

EXTERNAL FINAL EVALUATION

**“WOMEN’S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS”
A REGIONAL PROJECT OF UN WOMEN**



Submitted to: UN Women Georgia Country Office



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Cover Photo: Woman beneficiary in Kvemo Kartli, Georgia. Photo: UN Women/Maka Gogaladze.

Evaluation Team:



TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----------|
| LIST OF TABLES..... | v |
| LIST OF FIGURES..... | v |
| ACRONYMS..... | vi |
| 1. The WEESC Project and Evaluation Context..... | 1 |
| 1.1 The WEESC Project Description and Theory of Change..... | 3 |
| 1.2 South Caucasus Regional and Country Context | 7 |
| 1.3 WEESC Project Boundaries and Complexity..... | 8 |
| 1.4 WEESC Key Project Stakeholders | 9 |
| 1.5 Implementation Status of the WEESC Project..... | 10 |
| 2. Evaluation Purpose, Objectives and Scope..... | 13 |
| 2.1 Evaluation Purpose..... | 14 |
| 2.2 Objectives of Evaluation | 14 |
| 2.3 Evaluation Scope | 15 |
| 2.4 Evaluation Criteria | 16 |
| 2.5 Gender Equality and Human Rights Considerations..... | 16 |
| 3. Methodology..... | 18 |
| 3.1 Evaluation Approach and Methodology | 19 |
| 3.2 Data Collection and Sources | 19 |
| 3.3 Sampling Framework and Data Analysis..... | 21 |
| 3.4 Stakeholder Consultations..... | 25 |
| 3.5 Challenges and Limitations | 25 |
| 3.6 Ethical Considerations | 26 |
| 4. Findings..... | 27 |
| 4.1 Relevance | 28 |
| 4.2 Coherence..... | 34 |
| 4.3 Effectiveness..... | 37 |
| 4.4 Efficiency | 53 |
| 4.5 Sustainability | 61 |
| 4.6 Sustainability | 61 |
| 4.6 COVID-19 Situation and Impact | 66 |
| 5 Conclusions | 71 |
| 5.1 Overall Project..... | 72 |
| 5.2 Georgia..... | 74 |

| | |
|--|-----------|
| 5.3 Armenia..... | 75 |
| 5.4 Azerbaijan | 75 |
| 6 Lessons Learned | 77 |
| 6.1 Overall Project | 78 |
| 6.2 Regional Dimension of Project..... | 79 |
| 6.3 Georgia | 79 |
| 6.4 Armenia..... | 79 |
| 6.5 Azerbaijan | 80 |
| 7. Recommendations | 81 |
| 7.1 Overall Project | 82 |
| 7.2 Georgia | 92 |
| 7.3 Armenia | 93 |
| 7.4 Azerbaijan..... | 94 |
| List of Annexes..... | 97 |

LIST OF TABLES

| | |
|--|----|
| Table 1 – WEESC Project Expected Outcomes and Outputs | 4 |
| Table 2 – WEESC Project Financial Resources (August 2018 to June 2020) | 9 |
| Table 3 - Stakeholder Groups in Each Country..... | 9 |
| Table 4 - Project Expenditures to Date by Outcome, Project Management & Program Support..... | 12 |
| Table 5 - Evaluation Sampling Framework for Each Country..... | 22 |
| Table 6 - Evaluation Limitations and Mitigation Strategies | 25 |
| Table 7 – Assessment of Impact Targets and Achievements | 38 |
| Table 8 - Assessment of Validity of Existing Project Assumptions | 39 |
| Table 9 - Outcome 1 Targets and Achievements for (Self-) Employment of Women | 42 |
| Table 10 - Overview of Allocation of WEESC Budget Resources | 54 |
| Table 11 - COVID-19 Situation in the South Caucasus Region | 67 |
| Table 12 - Overall Project Recommendations..... | 82 |
| Table 13 – Georgia Specific Country Recommendations..... | 92 |
| Table 14 - Armenia: Country-Specific Recommendations | 93 |
| Table 15 – Azerbaijan Country-Specific Recommendations | 94 |

LIST OF FIGURES

| | |
|--|----|
| Figure 1 - Project Visual Theory of Change Constructed by the Evaluation Team..... | 5 |
| Figure 2 - WEESC Project Implementation in Georgia..... | 10 |
| Figure 3 - WEESC Project Implementation in Armenia..... | 11 |
| Figure 4 - WEESC Project Implementation in Azerbaijan..... | 11 |
| Figure 5 - Data Collection Methods and Sources | 21 |
| Figure 6 Women’s Access to Training and Financial Resources..... | 41 |
| Figure 7 - Proportion of Women Securing Economic Activities | 42 |
| Figure 8: Proportion of Women Securing Self-Employment and Employment | 45 |
| Figure 9: Top Six Sectors for Women’s Self-Employment..... | 46 |
| Figure 10: Progress in Achieving Outcome 3 – Institutional Level | 51 |
| Figure 11: The Systemic Change Framework | 65 |
| Figure 12 - Proposed Revised Theory of Change..... | 96 |

ACRONYMS

| | |
|----------|--|
| ADA | Austrian Development Agency |
| ADC | Austrian Development Cooperation |
| AMFA | Azerbaijan Micro-Finance Association |
| APMA | Agricultural Projects Management Agency of Georgia |
| ARDA | Agricultural and Rural Development Agency |
| ARMSTAT | National Statistical Service of the Republic of Armenia |
| AWEDA | Association for Women Entrepreneurship Development in Azerbaijan |
| CEDAW | International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women |
| CERD | International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination |
| CGEP | Country Gender Equality Profile |
| COVID | Coronavirus-19 |
| CMW | International Convention on the Rights of Migrant Workers and Their Families |
| CRPD | Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities |
| CRRC | Caucasus Resource Research Centres |
| CSO | Civil Society Organisation |
| DWCP | Decent Work Country Program |
| EMG | Evaluation Management Group |
| EPIC | Equal Pay International Coalition |
| ERG | Evaluation Reference Group |
| EU | European Union |
| Eurostat | European Statistical Office |
| EU-STEP | Statistics through Eastern Partnership |
| FGD | Focus Group Discussion |
| GBA+ | Gender-Based Analysis Plus (re: intersectionality) |
| GEC | Gender Equality Council of the Parliament of Georgia |
| GEOSTAT | National Statistics Office of Georgia |
| GEWE | Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment |
| GFA | Association of Finance Officers of Georgian Local Self-Governing Units |
| GIA | Gender Impact Assessment |
| GIZ | Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit |
| GPG | Gender Pay Gap |
| GRB | Gender Responsive Budgeting |
| ICCPR | International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights |
| ICESCR | International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights |
| IDP | Internally Displaced Person |
| ILO | International Labour Organization |
| ISET | International School of Economics at Tbilisi State University |
| JAWE | Joint Action for Women's Economic Empowerment in Georgia (UN Women Georgia's cost-share project) |
| KRDF | Kakheti Regional Development Foundation of Georgia |
| LFS | Labour Force Survey |
| LGA | Local Government Authority |
| M&E | Monitoring and Evaluation |

WEESC Evaluation Report

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| MLSA | Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of Armenia |
| MoESD | Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia |
| MoFA | Ministry of Finance Training Academy of Georgia |
| MoIDPOTLHSA | Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labour, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia |
| MOU | Memorandum of Understanding |
| MRDI | Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure of Georgia |
| MTAI | Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure of Armenia |
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organization |
| OECD-DAC | Organisation for Economic Co-operation & Development - Development Assistance Committee |
| PGA | Participatory Gender Audit |
| PPP | Public-Private Partnership |
| PwC | PricewaterhouseCoopers |
| RIA | Regulatory Impact Assessment |
| RBM | Results Based Management |
| RRF | Results and Resources Frameworks |
| SCFWCA | State Committee for Family, Women and Children Affairs of Azerbaijan |
| SDC | Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation |
| SDGs | Sustainable Development Goals |
| SHG | Self-Help Group |
| SIL | Social Innovation Lab |
| SME | Small and Medium Enterprises |
| TASO | TASO Foundation |
| ToC | Theory of Change |
| TUS | Time Use Survey |
| UNCT | United Nations Country Team |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Programme |
| UNEG | United Nations Evaluation Group |
| UNEP | United Nations Environment Programme |
| UNSDCF | United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework |
| UN Women | United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women |
| VAW | Violence Against Women |
| WEE | Women's Economic Empowerment |
| WEEI | Women's Economic Empowerment Index |
| WEF | World Economic Forum |
| WEESC | Women's Economic Empowerment in the South Caucasus |
| WEPS | Women's Empowerment Principles: Equality Means Business |
| WIC | Women's Information Center |
| Women Count | Making Every Woman and Girl Count (UN Women's global flagship project) |
| WRC | Women's Resource Center |



Beneficiary women in Armenia. Photo?

Executive Summary

Women's economic empowerment (WEE) is increasingly considered to be a prerequisite for realizing gender equality, strengthening women's agency and achieving sustainable development for all as agreed in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with an aim to reduce inequalities and to "leave no one behind".

There has been some progress in recent years in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia in terms of reducing gender inequality. Yet, several international indices such as the World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report (2017) and the Social Progress Imperative Index (2018) show that work remains to be done to remove gender-based discrimination and achieve the full and equal participation of women in society. Social and cultural barriers, gendered division of work and unpaid care work, as well as weaker financial incentives for women to work as reflected in the pay gap, prevent women from engaging in income generating activities in the three countries.

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

The primary purpose of this formative evaluation is to assess Phase One performance and achievement of anticipated results with impartiality and rigor in order to highlight lessons learned, and to draw conclusions and develop recommendations that can be utilized in designing Phase Two of the project.

The information generated by the evaluation will be used by different stakeholders to: 1) contribute to building of a consolidated evidence base on effective WEE strategies in all three countries; and 2) facilitate deep reflection, learning and strategic planning for further WEE programming at grassroots, law and policy, as well as institutional levels, including the promotion of women's participation in decision-making within their respective communities.

The overall structure of the evaluation is based on a utilization-focused and mixed methods approach that examine a number of criteria central to OECD-DAC's method for evaluating development interventions including relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability. This approach takes into account both the existing project Theory of Change by examining the outputs and outcomes against the program's key indicators of success and the socio-economic and WEE contexts of the three countries. The evaluation has also been informed by feminist, rights and responsibilities-based and inter-cultural theories and has also considered the broader WEE policy and legal systems both regionally and nationally which the WEESC project is seeking to influence.

Relevance - Is the Intervention Doing the Right Things?

The three-pronged approach to addressing women's economic empowerment is viewed as highly relevant within the participating countries. The programming was considered important by stakeholders for improving the enabling environment for women's participation in the economic activities and aligned well with the international and national priorities in relation to WEE.

The project design is highly relevant in terms of targeting women with multiple vulnerabilities. Under Outcome 1, women beneficiaries shared positive feedback related to grants for start-up businesses and gender responsive budgeting; however, they indicated the need to improve the training component to better align with existing economic activities and growth opportunities in their regions. While the policy level work under Outcomes 2 and 3 is viewed as highly relevant, stakeholders including women beneficiaries, have expressed the need to better include issues around ‘unpaid care’, ‘gendered norms’, in addition to ‘policies and services targeting entrepreneurship’.

There is also a need to better connect Outcome 1 with Outcomes 2 and 3 and adopt a more strategic approach to targeting priority economic sectors for women’s economic activity and similarly, for engagement with the private sector.

Coherence: How Well Does The WEESC Project Fit?

There is ample evidence that the WEESC Project is very compatible with other GEWE interventions in the South Caucasus Region. The WEESC Project threefold mandate is clearly aligned with UN Women’s Strategic Plan and with UNDP priorities in the South Caucasus Region. The Project has developed many synergies within the UN system, UNCTs, other projects of UN Women and UNDP, in addition to coordinating with government entities in each country in order to avoid duplication of efforts. UN Women and UNDP are seen as having a distinct comparative advantage in the region around WEE given their combined expertise in GE and sustainable development.

The UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks that were agreed upon with all three national governments in 2016 laid the foundation for project implementation, according to their respective priorities for achieving SDGs, thereby improving each country’s international human rights commitments under CEDAW and other legal instruments, particularly related to equitable economic development.

Effectiveness: Is the Intervention Achieving Its Objectives?

There have been variable results across the three Outcome areas in the countries of implementation. Under Outcome 1, the Project has achieved 87% of its target as of December 2020 across the three countries in terms of the ‘number of self-(employed) women for at least 6 months, with six months remaining in project implementation. The majority of benefits to women achieved under Outcome 1 relate to self-employment which also includes grants provided by the project to support the establishment of women’s businesses. However, there is a need to further enhance targeting criteria and the training being provided to women, by incorporating learner-centered models that facilitate the development of different learning pathways and related support services (i.e. self-employment), thereby enabling customization at country and local levels to ensure the content is relevant to local needs.

Securing employment was viewed as one of the greatest challenges under Outcome 1 as women continued to face difficulty in securing jobs, a pattern further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The training and economic opportunities provided by the project resulted in increased self-confidence of women beneficiaries. However, there has been little to no change observed in decision-making, control/power relations and gendered perceptions of women’s roles.

Fifteen companies have endorsed the WEPs (11 in Armenia and 4 in Azerbaijan) and their engagement in the project has helped to increase networking among like-minded companies. However, project activities with the private sector have been experimental and there no clear evidence yet on the

application of the changes emanating from adoption of the WEPs. Going forward, accompanying incentives for the private sector to implement these changes will need to be explored and additional demonstration activities tested together with the private sector in these countries.

In Georgia and Armenia, under Outcomes 2 and 3, significant work has been undertaken at the local governance and policy level, with a particular focus on formal employment and GRB. However, stakeholders expressed the need to continue work on the institutionalisation of the policies and to also focus on policies geared towards self-employment, in addition to wage employment, to ensure better integration across the Outcome areas.

Efficiency: How Well Are Resources Being Used?

The WEESC project delivers results in a reasonably economical and timely fashion overall given the constraints caused by the COVID pandemic, conflicts, and changes in governments. The strategic allocation of project resources to the implementing agencies has been equitably spread between the three countries, with almost half of the net budget addressing the needs of poor and socially marginalized women in the rural regions who are the primary direct beneficiaries. The timeliness of outputs and activities implementation has been reasonable given the negative impacts of both the COVID-19 pandemic and the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Project planning and implementation with stakeholders and other actors have proven to be significantly effective, yet there are a number of areas which call for strengthening. Project leadership and management also received a high approval rate from key implementing staff; however, a clearer definition of roles and responsibilities and management structure was identified as requiring some adjustment to enhance overall efficiencies.

The assessment of cost-efficiency proved difficult due to a lack of financial data based on a breakdown by budget line item due to UN Women's centralized financial reporting processes, however the analysis that was undertaken did not surface any key issues.

Project M&E mechanisms put in place are standard practice, however there is a need for a consistent tracking tool to improve the efficiency of results reporting and assessment and a need for designated M&E personnel in each country. The utilization of M&E data has been limited in that the performance measurement indicators established at the Project's outset were all quantitative in nature and do not capture the gender-sensitive qualitative measurement of GE and WEE results.

Sustainability: Will the Benefits Last?

There is evidence of commitment to sustainability in the form of institutionalisation across all levels, however, progress has been variable. As it relates to sustainability at the grassroots level with women beneficiaries, their ability to network through the women's group has the strongest potential to continue. Evidence also suggests an increase in income of women who have been able to secure self or wage employment; yet, for self-employed women, continuity of economic activity remains subject to vulnerability due to inconsistent markets in the current context and their limited ability to expand into new alternative markets. Wage-employed women, on the other hand, are concerned about the nature of their contract as many of them have service contracts which tend to be precarious and lack benefits.

In terms of private sector interventions, there is acknowledgement by the private sector of the importance of gender inclusive practices. However, at this point, the private sector is still in the process

of adopting such practices and further work is needed to demonstrate how the WEPs and inclusive business models can be applied and operationalized in each country.

As it relates to local and national government interventions, there is acknowledgement and commitment from local and governments to be more gender responsive. Certain progressive practices such as GIAs and GRB are in the process of being institutionalised. However, there is a risk of discontinuity given the relatively high turn-over of government officials and further work is needed to reinforce GE and WEE mechanisms.

Summary: COVID-19 Situation for Women in the South Caucasus Region and WEESC Implementation:

Overall, the project has successfully adapted to the new reality, launching timely and innovative initiatives to assist women beneficiaries and their families cope with the pandemic, while also adjusting project implementation modalities and re-profiling budget resources to facilitate maximum support. For example, most of the planned activities since March 2020 have been conducted virtually and the savings derived from under-utilized travel budgets and face-to-face events were re-allocated to supporting WEE during the crisis.

However, there are also ongoing challenges and obstacles posed by the pandemic, particularly for self-employed women whose ability to put into practice benefits derived from the Project are currently undermined as many of their activities have been suspended due to shutdowns. Although the project adapted to a virtual modality and achieved some important successes, women were not able to fully attend the training sessions due to financial, technical and family constraints, although the Project has attempted to address these issues and will need to do so in the foreseeable future. Finally, the COVID-19 lockdown and travel restrictions have had a negative influence on the regional dimension of the project, although this can be counter-balanced by replicating some of the key innovations and best practices at county level in the design of Phase Two of the project.

| OVERALL PROJECT RECOMMENDATIONS | ACTIONS TO CONSIDER | TIMEFRAME & RANKING (L = low, M = medium, H = high priority) |
|---|---|---|
| <p>1. Strategic: Ensure that implementing partners, key stakeholders and a representative sample of women beneficiaries are proactively engaged in the design of Phase Two through participatory processes.</p> | <p>Hold virtual brainstorming sessions on Zoom with women from each WRC or Women’s Room, including the Coordinators during the project design and review process.</p> <p>Conduct participatory mapping exercises in the inception phase to ensure more social inclusion as well as participatory action research to promote local ownership of research results (designing research questions, identifying risks and mitigation strategies, validating assumptions and findings, etc.).</p> | <p>Immediate: H</p> <p>Short Term: M</p> |
| <p>2. Strategic: Refresh the inception analysis to look more closely at the factors that facilitate and limit women’s ability to secure (a) wage employment, and (b) self-employment across the three countries and the policies and the service provisions that are necessary to facilitate both types of economic activities.</p> | <p>Conduct new baseline studies and/or needs assessments that take into account the gendered relations and family dynamics by consulting both females and males from different age, ethnic, and religious groups. Ensure disabled, migrant and other disadvantaged people are included.</p> | <p>Immediate: H: As part of the transition to Phase 2 <i>before deciding</i> project activities</p> |
| <p>3. Strategic: Obtain a clear understanding of market potential or growth prospects for a wide range of economic activities before offering grants to women for self-employment, vocational training, or wage employment.</p> | <p>Conduct an economic analysis in each country to identify the sectors or economic activities that have growth opportunities both for formal employment and self-employment for women in the target rural regions and also those economic activities where women are currently active in. Use the analysis to decide which sectors or activities should be prioritized for project activities.</p> | <p>Immediate: H: As part of the transition to Phase 2 <i>before deciding</i> project activities</p> |
| <p>4. Strategic: Align Phase Two with new 4-year UNSDCF’s for three countries (2021-2025) along with their commitments under international human rights treaties, conventions, and relevant national legislation.</p> | <p>Incorporate/address recommendations from UN human rights committees under CEDAW, CERD, ICSECR, ICCPR, CMW, CRPD, and Special Rapporteur reports on Violence against Women as they relate to GE and WEE particularly.</p> <p>Work more closely with UNCT members such as OHCHR and UNHCR within each country, as well as national government authorities.</p> | <p>Immediate: H</p> <p>Ongoing: H</p> |

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| <p>5. Strategic: Strengthen the regional dimension of WEESC based on the comparative advantage of UN Women and UNDP in the region in knowledge management by formalizing a WEE sub-regional knowledge hub within UN Women Georgia.</p> | <p>Allocate specific resources to support a hub and an associated online platform to facilitate knowledge management and sharing.</p> <p>Create a regional level and country level knowledge sharing mechanism for stakeholder coordination whereby implementation partners and key stakeholders (including other relevant donor projects) can discuss the progress and coordinate activities to prevent duplication, share tools and amplify impact.</p> | <p>Short Term: H</p> <p>Medium Term: M</p> |
| <p>6. Operational: Enhance the involvement of local partners with expertise in GEWE or WEE and ensure they are allocated resources sufficient to enable their participation in the project.</p> | <p>Expand partnership networks especially in the targeted rural communities, to ensure WRCs and Women’s Rooms have more frequent contact with knowledgeable resource people. As it relates to the WRCs in Azerbaijan, more detailed recommendations are provided in Section 5.2</p> | <p>Short Term: M</p> |
| <p>7. Operational: Enhance the involvement of local governments and private enterprises at the grassroots level, with the objective of creating jobs for women.</p> | <p>Assess opportunities for job shadowing and volunteering for young women (and men) as part of a career development strategy for the next generation of gender-sensitive workers.</p> <p>Work with the local school authorities and chambers of commerce to create pilot GEWE projects in commercial sectors that enhance the resilience of the rural communities (i.e. that meet basic needs such as food, water, medicine, shelter, clothing, safety, and access to health facilities).</p> <p>Identify “champions” within these organisations to spearhead the programs and serve as role models in promoting gender inclusive and sexual harassment free workplaces. Mentorship could also be tested with more mature entrepreneurs to</p> | <p>Short-Medium Term: M</p> |

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| | <p>provide motivation and advisory support to other women.</p> <p>Where in-kind resources are provided by any partners, they should be both recognized and reflected in cost-efficiency analyses.</p> | |
| <p>8. Strategic: Develop further partnerships to facilitate awareness on gendered norms, and collaboration with market actors or other organisations who can offer services to support poor rural women in reducing their load of unpaid care</p> | <p>A range of models could be tested:</p> <p>(a) Models with the private sector, particularly with those companies that have endorsed the WEPs to promote flexible work hours so that women are encouraged to engage in formal employment.</p> <p>(b) Support services to meet unpaid care responsibility for women. For e.g. this could be part of the Women’s Rooms or WRC’s business model and be linked to the “care economy”.</p> <p>(c) Establishment of daycare support in the community as a social enterprise so that women can help themselves).</p> <p>(d) Consider engaging men and other household/community members to promote positive gendered norms and reduce traditional perceptions of women’s roles.</p> <p>This can also be linked to potential expansion of project scope to include social and civic empowerment.</p> | <p>Short-Medium Term: H</p> |
| <p>9. Strategic: Demonstrate some form of “graduation” to break the cycle of grant dependence in order to continue to further support and sustain self-employed women, especially those who are currently establishing their businesses and obtaining small grants from the WEESC project.</p> | <p>Identify strategic partners who can be long term sources of working capital for women. Engage with service providers or market actors (e.g. raw material suppliers, agro-dealers/retailers, financial institutes, etc.) to pilot models for products or services that enable women to access finance or credit using buyer contracts as a guarantee, or value chain financing.</p> | <p>Medium Term-Long Term: H</p> |

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| <p>10. Operational: Adjust the training program to be more learner-centric and better aligned with the needs, current level of understanding and experiences of the target groups in each country, and include the use of accelerated digital technology, including online courses and creation of videos for core modules.</p> | <p>Conduct a training needs assessment across two groups (self-employment and wage employment) in different areas and also identify the level of willingness and skill to engage with different medium, particularly, digital platforms.</p> <p>Leverage WRCs and Women’s Rooms to bring small groups together for digital training of those impoverished women who lack the facilities for online learning at home and provide related budget support for connectivity, and where required, devices.</p> <p>Identify strategic partners (e.g. vocational training services providers, knowledge providers and or other businesses who could outsource supply and also train women) who have the incentive to provide training or advisory/mentorship support. Collaboration with local or international service/knowledge providers might solve the certification or validation challenge and ease the way of women to wage-employment.</p> <p>Develop more modular training that includes core foundational or generic modules such as digital skills, book-keeping, management/business planning and advisory. This should be separated from advanced trainings (e.g marketing and those specific to sectors or technical skills such as production or quality control, with more practical examples); mentorship or linkages with experienced businesses/entrepreneurs. WEESC could also consider modules specific to the two WEE pathways (self-employment and employment).</p> | <p>Short Term: H</p> |
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| <p>11. Operational: Develop systems to ensure closer monitoring of training to assess relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of the learning</p> | <p>Consider contracting of specialized instruction design expertise, a blended approach to learning once COVID restrictions are eased and a higher level of resource allocation for training than has been currently allocated in Phase One.</p> <p>Conduct short tracer studies at least 6 months to 1 year after the training is complete with different cohorts to see what skills women have been able to apply in practice (why or why not) and track their progress with (self-) employment pathways in an effort to accelerate the uptake of skills and percentage of women who secure (self-) employment.</p> | <p>Immediate & Ongoing: M</p> |
| <p>12. Strengthen the M&E framework for Phase Two by harmonizing the tracking system of enhanced performance indicators as well as ensuring there are gender-sensitive qualitative indicators also built into WEESC LogFrame.</p> | <p>Designate specific M&E teams or personnel within each country and develop country-specific outputs mapped to the overall Theory of Change.</p> <p>Review the assumptions and indicators and strengthen the measurement around behaviour change and sustainability.</p> <p>Engage the regional UN Women Evaluation Unit in Istanbul to deliver capacity-building exercises for local personnel to further develop M&E competencies in the field and with implementation partners.</p> <p>Explore the use of cloud-based platform(s) for housing data and also presenting results in a user-friendly across multiple countries and partners.</p> | <p>Short Term: H</p> <p>Ongoing: M</p> |
| <p>13. Strengthen the program TOC and interventions to reflect linkage between Outcome 1 and Outcomes 2 and 3. This inter-linkage amongst the outcomes is a core element of the WEESC project design.</p> | <p>Currently, the majority of institutional interventions are geared towards employment, whereas, to date, there has been a greater uptake of women in self-employment, for multiple reasons. These include, but are not limited to,</p> | <p>Immediate: H</p> |

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| | <p>issues related to unpaid care, continued perception of gendered norms which limit women from taking up formal employment and the current COVID-19 context.</p> <p>The project needs to take these into account and develop potential activities to help mitigate these challenges. Alongside policies for employment, the project should also consider what needs to be done to reduce entry and expansion barriers in self-employment. For example, if finance is a key problem, then partnerships could be developed with banks, MFIs, savings and loan groups to introduce alternative financing models into the project. If working capital to buy raw materials is an option, the project could test out value chain financing models.</p> <p>For the employment pathway, in addition to supporting an enabling policy environment, the project should also explore which sectors offer high potential for jobs and based on this landscape assessment, work together with partners (both private and public sector) to enable increased jobs for women in these sectors. These could include such sectors as the green economy (agri-business, waste recycling, renewable energy), the care economy (daycares, elder care centres, women’s shelters), the health and safety sector (health care workers, personal support workers and emergency response workers).</p> <p>Increase engagement of implementing partners to facilitate linkages, particularly between Outcomes 1 and 2.</p> | |
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| <p>14. Operational: Improve the use of the M&E data for decision making purposes, not only for reporting purposes. The project should also revisit how it measures sustainability across different levels and focus more on adoption and behavior change.</p> | <p>Assess effectiveness and analyze (a) the variability of results from target and (b) the attrition rate from access to usage to benefit and the uptake/application (e.g. women applying the skills) and benefit (e.g. women securing jobs or self-employment). There should be a focus on assessing behaviour change and indicator(s) related to sustainability need to be revisited.</p> <p>Develop a clear sustainability and exit strategy, that is, how will these services and functions carry on in the long term without the support of external funding.</p> <p>Review and analyse findings against such indicators. See Figure 12 which illustrates recommendations for a revised TOC for Phase Two.</p> | <p>Immediate & Short Term: M</p> |
| <p>15. Operational: Enhance transparency and accountability for the use of resources (financial, human and material).</p> | <p>Report on resources utilized by all implementing partners broken down by specific budget-line items to more effectively determine more the cost-efficiency of each output/activity in Phase 2.</p> | <p>Ongoing: M</p> |
| <p>16. Operational: Position UN Women & UNDP should act as a role model for other project stakeholders as it relates to disaggregating data by sex and vulnerability.</p> | <p>UN Project Managers ensure disaggregated data by sex, age, minority status, disability, and income via agreements with implementing partners and any consultants hired.</p> <p>Share UN Women’s & UNDP’s corporate gender policies with all stakeholders, including gender-sensitive procurement policies, in order to contribute to the promotion of women-owned businesses and their legitimate place in the value chain.</p> <p>Encourage project stakeholders to model and promote their own gender-sensitive procurement</p> | <p>Short to Medium Term: M</p> |

