

# UN Women

## Final Evaluation of the Project “Gender Rural Equality and Tourism (GREAT)”

### Final Report

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## Project Details:

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## Project Evaluation

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

AICS	Agenzia Italiana per la Cooperazione allo Sviluppo
CAP	Common Agriculture Policy
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
IPARD	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance for Rural Development
EC	European Commission
EERG	External Evaluation Reference Group
EMG	Evaluation Management Group
ERP	Economic Reform Programme
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GRB	Gender Responsive Budgeting
GREAT	Gender Rural Equality and Tourism
INSTAT	Institute of Statistics
IPRO	Immovable Property Registration Office
LAGs	Local Action Groups
LEADER	"Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'Économie Rurale" 'Links between activities (or actions) for the development of rural economy'
MARD	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development
NSARD	National Strategy on Agriculture and Rural Development
MTR	Mid Term Review
NPEI	National Plan for European Integration
PFM	Public Financial management
SASPAC	State Agency for Strategic Programming and Aid Coordination
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound
TOC	Theory of Change
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
VNR	Voluntary National review
WEE	Women's Economic Empowerment
WEF	World Economic Forum

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## BACKGROUND

The Gender Rural Equality and Tourism (GREAT) was a three-years project (with two non-cost extensions<sup>1</sup> a four-year project) implemented by UN Women as lead implementing agency and FAO as responsible party for the implementation of specific components. The project is implemented in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) in Albania and with the financial support of the Italian government (Agenzia Italiana per la Cooperazione allo Sviluppo – AICS). The project's aims to create more enabling environment for economic empowerment of rural women and more directly to empower rural women in three municipalities in Albania: Kolonjë (county of Korçë), Gramsh and Elbasan (county of Elbasan).

The UN Women Country Office in Albania has commissioned this independent project evaluation with the aim to assess project results and identify lessons learned. **Evaluation users** include implementing organizations, their implementing partners (MARD and Albanian Network for Rural Development - ARND) and donor, other UN agencies in the country, as well as other relevant stakeholders whether being decision makers, independent institutions, civil society organizations or target groups which can draw important lessons for future engagement in these areas.

The report was validated by the Evaluation Management Group (EMG) and External Evaluation Reference Group (EERG), comprised of relevant stakeholders, including representatives of donor, ministries of agriculture and finance, representatives of local governments, partner NGOs and final beneficiaries. It was also quality assured by the Independent Evaluation Service.

## PURPOSE, OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE

The evaluation primarily aims to foster organizational learning, helping to design and implement future programs effectively. It serves to hold accountable to funders, stakeholders, and beneficiaries by transparently sharing both the successes and shortcomings, thereby supporting evidence-based decision-making.

The **objective** of the evaluation is to assess the achievement of project results and performance of the project interventions considering the following OECD evaluation criteria: relevance, coherence, effectiveness, impact, efficiency and sustainability as listed in the ToR (Annex 6). The evaluation also assesses human rights, gender equality and disability inclusion as crosscutting issues. The evaluation captures lessons learned, documents best practices for replication, and offers actionable recommendations for future projects. It also identifies and addresses specific challenges encountered in the Elbasan region during the project's implementation to guide future interventions. The evaluation spans the entire duration and **scope** of the project, covering all targeted local communities from March 2021 to January 2025.

## COUNTRY CONTEXT

Economically, Albania is progressing toward a functional market economy, supported by robust tourism and investments. However, challenges like labor shortages, particularly skilled workers due to emigration, persist. The agricultural sector, while declining slightly in GDP contribution, remains

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<sup>1</sup> First extension of ten months (05/03/2021 - 04/03/2024) and second of four months until 04/05/2025.

a significant employer. Gender inequality in the labor market remains pronounced, with a persistent gender gap and rural women facing significant barriers in access to health care and economic opportunities.

Social norms continue to reinforce traditional gender roles, significantly affecting women's economic participation and perpetuating gender-based violence. Women are often employed in lower-paid sectors like health and social services, education, and agriculture. The UN Women Albania Strategic note highlights that long-term unemployment and poverty are significant issues, particularly affecting women, youth, and the less educated.

Albania has ratified key international agreements on gender equality, including CEDAW and the Istanbul Convention, and is committed to the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Challenges remain in fully implementing these frameworks due to insufficient resources and weak accountability mechanisms, as highlighted in the National Strategy for Gender Equality 2021–2030 and the UN Women Albania Strategic note for 2022-2026. The 2023 CEDAW committee report underscores these challenges, emphasizing the need for improved access to land, financial services, and greater inclusion in decision-making roles. The European Commission's 2024 report acknowledges Albania's moderate progress in statistical capacity, recommending improvements in data quality and alignment with EU standards, including work-life balance legislation, to support better policy-making and compliance with EU directives.

Albania has established a robust legal framework to advance gender equality, including laws on gender equality, protection from discrimination, family violence, and local self-governance. Strategically, Albania has implemented several national strategies to create a conducive environment for gender equality, including the National Strategy on Gender Equality (2021-2030) and the National Employment and Skills Strategy (2023–2030). These strategies are integrated with broader national development goals and EU integration efforts, focusing on key areas like agriculture, rural development, and tourism, where gender-sensitive policies are increasingly emphasized.

However, challenges remain in fully implementing these strategies, particularly in terms of accountability, capacity, and the alignment of national laws with international standards. Issues like insufficient gender-sensitive data and weak policy implementation hinder the effectiveness of Albania's gender policies. The National Strategy for Agriculture, Rural Development, and Fisheries (2021–2027) shows gaps in incorporating gender-sensitive measures, despite its declared alignment with EU gender equality plans. Moreover, efforts to enhance women's roles in tourism and agriculture have seen regulatory support, but the actual empowerment of women in these sectors remains limited. Future tourism strategies are aiming to prioritize women-led initiatives, especially in community-based tourism, to enhance their participation and leadership in the sector.

#### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

<p><b>The project duration:</b> 05/03/2021 - 04/05/2025 (with two non-cost extensions, first from 04/05/2024 and second from 04/03/2025)</p> <p><b>Project budget:</b> EUR 1,350,000</p>
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Project **goal** is to contribute to rural women's empowerment in Albania and to facilitate and strengthen women's roles in rural development. The project is structured around one outcome and four outputs. The project has one outcome and four outputs. **Outcome1:** An enabling policy and legislative environment to promote and translate into action women's economic empowerment

and access to and control over productive assets. **Output 1.** Capacities of rural women developed and gender-based stereotypes contested for gender-equitable LAG formation. **Output 2.** The capacities of rural advisory services, municipal institutions and national partners are developed in the provision of gender-responsive services for rural tourism, agri-business and value chain development. **Output 3.** Women's capacity to start and develop own business is strengthened by coaching and mentoring, improved access to finance and agro-extension services. **Output 4.** Technical support is provided for gender-responsive policy and law formulation and implementation in rural development, including the LEADER framework.

The **Project Theory of Change** states that IF (1) the capacities of rural women are developed and gender-based stereotypes are contested for gender-equitable LAG formation; IF (2) the capacities of rural advisory services, municipal institutions and national partners are developed in the provision of gender-responsive services for agri-business and value chain development; IF (3) women's capacity to start and develop own business is strengthened by coaching and mentoring, improved access to finance and agro-extension services and IF (4) technical support is provided to MoARD for gender-responsive policy law formulation and implementation and rural development, including the LEADER framework THEN (5) an enabling policy and legislative environment to promote and translate into action women's economic empowerment and access to and control over productive assets will be in place.

The theory of change (ToC) was reviewed by Evaluation Team (ET) and adjusted to better reflect current realities and assumptions that influenced the intervention chain. The ET concluded that the results framework exhibited some limitations. Specifically, while the project's interventions were designed to address identified challenges effectively, they encompassed a broad range of activities whose impact extended beyond the narrow outcome statements focused solely on policy and legislative enhancements. The evaluation assessed these broader economic empowerment achievements without altering the outcome phrasing in the original ToC.

**Organizational structures.** In addition to the core Programme Management Unit (PMU), a Steering Committee (PSC) was established, chaired by a representative from the MARD and including members from AICS, UN Women, and FAO. The PSC, acted as a decision-making and coordination body, monitoring progress and guiding strategic decisions based on its Terms of Reference. Additionally, the project implemented a communication strategy to increase the visibility of its gender-focused activities and outcomes.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The evaluation methodology was designed to align with the defined purposes in the ToR, incorporating UN Women's gender-responsive approach and OECD DAC criteria, including crosscutting issues like human rights, gender equality, and disability inclusion. The methodology combined summative and formative approaches, assessing both the immediate outcomes and the longer-term applicability of the project's results, while emphasizing a gender-responsive perspective focusing on empowerment and inclusion. The evaluation was a participatory and transparent process, engaging a wide range of stakeholders and ensuring adherence to UN Women's evaluation policies and ethical standards. Quality assurance was maintained through the use of the UN Women Global Evaluation Reports Assessment and Analysis System (GERAAS), and the process involved four key stages: inception, data collection, analysis and preparation of report, as well as validation by EMG and EERG.



Over 50 documents were reviewed, 53 stakeholders interviewed (64% female and 36 male) to collect evaluation evidence (list of stakeholders presented in the Annex 5). The evaluation was guided by 18 evaluation questions presented in the evaluation matrix (Annex 3).

The evaluation fully complied with UNEG Norms and Standards for Evaluation and UNEG Ethical Code of Conduct. The evaluation was conducted with integrity and respect for the beliefs, manners and customs of the social and cultural environment; for human rights and gender equality; and for the 'do no harm' principle.

## **FINDINGS**

**Relevance.** The GREAT project is highly relevant and aligns with key national policy priorities at the intersection of gender equality and rural development while simultaneously addressing the economic empowerment needs of rural women as final beneficiaries. It addresses the developmental challenges of targeted local communities and aligns with international commitments based on gender equality instruments, SDGs and EU accession processes. The project was developed based on the findings of several studies conducted by UN Women and FAO, as well as on consultations with partners and other relevant stakeholders, ensuring a broad understanding of the local context and needs. However, concerns were raised by some stakeholders regarding the top-down approach in designing economic empowerment strategies, particularly its emphasis on entrepreneurship over stable employment, which did not always align with the actual needs and aspirations of rural women.

**Coherence.** The project demonstrates strong internal coherence by aligning with UN Women and FAO's strategic plans and similar initiatives, fostering synergy—particularly with programs supporting women's entrepreneurship and the effective implementation of gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) in local planning. The project demonstrates high coherence with UNSDCF Albania, with AICS strategic priorities, with policy priorities of targeted local communities and other initiatives, such as EU and German funded rural development projects.

**Effectiveness.** The project has achieved important results in three main areas: improvement of gender responsive agricultural policies at national and local levels, direct economic empowerment of rural women and contribution to a more enabling environment through enhanced capacities of local governments and officials, support to LAGs, and increased awareness on rural women's economic contributions. One of the project's key structural interventions was the establishment of business incubators for rural women, aimed at fostering entrepreneurship and creating sustainable income-generating opportunities. At the time of the evaluation, the incubator in Leskovik was fully established and functional, while the incubator in Elbasan was not yet operational.

The Leskovik incubator enabled transformation of local women from traditional subsistence farming, to engaging in more structured business ventures. The project provided essential business training, access to modern equipment, and opportunities for networking, which empowered them in quality control, branding, financial management, and product diversification. Critical to this transformation has been the robust support from the local government, which provided the incubator's space rent-free, covered utility costs, and exempted the enterprise from local taxes for five years. The products have gained popularity, supported by social media and word-of-mouth marketing, leading to significant sales increases especially during the tourist-heavy peak season from May to October. Moreover, the incubator has become a social hub where women support each other's entrepreneurial efforts, enhancing its impact beyond mere economic benefits.

The Elbasan incubator has encountered some challenges related to the incubator's location and the pre-existing occupancy of the Farmers' Federation, which anticipated a managerial role. Complications were exacerbated by the absence of formal agreements, leading to prolonged discussions between key stakeholders about financial and management aspects of the incubator. While the Federation expected control over the incubator, no supporting documentation has been found to confirm such arrangements, resulting in strained relations and financial burdens. Initially, the women participants (who were organized in the formal group during the project) were prepared to manage the incubator themselves, but due to these ongoing challenges, they have expressed a preference for more stable employment opportunities, suggesting a shift from the project's original entrepreneurial focus to one that perhaps better aligns with their current needs and circumstances. As the project moved into its final phase, concerted efforts were made to address these issues, aiming to establish a functional and mutually agreeable operational framework for the incubator. The evaluation's influence facilitated reaching this agreement in Elbasan between the involved parties, coordinated by the project team, which will allow the engagement and employment of women.

In Gramsh, project provided significant support to a local women's group for cultivating, processing, and exporting organic and aromatic medicinal plants, by equipping it with several pieces of essential equipment.. This support enabled the business to employ up to 15 women aged 35-55, on an informal basis, adapting to fluctuating market demands. The women benefited from reduced physical labor, enhanced productivity, and increased income, improving their economic independence and social interaction. The strategy, led by UN involved direct support and capacity building, avoiding the complexities of large-scale business management and enabling women to focus on enhancing their business skills and confidence. This approach has not only been effective in meeting the immediate needs of the women but also set a foundation for future leadership roles within their community. The success of this model in Gramsh is viewed as a potential blueprint for other areas, demonstrating a robust method for empowering rural women economically and socially.

Excluding Elbasan incubator component, the project achievements were enabled by the **effective project strategies** combining policy work at national and local level with direct economic empowerment and efforts focused on creating a more enabling environment for rural women's economic activity. However, the project faced many challenges that prevented higher effectiveness: sociocultural stereotypes preventing women to engage, resistance by some stakeholders in the communities, pandemic and war in Ukraine, lack of community engagement and ownership.

**Efficiency.** The financial and human resources, along with the capacity for technical support, were deemed sufficient. However, despite the dedicated implementation teams allocating resources as planned, the project's efficiency faced challenges due to the increased equipment costs, as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic and war in Ukraine. Financial analyses also suggest a low return on investment in the short term, as the economic empowerment model proved costly given the small number of women remaining economically active through incubators. Nonetheless, such investment holds the potential for broader social impacts in the long term. Collaboration between UN Women and FAO was crucial in initiating the project; however, challenges in leadership and management, particularly in coordination and oversight, significantly impacted its execution. Insufficient coordination led to oversight gaps and delays in decision-making. Shared accountability between the agencies, coupled with ineffective monitoring and reporting mechanisms, complicated the determination of responsibility and contributed to management difficulties. Additionally, bureaucratic and legal complexities, along with underdeveloped long-term monitoring, hindered the timely delivery of results and the efficient assessment of the project's sustained economic impact.

**Potential for impact.** Although it is not yet possible to fully estimate the project's impact, there are promising indications, particularly in Kolonje. Increased interest from women in neighbouring communities for similar support has been noted by local government, which has also expressed strong interest in replicating the model. Additionally, the project has brought attention to other critical issues, such as women's access to property, and has enabled targeted municipalities to extend gender-responsive budgeting practices beyond the project scope into other sectors.

**Sustainability.** Evidence points to high sustainability prospects regarding the national level policies, local gender responsive budget planning focused on WEE, and Leskovik Incubator due to the system integration and ensured model of support by the municipality for the next 3-5 years. Other project components (mainly incubator in Elbasan and economic empowerment of women in same municipality) are faced with high sustainability risks due to the resistance of some key stakeholders, low ownership by local governments but also by women beneficiaries.

**Crosscutting issues.** The project demonstrates a strong commitment to gender equality and human rights by focusing on the economic empowerment of rural women; however, it does not comprehensively address intersectional vulnerabilities beyond those linked to rural status. Key gaps include limited inclusion of younger women, which is crucial for long-term sustainability, and a lack of integration of disability inclusion principles, aside from adhering to basic UN accessibility standards.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The GREAT project has significantly advanced gender equality and women's economic empowerment within rural development in Albania, aligning with national and international priorities. It has enhanced policy, built institutional capacities, and established economic initiatives, thereby embedding WEE into local governance. However, the project's sustainability hinges on securing financial stability, community ownership, and market integration.

Substantial progress has been made in gender-responsive rural development, with the project impacting agricultural policies and increasing local government involvement in gender-responsive economic planning. Yet, challenges in operational efficiency, the preference for entrepreneurship over employment, and the need for stable commercial pathways have somewhat limited the project's effectiveness and raised sustainability concerns.

Operational challenges related to discussions about financial and management arrangements of the incubators, particularly in Elbasan, underscore the necessity for clear partnerships and sustainable financial strategies. There is also a need to engage younger women to ensure generational continuity in WEE initiatives. To solidify the gains made, continued support for LAGs, sustainable municipal financing, and development of commercialization pathways are essential. The project's focus on human rights and gender equality has positively influenced local policy and practices, though it has room for improvement in intersectionality and inclusivity.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Recommendations were developed based on discussions with implementing partners and stakeholders during the evaluation process, and validated by the EMG and ERG. There are seven key recommendations, each proposing also some potential actions, targeted towards specific stakeholders (mainly UN Women and FAO):

1. Continue advocacy for gender sensitive policy at national and local levels and strengthen Government engagement
2. Advocate for more sustainable financial support and Mechanisms
3. Foster private sector engagement and support access to market opportunities
4. Support improvement of digital literacy and financial inclusion of rural women
5. Focus future work in this area on youth and intergenerational engagement
6. Contribute further to community integration and local buy-in
7. Improve coordination between stakeholders and their capacities of gender responsive rural development policies

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background

The Gender Rural Equality and Tourism (GREAT) is three-year project (with two extensions four-year project<sup>2</sup>) implemented by UN Women as lead implementing agency and FAO as the main responsible party for the implementation of specific components across different outputs. The project is implemented in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development in Albania and with the financial support of the Italian government. The project aims to empower rural women in three municipalities in Albania: Kolonjë (county of Korçë), Gramsh and Elbasan (county of Elbasan) to boost sustainable economic development among rural communities by enhancing women's income opportunities and employability.

The UN Women Country Office in Albania has commissioned this independent project evaluation with the aim to assess project results and identify lessons learned. **Evaluation users** include implementing organizations (UN Women and FAO), their implementing partners (ministries and NGOs), the donor, other UN agencies in the country, as well as other relevant stakeholders whether they are decision makers, independent institutions, civil society organizations or target groups which can draw important lessons for future engagement in these areas. The findings are presented in line with UN Women evaluation practices<sup>3</sup>, so that learning and knowledge dissemination is achieved.

This Evaluation Report presents findings of the evaluation, and it was validated by the Evaluation Management Group (EMG) and External Evaluation Reference Group (EERG), comprised of relevant stakeholders, including donor representatives, ministries of agriculture and finance, representatives of local governments, partner NGOs and final beneficiaries. It was also quality assured by the Independent Evaluation Service.

## 1.2 Purpose, objectives, scope and organization of the evaluation

### PURPOSE OF THE EVALUATION

**The main purpose** of this final evaluation is to contribute to organizational learning, that will help to design and implement similar programmes. It also contributes to accountability to funders, stakeholders and beneficiaries by transparently sharing results including both successes and shortcomings. It provides evidence and lessons learned to enhance evidence-based decision making in the respective areas.

**The overarching objective** of the evaluation is to assess the achievement of project results and performance of the project interventions considering the following OECD evaluation criteria: relevance, coherence, effectiveness, impact, efficiency and sustainability as listed in the ToR (Annex 6). The evaluation also assesses human rights, gender equality and disability inclusion as crosscutting issues.

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<sup>2</sup> First extension of ten months (05/03/2021 - 04/03/2024) and second of four months until 04/05/2025.

<sup>3</sup> [UN Women, How to manage gender-responsive evaluation, Evaluation handbook.](#)

The evaluation provides **specific recommendations** as to the priority areas that should be considered to inform future programming. This includes interventions that require continued support, successful interventions for expansion, and recommendations on prioritizing interventions to maximize impact. Specific attention has been paid to provide recommendations on addressing challenges in Elbasan region which might undermine the sustainability of results.

#### **SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES OF THE EVALUATION**

The objectives of this evaluation as per the ToRs are to:

- Analyse the relevance of the project objectives, strategy and approach at the country level;
- Assess effectiveness and a potential measurable impact of the project intervention;
- Assess efficiency in progressing towards the achievement of project results as defined in the intervention;
- Assess the sustainability of the results that will ensure continued empowerment of rural women;
- Assess the value added of UN Women including but not limited to advancing gender equality, mainstreaming gender in local and national documents and strategies, fighting of gender stereotype in rural areas, economic and social empowerment of rural women.
- Identify and document lessons learned, good practices and innovations, as well as success stories and challenges, to inform the future work of UN Women on rural women's empowerment;
- Identify strategies for replication and up-scaling of the project's best practices;
- Provide actionable recommendations for the development of future similar projects and maximize ownership by partners in the areas covered by the project;
- Identify and explain challenges that emerged in the Elbasan region during project implementation which might undermine the effectiveness and sustainability of results and, based on findings related to the causes, nature and scale of challenges, provide guidance to the project team and donor on how to intervene in the future to ensure the sustainability of results.

