. Beneficiaries are still encouraged to attend all modules as a general practice, an time is dedicated in this regard. This was assessed as a positive approach.

Criteria	A	B	C	D	E

Impact prospects:

Available information, including interaction with interlocutors, strongly indicate that project efforts have significantly contributed to increased economic empowerment of women at least at local level and that efforts are made into the desired direction in locations where other support is, at least, limited. However, currently available data challenges a comprehensive analysis to measuring the extent to which the project has directly contributed to making progress on the road to the envisaged impact.

The participating women and men have received tangible benefits from the project that are already impacting their lives and the lives of their families, some with very good results (i.e.

capacity to buy more stock, bring children to school, be more respected by their families and partners and buying a new house among others).

In most cases, when they require additional guidance they do obtain it through the PSGs and the informal system. The benefits at community level are these caused by the impact in the direct beneficiaries, including empowerment of women and men participants with capacity to impact women’s needs and government priorities, in line with all partners commitments. For instance, in relation with other UN Women Impact Areas, mainly Impact Area 1: participation in decision making; Area 3: freedom from violence; Area 5: planning and accountability for gender equality.

A more strategic and coordinated follow up, targeted post-training follow up, support in access to market and finance, supervised/supported knowledge sharing at PSG level and community advocacy activities that would not require much effort could well enhance impact prospects. For instance, so far in the project engagement in post training support, promotion of PSGs and information on access to markets and finance depends on the capacity and level of engagement of the field staff in each location. Although they receive guidance in the monthly meetings, a more structured guiding tool and/or clear objectives are expected. Since it is only a few months ago that the first beneficiaries finished the training programme and field staff have the contact information of most beneficiaries, mitigation action may still be taken in this regard.

The fact that even if the project was also intended to women project partners decided to allow participation to a reduced group of men is assessed positively as a manner to build sustainable communities and promote integration.

A mitigation strategy to reducing the rare but real potential negative impacts of the project include actions to avoid violence (i.e. women been alone in their business) and effects of bad management (i.e. misuse of business income by engaging in risk operations).

Training materials are in general relevant and adequate to the context. However, direct reference to branch products (a rage of Coca-Cola products) should be avoided, and examples provided in the manual revised in future reprints in the interest of fairness and ethical (i.e. Coca-Cola as a no risk product against basic food basket products)

Criteria	A	B	C	D	E
Impact					

Overall score: B

The project has been defined as a pilot project and the first where three very different and complementary partners gather together to serve a common goal. Partners are seriously committed towards progress and have assigned knowledgeable, dedicated and complementary staff to serve this purpose. At this stage, corrective actions should be taken to improve partners’ capacity to achieve the overall objective and a good distribution of efforts to achieve each of the outcomes and outputs should be in place. The project is achieving tangible impact in vulnerable direct beneficiaries in areas where there is almost no other sort of support and where the project can well serve as entry point to address other more sensitive

issues. Partners are willing to seat together, enhance weaker strategies and improve project monitoring and reporting.

6.- Conclusions and lessons learnt

Project management

Flexibility in project management and implementation has allowed project partners to assume ownership and leadership for results achievement. It helped towards the identification of emerging needs and overcome difficulties.

UN Women repeatedly encouraged and supported its partners to revise activities and plans whenever there was a need, benefiting from emerging new opportunities what granted flexibility to target the actions to the needs of beneficiaries (i.e. range of actions to promote participating at field level).

Although a revision of management arrangements would be desirable during this last phase of implementation, this flexibility allowed partners to express and demonstrate their commitment and capacities. They have been able to operate in a completely new partnership context. Over the remaining period, the diversity of partners should be used in a more strategic manner, distributing actions according to their mandate and capacities (i.e. capacity to engage different types of stakeholders, provide technical expertise, promote sustainability at the different levels, and coordinate with various sectors).

Programme design from an individual approach towards the promotion of supportive and sustainable systems

Most international best practices tend to conclude that programme design needs to be holistic, multidimensional, multi stakeholders approach. In this case, a focused scope promoting tangible actions that benefit vulnerable groups worked well as an entry point to communities that have been exposed to few and ad hoc projects and where there is almost no other support, like it is the case in some parts of Mpumalanga province.

Although this priority strategy worked well during the period corresponding to the evaluation, it would be limited in scope during the remaining period. Partners should now dedicate more efforts to strengthening Peer Support Groups, promoting business network opportunities to women and actively engaging stakeholders.

Focused interventions at the local level reaching participants who are already engaged in business activities

The project demonstrates an innovative approach when targeting beneficiaries who have already started some sort of business instead of promoting reactive engagements (beneficiaries without any experience or previous interest in business). This has demonstrated to be an effective approach and good indicator of success.

While most economic empowerment projects promote starting up of new activities, EWEP project aims at improving existing micro and small businesses by providing tailor made training and problem solving action solving guidance.

Adaptability of the learning plan to the self-assessed needs

The project demonstrates an innovative and flexible approach since participants are encouraged to attend all four training modules but they can also choose to participate in the modules they consider most relevant to their current business needs.

This allows for an external support capacity building phase that opens a rather “self-driven” and “self-paced” period that facilitates the internalization of new processes and work practices that have been presented and allow them to take the necessary time to integrate them in their own business routine. This approach promotes greater ownership and enrolls the most vulnerable groups (i.e. women with a strong care giver role).