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| | <p>policies to enhance their credibility with local governments, civil society and private sector companies working within the rural communities.</p> | |
| <p>17. Operational: Enhance the demand-driven aspect of the training provided to women to improve their business and their readiness for economic activities.</p> | <p>Analyze the demand or market for high-priority those sectors/services/products and the demand-driven opportunities for women in the employment sector.</p> <p>Facilitate linkages so that buyers are connected to these suppliers and employers see the benefit of hiring women. Explore promoting women’s involvement in investing in alternative initiatives such as small-scale renewable energy (solar, biogas, wind turbines), waste recycling operations (paper, plastics, glass, metals, and organic materials for composting, etc.).</p> | <p>Short Term: H</p> |
| <p>18. Operational: Develop pilot activities to demonstrate a shared incentive for the private sector to adopt policies and practices to improve absorption and retention of women at the workplace.</p> | <p>Conduct pilot initiatives with select private sector partners in relevant countries to capture and “demonstrate” the financial and social benefits of adopting the WEPs and resultant changes to corporate policies and practices.</p> <p>These initiatives could potentially include the following activities to be implemented directly with private sector partners (1) convene discussions to understand if companies are having issues with retention, absenteeism and employee turnover and also understand if there is scope for women’s (increased) employment in the organisation and rationale for the companies to hire more women; (2) conduct brief exploratory research to understand if any of the above issues are specific to women; (3) interview current female staff separately to obtain their individual perspectives and identify potential female role model/champions within the company (4) develop models with interested private sector partners to</p> | <p>Short to Medium Term: M</p> |

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| | <p>address above issues that may have been identified and align with international and regional best practice; and (5) share the learning with other private sector organisations and develop a community of practice of private sector partners committed to operationalizing the WEPs in the context of inclusive business models that embrace women’s economic empowerment.</p> <p>Given the current COVID-19 context, partnerships with local companies active in rural areas should be prioritized in Phase 2 by conducting landscape assessments in the 3 countries. There may be an opportunity to prioritize collaboration with local companies engaged in agri-business (i.e. wage employment opportunities) in light of food security issues related to COVID, and also potentially those engaged in the medical supplies sector.</p> <p>Such interventions have been undertaken with strong success by IFC in Asia, Market Development Facility in the Pacific and the Arab Women Enterprise Fund in Jordan and Egypt.</p> | |
| <p>19. Strategic: Develop a specific WEESC Phase Two COVID-19 Action Plan, including priority activities and resource allocation requirements.</p> | <p>The action plan should continue to address the ongoing immediate needs of poor and excluded women and also focus on medium-term strategic policy and institutional initiatives, as well as post-COVID recovery considerations.</p> <p>Consider the creation of a COVID-19 Gender Response Tracker that defines gender-sensitive measures as those that seek to directly address the risks and challenges that women and girls face in the COVID crisis, notably violence against women, unpaid care work and economic insecurity. Measures currently included in the tracker are clustered into 4 categories: Social Protection,</p> | <p>Immediate to Short Term: H</p> |

| | | |
|--|---|--|
| | Labour Markets, VAW and Economic and Fiscal Policies. | |
|--|---|--|

Source: Prepared by the Evaluation Team based on evaluation findings, conclusions and lessons learned.

| GEORGIA: COUNTRY-SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS | ACTIONS TO CONSIDER | TIMEFRAME & RANKING (L, M, H) |
|---|--|--------------------------------|
| <p>1. Strategic: Capitalize on the achievements and results of Phase One and deepen/expand activities in Outcomes 2/3 for improved policymaking and legislation for WEE and recommendations to ensure that the legislation harmonizes with international standards.</p> | <p>Provide much needed support to the line Ministries in order to enhance their GE and WEE capacity and help them translate their strategies and action plans into policy documents and standard operating procedures.</p> | <p>Short to Medium Term: M</p> |
| <p>2. Strategic: Accelerate work with municipal decision-makers to raise the awareness of the benefits of GRB and influence the institutionalization of GRB related work</p> | <p>GRB has been positioned as an auxiliary strategy for social mobilization activities in Phase One of the project. It has been successful in this regard, and in Phase Two, the WEESC project should address the current expectations among rural and vulnerable women that their voices will be heard by municipal government as it relates to GRB.</p> <p>Phase Two should expand the interaction with municipal governments to include decision-makers who can drive increased awareness and also ensure commitment to institutionalization of GRB at a municipal level.</p> | <p>Short to Medium Term: M</p> |

Source: Prepared by the Evaluation Team based on evaluation findings, conclusions and lessons learned

| ARMENIA: COUNTRY SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS | ACTIONS TO CONSIDER | TIMEFRAME & RANKING (L, M, H) |
|---|--|-------------------------------|
| <p>1. Strategic: To strengthen the linkages between the grassroots, law and policy, and institutional levels, allocate additional resources to working with local governments on reforming their bylaws and policies to encourage WEE and GE.</p> | <p>Identify further capacity-building (training, mentoring, coaching, etc.) and institutional-strengthening needs related to good governance, including e-governance for transparency.</p> <p>Work with local male leaders and administrators to change their perceptions on women in the public workforce. Identify GEWE champions to change community perceptions as to women’s roles in the economy and the “power of the purse”.</p> | <p>Short-Medium Term: M</p> |
| <p>2. Operational: Encourage local government to embrace e-governance, especially in times of COVID and beyond the pandemic, so as to enhance transparency around GE and WEE.</p> | <p>Consider developing a radio or TV program in Armenian which reaches the rural populations as well to promulgate developments concerning GE & WEE in times of COVID and beyond.</p> | <p>Short Term: M</p> |
| <p>3. Operational: Raise the awareness of local leaders, private sector companies, and the general public at public events or via online media about best practices and innovative approaches to GE and WEE.</p> | <p>Consider the establishment of a new Center for Creative Technology in Azerbaijan and Georgia as pilot projects like the one in Vardenis, Armenia. Assess how each Centre incorporates lessons learned from Phase One and</p> | <p>Medium Term: M</p> |

Source: Prepared by the Evaluation Team based on evaluation findings, conclusions and lessons learned.

| AZERBAIJAN: COUNTRY SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS | ACTIONS TO CONSIDER | TIMEFRAME & RANKING (L, M, H) |
|---|--|--------------------------------|
| <p>1. Strategic: During Phase Two, explore the integration of Outcomes 2 and/or 3 in Azerbaijan, using a similar approach to collaboration with UNDP Armenia.</p> | <p>Recruit a designated UN Women focal point in country to manage these outcome(s), shares its expertise, and works closely with UNDP alongside a network of public sector stakeholders, and outsourced NGOs, local and/or international WEE</p> | <p>Immediate-Short Term: H</p> |

| | | |
|---|---|-----------------------------|
| | <p>experts.</p> <p>Develop gender-responsive entrepreneurship support mechanisms in collaboration with the Ministry of Economy and Industry and National Fund of Assistance for Entrepreneurship.</p> <p>Partner with the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Azerbaijan, to assess and facilitate gender-responsive social protection programming and early childhood care services, given the high unpaid care responsibilities of women that limit their economic engagement.</p> <p>Identify leading gender-responsive businesses in the project regions, as well as women’s business associations.</p> | |
| <p>2. Strategic: Prioritize support to the Azerbaijani WRCs to build both governance and funding diversification models and options to lay the foundation for long(er) term sustainability.</p> | <p>Formulate both a capacity building/governance and exit strategy for the existing WRCs in order to develop a financially sustainable model(s) to enable independent operation.</p> <p>Test a number of alternative models such as contribution of a portion of income generated by women to support the services provided by the WRCs, social enterprise models and cooperative models (of profit sharing), etc.</p> | <p>Short-Medium Term: H</p> |
| <p>3. Operational: Engage private sector entities in the implementation of WRC activities, as well as in the design of capacity building and sustainability processes and models.</p> | <p>Use the WRCs to connect women to markets and, in exchange, a portion of the sales commission would support the WRC services.</p> <p>Connect the WRCs to broader women’s business associations or their regional chapters to facilitate potential mentorship and angel investor opportunities.</p> | <p>Short-Medium Term: M</p> |

Source: Prepared by the Evaluation Team based on evaluation findings, conclusions and lessons learned



Women from Qusar and neighboring villages participating in the opening ceremony, Azerbaijan. Photo: UNDP Azerbaijan

1. The WEESC Project and Evaluation Context

Women's economic empowerment (WEE) is increasingly considered to be a prerequisite for realizing gender equality, strengthening women's agency and achieving sustainable development for all as agreed in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with an aim to reduce inequalities and to "leave no one behind".

There has been some progress in recent years in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia in terms of reducing gender inequality. Specifically, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women recognized the advances made by Armenia such as amendments to their Electoral Code, the Law on Social Assistance, the Law on Identifying and Assisting Victims of Trafficking and Human Exploitation, the Law on Provision of Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, plus the establishment of the Council on Ensuring Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities between Women and Men and an employment strategy, to name a few.¹

Likewise, in Azerbaijan the same UN Committee acknowledged the gains made in the country, which included the Law on Amendments to the Family Code, the Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence, and the "Azerbaijan: Vision 2020" development strategy making gender equality a cross-cutting goal.² In December 2016, a package of strategic road maps was adopted in 11 areas by the Government of Azerbaijan, which was in line with the *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs), and 2 of the 11 road maps contained clauses about women and girls, namely the *Strategic Roadmap for Manufacturing and Processing of Agricultural Products in the Republic of Azerbaijan*, and the *Strategic Roadmap for the Production of Consumer Goods at the Level of Small and Medium Entrepreneurship*.

In Georgia, the UN Committee similarly recognized the country's adoption of an Act on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination, an Act on Internally Displaced Persons, Amendments to the Labour Code to enhance the protection of women's rights in the workplace, Amendments to the Election Code, an Act on Gender Equality, a National Action Plan on Gender Equality, and the establishment of a Gender Equality Council, as well as a Permanent Inter-Agency Coordination Council for the Prevention of Domestic Violence.³

Yet, several international indices such as the World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report (2017) and the Social Progress Imperative Index (2018) show that work remains to be done to remove gender-based discrimination and achieve the full and equal participation of women in society and in the economy.⁴ Overall, Armenia ranks 98 out of 153 countries, with a score of 0.684 on the Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI); however, they rank 79 in economic participation and opportunity, 45 in educational attainment, 148 in health and survival, and 114 in political empowerment. Azerbaijan ranks 94 overall, with a score of 0.687 on the GGGI; and 33 in economic participation and opportunity, 60 in educational attainment, 152 in health and survival, and 140 in political empowerment. And overall, Georgia ranks 74 with a score of 0.708 on the GGGI; and 61 in economic participation and opportunity, 29 in educational attainment, 68 in health and survival, and 94 in political empowerment.

The available statistics on women's labour force participation do not provide a complete picture, given the disproportionate engagement of women in the informal economy and vulnerable employment. However, data from the South Caucasus region does indicate that women in their productive years in the three countries in the region are less likely to participate in the labour force than men.⁵ The labour participation rates of the

¹ CEDAW/C/ARM/CO/5-6, 25 November 2016.

² CEDAW/C/AZE/CO/5, 12 March 2015.

³ CEDAW/C/GEO/CO/4-5, 24 July 2014.

⁴ See The Global Gender Gap Index and Country Profiles in the World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Report 2020*. Available from <https://www.weforum.org/reports/gender-gap-2020-report-100-years-pay-equality>. See also: ILOSTAT, *Modelled Estimates, Labour force participation rate by sex and age, 2016*; and *Women's Economic Opportunity Index, 2012*.

⁵ Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia (2018), *Women and Men in Armenia*. Available at https://www.armstat.am/file/article/gender_2018pdf.

working population (aged 15-64) indicate a gap of 18% in Armenia, 17% in Georgia and 6% in Azerbaijan. Similarly, women on average earn less than men in the three countries, with women's earnings as a proportion of men's earnings as 62% in Armenia, 64% in Georgia and 50% in Azerbaijan.⁶

Social and cultural barriers (e.g. poverty, disability, migratory status, violence against women, and discrimination based on sex, age and ethnicity/race/religion), gendered division of work and unpaid care work, as well as weaker financial incentives for women to work as reflected in the gender pay gap⁷, cumulatively prevent women from engaging equitably in income generating activities in the three countries.⁸ These dimensions are elaborated in the learning briefs and country presentations found in the annexes to this report; however, they include unequal domestic labour, the prevalence of women in the informal economy which lacks job security, social benefits such as paid sick leave, pensions, and maternity leave, plus the lack of daycare and kindergartens for working mothers.

1.1 The WEESC Project Description and Theory of Change

To address these challenges, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) Georgia launched a first main phase of the "Women's Economic Empowerment in the South Caucasus" (WEESC) Project in August 2018, with the goal of ensuring that women, particularly the poor and socially excluded, in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia are economically empowered and participate in relevant decision-making processes. The 3-year project is being implemented by UN Women Georgia, in close partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Armenia and Azerbaijan from August 2018-July 2021. It is funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the Austrian Development Agency (ADA). A second phase of the project is proposed for an additional 36 months to build on the results achieved during Phase One, lessons learned and recommendations from this evaluation, including an assessment of potential realignment of outcome areas across the three countries. A final exit phase is planned for an additional 12 months.

State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan (2018), Women and Men in Azerbaijan. Available at <https://www.stat.gov.az/source/gender/?lang=en>.

National Statistics Office of Georgia (2018), Women and Men in Georgia.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷At the WEESC Project's inception phase, the pay gap stood at 34 per cent in Armenia, 53 per cent in Azerbaijan and 36 per cent in Georgia according to the *Progress of the World's Women* report of 2015-2016.

⁸ Pro-Doc SDC-ADA October 2018.

Table 1 below outlines the 3 outcomes and 7 outputs that set the stage for achievement of the overarching goal of WEESC.

Table 1 – WEESC Project Expected Outcomes and Outputs

| Outcomes | Outputs |
|--|--|
| 1: Grassroots Level: Women, particularly the poor and socially excluded, use skills, economic opportunities and relevant information to be self-employed and/or to join the formal labour sector in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia | 1.1: Women, particularly poor and socially excluded, obtain skills and opportunities to be (self-) employed in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia |
| | 1.2: Women and women’s groups are empowered to participate in local planning and budgeting, e.g. Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) discussions |
| | 1.3: Selected private enterprises are empowered to serve as opinion leaders in terms of Women’s Economic Empowerment Principles (WEPEs) |
| 2: Policy and Legislation Level: Armenia and Georgia implement adequate legislative and policy frameworks to enable WEE | 2.1: Data and evidence generated to develop legislative and policy frameworks that enable WEE in Armenia and Georgia |
| | 2.2: National gender machineries of Armenia and Georgia supported to carry out changes in policy and legislative frameworks enabling WEE |
| 3: Institutional Level: Government and public institutions develop and deliver gender-responsive programs, public services, strategies and plans for WEE in Armenia and Georgia | 3.1: Targeted government and public institutions are strengthened to mainstream gender in their operations and develop gender-responsive programs, services and plans in Armenia and Georgia |
| | 3.2: Employees of targeted government and public institutions have knowledge and skills to mainstream gender in respective programs, public services, strategies and plans in Armenia and Georgia |

Source: UN Women WEESC Programme Document

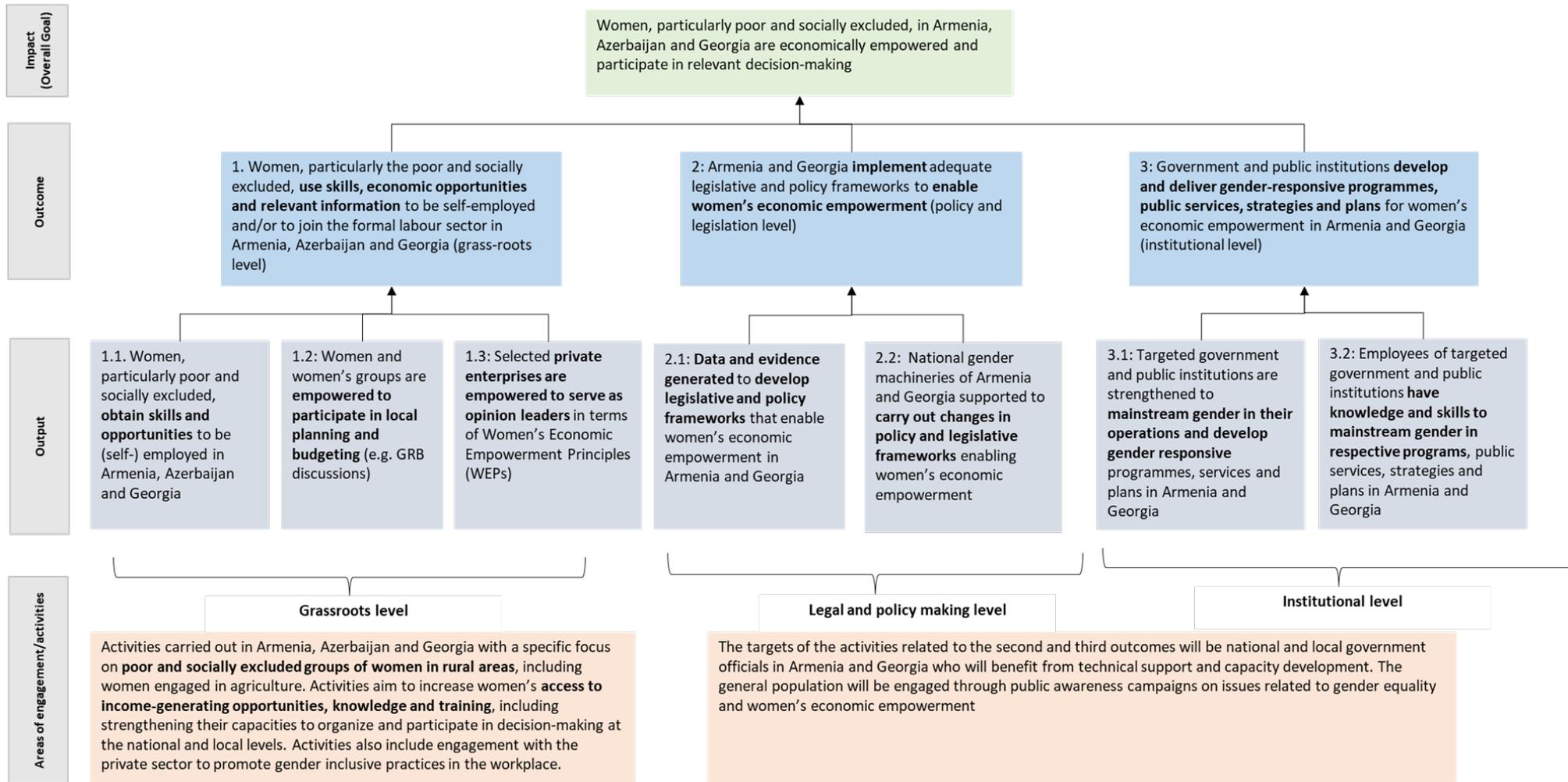
This three-pronged and holistic approach to enhance gender equality (GE) and WEE is designed to bring about interrelated and transformative change within each country at multiple levels -- local, regional and central -- while promoting coordination and inclusive good governance within the public sector, civil society as well as the private sector.⁹

It is intended that this formative evaluation test the viability of this integrated approach with impartiality and rigor in order to inform future programming. The principal donor, SDC, has also indicated that the design of Phase Two could potentially go beyond the current scope of Phase One, to encompass, for example, the civic and social empowerment of women at the grassroots level and relevant responses to the continuing COVID pandemic, in addition to peace and security issues affecting women and their families in the region.

As part of the inception phase work, the evaluation team constructed a visual Theory of Change (see Figure 1) based on the WEESC Programme Document Annex 1 Log-Frame, for reference throughout the evaluation process. The graphic is followed by a summary of assumptions and risks that were extracted from the ProDoc. The evaluation continually refers to the Theory of Change throughout the evaluation, testing ideas and mapping possible adjustments to better understand the possibilities for outcomes. Based on triangulation of evaluation evidence and findings, some suggested revisions to the Theory of Change and its associated indicators have been identified in Section 6 Recommendations.

⁹ WEESC ProDoc.

Figure 1 - Project Visual Theory of Change Constructed by the Evaluation Team



Source: A graphical illustration prepared by the Evaluation Team based on the WEESC ProDoc Annex 1 Project LogFrame.

| Level | Key Assumptions | Sustainability Angle |
|-----------|---|---|
| Outcome 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Women can be inspired to participate in project activities and in becoming more active economically and socially Understanding of the concept of decent work for women among all stakeholders There is decent work opportunities for women, especially the poor and socially excluded | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Women who successfully transitioned from informal to formal decent jobs and/or whose incomes increased as a result of the project's support Women's networks (country and regional) that have been created and/or strengthened as a result of the project. |
| Outcome 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is political will to undertake policy & legislative reforms aimed at WEE Reforms are not slow and addresses all dimensions relevant for WEE. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adopted laws and policies that remove discriminatory barriers for women to participate in and benefit from economic opportunities (Armenia and Georgia) |
| Outcome 3 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Govt. institutions engage women in local planning and budgeting Organisations can be convinced of the need to integrate women | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Institutionalized capacities and mechanisms delivering gender-responsive programmes and services (Armenia and Georgia; national and local levels) |

Source: Prepared by Evaluation Team based on assumptions included in WEESC ProDoc

1.2 South Caucasus Regional and Country Context

There are a number of factors that influence the implementation of the WEESC Project, namely socio-economic conditions within the South Caucasus Region, demographic considerations in both rural and urban environments, civil and political climates within each country and between countries, and in different levels of institutional capacity for WEE and GE. A full description of the implementation environment in which the WEESC Project has been rolled out within each country can be found in the Country Reports for Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia, as well as their respective Learning Briefs. See Annexes A, B, C. Additionally, the contributions from other state and non-state actors to the attainment of positive results can be found in the report's Findings Section 4.2 on Coherence.

In addition to recommendations from international human rights bodies such as the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women's (CEDAWs) Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women and evidence-based research, and global and national evaluations of UN Women's work on WEE, the design and selected priorities of the WEESC project have been informed by the commitments of UN agencies in all three countries. These undertakings are defined within the multi-year agreements between the UN Country Teams (UNCTs) and the Governments of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, and thus are linked to their respective national priorities. The three UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCFs) are core instruments for providing coherent, strategic directions for UN development activities by all UN entities at country levels, particularly UN Women and UNDP for this project.

The South Caucasus Region has made considerable headway towards achieving Sustainable Development Goals 5 and 8 of Agenda 2030. Leading up to the WEESC project, the UN Women Georgia Country Office undertook a number of GE and WEE initiatives, in particular the establishment of a broader Gender Theme Group (GTG) in 2012 and a Task Force on WEE in 2017.

In Armenia, the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF-Armenia) 2016-2020 paved the way for UN Women and UNDP-Armenia to work diligently towards the promotion and attainment of Sustainable Development Goals 1, 5 and 8. The latest CEDAW Committee report highlighted a number of calls to action for the Government of Armenia to address with respect to women's employment and economic empowerment as well as participation in political and public life, which are the two main goals of the WEESC Project.¹⁰ The community consolidation process over the more recent past has seen the numbers of jurisdictions reduced from 915 to 250 by 2019, which has also had a major impact on project implementation, especially as regards Outcomes 2 and 3.

In Azerbaijan, the UN-Azerbaijan Partnership Framework (UNAPF) 2016-2020 laid out some key steps to achieve Sustainable Development Goals 1, 5 and 8 during Phase One of the WEESC Project. The most recent CEDAW Committee report made a number of recommendations for the Government of Azerbaijan to address regarding WEE and employment, participation in political and public life, as well as gender equality in rural areas.¹¹ The International Labour Organization (ILO) has also established a

¹⁰ UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Concluding observations on the combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Armenia, 2016, CEDAW/C/ARM/CO/5-6

¹¹ UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Azerbaijan, 2015, CEDAW/C/AZE/CO/5

Decent Work Country Program (DWCP) to promote satisfactory jobs, empower young females and males, and to enhance self-employment for budding entrepreneurs. A gender-balanced National Tripartite Commission mechanism for social dialogue was to be established, and e-governance has been recommended for outreach and extending social partners' networks for DWCP.

In Georgia, the UN Partnership for Sustainable Development in Georgia (UNPSD-Georgia) 2016-2020 integrated Sustainable Development Goals 5, 8, 10 and 12 in its priorities for the period. The last CEDAW Committee report called on the Government of Georgia to strengthen a number of areas.¹² These included employment, rural women, disadvantaged groups of women, participation in political and public life, and the legal framework for non-discrimination and GE that align with WEESC Project priorities. Additionally, the ongoing Joint Action for Women's Economic Empowerment (JAWEE), UN Women Georgia's cost-share project funded by Norway, creates a synergistic effect and strengthens both projects.

However, during the course of WEESC implementation, project activities have been negatively affected by external events, specifically the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan and the onset of the COVID-19 global pandemic. The conflict has had serious consequences throughout the South Caucasus Region, with an increase in numbers of internally displaced people (IDP) and spontaneous arrivals (in Armenia), of refugees (Azerbaijanis and Armenians in Georgia) and migrant workers. The global COVID-19 pandemic has further hampered the economies of all nations, with a rise in health and welfare issues, mortalities, lockdowns, travel restrictions, and an increase in domestic violence.

Similar to the rest of the world, the South Caucasus Region cannot avoid the pandemic. However, the COVID pandemic and the development of corresponding innovative measures to respond to the situation have also led to a number of positive impacts. For example, there has been an accelerated use of digital technologies for communications, business enterprises, learning platforms and governance to name just a few. Other issues that have gained prominence are the importance of national food security, robust medical services, well-prepared emergency management systems and reliable energy sources which in turn create potential economic opportunities for the poorest rural regions in the South Caucasus given their location.

1.3 WEESC Project Boundaries and Complexity

There are a significant number of components within the project making it a challenge for the parties responsible for its design, delivery, monitoring and evaluation. Foremost is the focus on three neighbouring countries south of the Caucasus mountain range with many similarities in demographics yet important differences to be accommodated in terms of project design and customisation. To address overall project management, a Steering Committee which meets every six months to guide project implementation and financial oversight.

Table 2 below summarizes the resources and expenditures for the first two years of project implementation, but does not include funds committed for the final year of Phase One.