#### **SCOPE OF THE EVALUATION**

The final project evaluation covers the period from 5 March 2021 to 17 January 2025. The evaluation covers the whole project scope, including all three local communities targeted by the project.

## **1.3 Country context**

### ***1.3.1 Demographic and socio-economic situation in the country***

The 2023 census conducted in Albania has enumerated a total resident population of Albania, of 2,402,113 persons out of which 49.6 percent are male, and 50.4 percent are female by evidencing a decrease of 420 thousand persons since the year 2011 Population and Housing Census (the resident population of Albania in 2011 was 2,821,977 persons). The census report highlights that the population dynamics underlying the change in population are determined by four factors: births, deaths, immigration and emigration. Persisting rural-urban disparities also has led to internal migration by overpopulating big cities while rural communities are increasingly at risk of being isolated (UNCT, 2020). The census 2023 reports that approximately one-third of Albania's population (31.6 percent) resides in the prefecture of Tirana. Elbasan prefecture which includes two targeted municipalities Elbasan and Gramsh of GREAT project) is the third largest population share with 9.7

percent of the total population. Korca prefecture (which includes the third targeted location of GREAT project Kolonje) population is the fifth largest population share with 6 percent of the total population.

The overall sex ratio according to the 2023 census in the population is 98.2, indicating that there are 98.2 males per 100 females in the population which is lower than the estimated global figure for the sex ratio (101.0), but higher than that of the EU in 2022 (95.6).

The proportion of women with tertiary education completed continuously increased from 41.1 percent in the 2001 Census to 51.0 percent in the 2011 Census, and 55.7 percent in 2023 Census. The prevalence of disability is higher among the female population (7.2 percent) compared to the male population (5.9 percent). Around one in four households (24.3 percent) have a female reference person, the person who generally undertakes the main decisions in the household and who is recognised as such by all other household members.

According to EU progress report for Albania,<sup>4</sup> October 2024 under Cluster 1, Economic Criteria Albania has a good level of preparation in developing a functioning market economy and made some progress in this area. Economic growth has been robust, helped by strong tourism and rising investments. Under Cluster 5 on Chapter 11- Agriculture and rural development overall capacities to correctly manage IPARD (The Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance for Rural Development) funds to facilitate institution building and alignment with the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP), remain to be improved.

Same report states that the labour market continued to improve, but labour shortages pose challenges for businesses. Employment increased in 2023, in particular in the services sector. The employment rate for the population aged 15 to 64 grew to 67.2% in 2023, up from 65% in 2022, mainly fuelled by a higher participation rate. Despite recent improvements in the activity rate of women, the gender gap was 13.2 pps in Q4-2023. Although the labour market situation improved, emigration remains an issue, leading to labour shortages, especially of skilled workers. The working age population declined, including for skilled workers. While the services sector is expanding, agriculture continues to play an essential role in the Albanian economy. Tourism has surged since the pandemic, with foreign arrivals reaching new record highs in 2023. This increased the share of services in gross value added from 54.2% in 2022 to 55% in 2023. Services also account for the largest proportion of the workforce (about 44% of total employment). Although the share in gross value added of agriculture fell to 20.9% of GDP (from 21.3% in 2022), this sector continues to play a major role in the economy (employing about 34% of the country's workforce).

The same report states that women living in rural and remote areas, Roma and Egyptian women and LGBTIQ individuals face limited access to primary healthcare and to sexual and reproductive healthcare services. On equality between women and men in employment and social policy, gender inequality persists with the employment rate for men (72.5% in the fourth quarter of 2023) exceeding that of women by 10.4%. The labour force participation rate for women decreased by 0.4 percentage points and for men it increased by 1.1 percentage points compared to the same quarter in 2022.

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<sup>4</sup> [Albania Report 2024 - European Commission](#)



According to World Bank Country gender assessment 2024<sup>5</sup> qualitative analysis assessing women's needs in rural areas reveals that rural women make decisions regarding entering the labor market in a different contextual setting. Structural factors such as limited job options, lack of training, and inadequate childcare services in rural areas further hinder rural women's integration into the labor market, alongside persistent social norms reinforcing traditional gender roles.

In both the private and public life, there is a clear power distribution of the roles assigned to women and men, with 83% of Albanian families reportedly headed by men (UNCT, 2020). Social norms and societal attitudes are key underlying factors that normalise and perpetuate gender-based violence (GBV) and harmful practices.

COVID-19 crisis has substantially changed the socio-economic outlook of Albania. Albania has fallen 6 places in the 2024 Gender Gap Report of the World Economic Forum, showing a deterioration of some indicators, while ranking first in the Western Balkans countries (The 2023 Gender Gap Report of the World Economic Forum).

Similarly, UN Women's Rapid Gender Assessment revealed that the economic and social fallout affected women more than men. The labour market in Albania is strongly gendered, with a tendency for women to work in lower-skilled, "traditionally female" jobs, accompanied by higher female unemployment rates and lower earnings (UN Women, Albania Country Gender Equality Brief, 2020). The pervasiveness of stereotypical gender roles also limits women's and girls' career choices, as they work predominantly in health and social services, education, manufacturing, and agriculture, all sectors characterised by lower wages.

UN Women Albania Strategic note 2022-2026 states that Albania remains one of the poorest countries in Europe, with an at-risk-of-poverty rate of 23.4% in 2018, compared to 16.9% in the 28 EU countries. Long-term unemployment represents 66% of the unemployed, with women, youth and those with limited education being the most excluded from jobs (UNCT, 2020).

According to Men and Women 2023 report of INSTAT, women play a key role in agriculture and rural development in Albania, making up 40% of the agriculture workforce, although in most cases invisible and informal.

In its 2023 recommendations for Albania, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) Committee has recommended to Albanian government "to strengthen efforts to reduce poverty among women with a particular focus on rural women, promote their access to low-interest loans without collateral and participation in entrepreneurial initiatives and ensure that women have equal access to land ownership, markets and financial credit" (CEDAW, 2023, p. 11).

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<sup>5</sup> [Albania - Country Gender Assessment](#)



### *1.3.2 Legislative framework and its implementation*

#### INTERNATIONAL

Several core human rights international instruments have been signed and ratified by Albania on gender equality and elimination of gender-based discrimination such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and the Istanbul Convention.

Albania has committed to implement the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which was adopted in 2015. The 2018 Voluntary National Review (VNR) indicate that 79% of all SDG targets and 59% of SDG 5 targets are linked to the specific objectives of the national strategic policy framework.

According to concluding observations of the fifth periodical report of Albania, CEDAW/C/ALB/CO/5, Albania's National Strategy for Gender Equality 2021–2030 commits the government to increasing women's, young women's and girls' access to financial services and productive resources through legal reform. UN Women Albania Strategic note 2022-2026 states that the current implementation of Albania's legal framework is insufficient to achieve SDG 5 and other gender related SDG targets. Key challenges include insufficient financial and human resources, and weak accountability mechanisms to ensure implementation.

According to CEDAW committee report 2023, rural women have limited access to health care, social protection and other basic services, and public transportation and are underrepresented in decision-making and leadership positions. The same report states that CEDAW Committee is also concerned about the barriers to the full participation of women in economic life in Albania, such as limited access to land ownership, public procurement and financial credit; the high unemployment rates among rural women, women with disabilities, and women belonging to ethnic minorities, including Roma and Balkan Egyptians; the lack of inclusion of rural women in climate change and biodiversity and cultural heritage preservation and the persistence of structural barriers to the participation of women in political and public life, in particular in respect of rural women, women with disabilities, women belonging to ethnic minorities and lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex women.

The European Commission Report launched by end October 2024 states that Albania is moderately prepared in the area of statistics by mentioning that some progress is made by improving data transmission to Eurostat. The report recommends that Albania should publish detailed data and a thematic analysis of the 2023 population and housing census following the initial data release in June 2024 and conduct the census of agriculture holdings in line with the relevant EU acquis and international standards. Agricultural statistics are partly aligned with the EU acquis. Improvement was made on administrative registers, but the data quality still needs to be improved. In addition Albania needs to align its legislation with the EU work-life balance directive.

## NATIONAL FRAMEWORK

Albania has established a solid legal framework and normative policies in relation to gender equality such as the Law No. 9970/2008, “On Gender Equality”, <sup>6</sup>the Law no. 10 221, dated 4.2.2010 “On Protection from Discrimination” amended by the Law no. 124/2020, 2008 Organic budget Law (OBL) and its amendments in 2016 by including gender equality as a core principle in the OBL and Standard Budget Preparation and Monitoring Instructions containing specific GRB procedures; (Law No. 9669, dated 18.12.2006, "On Measures Against Violence in Family Relations, Law No. 139/2015, “On Local Self-Governance”, and Law No. 68/2017, “On Local Self-Government Finances”, Law No. 9817, 22 October 2007, “On agriculture and rural development”, Law 36/2022 on “ The organization and operation of Local Action Groups (LAGs)”. Provisions on gender equality have been introduced progressively in the Electoral Code from 2008 to 2020 to enhance women’s representation in politics and among voters.

In addition, several strategies relevant to the GREAT project are developed and approved helping at enabling environment for gender equality such as National Strategy on Gender Equality (2021-2030), National Strategy on Development and Integration II, National Plan for European Integration (NPEI), and the Economic Reform Programme (ERP), 2021-2023, Business and Investment Development Strategy, 2021–2027, National Employment and Skills Strategy, 2023–2030, National Strategy for Agriculture, Rural Development and Fisheries 2021– 2027 and its Action Plan.

According to (UNCT, 2020) overall, the Gender Equality Machinery lacks accountability, capacity and resources to coordinate government action at central and local levels. In addition, gaps in gender statistics need to be addressed to better respond to the specific needs of women and girls to persisting patterns of inequalities.

According to the 2024 Report of European Commission the legal and institutional framework for gender equality is partially aligned with the EU acquis and European standards. Weaknesses remain in implementing the National Strategy for Gender Equality 2021-2030 and its Action Plan, which focuses on overlapping forms of discrimination and vulnerability.

Legal analysis of the Policy Paper that was developed by UN Women and FAO, in the frame of the GREAT project in 2024, highlights that the National Strategy for Agriculture, Rural Development and Fisheries 2021– 2027 and its Action Plan has included legal and administrative shortcomings in relation to gender equality. Even though the Strategy itself declares compatibility with the European Union’s Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment in External Action 2021–2025 and reflects gender equality, gender-sensitive measures in support of women are not included, such as incorporating criteria that reflect gender equality objectives in the adopted instructions on direct financial benefits for rural activities (measures 7, 22), as well the collection of gender-sensitive statistical data in agriculture and rural development (measures 25, 26).

Law No. 9817, 22 October 2007, “On agriculture and rural development” foresees that agricultural and rural policies should increase income and well-being for the rural population by improving working and living conditions, as well as creating equal opportunities for men and women (Article

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<sup>6</sup> At the time when evaluation is conducted this Law was undergoing a deep review (also following specific observation from CEDAW) to strengthen its provisions to eliminate gender based discrimination and expand its application beyond the public administration to include the private sector.

3-b). While the law itself does not contain any specific measures to strengthen the rights of women engaged in family farming, it does provide the foundation for the adoption of measures to that purpose. Disregarding the principle of gender equality embraced in the law, gender-sensitive criteria are generally missing in the respective instructions on the criteria, procedures and method of administration of the Agriculture and Rural Development Program Fund, adopted by the ministries responsible for agriculture and rural development and on finance and economy in Albania.

The presence of women in tourism is regulated in Ministerial Regulation No. 50 of 2011 regarding the National Tourism Development Master Plan, Article 28 (b) of which states: one of the community's strengths in tourism includes optimizing gender integration through tourism development. The optimization of women's role in tourism is also regulated in the Ministry of Culture and Tourism Regulation of 2011, which explains that the community is actively involved in activities ranging from planning, implementation, monitoring, maintenance, and utilization, offering extensive opportunities for active participation by women. The previous national tourism strategy, which ended in 2023 did not mention women and their role in Albanian tourism at all. The newly developed National Tourism Strategy 2024 - 2030 launched in 2024, does mention women's role more specifically in Community Based Tourism development which provides a unique platform to increase women's involvement in the tourism sector, especially in rural areas and underdeveloped ones. The strategy clearly states that future stages of Community based Tourism development should prioritise creating space for women-led projects, ensuring that they play a central role in shaping and managing tourism experiences in their communities.

According to the 2024 Report of the European Commission<sup>7</sup>, the application of gender responsive budgeting continued in 2023, with 48 out of 75 budget programmes in 11-line ministries and Central Institutions. The public financial management (PFM) is broadly in place but needs to be improved. Budget transparency is mostly satisfactory with all key budget documents regularly published.

Developing women's entrepreneurial capacities, particularly key value chains in rural areas is key to advance Women's Economic Empowerment WEE. In 2019, roughly 25% of active enterprises were owned or administrated by women, down from nearly 30% in 2017 (UNCT, 2020). The World Economic Forum (WEF) ranked Albania uncompetitive in entrepreneurial culture (World Economic Forum, Global Competitiveness Report 2019).

The EC Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) continues to support gender equality in rural areas through the new CAP Strategic Plans (2023–2027), and especially its 8th Objective that promotes employment, growth, representation in decision-making processes, participation in farming businesses, social inclusion and local development.

To date, according to Performance audit Report, MoARD has issued no official statistics regarding the number of progressive farmers and consequently, there is no accurate number of how many of them are men and women. The lack of such data required for the performance and work of MoARD fails to provide a clear view of the outcome and progress of the work driven by policies to support women in rural areas.

In compliance with Law 36/2022 on the organization and operation of Local Action Groups (LAGs), LAG Elbasan “Egnatia” was registered by the MARD on the 16th of October 2024 and LAG Kolonja “Green Kolonja” was registered on 17<sup>th</sup> January 2025.

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<sup>7</sup> [KLSH Audit 2023\\_Brief English\\_web.pdf](#)

## 2. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

**The project duration:** 05/03/2021 - 04/05/2025 (with two non-cost extensions, first from 04/05/2024 and second from 04/03/2025)

**Project budget:** EUR 1,350,000

**Geographical scope:** municipalities Elbasan, Gramsh and Kolonja

**Implementing agency:** UN Women and FAO

The project GREAT was developed based on the needs identified by UN Women and FAO in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, following recommendations of different studies and country assessments undertaken by these entities. Its main goals are aligned with the priorities of the Government and the donor, AICS Tirana (donor), in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its core principle of leaving no-one behind.

The project aims to develop the capacities of rural women to develop their own business, to self-organize and register as local groups and to improve their access to finance. Simultaneously, GREAT supports targeted municipalities to prioritize and promote rural women's businesses, rural tourism and value chain development. Furthermore, it promotes a policy and legislative environment to strengthen women's economic empowerment and their access to and control over productive assets.

The primary beneficiaries of the project are women and girls living in the rural areas of the municipalities of Elbasan, Gramsh<sup>8</sup> and Kolonja. Rural women are usually informally employed in the family farms and they rarely own private registered businesses. Other project beneficiaries include: women who want to improve their agricultural production using incubator's facilities and access new markets, women potential or actual business owners, CSOs working on gender equality and rural development, formal and non-formal institutions, organizations working at the national, regional and local level, and the rural population at large.

### 2.1 Project objectives

The project's overarching goal is to contribute to rural women's empowerment in Albania and to facilitate and strengthen women's roles in rural development. The project is structured around one outcome and four outputs (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Project design**

Overarching goal: To contribute to rural women's empowerment in Albania and to facilitate as well as to strengthen women's roles and contribution to rural development in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its core principle of leaving no-one behind.		
Outcomes		Outputs
<b>Outcome:</b>	<b>An</b>	<b>Output 1.</b> Capacities of rural women developed and gender-based stereotypes contested for gender-equitable LAG formation.
<b>enabling policy and</b>		

<sup>8</sup> Instead of Gramsh, initially as the third location was planned Puke. However, it was later discarded due to lack of sufficient guarantees from the municipality including with regards to identification of adequate location to be used and terms of use.

legislative environment to promote and translate into action women's economic empowerment and access to and control over productive assets	<b>Output 2.</b> <i>The capacities of rural advisory services, municipal institutions and national partners are developed in the provision of gender-responsive services for rural tourism, agri-business and value chain development.</i>
	<b>Output 3.</b> <i>Women's capacity to start and develop own business is strengthened by coaching and mentoring, improved access to finance and agro-extension services.</i>
	<b>Output 4.</b> <i>Technical support is provided for gender-responsive policy and law formulation and implementation in rural development, including the LEADER framework.</i>

**Output 1** is planned to be achieved through set of activities focused on preparing rural communities and rural women's groups to self-organize and register as local action groups. Support is designed based on LEADER approach with a focus on joint purchasing, shared branding, marketing boards and legal registration. It was planned to support women through business incubators and to organize exchange of experience and knowledge with rural women's associations across Europe. While it was planned that all these activities will be implemented by UN Women, the role of FAO was to provide technical support to training of three potential LAGs on joint purchasing, shared branding and marketing boards and to media campaign promoting role models of women entrepreneurs in rural areas.

**Output 2** included activities aiming at identification of women's agribusinesses in tourist areas, value chains related to gourmet food and specialized products, and technical assistance and capacity building of targeted municipalities to reach rural women's businesses. It also focused on the implementation of gender responsive budgeting (GRB) in line with rural tourism priorities and improvement of the business environment through diversifying economic activities and the valorisation of natural resources. In regard to this output area, FAO had responsibilities related to the value chain and market assessment, support to municipalities in horizontal and vertical coordination, introduction of one-stop-shop approach, budget planning for improved agri-businesses infrastructure, assessing bottlenecks in rural advisory services and provision of trainings to enhance these services. The role of UN Women was to conduct costing of gender responsive rural advisory services, to support GRB integration in municipal action plans and budgets, to provide coaching for budgeting specialists, strengthen capacities of local administration for GRB and build capacities of LAGs in budget literacy.

**Output 3** was planned to be achieved through identification of women economic groups and formalization, capacity building on business skills development, access to financing, specific joint actions such as purchasing, quality control, marketing, branding, food processing and storage. Duties of UN Women included identification of rural women's groups, direct support, trainings and enhancing capacities of women-led associations, while FAO's role was to support capacity building activities in relation to value chain development.

The activities undertaken under **Output 4** included preparation of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural development for drafting and implementation of gender responsive legal and policy framework for the implementation of the LEADER approach in Albania. Additionally, it was planned to establish two incubators of traditional products in the identified value chains. The responsibilities of FAO were to develop feasibility study for the implementation in Albania by law of the figure of farm co-manager, provide long-term technical assistance to the Ministry, assessment of bottlenecks in advancing towards SDG target 5.a, development of capacities of MARD, INSTAT, IPROS and other stakeholders to monitor and report on SDG 5.a.1 and 5.a.2. FAO was also responsible for the

development of incubators. The tasks for UN Women included technical support for gender mainstreaming of all activities and technical assistance for GRB.

## 2.1 Theory of change

The Project Theory of Change states that IF (1) the capacities of rural women are developed and gender-based stereotypes are contested for gender-equitable LAG formation; IF (2) the capacities of rural advisory services, municipal institutions and national partners are developed in the provision of gender-responsive services for agri-business and value chain development; IF (3) women's capacity to start and develop own business is strengthened by coaching and mentoring, improved access to finance and agro-extension services and IF (4) technical support is provided to MoARD for gender-responsive policy law formulation and implementation and rural development, including the LEADER framework THEN (5) an enabling policy and legislative environment to promote and translate into action women's economic empowerment and access to and control over productive assets will be in place (original project ToC is presented in the Annex 1).

