



Evaluation Brief



WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS REGIONAL PROJECT 2018-2021

Mariam Lomtadze, Founder of Hero and Farm App Tech Start-Ups, Georgia. Photo: UN Women

Women's economic empowerment (WEE) is increasingly considered to be a prerequisite for realizing gender equality, strengthening women's agency and achieving sustainable development for all as agreed in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with an aim to reduce inequalities and to "leave no one behind". There has been some progress in recent years in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia in terms of reducing gender inequality. Yet, several international indices such as the World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report (2017) and the Social Progress Imperative Index (2018) show that work remains to be done to remove gender-based discrimination and achieve the full and equal participation of women in society.

To address these challenges, UN Women Georgia launched a first main phase of the "Women's Economic Empowerment in the South Caucasus" (WEESC) project in August 2018 which is the initiative being evaluated. The goal of WEESC is to ensure that women, particularly the poor and socially excluded, in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia are economically empowered and participate in relevant decision-making. The 3-year project is being implemented by UN Women Georgia, in close partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Armenia and Azerbaijan from August 2018-July 2021. WEESC is funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the Austrian Development Agency (ADA).

What Did the Evaluation Conclude?

Relevance: The WEESC Project is well aligned with national, international and UN Agency priorities in relation to gendered outcomes and women's economic empowerment in the South Caucasus region.

Coherence: There is a high level of compatibility of the WEESC Project with other GEWE interventions in the South Caucasus region, as well as within the three countries.

Effectiveness: This has varied across different outcome levels and across the three countries, with anticipated project results negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and the South Caucasus geopolitical crisis. However, there are good signs of progress across the different outcomes, although there is a clear need to increase cohesion amongst the different outcome levels.

Efficiency: The WEESC project delivered results in an economical way and timely manner during the first 1.5 years of Phase One and prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020. However, there is a need to improve the project M&E framework and related monitoring system.

Sustainability: While external funding can be a catalyst for the initial phase, the project life cycle must also address long-term financial and environmental sustainability. For this to be achieved, there needs to be collective "buy-in" from the targeted grassroots communities, legislative and policy-making branches of governments and local organizations that ultimately impact the target beneficiaries. The project has made considerable gains in this regard, however with two additional phases planned, much remains to be done.

COVID 19 Situation and Impact: The COVID-19 crisis has been particularly hard on women in the South Caucasus Region, similar to the rest of the world. Unsurprisingly, the onset of the pandemic in March 2020, at the mid-point of the WEESC Phase One project cycle, has affected negatively project implementation and achievement of some of the intended results. However, the evaluation has identified multiple lines and levels of evidence to support the conclusion that the WEESC project has also achieved some key successes in adapting to the new reality.

Recommendations On How UN Women Can Improve?

1. Ensure that implementing partners, key stakeholders and a representative sample of women beneficiaries are proactively engaged in the design of Phase Two through participatory processes.
2. Refresh the inception analysis to look more closely at the factors that facilitate and limit women's ability to secure (a) wage employment, and (b) self-employment across the three countries and the policies and the service provisions that are necessary to facilitate both types of economic activities.
3. Obtain a clear understanding of market potential or growth prospects for a wide range of economic activities before offering grants to women for self-employment, vocational training, or wage employment.
4. Align Phase Two with new 4-year UNSDCFs for three countries (2021-2025) along with their commitments under international human rights treaties, conventions, and relevant national legislation.
5. Strengthen the regional dimension of WEESC based on the comparative advantage of UN Women and UNDP in the region in knowledge management by formalizing a WEE sub-regional knowledge hub within UN Women Georgia.
6. Enhance the involvement of local partners with expertise in GEWE or WEE and ensure they are allocated resources sufficient to enable their participation in the project.
7. Enhance the involvement of local governments and private enterprises at the grassroots level, with the objective of creating jobs for women.
8. Develop further partnerships to facilitate awareness on gendered norms, and collaboration with market actors or other organizations who can offer services to support poor rural women in reducing their load of unpaid care.
9. Demonstrate some form of "graduation" to break the cycle of grant dependence in order to continue to further support and sustain self-employed women, especially those who are currently establishing their businesses and obtaining small grants from the WEESC project.
10. Adjust the training program to be more learner-centric and better aligned with the needs, current level of understanding and experiences of the target groups in each country, and include the use of accelerated digital technology, including online courses and creation of videos for core modules.
11. Develop systems to ensure closer monitoring of training to assess relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of the learning.
12. Strengthen the M&E framework for Phase Two by harmonizing the tracking system of enhanced performance indicators as well as ensuring there are gender-sensitive qualitative indicators also built into WEESC LogFrame.
13. Strengthen the project Theory of Change and interventions to reflect linkage between Outcome 1 and Outcomes 2 and 3. This inter-linkage amongst the outcomes is a core element of the WEESC project design.
14. Improve the use of the M&E data for decision making, not only for reporting purposes. The project should also revisit how it measures sustainability across different levels and focus more on adoption and behavior change.
15. Enhance transparency and accountability for the use of resources (financial, human and material).
16. UN Women & UNDP should act as a role model for other project stakeholders as it relates to disaggregating data by sex and vulnerability.
17. Enhance the demand-driven aspect of the training provided to women to improve their business and their readiness for economic activities.
18. Develop pilot activities to demonstrate a shared incentive for the private sector to adopt policies and practices to improve absorption and retention of women at the workplace.
19. Develop a specific WEESC Phase Two COVID-19 Action Plan, including priority activities and resource allocation requirements.

EVALUATION APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

3 COUNTRIES – GEORGIA, ARMENIA AND AZERBAIJAN

62 PERSONS INTERVIEWED

Semi-structured interviews with representatives from (a) national government, (b) local government, (c) private sector, (d) community organizations/NGOs, (e) donors and (f) UN agencies/project staff

- Armenia: 16
- Azerbaijan: 14
- Georgia: 13
- UN Women Georgia Staff: 6
- Donors: 4
- Inception Phase: 9

92 PERSONS PARTICIPATED IN 16 FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

FDGs were conducted focused on (a) women trained and self employed, (b) women trained and secured jobs and (c) women trained but economically inactive and (d) women trained in GRB

FDGs completed per country:

- Armenia: 5 covering Gegharkunik, Shirak, Armasia, Chambark (31 participants)
- Azerbaijan: 6 covering Gusar, Khazar, Sabirabad (30 participants)
- Georgia: 5 covering Marneuli, Akhaltsikhe, Lagodekhi, Telavi, Aspindza (31 participants)

117 DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

Detailed review of international, regional and country - level documents:

- Project documents
- Inception reports/studies
- Strategic documents
- M&E documents and trackers
- Progress Reports
- Financial Reports

SURVEY OF UN STAFF AND IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS

Structured questionnaires were sent to 28 staff of WEESC and Implementing partners

Response rate: 39%

3 LEARNING BRIEFS

Armenia: focus on interconnection between three Outcomes

Azerbaijan: focus on Outcome 1 and contrasting learning between a mature and 2 new WRCs

Georgia: focus on the success and learnings on the Labor Code and Gender Based Budgeting

RESULTS

FINDINGS:
19 Project-Wide

CONCLUSIONS:
6 Project-Wide, 3 Country Specific

LESSONS LEARNED:
4 Project-Wide, 3 Country Specific

RECOMMENDATIONS
19 Project-Wide, 8 Country Specific