¹² UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Concluding observations on the combined fourth and fifth periodic reports of Georgia, 2014, CEDAW/C/GEO/CO/4-5

Table 2 – WEESC Project Financial Resources (August 2018 to June 2020)

| WEESC Resources | Steering Committee Budget (USD) | | | Expenditures from August 18, 2018 to June 30, 2020 | | Percentages Expended & Projected | |
|-----------------|---------------------------------|---------------|---------------|--|-------------------|----------------------------------|------------------|
| | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 | Years 1 & 2 Total | Year 3 Projection | Years 1 & 2 Expended | Year 3 Projected |
| SDC @78% | .999 m | 1.09 m | 1.17 m | 2,019,785 USD | 2.17 m | 48%* | 52% |
| ADA @ 22% | .319 m | .322 m | .285 m | | | | |
| Total | 1.32 m | 1.41 m | 1.46 m | | | | |

Source: Prepared by Evaluation Team based on WEESC Interim Semi-Annual Financial Reports. *An additional amount of USD 382,002 in partner advances and USD 69,010 in other expenses have been committed as of June 2020. Thus, total projected spent and committed funds as of June 2020 are USD 2,930,879 (69%). Source: WEESC Interim Financial Reports I to IV for Phase One (UN Women to SDC/ADA Donors) and updates from UN Women.

1.4 WEESC Key Project Stakeholders

The key stakeholders involved in project implementation, including the implementing agencies and partners, are illustrated by the WEESC Partner Map included as Annex D and summarized in Table 3. Within each country, these entities form stakeholder groups that meet annually and function as an Evaluation Reference Group (ERG) for the evaluation team, providing feedback during preliminary findings presentations and thereafter.

Table 3 - Stakeholder Groups in Each Country

| Countries | Stakeholder Sector | Stakeholder Group Participants |
|-------------------|--|--|
| Georgia | National Government Local Government Organizations | RDA, MOH, Geostat, Gender Commission, Parliamentary Gender Committee Kakheti, Kvemo Kartli, Samtskhe-Javakheti Regions ILO, ISET |
| Armenia | National Government Local Government Organizations Private Sector/Other | ARMSTAT, Ministry of Labour and Social Issues and its Department for Women, Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure Gegharkunik, Shirak Regions 3R Strategy LLC and Green Lane NGO consortium and SDA Armenia, ILO Coca Cola CJSC, IBIS Hotels, C-Quadrat |
| Azerbaijan | National Government Local Government Organizations Private Sector/Other | State Committee for Family, Women and Children Affairs Khazar, Gusar, Sabirabad Regions WRCs, AWEDA, Azerbaijan Micro-Finance Association PwC Azerbaijan, SOCAR AOs, and Deloitte Azerbaijan, EU Azerbaijan |

Source: Prepared by Evaluation Team based on WEESC project documents.

1.5 Implementation Status of the WEESC Project

The WEESC Project focuses on Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia in the South Caucasus Region. Grassroots-level/Outcome 1 is being implemented across all three countries, whereas the Policy and Legislation-level/Outcome 2 and Institutional-level/Outcome 3 areas are being conducted in only Armenia and Georgia.

An analysis of progress towards results achieved to date is included in Annex E (Results Tracker). The highlights of the cumulative progress to date organized by outcome areas as of June 30, 2020, and updated with data collected from July 1 to December 31, 2020, are summarized in Findings Section 4.3 on Effectiveness. The maps below illustrate the project's geographic reach in each of the three countries.

Figure 2 - WEESC Project Implementation in Georgia



Source: Prepared by Evaluation Team

In order to accomplish project activities, Table 4 illustrates how the donor funds were spent up until June 2020. The December 2020 Interim Financial Report V to donors will not be available until April 2021.

Table 4 - Project Expenditures to Date by Outcome, Project Management & Program Support

| Total Expenditures as of June 2020 (USD), excluding funds committed* | | | | | | | |
|--|----------------|----------------|----------------|-----------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|-------|
| Outcomes | | | | Project Mgmt & Depreciation | Program Support | Total Spent Years 1 & 2 | |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | | | | Total |
| | AZ AM GE | AM GE | AM GE | | | | |
| Project-Wide activity | 283,150 | 419,442 | 165,297 | 867,889 | | | |
| Armenia Specific | 135,763 | | 136,124 | 271,887 | | | |
| Azerbaijan Specific | 302,321 | | | 302,321 | | | |
| Georgia Specific | | | 69,712 | 69,712 | | | |
| | 721,234 | 419,442 | 371,133 | 1,511,809 | 270,322 | 237,654 | |
| Proportion - Total Expenditure | 35.7% | 20.8% | 18.4% | 74.8% | 13.4% | 11.7% | |
| Total 3 Year Budget Allocated (USD): USD 3,262,429 from SDC & EURO 800,000 from ADA | | | | | | USD 4.2 m | |
| Proportion of Total Budget Spent (%)* | | | | | | 48.2% | |

Source: Prepared by Evaluation Team based on WEESC Interim Semi-Annual Financial Reports.

*An additional amount of USD 382,002 in partner advances and USD 69,010 in other expenses have been committed as of June 2020. Thus, total projected spent and committed funds as of June 2020 are USD 2,930,879 (69%). Source: WEESC Interim Financial Reports I to IV for Phase One (UN Women to SDC/ADA Donors) and updates from UN Women.



Armenian private sector learns about Women's Empowerment Principles. Photo: <http://georgia.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2019/06/armenian-private>.

2. Evaluation Purpose, Objectives and Scope

2.1 Evaluation Purpose

As mandated in the Project Document, this final external evaluation is being conducted by UN Women in the last year of Phase One WEESC project implementation. Its formative focus is expected to yield a number of recommendations that will be utilized in designing Phase Two of the project. Consistent with the OECD-DAC guidelines, the evaluation considered relevance, effectiveness, organizational efficiency and sustainability criteria, as well as coherence. Furthermore, the evaluation incorporated the principles embedded in the United Nations Evaluation Group's (UNEG's) New Norm 9: National evaluation capacities; Norm 2: Utility; and Norm 14: Evaluation use and follow-up.

An Evaluation Management Group (EMG) composed of five individuals is responsible for supporting the independent evaluation team with their tasks.¹³

The primary evaluation users are the WEESC Project Steering Committee consisting of representatives from the UN Women Georgia Country Office, as well as Phase One project donors, SDC and ADA. Secondary evaluation users include national stakeholders such as the UNDP in Armenia and Azerbaijan, civil society and private sector partners, parliamentary counterparts, key state agencies, and local governments within the eight targeted and impoverished rural regions in the South Caucasus. In Azerbaijan and Armenia, companies within the private sector who have been serving as opinion leaders for WEPs are also considered stakeholders, while in Georgia, this private sector work is largely being covered by a separate UN Women WEE project being funded by Norway¹⁴.

The quantitative and qualitative data generated by this evaluation is intended to be used by different stakeholders to: 1) contribute to building of a consolidated evidence base on effective WEE strategies in all three countries; and 2) facilitate deep reflection, learning and strategic planning for further WEE programming at the grassroots, law and policy, as well as institutional levels, including the promotion of women's participation in decision-making within their respective communities.

The findings, lessons learned, conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation are expected to contribute to Phase Two of the WEESC Project and to influence overall effective programming on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) in the South Caucasus Region. Furthermore, the data collected and analyzed by the evaluation team will be used to engage policy-makers and other stakeholders at local, national and regional levels in evidence-based dialogues and to advocate for practical gender-responsive strategies to economically empower women.¹⁵

2.2 Objectives of Evaluation

The overall objective of this final evaluation is to assess the achievement of anticipated results and performance of the WEESC Project – Phase One. The specific objectives are:

- To analyze the relevance of the implementation strategy and approaches;
- To assess organizational efficiency in progressing towards the achievement of the project's results as defined in the intervention;

¹³ Tamar Sabedashvili, Mehjabeen Alarakhia, and Isabel Suarez Garcia of UN Women; Natalya Harutyunyan of UNDP Armenia, and Gulara Humbatova of UNDP Azerbaijan.

¹⁴ Joint Action for Women's Economic Empowerment in Georgia (JAWEE), UN Women Georgia's cost-share project

¹⁵ UN Women Terms of Reference

- To validate the project results in terms of achievements and/or weaknesses toward the outcome and outputs;
- To assess the potential for sustainability of the results achieved;
- To document lessons learned, best practices, and challenges to inform future work of UN Women on WEE;
- To identify strategies for scaling up and replication of best practices;
- To provide actionable recommendations for the implementation of WEESC Project - Phase Two and maximize various partners' ownership within Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia in order to foster sustainability of the WEE intervention;
- To assess how the project and its results relate and contribute to commitments and achievement of SDGs in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, with a focus on SDGs 5 and 8.¹⁶

Key performance principles include UNEG's General Norms for Evaluation (Norms #1 to #10) and Institutional Norms for Evaluations in the UN System (Norms #11 to #14), including New Norms #1 on internationally agreed principles, goals and targets; #8 on human rights and gender equality; #9 on national evaluation capacities; and #10 on professionalism, with a stronger emphasis on the utility and use of the evaluation (Norm #2). Norm #4 on independence was adhered to and UNEG's performance standards 1 through 5 were foremost in the minds of the EMG and the evaluation team, especially Standard 4 on the conduct of the evaluation, and Standard 5 on quality assurance and control.

2.3 Evaluation Scope

Phase One of the WEESC Project commenced implementation in August 2018 and extends to July 2021. This evaluation was initially intended to cover the period starting from August 13, 2018 and ending July 31, 2020, however UN Women provided additional data for the period August-December 2020 that has been incorporated into the evaluation scope. The WEESC project targets eight regions of the South Caucasus within the three countries as identified in Section 1.5.

The evaluation includes a review of WEESC Project documents for Phase One, including project design documents, annual work plans, periodic reports to SDC and ADA, project-related knowledge products (e.g. manuals, reports, studies, articles, *etc.*) as well as performance measurement and logical frameworks. The evaluation also considers the broader WEE policy and legal systems both regionally and nationally which WEESC programming seeks to influence in compliance with international human rights law (e.g. CEDAW, the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (CCPR), *etc.*).

Finally, the evaluation considers the dimensions of stakeholder involvement in each country, both at the national and regional levels, particularly in light of the COVID pandemic and the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict. Gender equality and human rights considerations are mainstreamed throughout the evaluation and include the connection between the COVID-19 pandemic and potential increases in domestic violence (section 2.5 below). Other than grants made to women for wage or self-employment initiatives and/or vocational training, the evaluation did not cover a cost-benefit analysis for expenses related to activities scheduled for the final year of Phase One.

¹⁶ Ibid.

2.4 Evaluation Criteria

The OECD-DAC criteria as outlined in the DAC Principles for Development Assistance are the main evaluation criteria for this formative evaluation, including the revised and updated version.¹⁷ Specifically, these criteria are the following:

Relevance: Is the WEESC Project doing the right things given contextual changes and a greater emphasis on relevance to beneficiaries' priorities and needs? What is the appropriateness of the intervention's objectives to the real problems, needs and priorities of the target groups/beneficiaries and the quality of program design through which these objectives are achieved?

Coherence: How well does the WEESC Project fit with a view to capture perspectives from partnerships and linkages, as well as to understand interventions within broader systems? What is the compatibility of the intervention with other interventions in a country, sector or institution?

Effectiveness: Is the WEESC Project achieving its objectives, including by examining differential results and encouraging analysis of equity issues? What is the extent to which the intervention is expected to achieve its objectives and its results, including any differential results across groups?

Efficiency: How well are the resources used (human, financial, material), including the notion of timeliness, and whether efficiency applied throughout the results chain? What is the extent to which the intervention delivers, or is likely to deliver results, in an economic and timely way?

Sustainability: Will the benefits last, focusing not on external funding, but on continuation of benefits and highlighting the multidimensional nature of sustainability? What is the extent to which the net benefits of the intervention continue, or are likely to continue?

One final OECD-DAC criteria, *Impact*, which examines the difference the intervention is making and focuses on higher-level changes in terms of significance, transformative potential, scope and/or time scale, was not called for by the EMG. Impact will be better assessed in the evaluation of WEESC Project Phase Two when there has been more time for implementation once the COVID pandemic has ended. However, early signs of project impact are incorporated into the criteria above wherever found, especially with reference to gains made towards SDGs 1, 5 and 8.

2.5 Gender Equality and Human Rights Considerations

In alignment with the new UNEG Norm #8, the evaluation objectives and scope included numerous questions that address issues of GE and human rights.¹⁸ Furthermore, compliance with UNEG Standard 4.7 called for a human rights-based approach and a gender mainstreaming strategy with respect to the conduct of the evaluation. As mentioned above, GE and human rights matters were embedded in all the

¹⁷ *The DAC Principles for the Evaluation of Development Assistance, OECD (1991), Glossary of Evaluation and Results Based Management (RBM) Terms, OECD (2000), and Better Criteria for Better Evaluation, OECD (2020).*

¹⁸ *"The universally recognized values and principles of human rights and gender equality need to be integrated into all stages of an evaluation. It is the responsibility of evaluators and evaluation managers to ensure that these values are respected, addressed and promoted, underpinning the commitment to the principle of 'no-one left behind'.*

questions to be answered by the evaluation, including matters related to the COVID-19 pandemic and its increased potential for domestic violence with consequences for WEE.

The design of the WEESC Project incorporated a strong human rights and gender equality approach; the strategy emphasizes the rights of women and pays particular attention to poor rural women, ethnic minorities, internally displaced people, migrant workers and disabled people. These marginalized groups within the targeted regions of Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia were the primary focus of Outcome 1 activities and they are the direct beneficiaries of numerous interventions. The women empowered at the grassroots level were also indirect beneficiaries of Outcome 2 and 3 activities in both Armenia and Georgia. Many of the Project's initiatives related directly to the recommendations of the UN treaty bodies overseeing the international human rights instruments: CEDAW, CERD, ICESCR, and ICCPR for all three countries, as well as the International Convention on the Rights of Migrant Workers and Their Families (CMW) for Azerbaijan and Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) for Armenia.¹⁹

In terms of implementation, the WEESC Project embraced a GE perspective throughout by engaging with the Gender Theme Group of the Task Force on Gender Equality in Tblisi, Georgia, as well as the Prime Minister's Advisor on Human Rights and Gender Equality Issues, the Gender Commission of the Government of Georgia, and Parliamentary Gender Committee. In Yerevan, Armenia, the Project implementers engaged with the Department of Family, Women and Children's Issues within the Ministry of Labor and Social Issues while in Baku, Azerbaijan, project engagement was with the State Committee for Family, Women and Children Affairs and Association for Women Entrepreneurship Development in Azerbaijan (AWEDA).

With respect to Phase One results achieved, a gender-based analysis plus (GBA+) approach was foremost in the evaluation team's methodology related to its assessment of the data collected by numerous document reviews, and 40+ KIIs, 16 FGDs involving 92 participants, and 1 online survey. As spelled out in the EU 2016 report on intersectional discrimination, due to its synergetic nature, such discrimination is extremely difficult to monitor and national statistics do not include data disaggregated for instance by both sex and ethnicity or sex and disability. As indicated in the WEESC ProDoc, this concept of intersectional discrimination uncovers the problems faced by those who are have multiple disadvantages and allows for addressing these problems. It has been incorporated both in project implementation and in the conduct of the evaluation.²⁰

¹⁹ The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Rights of Migrant Workers and Their Families, and the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities

²⁰ WEESC Project Pro-Doc



From right to left: Diana Imedashvili and her mother-in-law are welcoming guests at Diana's – Café Birkiani, Georgia.
Photo: UN Women

3. Methodology

3.1 Evaluation Approach and Methodology

Adopting a utilization-focused and mixed methods approach, the evaluation examines a number of criteria central to OECD-DAC's method for evaluating development interventions including relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability. This ensures the evaluation is transparent, inclusive, participatory and responsive to the information needs of evaluation users. This approach takes into account both the existing Theory of Change by examining the outputs and outcomes against the Project's key indicators of success, in addition to the socio-economic and WEE contexts of the three countries. The evaluation has been informed by feminist, rights and responsibilities-based and inter-cultural theories and has also considered the broader WEE policy and legal systems, both regionally and nationally, which the WEESC Project is seeking to influence in compliance with international human rights law, as discussed above.

This approach is focused on the information needs of evaluation users to assess project performance to date and to provide evidence and advice to support future programming. It requires an analysis of the assumptions behind the WEESC Project Theory of Change as well as the implementation strategy and approaches used. This accommodates the complexity of relationships in a development context and ensures the use of culturally appropriate, participatory and inclusive processes. Utilization focused evaluation also prioritizes measures to reach disadvantaged groups and ensure the collection of diversity and sex-disaggregated data to allow for appropriate GBA+ analysis.

Within this framework, the evaluation used a mixed methods approach combining qualitative and quantitative methods in order to triangulate the data. The evaluation incorporated the following methodologies: document reviews; semi-structured interviews; focus group discussions (FGDs); three learning briefs (case studies); a survey and a visually constructed theory of change developed by the Evaluation Team.²¹ Due to the COVID-19 context, all data collection was conducted online and by telephone, Skype and Zoom, with multiple lines of evidence triangulated in order to provide an evidence-based narrative that connects GBA+ analysis, findings, conclusions, recommendations and lessons learned.

The evaluation used the Evaluation Matrix (EM) as the primary tool to collect, analyse and assess data and information to answer the key evaluation questions. The EM was structured according to the above OECD/UN criteria, and under each of these, UN Women identified initial key questions to address during the evaluation within the Terms of Reference. During the evaluation's inception phase, these questions were reviewed and further refined as indicated in the Final Evaluation Matrix which is included in Annex F. The UN Evaluation Group's Guidance on Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluation was also taken into account and embedded in evaluation questions and data collections methods, sources and instruments.

3.2 Data Collection and Sources

The evaluation used five data collection tools described below, with the data sources summarized in the table on the following page. The data collection tools are included as Annexes I and J.

²¹ See section 2.3 for details.

Document Review – A wide range of **117 program documents** were reviewed, including the WEESC Project logical framework, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) plan and progress reports. In addition, selected UN Women and UN documents have been reviewed that focus on strategic frameworks for the region and each country as well as broader GEWE agreements. Other country-specific documents have also been reviewed for Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia, including reports, knowledge products attributable to the WEESC Project, and work plans. Given the current COVID-19 context, several resources have been identified to support the assessment of COVID-19 in the respective countries and related analysis of implications for the WEESC Project. A final bibliography of documents reviewed is included as Annex L.

Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) – A key source of qualitative data were the **62 semi-structured interviews** with implementers and key stakeholders across the following groups: (a) project staff and donors, (b) public sector partners both at the national and local levels, (c) private sector entities collaborating with WEESC, (d) local community organizations/NGOs and national human rights institutions, and (e) other programs collaborating with the Project. Interviews were conducted virtually and included both descriptive questions seeking quantitative data or factual insights related to programming contexts, plus normative questions seeking perceptions on project planning, implementation and results against expectations. KIIs also probed behavioral changes or modifications to existing practices as a result of the project activities.

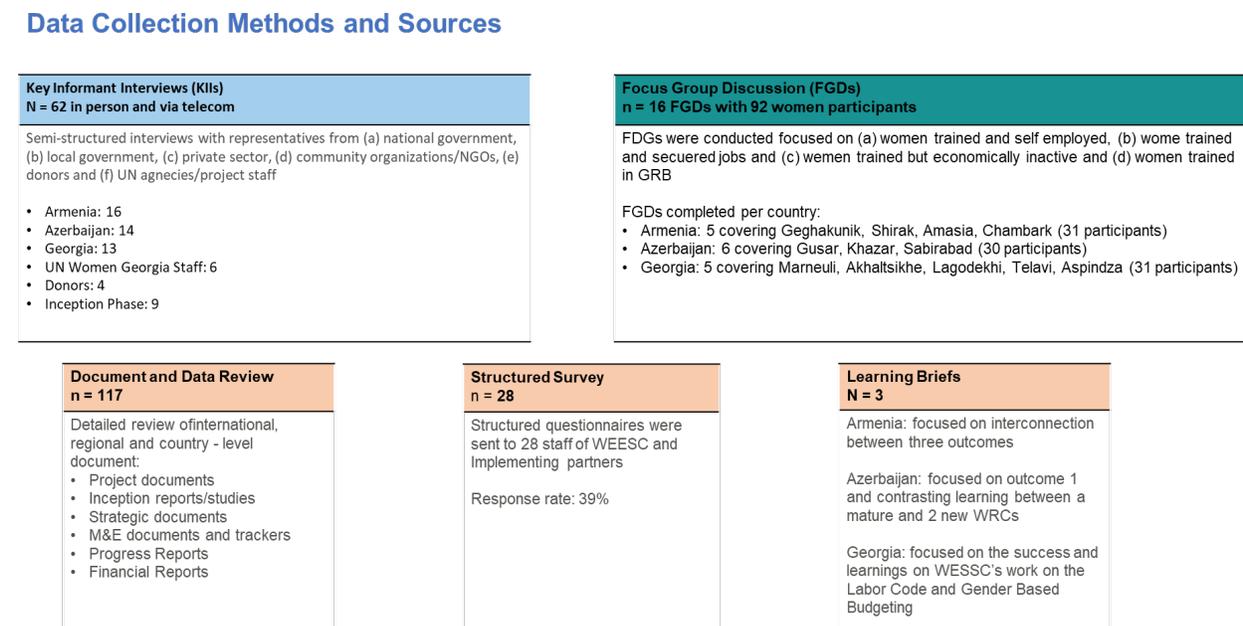
Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) – **16 FGDs were conducted with 92 women beneficiaries** at the grassroots level in 12 different locations, representative of the 8 target regions of the Project in the 3 countries, in order to understand the benefits of WEESC program activities both in terms of their economic and social change. A FGD discussion guide was developed and customized for three groups to understand respondents' own accounts of attribution of change as a result of their engagement with the Project, namely: (a) self-employed (i.e. those who have established businesses), (b) those who secured employment as result of project support, and (c) those who went through training(s) but have not yet secured employment nor established businesses. However, as noted below in the sampling strategy, the locations for the FGDs were strategically selected to compare and contrast performance and learnings across these three groups, with an emphasis on intersectionality. In Georgia, an FGD was also conducted with women who received Gender Responsive Planning and Budgeting training. A list of people interviewed is included as Annex M and covers both KIIs and FGDs.

Survey – A short survey was administered in English to **28 staff of UN Women and UNDP and principal implementation partners** working on WEESC programming across Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. Although the response rate was rather low (39%) due to the compressed timeline for data collection, the survey did provide additional perspectives on the relevance of the overall WEESC approach, coherence and synergies, and efficiency issues within their country and for the WEESC project more broadly.

Learning Briefs – Three short learning briefs were also developed to further highlight project relevance, performance, innovations, challenges and best practices across the different outcome areas in the three countries. The cases embedded in the briefs focused on capturing the relevance of project activities to achieve the broader objectives as defined by the Theory of Change (ToC), particularly in relation to: a) the socio-economic benefits to women and community members across the relevant WEE dimensions defined by the project, b) their contribution to addressing some of the key systemic constraints for women's employment and income earning opportunities through change in the behavior of system actors, and c) the key lessons learned and suggested ways forward for Phase Two. In Azerbaijan, the case study addresses Outcome 1 and contrasts learning between a mature Women's Resource Centre (WRC) and two new WRCs. In Georgia, the two case studies delve into the learning, interlinkages and project

success related to Outcome 2, specifically the Labor Code and Gender Responsive Budgeting. In Armenia, the case explores the interconnection between the three project Outcomes.

Figure 5 - Data Collection Methods and Sources



Source: Prepared by Evaluation Team based on the Data Collection Phase.

3.3 Sampling Framework and Data Analysis

Sampling Framework

The evaluation methodology and the ToC are the basis for the GBA+ analysis of data gathered from primary and secondary sources which have been triangulated and linked to the specific evaluation questions in order to identify trends, themes and patterns.

The evaluation employed a purposive sampling approach, based on the extent of work with different stakeholders and impacts reported across the three outcome levels. It took into account the spread of beneficiaries and partners across different regions. The sampling approach was also informed by the inception phase interviews to identify priority areas for query, given limitations related to evaluation scope and timelines.

The sampling framework is presented in Table 5 for each country and describes the rationale for, and mechanics of, sample selection, diversity of stakeholders based on GBA+ analysis to ensure that the evaluation is inclusive and respectful of all stakeholders (rights holders and responsibility bearers).

Due to COVID-19 restrictions and the fact that all data collection was virtual or by telephone, the implementing partners were responsible for selecting the participants for all of the FGDs in the 3 countries. Purposive sampling was applied to identify a representative number of self-employed, wage-employed and unemployed women in urban and rural settings. All of the 16 FGDs comprised 5-6 participants who were selected by the implementing partners on the basis of criteria provided by the Evaluation Team. These criteria included: previously defined vulnerability criteria, family status, ethnicity

and age. An additional FGD related to GRB was also conducted in Georgia with municipal-level representatives who had been involved in GRB activities.

For the KIIs, a preliminary list of respondents was identified and approved in the Inception Phase Report (Table 5, p. 20 reproduced below). This list identified organisations in the following sectors and the approximate number of interviews to be conducted in each: Private Sector, National Government, Local Government, CBOs, other Stakeholders and project Management. As mentioned previously, given the virtual and telephonic nature of the data collection, UN Women and UNDP staff worked with the Evaluation Team to identify the appropriate respondents in each country across the various categories. A semi-structured survey, that included a mix of response choices and open-ended questions for comment, was also administered online to staff from UN Women, UNDP and principal implementing partners.