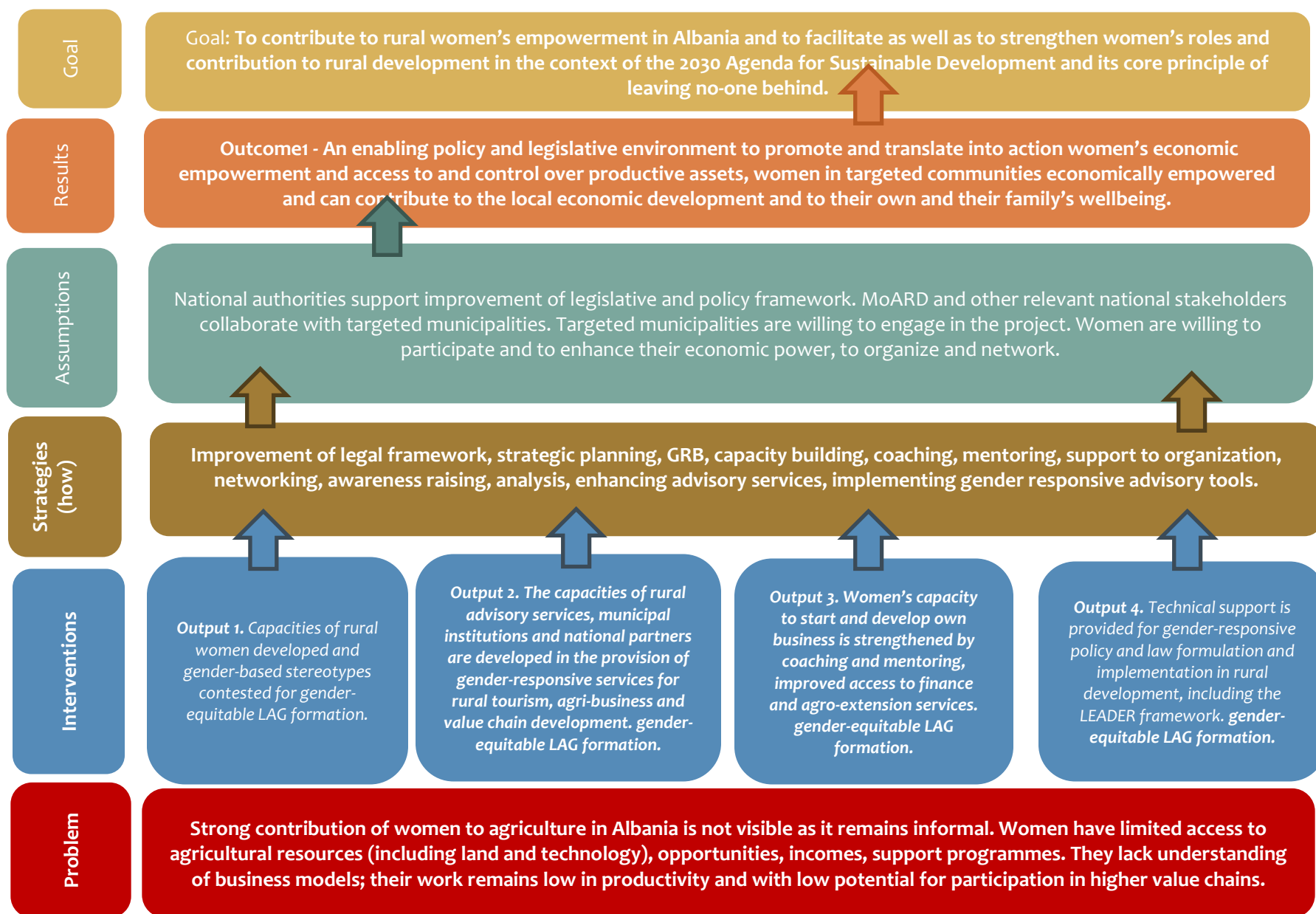
For the purposes of this evaluation, the theory of change was reviewed and slightly reconstructed in order to take into account new circumstances and reality checks related to assumptions and factors that influenced chain of interventions (Figure 1).<sup>9</sup> The evaluation team found that no major changes are needed compared to the original ToC, only few additions in terms of stronger links of intervention logic and assumptions to the identified problem and baseline situation (problem statement added to the ToC chart). Starting from the key identified challenges as emphasized in the situation analysis based on which project was developed, the theory of change lists key project interventions and strategies, states basic assumptions on preconditions for effective interventions and strategies and successful achievement of planned result that should lead to the higher-level goal. The evaluation team found that theory of change and consequently result framework demonstrate certain weaknesses. While the interventions are adequately designed to respond to the identified problems, they encompass broader sets of activities and outputs for which the outcome statement is too narrow. Namely, while the outcome envisages only results related to enabling policy and legislative environment to promote and translate into action women's economic empowerment and access to and control of productive assets, the interventions actually enhance directly women's capacities to conduct more productive agri-businesses and to become better organized and more powerful economic actors in rural areas. The Evaluation Team decided to assess the achievements related to the economic empowerment of women regardless its omission from the outcome statement, but not to rephrase the outcome.

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<sup>9</sup> As the UN Women guidelines for gender responsive evaluation defines as one of the evaluation steps is to review the original ToC and if needed revise with additional insights in sustained relevance and adequacy, to check if some changes occurred that would require adjustment in the chain of intervention logics or some assumptions, factors that might emerge meanwhile. For more details see UN Women, How to manage gender responsive evaluation, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/05/un-women-evaluation-handbook-2022>.



Figure 1: Theory of Change reconstructed by evaluation team



## 2.2 Project stakeholders

In cooperation with EMG, the evaluation team mapped key stakeholders involved in project implementation. Key partners of the UN Women and FAO implementing teams, was the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of Albania which is main government entity responsible for agriculture and rural development policies. In addition, the Ministry of Economy and Finance, was important partner due to the implementation of GRB components. The national institutions such as SASPAC and INSTAT were involved in the areas of land related issues or gender responsive statistics.

Local stakeholders engaged in the project implementation included local governments of two targeted municipalities (Elbasan, Gramsh and Kolonje), local officials involved in the implementation of local gender responsive policies and GRB, local action groups, broader group of local women who were involved in capacity building activities and final beneficiaries who were selected as founders of women's NGOs that were planned to administrate business incubators established through the project. Stakeholders also included Albanian Network for Rural Development, a network of CSOs committed to the promotion of rural development, as well as consultants and experts that were involved in delivery of various capacity building activities.

Finally, other relevant stakeholders, from the perspective of coherence were UN Albania and EU Delegation, particularly from the perspective of Albania's alignment with EU in agricultural and rural development policies.

**Table 2: Map of stakeholders**

Stakeholders	Role in the intervention
UN Women team	GREAT implementation team, CO leadership for reference to SN and internal coherence
FAO team	GREAT implementation team, CO leadership for reference to SN and internal coherence
AICS	Project donor
Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development	Project partner, programmatic area of policies
Ministry of Economy and Finance	Involvement in GRB
SASPAC	Involved in the implementation regarding land-related gender-sensitive SDGs (SDG 5.a.1 and SDG 5.a.2)
INSTAT	Beneficiary of technical assistance in area of gender responsive statistics in area of agriculture and rural development
Municipality of Elbasan	Project beneficiary supported in enhancing capacities for policy making and GRB in the area of agriculture, economic empowerment and gender equality
LAG Elbasan	WEE activities & Incubator



Rural women direct beneficiaries of the project Elbasan	WEE beneficiaries
Women and men from broader community (family members, neighbours, active community members)	Broader community
Municipality of Kolonja	Project beneficiary supported in enhancing capacities for policy making and GRB in the area of agriculture, economic empowerment and gender equality
LAG Kolonja	WEE activities & Incubator
Rural women direct beneficiaries of the project Kolonja	WEE beneficiaries
Women and men from broader community (family members, neighbours, active community members)	Broader community
Women Group Gramsh	Project beneficiaries
Albanian Network for Rural Development	Project responsible partner
UN RCO representative	Coherence with UNSDCF
Experts, consultants, trainers	Project implementation
EU Delegation	External coherence

## 2.3 Project management, coordination, M&E

The core Programme Management Unit (PMU) consisted of a National Programme Manager, an Administrative Assistant and a part-time Driver (these positions are covered from the programme budget). The project has established a Steering Committee (PSC), consisting of Agenzia Italiana per la Cooperazione allo Sviluppo (AICS), UN Women, FAO, and a representative from the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) which is the chair of the SC. The PSC served as a joint decision-making body and also ensured coordination among stakeholders, monitored the project's progress, and made strategic informed decisions for the project implementation and paved the way for achieving the targeted indicators as outlined in the PSC Terms of Reference (TORs). The PSC has met six times during project implementation.

The project has developed and implemented a [communication strategy](#) to enhance the visibility of its gender related activities and results.

### MONITORING PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

A Programme Monitoring Framework (PMF) was developed in the beginning of the programme, using SMART indicators. The programme implementation was assessed continuously at the level of outputs which were measured at regular intervals and against clearly defined indicators (result framework presented in the Annex 4).

Regular monitoring was conducted by the Programme Management Unit, with field visits to and participation in, project events. Regular financial and narrative progress reports were provided by implementing partners to the Programme Management Unit, which provided periodic progress and final reports to the donor in compliance with the donor agreement schedule.

A **mid-term review** (MTR) was conducted after the first two years of implementation and its results were taken into account in the final evaluation, particularly with the purpose to assess the extent to which its recommendations were taken into account towards the final stage of implementation. The MTR revealed a strong dedication to advancing gender equality and empowering women, foundational to its design and execution. This commitment was reflected through detailed gender analysis at the project's inception, leading to the integration of gender-responsive activities and robust stakeholder coordination. These efforts significantly enhanced the visibility of the project's gender-focused initiatives and actively engaged local communities in challenging gender stereotypes.

Key achievements noted in the MTR included substantial progress in educating rural women about their roles and rights, with approximately 85% of planned initiatives successfully implemented. The training of Local Action Groups on gender-responsive budgeting also saw notable progress, achieving an 80% completion rate. The MTR found that the project's management infrastructure, characterized by strong monitoring and transparent reporting mechanisms, was pivotal in steering the project towards these achievements.

However, the review also highlighted several challenges. There were delays, particularly in the completion of business incubators crucial for fostering a cooperative business ecosystem for women-led associations. Delays in setting up and equipping the incubators were mostly due to significant price increase following COVID-19 pandemic and war in Ukraine. In addition to these challenges, establishment of incubator in Elbasan faced also challenges related to prolonged negotiations with local stakeholders regarding the management arrangements. The Project Management Framework needed enhancements, specifically in integrating a more effective risk management and mitigation strategy, including the adoption of a traffic light system for better visualization and management of progress. External factors such as the upcoming local elections, potential changes in governmental structures, and delays in enacting supportive by-laws posed additional risks to timely project completion. Given these challenges, the MTR recommended a no-cost extension to ensure all planned activities were executed with the intended quality and effectiveness. The MTR underscored the necessity for ongoing adjustments and enhancements to address the unique challenges encountered, ensuring that the project remained adaptable and effective in achieving its long-term goals.

## **3. EVALUATION APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Evaluation Approach**

The evaluation methodology and approach were developed taking into account the evaluation purpose as defined in the ToR, the UN Women approach to gender responsive evaluation as described in the Evaluation Handbook, OECD DAC evaluation criteria (relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability), and in addition, the criterion on crosscutting issues, such as human rights approach, gender

equality and women's empowerment and disability inclusion.<sup>10</sup> The evaluation is a final project assessment that utilizes both summative and formative approaches. The summative approach focuses on assessing the achievement of results at the output and outcome levels and capturing lessons learned. The formative, forward-looking approach assesses the applicability of these results. The evaluation is gender-responsive which means that it took care of fair relations of power, empowerment, participation and inclusion, independence and integrity, transparency, quality, credibility and ethics.

The evaluation used theory based-approach and contribution analysis. In terms of lessons learned and good practice models, the evaluation team utilized **appreciative inquiry**<sup>11</sup> and **positive deviances**<sup>12</sup> approaches that focus on existing strengths, but which also identify main weaknesses and challenges to the implementation of the Project and achievements of desired results and impacts. The appreciative inquiry approach enabled to identify drivers at individual (rural women), organizational (LAGs, Women's organizations and networks) and institutional levels (local governments, ministries) that can be further leverage to increase sustainability of results and open room for broader impact of achieved results.

The **Positive Deviance approach** allowed evaluators to more clearly identify the factors that enabled individual women and local communities to enhance their economic activities despite the common challenges they faced. This approach proved very helpful in comparing success of incubators in Elbasan and Leskovik, which at the initial stages of the project faced similar challenges, but resulted with different success, making Leskovik incubator as example of good practice and Elbasan as still challenging case.<sup>13</sup> The evaluation was **transparent and participatory** process involving relevant stakeholders and partners. The evaluation was utilization-focused corresponding to the needs of the end users.

The evaluation adhered to UN Women Evaluation Policy<sup>14</sup>, UNEG Norms and Standards for Evaluation<sup>15</sup>, Ethical Guidelines and Code of Conduct<sup>16</sup>, UNEG guidance on integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in evaluations with gender responsive and human rights approaches<sup>17</sup> integrated into the scope and conduct of the evaluation (broader human rights context, gender and intersectional discrimination, power structures and exclusion, participation, inclusiveness and affirmation of human rights of the most vulnerable, human rights based and gender responsive approach in programming, monitoring and reporting etc.).

**To ensure quality** and that all required information is included, evaluation team self-assessed the draft evaluation report using the UN Women Global Evaluation Reports Assessment and Analysis System (GERAAS) tool<sup>18</sup> to ensure that all required information is included in the final report.

In line with a participatory approach, the evaluation process included Evaluation Reference Group which participated in key stages of evaluation process: validation of evaluation methodology as presented in the

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<sup>10</sup> OECD/DAC Criteria for Evaluating Development Assistance:

<https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/daccriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm>

<sup>11</sup> Appreciative Inquiry is a way of exploring and finding the best in people, organizations, and the world around them. It focuses on discovering what makes a system thrive and perform at its best—economically, environmentally, and socially. At its core, it's about asking thoughtful questions that help a system understand, anticipate, and unlock its positive potential.

<sup>12</sup> Positive deviance (PD), a behavioural and social change approach, involves learning from those who find unique and successful solutions to problems despite facing the same challenges, constraints and resource deprivation as others.

<sup>13</sup> This comparison of two incubators was requested by the EMG and ERG during the presentation of first draft of Inception Report. It was decided to incorporate this as important segment of the evaluation for the learning purposes and future guidance.

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2012/10/evaluation-policy-of-the-united-nations-entity-for-gender-equality-and-the-empowerment-of-women>

<sup>15</sup> [https://www.unevaluation.org/uneval\\_publications/uneval-norms-and-standards-evaluation-un-system](https://www.unevaluation.org/uneval_publications/uneval-norms-and-standards-evaluation-un-system)

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/102>

<sup>17</sup> Including: Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluation -- Towards UNEG Guidance; UNEG Handbook for Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality Perspectives in Evaluations in the UN System

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/Evaluation-GERAAS-guidance-2021-en.pdf>

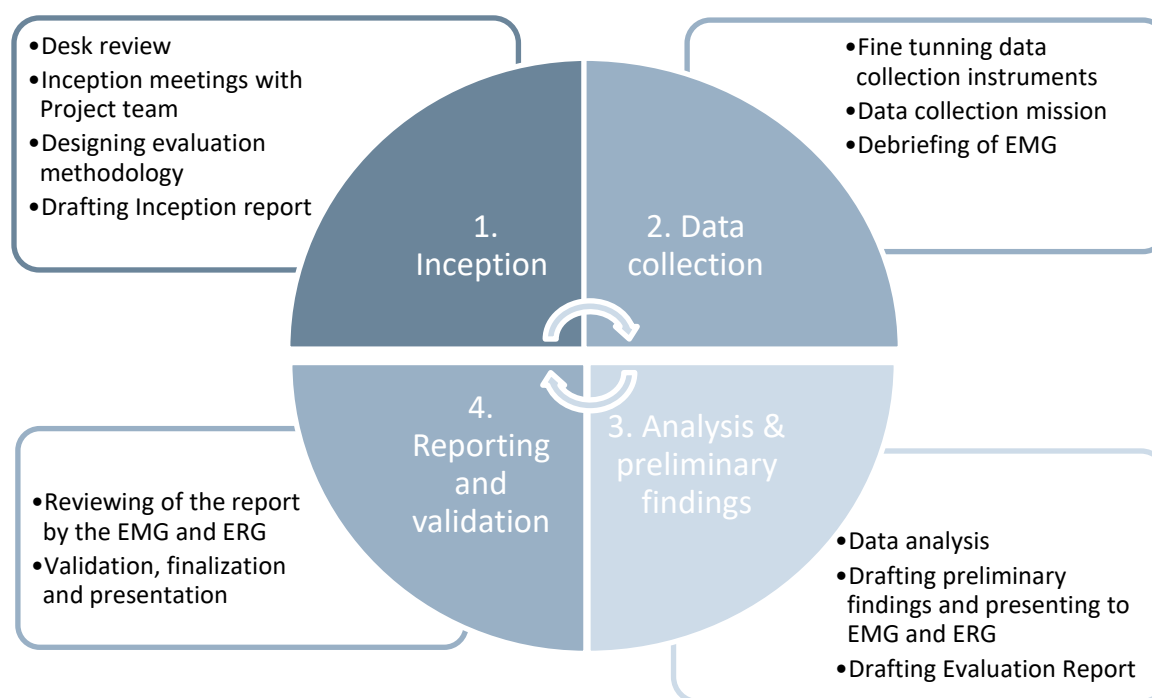
inception report, data collection, presentation and validation of preliminary findings and validation of the final report. The data collection process included consultations with key project partners including governmental representatives from relevant ministries and national institutions, civil society representatives and active women's groups as well as key development partners.

## 3.2 Evaluation methodology

The evaluation methodology followed a **ToC approach** and employed **mixed methods of data collection and analysis** to understand the complexity of processes and structures and gender relations in them.

The evaluation process was conducted in four distinctive phases, each relying on specific combination of methods.

**Figure 2: The evaluation process**



During the inception phase the overall evaluation methodology as well as data collection and analytical instruments were designed. This phase included several components:

- Desk research of project documentation, relevant reports and studies, as well as secondary data from official statistics, or similar sources, that enabled understanding of the context in which project was implemented (see Annex 2 for the list of documents).
- Drafting Inception Report (IR) containing the description of evaluation objectives, context, scope, stakeholders' analysis approach, methodology, evaluation questions, ethical standards, and data collection instruments.
- EMG and ERG feedback on draft of the Inception Report provided partly in writing and partly during the IR presentation followed by discussion during the Inception meeting.
- Revision of IR based on the workshop and written feedback of EMG and ERG, finalization of the Inception Report and submission of final version.

- Presentation and validation of the Inception Report with participation of EMG and ERG.

Data collection phase included continued analysis of documents, data collection mission to Tirana and three municipalities during 13-17 January (covering Elbasan and Kolonje) and 28 January (in Gramsh), debriefing of UN Women team and (on 17<sup>th</sup> January).

Several data collection methods were used to gather the evidence:

- Desk review of project documentation, reports, knowledge products or other documents that provided information about project implementation;
- **Semi-structured individual interviews**, which were conducted to collect in-depth reflections and interpretations on evaluation questions with representatives of ministries, local governments, representative of Federation of farmers and women beneficiaries in Elbasan.<sup>19</sup> This method was also applied in relation to UN RCO and ANRD.
- **Group interviews** were conducted with UN Women and FAO implementation teams, AICS, representatives of municipality in Kolonje.
- **Focus Group Discussions** (FGD) were implemented with women beneficiaries in Kolonje and Gramsh and LAGs in Elbasan and Kolonje.
- The observation was used for gathering evidence on local business incubators in Elbasan and Kolonje with the aim to identify the functionality which demonstrates the project effectiveness, potential impact and provide indications on sustainability of incubators and newly established businesses.

Identification of stakeholders and development partners was undertaken using the information from the received project documents and through consultations with EMG. The sampling approach was designed to reflect adequately the landscape of the project stakeholders. It was purposeful, selecting representatives of each type of stakeholder participating in the project with implementing responsibilities or as beneficiaries. Such an approach ensured that vulnerable women from rural areas were included as final beneficiaries. However, not specific criteria related to the representation of women from multiple marginalized groups, such as women with disabilities, was not applied, as it was not included in the project design or implementation.

**Triangulation** of findings was ensured by combining different sources of information, e.g. different stakeholders, data sources from documentation or statistical data sets, but also data obtained through observation during the field.

**Table 3: Stakeholders included in data collection**

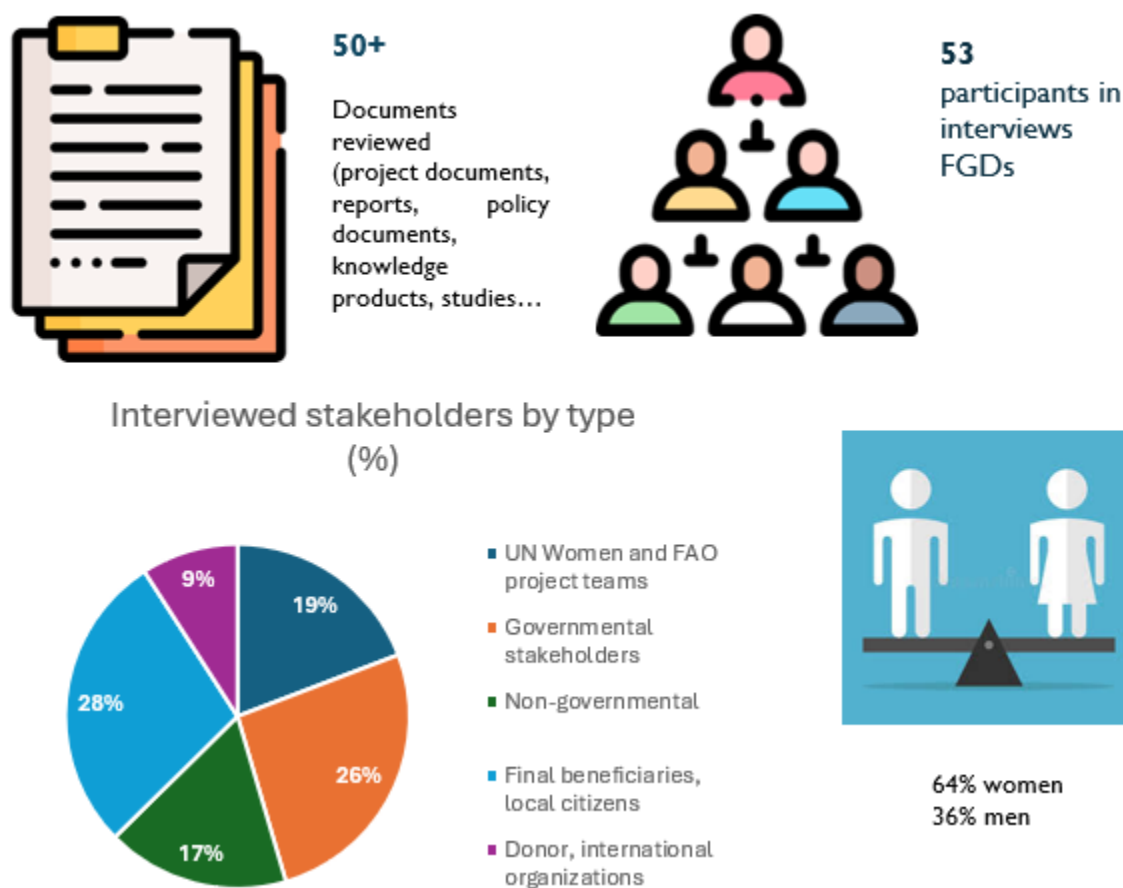
Stakeholder	Number	No. of women	No. of men
UN Women	6	4	2
FAO	4	3	1
Governmental stakeholders – national level	3	2	1
Governmental stakeholders – local level	6	3	3
Public institutions	5	3	2

<sup>19</sup> Due to the sensitivity of situation in Elbasan, the Evaluation Team was advised by donor and EMG to approach women individually.