On-going support means needs to be effectively communicated

Although the project plans to offer on-going support to the participants, better communication and a more strategic would be needed to effectively reach participants after the trainings in some of the settings. To make on-going consultations effective, clear actions need to be identified and communicated accordingly (i.e. monthly meetings, periodic calls...).

Capacity development requires time

Efforts aiming to support the process of capacity development need to be tailored to the respective stakeholders, and employ a variety of complementary strategies. Follow up and continuous support is needed, moreover considering the ambitious 25,000 beneficiaries project target.

Exchange of knowledge is required

This project was designed as a pilot case and many others can learn from the gained experience, first in the new provinces where it is to be implemented and then in other sectors in the same areas and hopefully internationally (i.e. MIS, engagement of already active beneficiaries).

Innovative activities implemented during this project are fully relevant to other projects, including those in different impact areas and geographic locations. At this stage, partners have not yet fully streamlined the opportunity to draw upon lessons and insights deriving from the project to inform organizational learning and theory building at the corporate, national and international levels.

A number of ‘emerging good practices’ demonstrated by the project have been pointed out throughout the report. Based on these, as well as on other evaluation findings presented in the previous sections, various lessons have been learned through the experience of the project under review.

Over the remaining period, and considering the complementary organizational knowledge available from each of the partners, a better knowledge management strategy would be expected (i.e. learning from international best practices and existing networks before actively engaging in developing new systems and tools).

Learning from the field

Since the project methodology is rather flexible, field staff has developed their own strategies to reach, engage and support target groups. Hence, practices differ from place to place and are

also different according to the capacities and preferences of the field staff. Unfortunately, although those good practices are often discussed with other field staff and/or with management they are rarely documented. Those discussions should serve strategic planning in a documented manner.

7.- Recommendations

The section summarizes evaluation conclusions, and tries to offer action oriented recommendations.

Priority actions:

- ✓ The project management and monitoring system needs to allow for timely gathering of information from the field; consolidation of emerging good practices from field team on implementation, and more structured facilitation of sharing of good practices amongst field team and technical support and guidance in applying the same in different locations where project is implemented. Current monthly meetings platforms, though useful, are not sufficient to align standards of delivery among field staff. Prioritization of the finalization of MIS is critical to make data readily available for different uses.
- ✓ With the support of the project management and monitoring system above, documentation on project achievements, lessons learned, stories, etc... needs to be prioritized and led by UN Women with strong contribution from HiH (i.e. identification of stories, identification of lessons learned at field level). These can be packaged and shared both nationally and internationally with the lead of UN Women and contribution of all partners. A needs, situation and trends analysis in the provinces needs to be conducted/those conducted consolidated whilst drawing linkages between macro and micro environments including the stakeholders involved., Emphasis should be placed on linking the analysis to not only project activities but also emerging results and possible scenarios for sustainability
- ✓ Hand in Hand should streamline the mapping of existing stakeholders at local levels while clearly highlighting the value they would add to the project beyond logistical support and referral of beneficiaries. UN Women should then lead efforts in engaging stakeholders at national level.
- ✓ Active participation of all relevant stakeholders in all project phases should be promoted. Each partner should focus in engaging stakeholders according to their own expertise with a project approach.
- ✓ The MIS tool itself should be revised by UN Women with the support of the other two partners to prioritize the most relevant information considering project implementation needs and the interests of potential institutional stakeholders

Other recommendations:

- ✓ Participation of beneficiaries in the elaboration of new training material contents should be promoted from the field level and led by HiH.
- ✓ At field level, communication on the mandate and less tangible role of UN Women needs to be strengthened by HiH.
- ✓ Promotion of knowledge sharing in the new areas, including exchange of knowledge from current and former beneficiaries and also exchange/peer learning for field staff needs to be prioritized and conducted by UN Women and HiH in an organized manner.

- ✓ In order to avoid potential misuse of information during the project implementation phase and beyond, A data protection and data management agreement needs to be reached by all partners UN Women should led this.
- ✓ All three partner organizations at national and international levels should explore whether and how they can draw upon project specific experience more effectively to inform overall organizational learning, partnership and theory building.
All project partners should explore if and how they can better continue to support together the realization of women’s rights in the country.

Despite the noted progress made towards the long term project goal of increased economic empowerment of women, there is a lot of improvements discussed in this report that can enable an even better results from the programme. To this end, the project under review has laid valuable foundations that can and should be built upon.

Since partners are already individually exploring opportunities to commit further support and stablish new alliances, it is recommended that partners explore and define together new actions and interactions as a direct result of the current interventions. This would enable synergies in a constructive manner. At the same time, although partners are completely free to decide their way forward once the project is completed, timely communication in decisions of partners with regard to project exit strategy would avoid unnecessary overlaps when individually planning new activities, exploring available technical and financial support opportunities, and contacting potential new partners. This may also help to more effectively identify ongoing common interests or share responsibilities on how to provide continued support to national actors using knowledge gained from the project.

8. - Annexes

- Annex 1. Project document and log-frame
- Annex 2. Country visit agenda
- Annex 3. Evaluation TORs
- Annex 4. Evaluation phases, activities and products
- Annex 5. Baseline Study, Gauteng Province
- Annex 6. Evaluation Questions