Table 5 - Evaluation Sampling Framework for Each Country

| Country | Sampling Framework | Description |
|---------|---------------------------|---|
| Georgia | Overview | In Georgia, due to COVID-19 restrictions, 13 interviews and 5 FGDs were conducted online in Tblisi and each of the three project target regions. The sampling framework was developed to obtain a cross-section of data within the very limited timeframe for data collection. At the grassroots level, three municipalities were selected and 5 FGDs, involving 31 women, were conducted within these three centres. |
| FGD | Telavi | <i>Telavi</i> is the regional center of Kakheti, which is one of the most developed regions in Georgia outside the capital city. The project data shows that most of the women trained, employed and self-employed are from this region. The women are from different backgrounds (urban and rural, covering all six vulnerability criteria) and the FGDs revealed important lessons related to barriers and challenges encountered by women who were trained but unsuccessful in obtaining self-employment and jobs. |
| FGD | Marneuli | <i>Marneuli</i> is the regional center of Kvemo Kartli that is mostly populated with ethnic minority women and the FGDs helped to illustrate specific challenges and achievements faced by ethnic minority women in relation to self-employment and jobs. |
| FGD | Aspindza | <i>Aspindza</i> is a regional periphery that has the lowest score on the Local Self-Government Index (the worst record at the municipality level) and faces the greatest socio-economic challenges according to the national assessment. Despite the difficult situational context, this FGD highlighted some of the achievements and progress made by women related to related self-employment and jobs. |
| FGD | Municipal Representatives | One FGD was also conducted with the <i>representatives of the financial offices of municipal governments</i> (Marneuli, Telavi and Lagodekhi) that have been successfully introduced to GRB methodology. The FGD revealed important findings about the effectiveness and sustainability of GRB component. |

| Country | Sampling Framework | Description |
|---------|--------------------|---|
| Armenia | Overview | In Armenia, although there were only limited COVID-19 restrictions, local travel was hindered by multiple factors during the data collection phase and thus, similar to the other countries, the 16 interviews and 5 FGDs, involving 31 women were conducted online. |
| FGD | Amasia | <i>Amasia, Shirak Region</i> , is a rural area, where there are low participation rates of women in economic activities. However, in recent years the wool production in Amasia has improved the situation and the economic activity of women has increased significantly. The FGD in this area explored how to ensure employment in rural areas. |
| FGD | Chambarak | <i>Chambarak in Gegharkunik Region</i> , has an urban population and thus the FGD revealed how the actual engagement of women in wage-employment is determined by the community-based programs and their synergic cooperation within the frameworks of different initiatives. |
| FGD | Shirak | <i>Shirak</i> is a Region with significant poverty in comparison to other regions of Armenia. The FGDs included all communities that have mostly rural populations in order to determine how the intervention impacted on women's economic inactivity and fostered self-employment. In this regard, the FGDs revealed how the intervention related to the peculiarities of the private sector, the operation of small and medium-size enterprises, business fundamentals and the possibilities for self-employment. |
| FGD | Gegharkunik | <i>Gegharkunik</i> is a Region that is mostly urban. In comparison to other regions, Gegharkunik Region is very traditional. The customs, traditions and gender stereotypes influence WEE greatly. In this regard, FGDs of Gegharkunik Region revealed how traditional and cultural factors determine women's economic inactivity and decrease the involvement of women in labour market. |

| Country | Sampling Framework | Description |
|------------|--------------------|--|
| Azerbaijan | Overview | In Azerbaijan, due to the restricted lockdown measures , 14 interviews and 6 FGDs in Baku and the regions were conducted online in Azerbaijan. As Outcome 1 has been prioritized for Azerbaijan and all the implemented activities were undertaken within the grassroots level component, six FGDs (two for each region) were organized, involving 30 women in these 3 centres. For Khazar, 2 FGDs were conducted with self-employed and trained, but economically inactive, women. For Sabirabad, 2 FGDs focused on self-employed and wage-employed women, and for Gusar Region, the major focus was 2 FGDs with trained, but economically inactive women and wage-employed women. The participants were selected through the assistance of WRC coordinators by a quota sampling method taking into account variables such as age, work experience, marital status, ethnicity, educational background and current residence (urban vs. rural). |
| FGD | Khazar | <i>Khazar</i> is a suburban region within commuting distance from Baku. It is one of the regions of Baku known for informal employment for women. Traditional economic engagement for women is the sale of goods and services in the local market. According to the project data, women from this region in Azerbaijan |

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| | | managed to secure most of the project’s business grants to establish their small businesses. The FGDs in this region explored both the existing challenges for women who could not secure employment and the achievements of self-employed women who started new businesses. |
| FGD | Gusar | <i>Gusar</i> is a region populated mostly by the ethnic minorities (a majority being Lezgis). The project progress reports indicate that the trained beneficiaries from this region have the lowest rate of self-employment, but a high rate of wage-employment. The FGDs in this region explored the barriers and root causes of the low self-employment level. |
| FGD | Sabirabad | <i>Sabirabad</i> is a region that has an existing WRC well known for its experience with women’s entrepreneurship. It is also populated by many internally displaced people (IDP) in which women beneficiaries have been targeted by the project. Progress reports indicate a high success rate for self-employed and wage-employed women. The FGDs helped to identify effective mechanisms for supporting the training-to-job transition and also explored the reasons behind the low diversity and traditional nature of employment sectors for wage-employed women. |

Source: Sampling Frameworks for each country prepared by the Evaluation Team.

Data Analysis

A theory-based approach as used to assess whether the program’s activities led to the expected results outlined in the ToC and to analyze causality amongst the outputs, outcomes and intended impact. Quantitative data from the Project were reviewed and qualitative data was collected using FGDs and KIIs to (a) understand the process of causality, in addition to how and why changes happened, (b) test the assumptions, and (c) validate results reported by the Project.

The totality of evaluation data collected from the literature reviews, project document reviews, FGDs, KIIs and survey, has been analysed primarily at country levels, but also on a Project-wide regional basis, with Preliminary Evaluation Findings at a Country Level included as Annexes N, O and P. Data analysis of qualitative findings related to evaluation questions pertinent to the FGDs, as identified in the EM, was undertaken using a standardized template for each country across three different categories of grassroots women beneficiaries (i.e. women trained and self-employed, women trained and secured a job, women trained but economically inactive). Content analysis from the FGDs was done using Excel and comparisons were made across different groups. Further qualitative data from the KIIs that were conducted in each country was similarly analysed using a standardized template across different categories of stakeholders (implementing partners, national/local government institutions and the private sector). While a standardized template was utilized, the interviews made references to the activities relevant to each stakeholder.

Quantitative data on key metrics such as the number and type of training attended, income and other demographics on the FGD participants, were collected from UN Women to validate findings. In addition, key quantitative metrics related to Outcome 1 were collected to measure the effectiveness of the training program(s) and grants. These were further triangulated with the FGDs, KIIs and a semi-structured survey administered to staff of UN Women, UNDP and principal implementation partners.

Content analysis was used to highlight the differing contexts within which the project was implemented and, where relevant, to flag divergent views. Contribution analysis was used to identify assumptions within the current ToC, which also led to the development of a proposed revised ToC for Phase Two, recommended by the Evaluation Team (see Section 6 Recommendations).

Country-level data analyses and findings were captured and presented in two complementary formats. These were preliminary presentations of findings for each country, and three learning briefs focusing on priority topics to draw out lessons learned, both on a project wide-basis and features unique to the WEESC project customization at a national level.

3.4 Stakeholder Consultations

As indicated previously, the evaluation is based on a consultative, inclusive and participatory process and has incorporated strong participation from project beneficiaries, particularly women at the grassroots level in all three countries.

Although consultations with the wider stakeholder audience were limited to a certain extent by the COVID-19 context, the Project’s stakeholder groups in each country were represented in the evaluation through their designation as the Evaluation Reference Group (ERG). The ERG facilitates the participation of key stakeholders in the evaluation process and helps to ensure that the evaluation approach is robust and relevant to staff and stakeholders.

Given the current post-conflict geo-political context, the Evaluation Team adapted the presentation of preliminary findings to encompass individual presentations for each of the three countries in February 2021. The team also participated in the subsequent annual stakeholder meeting and discussions in February 2021. Based on this activity, the Evaluation Team also decided to extend the scope of the evaluation to encompass analyses of project activities and progress from June 2020 to the end of December 2020 based on updated information presented at the February 2021 stakeholder meetings.

These workshops offered a timely opportunity for both the EMG and stakeholders to provide input into the preliminary findings to ensure accuracy and support validation of the findings. This preliminary feedback has been considered and incorporated into the draft report and comments from the EMG on the draft report have been addressed and incorporated into this final report.

3.5 Challenges and Limitations

The evaluation inception phase identified a number of limitations and risks. Approaches to mitigating these were integrated into the evaluation design. The utilization-focused design deployed has many comparative advantages with the purpose, objectives and scope of the evaluation. It also faces inherent limitations, some of which cannot or can only be partially overcome. The main limitations of the evaluation design and corresponding mitigation strategies are described in Table 6.

Table 6 - Evaluation Limitations and Mitigation Strategies

| Limitations | Context and Mitigation Strategies |
|---|--|
| Compressed timelines to conduct the formative evaluation in order to inform the design of Phase Two of the project | The formal start of the evaluation was in late November 2020, with preliminary findings required by early February 2021. The data collection phase was compressed to 4 weeks and occurred during the Christmas holiday season. Given the decision to separate the preliminary findings into 3 separate presentations, rather than 1 as per the ToRs, an additional 2 weeks were allocated for data analysis. |
| Lack of complete data that aligns with the duration of the project | Although categorized as a final evaluation, the data set provided during the inception phase and referenced in the evaluation TORs covers only the first two years of the project (August 2018-June 2020). The sampling strategy developed in the inception phase took this into |

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|---|--|
| | account and in December 2020 and February 2021, additional data (particularly for Outcome 1) was provided by UN Women that extended the data coverage to December 2020. |
| COVID-19 related restrictions required the entire evaluation to be conducted virtually | Data collection in each country followed each country's respective COVID-19 guidelines and also the COVID-19 Global Evaluation Coalition. In all three countries, interviews and FGDs were conducted virtually using digital technology. The Evaluation Team collaborated closely with UN Women, UNDP and the local implementing partners to organize the interviews and FGDs. |
| Absence of qualitative and capacity indicators in the WEESC results framework (particularly for Outcome 1) | The RRF only includes quantitative indicators. This meant that the evaluation needed to use qualitative data collection methods to compensate. |
| Limited involvement of large numbers of marginalized women in the evaluation | Given time and resource constraints, only a limited number of direct women beneficiaries were engaged in the data collection phase. The sampling strategy developed in the inception phase was carefully formulated and tailored for each country and included 16 FGDs to address this challenge. |

Source: Prepared by the Evaluation Team

3.6 Ethical Considerations

The evaluation was guided by the UNEG Ethical Guidelines and the UNEG Code of Conduct for Evaluation in the UN System.



Azerbaijan - no further info re photo setting or credit

4. Findings

This section presents the main findings of the evaluation. It addresses the questions set out in the evaluation matrix; however, some of these have been grouped together and the analysis prioritizes the most relevant and useful findings for future programming and the design of Phase Two. This synthesis combines the findings from the three countries covered by the WEESC project, as well as the South Caucasus regional level. Given the significant implications of the current COVID-19 pandemic on current project implementation which are envisaged to continue for the foreseeable future, findings related to COVID-19 in each of the three countries are also included. A more detailed analysis of the achievements and challenges in Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan are contained in each country's presentation of findings found in Annexes N, O and P.

4.1 Relevance

Summary of Relevance Findings: Is the Intervention Doing the Right Things?

The three-pronged approach to addressing women's economic empowerment is viewed as highly relevant within the participating countries. The programming was considered important by stakeholders for improving the enabling environment for women's participation in the economic activities and aligned well with the international and national priorities in relation to WEE.

The project design is highly relevant in terms of targeting women with multiple vulnerabilities. Under Outcome 1, women beneficiaries shared positive feedback related to grants for start-up businesses and gender responsive budgeting; however, they indicated the need to improve the training component to better align with existing economic activities and growth opportunities in their regions. While the policy level work under Outcomes 2 and 3 is viewed as highly relevant, stakeholders including women beneficiaries, have expressed the need to better include issues around 'unpaid care', 'gendered norms', in addition to 'policies and services targeting entrepreneurship'.

There is also a need to better connect Outcome 1 with Outcomes 2 and 3 and adopt a more strategic approach to targeting priority economic sectors for women's economic activity and similarly, for engagement with the private sector.

1. ALIGNMENT WITH COUNTRY, REGIONAL, INTERNATIONAL AND UN AGENCY PRIORITIES

The WEESC project design is strongly aligned with the gender equality and sustainable development priorities of the three countries and directly addresses relevant international agreements and donor mandates. The project also supports the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCFs) that were agreed upon with all three national governments in 2016 and which laid the foundation for project implementation.

Alignment with International, Regional and National Agreements

All three countries in the South Caucasus region have committed to advancing WEE through a number of international and regional human rights and development frameworks, such as *inter alia*, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA), CEDAW, ILO conventions on gender equality and, most recently, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs. In addition, governments are guided by intergovernmental processes such as the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), which focuses on WEE in the changing world of work, hence both challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls respectively.

The project builds on the interconnectedness between GE and sustainable development (including economic, social and environmental sustainability which is also in alignment with the host country governments' international commitments under BPfA, Rio Conventions, SDGs, CEDAW and the Paris Agreement, *etc.* The assessment of environmental sustainability was not included in the evaluation TORs or evaluation matrix, however it undoubtedly an important dimension of rural development. Going forward, the WEESC project should accord great emphasis to the Green Economy and Renewable Energy and this sector should be included in the landscape analysis of strategic high-growth priority sectors for the WEESC project.

Strategic Alignment with Donor Priorities

Both the KIIs and the ProDoc indicate strong alignment of the project design with SDC's interests and priorities as outlined in the 2017-2021 strategy. The strategy includes two main portfolios: (1) inclusive sustainable economic growth, and (2) effective democratic institutions, human safety and security, which are critical components of the project design. Going forward, SDC will release a new strategy for 2022-2025 under which women's empowerment will continue to remain a priority and there is a potential interest in extending the project's mandate to also address women's civic and social empowerment. A preliminary analysis of this potential is addressed in Section 6.3 Lessons Learned.

The project is also aligned with the priorities of ADA as outlined in the Austrian Development Policy (2016-2018). Key priorities under this policy include poverty reduction, the promotion of human rights, the rule of law and democracy, securing peace, environmental protection and GE, plus the provision of effective support for education, in addition to advancing inclusive and sustainable economic development. Going forward, ADA will release a new Strategy Framework for Eastern Partnership Countries that is expected to be published in the Springtime of 2021.

Relevance to Partner Country Needs, Strategies and UNSDCFs

Both Azerbaijan (2014) and Georgia (2016) have drawn the attention of the UN Human Rights Council's Special Rapporteurs on Violence against Women.²² Female IDPs and refugees report a higher rate of intimate partner violence than others in Azerbaijan; therefore, there are a number of recommendations aimed at securing sustainable support for vulnerable women's income-generating activities and establishing quotas for their enhanced participation in decision-making positions in their communities and beyond. And in Georgia, the focus was more on legislative and policy frameworks within government to address issues such as sexual harassment, mandatory quotas for female Parliamentarians, the need for increased cooperation with NGOs working in communities on the violence against women (VAW) issue, and combating discriminatory practices such as gender stereotyping in the media.

Triangulated evidence from the document review, KIIs and survey indicate that project is well aligned with national gender equality-related policies, strategies and UNSDCFs of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. In all three countries, WEESC is aligned with a number of SDGs including SDG 5 (gender equality), SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth), SDG 10 (reduced inequalities), and SDG 1 (poverty alleviation).

Georgia

WEE is one of the main goals to achieve GE and Georgia has politically and legally committed to GE in economic participation. The 2014 Association Agreement between Georgia and the EU also requires Georgia to bring national legislation into conformance with international standards. This includes an

²² A/HRC/26/38/Add.3 (18 June 2014) and A/HRC/32/42/Add.3 (22 July 2016), respectively.

obligation to support women’s equal participation and enact all necessary measures at the national level, aimed at achieving greater equality between women and men.

The WEESC project addresses Georgia’s international commitments under CEDAW, CERD, ICESCR, and ICCPR human rights treaties and recommendations from the Committees with oversight responsibilities.

The project objectives support the implementation of the *United Nations Partnership for Sustainable Development (Framework Document), Georgia, 2016-2020*, especially Focus Area 2: Jobs, Livelihood and Social Protection. Output 3 states: *By 2020 poor and excluded population groups have better employment and livelihood opportunities as a result of inclusive and sustainable growth and development policies*; while Output 4 states: *By 2020 vulnerable groups have access to proactive and inclusive gender and child sensitive social protection system that address major vulnerabilities*.

The *SDG Financing Report, December 2020* outlines the alignment of Georgian national strategies with its SDG targets of which SDGs 1, 5 and 8 are listed and tracked.²³ Linkages with SDG Indicators in the Government’s 2019 budget also indicate that Georgia has a long way to go towards GRB as SDG 5 was still significantly underfunded.

Armenia

In Armenia, the WEESC project design is well aligned with a number of country strategies, including the Gender Equality Strategy 2019–2023; Law on Ensuring Equal Opportunities & Equal Rights for Women and Men; Human Rights Strategy (2019) and The Strategic Programme 2019-2023 on the “Implementation of Policy Ensuring Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Women and Men” in Armenia.

The WEESC project address Armenia’s international commitments under CEDAW, CERD, ICESCR, ICCPR, and CRPD human rights treaties and recommendations from the Committees that monitor compliance.

WEESC objectives also directly support the *Armenia-United Nations Development Assistance Framework, 2016-2020* and Armenia’s SDG plans and priorities. Pillar 1 is Equitable, Sustainable Economic Development and Poverty Reduction and *Outcome 1: By 2020, Armenia’s competitiveness is improved and people, especially vulnerable groups, have greater access to sustainable economic opportunities*.

Azerbaijan

In Azerbaijan, 85% of key informants considered the goal and design of the WEESC project to be well aligned with GE principles and human rights norms.

The WEESC project addresses Azerbaijan’s international commitments under CEDAW, CERD, ICESCR, ICCPR, CRPD and CMW human rights treaties. According to the CEDAW Committee’s report in 2015, Azerbaijan is progressively passing, amending, and updating legislation in line with its commitments under international conventions on GE. The Committee made specific recommendations for improvement in women’s employment, economic empowerment and entrepreneurship, as well as measures targeting disadvantaged and marginalized groups of women (i.e. rural, disabled, IDPs, refugees, and older women).

²³ See sdg.gov.ge

The project objectives support the implementation of the *United Nations-Azerbaijan Partnership Framework, 2016-2020*. Strategic Priority Area 1 deals with *Promoting Sustainable and Inclusive Economic Development Underpinned by Increased Diversification and Decent Work*. Cross-cutting themes include a human rights-based approach, GE, youth, specific capacity development for M&E (institutional, technical, managerial), and improving the overall evidence base. Two expectations from such alignment are an increased commitment by the national government to social inclusion, particularly for women, youth, children and vulnerable groups such as IDPs, refugees and persons with disabilities, as well as a better balance between urban and rural areas. Accordingly, the government's Vision 2020 goals include: 1) working towards a highly competitive economy balanced between regions, 2) developing human capital, and 3) ensuring transition to an information society. Outcome 1.1 states: *By 2020, the Azerbaijan economy is more diversified and generates enhanced sustainable growth and decent work, particularly for youth, women, people with disabilities, and other vulnerable groups.*

WEESC project implementation also directly supports the National Plan on Local Development of the Regions (2015-2018; 2020-2024) which emphasizes creating opportunities for self-employment of women and empowerment of women to actively engage in rural and urban life in the regions.

2. RELEVANCE OF PROJECT DESIGN IN ADDRESSING NEEDS OF VULNERABLE WOMEN

The project design is highly relevant in terms of targeting women with multiple vulnerabilities and identifying their needs to increase economic opportunities. In particular, the work on GRB is critical to addressing women's needs in local level decision making settings. The training design addresses a range of different skills and economic activities. However, women, particularly in Azerbaijan and Armenia, expressed a need to better tailor training programs to meet their levels of experience and to align with sectors that have strong economic potential in their communities. Initial progress was made in engaging the private sector to connect women to economic opportunities; however further work is needed to create a demonstration effect within the private sector.

The WEESC project consulted a range of different stakeholders at the grassroots, local and national government and private sector levels to inform the project design.

Grassroots Level

The project design is very relevant to the economic needs of women; however, the success of implementation has varied across different countries. In Armenia, for example, the project's activities were very well structured and focused on agricultural production and food processing, amongst other sectors, yet there is a need to revisit the targeting of women participants and to continue to expand the scope of training to encompass other sectors with potential for high-growth. The project design related to GRB is also very relevant in terms of raising awareness of women's needs and providing opportunities for women's voices to be heard, and thereby promoting their engagement in the resolution of gender inequalities in service provision at the local level. However, there have been issues related to women's participation in certain locations. While women's needs in general have been taken into account, the "one-size fits all" training model should be adjusted and further customized in order to better address specific local and regional contexts, varied vulnerabilities, and the needs of certain groups.

In addition to the activities, the choice of locations for WEESC project activities in each country is also very relevant in terms of targeting the most vulnerable communities. In Georgia, two-thirds of project beneficiaries interviewed confirmed that the interventions enhanced and supported their livelihoods, even during the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, all of the women confirmed increased capacities or

attested to the resilience of their communities. This included, but was not limited to an enhanced understanding of women's rights and economic empowerment possibilities. In addition to WEE, the project recognised the psycho-social element affecting women due to their higher degree of vulnerability (e.g. issues related to gender-based violence) during the pandemic. However, there is a need to further respond to these challenges in a more strategic manner. This was particularly true in Azerbaijan where activities focused exclusively at the grassroots level.

National and Local Government Levels

The WEESC project builds on UN Women's strength of working with the government at different levels and the design took into account the local and national level structures within each country. The project was also highly sensitive and respectful of the geopolitical issues in the South Caucasus Region, and adapted as required, to meet both the needs of the project and respond to immediate challenges. The work around gender pay gaps, labour codes and gender audits was viewed as highly relevant to the needs across the three countries given the large wage variation and poor participation of women in the labour force. While many of the activities related to Outcomes 2 and 3 are aligned with national priorities, high staff turnover affected institutional memory of the organisations, thereby affecting the effectiveness of the program. The section on effectiveness further discusses the strengths and weaknesses of the project activities in relation to Outcomes 2 and 3.

Private Sector Level

Engagement with the private sector is relevant to the project's aim to connect women to economic growth opportunities. During project implementation, efforts were made to engage private sector enterprises as champions and vehicles of change to increase absorption and retention of women in the labour force. The WEESC project worked with a number of other donor projects and sister programs at this level. The expectation was that the engagement with the private sector would create a demonstration effect for other companies to improve their workplace policies and practices. To facilitate demonstration, the project promoted exchanges and interactions between companies across the countries, although this was hindered by the geopolitical conflict and the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of the project activities in this regard were aimed at developing private sector organisational policies that were more inclusive (focused on the benefit of women), but the analysis did not take into account the benefits and incentives (economic and social) for the private sector to make the needed changes.

3. BALANCING THE SUPPLY-DEMAND EQUATION IN PROJECT DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

The project design is based on needs assessments and analyses at the grassroots and national policy levels, combined with lessons learned from UN organisations within the target countries. There is little clear evidence, however, of how the project progressed against some key variables identified during its inception phase to inform project management and decision making. The project design also lacked a systematic landscape analysis to identify priority growth sectors to accelerate or anchor new economic opportunities for women. Similarly, a demand-side analysis of the motivations and/or challenges confronting the private sector in terms of uptake of inclusive business models would have been helpful.

Overall Project

During the design phase, the WEESC project conducted a number of assessments including the "Gender Analysis of Labour Market Regulations" and the "Women's Economic Inactivity and Engagement Study" across all three countries. The findings of the studies were used to inform the project design and a

number of additional assessments were conducted as part of the program activities under Outcomes 2 and 3 to inform policies and project activities. UN Women also built on lessons learned from its work and those of sister UN agencies in the target countries. For example, UN Women Georgia's approach to WEE builds on lessons learned from its work since 2010 to reach out to poor and socially excluded populations in Georgia – including ethnic minority and internally displaced women and girls affected by conflict. This included an assessment of their needs and priorities, proposed actions to increase their participation and influence in both local and national decision-making spaces, as well as enhance their livelihoods and capacities to contribute meaningfully to the overall resilience of their communities. A similar approach was taken in Azerbaijan where the project built on UNDP experience with the WRC in Sabirabad.

However, it is important to note that while these studies were used to inform project design, there is little clear evidence to indicate women beneficiaries were actively involved in the (co)-design of the WEESC Project and how the Project progressed against study findings to inform project management and decision making. For example, 'unpaid care' and 'gendered perceptions' were identified as key variables influencing women's economic inactivity. However, to date, project activities have been very limited in responding to these issues. As indicated later in the Report, these challenges provide a basis and rationale for considering expanding the ambit of the project to include complementary social and civic empowerment activities.

It is also to be noted that, aside from the Gender Assessment of Agriculture and Local Development Systems study, no multi-sectoral assessment was conducted to analyze which sectors or value chains or economic activities should be prioritised for self-employment and job creation. This point was highlighted the KIIs in terms of the importance of prioritizing activities and resources towards economic activities that have both growth potential and represent diversification from traditional sectors associated with women's economic activity, at both a country, and to the extent possible, sub-regional level.

The GBA+ analysis also needed to take into account the motivations and challenges of the private sector to engage women as employees or as suppliers within their supply chain. The project assumed that policy level change would be adequate for the private sector to engage in better gender inclusive practices. However, actual implementation has been very limited, due in part to COVID-19. Going forward, it will also be important to focus on a demand-side analysis and to identify which incentives will help accelerate private sector actions, particularly with locally owned and managed companies.

4.2 Coherence

Summary of Coherence Findings: How Well Does the Project Fit?

There is ample evidence that the WEESC Project is very compatible with other GEWE interventions in the South Caucasus Region. The WEESC Project threefold mandate is clearly aligned with UN Women's Strategic Plan and with UNDP priorities in the South Caucasus Region. The Project has developed many synergies within the UN system, UNCTs, other projects of UN Women and UNDP, in addition to coordinating with government entities in each country in order to avoid duplication of efforts. UN Women and UNDP are seen as having a distinct comparative advantage in the region around WEE given their combined expertise in GE and sustainable development.

The UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks that were agreed upon with all three national governments in 2016 laid the foundation for project implementation, according to their respective priorities for achieving SDGs, thereby improving each country's international human rights commitments under CEDAW and other legal instruments, particularly related to equitable economic development.

4. ALIGNMENT WITH UN STRATEGIES AND SYNERGIES WITHIN COUNTRIES AND UN SYSTEM

WEESC project objectives are aligned with UN Women's and UNDP's policies and strategies within the three countries. The Project has developed many synergies within the UN system, UNCTs, other projects of UN Women and UNDP, in addition to coordinating with government entities in each country in order to avoid duplication of efforts and conversely, fill perceived gaps. There is considerable evidence that WEESC supports broader UN coordination efforts, as well as evidence of coordination across UN agencies in the entire South Caucasus Region.

Regional

At the South Caucasus regional level, a vast majority of survey respondents indicated that it was either *moderately likely* or *highly likely* that the WEESC project will realize synergies and coordination within the broader UN mission to achieve GEWE in the three countries, the work of the UN Country Teams, the interventions of UN Women/UNDP and other actors' interventions in the same context.

Georgia

UN Women Georgia has identified WEE as one of its strategic priorities for achieving gender equality and women's empowerment, noting that the WEESC project contributes to that goal through its threefold mandate across the South Caucasus region. Specifically, the UN Women Strategic Plan (2018-2021) aspires for women to gain income security, decent work and economic autonomy, while outputs 8, 9 and 10 address different critical aspects that are instrumental for the achievement of the above outcome.

In Georgia, UN Women has developed a long-term partnership with civil society organizations (CSOs) such as the TASO Foundation and the application of its already successful social mobilization methodology has enabled the project to reach the most vulnerable communities and address their needs. The project also benefited from the experience of UN Women Georgia's JAWE project supported by the Government of Norway and working with private enterprises on WEPs. From a regional perspective, the Project offered opportunities for exchanging experiences and best practices among private sector partners that have adopted WEPs in the target countries. A KII respondent from the private sector in Georgia indicated that the partnership building process between UN Women and the

WEE project has been successful and led to unexpected positive results and numbers. Therefore, future work on the WEPs component needs to be intensified in both Azerbaijan and Armenia. If the Norway financed project is extended, it will be important to ensure strong coordination and synergy with WEESC to avoid the potential for confusion amongst women beneficiaries in Georgia.

UN Women Georgia has also supported the Government and different line ministries, upon request, to mainstream gender in their policies, programs and national action plans and has also supported local governments with GRB. The well-established partnership that exists with the Inter-Agency Commission on Gender Equality, Ending Violence against Women and Domestic Violence and UN Women Georgia (that coordinates government's actions on GE at the decision-making level) and the Task Force on Women's Economic Empowerment has enabled the project to ensure synergies and avoid duplications.