Donors / Other development partners	3	2	1
Non-governmental stakeholders	9	3	6
International organizations	2	1	1
End beneficiaries, local citizens	15	13	2
Total	53	34	19

The following figure presents a summary of the evidence collected to inform evaluation findings, conclusions and lessons learned.

**Figure 3: Evaluation evidence**



After data collection, the analysis was conducted in line with the evaluation matrix and evaluation questions. The preliminary findings were presented to the EMG and ERG. The summary report was drafted and submitted to EMG and ERG for review.

### 3.2.1 Evaluation criteria and key questions

The evaluation team has reviewed the Evaluation Questions from the Terms of Reference and streamlined them for clarity and focus.

**Table 4: Evaluation Questions**

Criteria	EVALUATION QUESTIONS
<b>Relevance</b>	1. To what extent was the design of the intervention and its results relevant to the needs and priorities of the beneficiaries?
	2. To what extent is the intervention consistent with the national and rural development strategies in the area of rural women empowerment, and government priorities in these areas?
	3. To what extent were key national and local level partners involved in the project's conceptualization and design process?
<b>Coherence</b>	4. To what extent does the project fit within UN Women's and FAO's Strategic Plans, and how it contributes to their internal coherence, enabling synergies with their other interventions in this area?
	5. To what extent is the project coherent with UNSDCF Albania and does enable synergies with other interventions in the area of women's economic empowerment, agriculture and rural development, and what is UN Women and FAO comparative advantage compared to other UN agencies?
	6. To what extent the project is in complementarity, harmonization and coordination with the interventions of other external actors' interventions in the same context and in the women economic empowerment area, and what is UN Women and FAO comparative advantage compared to other external actors?
<b>Effectiveness</b>	7. To what extent have the expected results of the project been achieved on both output and outcome levels? both objectives and results levels?
	8. How effective have the selected strategies and approaches been in achieving project results? Are any of strategies innovative, resulting in good practices?
	9. What were factors contributing to the successful achievement of results and what were inhibiting factors?
	10. Has the project achieved any unforeseen results, either positive or negative? For whom?
<b>Efficiency</b>	11. Have resources (financial, human, technical support, etc.) been allocated strategically to achieve the project outcomes? Have the project's results been delivered in a timely manner?
	12. Has there been effective leadership and management of the project including the structuring of management and administration roles to maximize results? Where does accountability lie?
<b>Potential for Impact</b>	13. Is there a potential measurable impact of the project intervention on the target group across all dimensions of empowerment? What evidence exist that the project has delivered longer term results?
	14. To what extent is the project bringing about gender transformative changes that address the root causes of gender inequalities? To what extent is the project changing the dynamics of power in relationships between different groups?
<b>Sustainability</b>	15. What is the likelihood that the benefits from the project will be maintained for a reasonably long period of time after the project phase out? What factors are/will be critical to maintain project results in the long term?



	16. How effectively has the project generated country ownership of the results achieved, the establishment of partnerships with relevant stakeholders (including relevant CSOs and women's organizations) and the development of in-country capacities to ensure sustainability of efforts and benefits?
	17. To what extent has the project been able to promote replication and/or up-scaling of successful practices?
<b>Crosscutting issues</b>	18. To what extent have gender equality and empowerment of women, human rights, disability inclusion, environmental sustainability and accountability principles and strategies been integrated into the projects design and implementation?

### *3.2.2 Methodological limitations and risks*

Some limitations are inherent to the evaluation methodology, including limited number of respondents that could be interviewed and consulted during the data collection phase, due to the limited human, time and financial resources, lack of possibility to compare effects among targeted women to women that were not project beneficiaries (lack of experimental or quasi-experimental design), potential bias of respondents who would like to present project experiences in more optimistic or challenging modality, etc. The limitation related to the limited number of respondents was mitigated by ensuring adequate sampling that will represent perspectives and experiences of all types of stakeholders. Potential bias of respondents was mitigated implementing triangulation, using multiple sources and solid evidence.

One limitation is related to the assessment of impact. As the higher-level impact is not possible to fully assess without appropriate time distance and more suitable methodology for impact assessment, the evaluation was focused on exploring the initiated changes that have potential to bring higher level impact under certain conditions.

## **3.3 Ethical considerations**

The evaluation fully complied with UNEG Norms and Standards for Evaluation and UNEG Ethical Code of Conduct. The evaluation was conducted with integrity and respect for the beliefs, manners and customs of the social and cultural environment; for human rights and gender equality; and for the 'do no harm' principle.

Focus groups, meetings, survey and interviews were led with a tone of respect, openness, and rapport. Evaluators respected the rights of institutions, organisations and individuals to provide information in confidence. Before collecting any data, an explanation of the purpose and the intention of the evaluation was given in Albanian or English (depending on the language of the interview) and explicit oral consent was sought.

Presentation of findings in the report ensured anonymity of the key informants. Sensitive data were protected, and it was ensured they cannot be traced to its source. Actual names of participants are not included in the Final Evaluation Report. The evaluation team has the final judgment on the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation report.



## 4. EVALUATION FINDINGS

### 4.1 Relevance

Evaluation questions	1. To what extent was the design of the intervention and its results relevant to the needs and priorities of the beneficiaries?
	2. To what extent is the intervention consistent with the national and rural development strategies in the area of rural women empowerment?
	3. To what extent key national and local level partners were involved in the project's conceptualization and design process?

**Finding 1:** The GREAT project is highly relevant and aligns with key national policy priorities at the intersection of gender equality and rural development while simultaneously addressing the economic empowerment needs of rural women as final beneficiaries. It addresses the developmental challenges of targeted local communities and aligns with international commitments based on gender equality instruments, SDGs and EU accession processes. The project was developed based on the findings of several studies conducted by UN Women and FAO, as well as on consultations with partners and other relevant stakeholders, ensuring a broad understanding of the local context and needs. However, concerns were raised by some stakeholders regarding the top-down approach in designing economic empowerment strategies, particularly its emphasis on entrepreneurship over stable employment, which did not always align with the actual needs and aspirations of rural women.

The GREAT project is highly relevant as it is grounded in a thorough analysis of the challenges rural women face in their economic empowerment. The analysis of the situation of rural women which was the foundational for the project design included several studies, such as FAO study on gender, agriculture and rural development in Albania,<sup>20</sup> UN Women's study on rural women and economic diversification in rural areas,<sup>21</sup> which provided comprehensive insights in the structural position and economic activity of rural women. The project design was particularly informed by two studies<sup>22</sup> more precisely focused on value chain analysis regarding rural women, which provided guidance for the approach, strategy and overall design of the GREAT project. In line with evidence provided by these studies, the project was designed to address key structural barriers, including limited access to productive resources and property, the prevalence of informal work, and sociocultural norms that define rural women primarily as a supplementary workforce and caregivers rather than independent economic actors. Furthermore, the project is designed with recognition of the absence of financial and institutional support mechanisms specifically designed to improve economic activity of rural women, which significantly hinders their ability to achieve economic self-sufficiency. It is important to notify that the consultations with national partners and relevant stakeholders informed the project design.

However, according to the views of different stakeholders (from both, donor and final beneficiary perspectives) a critical gap in the project's approach is the limited conception of women's economic

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<sup>20</sup> FAO. 2016. *Gender, agriculture and rural development in Albania*. Country gender assessment series. Available at: <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i5413e.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> UN Women (2016) *National Study in Rural Women and Economic diversifications in rural areas*. Tirana: UN Women.

<sup>22</sup> UN Women 2016: [Rural women's value chains mapping](#) ; FAO 2018. [Market and value chain analysis of selected sectors for diversification of the rural economy and women's economic empowerment. Albania](#).

empowerment needs, as the interventions lean more towards entrepreneurship rather than employment opportunities, which may not align with the actual aspirations or circumstances of many rural women. Some of the stakeholders (particularly representatives of donor and some rural women who participated in project activities) pointed out that **economic empowerment, as understood in Western donor circles, does not always align with the actual needs and desires of rural women.** The project appeared to be designed based on an external vision of empowerment—focusing on entrepreneurship and business ownership—without sufficient consideration of whether the women involved actually aspired to become entrepreneurs.

“We often, or at least in this case, as Westerners, we arrive to help with our concept of development, our concept of women empowerment, our concept of gender equality, women’s rights, and whatever, and impose it on the beneficiaries without asking them if they agree or not—if they want to be empowered or not.”

International stakeholder

The **top-down nature** of the project was another criticism coming from some of the key stakeholders. They noted that rural women were not adequately consulted during the project design phase, which led to a disconnect between the intended goals and the actual needs of the community. This was evident in how beneficiaries talked about the initiative — referring to decisions being made by "the project" rather than by themselves. Instead of empowering women in a way that reflected their own agency, the project structured empowerment based on an external model that assumed women needed to be business owners to be independent. However, many women prioritized stable employment over business risks, which the project did not sufficiently consider. This was particularly evident for Elbasan, but also in Leskovik, women who currently administrate the incubator, shared the impression that some other women who were initially interested in the participation, gave up as they expected they will get the employment with secured salary at the end of the month.

Beyond individual economic empowerment, the **project aligns with the broader needs of local communities**, which are increasingly impacted by rural depopulation and a lack of essential services, including lack of employment services and opportunities. The outmigration of working-age populations, particularly women, threatens the long-term sustainability of rural areas. Additionally, institutional mechanisms that could foster gender-responsive economic and local development policies remain weak or underdeveloped. By directly addressing these issues, the GREAT project contributes to creating a more enabling environment for rural women while also promoting the revitalization of local economies.

The project’s relevance is further reinforced by its **strategic alignment with national, international, and EU policies**. It is consistent with national strategies such as the National Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development (NSARD), the Gender Equality Law, and respective action plans. Moreover, the project upholds commitments to international frameworks, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA), and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Its approach also aligns with EU integration policies related to rural economic development and gender mainstreaming standards, reinforcing its potential to contribute to broader socio-economic transformation in rural areas.

The design of the project was rooted in consultations and previous cooperation with national stakeholders, particularly the Ministry of Agriculture, ensuring that it aligned with both national and local priorities. From the outset, UN Women and FAO worked in **close collaboration with the Ministry** to develop policies and programs that specifically addressed gender equality in agriculture and rural development. These efforts were integrated within the **biannual Common Cooperation Framework**, a structured programming

mechanism that aligns with Albania’s broader UN Cooperation Framework (UNCF) and the Ministry’s sectoral and intersectoral strategies.

The involvement of AICS as a key donor was instrumental in bringing the project to fruition. Their unwavering commitment to the initiative provided a strong foundation and a level of financial and institutional security that allowed the project to transition from concept to implementation. By actively participating in the design phase, the AICS played a critical role in strengthening the project’s structure, ensuring it was well-integrated into Albania’s agricultural policy framework and capable of delivering tangible results.

The selection of target regions for the GREAT project was primarily driven by a combination of **government and donor priorities**, ensuring alignment with broader strategic development goals. The chosen regions were identified as areas where intervention could have the greatest impact on women’s economic empowerment, particularly in sectors with high potential for growth and sustainability. The project is aligned with gender policy priorities in targeted communities, particularly through the local gender action plans (LGAPs).<sup>23</sup> The project’s focus on women’s economic empowerment aligns with municipal budget priorities, further reinforcing its relevance at the subnational level.

4.2 Coherence

Evaluation questions	4. To what extent does the project fit within UN Women’s and FAO’s Strategic Plans, and how it contributes to their internal coherence, enabling synergies with their other interventions in this area?
	5. To what extent is the project coherent with UNSDCF Albania and does enable synergies with other interventions in the area of women’s economic empowerment, agriculture and rural development?
	6. To what extent the project is in complementarity, harmonization and coordination with the interventions of other external actors’ interventions in the same context and in the women economic empowerment area?

**Finding 2:** The project demonstrates strong internal coherence by aligning with UN Women and FAO’s strategic plans and similar initiatives, fostering synergy—particularly with programs supporting women’s entrepreneurship and the effective implementation of gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) in local planning.

The internal coherence of the GREAT project is evident through its alignment with the strategic priorities of FAO and UN Women. This ensures that the project is not a standalone intervention but rather part of a broader, well-coordinated effort to enhance gender equality and economic empowerment in Albania, including through the implementation of gender-responsive budgeting.

For UN Women, the project aligns with various regional and national gender initiatives. It complements the efforts related to Regional Women’s Entrepreneurship EXPO, which supports women-led businesses, and

<sup>23</sup> By law, municipalities are required to renew these action plans periodically, and the most recent update took place in 2021.

contributes to the EU Gender Equality Facility, which ensures that gender perspectives are integrated into national economic policies. Additionally, it ties into broader joint programs on eliminating violence against women, which adopt an integrated approach linking economic empowerment with safety measures. By integrating GRB-related interventions, the project contributes to strengthening public finance systems that support gender equality, ensuring that resources are allocated to address women's economic empowerment needs effectively.

For FAO, the project complements existing initiatives that focus on investment support for women in business, digitalization in rural areas, and vocational education programs aimed at increasing female participation. The gender-responsive value chain analysis and rural advisory services developed through the project are also highly relevant to FAO's regional objectives, particularly in improving access to services for rural women, including those not formally registered as farmers. Furthermore, the project's contributions to gender-sensitive frameworks in digitalization and data storage reinforce FAO's commitment to ensuring inclusive agricultural policies. Notably, its influence extends to strategic climate goals, shaping future initiatives such as Albania's 2025 agricultural census, which integrates gender considerations into data collection and analysis.

**Finding 3:** The project demonstrates high coherence with UNSDCF Albania, with AICS strategic priorities, with policy priorities of targeted local communities and other initiatives, such as EU and German funded rural development projects.

The external coherence of the GREAT project is reflected in its alignment with broader national, donor, and international development strategies. The GREAT project aligns with Albania's United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF). Moreover, the project is contributing to the Outcome 2, Social Cohesion (year 2020-2021) and Economic Growth, Innovation and Climate Change (2022-2023, 2024-2025) of the Joint Working Plans between UN RCO and Albanian government.

The project's coherence with donor priorities is another key dimension of its external alignment. Italian development cooperation in Albania is structured around rural development, agricultural modernization, digitalization, and gender mainstreaming, all of which intersect with the GREAT project's objectives. By focusing on food safety standards, smallholder farmers, and modernization efforts, the project aligns with Italy's strategic goals for improving agricultural value chains. Additionally, it contributes to Italy's broader organizational strengthening agenda, which seeks to promote farmer associations and formalized agricultural groups, helping Albania comply with EU regulations (Chapters 11, 12, and 13 of the EU acquis). Importantly, gender equality is a transversal priority in Italian-funded projects, with at least 10% of the funding portfolio dedicated to gender-specific initiatives. The GREAT project directly complements this priority by advancing women's economic empowerment (WEE) in rural areas.

Beyond its direct alignment with donor priorities, the project also connects with historical and ongoing Italian-funded initiatives in rural development. These include the Local Action Groups (LAGs) for community-driven rural development, the Federation of Farmers (which received Italian funding in the early 2000s), and the Rural Albania project led by Italian CSOs. However, the project faced challenges in maximizing synergies due to a lack of initial coordination between stakeholders, which limited the ability to fully integrate GREAT within the broader Italian-funded development landscape.

The project's coherence extends beyond bilateral partnerships, as its lessons and practices have been shared with other international organizations and donors in Albania. Through a UNDP-financed initiative supported by the Swedish development agency, efforts have been made to help agribusinesses adopt SDG-compliant practices, where gender inclusion remains an integral component. Additionally, EU-funded digitalization projects under the Joint Institute Fund incorporate gender-sensitive strategies, reflecting a

growing emphasis on gender-responsive development across multiple sectors. The GREAT project, therefore, contributes to the global conversation on integrating gender into rural economic policies, ensuring that its approaches and findings have wider relevance beyond Albania.

Beyond Albania, the project draws on lessons from regional gender budgeting programs, ensuring that best practices from other contexts are applied to strengthen the gender-responsive financial planning component of the intervention. It also complements EU and German-funded rural development initiatives, highlighting the broader European commitment to sustainable, inclusive economic growth in rural areas.

Overall, the GREAT project demonstrates strong external coherence by aligning with FAO’s previous research, Italian donor strategies, municipal gender action plans, and international initiatives supporting women’s economic empowerment. While initial coordination gaps limited synergies with some rural development projects, the project remains a well-integrated component of Albania’s broader gender-responsive economic policies and international development frameworks.

### 4.3 Effectiveness

Evaluation questions	7. To what extent have the expected results of the project been achieved on both objectives and results levels?
	8. How effective have the selected strategies and approaches been in achieving project results? Are any of strategies innovative, resulting in good practices?
	9. What were factors contributing to the successful achievement of results and where were inhibiting factors?
	10. Has the project achieved any unforeseen results, either positive or negative? For whom?

**Finding 4:** The project has achieved important results in three main areas: improvement of gender responsive agricultural policies at national and local levels, direct economic empowerment of rural women and contribution to a more enabling environment through enhanced capacities of local governments and officials, support to LAGs, and increased awareness on rural women’s economic contributions.

The project is in final stage of the implementation, with second non-cost extension until 04/05/2025. The overview of the achieved results based on the project’s result framework demonstrates high level of achievements as targets are achieved as planned at the outcome level while at the output level, out of 12 indicators, 3 are achieved above set targets, 6 are achieved as planned while 3 were not achieved (Table 5).

**Table 5: Achievement of results based on the project's result framework<sup>24</sup>**

Result level	Indicators	Baseline value	Target value	Actual value	Level of achievement
<b>Goal:</b> Contribute to rural women's empowerment in Albania and to facilitate as well as to strengthen women's roles and contribution to rural development in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its core principle of LNOB.	Indicator: No of new businesses established by sex of owner.	Baseline (2019): 2,359 new businesses Total: 17,508 Women owned: 5,092 <sup>25</sup>	2,359 new businesses owned by women (2023)	4,265 <sup>26</sup> new businesses owned by women during 2023	+
<b>Outcome:</b> An enabling policy and legislative environment to promote and translate into action women's economic empowerment and access to and control over productive assets.	Indicator 1: Women's share among beneficiaries of agriculture extension service	11% (2016)	20% increase of baseline value 11%	8% (2023)	
	Indicator 2: Number of gender responsive policies and action plans of the MARD related agencies and institutions, and local governments of pilot municipalities.	0 (2021)	1	1	
	Indicator 3: Awareness level of gender issues in agriculture and rural development, and of gender mainstreaming in policy and program cycle by MARD, extension service and local government staff.	N.A.	+30% of baseline which was not available	It is not possible to assess due to the missing baseline	

<sup>24</sup> See Annex 4.