Armenia

In Armenia, the project design is coherent and comprehensive in terms of reaching the UN's wider goals of equality for all people and GEWE goals of the Armenian UNCT members, for example UNDP Armenia. The threefold nature of the project (bottom-up, middle-ground and top-down) contributed to its effectiveness and capacity to address the needs of women at all intervention levels (grassroots, law and policy, as well as institutional). It was also found that the networking processes were effective especially at the grassroots level, as women in each targeted region forged very strong bonds with each other and could easily cooperate together.

In terms of synergies with other initiatives, KII respondents reported beneficial cooperation with many NGOs international organizations working in the country. They even exchanged beneficiaries with other WEE programs. These included the World Bank, USAID and the Austrian Development Bank who organized many meetings. Positive synergies were adopted for the Statistical Committee of Armenia (ARMSTAT) to conduct its "Gender Pay Gap" analysis. The cooperation was very meaningful as it helped them to synchronize the data collection and processing procedures to address WEESC Project objectives in both Georgia and Armenia. At an institutional level, the project was deemed compatible as well. For example, The Caucasus Resource Research Centre (CRRC) Georgia conducted research around women's economic inactivity in close cooperation with CRRC Armenia.

Azerbaijan

In Azerbaijan, 85% of KIIs consider the design and the goal of the project to be coherent with their principles and programs in the country on GE and human rights. At the regional level, approximately 77% of survey respondents across the three countries indicate that the WEESC project fits well within UN Women's Strategic Plan, the interrelated threefold mandate and UNDP priorities in the targeted countries.

The WEESC project has created a new kind of synergy among the stakeholders and beneficiaries, involving the large corporations, local municipalities, national government, public organizations and NGOs. In terms of harmonization within the region, one KII respondent reported that the major synergy and learning output for its WRC was an international exchange of the experience with the other two countries' representatives over an online meeting. They also appreciated access to tools for holding online events, as well as building connections and implementing the project in coordination with the State Committee on Women Affairs. Overall, the interests of local and national governments, working at a grassroots level with families and women in order to economically and socially empower them, were well integrated into the components of the project.

5. COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGE IN WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

UN Women and UNDP are viewed as having a distinct comparative advantage related to WEE in the South Caucasus Region given their combined expertise in GE and sustainable development. Additionally, beyond the funding of projects, implementing partners and stakeholders recognize the technical expertise and support provided by UN Women and both agencies' flexibility in responding to unforeseen circumstances during project implementation (e.g. geo-political and COVID).

Regional

From a regional perspective, implementing partners and stakeholders recognize the comparative advantage of UNDP working in concert with UN Women Georgia, in both Azerbaijan and Armenia.

Georgia

In Georgia, implementing partners and other stakeholders recognize many comparative advantages of UN Women, including competencies and expertise in WEE and technical support beyond the funding of projects. For example, technical expertise and support and capacity building related to project preparation, management and implementation skills of organizations were highlighted as particularly beneficial for grassroots organizations. Also, highly valued was UN Women's flexibility during implementation to respond to unexpected circumstances (particularly to the changes in the political context) and willingness to work with implementing partners and stakeholders to adjust activities in order to deliver more effective results.

Reportedly, UN Women Georgia selected highly qualified professionals to advise the WEESC project on ways forward. They were up-to-date on global trends and responsive to the changing environment in which the project was being implemented. Government and ILO partners clearly expressed satisfaction with the interventions they were involved in. UN Women has over a decade of experience in reaching out to poor and socially excluded populations in Georgia which has positioned the organization very well for assessing the needs and priorities of ethnic minority women and victims of gender-based violence. They are also knowledgeable about potential opportunities available to marginalized women for participation in local decision-making venues.

Armenia

In Armenia, implementing partners and stakeholders recognize the comparative advantage of UNDP, especially their experience in implementing projects on GE. The collaboration between UN women and UNDP in Georgia was also recognized, particularly given the external challenges encountered during project implementation, although opportunities for enhanced coordination should be explored. Additionally, they valued the flexibility and responsiveness that UNDP-Armenia has demonstrated during the implementation of this project.

Azerbaijan

In Azerbaijan, implementing partners and stakeholders recognize the comparative advantage of UNDP, especially their experience in implementing projects on GE. The leveraging of the unique WRC model to support implementation of Outcome 1 was appreciated and acknowledged as a powerful and effective tool for promoting women's entrepreneurship and undertaking capacity building activities for women in the regions, although challenges related to longer-term sustainability of the WRCs remain. Additionally, they valued the flexibility and responsiveness that UNDP-Azerbaijan has demonstrated during the implementation of this project.

4.3 Effectiveness

Summary of Effectiveness Findings: Is the Intervention Achieving Its Objectives?

There have been variable results across the three Outcome areas in the countries of implementation. Under Outcome 1, the Project has achieved 87% of its target as of December 2020 in across the three countries in terms of the 'number of self-(employed) women for at least 6 months, with six months remaining in project implementation. The majority of benefits to women achieved under Outcome 1 relate to self-employment which also includes grants provided by the project to support the establishment of women's businesses. However, there is a need to further enhance targeting criteria and the training being provided to women, by incorporating learner-centered models that facilitate the development of different learning pathways and related support services (i.e. self-employment), thereby enabling customization at country and local levels to ensure the content is relevant to local needs.

Securing employment was viewed as one of the greatest challenges under Outcome 1 as women continued to face difficulty in securing jobs, a pattern further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The training and economic opportunities provided by the project resulted in increased self-confidence of women beneficiaries. However, there has been little to no change observed in decision-making, control/power relations and gendered perceptions of women's roles.

Fifteen companies have endorsed the WEPs (11 in Armenia and 4 in Azerbaijan) and their engagement in the project has helped to increase networking among like-minded companies. However, project activities with the private sector have been experimental and there no clear evidence yet on the application of the changes emanating from adoption of the WEPs. Going forward, accompanying incentives for the private sector to implement these changes will need to be explored and additional demonstration activities tested together with the private sector in these countries.

In Georgia and Armenia, under Outcomes 2 and 3, significant work has been undertaken at the local governance and policy level, with a particular focus on formal employment and GRB. However, stakeholders expressed the need to continue work on the institutionalisation of the policies and to also focus on policies geared towards self-employment, in addition to wage employment, to ensure better integration across the Outcome areas.

6. PROJECT GOAL AND ASSMUMPTIONS

There are early indications of contribution towards women's economic gains and abilities to participate in decision making processes in both private and public realms. However, it was difficult to assess progress against the project goal or impact as the WEESC project has only been implemented for just over two years and the logical framework metrics are specific to each country. This will require additional assessment which is beyond the scope of the present evaluation. However, triangulated evidence does show some early signs of progress and similarly, the majority of the assumptions that underpin the ToC were either weak or moderately proven, and therefore requires more time for actualization.

High Level Goal

Indicators of change related to the higher-level goal of “Women, particularly poor and socially excluded, in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia are economically empowered and participate in relevant decision-making” are related to country level metrics. Hence, it will not be appropriate to make any conclusive statements on the progress against these indicators. It is recommended that the WEESC project conduct a separate contribution analysis to check progress against these targets. However, the following table gives a brief indication based on qualitative findings.

Table 7 – Assessment of Impact Targets and Achievements²⁴

| Indicators | Signs of progress |
|---|---|
| % of the female labor force participation in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia | Engagement of 473 women securing economic activities as a result of project activities indicates contribution to female labour force participation. |
| % of the gender wage gap in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia | The WEESC project has supported a number of policy reforms to close the gender wage gap but application and implementation of these policies are yet to be seen. |
| % of women’s employment categorized as vulnerable | A majority of the women are engaged in self-employment but there is no conclusive evidence of how many of them are registered as formal businesses. Similarly, there is variability in data on employment that indicates a number of women are securing employment contracts that are service contracts. This continues to make them vulnerable. In the absence of concrete data, the evaluation team cannot make any strong statements on the signs of progress in reducing vulnerability in employment. |
| Number of beneficiary women with increased income in wage employment or entrepreneurship | Women who have secured wage employment or self-employment have reported income increases. However, there is indication that some of the economic activities have been affected by COVID-19 since early 2020. |

Source: Prepared by the Evaluation Team based on evidence generated in the evaluation.

TOC Causality and Assumptions

The existing ToC does not clearly capture behaviour change of certain key actors (particularly the private sector) and how this intended behavioural change (application of WEP and practices) contributes to the resulting outcomes. A revised ToC for Phase Two has been put forward in the Recommendation section for consideration.

There is also variability in the number of assumptions being proven true. The following table summarises the key assumptions and the findings from the evaluation. More is described in subsequent sections.

²⁴ Impact for easy reference: Women, particularly poor and socially excluded, in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia are economically empowered and participate in relevant decision-making

Table 8 - Assessment of Validity of Existing Project Assumptions

| Level | Existing Key Assumptions (as per WEESC Prodoc) | Findings |
|------------------|--|--|
| Outcome 1 | Women can be inspired to participate in project activities and in becoming more active economically and socially | Strong: Women are inspired to engage in economic activities; however, perception around gendered norms continue to exist in local communities. |
| | Understanding of the concept of decent work for women among all stakeholders | Moderate: Project stakeholders have expressed an understanding of decent work, but FGDs indicate that there continues to be traditional perceptions around gendered norms at the community level. |
| | There is decent work opportunities for women, especially the poor and socially excluded | Weak: A majority of women expressed difficulty in finding decent employment opportunities. Most women preferred to engage in self-employment which is more precarious |
| Outcome 2 | There is political will to undertake policy & legislative reforms aimed at WEE | Strong: Strong political will and motivation has been expressed by relevant stakeholders to undertake policy and legislative reforms. |
| | Reforms are not slow and addresses all dimensions relevant for WEE. | Weak: The extent of reform implementation has been variable across countries, but in most cases has taken time. In addition, high turnover at local and national levels risks continuity and hence requires continuous reinforcement. |
| Outcome 3 | Government institutions engage women in local planning and budgeting | Moderate: Women have been involved in local planning and budgeting. How much of that has resulted in meeting needs of women is yet to be seen. |
| | Organisations can be convinced of the need to integrate women | Weak: Organisations have their own understanding and need for being gender inclusive; however, application of practices or behavioural change to be more inclusive is yet to be seen. |

Source: Prepared by the Evaluation Team based on evidence generated in the evaluation.

7. OUTCOME 1: GRASSROOTS LEVEL²⁵

As of December 2020, the WEESC project achieved 87% of the project-wide target of ‘the *number of women (self-employed) for at least 6 months due to improved skills and capacities*’ regionally, and was also to reach vulnerable communities across the three countries. At the country level, there was considerable variability in terms of achieving the planned targets. Key factors affecting variability include: prior exposure to training, skills and experience of women in economic activity; alignment of training content to the needs of women and growth opportunities in priority economic sector; existing perceptions around gender norms and unpaid care responsibilities; access to finance; level of coordination with local stakeholders; the social mobilisation approach; and the effects of COVID-19 combined with the regional conflict.

Strategic Intent

Activities related to the first outcome were intended to be carried out across Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia with a specific focus on the provision of women, particularly poor and socially excluded groups, with information, skills development and economic opportunities to be self-employed and/or to join the formal labour sector in the three countries and strengthen their capacities to organise and participate in decision-making at the national and local levels (WEESC Pro Doc).

- For self-employment: the priority was to ensure support to women for self-employment opportunities with decent work elements in the project target rural communities where formal labour sector jobs are scarce or unavailable and reduce vulnerability of their economic activities.
- For employment: the priority was to ensure provision of support to women with decent work opportunities that are linked with employment in the formal sector.

However, due to the onset of COVID-19, and the resulting digital implications that the project had not foreseen, as well as an increase in unpaid obligations of women, and negative economic downturn, opportunities in the formal employment pathway proved to be more challenging than originally envisaged.

Delivery Model

The activities at the grassroots level were facilitated in different ways in different countries in relation to the local context.

- In Armenia, the grassroots component of the WEESC project has been implemented in consortium with Green Lane NGO and 3R Strategy Co. Ltd. A social mobilization approach has been applied to reach out to women in 11 municipalities in the targeted Gegharkunik and Shirak regions.
- In Azerbaijan, women at the grassroots level were engaged through the expansion and establishment of WRCs in 3 regions (Gusar, Sabirabad, Khazar).
- In Georgia, UN Women applied a social mobilization approach to reach out to women, particularly the poor and most excluded, in 9 municipalities from the three target regions of Kakheti, Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti. Self-help groups have been created as a mechanism to effectively share information and knowledge with the project beneficiary women on public services and vocational and income-generating opportunities offered by state, private and development partners. The project also worked through the Women’s Rooms to facilitate

²⁵Outcome 1 for easy reference: Women, particularly the poor and socially excluded, use skills, economic opportunities and relevant information to be self-employed and join the formal labour sector in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia.

dialogue and exchanges between mobilized women and local authorities around the issues relevant to WEE.

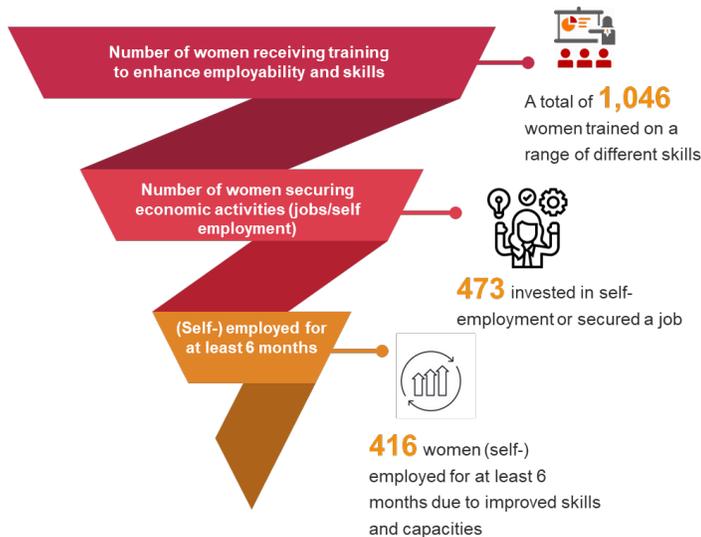
Vulnerability

It is to be noted that all the locations selected included vulnerable populations; however, within those regions the selection of vulnerable target groups has been variable across the three countries. Women in Armenia expressed the highest concerns around targeting as many of the women benefitting from the project had received some form of support previously. In Georgia and Azerbaijan, women expressed relatively higher satisfaction with targeting. However, it was interesting to find that the number of vulnerability criteria show some correlation with women’s abilities to secure or generate economic activities. In accordance with the main project target group, vulnerable women who were not able to secure any economic activity after training tended to be those who had multiple vulnerabilities such as mobility restrictions, unpaid care responsibilities, were from highly vulnerable ethnicities, were subject to gender based violence and had poor access to markets.

Overall Progress in Outcome 1: Grassroots Level

The figures and narrative below illustrate the progress made across the 3 countries under Outcome 1. They have been prepared by the Evaluation Team based on data provided by UN Women to the end of December 2020.

Figure 6 Women’s Access to Training and Financial Resources



Progress in Relation to Women’s Access to Training, Information and Financial Resources



Women obtaining skills and opportunities: A total of 1,046 women (171 in Armenia, 422 in Azerbaijan and 453 in Georgia), especially those facing poverty and social exclusion, have received a range of different training to enhance their employability and/or business skills.



Women trained in GRB and local budgeting process: Approximately 293 women (140 in Armenia and 150 in Georgia) have been trained in GBB and have stated increased knowledge regarding women’s rights and policies through advocacy initiatives.



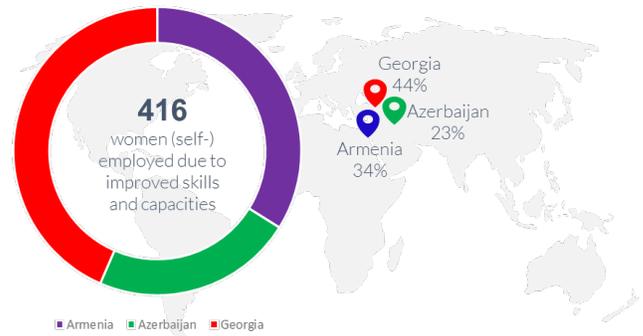
Women receiving grants: a total of 324 women received grants for small business establishment and expansion. In Georgia, women also received grants for vocational education.



Progress in Relation to Women’s Use and Application of Skills, Information and Grants

Women securing economic activities: Of the total number of women trained, 473 women secured economic activities (either jobs or self-employment). Of the 473 women, 416 reported to have continued for at least 6 months.

Figure 7 - Proportion of Women Securing Economic Activities



Across the three countries, Georgia had the highest proportion of women (self-) employed due to improved skills and capacities (44% of 416) followed by Armenia (34%) and Azerbaijan (23%) respectively.

At an aggregate level, the project met 87% of the target (which was 120 women in Armenia and 180 in both Azerbaijan and Georgia) in terms of the ‘number of women (self-employed) for at least 6 months due to improved skills and capacities’. The table below shows the project’s status of ultimate targets met under Outcome 1.

Table 9 - Outcome 1 Targets and Achievements for (Self-) Employment of Women

| Targets achieved in relation to ‘number of self-(employed)’ for at least 6 months due to improved skills and capacities | | | |
|---|---------|------------|---------|
| | Armenia | Azerbaijan | Georgia |
| TARGET: | 120 | 180 | 180 |
| Achieved | 141 | 94 | 181 |
| % of target achieved | 118% | 52% | 101% |
| # of women receiving training to enhance employability and skills | 171 | 422 | 453 |
| Uptake: number of women self-employed as a percentage of those trained | 82% | 22.3% | 40% |

Source: Prepared by the Evaluation team based on quantitative data provided by UN Women

While Georgia and Armenia were able to exceed their targets (by 1% in Georgia and 18% in Armenia), Azerbaijan was able to reach only 52% of their target. There are several factors that affected this variation in progress towards achieving training targets and these are analyzed below. Although it is unrealistic to expect that all women trained will secure economic activity, it is important for the project to review and analyze the uptake rates in order to validate the effectiveness of the activities.

Although both Georgia and Armenia exceeded their targets, the proportion of trainees who were actually able to use the skills to secure (self-) employment is variable. Armenia had the highest uptake rate²⁶ with 82%, followed by Georgia at 40% and then Azerbaijan at 22%, respectively.

Below are some of the key reasons that may have contributed to the variation in target achievement and uptake rates across the South Caucasus Region. Some of these factors are common across all three countries while others are more country specific.

Variability in Progress Toward Training Targets: Regionally

Varied perceptions around gender norms had a varying impact on women's ability to be economically active. For example, a majority of the project beneficiaries in Armenia were from the region with a relatively low gender stereotype. This was generally considered high across Azerbaijan. Similarly, unpaid care responsibilities were cited as an important reason for women in Georgia to refrain from engaging in economic activities despite training.

Differing baselines of women in terms of their skill sets and existing involvement in economic activities were identified. This is further expanded below.

Variability in Progress Toward Training Targets: Georgia

Unpaid care responsibilities and the lack of affordable childcare have been a critical factor in limiting women's ability to engage economically despite obtaining skills through the training programs.

Lack of access to capital due to collateral issues: women struggle to obtain capital from financial institutions because of their inability to meet collateral requirements.

Limited or no transportation along with the high costs of travel serve to holdback women from securing job opportunities.

The approach to social mobilisation using self-help groups in Georgia was highly effective in increasing women's participation in economic activities. For example, the social mobilization method implemented by TASO and KRDF was seen as highly effective as women were able to engage in self-employment in an area where they already had experience (of unpaid childcare and elderly care work). Building on existing experience meant they were able to quickly pick up and apply their learning to participate in paid labour. This also increases their confidence and self-esteem.

Variability in Progress Toward Training Targets: Armenia

Women with existing businesses and skills: Most of the women engaging with the WEESC project in Armenia had a stronger economic orientation. They either had existing businesses or had been trained or received grants previously by other programs. The training was attended primarily to meet the compliance requirement for obtaining grants. This led to a higher uptake rate between those trained and those securing economic activity. Therefore, this does not necessarily indicate effectiveness of the training, but is indicative of a higher baseline of competency for the clients in Armenia. In addition, the total number of women targeted for training was also lower compared to Azerbaijan and Georgia.

Strong coordination between WEESC project implementing partners and project participants: The project (implementing partners and project leads) reached agreements with potential project

²⁶ Defined as the proportion of women able to secure and continue (self-employed) activities for at least 6 months, to total number of unique women trained.

participants and relevant local authorities on the type of WEE project needed, in addition to the best ways to plan and implement it. This needs-based approach improved the effectiveness of the project activities.

Variability in Progress Toward Training Targets: Azerbaijan

Lack of previous experience and discrepancy between economic opportunities available for women and the type of training offered: In Azerbaijan, external factors were more critical to contribute to women's inactivity despite training. Lack of previous work experience, absence of relevant certificates (similarly to Georgia) or documents to endorse and/or validate their skills on completion of certain training, and a scarcity of relevant job opportunities in the field they are seeking have cumulatively led to a poor uptake rate. Also, the lack of baseline data or situational analyses to assess the local market situation (formal and informal labour market opportunities, skills required, market trends and growth opportunities) led to a discrepancy between the specific needs of women and the economic realities or opportunities in their communities. In addition, remoteness of location from areas where job opportunities are available (particularly in Sabirabad and Gusar) was also seen as a contributing factor to economic inactivity. In general, women perceive public sector employment as stable and well-regulated compared to self-employment. However, these factors limit their ability to engage economically.

Poor business environment: The general business environment is perceived to be challenging for women to enter the job market or take up economic activities. This is also supported by secondary information which indicates lower SME skill scores compared to other countries in the South Caucasus Region.

Lack of access to capital and perceived fear related to business set-up and operations: Although there are provisions for lower interest rates for women to take out loans for business development, the collateral requirements limit women's ability to obtain finance for economic activities. In addition, the fear related to taxation and complexities of bookkeeping discourage women from setting up their businesses.

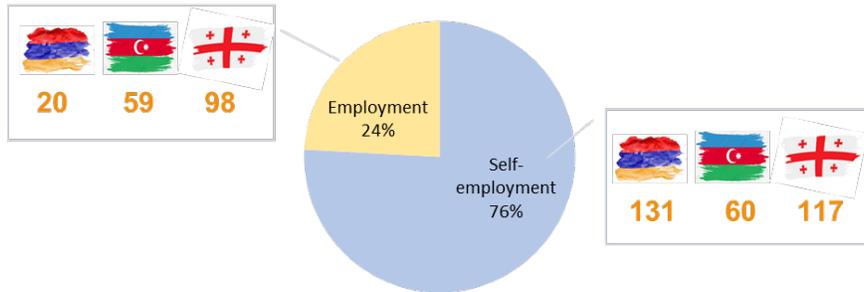
Disproportionate impact of COVID-19 and the recent Nagorno-Karabakh conflict affected the target population in Azerbaijan more seriously relative to other countries. In Azerbaijan, COVID-19 limited the purchasing capacity and business opportunities, but also affected women's incentive to engage in economic activities.

8. OUTCOME 1 GRASSROOTS LEVEL (TRAINING PROGRAM)

The majority of women who engaged in economic activities secured self-employment instead of wage-employment (i.e. jobs). The project facilitated an increased ability of women to network, gain a range of work-related skills, express their needs in public forums, and engage in local level budgeting discussions. This enabled them to gain access to economic opportunities and support networks, as well as helped to increase their confidence and boost self-esteem. However, participants also expressed the need to better align the design of the training with their specific contexts and requirements, in particular, with economic activities that have strong growth potential in their community, region and country.

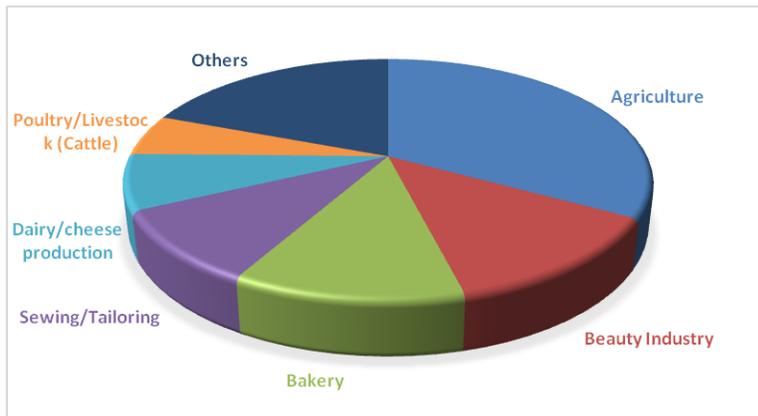
In terms of economic activities, approximately 76% of the target group secured self-employment (either through establishment of new or expansion of existing businesses) and this rate is partially influenced by the grant activities of the program geared towards self-employment activities. The figures below were prepared by the Evaluation Team based on data provided by UN Women.

Figure 8: Proportion of Women Securing Self-Employment and Employment



While the composition varied within countries, on average, self-employment activities were highest in agriculture (33%), followed by the beauty industry. The top six sectors where women engaged in self-employment activities are shown below.

Figure 9: Top Six Sectors for Women’s Self-Employment



| Distribution of Self Employment across different counties | |
|---|-----|
| Agriculture | 33% |
| Beauty Industry | 13% |
| Bakery | 12% |
| Sewing/Tailoring | 10% |
| Dairy/cheese production | 7% |
| Poultry/Livestock (Cattle) | 6% |
| Others (multiple sectors) | 19% |

Women applying GRB Information

According to WEESC project reports, women trained on local planning and budgeting are now able to follow up on commitments made by local authorities, particularly in Armenia and Georgia through roundtable meetings and via women from self-help groups. In total, as of December 2020 the project has been able to facilitate a total of 64 advocacy initiatives (20 in Armenia, 12 in Azerbaijan and 32 in Georgia) and a total of 159 women beneficiaries reported as having contributed to local planning and budgeting / GRB discussions aimed at addressing their socio-economic concerns.



In Armenia, 140 women reported increased knowledge regarding women’s rights and policies through advocacy initiatives. 79 active women in 7 communities engaged in virtual discussions to identify gender-responsive community development priorities to be included in their 2021 annual work plan.



In Georgia, 9 municipalities incorporated GRB in their budgeting processes and included many of women’s needs in their budgets (access to clean drinking water, rehabilitation of roads and public buildings and maintenance of waste management systems, building on playgrounds for children).

Benefits and Progress Highlighted by Women Beneficiaries

FGDs conducted across the three countries indicate positive responses from women beneficiaries in the following areas:

Access to new tools, techniques, skills and markets: Business grants, networking opportunities, new skills on business management, marketing and job search were some of the key motivations and areas of learning for women. In Armenia, women mentioned that they had the opportunity to be introduced to new crops, improved production techniques, financial management and social media tools (such as Facebook) for marketing their products. In Azerbaijan, self-employed women highlighted the importance of learning to apply skills related to business planning, English-language skills, computer skills, accounting and financial management, packaging and marketing, whereas, wage-employed women mentioned the importance of being able to acquire computer skills, language and job application skills. In Georgia, women obtained skills connected to programme budgeting and project writing that enabled them to

develop and submit project proposals to different donor organizations, beyond WEESC, based on their community's or household's needs and capacities.

Access to working capital to expand or invest in business: Access to grants was a key motivation for women to join the training programs in each of the countries. Women in a number of FGDs across the three countries, particularly in Georgia and Azerbaijan, mentioned the absence or lack of capital to start a business, with the grants providing them an opportunity to test out their business ideas and skills.

Access to social networking skills and social capital: Access to safe spaces and networking opportunities for women were identified as key benefits of the WEESC project. In Armenia, women used social media platforms to exchange information and communicate on important issues such as COVID, transportation, roads, etc. In Azerbaijan, women highlighted the importance of the WRCs in developing networks that have helped them graduate to secure jobs, expand their social networks or create business partnerships. The WRCs also exposed them to networking and marketing opportunities such as trade exhibitions for profiling their businesses with direct clients and other buyers. In Georgia, the FGDs revealed that the trainings and information sessions supported the establishment of both internal networks (among the socially mobilized women) and external networks (with the CSOs working with women in the region and local government entities). In turn, these helped women to increase their access to information and services, funding grants, capacity building opportunities and served to enhance their overall self-confidence.

Improved understanding of women's rights: Women beneficiaries also highlighted their improved understanding of GRB and issues surrounding violence against women (VAW), as well as support services and mechanisms available for them.

Signs of increased agency: While no clear change has been seen in terms of women's decision-making, control/power relations and division of labour at the household level, women have mentioned positive outcomes in terms of improved self-confidence and self-esteem through their ability to network and contribute to household income. For example, in Armenia women indicated a reduced dependency on their husbands as a result of being able to secure self-employment. Women also highlighted their increased ability to express their needs and contribute to budget discussions at the community level.

Challenges/Barriers Faced by Women at the Grassroots Level

Some of the challenges/barrier mentioned by women during the FGDs include:

Difficulties with the transition to online training: The shift to online platforms limited women from attending the sessions, particularly for those who did not have internet access. Women also highlighted the value and importance of face-to-face interactions.

Criteria for beneficiary selection: According to women, the main target group could have been more clearly defined in accordance with their economic inactivity and vulnerability status. For example, most of the beneficiaries in Armenia, particularly those receiving grants, were previously involved in similar programs. On the other hand, in Georgia, women with multiple vulnerability criteria (e.g. mobility restrictions, unpaid care responsibilities, member of deprived groups, etc.) faced relatively greater challenges to secure economic activities compared to those with fewer vulnerability variables.

Concerns with the training programs:

- Structure of the training: According to women, the training courses were attended on a voluntary basis and there was no specific modular approach. As soon as women secured an economic activity, they could choose to discontinue attending training. It was also quite theoretical and women also expressed the need for the training content to include practical/field examples.
- Disconnect between trainees' experiences and the training courses: There was mention of mismatch between the trainees' backgrounds or existing economic activities and the courses they attended. They expressed their need for greater alignment between the job or economic prospects and the trainings offered. In Armenia for example, the training courses were geared towards agriculture so the women who were involved in non-agricultural activities, yet who did meet the vulnerability criteria, could not make much use of the training. In Georgia, in many cases women did not consciously choose which type of training to attend; their participation was more a factor of which training was available and their own availabilities, which resulted in less than optimal application of the learning.
- Absence of certification: Lack of a formal certification or recognition of credential precluded women in Azerbaijan from making use of the training courses for employment. However, it is important to note there are several benefits to experiential adult learner-centric training which is customized to the target audience and typically involves the awarding of certificates for course completion and these type of certificates should be integrated into the WEESC project. In Georgia, grants were also provided to women to enrol in vocational education in which formal certification is provided and this option could also be considered for Azerbaijan and Armenia.

Poor uptake of economic activity despite training: Despite the training received and skills gained, access to formal employment remains a challenge across the three countries. These challenges are related to mobility restrictions, availability of few employment opportunities, infrastructure difficulties associated with rural regions, low wages and the economic downturn caused by COVID-19 and the geo-political context. In Azerbaijan, for example, although women gained a range of different skills from the trainings, they struggled to find jobs as there are very few options for formal employment contracts. Most women were able to secure employment under service contracts; however, these pose risks related to vulnerability of income. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the women employed by beauty salons did not receive any income/compensation due to the nature of their service contracts.

Limited or no change in women's agency: Although women gained more information about their rights and their self-confidence increased, there was no clear evidence of changes in the traditional gendered roles and decision-making nor control exercised by women at the household level.

Continued gender stereotypes and constraints to women's ability to engage: This was applicable both in terms of training attendance and in acquiring employment opportunities. Women continued to engage in self-employment in order to balance their unpaid care work with economic activities and there is no clear evidence of a shift in their existing roles at the household level. This meant that they had to continue making sure they satisfied their household responsibilities in addition to their individual economic activities. In some cases, the participation of women in training programs was hindered by negative perceptions of these events by other household members (e.g. mother-in-law and husband). For example, in some cases in Georgia, women were not allowed or discouraged to participate, whereas

in other cases, household members accompanied women to the training program and only endorsed it if they felt comfortable with the content.

External factors such as COVID and the conflict affected women's mental health and their ability to engage or continue their economic activities.

9. OUTCOME 1 GRASSROOTS LEVEL (PRIVATE SECTOR ENGAGEMENT)

Private sector companies who engaged with the project have acknowledged an increased understanding and intent to integrate gender inclusive practices in their organisations. However, to date, there is scant evidence of or signs of application of practices as a result of their participation with the WEESC project. COVID-19 also posed a serious challenge to the achievement of this output as priorities shifted and a number of companies faced financial constraints.

Progress with the Private Sector

A total of 15 companies have signed the WEPs with the project (11 in Armenia and 4 in Azerbaijan). WEPs were not signed directly with companies in Georgia, yet through their sister programs, 160 women were trained by private sector (*pro-bono*). KIIs suggested that this was the first occasion in which companies in the three countries engaged with UN organisations and this experience was viewed as a pilot. The companies found the networking and exchanges organized by UN Women and UNDP very useful, as well as the mentoring manual created by UN Women Georgia, which has been shared by the UN Women Head Office as a global resource.

Challenges/Barriers in Relation to the Private Sector

The activities under this output were aimed at implementing gender-responsive corporate policies and practices to increase women's access to decent work and increasing inclusion of more women-owned and collective enterprises in their supply chains. While private sector companies have expressed their intent to work towards WEE through the signing of the WEPs and participating in exchanges, in Armenia the large companies already have established gender-sensitive practices, so there is no clear evidence of the application of changes to practices as a result of WEPs signed. It is also not clear what specific benefits or indications of benefits which might have accrued to the companies involved, which is often a core part of analysis for WEE programs engaging the private sector. It is to be noted that COVID-19 also posed a serious challenge to the achievement of this output as priorities shifted and as mentioned prior, a number of companies faced financial constraints.

10. OUTCOMES 2 AND 3: POLICY, LEGISLATIVE AND INSTITUTIONAL LEVELS

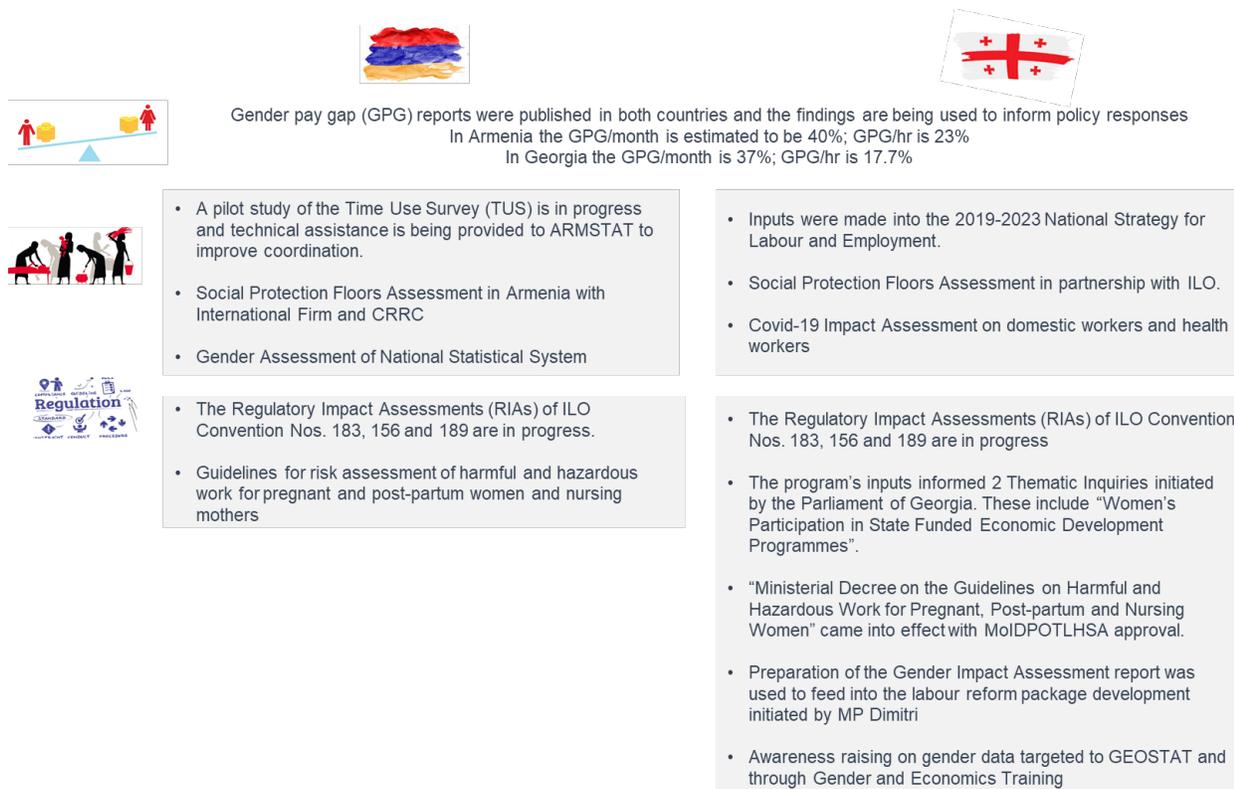
The WEESC project was effective in facilitating evidence-based policies that targeted reforms in labour laws and in reduction of the gender pay gap. Moreover, the project was able to work with local authorities to improve the gender responsiveness of local budgeting and resource allocation. However, actual implementation of these policies and practices is at a very early stage and will require reinforcement. Much of the policy-level work under Outcome 2 was targeted to formal employment and there is a need to expand such activities to also respond to the needs of women engaged in self-employment as they constituted the majority of project participants within the three countries.

Outcome 2: Armenia and Georgia implement adequate legislative and policy frameworks to enable women's economic empowerment.

Two key areas of project work include, ‘research and data’ and ‘improved policy and legislative frameworks aligned with international labour standards’. The following figures illustrate the major activities conducted across Armenia and Georgia under Outcome 2 and have been prepared by the Evaluation Team based on data provided by UN Women.

Progress in Outcome 2

Figure 10: Progress in Achieving Outcome 2 - Policy and Legislation Level



Outcome 3 Government and public institutions develop and deliver gender-responsive programmes, public services, strategies and plans for WEE in Armenia and Georgia.

Two key areas of WEESC project work include: ‘strengthening institutional capacities: government internal systems for GE mainstreaming’ and ‘strengthening individual capacities on GE: technical staff at the government institutions’.

Progress in Outcome 3

Figure 10: Progress in Achieving Outcome 3 – Institutional Level



Signs of Progress/Success at the Institutional and Local Government Level

Key informant interviews indicated the following signs of success:

Targeting women with different vulnerabilities: An increasing number of women, including women from remote areas and vulnerable groups, are now actively involved in GRB meetings. However, women also mentioned that due to COVID, the needs and vulnerability assessments were moved to online platforms which may have affected the targeting of disadvantaged women participants.

Engagement of local government ensured greater inclusion: Engagement of the local government in project implementation at the grassroots level helped the community organizations to select vulnerable groups and project beneficiaries who, then in turn, established their own businesses as a result of the project. This along with training of women on GRB resulted in a two-way facilitation of grassroots women and local governments' understanding of women's engagement in the budgetary process.

Emergence of other services triggered by increased women's economic activities: At a national level, the launch of different approaches and new programs to promote the development of small and medium enterprises, social entrepreneurship, and agro-tourism have positively influenced WEE. This has also influenced the establishment of other services, such as in Armenia, where the loan policy was recently changed to ease the tax burden for small and family-based enterprises.

Evidence-based policy discussion: The research and assessment output were viewed as important steps in ensuring evidence-based policy advocacy targeting women. This includes the gender wage gap study, access to economic resources in line with international best practices, and the Ministerial decree on "Harmful and Hazardous Work for Pregnant, Postpartum and Nursing Women" in Georgia and Armenia. Policy dialogues also laid the groundwork for landmark policy implementation such as the official declaration of the Government of Georgia to join Equal Pay International Coalition (EPIC).

Greater accountability through assessments and audits: Participatory gender audits (PGAs) are considered important mechanisms to support gender mainstreaming at the institutional level, which in turn can lead to concrete recommendations and gender action plans.

Challenges/Barriers at the Local Governance and Institutional Level

Insufficient resources and coordination challenges: The project underestimated the extent of UN Women staff resources required for partnering with government agencies that do not have existing institutional mechanisms and knowledge of GE, nor how to prioritise gender issues and focus on policy-making. In addition, KIIs indicated coordination challenges with other programs and institutions.

Targeting of institutions: KIIs revealed the need to target the most appropriate institution(s) for integrating gender relevant activities and decision-making. For example, the GRB component in Georgia has been introduced with the financial offices of the municipalities that do not have the decision-making capacity nor adequate data and support from the rest of the municipal apparatus, including political support from the ultimate decision makers.

Disconnect between Outcome 1 and Outcomes 2 and 3: FGDs and KIIs at all three levels revealed that the Outcome 1 functioned as a stand-alone program, while it should have also been a foundation to enable other outcomes, especially at the policy-making level. The Outcome 1 results achieved could have been a foundation to inform WEE strategies under Outcomes 2 and 3.

Difficulties with online modalities: Similar to the FGDs, KIIs also indicated the difficulties in women's participation due to the shift to online platforms.

Gender stereotypes, unpaid care responsibilities and gender of local council members: Gender stereotypes related to women's economic engagement at the local community level, along with the unpaid care responsibilities, were seen as key deterrents for women to participate in budgeting discussions. Additionally, in locations where the proportion of men on local councils is greater, women feel hesitant to participate.

4.4 Efficiency

Summary of Efficiency Findings: How well are project resources being used?

The WEESC project delivers results in a reasonably economical and timely fashion overall given the constraints caused by the COVID pandemic, conflicts, and changes in governments. The strategic allocation of project resources to the implementing agencies has been equitably spread between the three countries, with almost half of the net budget addressing the needs of poor and socially marginalized women in the rural regions who are the primary direct beneficiaries. The timeliness of outputs and activities implementation has been reasonable given the negative impacts of both the COVID-19 pandemic and the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Project planning and implementation with stakeholders and other actors have proven to be significantly effective, yet there are a number of areas which call for strengthening. Project leadership and management also received a high approval rate from key implementing staff; however, a clearer definition of roles and responsibilities and management structure was identified as requiring some adjustment to enhance overall efficiencies.

The assessment of cost-efficiency proved difficult due to a lack of financial data based on a breakdown by budget line item due to UN Women centralized financial reporting processes, however the analysis that was undertaken did not surface any key issues.

Project M&E mechanisms put in place are standard practice, however there is a need for a consistent tracking tool to improve the efficiency of results reporting and assessment and a need for designated M&E personnel in each country. The utilization of M&E data has been limited in that the performance measurement indicators established at the Project's outset were all quantitative in nature and do not capture the gender-sensitive qualitative measurement of GE and WEE results.

11. ALLOCATION OF PROJECT RESOURCES AND COST-EFFICIENCY

The strategic allocation of project resources to the implementing agencies has been equitably spread between the three countries, with almost half of the net budget addressing the needs of poor and socially marginalized women in the rural regions who are the primary direct beneficiaries. However, the assessment of cost-efficiency proved difficult due to a lack of financial data based on a breakdown by budget line item. However, the analysis that was undertaken of the WEESC project budget across the outcomes, central and regional levels and UN agencies did not surface any key issues.

Overall Project

Overall, project resources (financial, human and material) have been allocated appropriately towards the expected results at the output and outcome levels. At a regional level, 63% of survey respondents believed the resources allocated and utilized towards the project outputs and outcomes have been used with *significant* efficiency. Furthermore, the project has been successful in identifying the regions and groups that are the most vulnerable and has met most of the vulnerability criteria established during project conceptualization. The vast majority of beneficiaries in all three countries are reported to satisfy at least one vulnerability criteria.

The total 3-year budget of USD 4,187,348 in 2018 was allocated in the following manner:

Table 10 - Overview of Allocation of WEESC Budget Resources

| | | |
|--|------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Outcome 1 (AZ & GE & AM) | 1,860,033 | (44.4% of Total or 48% of Net) |
| Outcome 2 (AM & GE only) | 740,873 | (17.7% of Total or 19% of Net) |
| Outcome 3 (AM & GE only) | 740,566 | (17.7% of Total or 19% of Net) |
| Direct project Management Costs | 536,383 | (12.8 % of Total or 8.6% of Net) |
| UN Program Support Costs | | |
| General Administration Fee | 305,895 | (8% of Net) |
| UN Coordination Levy²⁷ | 3,597 | (1% of Net) |
| GRAND TOTAL | 4,187,348 | (78% from SDC; 22% from ADA) |

Source: Prepared by the Evaluation Team based on financial information from the UN Women Interim Financial Reports to the donors.

There is evidence that 86% of the net budget was allocated to outcomes/outputs/activities (direct program costs) and that project management costs were reasonable at 8.6%, while the program support costs were fixed according to UN standards at 8%. UNDP-Azerbaijan was allocated USD 712,000 of which USD 659,259 (or 93%) was for direct program costs. Project implementation partners considered the project resource allocation efficient. UNDP-Armenia was allocated USD 637,000 of which USD 589,815 (or 93%) was designated for direct program costs. The above analysis is based on the four semi-annual interim financial reports to donors that were provided to the Evaluation Team, as financial data showing a breakdown of actual allocations to output/activity to various implementing partners within each country was not available.

The Evaluation Team also undertook a preliminary cost-efficiency analysis of the WEESC project budget that included a review of the original 2018 budget, interim financial reports for the Steering Committee's deliberation, and triangulation with several KIIs with UN Women Georgia and government officials, stakeholders and partners.

Due to UN Women's corporate policy of centralized financial reporting to the donors, the Evaluation Team was not provided with financial data / expenditures based on budget line items which complicated the cost-efficiency analysis. However, on a regional level, 72% of survey respondents believe that the WEESC project approaches and strategies utilized have been cost-efficient, although it should be noted that the allocation of funds by regional component was not available for Outcome 2.

Annex Q attempts to provide a more in-depth analysis of financial resources according to the results framework in order to estimate whether the project is on track in this regard. From this analysis, it is apparent that all the outputs were under-expended for years 1 and 2; yet both the project management and program support costs were over-expended. This can be attributed to the fixed nature of the latter two costs and the variable costs associated with project implementation given the COVID-19 and geopolitical context in the region. One key informant indicated that some of the financial resources that had been accumulated because of the pandemic (due to travel restrictions, for example) have been redirected to beneficiaries by way of economic grants. The activities where there was evidence of

²⁷ collected by the UN entity on behalf of the UN Secretariat

substantial utilization of available funds included: Output 1.1 (66%) for all 3 countries; as well as Outputs 2.1 (79%), 2.2 (89%), and 3.1 (78%) for Armenia and Georgia combined.

Without a comparison by budget line item to actual expenditures, it is difficult to assess the true cost-efficiency of the project interventions. However, the financial reports provided allow the Evaluation Team to infer that project funds were spent in accordance with the general budget parameters set for Outcomes 1, 2 and 3, and project management costs determined at the project's inception.

Georgia (Allocation of Resources and Targeting of Vulnerable Women)

In Georgia, the WEESC project has allocated resources with a view to creating a foundation for further WEE reforms in alignment with the international standards and quality assurance tools and/or policy instruments within the country. As mentioned previously, UN Women Georgia is recognized for their technical expertise. The KIIs reveal that the expertise of technical project analysts and other personnel greatly supported the achievement of results during the project's first phase and thus, represents significant value for money.

In terms of allocation of resources to Outcome 1 and targeting of vulnerable women to address intersectionality, particularly as it relates to poor rural women suffer multiple layers of discrimination, UN Women Georgia utilized a clearly defined methodology. They also trained their CSO partners (e.g. TASO and KRDF in Georgia) in using this methodology to select different women participants from marginalized communities. The methodology involved convening village meetings whereby community members identified the most vulnerable women and those who most needed empowerment so as to engage them — known as the “snowball principle”. However, this methodology was used only in Georgia. In Armenia and Azerbaijan, grassroots work is carried out through UNDP agencies and due to the specific country contexts and modalities in which these agencies function, a different methodology was deployed.

In terms of Outcomes 2 and 3 (for Georgia and Armenia), because of the above limitations, it was difficult to assess the cost-efficiency of key project activities that were linked to creating and analyzing data, developing methodologies, RIAs and GIAs, all intended to contribute to the sustainability of WEESC initiatives.

Armenia (Allocation of Resources and Targeting of Vulnerable Women)

In Armenia, the evaluation determined that the main challenge at the grassroots and community levels is access to finance. Hence, establishing women's cooperatives was thought to enhance chances for economic success and financial stability, as well as to distribute the risk across a larger group of women and contribute to solidarity in times of adversity.

As it relates to targeting of vulnerable women In Armenia, UNDP Armenia selected beneficiaries from the lists provided by local municipalities of people who received social benefits. The WEGE Programme Manager indicated that UNDP Armenia applied a rigorous approach in beneficiary selection, alongside the implementing partner consortium, Green Lane/3R Strategy, as members of the selection committee. For the grassroots interventions, there was an open call for interested project participants, consultations were held with local governments, and the subsequent selection of women entrepreneurs was based on the feasibility of their business plans.

Most of the project activities were deemed important and effective by key informants. For example, implementing partners selected vulnerable groups of Armenian women from different backgrounds and

supported them both socially and emotionally, taking necessary steps to help them improve their economic situation. The women trained reported a change in their self-esteem and outlook. As a result of this enhanced confidence, their decision-making roles within the household increased as well.

Azerbaijan (Allocation of Resources and Targeting Vulnerable Women)

In Azerbaijan, the majority of the project resources were allocated to Output 1.1, namely to establish two new WRCs in Gusar and Baku-Khazar regions and to support the existing WRC in Sabirabad. WRCs were well equipped and coordinators had sufficient resources to successfully deliver the training sessions and events. The WRCs report to UNDP-Azerbaijan on a monthly basis as to expenses related to budget allocations. Alongside government, private sector and NGO partners, UNDP organized monthly monitoring trips to the WRCs and some of the established business sites. In future, Gusar and Khazar WRCs mentioned they would need larger spaces which could also accommodate a women's shelter for short-term stays. Independent operational capacity of WRCs remains as one of the major sustainability challenges for the project according to KII respondents.

12. TIMELINESS OF OUTPUTS AND ACTIVITIES

The timeliness of outputs and activities implementation has been reasonable given the negative impacts of both the COVID-19 pandemic and the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. There was ample evidence of regular reporting of performance against identified outputs, including consideration of COVID-19 implications, changes in governments and personnel, as well as the serious effect of regional conflict on timeliness matters.

Overall Project

At a regional level, 72% of survey respondents believe WEESC project results have been delivered in a *timely* manner. In Azerbaijan, the reporting of performance against identified outputs, including consideration of COVID-19 implications on the timeliness of implementation, was assessed as sufficient. Some project stakeholders indicated that milestones and timelines for project implementation could be more efficient by decreasing some perceived bureaucratic obstacles. For example, gaps in-between meetings with UNDP and designing and delivering the training sessions at WRCs were sometimes inefficient and not well coordinated among the three implementation partners.

According to triangulated data from KII and FGD respondents in Armenia, the Evaluation Team found a perceived lack of awareness-raising campaigns or events directed towards the WEESC project, not only at the beginning of the project, but also during the implementation stage. UNDP explained that *“At the initial phase of the project UNDP Armenia team proposed to UN Women Georgia to have a communication strategy for the project (even a respective ToR was shared). However, the UN Women response was that there would be a unified communication approach within all countries, but no further action followed.”*

Within the South Caucasus region, UN Women Georgia reported that during the first phase, the project team invested a great deal of time in creating and analyzing the data (e.g. gender pay gap), developing methodologies, and creating RIA and GIA tools with the involvement of international and local experts to build the capacity in this field.

In Georgia, concurrent grassroots and policy level activities being implemented at the same time as GIA monitoring enabled the WEESC project to focus on how granting agencies addressed existing inequalities. Minor delays occurred due to COVID-19 which negatively influenced the delivery of some

project outputs in a timely manner. As a result, the project was extended until March, 2021 for the Association of Finance Officers of Georgian Local Self-Governing Units (GFA) and CARE International. According to key informants from implementing partners, the project managed to redirect COVID-related savings (e.g. travel funds and DSA) to cover some basic needs of vulnerable women in rural communities (e.g. face masks and hand sanitizers), with the assistance of self-help groups established during the first stage of the project. Related to that finding, another key informant indicated online communication is considered a resource in and of itself being very time efficient – perhaps even more so when working in several regions at once.

13. PROJECT PLANNING, IMPLEMENTATION AND MANAGEMENT

Project leadership and management enjoyed a high approval rate from key implementing staff, however there is a need to more clearly define roles and responsibilities and management structure, particularly as it relates to UNDP in Azerbaijan and Armenia, to enhance overall efficiency. There is evidence of a solid commitment by UN Women and UNDP to work together in the WEESC project both at the country level as well as at the regional level. Project planning and implementation with stakeholders and other actors has proven to be significantly effective and there is evidence of stakeholder participation in decision-making. However, there are a number of areas which could be strengthened, including greater participation of grassroots women in project planning and more frequent country-level stakeholder meetings given the complexity and scale of the WEESC project.

Overall Project

In Georgia, the leadership and management of the WEESC project has been effective to maximize results. Results-based management (RBM) and reporting enhanced the overall results and contributed to communication around project achievements. The project overcame quite a number of substantial challenges related to regional conflicts and the COVID-19 pandemic as previously indicated. Benchmarking tools such as the project document, ToC, logical framework, and M&E plans to measure project progress, efficiency, and accountability, were successfully utilized. Organizations were found to be well profiled, as was the use of social mobilization methodologies by CSOs to empower the most vulnerable communities. However, in Armenia and Azerbaijan, there has been feedback that a clearer division of roles would have enhanced project efficiency. In Armenia, focus groups and one-on-one in-depth interviews with stakeholders show that for half of the project beneficiaries and stakeholders consulted, the roles and responsibilities of the project team were unclear.

UN Women Georgia also acknowledged that the WEESC project underestimated how much staff capacity is needed for a project that is focused on policy making (i.e. full-time professionals providing technical assistance to partners) and that a dedicated, on-the-ground presence is needed in Yerevan to fully support Outcomes 2 and 3.

Regional

At a regional level, 90% of the survey respondents believed there is *effective* leadership and management within the WEESC project. Over 60% of the respondents felt the structuring of management and administrative roles were *significantly effective* in order to maximize results and communication strategies, with the sub-sections below highlighting input specific to Armenia and Azerbaijan.