<sup>25</sup> Baseline source: <https://www.instat.gov.al/media/7172/regjistri-i-ndermarrjeve-2020.pdf>, page 32

<sup>26</sup> Source: <https://www.instat.gov.al/media/13413/regjistrat-e-biznesit-2023.pdf>, page 38 Data for 2024 will be published by INSTAT in June 2025

Result level	Indicators	Baseline value	Target value	Actual value	Level of achievement
<b>Output 1:</b> Capacities of rural women developed and gender-based stereotypes contested for gender-equitable LAG formation.	Indicator 1A: Number of actions <sup>27</sup> that raise awareness on rural women role and rights in agriculture and rural economy:	5 (2019)	8	8	
	Indicator 1B: Number of rural women informed through awareness raising and trainings.	700 (2018)	5,000	6,020	+
<b>Output 2:</b> The capacities of rural advisory services, municipal institutions and national partners are developed in the provision of gender-responsive services for rural tourism, agri-business and value chain development.	Indicator 1: Existence <sup>28</sup> of a roadmap for gender-responsive value chain development (in rural tourism, honey, medicinal herbs and gourmet) in pilot municipalities, and technical trainings/advise provided by the RAS.	0 (2019)	1	1	
	Indicator 2: Tailored capacity development events conducted for rural advisory services and related partners on gender-responsive services and social behavioral change.	0 (2019)	3	3	
	Indicator 3: RAS burdens towards gender-responsive advisory services identified <sup>29</sup> , including nudges for behavioral change and presented to	0 (2019)	1	1 <sup>30</sup>	

27 Nationwide implemented campaigns in rural areas that disseminate information on rural women's rights.

28 Boolean indicator where 0=No, 1=Yes

29 Boolean indicator where 0=No, 1=Yes

30 <https://openknowledge.fao.org/items/70f3e4c1-7737-4d8a-adf8-65e3f9bc9e11>

Result level	Indicators	Baseline value	Target value	Actual value	Level of achievement
	rural advisory services for testing and application Baseline				
	Indicator 4: Percentage of GRB integrated in the three municipalities medium-term budgeting.	4%	12%	8.22%	
<b>Output 3:</b> Women's capacity to start and develop own business is strengthened by coaching and mentoring, improved access to finance and agro-extension services.	Indicator 1: Number of participants in the trainings on rural women economic empowerment.	0 (2020)	100	194	+
	Indicator 2: Number of products of the women group that are labeled and marketed according to the required standards.	0 (2023)	12	32	+
<b>Output 4:</b> Technical support is provided to MARD for gender-responsive policy and law formulation and implementation and rural development, including the LEADER framework.	Indicator 1: No. of policy recommendations and new/revised policies, laws and by-laws and regulatory frameworks provided by the project for consideration of MARD and other ministries that support women entrepreneurship in rural areas.	1 <sup>31</sup> (2018)	6	6	
	Indicator 2: Number of training and capacity development events for monitoring and reporting on SDG indicators 5.a.1 and 5.a.2, and on advancing towards	0 (2018)	4	4	

<sup>31</sup> RD Strategy contains gender targets



Result level	Indicators	Baseline value	Target value	Actual value	Level of achievement
	the target 5.a and CEDAW article 14.				
	Indicator 3: Traditional business incubators for women developed.	0 (2020)	2	1	
	Indicator 4: Number of women businesses assisted through the incubator's services	0 (2020)	200	150 <sup>32</sup>	
Legend					
+				Target exceeded	
				Target achieved	
				Target partially achieved	
				Not possible to assess	

The evaluation evidence indicates that the GREAT project has contributed to advancing gender equality and women's economic empowerment in rural Albania through policy reform, economic empowerment, and the creation of an enabling environment for sustainable change. At the **policy level**, the project successfully integrated **gender-responsive measures** into Albania's **Agricultural Development Strategy**, ensuring that gender equality considerations are embedded within the country's long-term rural development framework. Additionally, local governments demonstrated increased **budget allocations for gender-sensitive projects**, reflecting a **growing institutional commitment** to supporting women in rural economies.

The project has contributed to the **economic empowerment** of women in targeted rural areas by strengthening women-led business initiatives and by **enhancing their business skills**. Through targeted training sessions and advisory support, rural women were equipped with practical knowledge and tools to improve their economic activity. One of the project's key structural interventions was **the establishment of business incubators for rural women**, aimed at fostering entrepreneurship and creating sustainable income-generating opportunities. While presently only one out of two incubators became fully functional<sup>33</sup>, their establishment marked an important step in providing women with physical spaces and resources to develop their businesses.

To support a more enabling environment for gender-responsive economic policies, the project worked to build the capacities of municipal officials on gender-responsive budgeting. This led to overall improvements

<sup>32</sup> Leskovik and surrounding areas

<sup>33</sup> The efforts to make Elbasan incubator functional has been continued with the project extension.

in GRB practices, helping local authorities incorporate gender considerations into budget planning and financial decision-making. The project also contributed to the activation and strengthening of Local Action Groups, which serve as community-driven mechanisms for rural development. A key achievement was the increased awareness among stakeholders—both institutional and community-based—regarding the importance of rural women’s contributions to the economy and local development.

#### LESKOVIK INCUBATOR – THE SUCCESS STORY

The Leskovik incubator stands as a successful model of rural women’s economic empowerment, demonstrating how community engagement, institutional support, and traditional knowledge can be harnessed to create sustainable business opportunities. Initiated by FAO under the GREAT project (in line with the division of responsibilities between UN Women as leading agency and FAO as implementing partner for specific components), the incubator was designed to provide rural women in Leskovik with a structured environment where they could process and market traditional agricultural and food products, improving their economic independence and visibility in the market.

At the heart of the incubator’s success is the active participation of local women, who initially hesitated due to limited prior experience in structured business operations. Many had spent their lives engaged in subsistence agriculture, producing grape-based products such as rakija and wine, as well as marmalades, pickles, and dried herbs. The lack of formal business knowledge and marketing channels had historically limited their income potential. The Leskovik incubator provided a breakthrough, offering business training, networking opportunities, and access to modern equipment. Through the incubator, women were trained in quality control, branding, financial administration, and product diversification. The municipality provided crucial support, offering the building rent-free, covering utility bills, and exempting the enterprise from local taxes for five years, demonstrating strong political will for supporting women’s economic empowerment.

The incubator officially opened its doors in July 2024, following extensive renovations and the procurement of necessary equipment. Initially, five women formed the core team, but the model has since expanded, with additional women using the space seasonally. The incubator specializes in the production of 32 traditional products, including roshnica (small pasta), trahana (fermented grain product), gliko (candied fruit), and fruit compotes and pickles. Women source raw materials from local farms, which not only supports nearby producers but also ensures that products maintain their authentic, organic quality. This approach strengthens the local supply chain, fostering a collective economic benefit for the entire community.

Despite initial skepticism, the project has transformed the economic landscape for women in Leskovik. Many of the participants had previously been confined to household work, unaware of their potential to engage in structured economic activities. The incubator gave them a space to work, learn, and earn, boosting their self-confidence and social status. It also provided quality space for children in case they accompany mothers at work. Social media and word-of-mouth marketing have played a crucial role in product sales, with orders coming from both the local community and Albanians living abroad. During the peak season from May to October, the incubator sees the highest production and sales, with tourists showing strong interest in the products. The Leskovik brand is slowly gaining recognition, and discussions are underway to distribute products in local supermarkets and kindergartens.



**Photo 1: The ‘Golden Hands’ of Leskovik at the established incubator. Author: Evaluation Team**

The success of the incubator has extended beyond economic benefits. It has become a hub for social interaction and learning, with women supporting each other in their entrepreneurial journey. The model has also drawn interest from other villages and municipalities, with discussions on how to replicate the initiative in Erseka and other areas. The project has also contributed to broader gender-responsive budgeting efforts, ensuring that the initiative remains a municipal priority beyond the initial project timeframe.

There is need for further improvement and investments, including the need for stronger market access, better signage for the incubator, and additional equipment for off-season production, the incubator has laid a strong foundation for sustainable women-led economic activity. It serves as a powerful example of how targeted investments, institutional backing, and traditional knowledge can come together to create meaningful economic change in rural communities.

The role of the local government in the success of the Leskovik incubator has been crucial, demonstrating how strong institutional support can drive sustainable economic empowerment

initiatives. From the inception of the project, Kolonja Municipality played a proactive role, recognizing the importance of creating economic opportunities for rural women and committing significant resources to ensure the incubator's success.



**Photo 2: The ‘Golden Hands’ of Leskovik incubator.**  
**Author: Evaluation Team**

One of the most critical contributions of the local government was its decision to provide the building for the incubator rent-free, ensuring that the women could operate without the financial burden of leasing a workspace. This decision was backed by the Municipal Council, which demonstrated clear political will and commitment to supporting women’s economic empowerment. The municipality also took on the responsibility of covering utility costs for five years, including electricity, water, and heating, removing additional financial constraints that might have otherwise hindered the incubator’s viability.

In addition to providing infrastructure, the municipality played an active role in financially supporting the women involved. It covered health and social insurance for three years, ensuring that women working in the incubator had basic financial security and access to benefits. Furthermore, the municipality allocated funds for purchasing raw materials, allowing the women to focus on production and sales without the initial investment risks.<sup>34</sup> By exempting the enterprise from local taxes for five years, the municipality further strengthened the incubator’s economic foundation, giving the women the time and space needed to grow their business

sustainably.

Beyond financial support, the local government has actively promoted the incubator, helping women connect with regional markets and gain visibility. Women from the incubator were invited to various fairs in Pogradec, Tirana, and Rehova, including international fairs, allowing them to showcase their products and expand their customer base. Additionally, the municipality has been negotiating with local institutions, such as kindergartens and supermarkets, to integrate incubator products into the local supply chain, creating long-term, stable demand for their goods.

The municipality has also played an important role in the incubator’s integration into national development programs. The initiative has been linked to the Hundred Villages Project, a national program that promotes rural tourism and economic development in historically significant villages. This connection has helped increase awareness of the incubator beyond Leskovik, encouraging other municipalities to replicate the model and invest in women-led rural businesses.

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<sup>34</sup> For the sake of precision, these funds were not yet used due to some operational procedures. They will be used in 2025. The initial purchase of raw materials was covered by FAO.

From a gender policy perspective, the project has reinforced the municipality's commitment to gender-responsive budgeting (GRB). Since 2018, Albanian law requires that municipal finances reflect gender priorities, and the municipality has integrated the incubator into its GRB framework. This ensures that women's economic empowerment remains a budgetary priority even beyond the initial support phase of the project. The local government's participation in trainings on GRB and rural women's economic empowerment has further reinforced its ability to design and implement gender-sensitive policies in the future.

#### ACHIEVEMENTS IN GRAMSH MUNICIPALITY

Unforeseen support to the women group engaged in a local private business in Gramsh that cultivate, process and export Organic and Aromatic Medicinal Plants, has been introduced through project in 2024 through purchase of several equipment. The business succeeded to employ so far a group of maximum 15 women (which varies in different time of the year) age from 35-55. Nevertheless, their employment depends on the market needs and is informal (not subject of social and health taxations) which doesn't allow benefits from the health system and social benefits. From the women's perspective such opportunities were considered very useful to their employment and economic needs and moreover become more socially and more interactive by engaging with other peers. Other benefits include reduced hand work time, less fatigue in processing herbs, increased value for their work translated in increased income. Although in a shorter period of time compared with the other two GREAT targeted locations the strategy applied to this location is considered a successful model of rural women's economic empowerment, through their employment by improving their economic independence and social interaction. The strategy applied by UN Women through direct support to the women group engaged in an existing operational private business is considered a sound action by ensuring direct engagement of women (both employment and capacity building happening at the same time) without being challenged to manage themselves such large scales activities that include market and suppliers identification, development of business plan in a fragile and sensitive environment of lack of multidimensional knowledge, lack of initiative and confidence, hesitations for legal registration as a group and lack of collective management skills of such business. The support and contribution provided by the project management (UN Women) is considered very result oriented in terms of direct benefit for women that instead of replicating the experience of Elbasan and Leskovik they entered into a direct operational contractual agreement that satisfied more women interested to get involved. Having said that, women involved through employment while working they are getting skills and knowledge on running the business, building their self-confidence, economic independence and social skills which will remain with them for potential new similar initiatives where they can take the leading role in the community. Another element of successful applied strategy is the one related with clear terms of contractual agreement initially set with the private business owner which has led to a smooth and faster involvement of women and increased number of those involved as well. Such strategy of support was considered a favorable one by women in Elbasan which is considered a challenging story and has served as a learning for the management team of GREAT. This support has evidenced the learning that such transitional period might be necessary to ensure a smooth shift from employment to leading the business as a group in the future.

#### INCUBATOR IN ELBASAN – CHALLENGING STORY

**Finding 5:** A key bottleneck in the project was the non-functional incubator in Elbasan, which required additional efforts to find effective solutions. The main challenge originated from the opposition of the Federation of Farmers, which intended to hold a gatekeeping position over the incubator premises and maintain a power-imbalanced relationship with the women who were selected as beneficiaries of the incubator.



The Elbasan incubator remained non-operational by the end of the preparation of the evaluation report, entangled in a series of challenges stemming from insufficiently clear communications, prolonged negotiations about financial and management arrangements, and misaligned expectations among key stakeholders.

From FAO's perspective, the incubator was intended as part of its broader gender-responsive rural development strategy, aiming to create economic opportunities for women through community-driven business models. FAO focused on capacity-building efforts, ensuring that the participating women received training in business operations, quality control, and financial management. The expectation was that women would actively participate in the agribusiness incubator's operations and management, while receiving technical support from the Farmers' Federation. The Federation was recognized as a key actor in ensuring the incubator's effective functioning. Both, the women involved, and the project team, were aware of the challenges rural women face in managing large-scale economic activities, particularly in areas such as third-party negotiations, supplier and market identification, contracting, and marketing. This awareness was reflected in the project's design, which acknowledged the need for external support and capacity-building.

However, the initiative faced certain structural and contextual challenges which have significantly influenced project results in Elbasan. The main challenge lies in the decision to establish the agribusiness incubator within a privately-owned building that already had a tenant — the Farmers' Federation — while also proposing cooperation with the latter. This arrangement brought complexities that required careful negotiation and alignment of interests among stakeholders, which was not successful until the preparation of this evaluation report. The project staff needed to hastily adjust to the circumstances and work with the Federation which was not supporting involvement of women in the agro-incubator as the Federation members. According to the FAO's team testimonies, Farmers' Federation later asserted that it had been promised management of the agribusiness incubator from the outset of the project. No documentation has been found to substantiate this claim by the evaluation team. While the project and women's groups remained realistic about the limitations faced by rural women, this was precisely why the Federation's role was formally recognized—to provide the necessary technical and operational support, rather than assume full control of the incubator.

From the Federation of Farmers' perspective, the project was not clearly communicated from the outset and lacked formalized agreements defining roles and responsibilities. The Federation, which expected to play a key role in managing the incubator, was not officially a project partner, having no signed contract, Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), or other formal agreement with the project team. This resulted in a significant financial burden for the Federation as reported by their representative, due to the rental of premises for nine years, leading to an accumulated debt.<sup>35</sup> The Federation has expressed frustration over the lack of transparency, particularly regarding how the women's group was formed.<sup>36</sup> Additionally, the Federation strongly opposed the financial model initially proposed by the project team, which required it to cover rent, taxes, salaries, and still share a percentage of revenue with the women's group, deeming it financially unsustainable. Interview with Federation representative demonstrated that Federation failed to acknowledge the significant added value of the incubator facilities as a result of the renovation subsidized by the project.

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<sup>35</sup> Information provided by UN Women states that, however, rent is paid only for first two years.

<sup>36</sup> Some members questioned why experienced female farmers producing over 100 tons of tomatoes annually were excluded from the group, raising concerns about the selection criteria used in the project.

The UN Women team has indicated that women have changed their preferences. At the initial stage of the project, they agreed to manage the incubator, but after complications raised by Federation, they opted for employment as more preferred option.

From the women's perspective, the incubator provided very valuable training and capacity-building support which have impacted in development of social skills and self-confidence. Their business skills were developed although without application of learning in practice meanwhile entrepreneurial leadership skills and capability of managing the incubator independently remained still weak in a non-secured outlook environment. Instead, they expressed a strong preference for stable employment rather than entrepreneurship, which contradicts the project's initial assumption that they would want to operate the business themselves. This highlights a broader issue in development initiatives, where entrepreneurship is often prioritized over employment, even when the latter better reflects the needs of local beneficiaries.

The Italian donor, which played a key role in financing the GREAT project, has raised concerns about project efficiency and the lack of strategic coordination among stakeholders, mainly regarding the incubator in Elbasan. From their perspective, the financial investment in the incubator has not translated into tangible results, as it remains non-operational. The donor also identified structural flaws in project implementation, including weak institutional integration and limited accountability mechanisms in regard to achieving agreement with the Federation, which have left both the Federation and the women's group without a clear path forward. During the last extension of the project implementation, new efforts were invested to reach agreement with the Federation and women's groups and to make the incubator fully functional.

#### **Post-evaluation project update**

After finalizing the evaluation report, an important update was provided from the project team to the Evaluation team which informed that on April 25, 2025, following the evaluation period, a formal cooperation agreement was signed between the women's NGO "AgroShirgjan" and the Elbasan Agricultural Federation (FBE), facilitated by the project team. Under this legally notarized agreement, AgroShirgjan retains full ownership of the equipment donated by FAO, including all incubator and auxiliary tools, as listed in the annex of the agreement. These assets are granted to the Federation for exclusive use through a renewable five-year lease. The lease is symbolic in nature, requiring the Federation to cover only a minimal monthly fee equal to the cumulative value of social and health insurance contributions for one employee earning the national minimum wage. This payment is to be transferred monthly to AgroShirgjan's bank account, activated once the incubator begins generating income.

The Federation is fully responsible for the use, care, and maintenance of the equipment and for covering all operational costs (e.g., electricity, water, internet), as well as any damages, except those resulting from normal wear and tear. The equipment must be used strictly in line with the Federation's statutory objectives and may not be repurposed without prior written consent from AgroShirgjan. A breach of this provision allows AgroShirgjan to reclaim the equipment and seek compensation.

A central condition of the agreement is the Federation's obligation to hire at least one woman member of AgroShirgjan through a formal labor contract, ensuring the empowerment and inclusion of women in operational activities. Furthermore, the Federation agrees to ensure ongoing transparency and cooperation, including notification of any changes in location and returning the equipment if the terms are violated.

This agreement marks a positive and sustainable outcome influenced by the evaluation process and ensures a clear legal framework for cooperation, ownership, and women's empowerment in the use of jointly developed resources.



## PROJECT STRATEGIES

**Finding 6:** Excluding Elbasan incubator component, the project achievements were enabled by the effective project strategies combining policy work at national and local level with direct economic empowerment and efforts focused on creating a more enabling environment for rural women's economic activity. However, project faced many challenges that prevented higher effectiveness: sociocultural stereotypes preventing women to engage, resistance by some stakeholders in the communities, pandemic and war in Ukraine, lack of community engagement and ownership.

The GREAT project has benefited from strong institutional support at both national and local levels, but it has also encountered significant challenges in mobilizing rural women, integrating community perspectives, and ensuring financial sustainability.

One of the most **positive factors** contributing to the project's success has been the consistent **support of the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Finance**. Their involvement has been crucial in achieving the project results at the national level, and long-term relevance, ensuring that gender-responsive policies continue beyond the immediate scope of this initiative. Additionally, **local governments** have played a pivotal role in the project's success, particularly in Kolonja Municipality, where the mayor and municipal council actively supported the incubator. They provided financial backing for operational costs, free premises, and tax exemptions, demonstrating a strong sense of ownership and commitment to the initiative. However, in larger municipalities like Elbasan, municipal engagement was more complex and less consistent, requiring different strategies to secure sustained support.

Another significant challenge was the **difficulty in mobilizing rural women**, largely due to deeply ingrained social norms and resistance to change within communities. Patriarchal structures often relegated women to informal labor without ownership or recognition, making it difficult to encourage their full participation in structured economic activities. Additionally, some women feared losing social benefits if they started earning an income,<sup>37</sup> discouraging them from engaging in formal business activities. The project also struggled with **low levels of community involvement** during its design phase, leading to women feeling like "subjects" of the project rather than owners. The Gramsh model, where women were employed within a private-sector-supported business environment, was widely considered by women themselves a better and more practical alternative than expecting them to independently manage an incubator.

From the perspective of donors and financial institutions, there were additional concerns related to financial sustainability. The Ministry of Finance pointed to **limited financial resources** allocated to gender-related programs, **weak inter-ministerial coordination** on gender budgeting policies, and gaps in data collection for monitoring gender-disaggregated budget impacts. There was also the issue of heavy reliance on donor funding, raising concerns about the long-term viability of project initiatives once external funding ends.

The project was further impacted by **external factors**, including the COVID-19 pandemic, and war in Ukraine which disrupted supplies and increased the prices of construction, materials and equipment. These factors disrupted implementation timelines and affected local community engagement. Additionally, project implementers faced complex and time-consuming financial reporting requirements, adding an administrative burden that slowed the project's adaptability and responsiveness.

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<sup>37</sup> Which is legal requirement that if a person with social benefits starts getting income, the social benefits are interrupted.

## 4.4 Efficiency

Evaluation questions	11. Have resources (financial, human, technical support, etc.) been allocated strategically to achieve the project outcomes?
	12. Has there been effective leadership and management of the project including the structuring of management and administration roles to maximize results? Where does accountability lie? Have the project's results been delivered in a timely manner?

**Finding 7:** The financial and human resources, along with the capacity for technical support, were deemed sufficient. However, despite the dedicated implementation teams allocating resources as planned, the project's efficiency faced challenges due to the increased equipment costs, as a direct result of the war in Ukraine. Financial analyses also suggest a low return on investment in the short term, as the economic empowerment model proved costly given the small number of women remaining economically active through incubators. Nonetheless, such investment holds the potential for broader social impacts in the long term.