At a regional level, survey answers were diverse when it came to describing how effectively the stakeholders and other actors were involved in project planning, implementation and monitoring. For project planning, respondents felt it was *moderately to significantly effective*. For project

implementation, a few people felt it was *slightly to moderately effective* with the majority indicating it was *significantly effective*. For project monitoring, most people felt it was *significantly effective* with about a quarter indicating it was *moderately effective*.

Georgia

In Georgia, there is evidence that implementing partners have been included in project planning and implementation. It was reported that CSOs have been voicing women's feedback at roundtables with UN Women, enabling them to swiftly react to the changing circumstances during the global COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, the WEESC project has been responsive to the needs of women in the region, especially women from minority and marginalized groups. Furthermore, the use of an innovative three-pronged approach for the successful implementation of the WEESC involved all relevant institutions and CSOs.

However, KIIs with UN Women Georgia staff also highlighted the following implementation challenges in Georgia: 1) the low capacity of partners at the policy level and a lack of focal points; 2) partners with high demands and insufficient resources or time; and 3) an extremely deregulated economy since 2004.

Armenia

At a grassroots level in Armenia, there is evidence that implementing partners and stakeholders were engaged closely with the beneficiaries in helping to improve their economic situation and the project reportedly had a significant impact, not only on the women but also on their entire families. The implementing partner, the Green Lane-3R Strategy consortium, also responded to interest from family members to participate in the project which helped Armenia to exceed the planned grassroots level training target. On the other hand, KIIs and FGDs indicated that women beneficiaries were not involved in preparation and design of the project and WEE programming. Addressing this gap in the direct engagement of women in project design and planning going will help with the identification and prioritization of project activities and should also help to strengthen overall project results.

KIIs with UN Women Georgia staff also highlighted the following implementation challenges in Armenia: 1) constant changes at decision making levels and not having a focal point at the ministry level; 2) political instability that made it difficult to lead policy level discussions; and 3) the fact that UN Women was not represented in the country. This was further exacerbated by COVID-19 and the inability to travel frequently.

From a project management perspective, UNDP was viewed as managing Outcomes 1 and 3 well given the multiple challenges encountered during project implementation. However, both FGDs and KIIs indicated that for many of the women beneficiaries and stakeholders, the division of roles and responsibilities between UNDP Armenia and the implementing partner consortium was unclear. There was also some confusion related to the roles of the two implementing partners in the consortium.

Azerbaijan

As it relates to project management, similar to Armenia, UNDP-Azerbaijan was viewed as managing the WEESC project well given the multiple challenges encountered during project implementation. However, KIIs indicated that there was a lack of clarity on the division of roles and responsibilities of UNDP and the implementing partners. In the case of Azerbaijan, it was also suggested that increased outsourcing of capacity building activities to implementation partners would increase project efficiency by continuously determining the learning needs of beneficiaries, designing interventions according to

those needs, providing in-field experience such as trips to established businesses, and supporting learners through an ongoing process of knowledge application.

14. PROJECT M&E FRAMEWORK AND SYSTEMS

The project M&E mechanisms put in place are standard practice; however, there is need for a consistent tracking tool to improve efficiency of results reporting and assessment. The current level of coordination between country and regional level M&E systems requires improvement and there is a need for designated M&E personnel in each country. The utilization of M&E data has been limited in that the performance measurement indicators established at the project's outset were all quantitative in nature and do not capture the gender-sensitive qualitative measurement of GE and WEE results. In order to become more robust, the performance measurement system needs to incorporate both qualitative and quantitative gender-sensitive (plus diversity-related) performance indicators to capture disaggregated data on outputs, outcomes and eventually, impact.

Overall Project

The Evaluation Team assessed the level of coordination between country and regional level M&E systems, as well as the robustness of the performance measurement system in capturing results (both quantitative and qualitative changes). It triangulated data from WEESC project plans, semi-annual reports, documents, aggregated survey results and KIIs with various members of the Steering Committee, stakeholder groups and key staff of UN Women Georgia and UNDP in Armenia and Azerbaijan. Regionally, a large majority of survey respondents believed the WEESC project has *effective* monitoring mechanisms in place for measuring and informing management of project performance of individual and joint entities and their progress towards meeting targets.

The Evaluation Team also assessed the extent to which results performance and lessons learned were integrated into internal decision-making. This was through document reviews (including strategic plans and periodic reports), KIIs with UN Women, UNDP and government officials, and with WEESC project stakeholders. In addition, a survey was undertaken to capture additional information and included people who were unavailable for interviews. The team also determined that a more robust M&E framework needs to be put in place in order to monitor and identify desired results in specific areas and their likely contribution towards meeting project objectives. Key informants revealed that the information gathered in the field was not fully utilized in order to influence project design, which resulted in a perceived weaker connection between Outcome 1 and Outcomes 2 and 3 of the project.

Regional

Within the South Caucasus Region, UN Women Georgia reported that the project does not have a dedicated M&E team nor M&E focal points for each country and believes the WEESC project would benefit from such dedicated resources. The project Manager is responsible for M&E activities, however the rest of the management team is responsible for strategic support which includes a National project Analyst who joined the team in June 2020 and one other staff member. Some of the M&E tools currently in use include a tracking tool updated every quarter by the country team/implementation partners who then manually insert the data for collection and aggregation by the UN Women Georgia *ad hoc* M&E team. In Azerbaijan and Armenia, the UNDP teams alongside the implementation partners, provide the information. Their M&E team works with the implementing partners to capture success stories and case studies for reporting and public relations purposes. Quarterly reports of UN Women Georgia to the UN also capture these narratives while quantitative data is collected by the tracking tool. However, the data appears to be only disaggregated by sex (but only partially as it was not clear how many males

participated in project activities) and not the additional categories called for by the various international human rights treaty committees, which include race and ethnicity, age group, disability, religion, income level, and so on. This is an important area for improvement.

The process of aggregating data across the country and project level was reported as being threefold. The WEESC project has a Results Monitoring Framework (RMF) and every 6 months the team updates the indicators in the RMF table to check on progress. The results measured across the log frame helps UN Women Georgia to assess how the project is progressing. They have both a project level ToC and a country level ToC, all of which are aligned to the UN Women Global Strategic Plan. The latter contains all the global performance indicators and the country offices feed into the indicators. As mentioned prior, the Evaluation Team found the quantitative indicators as being insufficient to capture the perspectives of project beneficiaries, mainly females but also males, within the rural communities targeted.

Survey respondents were divided when it came to the extent to which the monitoring data was objectively used for management action and decision making. While 45% felt it was *significantly effective*, 36% felt it was *moderately effective*, 9% felt it was *slightly effective* and another 9% *didn't know*.

UN Women Georgia has also acknowledged the need for a standard results-tracking tool that is based on a cloud-based system as current data entry is done manually via Excel files and is prone to error. A streamlined, cloud-based system that can be easily accessed and used by both UN agencies and implementing partners would improve data aggregation and analysis.

M&E Financial Resources and Capacity Building

In terms of the adequacy of allocation of resources for M&E, the UN Women Georgia Country Office intended to spend 3% of its total budget in 2016-2020 on evaluation activities, in compliance with the UN Women Georgia Strategic Note and based on their work plans and best estimates. According to the UN Women Strategic Plan and given the partnership context, the preferred modality for the UN Women Georgia Country Office was to have at least two-thirds of its 2016-2020 portfolio evaluated.

As it relates to training or capacity building exercises conducted for staff on M&E for implementation, UN Women Georgia reported that the WEESC project does not have a specific budget line item for M&E, and only has an allocation for evaluation as per the UN guideline which is 3%. Reportedly, none of the projects have a specific budget line item as M&E is typically carried out as part of project management by way of staff time, logistics, audit costs, and field visits which are incorporated into the M&E activities.

Georgia

The WEESC ProDoc states there was to be a regular monitoring mechanism in place conducted by the project Management Unit, with field visits to all three countries and participation in project events among other modalities. COVID-19 related travel restrictions limited the capacity of the UN Women team to gather the information and feedback via field visits, which also influenced the monitoring quality.

In Georgia, ensuring the project-supported reforms were linked to creating and analyzing the data, developing methodologies, RIAs as well as GIAs, would collectively better ensure sustainability of WEESC initiatives.

At the most recent annual Stakeholder Meeting conducted in February 2021 in which there were 29 participants online (including the Evaluation Team), UN Women Georgia's project Manager and Analyst co-presented on highlights of the WEESC project's achievements and priorities for the remainder of the project.

Armenia

In Armenia, project management has delivered the planned outputs that they oversee. In this regard, the implementing partners also contributed to the project's efficiency by utilizing monitoring mechanisms such as follow-up calls, field visits, feedback discussions regarding any perceived project shortcomings, outcomes, as well as short-term and mid-term evaluation leaflets/questionnaires for completion. However, some respondents reported insufficient M&E procedures, not only for the WEESC project, but for GRB in each region in Armenia.

At the most recent annual Stakeholder Meeting conducted on February 15, 2021 in which there were 22 participants online (including the Evaluation Team), UNDP Armenia presented on highlights of the project's achievements and priorities for the remainder of the project.

Azerbaijan

WRC coordinators have been delivering monthly reports to UNDP-Azerbaijan management on expenses, visits, and statistics on events held. The UNDP project team has been conducting monthly site visits to the WRCs with different stakeholders, and also checking on established businesses. Again, the COVID-19 and lockdown have hindered the quality and intensity of monitoring visits to the regions. One of the challenges was reported as being the lack of a singular M&E framework that could be communicated and updated accordingly by all implementing partners.

At the most recent annual Stakeholder Meeting conducted on February 18, 2021, in which there were 23 participants online (including the evaluation team), UNDP Azerbaijan presented on project results and priorities for the remainder of the project.

4.5 Sustainability

Sustainability: Will the Benefits Last?

There is evidence of commitment to sustainability in the form of institutionalisation across all levels, however, progress has been variable. As it relates to sustainability at the grassroots level with women beneficiaries, their ability to network through the women's group has the strongest potential to continue. Evidence also suggests an increase in income of women who have been able to secure self or wage employment; yet, for self-employed women, continuity of economic activity remains subject to vulnerability due to inconsistent markets in the current context and their limited ability to expand into new alternative markets. Wage-employed women, on the other hand, are concerned about the nature of their contract as many of them have service contracts which tend to be precarious and lack benefits.

In terms of private sector interventions, there is acknowledgement by the private sector of the importance of gender inclusive practices, however at this point, the private sector is still in the process of adopting such practices and further work to demonstrate how the WEPs and inclusive business models can be applied and operationalized in each country is needed.

Regarding local and national government interventions, there is acknowledgement and commitment from local and governments to be more gender responsive. Certain progressive practices such as GIAs and GRB are in the process of being institutionalised. However, there is a risk of discontinuity given the relatively high turn-over of government officials and further work is needed to reinforce GE and WEE mechanisms.

Project Definition of Sustainability

As per the ProDoc, 'sustainability' of results was planned to be achieved at all three levels, corresponding with the WEESC project outcomes and outputs, as follows:

- *At the grassroots level*, sustainable results will be represented by women who successfully transitioned from informal to formal decent jobs and/or whose incomes increased as a result of the project's support, as well as by women's networks (country and regional) that have been created and/or strengthened as a result of the project.
- *At the legal and policymaking level*, sustainable results will include adopted laws and policies that remove discriminatory barriers for women to participate in and benefit from economic opportunities (Armenia and Georgia; national and local government levels)
- *At the institutional level*, sustainable results will be represented by institutionalized capacities and mechanisms delivering gender-responsive programmes and services (Armenia and Georgia; national and local government levels).

15. SUSTAINABILITY AT THE GRASSROOTS LEVEL WITH WOMEN BENEFICIARIES

Women's ability to network through the women's groups has the strongest potential to continue. It is also a key source of information for women on economic activities and opportunities. While all women securing economic activity have seen positive changes in income, there is uncertainty around continuity of the economic activity as they are being affected in the context of COVID-19. In addition, there is little concrete evidence of jobs (with benefits) being created in the formal sector which continues to make them vulnerable. There is high appreciation of training courses; however, women have expressed the desire to have more targeted and needs-specific training courses.

Increase in Income

The WEESC monitoring reports indicate an additional increase in income (as measured from baseline data) for the women who received grants to set up and expand businesses and who were able to secure jobs. This was further confirmed during the FGDs. However, continuity of business and jobs was affected by COVID as women found it difficult to continue making sales. It was clear from the FGDs that women had limited or no alternative sources of finance. Women either have to rely on their own savings or apply for loans that require collateral which women cannot meet. This means in the absence of grants, these women would have struggled and there continues to be a strong desire to seek further financial assistance.

Limited Transition to Formal Jobs and Vulnerability of Income

The majority of beneficiaries were self-employed in a variety of small businesses. There was no clear indication of the formalization of those businesses nor growth prospects of the economic activities women have been investing in. In some cases, women viewed the grants as a one-time cash injection without a clear vision of business expansion. This puts the sustainability of the business' continuity at risk in the longer term. Most often women chose to invest or expand their businesses as opposed to take up jobs due to (a) a perceived need to remain in close proximity to home, (b) flexibility of work hours to manage unpaid responsibilities, and (c) absence of the ability to secure formal employment. Vulnerability of income remained an issue as many women's businesses were affected by COVID and the absence of consistent buyers or markets for their goods and services. In addition, the majority of women securing employment had a service contract (particularly as seen in Azerbaijan), which increases the precariousness of income source as the nature of service contracts means little or no employee protection or compensation in situations like COVID.

Strong Women's Networks

The WEESC project has been able to foster networking amongst women through the self-help groups, Women's Rooms and Women's Resource Centers. Use of the networks and the facilities at these centers were expressed as important changes appreciated by women. These networks have also become sources of information on economic opportunities, social capital and awareness of women's rights. Women have also been seen to use these networks to voice their opinions and communicate their needs and rights with different stakeholders. The women's networks are also seen as a key source of reference for other women. For example, 85% of FGD participants in Azerbaijan mentioned that they have referred at least 2 other women to the center.

Concerns Around Technological Challenges

Lower general digital skills, and especially digital sales skills for self-employed women, was one of the most frequently mentioned concerns by KII respondents for sustainability, especially during the ongoing pandemic where the digital skills were as equally important as general knowledge on business management and operations. This indicates the limitations around adapting new methods and training platforms or modules based on current contexts.

Variable Application of Uptake of Training

While women gained some important skills in accounting and finance, marketing, use of social media, writing abilities, etc., women also expressed their concerns on the generic nature of the training rather than aligning the training to their level of understanding or experiences. For women seeking formal employment, the absence of certification or any form of document endorsing their acquired skills, limited their ability to illustrate the importance of the training. For women engaged in self-employment, women either expressed concerns on the generic nature of trainings, or a mismatch between economic opportunities and the training subject matter. In some places, timing and location of the training was also seen as a limitation for participation. Training on mentoring and market linkages was also expressed as a critical need to continue increasing sales.

16. SUSTAINABILITY RE TRAINING PROGRAMS AND WOMEN'S NETWORKS

In the South Caucasus Region, the WRCs and Women's Rooms rely heavily on external organizations to design and deliver WEE training. There is scant clear evidence of capacity for these women's groups to continue operating independently and to offer training and information services without external support, in the absence of the WEESC project. This means that alternative models for self-reliance and financial independence need to be investigated to enhance sustainable project results.

Reliance On WEESC Project Training Content and Delivery

The delivery of training and capacity of women's groups have been facilitated and led either by UNDP or the implementing partner NGOs. In a number of interviews, it was suggested that the initial content has been developed by UN organizations and the women's groups can continue to use them. Yet there was no mention of how any upgrades or changes to the content of the training materials will be carried out in the absence of the project.

Limited Capacity of the Women's Groups to Continue Without Support

A number of activities have been carried out to improve the capacity of the women's groups; however, there has been no clear evidence of the pathway towards their independent ability to run these women's groups or centers. Some great initiatives include PwC's training of WRC coordinators in

Azerbaijan, but KIIs indicate that the WRCs need more organizational and financial support (at least for a couple of years), in order to help the beneficiaries to sustain themselves.

Alternative Models for Sustainability Need to Be Considered

Ensuring the independence and formulation of WRCs as independent NGOs is one of the major sustainability concerns of stakeholders. KIIs indicate that becoming an NGO could be an alternative solution for the women's centers to operate on their own; however, NGOs could potentially continue to mean dependency on donor funds unless they become social enterprises. At the project design phase, there was mention of testing out models such as "common pots" and "contribution of a portion SME profit into the centres" similar to World Bank projects in the southern part of Azerbaijan (where it has been seen that women who contributed in the cooperative approach were getting back twice the amount of investment). However, these approaches have not been tested yet by the WEESC project.

17. SUSTAINABILITY OF LOCAL AND NATIONAL GOVERNMENT INTERVENTIONS

There is an acknowledgement and commitment from local and national governments to be more gender responsive. Certain progressive practices such as GIAs and GRB are in the process of being institutionalised. However, there is a risk of discontinuity given the relatively high turnover of government officials and further work is needed to put GE and WEE mechanisms in place to ensure continuous reinforcement.

Commitment to Integrate Gender Equity Issues with National Priorities

Local government and other State officers acknowledge the poor understanding of GE issues but are committed to further align their operations with national priorities. However, practical application has been low. Most of the policies are top-down in nature with little bottom-up involvement. The KIIs with partner Government agencies also revealed the need for continued support from the project to address all the participatory gender audits' recommendations, particularly to strengthen the capacity component of the national and local government offices.

Integration of GRB Issues at The Local Planning Level

Across Armenia and Georgia, the inclusion of gender relevant changes in the local budgetary process is a sign of progress towards institutionalization. Continued integration and roll-out of the GRB initiative in local government budgeting processes to meet women's ongoing needs is in process, recognizing that in Phase One, GRB was initially conceived as an auxiliary strategy to social mobilization activities

Increased Regional Collaboration

The WEESC project has not been able to take advantage of the South Caucasus regional aspirations of the project as much as it had initially planned. There have been some regional exchanges and interactions, but more could be done according to some stakeholders.

Further Institutionalization of GRB

Notwithstanding the initial intention for inclusion of GRB in the WEESC project, Phase One has created expectations among rural and vulnerable women, who are now empowered and equipped to voice their needs, actual changes to the local governments' budgets in response to those needs. The FGDs with municipal representatives and CSOs reveal that for more sustainable results on the GRB component, the project needs to continue working with the decision makers at the municipality level to raise their awareness on the benefits of GRB and influence the institutionalization of GRB related work.

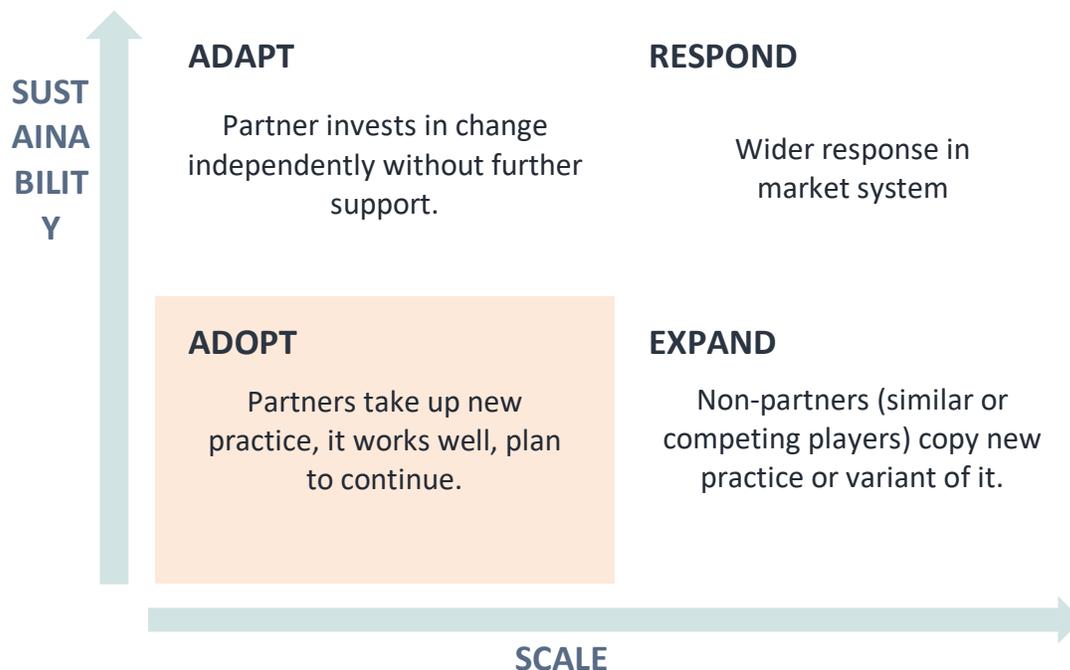
18. SUSTAINABILITY OF PRIVATE SECTOR INTERVENTIONS

There is acknowledgement by the private sector of the importance of gender inclusive practices, however at this point, the private sector is still in the process of adopting such practices and further work to demonstrate how the WEPs and inclusive business models can be applied and operationalized in each country is needed. Such demonstration initiatives also need to be more demand-driven and designed and tested together with private sector partners in the three countries, with further scope for accelerated knowledge sharing and exchange of best practice on a regional level.

Engagement with the private sector was aimed at creating a demonstration effect to improve workplace practices. KIIs with the private sector representatives in Armenia and Azerbaijan did not indicate any clear application of change in practices as a result of project support. Many of the changes made by large Armenian companies were already in place given their concern for reputations around corporate social responsibility (CSR). No new changes have been discerned as a result of WEESC project activities. In Georgia however, the work with business associations like the Georgian Farmers' Association and organizations such as 'Women for Tomorrow' strengthened the sustainability component. The Georgian Chamber of Commerce incorporated WEPs into their internal regulations and companies have indicated a desire to undertake fundraising to support GE and further respond to the gaps and needs identified.

If we consider an analytical framework for systemic change across four key quadrants presented in Figure 11 below²⁸, it can be seen that much of the WEESC sustainability progress is still at the 'Adopt' stage where partners have adopted new practices in cooperation and with support from the project, but have not yet advanced to implementing independent changes at a wider systemic level.

Figure 11: The Systemic Change Framework



²⁸ Source: The Systemic Change Framework by the Springfield Center

4.6 COVID-19 Situation and Impact

Summary: COVID-19 Situation for Women in the South Caucasus Region and WEESC Implementation:

Overall, the project has successfully adapted to the new reality, launching timely and innovative initiatives to assist women beneficiaries and their families cope with the pandemic, while also adjusting project implementation modalities and re-profiling budget resources to facilitate maximum support. For example, most of the planned activities since March 2020 have been conducted virtually and the savings derived from under-utilized travel budgets and face-to-face events were re-allocated to supporting WEE during the crisis.

However, there are also ongoing challenges and obstacles posed by the pandemic, particularly for self-employed women whose ability to put into practice benefits derived from the Project are currently undermined as many of their activities have been suspended due to shutdowns. Although the project adapted to a virtual modality and achieved some important successes, women were not able to fully attend the training sessions due to financial, technical and family constraints, although the Project has attempted to address these issues and will need to do so in the foreseeable future. Finally, the COVID-19 lockdown and travel restrictions have had a negative influence on the regional dimension of the project, although this can be counter-balanced by replicating some of the key innovations and best practices at county level in the design of Phase Two of the project.

19. COVID-19 IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR WEESC IMPLEMENTATION

Overall, the project has successfully adapted to the new reality, launching timely and innovative initiatives to assist women beneficiaries and their families cope with the pandemic, while also adjusting project implementation modalities and re-profiling budget resources to facilitate maximum support. However, there are also ongoing challenges and obstacles posed by the pandemic, including issues related to online accessibility and affordability for key project activities, negative economic impacts, particularly for self-employed women and the private sector, and limitations related to regional exchange and knowledge sharing.

COVID-19 Situation and Impact on Women in the South Caucasus Region

Women have been disproportionately affected by the impact of the COVID-19 crisis. Since the beginning of the pandemic, violence against women and girls has intensified all over the world, and the ECA region is no exception. Data from multiple sources show an increase in cases of gender-based violence, and particularly domestic violence. The pandemic has also deepened pre-existing gender inequalities, especially in women's access to social protection services and their disproportionate share of unpaid care work. Women also face heightened risks of seeing their income and livelihoods decrease.

Economic impacts are experienced disproportionately by women and girls who generally earn less, save less, hold insecure jobs and/or live close to the poverty line. In the South Caucasus Region, women constitute the majority of those employed in the sectors worst hit by business closures, including the service sector and tourism. This situation is further exacerbated by the fact that the vast majority of women's employment – 70 per cent – is in the informal economy with few provisions against dismissal or for paid sick leave and with limited access to social protection measures.²⁹

²⁹ Ibid.

In each of the three countries covered by this project, the COVID-19 crisis has evolved differently. While all three countries have taken measures to control the spread of the pandemic, the table below presents a summary of their cases as of March 9, 2021.

Table 11 - COVID-19 Situation in the South Caucasus Region

| Country | Total cases | New cases | Total deaths | New deaths | Recovered | New Recoveries |
|-------------------|-------------|-----------|--------------|------------|-----------|----------------|
| Georgia | 273,000 | 147 | 3,591 | 15 | 267,000 | 193 |
| Azerbaijan | 237,000 | 337 | 3,247 | 4 | 230,000 | 170 |
| Armenia | 175,000 | 337 | 3,225 | 170 | 165,000 | 4 |

Source: [COVID-19 Daily Statistics](#) as of March 9 2021

Georgia

In Georgia, the national government developed the Anti-Crisis Economic Recovery Plan,³⁰ which contains measures aimed at supporting micro- and small business, strengthening social protection of furloughed workers and vulnerable citizens, and supporting people residing in villages, among other measures. The plan, however, includes no explicit measures for WEE, and the government failed to identify adequate mechanisms to reach informal workers, particularly domestic workers who have been largely affected by the mobility restrictions and social distancing measures. According to the COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker developed by UN Women and UNDP, the proportion of gender sensitive measures out of the total COVID-19 related policy measures is 24% in Georgia.

WEESC Project Success in Responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic and Adapting to Challenges

- Overall, the project has successfully adapted to the new reality, launching timely and innovative initiatives to assist women beneficiaries and their families cope with the pandemic, while also adjusting project implementation modalities and re-profiling budget resources to facilitate maximum support. For example, most of the planned activities since March 2020 have been conducted virtually and the savings derived from travel budgets and face-to-face events were re-allocated to supporting WEE during the crisis.
- UN Women Georgia leveraged the country-level stakeholder group as a key mechanism to disseminate information in the early days of the pandemic; approximately 400 households were reached via phone with infection prevention information. In addition, WHO information in ethnic minority languages (Armenian and Azerbaijani) was shared through social media, reaching approximately 9,600 people; and 150 posters in ethnic minority languages were placed in municipal centres and villages.
- Due to the sudden and strict lockdown that was enforced in the target municipalities of this project, the WEESC project provided food and hygiene packages as a one-time assistance to the most vulnerable households. A total of 450 food and hygiene kits were distributed in the nine target municipalities. The packages included basic food (e.g. rice, flour, sugar, oil) and hygiene products. The value per package is approximately GEL 100.
- Women in stakeholder groups also supported one another by managing members' crops, particularly for those who were in quarantine due to COVID-19, or by helping to facilitate access to online training for those who did not have Internet access.
- Women indicated that engagement in the project during the pandemic, particularly during lockdown periods, although virtual, had a positive influence on their psychological well-being.

³⁰ Available at <https://stopcov.ge/en/Gegma> (accessed on 23 July 2020).