The efficiency of the GREAT project was influenced by a combination of organizational, financial, and systemic factors, shaping its implementation and outcomes. The project contributed to gender-responsive rural development but faced challenges in coordination, financial sustainability, and monitoring mechanisms, which affected its overall efficiency.

**Financially**, the project was affected by external economic conditions, including increased material costs due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the Ukraine war, which led to higher investment requirements for incubators. Delays in securing municipal property rights for incubator locations further impacted financial planning and execution. The project required significant investment for presently relatively small number of direct beneficiaries, making the model expensive compared to its outreach. According to the project's budget plan, an investment of €80,000 was allocated for each incubator. In the successful case of the Leskovik incubator, the municipality committed to covering additional expenses. These include utility bills, with electricity costs of €100 per month and water supply costs of €40 per month, both for the next three years. Additionally, social insurance contributions of €111 per woman will be covered for the next five years. The incubator will also benefit from a tax exemption amounting to approximately €165 in local taxes. Moreover, the municipality has made a one-time investment of €3,000 in raw materials and has provided free rent for the incubator for the upcoming decade.

More accurate analyses can be conducted after a certain period and should be aligned with corresponding impact assessments to more precisely estimate the cost-benefit outcomes of this model.

The FAO regional office in Budapest played a central role in providing **technical guidance** and operational oversight, ensuring alignment with FAO's broader gender and social inclusion agenda. However, as FAO's office in Albania was still in transition to a fully-fledged representation office, there were operational and structural constraints that affected local-level execution. The Ministry of Agriculture remained a key institutional partner, providing policy support and integration into national development frameworks, but inter-agency coordination on gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) faced challenges, affecting financial tracking and implementation at the municipal level.

**Finding 8:** Collaboration between UN Women and FAO was crucial in initiating the project; however, challenges in leadership and management, particularly in coordination and oversight, significantly impacted

its execution. Insufficient coordination led to oversight gaps and delays in decision-making. Shared accountability between the agencies, coupled with ineffective monitoring and reporting mechanisms, complicated the determination of responsibility and contributed to management difficulties. Additionally, bureaucratic and legal complexities, along with underdeveloped long-term monitoring, hindered the timely delivery of results and the efficient assessment of the project's sustained economic impact.

While collaboration between UN Women and FAO was pivotal in driving the initiative, there were significant challenges with effective leadership and management. The insufficient coordination between the two agencies led to oversight gaps and delays in decision-making. The evidence pointing to coordination deficiencies was often implicit rather than explicit. During evaluation consultations, it became clear that UN Women did not always have fully updated information from the field on activities primarily managed by FAO, and vice versa. The issues surrounding the Elbasan incubator surfaced more prominently as a result of the evaluation process. In some cases, the information was requested from ET that should be exchanged directly between implementing partners, etc.

Accountability is shared between UN Women and FAO, reflecting challenges in coordination and oversight. Donor pointed to the presence of gaps in monitoring and reporting, which did not fully capture the on-ground conditions, has made it difficult to clearly determine the locus of accountability. From donor's perspective, the reports were not well-structured, which made it challenging to obtain clear and actionable information. However, the reports followed standard UN Women format, which indicated the need in the future to consider possibilities to adjust reporting formats more to donor's expectations. Additionally, donor mentioned the lack of detailed reporting and the need to repeatedly request clarifications, indicating a gap in the flow of information necessary for transparent and accountable management. This resulted in difficulties in understanding project progress and effectiveness. This complexity may have contributed to some of the management challenges encountered in the project.

The project faced delays in delivering results on time. Several factors contributed to these setbacks, including bureaucratic and legal complexities concerning municipal property rights, business registration, and financial management structures. Furthermore, the absence of fully developed long-term monitoring mechanisms made it difficult to efficiently track and assess the project's sustained economic impact. These issues together affected the timely achievement of the project's goals.

## 4.5 Potential for impact

Evaluation questions	13. Is there a potential measurable impact of the project intervention on the target group across all dimensions of empowerment? What evidence exist that the project has delivered longer term results?
	14. To what extent is the project bringing about gender transformative changes that address the root causes of gender inequalities? To what extent is the project changing the dynamics of power in relationships between different groups?

**Finding 9:** Although it is not yet possible to fully estimate the project's impact, there are promising indications, particularly in Kolonje. Increased interest from women in neighbouring communities for similar support has been noted by local government, which has also expressed strong interest in replicating the model. Additionally, the project has brought attention to other critical issues, such as women's access to

property, and has enabled targeted municipalities to extend gender-responsive budgeting practices beyond the project scope into other sectors.

The GREAT project has demonstrated certain potential for impact. In Kolonja, there is already visible broader impact, as other local communities in addition to Leskovik have expressed interest in implementing similar women's economic empowerment programs. The municipality itself is committed to replicating the initiative, further embedding gender-responsive economic development within local governance. The project has also played a crucial role in raising awareness about the importance of women's access to property ownership and financial security, initiating policy discussions that could contribute to structural improvements in gender equality policies.

One of the most significant impacts of the project is the improvement in local gender-responsive budgeting practices, which have shifted municipal financial planning toward more gender-sensitive allocations. These advancements provide a model for other municipalities, ensuring that WEE principles are integrated into local development planning across different sectors.

The project has also contributed to strengthening institutional capacity for gender-responsive policymaking at both local and national levels, reinforcing women's economic empowerment as a formal component of municipal planning.

At the community level, the project has empowered rural women to advocate for their rights, particularly in relation to land ownership and financial security. By participating in the initiative, women have developed entrepreneurial skills, gained exposure to new economic opportunities, and engaged in networks of women-led cooperatives. Awareness campaigns conducted through the project have played a transformative role in shifting stakeholders' perspectives on women's roles in rural development, increasing the visibility of their economic contributions.

The project provided multiple marketing and promotion opportunities through participation of project beneficiaries in activities in Tirana and Italy which contributed considerably in the promotion of local products. However, the project did not establish strong commercial linkages, which affected its ability to secure market-driven sustainability for women-led businesses.

## 4.6 Sustainability

Evaluation questions	15. What is the likelihood that the benefits from the project will be maintained for a reasonably long period of time after the project phase out?
	16. How effectively has the project generated country ownership of the results achieved, the establishment of partnerships with relevant stakeholders and the development of in-country capacities to ensure sustainability of efforts and benefits? What factors are/will be critical to maintain project results in the long term?
	17. To what extent the project fostered the participation of relevant CSOs and women's organizations?
	18. To what extent has the project been able to promote replication and/or up-scaling of successful practices?

**Finding 10:** Evidence points to high sustainability prospects regarding the national level policies, local gender responsive budget planning focused on WEE, and Leskovik Incubator due to the system integration and ensured model of support by the municipality for the next 3-5 years. Other project components (mainly

incubator in Elbasan and economic empowerment of women in same municipality) are faced with high sustainability risks due to the resistance of some key stakeholders, low ownership by local governments but also by women beneficiaries.

The sustainability of the GREAT project's results presents a mixed outlook, with strong prospects for continuity at the policy level but significant risks at the operational and economic levels. While the project successfully introduced gender-responsive policies at the national level, ensuring institutional sustainability within government frameworks, concerns remain regarding the long-term viability of incubators, market integration, and local ownership.

At the national level, the adoption of **gender-responsive policies significantly enhances sustainability**. The project contributed to mainstreaming gender considerations into policy discussions, particularly in areas such as land ownership, financial security for rural women, and gender-responsive budgeting. These advancements ensure that gender equality remains a long-term policy focus rather than a short-term intervention.

The Leskovik experience demonstrated how GRB practices could be replicated in other municipalities, reinforcing the potential for expanding gender-sensitive economic initiatives. Leskovik's participation in the Hundred Villages Project further integrates gender-responsive approaches into national rural development programs, providing a platform for scaling up successful models.

In regard to the incubators, sustainability prospects are strongest in Leskovik, where the municipality has committed financial support to the incubator, ensuring its operation for the foreseeable future. However, the continued success of the incubator depends on the participation and interest of future generations of women, particularly younger women, whose engagement remains limited. In Elbasan, municipal capacity to allocate sustained budgets for gender projects remains a concern, with uncertainties around the long-term financial commitment of local governments to maintain gender-responsive initiatives beyond donor funding cycles.

Despite these policy advancements, the economic sustainability of the project remains uncertain. The business viability of incubators is questionable, as many women face limited access to markets and unclear commercialization pathways for their products. The project did not fully establish market integration strategies, leaving women without strong connections to buyers, distribution channels, or long-term business development plans. This poses a high risk for sustainability of their businesses once donor funding ends.

A critical issue affecting sustainability is the lack of true ownership among women's groups. Many women participated in training and capacity-building activities, but few were willing or able to take on long-term business management responsibilities. In some cases, the project disrupted existing community relationships rather than strengthening them, as seen in Elbasan, where tensions between the Federation and the women's group hindered progress.

Institutionally, uncertainty remains around the functionality of Local Action Groups. While the project contributed to the legal framework for LAGs, their actual operational effectiveness and sustainability beyond donor support remain unclear. Without continued institutional and financial support, LAGs may struggle to maintain their role in gender-responsive local development, although even without funds the Kolonje LAG expressed commitment to further support women's economic and social empowerment in their communities.

From a financial perspective, sustainability is constrained by limited municipal capacity to allocate sustained budgets for gender projects, making municipalities dependent on external support. The Ministry of Finance has identified gaps in government funding commitments to sustain GRB initiatives, as well as limited institutional mechanisms to maintain project outcomes beyond donor funding cycles. Without government-backed financial resources, municipalities may lack the autonomy and budget flexibility needed to independently sustain WEE initiatives. UN Women also noted that continued advocacy is essential to ensure that gender-sensitive economic policies are fully integrated into governance structures, rather than being treated as donor-driven priorities.

To ensure long-term sustainability, several key factors must be addressed. Stronger community ownership and deeper engagement with local governments are essential for maintaining project outcomes beyond donor support. The integration of successful agribusiness incubator models into national rural development programs could facilitate broader replication and institutionalization. The development of clear exit strategies — including financial planning, market integration, and legal frameworks for incubator operations — would enhance the likelihood of sustained impact. Additionally, improving grassroots access to grant opportunities and fostering a bottom-up advocacy approach could help ensure that rural women’s economic empowerment remains a local and national priority.

### 4.7 Crosscutting issues – human rights, gender equality and disability inclusion

Evaluation question	19. To what extent have gender equality and empowerment of women, human rights, disability inclusion, environmental sustainability and accountability principles and strategies been integrated into the projects design and implementation?
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**Finding 11:** The project demonstrates a strong commitment to gender equality and human rights by focusing on the economic empowerment of rural women; however, it does not comprehensively address intersectional vulnerabilities beyond those linked to rural status. Key gaps include limited inclusion of younger women, which is crucial for long-term sustainability, and a lack of integration of disability inclusion principles, aside from adhering to basic UN accessibility standards.

The project addressed human rights and gender equality through a comprehensive approach that integrated these themes across its implementation and strategic objectives. The project actively worked to contest gender-based stereotypes by developing the capacities of rural women. This was achieved through awareness-raising initiatives and trainings that emphasized the role and rights of women in agriculture and rural economies, thus supporting their empowerment and participation in the local economic development.

The project also aimed to create an enabling policy and legislative environment that promoted women’s economic empowerment and their access to and control over productive assets. This involved increasing capacities of agricultural extension services to deliver their services in more gender equitable ways and implementation of gender-responsive policies and action plans in collaboration with local governments and relevant ministries. This was in line with CEDAW recommendations to enhance women's access to essential services and economic opportunities.

By supporting the formation of gender-equitable LAGs and providing technical support for gender-responsive policy formulation and implementation, the project fostered greater inclusion and participation



of women in rural development processes. The project also focused on raising awareness about gender issues in agriculture and rural development among staff from the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, extension services, and local government, which is crucial for the sustainability of gender equality initiatives.

However, its approach to intersectionality remains limited. While it successfully addressed vulnerabilities linked to rural status, it did not systematically consider other intersecting factors that shape economic exclusion. One critical gap is the lack of targeted engagement with younger women, whose involvement is essential for ensuring generational sustainability of economic empowerment initiatives.

Additionally, the project did not explicitly incorporate disability inclusion measures beyond adhering to basic UN accessibility standards.

## 5. LESSONS LEARNED

- It is essential to recognize the diverse challenges faced by rural women, as their needs and circumstances are not homogeneous. Tailored approaches, informed by comprehensive needs assessments conducted both prior to and during project design, are essential to ensure that interventions are relevant and responsive to the realities of different groups of women. In line with this, the economic empowerment should be understood and implemented in more diverse forms than business skills and entrepreneurship.
- There is critical need for formalized partnerships through contracts or Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) before any investments are made. Establishing clear agreements from the outset ensures accountability, alignment of expectations, and sustainability of outcomes, preventing disputes or misalignment between stakeholders.
- Evidence from project implementation has underscored the critical importance of distinguishing between symbolic and substantive commitments from local governments. Although many municipalities may formally agree to support initiatives, there can be significant variations in their actual willingness and capacity to allocate the necessary municipal resources. This lesson highlights the need for future initiatives to assess not only the verbal or formal commitments but also the concrete financial and institutional support that municipalities are prepared to provide.
- The project underscores the complementary roles of different development actors. UN Women's strength lies in engaging at the high political level, driving policy change and institutional reforms, while civil society organizations are often better positioned to work directly with rural communities and women on the ground. A balanced collaboration between these actors can enhance both policy impact and grassroots engagement, ensuring a more holistic and sustainable approach to women's economic empowerment.
- The partnership with grassroots organizations and networks such as ANRD proved as very productive in work with women in local rural communities due to their abilities to adjust the intended interventions to the local context and needs with different groups of women in concrete communities.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

**Conclusion 1** (F1 – F3): The GREAT project represents a significant step toward integrating gender equality and women's economic and social empowerment into rural development policies and practices in Albania.



By aligning with national priorities, international commitments, and donor strategies, the project has contributed to policy reform, institutional capacity-building, and economic empowerment of rural women in targeted local communities. It has successfully positioned WEE as a key component of municipal planning, influencing local budgeting practices and fostering the creation of women-led economic initiatives. However, while the project established a strong policy and institutional foundation, its long-term sustainability is contingent upon financial stability, market integration, and broader community ownership which might be enhanced once the business passes the start-up phase.

**Conclusion 2** (F4-F6): The GREAT project has made significant contributions to gender-responsive rural development by advancing policy reforms, directly empowering rural women, and fostering a more enabling environment for their economic participation. It successfully influenced agricultural policies at national and local levels, strengthened institutional capacities, and enhanced awareness of rural women's economic contributions, demonstrating a comprehensive and multi-level approach to women's economic empowerment. Through business incubation, training programs, and local governance engagement, the project has laid the foundation for sustainable economic opportunities for rural women. The project's integrated strategy—linking policy reform, local governance, and direct economic interventions—demonstrated clear potential for systemic change. Strengthening community engagement, fostering generational continuity, and ensuring sustainable financing mechanisms will be critical to maximizing long-term impact. By addressing these factors, the project can serve as a replicable model for advancing women's economic empowerment in rural economies, ensuring that policy gains translate into lasting economic and social transformation. One of the project's most notable achievements has been its ability to catalyze local government engagement in gender-responsive economic development. The Leskovik incubator, backed by municipal support, has become a model for sustainable WEE, demonstrating how local governments can take ownership of women's economic initiatives and integrate them into broader regional development strategies. The municipality's commitment to financing operational costs reflects a shift in municipal priorities toward gender-sensitive planning, with the potential for replication in other regions.

**Conclusion 3** (F5 – F7): Despite these institutional advancements, the project faced operational and financial challenges caused by COVID-19 pandemic and war in Ukraine, that affected its overall efficiency and sustainability. The emphasis on entrepreneurship over stable employment did not always align with women's actual economic needs and aspirations, leading to difficulties in mobilizing participants and securing long-term engagement. Furthermore, market integration gaps and limited commercialization pathways created uncertainty regarding the economic viability of incubators, raising concerns about their ability to function independently after donor support ends. In Elbasan, the lack of clear agreements and financial planning led to tensions between stakeholders, demonstrating the importance of formalized partnerships and well-defined sustainability strategies.

**Conclusion 4** (F10 -F11): ): Another critical challenge was ensuring generational continuity in WEE initiatives. The project did not sufficiently engage younger women, raising concerns about the long-term participation of future generations. This is, however, structural problem caused by outward migration of young people from rural areas, and generally small presence of young women in villages.

**Conclusion 5** (F10): The project's sustainability depends on continued institutional and financial support, particularly for Local Action Groups (LAGs), municipal budgeting commitments, and commercialization pathways for women-led businesses. While the project successfully influenced local governance and policy discussions, ensuring financial autonomy for municipalities to sustain WEE programs remains a challenge. The reliance on external donor funding underscores the need for long-term financial mechanisms, including public-private partnerships and grant opportunities for grassroots organizations, to maintain momentum beyond the project cycle.

**Conclusion 6 (F11)** The project contributed to advancement of human rights and gender equality in rural areas by embedding these principles throughout its execution and strategic objectives. It challenged gender-based stereotypes and promoted the economic empowerment of rural women through capacity-building, awareness initiatives, and training, as well as creating new economic opportunities through incubator, which emphasized their crucial roles in agriculture and rural economies. The project also strengthened gender-equitable policies and collaborated with local governments and ministries to enhance agricultural services and policy frameworks, aligning with CEDAW recommendations for improving women's access to resources and opportunities. However, the project's approach to intersectionality was limited, particularly in engaging younger women and incorporating comprehensive disability inclusion principles, pointing to areas for future improvement.

Overall, the GREAT project has laid the groundwork for systemic change in gender-responsive rural development, enhancing visibility, institutional capacity, and policy integration for WEE. However, its long-term success will require stronger financial planning, commercial linkages, and intergenerational engagement strategies. By addressing these gaps, the project has the potential to serve as a replicable model for expanding WEE initiatives across Albania, ensuring that rural women's economic empowerment remains a sustainable and locally driven priority.

## 7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations were developed based on the discussions with implementing partners and stakeholders during the evaluation process, and validated by the EMG and ERG.

<b>Recommendation 1</b>	<b>Continue advocacy for gender sensitive policy at national and local levels and strengthen Government engagement</b>
<b>Origin</b>	Findings 3 and 4, conclusions 1 and 2
<b>Priority Level:</b>	High
<b>Responsibility:</b>	UN Women country office Albania, FAO country office Albania, relevant ministries, national gender equality mechanisms, local governments
<b>Potential actions:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Strengthen policy advocacy</b> to secure long-term government commitment to gender-responsive economic policies, ensuring they remain a national priority beyond donor-driven initiatives.</li> <li>• Improve <b>inter-ministerial coordination</b> on gender financing strategies for women's economic empowerment in rural areas, fostering coherent and well-resourced interventions.</li> <li>• Expand the implementation of <b>gender-responsive budgeting</b> in WEE beyond pilot municipalities, embedding it systematically into local and national fiscal policies.</li> </ul>

<b>Recommendation 2</b>	<b>Advocate for more sustainable financial support and Mechanisms</b>
<b>Origin</b>	Finding 9, Conclusion 5
<b>Priority Level:</b>	High
<b>Responsibility:</b>	UN Women country office Albania, FAO country office Albania
<b>Potential actions:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advocate for and pilot where possible <b>multi-year municipal financing mechanisms</b> to provide sustainable funding for rural women's entrepreneurship programs, reducing reliance on short-term donor funding.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage municipal co-financing for gender-sensitive projects, distributing financial responsibility and increasing local ownership and long-term commitment.</li> </ul>
<b>Recommendation 3</b>	<b>Foster private sector engagement and support access to market opportunities</b>
<b>Origin</b>	Findings 4 and 9, Conclusions 2, 3 and 5
<b>Priority Level:</b>	High
<b>Responsibility:</b>	UN Women country office Albania, FAO country office Albania, partner organizations and networks
<b>Potential actions:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strengthen private sector engagement to establish sustainable market linkages for women-led businesses, ensuring they operate within a viable commercial ecosystem.</li> <li>Invest in scalable commercialization strategies, enabling women's businesses to expand beyond local markets and achieve long-term economic viability.</li> <li>Facilitate diverse market access strategies, complementing social media promotion with local and international trade networks, retail partnerships, and targeted business development support.</li> </ul>

<b>Recommendation 4</b>	<b>Support improvement of digital literacy and financial inclusion of rural women</b>
<b>Origin</b>	Findings 4 and 9, Conclusions 2 and 5
<b>Priority Level:</b>	Medium
<b>Responsibility:</b>	UN Women country office Albania, FAO country office Albania, partner organizations and networks
<b>Potential actions:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expand digital literacy and financial inclusion training for rural women, equipping them with the tools to navigate digital economies, improve financial management, and access e-commerce opportunities.</li> </ul>

<b>Recommendation 5</b>	<b>Focus future work in this area on youth and intergenerational engagement</b>
<b>Origin</b>	Findings 9 and 10, Conclusions 4, 5 and 6
<b>Priority Level:</b>	High
<b>Responsibility:</b>	UN Women country office Albania, FAO country office Albania, partner organizations and networks
<b>Potential actions:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strengthen youth engagement initiatives to promote the continuity and sustainability of women's economic empowerment programs, ensuring that younger women see viable career paths in rural entrepreneurship.</li> <li>Enhance mentorship programs, connecting young women with experienced professionals and entrepreneurs, fostering knowledge transfer and long-term skill development.</li> </ul>

<b>Recommendation 6</b>	<b>Contribute further to community integration and local buy-in</b>
<b>Origin</b>	Findings 8, 9 and 10, Conclusions 1, 4 and 5
<b>Priority Level:</b>	High
<b>Responsibility:</b>	UN Women country office Albania, FAO country office Albania, partner organizations and networks

<b>Potential actions:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prioritize genuine community participation from the project's inception, ensuring that interventions align with local needs and expectations.</li> <li>• Establish a balanced top-down and bottom-up approach, ensuring that policy frameworks and grassroots realities reinforce each other.</li> <li>• Strengthen local ownership by allowing communities to play an active role in shaping project goals and implementation, creating sustainable and culturally embedded solutions.</li> </ul>
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<b>Recommendation 7</b>	<b>Improve coordination between stakeholders and their capacities of gender responsive rural development policies</b>
<b>Origin</b>	Findings 6 and 9, Conclusions 1, 2 and 5
<b>Priority Level:</b>	Medium
<b>Responsibility:</b>	UN Women country office Albania, FAO country office Albania, partner organizations and networks, relevant ministries and national gender equality mechanisms
<b>Potential actions:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve coordination between donors, UN agencies, and local CSOs to maximize efficiency, reduce duplication of efforts, and ensure optimal resource utilization for gender-responsive rural development initiatives.</li> <li>• Strengthen capacity-building efforts among local institutions and implementing partners, ensuring they have the expertise and tools to sustain and expand women's economic empowerment efforts beyond the project cycle.</li> </ul>

# ANNEX 1: PROJECT ORIGINAL THEORY OF CHANGE

GOAL TOC STATEMENT	GOAL			
	To contribute to rural women's empowerment in Albania and to facilitate as well as to strengthen women's roles and contribution to rural development in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its core principle of leaving no-one behind.			
	The theory of change towards achieving this goal is as follows:if (1) the capacities of rural women are developed and gender-based stereotypes are contested for gender-equitable LAG formation; if (2) the capacities of rural advisory services, municipal institutions and national partners are developed in the provision of gender-responsive services for agri-business and value chain development; if (3) women's capacity to start and develop own business is strengthened by coaching and mentoring, improved access to finance and agro-extension services and (4) if technical support is provided to MoARD for gender-responsive policy law formulation and implementation and rural development, including the LEADER framework then (5) an enabling policy and legislative environment to promote and translate into action women's economic empowerment and access to and control over productive assets will be in place.			
	Outcome			
	An enabling policy and legislative environment to promote and translate into action women's economic empowerment and access to and control over productive assets			
Outputs	1. Capacities of rural women developed and gender-based stereotypes contested for gender-equitable LAG formation	2. The capacities of rural advisory services, municipal institutions and national partners are developed in the provision of gender-responsive services for rural tourism, agri-business and value chain development	3. Women's capacity to start and develop own business is strengthened by coaching and mentoring, improved access to finance and agro-extension services	4. Technical support is provided to MoARD for gender-responsive policy and law formulation and implementation and rural development, including the LEADER framework.
	Key Assumptions	Key Assumptions	Key Assumptions	Key Assumptions
	National authorities support in the establishment of a legislative / policy framework that contributes to social behavioral change	MoARD and other national partners assist in ensuring collaboration of target municipalities. Target municipalities have an interest in engaging in the project	Close coordination of actions with local governments, active awareness raising campaign in the regions	MoARD and other national partners have a genuine interest in the project to help them implement effectively LEADER and meet SDGs and other international commitments
Risks and Barriers	Risks and Barriers	Risks and Barriers	Risks and Barriers	Risks and Barriers
	Social resistances limit the impact of the project towards women's access to economic resources	Poor support of rural advisory services and local authorities	Low level of participation of women in project interventions in the field	Poor support of MoARD and other national partners

## ANNEX 2: LIST OF KEY DOCUMENTS

Documents	
Project documents	
1.	GREAT project proposal document
2.	Communication Plan GREAT Project
3.	Theory of Change
4.	Project logframe
5.	List of stakeholders September 2024
6.	GREAT project's Mid-Term Review Report (MTR)
7.	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2022 – 2026
8.	GREAT project reports for donors 05/03/2021 – 04/03/2022; 05/03/2022 – 04/03/2023
9.	Strengthening the status of the spouse and partner in Albania's agriculture re businesses Policy Paper UN Women and FAO, developed in the frame of GREAT project,2024
10.	Towards gender-responsive agricultural extension services in Albania
11.	Gender-responsive value chain analysis in Albania: The case studies of Elbasan, Leskovik, and Puke
12.	UN to UN transfer agreement
13.	GREAT Project Budget documents
14.	ANRD reports
15.	GREAT reports to Donor
16.	Steering Committee minutes
Studies, reports	
17.	Concluding observation fifth periodical report of Albania, CEDAW/C/ALB/CO/5
18.	FAO, Gender-Responsive Value Chain Analysis in Albania: The case studies of Elbasan, Leskovik, Puka
19.	Albania 2024 Report, European Commission Brussels, 30.10.2024 SWD (2024) 690 final
20.	UN Women Albania, Strategic Note 2022-2026 /UN Women Albania Country Office
21.	FAO & UN Women. (forthcoming). National gender profile of agriculture and rural livelihoods: Albania. Country Gender Assessment Series. Budapest
22.	Policy document by the Albanian Rural Network, The Dynamics of Implementation of the LEADER Approach and Its Way Forward in Albania September 2020
23.	National Strategy for Gender Equality 2021-2030 and its Action Plan
24.	National Strategy for Agriculture, Rural Development and Fisheries 2021– 2027 and its Action Plan
Other	
25.	<i>Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluation -- Towards UNEG Guidance; UNEG Handbook for Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality Perspectives in Evaluations in the UN System</i>
26.	OECD/DAC Criteria for Evaluating Development Assistance: <a href="https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/daccriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm">https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/daccriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm</a>
27.	UN Women, How to manage gender-responsive evaluation, Evaluation handbook, <a href="https://genderevaluation.unwomen.org/en/evaluation-handbook">https://genderevaluation.unwomen.org/en/evaluation-handbook</a>
28.	UN Women Strategic Note 2022-2026
29.	UNSDCF Albania 2022-2026



## ANNEX 3: EVALUATION MATRIX

Criteria	Evaluation Questions	Judgement Criteria	Data collection methods	Sampling/Sources
Relevance	1. To what extent was the design of the intervention and its results relevant to the needs and priorities of the beneficiaries?	Documental evidence on needs and priorities of rural women in Albania and perceptions of stakeholders	Interviews, FGDs, analysis of secondary sources	Project reports, UN Women and FAO teams, project beneficiaries  Sampling: FGDs with Rural women
	2. To what extent is the intervention consistent with the national and rural development strategies in the area of rural women empowerment, and government priorities in these areas?	Documental evidence on adherence to national gender equality and rural development policies  Perception of stakeholders of correlation with the national policy priorities	Desk review, Interviews, FGDs	National strategies, programmes for gender equality, agriculture and rural development  Sampling: National and local governmental stakeholders
	3. To what extent were key national and local level partners involved in the project's conceptualization and design process?	Testimonies of stakeholders on involvement in the project design, evidence of needs assessments and multistakeholder consultations	Interviews, FGDs	Sampling: representatives of relevant ministries, local governments and CSOs representing rural women
Coherence	4. To what extent does the project fit within UN Women's and FAO's Strategic Plans, and how it contributes to their internal coherence, enabling synergies with their other interventions in this area?	Documental evidence on adherence to UN Women's and FAO's strategic notes.  Perception of UN Women and FAO representatives	Desk review, Interviews	Strategic notes of UN Women and FAO  Sampling: UN Women and FAO staff
	5. To what extent is the project coherent with UNSDCF Albania and does enable synergies with other interventions in the area of women's economic empowerment, agriculture and rural development, and what is UN Women and FAO comparative advantage compared to other UN agencies?	Documental evidence on adherence to UNSDCF Albania, alignment and contribution (or lack of) to outputs and outcomes.  Perception of UN Women and FAO representatives	Desk review, Interviews, FGDs	UNSDCF document  Sampling: UN Women, FAO staff and RCO representative



	6. To what extent the project is in complementarity, harmonization and coordination with the interventions of other external actors' interventions in the same context and in the women economic empowerment area, and what is UN Women and FAO comparative advantage compared to other external actors?	Evidence on alignment with other initiatives and interventions related to the WEE of rural women in the context of rural development	Interviews	Sampling: UN RCO, EU Delegation, GIZ, representatives of relevant ministries, representatives of international organizations
<b>Effectiveness</b>	7. To what extent have the expected results of the project been achieved on both output and outcome levels? both objectives and results levels? ?	Achievements against project indicators (goal, outcome and output level)	Desk review, interviews, FGDs	Project reports to donor, mid-term review, other project documentation  Sample: project team, project partners, donor, project beneficiaries
	8. How effective have the selected strategies and approaches been in achieving project results? Are any of strategies innovative, resulting in good practices?	Perceptions on the effectiveness of strategies, desk review comparing strategies to project results	Desk review, interviews, FGDs	Project reports to donor, mid-term review, other project documentation  Sample: project team, project partners, donor, project beneficiaries
	9. What were factors contributing to the successful achievement of results and where were inhibiting factors? How were they overcome?	Identified factors that contributed to the project effectiveness, as well as factors inhibiting project success.	Desk review, interviews, FGDs	Project reports to donor, mid-term review, other project documentation, contextual analysis  Sample: project team, project partners, donor, project beneficiaries
	10. Has the project achieved any unforeseen results, either positive or negative? For whom?	Identified unforeseen results positive or negative	Interviews, FGDs	Sample: project team, project partners, project beneficiaries
<b>Efficiency</b>	11. Have resources (financial, human, technical support, etc.) been allocated strategically to achieve the	Relative assessment of the investment of resources and complexity and achievements of project components;	Interviews, FGDs, Project reports/outputs analysis	Project reports  Sampling: UN Women and FAO teams, Donor representatives, project partner representatives

	project outcomes? Have the project's results been delivered in a timely manner?	Allocation of human and financial resources to programme outcome; Extent to which key management processes are integrated in implementation, including monitoring, evaluation and learning; Timeliness of implementation against the plan.		
	12. Has there been effective leadership and management of the project including the structuring of management and administration roles to maximize results? Where does accountability lie?	Adequacy of organizational assets, structures and capabilities (in terms of financial and human resources) Effectiveness of internal coordination/communication (vertical/horizontal) mechanisms  Effectiveness of external coordination/communication mechanisms with partners and beneficiaries	Interviews, FGDs, Project reports/outputs analysis	Project reports  Sampling: UN Women and FAO teams, Donor representatives, project partner representatives
<b>Potential for impact</b>	13. Is there a potential measurable impact of the project intervention on the target group across all dimensions of empowerment? What evidence exist that the project has delivered longer term results?	Achievements against project indicators  Evidence on the changes at individual, group, community and institutional levels that can be contributed to project interventions	Desk review, interviews and FGDs	Project reports, statistical data, relevant studies and reports  Sampling: women final beneficiaries, local government, CSOs, LAG coordinators, national level governmental stakeholders
	14. To what extent is the project bringing about gender transformative changes that address the root causes of gender inequalities? To what extent is the project changing	Achievements against project indicators  Evidence on the changes at individual, group, community and institutional levels that can be	Desk review, interviews and FGDs	Project reports, statistical data, relevant studies and reports  Sampling: women final beneficiaries, local government, CSOs, LAG coordinators, national level governmental stakeholders, project

	the dynamics of power in relationships between different groups?	contributed to project interventions		teams, consultants and experts engaged for the project
<b>Sustainability</b>	15. What is the likelihood that the benefits from the project will be maintained for a reasonably long period of time after the project phase out? What factors are/will be critical to maintain project results in the long term?	<p>The elements that support and hamper sustainability have been identified so as to be taken into consideration in future actions</p> <p>Evidence of system integration of changes (legislative, budgetary, institutional).</p> <p>Evidence on capacities of beneficiaries to sustain the changes.</p>	Interviews, FGDs, Project reports/outputs analysis	<p>Project reports</p> <p>Sampling: women final beneficiaries, local government, CSOs, LAG coordinators, national level governmental stakeholders, project teams, consultants and experts engaged for the project</p>
	16. How effectively has the project generated country ownership of the results achieved, the establishment of partnerships with relevant stakeholders (including relevant CSOs and women's organizations) and the development of in-country capacities to ensure sustainability of efforts and benefits?	<p>Evidence on country ownership of the results, capacities to maintain results.</p> <p>Evidence on capacities of CSOs and women's organizations for participation in local actions, legislative, policy and budgetary processes, and capacities to maintain project benefits.</p>	Interviews, FGDs	Sampling: women final beneficiaries, local government, LAG coordinators, national level governmental stakeholders, CSOs
	17. To what extent has the project been able to promote replication and/or up-scaling of successful practices?	<p>Evidence of replicated and up scaled practices</p> <p>Perception of stakeholders on effectiveness of these practices and contribution to sustainability</p>	Interviews, Focus groups, Project reports/outputs analysis	Project reports, UN Women, FAO, project partners, final beneficiaries

<b>Crosscutting issues</b>	<p>18. To what extent have gender equality and empowerment of women, human rights, disability inclusion, environmental sustainability and accountability principles and strategies been integrated into the projects design and implementation?</p>	<p>Evidence of extent to which interventions consider /address the needs of women, including women from marginalized groups</p> <p>Alignment of partner's mandates with the areas and strategies of intervention</p> <p>Perception and evidence of influence of partners on the thematic areas of the project</p> <p>Ability of partners to reach the target groups and beneficiaries (capacity, sector wise, geographically)</p> <p>Evidence on disability inclusion</p>	<p>Interviews, Focus groups, Project reports/outputs analysis</p>	<p>Project reports, UN Women, FAO, project partners, final beneficiaries</p>
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## ANNEX 4: RESULTS FRAMEWORK

Results	Indicators	Means Verification/ Sources Information	Assumptions/ Risks	Responsible implementing agency
<b>Goal:</b> To contribute to rural women's empowerment in Albania and to facilitate as well as to strengthen women's roles and contribution to rural development in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its core principle of leaving no-one behind.	<b>Indicator:</b> N <sup>o</sup> . new businesses established by sex of owner  <b>Baseline</b> <sup>38</sup> : Total 16,731: Female 1,947; Male 14,784  <b>Target (2021):</b> Annual 10% increase <sup>39</sup>	INSTAT Business Registration Office	<b>Assumption:</b> There is a political will from Government of Albania, including MoARD, its related institutions and local governments to advance towards gender equality and follow up of gender mainstreaming initiated by the project.	<u>UN Women</u>
<b>Outcome</b> An enabling policy and legislative environment to promote and translate into action women's economic empowerment and access to and control over productive assets.	<b>Indicator:</b> Women's share among beneficiaries of agriculture extension service  <b>Baseline 2016:</b> 11% Target 2021 : 20% of beneficiaries from public extension services are women.  <b>Indicator:</b> Number of gender-responsive policies and action plans of the MoARD , related agencies and institutions, and local governments of pilot municipalities	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development  Baseline assessment and exit assessment	<b>Risk:</b> Provision of services to business and agri-business are limited and gender blind. <b>Mitigation mechanism:</b> On that purpose UNW and FAO will advocate for women staff in rural service provision and introduce gender equity in the delivery of new services  <b>Risk:</b> There are social, cultural, and trade barriers to women moving up the value chain. <b>Mitigation mechanism:</b> Therefore, work will focus in the promotion of untapped potential and value of women role in agriculture and the benefit it can bring to rural economy through awareness raising and dedicated campaigning	<u>UN Women</u>

<sup>38</sup> Baseline was revised according to the Baseline source: <https://www.instat.gov.al/media/7172/regjistri-i-ndermarrjeve-2020.pdf> , page 32.

<sup>39</sup> 2,359 new businesses owned by women

	<p><b>Target 2021:</b> Increase by 30%<sup>40</sup> compared with the baseline</p> <p><b>Indicator:</b> Awareness level of gender issues in agriculture and rural development, and of gender mainstreaming in policy and program cycle by MoARD, extension service and local government staff</p> <p><b>Baseline:</b> To be collected during the baseline assessment at the inception phase</p> <p><b>Target 2021:</b> Increase compared to baseline. The target to be decided during the baseline assessment.</p>			
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<sup>40</sup> The baseline was set at 0 so the target was revised to 1 instead of 30% increase from zero.

<p><b>Output 1</b></p> <p>Capacities of rural women developed and gender-based stereotypes contested for gender-equitable LAG formation.</p>	<p><b>Indicator 1A:</b> Number of actions that raise awareness on rural women role and rights in agriculture and rural economy:  <b>Target: Year: 2021</b> Value: 8  <b>Baseline: Year: 2019</b> Value: 5  <b>Notes:</b> Nationwide implemented campaigns in rural areas that disseminate information on rural women's rights.  <b>Source:</b> UN Women annual report.</p> <p><b>Indicator 1B:</b> Number of rural women informed through awareness raising and trainings  <b>Target: Year: 2021</b> Value: 5000  <b>Baseline: Year: 2018</b> Value: 700  <b>Source:</b> UN Women annual report</p>		<p><b>Risk:</b>  Social resistances limit the impact of the project towards women's access to economic resources</p> <p><b>Mitigating action:</b>  An awareness raising campaign is in place for behavioral change, and possible nudges for behavioral change are assessed</p>	<p><u>Led by UN Women with the support of FAO</u></p>
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**Activities to be implemented by UN Women:**

- 1.1 Provide trainings and know how to rural women's groups and women's grassroots in the three target rural areas on LEADER, LAGs and IPARD grants;
- 1.2 Support to civic and community structures to self-organize into LAGs including establishment of board members, legal statute and the Registration Act of LAGs; Code of Ethics, and respective Local Development Strategies
- 1.3 Training of potential 3 LAGs on joint purchasing, shared branding and marketing boards.
- 1.4 Design and implement training to boost networking in each LAG and between the LAGs and support LAGs member participation in events and forums with public and private, regional, national and international cooperation actors for fund management.
- 1.5 Training events provided to rural women and men from the 3 target municipalities on gender equality and human rights principles, with evidence of powerful women role models to eliminate pervasive stereotypes.
- 1.6 **Launch and implement an innovative Media campaign to fight against gender-based stereotypes and to showcase powerful role models of women entrepreneurs in rural areas including the two subcomponents:** a) A commercial is developed to make visible women's contribution to agriculture and rural development, and to fight against pervasive gender stereotypes, and is broadcasted in key TV channels. B) A series of interviews and interventions are provided to national, regional and local TV and radio channels on the evidence of strong women from rural areas, and on the elimination of pervasive stereotypes.

**Activities to be implemented by FAO:**

- 1.7 Provision of technical support to LAG formation, to activities 1.2, 1.3 and 1.4, and to the Media campaign of activity 1.6



<p><b>Output 2</b></p> <p>The capacities of rural advisory services, municipal institutions and national partners are developed in the provision of gender-responsive services for rural tourism, agri- business and value chain development.</p>	<p><b>Indicator</b></p> <p>Indicator 2.1: Existence of a roadmap for gender-responsive value chain development (in rural tourism, honey, medicinal herbs and gourmet) in pilot municipalities, and technical trainings/ advise provided by the RAS</p> <p><b>Baseline:</b> non-existent (2018)</p> <p><b>Target 2021:</b> Roadmap and training curriculum available and disseminated in 2020.</p> <p><b>Indicator 2.2:</b> Tailored capacity development events conducted for rural advisory services and related partners on gender-Target revised.</p>	<p>Project documents, rural advisory services,</p>	<p><b>Risk:</b></p> <p>Poor support of rural advisory services and local authorities</p> <p><b>Mitigating action:</b></p> <p>Close collaboration with local stakeholders</p>	<p>Led by UN Women with the support of FAO</p>
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	<p><b>Indicator 2.3:</b> RAS burdens towards gender-responsive advisory services identified, including nudges for behavioural change and presented to rural advisory services for testing and application</p> <p><b>Baseline 2019:</b> No systematic identification of burdens and nudges identified.</p> <p><b>Target: 2021:</b> Burdens and nudges identified and presented to RAS and other stakeholders, and supported for its testing and application</p> <p><b>Indicator 2.4</b> Percentage of GRB integrated in the three municipalities medium-term budgeting programs (MTBP).</p> <p><b>Baseline:</b> Not known, to be collected during the baseline assessment at the inception phase</p> <p><b>Target: 2021</b> to be decided during the baseline assessment at the inception phase</p>			
Activities to be implemented by FAO:				

- 2.1 Value chain and market assessment of selected products in target municipalities and develop a strategic plan for the development of these value chains, including the “from farm to tourist” approach, territorial certification and the promotion of authentic products specifically produced by rural women and small holders.
- 2.2 Analyse the determinants of vertical chain coordination (including contract farming) and horizontal cooperation.
- 2.3 Provide recommendations and technical support to policy-makers and municipalities on 1) how to improve horizontal and vertical coordination, 2) how to move towards a one stop shop approach, and 3) how to plan and budget for improved rural agri-business infrastructure, post-harvest storage, cooperative processing and other elements of the value chain.
- 2.4 Assess existing bottlenecks for gender responsive rural advisory services and business development services in pilot municipalities using the FAO GRAFT (Gender-responsive advisory service tool), and assess possible nudges for behavioural change.
- 2.5 Provide training for rural advisory services, ACCTs, municipal authorities and related institutions for gender-responsive services related to value- chain, tourism etc. .

**Activities to be implemented by UN Women:**

- 2.6 Conduct the costing of gender responsive rural advisory services and gender sensitive business development services in the three target municipalities
- 2.7 Support GRB integration in municipal action plans and budgets through trainings and mentoring
- 2.8 Capacity building and coaching for planning and budgeting specialists, programmatic municipal staff and gender equality employees of the three target municipalities on gender responsive planning and budgeting in the Medium-terms budgeting programme.
- 2.9 Strengthen capacities of local administration and municipal councils, including women local alliances, on rural women gender gaps and their reflection in the local budgeting processes.
- 2.10 Build capacities of the established LAGs in the three target municipalities in budget literacy and budget monitoring techniques and enable them to advocate for GRB at their local communities

<p><b>Output 3</b> Women’s capacity to start and develop own business is strengthened by coaching and mentoring, improved access to finance and agro-extension services.</p>	<p><b>Indicator 3.1</b> Number of new enterprises opened/ owned by rural women in rural tourism as a result of the project interventions</p> <p><b>Baseline:</b> 0 <b>Target: 2021</b> to be decided during the inception phase</p>		<p><b>Risk:</b> Low level of participation of women in project interventions in the field <b>Mitigating action:</b> Close coordination of actions with local governments, active awareness raising campaign in the regions</p>	<p><u>Led by UN Women with the support of FAO</u></p>
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	<b>Indicator 3.2</b> Number of rural women's products and services that receive a quality certificate  Baseline: 0 Target: 2021 <sup>41</sup> : <b>10</b>			
<p><b>Activities to be implemented by UN Women:</b></p> <p>3.1 Capacity building of identified rural women's groups (as per selected value chains and tourism corridors) on: business skills development; access to financing; specific joint actions such as purchasing, quality control, marketing, branding, food processing and storage.</p> <p>3.2 Direct support (in alignment with activity 4.6) and know-how on business start-up, business growth, business formalization and taxes.</p> <p>3.3 Provide trainings and foster dialogue between rural women beneficiaries on common value chains, businesses and business cooperatives.</p> <p>3.4 Improve rural women's business operators' capacity and the quality and marketing of their products.</p> <p>3.5 Enhance the capacities of women-led associations to jointly manage productive assets and deliver effective services to their members.</p> <p><b>Activities to be implemented by FAO:</b></p> <p>3.1 Provision of technical support to activities 3.1, 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4 on value chain development.</p>				

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<sup>41</sup> Target revised

<p><b>Output 4</b> Technical support is provided to MoARD for gender-responsive policy and law formulation and implementation and rural development, including the LEADER framework.</p>	<p><b>Indicator 4.1</b> : No. of policy recommendations and new/revised policies, laws and by-laws and regulatory frameworks provided by the project for consideration of MoARD and other ministries that support women entrepreneurship in rural areas</p> <p><b>Baseline:</b> Year: 2018 Value: 1 (RD Strategy contains gender targets)</p> <p><b>Target: Year: 2021</b> Value: 6</p> <p><b>Source:</b> Ministry of Finance and Economy. Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development</p>		<p><b>Risk:</b> Poor support of MoARD and other national partners</p> <p><b>Mitigating action:</b> MoARD and other national partners are going to be engaged in the project from the beginning</p>	<p><u>Led by UN Women with support FAO</u></p>
	<p><b>Indicator 4.2</b> Number of training and capacity development events for monitoring and reporting on SDG indicators 5.a.1 and 5.a.2, and on advancing towards the target 5.a and CEDAW article 14.</p> <p><b>Baseline:</b> Year 2018 Value: 0 <b>Target:</b> 2021: 4</p> <p><b>Indicator 4.3:</b> Traditional business incubators for women developed <b>Baseline:</b>0</p>			

	<p><b>Target<sup>42</sup>:</b> 2021: 3</p> <p><b>Indicator 4.3</b> Number of women businesses assisted through the incubators services</p> <p><b>Baseline: 0</b></p> <p><b>Target 2021<sup>43</sup>:</b> 300</p>			
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<sup>42</sup> Target revised.

<sup>43</sup> Target revised.

**Activities to be implemented by FAO:**

4.1 Provision of long-term technical assistance to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development on the preparation of LAGs formation and operation, legal framework and related by laws, with gender lenses, including the provision of best practices trainings and in the house technical support.

4.2 Assessment of bottlenecks for advancing towards SDG target 5.a, including progress on indicators 5.a.1 and 5.a.2, in line with CEDAW article 14 and the FAO guidelines for notaries for gender-responsive services, and development of a roadmap.

4.3 Develop capacities of the Ministry of Agriculture, INSTAT, IPROS, Ministry of Justice, and related public and private stakeholders to monitor and report on SDG 5.a. 1 and 5.a.2, and to advance to achieve the SDG target 5.a.

4.4 Feasibility study for the implementation in Albania by law of the figure of the farm co-manager (already existing in Belgium and Spain), for improved access of spouses of farmers to land, social protection, health insurance, public grants, credits and other resources and services.

4.5 Development of 3 traditional products incubators for women. In close cooperation with MoARD 3 traditional products incubators for women will be established with tailored services for women needs (in alignment with activity 3.2 and 3.5).

**Activities to be implemented by UN Women:**

4.6 Provision of technical support on effective gender mainstreaming of activities 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4

4.7 Development of 3 traditional products incubators for women. In close cooperation with MoARD 3 traditional products incubators for women will be established with tailored services for women needs (in alignment with activity 3.2 and 3.5).

4.8 Technical Assistance to MoARD to engender the Strategy of Rural Development (in alignment with activity 4.1)

4.9 Technical Assistance to planning and budgeting specialist and gender equality employs to integrate GRB in the MTBP and conduct its monitoring



## ANNEX 5: LIST OF STAKEHOLDERS PARTICIPATING IN THE EVALUATION

Institution/organization	Position
UN Women Albania	Country representative
	Project team members (4)
	Other personal (1)
FAO	Country representative
	Project coordinator
	Regional office representatives, including gender specialist (2)
Ministry of Agriculture	General Director of the General Economic and Support Services Directorate
Ministry of Finance	Director of Local Finances
Ministry of Health and Social Protection	Head of Social Inclusion and GE Policies Department
SASPAC	Representatives (2) Department of strategic planning Coordinator Chief of section for coordination of no EU foreign aid
INSTAT	Representatives (3) General Director for Statistical production Former director for statistics in agriculture Head of Crops and Land statistics sector
Albanian Network for Rural Development (ANRD)	National Coordinator
Independent expert	GRB expert at local level
Municipality of Elbasan	Head of Mayor's Cabinet
Shirgjan administration	Administrative unit agronomist
LAG Elbasan	Members (4)
Agriculture Federation of Elbasan	Representative (1)
Women final beneficiaries in Elbasan	4
Women from local community in Elbasan (non-beneficiaries)	1 woman
Kolonja Municipality	General Secretary and 2 representatives
LAG Kolonje	Director and 3 members
Women final beneficiaries in Leskovik	3 members of incubator
Representative of broader local community in Leskovik	1 member of community
Women final beneficiaries in Gramsh	5
Business owner Gramsh	Representative (1)
AICS (donor)	Representatives (3)
UNCT Albania	Resident Coordinator Head of Office(1)
GIZ	Sustainable Rural Development project Program Manager(1)

## ANNEX 6: DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

### Tentative questions for UN Women and FAO

Thank you for your time and readiness to contribute to this evaluation process. This interview will inform the evaluation of UN Women's and FAO's project 'Gender Rural Equality and Tourism (GREAT)' in Albania (2021-2025).

Evaluators introduce themselves

This evaluation aims to assess the relevance of the project, its coherence with other interventions of implementing organizations but also external stakeholders, the effectiveness of the strategies applied, to capture the results, identify key enabling and hindering factors in implementation, assess prospects for sustainability and support learning for future similar interventions.

Findings, lessons learned, and recommendations will inform future programming of UN Women and FAO in this area. In addition to interviews with UN Women, FAO, national and local governments representatives, CSOs, media and experts, we analyse broad spectrum of documentation.

Considering your position, your perspective is extremely valuable.

Any information that you provide to us will be held confidential - including our notes of this interview. We will not attribute any specific comments or information to you or your organization/institution. We are taking notes for our own use, but we are not otherwise recording this conversation.

DATE:

NAME OF INTERVIEWEE:

POSITION HELD IN ORGANIZATION:

ORGANIZATION:

INTERVIEWERS:

#### RELEVANCE

1. To what extent was the design of the intervention and its results relevant to the needs and priorities of the beneficiaries?
  - a. Please describe the priorities and situation in the country related to position of rural women, their prevailing economic engagement and their role in the rural development?
  - b. How much were their needs taken into account during the project design? In which ways?
  - c. Please describe who are key stakeholders at national and local level whose mandate and work is dedicated to WEE in rural communities?
  - d. How much were the needs of key state stakeholders at national and local levels taken into account during the project design and in which ways?
  - e. How much project design paid attention to the intersectionality among rural women, particularly most vulnerable (note to the interviewer: check about disability inclusion)? How their needs are addressed through the project design?
  - f. Which needs and priorities of women were identified as crucial that served as the basis for project design?
  - g. Which needs and priorities of governmental and non-governmental stakeholders at national and local level were taken into account for the project design?
2. To what extent is the intervention consistent with the national and rural development strategies in the area of rural women empowerment and government priorities?
  - a. Please list key national policies in area of development, SDGs, rural development, agriculture, gender equality, employment, green transition, that were taken into account during project design with the aim to align project objectives with national policies

- b. Please describe which other national/governmental priorities guided project design? Are some of them grounded in the international GEWE commitments? Which ones (CEDAW, Beijing, SDGs)?
  - c.
- 3. To what extent key national and local level partners were involved in the project's conceptualization and design process?
  - a. Were they involved directly?
  - b. Was indirectly used experience and knowledge on their needs and priorities? Where this knowledge comes from, any previous projects?
- 4. Is project still relevant? Why?

#### COHERENCE

- 5. To what extent does the project fit within UN Women's and FAO's Strategic Plans, and how it contributes to their internal coherence, enabling synergies with their other interventions in this area?
  - a. Are there synergies between project and other areas of work of UN Women and FAO? Which ones?
- 6. To what extent is the project coherent with UNSDCF Albania and does enable synergies with other interventions in the area of women's economic empowerment, agriculture and rural development?
  - a. To which UNSDCF outcomes and outputs contributes?
  - b. How much is coherent with other interventions in same outcome areas, by other agencies?
- 7. To what extent the project is in complementarity, harmonization and coordination with the interventions of other external actors' interventions (non-UN) in the same context and in the women economic empowerment area?

#### EFFECTIVENESS

- 8. To what extent have the expected results of the project been achieved on both outcome and output levels?
  - a. Are there any planned results not achieved? Why?
  - b. What are the results that exceeded planned levels, if any?
  - c. Were there any unforeseen results, whether positive or negative? Which ones, for whom? How they happened?
- 9. How effective have the selected strategies and approaches been in achieving project results?
  - a. Are any of strategies innovative, resulting in good practices?
  - b. Were there any strategies that were found not sufficiently effective? Which ones?
- 10. What were factors contributing to the successful achievement of results and where were inhibiting factors?
- 11. Has the project achieved any unforeseen results, either positive or negative? For whom?

#### EFFICIENCY

- 12. Have resources (financial, human, technical support, etc.) been allocated strategically to achieve the project outcomes?
- 13. Has there been effective leadership and management of the project including the structuring of management and administration roles to maximize results?
  - a. How coordination between UN Women and FAO was organized, were there any bottlenecks?
  - b. Where does accountability lie?
  - c. Have the project's results been delivered in a timely manner?
  - d. How were monitoring and evaluation organized?
  - e. To what extent was the monitoring data objectively used for management action and decision making?

#### POTENTIAL FOR IMPACT

- 14. Is there a potential measurable impact of the project intervention on the target group across all dimensions of empowerment?
  - a. What evidence exist that the project has delivered longer term results?
  - b. How project impacts or is likely to impact women end beneficiaries and the most vulnerable groups of rural women?

15. To what extent is the project bringing about gender transformative changes that address the root causes of gender inequalities?
  - a. To what extent is the project changing the dynamics of power in relationships between different groups?

#### SUSTAINABILITY

16. What is the likelihood that the benefits from the project will be maintained for a reasonably long period of time after the project phase out?
  - a. To what extent the intervention succeeded in building individual and institutional capacities of rights-holders and duty-bearers to ensure sustainability of benefits and more inclusive practices to local development and good governance?
17. How effectively has the project generated country ownership of the results achieved, the establishment of partnerships with relevant stakeholders and the development of in-country capacities to ensure sustainability of efforts and benefits?
  - a. How was ownership generated for different types of stakeholders and at different levels?
  - b. To what extent the project fostered the participation of relevant CSOs and women's organizations?
  - c. Have CSOs increased capacities for continued participation and engagement? How CSOs can further contribute to the sustainability of results?
  - d. What factors are/will be critical to maintain project results in the long term?
18. To what extent has the exit strategy been well planned and successfully implemented?
19. To what extent has the project been able to promote replication and/or up-scaling of successful practices?

#### CROSSCUTTING ISSUES

20. To what extent have been gender equality and empowerment of women, human rights, disability inclusion, environmental sustainability and accountability principles and strategies been integrated into the projects design and implementation?

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. What would be your recommendation for future programming in this area?
2. Any other comments/recommendations?

### **Tentative questions for project partners (ministries, governments, CSOs)**

Thank you for your time and readiness to contribute to this evaluation process. This interview will inform the evaluation of UN Women's and FAO's project 'Gender Rural Equality and Tourism (GREAT)' in Albania (2021-2025).

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Findings, lessons learned, and recommendations will inform future programming of UN Women and FAO in this area. In addition to interviews with UN Women, FAO, national and local governments representatives, CSOs, media and experts, we analyse broad spectrum of documentation.

Considering your position, your perspective is extremely valuable.

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Date:  
Name of Interviewee:  
Position held in organization:  
Organization:  
Interviewers:

## Introduction

Please describe your role in the GREAT project, in which activities you have participated?

1. What was your role in the implementation of GREAT project, in which activities you have participated?

## RELEVANCE

2. From your perspective what are the major problems related to position of women and gender equality in rural areas, particularly with focus on women's economic participation in agriculture and in the context of rural development?
3. What exactly are priorities of your ministry/institution/organization that are addressed through GREAT project?
4. Was your institution/organization asked to take part in the programming/project preparation of the GREAT project? In which way?
5. How relevant is GREAT project for the country/local communities targeted by the interventions needs and priorities? Why?
6. How relevant is GREAT project for your institution/organization/you personally or more generally social group that with which you identify? Was there something that was missing as part of the project to ensure more relevance and to enable higher effectiveness?
7. From your perspective is the GREAT project still relevant? Shall it be some similar intervention organized in the future?

## EFFECTIVENESS

8. What are the main project results from your perspective? What was particularly effective and what were maybe less effective aspects, under-achievements? Did project contribute to capacity building of your institution/organization? How?
9. Has the Project contributed to improvement of the overall situation in your jurisdiction and in what respect?
10. How effective were project strategies to your knowledge?
  - a. Capacity building
  - b. Advocacy
  - c. Coordination and networking
  - d. Direct support to WEE
  - e. Strengthening local actors through LAGs
  - f. Focusing on policies and governmental capacities
11. What were the factors contributing to the successful achievement of results and what were the inhibiting factors?
12. any unexpected positive or negative result for you, your institution/organization? Something that was not planned initially to be achieved by project activities? Which one?

## COHERENCE

13. How this project is aligned with other initiatives in the area of WEE in agriculture and rural development which is implemented or planned by your institution/organization?

14. In the landscape of international organizations, are there any comparative advantages of UN Women and FAO for work in the area of GEWE in the context of WEE in agriculture and rural development? What would these be?

#### EFFICIENCY

15. Was the project implemented in the most efficient way, or you see the other ways that could more efficiently use financial and human resources invested in the project? com, in your opinion? How would you describe the cooperation, coordination, communication with project implementing teams?
16. Could the project be more efficiently implemented otherwise?

#### IMPACT

17. In your opinion, are already visible some higher level changes due to the project implementation, including shifting power relations, changing structural, root causes of gender equality, changes of norms, attitudes, behaviours?

#### SUSTAINABILITY

18. Are the project results sustainable in your view? What would be the positive factors that can ensure sustainability??
- a. Has the government dedicated resources, ensured institutional mechanisms
  - b. How will sustainability be measured?
  - c. Have been capacities of duty bearers and right holders sufficiently enhanced to maintain project results?
  - d. Was the ownership generated among local stakeholders to foster accountability and responsibility?
  - e. Are project results embedded into national and local policies to ensure long-term support?
  - f. Is there financial sustainability?
  - g. Are income-generating activities sustainable?
  - h. Were there attitudinal and behavioural changes that can further support maintenance of results?
19. And what are the obstacles to sustainability?
20. Is there potential for replication, upscaling of project results, models?

#### CROSSCUTTING ISSUES

21. How were the issues of human rights, environmental sustainability and disability inclusion addressed through the project?

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

3. What would be your recommendation for future programming in this area?
4. Any other comments/recommendations?

### **Tentative questions for donor**

Thank you for your time and readiness to contribute to this evaluation process. This interview will inform the evaluation of UN Women's and FAO's project 'Gender Rural Equality and Tourism (GREAT)' in Albania (2021-2025).

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Findings, lessons learned, and recommendations will inform future programming of UN Women and FAO in this area. In addition to interviews with UN Women, FAO, national and local governments representatives, CSOs, media and experts, we analyse broad spectrum of documentation.

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Date:

Name of Interviewee:

Position held in organization:

Organization:

Interviewers:

#### RELEVANCE

1. From your perspective what are the major problems that was addressed by the GREAT project? How your organization came to the idea to support this project?
2. What exactly are your priorities around this issue?
3. What comments do you have on GREAT relevance for the needs and priorities in Albania, targeted local communities, rural women?
4. Are there still uncovered needs to be addressed by potential donors, including you?

#### COHERENCE

5. What is the unique role of the Italian support to UN Women, and FAO if any?

#### EFFECTIVENESS

6. To what extent you find your support to UN Women and FAO effective?

#### EFFICIENCY

7. To what extent was the financial contribution justified by the benefits generated, in your opinion?
8. Was the project implemented in the most efficient way compared to alternatives, in your opinion?
9. Could the programmes be more efficiently implemented otherwise?

#### IMPACT

10. According to your knowledge, what is the impact of the project up today? Did project triggered higher level changes?
11. How that compares to your expectations?

#### SUSTAINABILITY

5. Are there any risks for the sustainability of the project?
6. What would be the most likely consequences of stopping or withdrawing the existing Italian support?



## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. What would be your recommendation for future programming in this area?
2. Any other comments/recommendations?

## **Tentative questions other international organizations (UN, EU, GIZ, etc.)**

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Date:

Name of Interviewee:

Position held in organization:

Organization:

Interviewers:

## COHERENCE

1. How your organization is engaged in the WEE in rural areas? What are the key priorities in regard to this issue from the perspective of your organization?
2. Are you familiar with GREAT project and how it relates to your initiatives in the area of WEE in agriculture and rural development? Is there any coherence, synergy? Please provide example of how the GREAT project complements some of the initiatives/projects your organization implements?
3. How do you perceive UN Women and FAO as international partners to Albania and their contribution to the WEE in agriculture and rural areas. Are there any comparative advantages compared to other international organizations?
4. Are there any coordination mechanisms in the country that can better synchronise the work of international organizations in this area?
5. How cooperation can further improve, evolve?

## EFFECTIVENESS

6. To your knowledge, what would be the major results, contributions by UN Women and FAO through GREAT project?

## Tentative questions for final beneficiaries

Thank you for your time and readiness to contribute to this evaluation process. This interview will inform the evaluation of UN Women's and FAO's project 'Gender Rural Equality and Tourism (GREAT)' in Albania (2021-2025).

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Date:

Name of Participants:

Position held in organization:

Organization:

Interviewers:

1. How did you learn about GREAT project and became involved?
2. What were your personal benefits from taking part in the project? ? What have you learned, which new skills you gained or enhanced, how do you use these skills today?
3. Did the project help you to improve economic activity. How? Please provide examples.
4. How important is the support you received? Why?
5. What could have been done better?
6. What would you need further to improve your economic activity and participation in community?
7. Was something that could be more efficiently implemented during your participation in project activities?
8. What recommendations would you make for a future?
9. Any other comments?

## ANNEX 6: ToR

Terms of Reference of the evaluation can be found on the following [link](#).