Women involved in the project also received varied assistance from the implementing partners: including the provision of basic hygiene products, training on stress-management and support to women-owned businesses to connect to online markets to sell their products.

- However, most had ambivalent views about the dynamics of online and face-to-face training. While most of the women in FGDs mentioned that online training and information sessions enabled them to deal with the increased burden of unpaid care work at home while attending the training, they also emphasized the benefits of face-to-face training, particularly the value of personal contact, networking and experience sharing.

WEESC Project Ongoing Challenges and Obstacles

- Knowledge sharing among the implementing partners provided an opportunity for networking and improving project outcomes in all three countries. However, the COVID-19 pandemic and related restrictions had a negative influence on the regional dimension of the project.
- Most of the self-employed women could not apply the knowledge gained in practice as many of their activities were suspended because of the pandemic.
- Due to limited access to the internet, women could not fully attend the trainings nor access information as a result of financial or for technical reasons. They either could not afford to buy internet packages, or don't have access to computers and smartphones, nor do they have access to private space at home to participate in the training as spaces are shared with other family members.
- Interestingly, women in rural settings mentioned that COVID 19 had not affected their workload, as they were already overburdened with unpaid care work, household related labour, animal husbandry and paid work.

Armenia

In Armenia, the Government developed a national strategy of socioeconomic recovery³¹ that includes some aspects of WEE such as cash transfers for married or single pregnant women who were not employed or who (or whose husbands) lost their jobs due to the crisis; and partial income replacement programmes for specific sectors including those dominated by women, such as tourism, hospitality, beauty and education. According to the COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker developed by UN Women and UNDP, the proportion of gender sensitive measures out of the total COVID-19 related policy measures is 26% in Azerbaijan.

WEESC Project Success in Responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic and Adapting to Challenges

- Overall, the WEESC project has successfully adapted to the new reality, launching timely and innovative initiatives to assist women beneficiaries and their families cope with the pandemic, while also adjusting project implementation modalities. For example, most of the planned activities since March 2020 have been conducted virtually and project implementation partners developed innovative solutions to support women, particularly in the agricultural sector, during the pandemic.
- For example, due to the COVID-19 restrictions on public events and visitations to established businesses, women beneficiaries needed consultations and technical assistance in certain areas of agriculture to increase their effectiveness. In response, implementing partners created online toolkits to address this issue, and moreover, self-employed women found new ways and technologies for selling their products.

³¹ Available at <https://www.gov.am/en/covid-19-cragrer/> (accessed on 20 July 2020).

- For women engaged in the agricultural sector, “Green Lane” implementation partner also helped women to develop social media marketing (SMM) skills to overcome the barriers of face-to-face communication and travel caused by the pandemic. An additional benefit was that women developed a special delivery system that helped to increase their income.

WEESC Project Ongoing Challenges and Obstacles

- Due to the COVID-19 restrictions, other stakeholders organized interventions to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on households that have seasonal workers. However, home-based child education was among the many problems created by the pandemic for the women as duties of mothers multiplied.
- Similar to the other two countries, all training courses were conducted virtually and this created many difficulties. Participants had trouble understanding the content, organizers felt a lot of pressure to transfer the content in an efficient way and “field visitations” were done online.
- In general, women in the Gegharkunik Region experienced the most difficulties as this area is situated on the borders with Azerbaijan. The municipalities were not accessible to external parties during the pandemic due to the double crisis (COVID and regional conflict) within their communities.

Azerbaijan

In Azerbaijan, the Government introduced programmes³² to support the economy, including, for example, income support to those who were unemployed or lost income due to the pandemic, as well as State support for entrepreneurship loan repayments. The Azerbaijani economy has not only been severely affected by the spread of COVID-19, but also by the decline in global oil prices, as oil is a key revenue source for the country. Earlier in 2020, a new Chair was appointed for the State Committee for Family, Women and Children Affairs who is supportive of the WEESC project objectives and activities. According to the COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker developed by UN Women and UNDP, the proportion of gender sensitive measures out of the total COVID-19 related policy measures is 29% in Azerbaijan.

WEESC Project Success in Responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic and Adapting to Challenges

- Overall, the project has successfully adapted to the new reality, adjusting project implementation modalities to online training and support sessions and through provision of various forms of direct assistance from UNDP to women and vulnerable families in the target regions.
- UNDP Azerbaijan has provided internet packages to the women in need, particularly in the regions of Gusar and Sabirabad, based on the income of women and their families.
- UNDP Azerbaijan has also delivered sessions on psychological assistance and domestic violence during the pandemic, which women appreciated highly and which helped to decrease their feeling of isolation.
- According to FGDs, women felt connected to the project and the WRCs during the pandemic due to regular check-in calls from WRC Coordinators to catch up on their learning, employment progress and self-employment challenges. They also created internal social media groups (Whats App groups) where they have shared news and various opportunities.

³² Available at <https://koronavirusinfo.az/az> (accessed on 21 July 2020).

WEESC Project Ongoing Challenges and Obstacles

- The rapid gender assessment conducted by UNFPA in Azerbaijan in 2020 indicates that women were more likely negatively impacted by the consequences of COVID-19 and lockdowns than men, in addition to highlighting the increase in disproportionate burden of unpaid care during the COVID-19 outbreak.
- In particular, self-employed women have experienced a major decrease in their sales and business opportunities, with only a few of them managing to digitalize their services and goods and sustain their sales over the COVID-19 period.
- A significant majority of FGD respondents (80%) expressed either negative or mixed views related to online/digital trainings. They attribute this to the poor quality of internet connection, lack of appropriate devices to access the online trainings as well as learning difficulties using digital tools.
- Challenges caused by the pandemic and a nation-wide lockdown were further exacerbated by martial law imposed as a result of the Azerbaijan-Armenia conflict. This has increased the socio-economic challenges and decreased overall economic empowerment opportunities in the target regions.



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

5 Conclusions

5.1 Overall Project

1. RELEVANCE: The WEESC Project is well aligned with national, international and UN Agency priorities in relation to gendered outcomes and women's economic empowerment in the South Caucasus region. (Based on Findings 1, 2 and 3)

The project's design aimed at bringing transformative changes across three levels – grassroots, policies and legislation, and institutions – is a highly relevant and holistic approach to WEE as it considers both the demand and supply side of women's needs, access to opportunities/skills and an enabling environment to address women's constraints to benefit from growth opportunities.

This approach was greatly appreciated across Georgia and Armenia; Azerbaijan has acknowledged the importance of this approach and mentioned the need to gradually pilot activities targeting local institutions. The choice of locations within each country was seen as highly relevant to meet the project outcomes. There is strong acknowledgement that the project design and the key issues it is trying to address are even more relevant in the current fragile context. There is need for greater cohesion amongst Outcomes 1 to 2 and 3 and paying equal attention to self-employment and wage employment in terms of policies and economic opportunities at the grassroots level.

2. COHERENCE: There is a high level of compatibility of the WEESC Project with other GEWE interventions in the South Caucasus region, as well as within the three countries. (Based on Findings 4 and 5)

The strengths of the WEESC project include the perceived expertise of both UN Women and UNDP in gender-responsive planning and programming, as well as the synergies they cultivate with government entities, CSOs, UNCTs, international donors, private sector companies and most importantly, the beneficiaries themselves. As such, UN agencies are well-positioned to play a unique coordination role with the myriad of WEE implementing partners in the region, and to identify any potential overlaps or gaps in WEE programming that need to be addressed.

This is the project's strength, yet conversely, it also represents a significant challenge in terms of coordinating WEE interventions in disadvantaged regions spread over 3 countries and programming for 3 medium-term outcomes at quite different levels, with a combined total of 7 short-term outputs.

3. EFFECTIVENESS: Effectiveness has varied across different outcome levels and across the three countries, with anticipated project results negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and the South Caucasus geopolitical crisis. However, there are good signs of progress across the different outcomes, although there is a clear need to increase cohesion amongst the different outcome levels. (Based on Findings 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10)

Under Outcome 1, much of the impact has been achieved at the more precarious self-employment level compared to wage employment. However, women's ability to apply the skills in practice was affected by a range of different challenges including the limited availability of economic opportunities available given the current COVID-19 and geopolitical context. While the generic training was regarded as useful, women expressed the need to have more specific modules or sessions aligned with the training needs or level of understanding and experience of the participants.

Under Outcomes 2 and 3, the project's work related to local institutions was highly regarded by stakeholders, and there has been progress related to women's engagement in local budgetary discussions, articulation of their needs, followed by initial commitments of resources to address some of these needs. At the national level, significant progress has been achieved in completing gender audits in selected government departments, with research and assessment findings being used to inform selected policy decisions, although many of the policies are geared towards formal employment, whereas the majority of the change at the grassroots level has occurred in the self-employment track.

4. EFFICIENCY: The WEESC project delivered results in an economical way and timely manner during the first 1.5 years of Phase One and prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020. However, there is a need to improve the project M&E framework and related monitoring system. (Based on Findings 11, 12, 13 and 14)

To a large extent, the financial, human and material resources are being utilized appropriately, however, without a rigorous tracking mechanism that is used jointly by all responsible parties and implementing partners, it is difficult to assess overall project efficiency. There are concerns with the perceived cumbersome and bureaucratic processes of UN agencies, particularly as it relates to the WEESC governance and project management model in which a high degree of coordination is needed amongst UN Women, UNDP and local implementation partners.

A streamlined project management and reporting system across the three outcome levels that engages all implementing partners will help to simplify the M&E tasks, as well as enhance transparency and inter-organizational accountability for project results. It would also make it easier to share lessons learned, good practices and innovative approaches between countries and organizations. Developing an appropriate IT based data collection and storage platform that is secure and easily accessible by all partners has been a challenge to date, which also necessitates translation of key documents into Azerbaijani, Armenian and Georgian languages from English.

5. SUSTAINABILITY: A holistic perspective of sustainability acknowledges its multidimensional aspects and explores whether the benefits will continue after the WEESC project has come to an end. While external funding can be a catalyst for the initial phase, the project life cycle must also address both long-term financial and environmental sustainability of the WEE programming. For sustainability to be achieved, there needs to be collective "buy-in" from the targeted grassroots communities (beneficiaries, municipal governments and the local private sector), legislative and policy-making branches of governments (local, regional and national), and institutions (public, private and CSOs) which ultimately impact the target beneficiaries. The WEESC project has made considerable gains in this regard; however, with two additional phases of the project planned, there is still much work to be done. (Based on Findings 15, 16, 17 and 18)

The women's groups that have been established as part of the grassroots level work are viewed as a powerful network and source for women to gain social capital and information on economic opportunities, and female beneficiaries have expressed their motivation to continue engaging. However, these networks require further investment in capacity building and additional funding in order to ensure their medium-long term viability. Limited behaviour change has been observed at the private sector level, both in terms of internal practices and uptake of policies initiated by local and national

governments, however, this is not surprising given the 2-year timeline evaluated to date and the negative impact on the private sector caused by COVID-19.

WEE institutionalisation is still in progress at the local government level, although it looks promising in light of the recent commitments to gendered resources at selective municipalities across the three countries. Similarly, some progress has been made to institutionalize gendered outcomes and good practices at the national government and policy level, but continued reinforcement and strategic prioritization is needed to ensure that these ideas and concepts are well integrated and implemented in the future.

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

A year into the pandemic, women continue to face multiple challenges: rising gender-based violence and acceleration of pre-existing gender inequalities related to disproportionate share of unpaid care work and access to social protection services. The impact of COVID on women's work has also been unequal, with women facing disproportionate risks of reduced incomes and disruptions to their livelihoods due to their concentration in sectors hardest hit by the economic shutdown.

Strong and timely collaboration amongst the UN agencies and implementing partners, and leverage of the project's strong grassroots networks across all three countries, enabled the project to directly assist women and their families with provision of critical information, supplies and financial and psychological support at the outset of the crisis. Innovations in project implementation modalities were also introduced, particularly the accelerated use of digital technologies and online marketing and services for self-employed women.

5.2 Georgia

7.GEORGIA: The WEESC project responded to the existing context and challenges with a holistic approach, enabling inter-linked interventions at the three levels. As Outcomes 2 and 3 were managed by UN Women Georgia, and in light of the support of the Tbilisi-based Gender Theme Group and its Task Force on WEE, implementing partners in Georgia benefited from their proximity to these GE and WEE knowledge brokers. (Based on Country Presentations, Learning Briefs and integrated Findings)

The three-pronged approach has been implemented through the participation of women from different backgrounds so that the policies, legislation and services respond to the needs of those most vulnerable and can empower them economically. The project also supported the development of gender machinery, including capacity development, legislation and policies to support gender mainstreaming and WEE in both Outcomes 2 and 3 which also helped to serve as a foundation for similar work in Armenia.

Several key results were achieved, including the development of assessment methodology of the gender wage gap, a Ministerial decree related to working conditions for pregnant and nursing women in Georgia, and the Georgian government's intent to join the Equal Pay International Coalition. It also identifies challenges, in particular with the GRB component under Outcome 2 related to the project's engagement with financial offices of the municipalities involved who most often lack the political support from decision-makers. More broadly, the project underestimated the level of resources and staff capacity needed for partnering with local government agencies that do not have either institutional mechanisms or GE focal points.

5.3 Armenia

8.ARMENIA: There were several inter-linkages between the three Outcomes, many benefits and a few challenges related to the geopolitical context, COVID-19 and coordination between UN Women and UNDP. The latter was further hindered by UN Women staff not being able to travel to Armenia due to COVID-19 and the absence of a dedicated representative on the ground to manage Outcome 2 at the legislative and policy-making level.

(Based on Country Presentations, Learning Briefs and integrated Findings)

At the grassroots level, poor and socially excluded Armenian women obtained some skills and opportunities to be self-employed and to a lesser extent, wage employed. They were empowered to participate in GRB discussions for local planning and budgeting purposes and a few private enterprises did adopt WEPs, although implementation of the principles needs further attention. At the legislation and policy level, the positive work on RIAs and GIAs was focused on the national level and in some cases, did not trickle down to the local level, in part due to the geopolitical and COVID-19 context. The same can be said for the institutional level which targeted the public sector as regards gender mainstreaming and developing gender-responsive plans, programs, services and strategies. All these levels need to be implemented at the local grassroots level in order to reach the poorest women from marginalized communities and their families.

5.4 Azerbaijan

9.AZERBAIJAN: The WRCs have been a powerful and effective tool for promoting women's entrepreneurship and undertaking capacity building activities for women in the regions, in spite of challenges around women's unpaid care responsibilities, perceived gender norms and inability to influence decisions at the household level. However, there needs to be more sharing of learning, mentoring and cross-fertilisation amongst the different WRCs, especially between the more mature WRCs such as in Sabirabad, coupled with further capacity-building of WRC Coordinators related to governance and diversification of sources of funding to enhance financial sustainability.

(Based on Country Presentation, Learning Briefs and integrated Findings)

While the choice of the project locations has been appropriate in terms of covering the most vulnerable segments of the population, the project has been able to meet only 52% of its target of 'number of self-employed) for at least 6 months due to improved skills and capacities'. Benefits have accrued mostly to self-employed women, while the total number of women in wage employment compared to self-employment was low. There is a need for more specialized training suited to the level of understanding

and experience of the women entrepreneurs, as well as certification for increasing their competitiveness in the job market for women seeking wage employment. Further work is needed to realize concrete results in regards to women voicing their needs in local budgeting decisions after having gained more confidence as a result of the exposure to training and economic activities. There is a need to engage the local governments and the local communities to facilitate some institutional changes in terms of making services available to women, and by women where feasible.



Armenia (No specifics – photo from Progress Report 1, Annex C Project Brief)

6 Lessons Learned

This section presents a set of lessons learned drawn from the evaluation’s findings and conclusions. that includes overall lessons from the WEESC project, as well as lessons specific to WEESC design and implementation in each of the three countries. The latter are based on the three Learning Briefs found in Annexes A, B and C.

6.1 Overall Project

1.COMMUNICATIONS AND AWARENESS-RAISING: Developing and launching a Communications and Awareness Raising Strategy at the outset of the project (phases) is an important foundation for engaging both project stakeholders and direct beneficiaries.

Given the threefold mandate of the WEESC project, its regional scope and accompanying complexity, the project encountered some challenges related to awareness of project, particularly in Armenia. As indicated previously, there was also lack of clarity related to roles and responsibilities, particularly of UNDP and the implementing partners, and this could be alleviated by conducting kick-off workshops at the outset of the project and maintaining more regular communications with implementing partners and stakeholders.

2. ENGAGEMENT OF BENEFICIARIES AND NETWORKING: Networking has featured prominently as an important benefit of WEESC Phase One. This can be further deepened and scaled in future phases, in terms of increased participation of women beneficiaries in project design/implementation, and more systematic exchanges amongst women’s networks (e.g. WRCs/Women's Rooms) and between women’s networks and government leaders, particularly at the local level.

Phase One of the WEESC project focused on awareness-raising/social mobilization, information-gathering/research, skills acquisition etc. for the grassroots women beneficiaries. Phase Two can build on this foundation and emphasize greater involvement of women in decisions related to the design and implementation of the project, while also deepening networking activities to facilitate “bottom-up” approach that prioritizes challenges, innovations and, successes. Lessons learned from these exchanges can feed into the national arena, yet also serve as a foundation for transformative change in poor and marginalized regions.

3.SOCIAL AND CIVIC EMPOWERMENT TO COMPLEMENT WEE: Unpaid care, gender-based violence and perceptions of gendered norms continue to pose significant challenges for women’s economic empowerment in all three countries. These challenges and their inter-connection with efforts to promote WEE provide a rationale for considering the expansion of the WEESC project scope to encompass relevant activities to address such issues.

Although the issue of potentially extending the scope of the WEESC project during Phase Two to encompass activities related to the civic and social empowerment of women was not formally identified in the Evaluation Matrix (sub)-questions, there is a significant amount of qualitative evidence from FGDs, that lend support for this expansion of project scope.

For example, GRB could potentially serve as a foundation for the social and economic empowerment of women during Phase Two. Similarly, greater emphasis on WRCs and Women’s Rooms as networks for

social change could also be considered, in addition to increasing the integration of families, men and selected social agents from communities.

6.2 Regional Dimension of Project

4.CUSTOMIZATION AT COUNTRY LEVEL BALANCED WITH REGIONAL APPROACH: Given the differing contexts and geopolitical situation of the three WEESC countries, evidence from Phase One has shown that customization of project design and implementation at a country-level is an important factor in ensuring that project is relevant and achieves its intended results in each country. However, there is scope to also deepen the regional dimension of the project in Phase Two.

As indicated previously, the customization of the WEESC project design at a country level has been viewed as a key strength of the project, together with ongoing flexibility of project management to adapt project activities to respond to external factors affecting project implementation.

This continued emphasis on customization should be continued in Phase Two. However, there are opportunities to deepen the regional dimension of the project, both in terms of overall WEE knowledge sharing as well as the accelerated exchange of cross-country experience, particularly in the areas of GIA, GRB, WEP engagement with the private sector and possible inclusion of TVET training for women beneficiaries across the three countries.

6.3 Georgia

5.GEORGIA: To reduce discrimination against women during employment and encourage a fairer gender division of labour to enable women’s participation in formal employment in the long run, it will be important to accelerate cooperation with the Government (both executive and legislative branches and at national and local levels) and organizations like ILO and ISET.

The provision of increased technical assistance support to the line Ministries is important in order to enhance their capacities on gender equality, and WEE in particular, and to help them ‘translate’ the strategies and action plans into policy documents and standard operating procedures. As noted previously, the role and technical expertise of UN Women is critical in this respect.

6.4 Armenia

6.ARMENTIA: The most successful aspect of the project was networking among different government entities, CSOs, private sector, implementing partners etc., in addition to the sharing of gender-based data with local and national government entities. However, going forward, the existing level of community/regional infrastructure should be assessed during project design/inception phases as it can significantly impact overall implementation of project activities and achievement of results.

At the grassroots (Outcome 1) and legislative/policy (Outcome 2) levels, there are many ideas and insights which cannot be applied because of the lack of adequate infrastructure. The level of development of community infrastructure (transportation, marketplace, employment, etc.) can significantly enhance or

decrease the effectiveness of any intervention. Therefore, all interventions at the grassroots level should take these conditions into account, but also at the legislative and policy levels.

6.5 Azerbaijan

7.AZERBAIJAN: WRCs provide women safe spaces to meet, network, exchange ideas, pursue partnerships, attract capital, gain confidence and grow professionally, which has led to a transformative impact in the country. In rural and remote areas especially, such spaces are instrumental in helping women learn more about their rights, discover untapped potential, and overcome obstacles.

To succeed and advance economically, women need the skills and resources to compete in markets, as well as fair and equal access to economic institutions. To have the power and agency to benefit from economic activities, women need to have the ability to make and act on decisions and control resources and profits. Economic advancement via ensuring and creating decent work and incomes, in addition to accessing knowledge and resources is fundamental. However, women's agency to make and act on economic decisions, and equitable systems (legal and policy frameworks, social and gender norms) are also crucial.



Georgia – no specifics. Photo from Progress Report 1, Annex C Project Brief

7. Recommendations

Based on the evaluation team’s findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are supported by evidence-based data and were formulated with the direct involvement of key stakeholders who will ultimately become the users of this formative evaluation. The process involved extensive document reviews, KIIs, FGDs and a survey, as well as several online meetings with members of the EMG and ERGs and the target audience is primarily UN Women, UNDP in Armenia and Azerbaijan and the project Steering Committee. The resultant recommendations and related actions to consider have been prioritized, particularly in light of the formative nature of the evaluation and the Phase Two design process.

The recommendations are presented in four tables. The first table of 19 recommendations relate to the WEESC project as a whole, including both regional and country levels. The following three tables identify country-specific recommendations for Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. Each of the tables include references to relevant parts of the Section 4 Findings section that back up and validate each recommendation, with detailed evidence found in multiple Annexes accompanying this report. The recommendations were validated by EMG and ERG.

7.1 Overall Project

Table 12 - Overall Project Recommendations

| OVERALL PROJECT RECOMMENDATIONS | ACTIONS TO CONSIDER | TIMEFRAME & RANKING (L = low, M = medium, H = high priority) |
|---|---|--|
| <p>1. Strategic: Ensure that implementing partners, key stakeholders and a representative sample of women beneficiaries are proactively engaged in the design of Phase Two through participatory processes.</p> | <p>Hold virtual brainstorming sessions on Zoom with women from each WRC or Women’s Room, including the Coordinators during the project design and review process.</p> <p>Conduct participatory mapping exercises in the inception phase to ensure more social inclusion as well as participatory action research to promote local ownership of research results (designing research questions, identifying risks and mitigation strategies, validating assumptions and findings, etc.).</p> | <p>Immediate: H</p> <p>Short Term: M</p> |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| <p>2. Strategic: Refresh the inception analysis to look more closely at the factors that facilitate and limit women’s ability to secure (a) wage employment, and (b) self-employment across the three countries and the policies and the service provisions that are necessary to facilitate both types of economic activities.</p> | <p>Conduct new baseline studies and/or needs assessments that take into account the gendered relations and family dynamics by consulting both females and males from different age, ethnic, and religious groups. Ensure disabled, migrant and other disadvantaged people are included.</p> | <p>Immediate: H: As part of the transition to Phase 2 <i>before deciding</i> project activities</p> |
| <p>3. Strategic: Obtain a clear understanding of market potential or growth prospects for a wide range of economic activities before offering grants to women for self-employment, vocational training, or wage employment.</p> | <p>Conduct an economic analysis in each country to identify the sectors or economic activities that have growth opportunities both for formal employment and self-employment for women in the target rural regions and also those economic activities where women are currently active in. Use the analysis to decide which sectors or activities should be prioritized for project activities.</p> | <p>Immediate: H: As part of the transition to Phase 2 <i>before deciding</i> project activities</p> |
| <p>4. Strategic: Align Phase Two with new 4-year UNSDCFs for three countries (2021-2025) along with their commitments under international human rights treaties, conventions, and relevant national legislation.</p> | <p>Incorporate/address recommendations from UN human rights committees under CEDAW, CERD, ICSECR, ICCPR, CMW, CRPD, and Special Rapporteur reports on Violence against Women as they relate to GE and WEE particularly.</p> <p>Work more closely with UNCT members such as OHCHR and UNHCR within each country, as well as national government authorities.</p> | <p>Immediate: H</p> <p>Ongoing: H</p> |
| <p>5. Strategic: Strengthen the regional dimension of WEESC based on the comparative advantage of UN Women and UNDP in the region in knowledge management by formalizing a WEE sub-regional knowledge hub within UN Women Georgia.</p> | <p>Allocate specific resources to support a hub and an associated online platform to facilitate knowledge management and sharing.</p> <p>Create a regional level and country level knowledge sharing mechanism for stakeholder coordination whereby implementation partners and key stakeholders (including other relevant donor projects) can discuss the progress and coordinate activities to prevent duplication, share tools and amplify impact.</p> | <p>Short Term: H</p> <p>Medium Term: M</p> |

| | | |
|---|--|-----------------------------|
| <p>6. Operational: Enhance the involvement of local partners with expertise in GEWE or WEE and ensure they are allocated resources sufficient to enable their participation in the project.</p> | <p>Expand partnership networks especially in the targeted rural communities, to ensure WRCs and Women's Rooms have more frequent contact with knowledgeable resource people. As it relates to the WRCs in Azerbaijan, more detailed recommendations are provided in Section 5.2</p> | <p>Short Term: M</p> |
| <p>7. Operational: Enhance the involvement of local governments and private enterprises at the grassroots level, with the objective of creating jobs for women.</p> | <p>Assess opportunities for job shadowing and volunteering for young women (and men) as part of a career development strategy for the next generation of gender-sensitive workers.</p> <p>Work with the local school authorities and chambers of commerce to create pilot GEWE projects in commercial sectors that enhance the resilience of the rural communities (i.e. that meet basic needs such as food, water, medicine, shelter, clothing, safety, and access to health facilities).</p> <p>Identify "champions" within these organisations to spearhead the programs and serve as role models in promoting gender inclusive and sexual harassment free workplaces. Mentorship could also be tested with more mature entrepreneurs to provide motivation and advisory support to other women.</p> <p>Where in-kind resources are provided by any partners, they should be both recognized and reflected in cost-efficiency analyses.</p> | <p>Short-Medium Term: M</p> |
| <p>8. Strategic: Develop further partnerships to facilitate awareness on gendered norms, and collaboration with market actors or other organisations who can offer services to support poor rural women in reducing their load of unpaid care</p> | <p>A range of models could be tested: (a) Models with the private sector, particularly with those companies that have endorsed the WEPs to promote flexible work hours so that women are encouraged to engage in formal employment.</p> | <p>Short-Medium Term: H</p> |

| | | |
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| | <p>(b) Support services to meet unpaid care responsibility for women. For e.g. this could be part of the Women’s Rooms or WRC’s business model and be linked to the “care economy”.</p> <p>(c) Establishment of daycare support in the community as a social enterprise so that women can help themselves).</p> <p>(d) Consider engaging men and other household/community members to promote positive gendered norms and reduce traditional perceptions of women’s roles.</p> <p>This can also be linked to potential expansion of project scope to include social and civic empowerment.</p> | |
| <p>9. Strategic: Demonstrate some form of “graduation” to break the cycle of grant dependence in order to continue to further support and sustain self-employed women, especially those who are currently establishing their businesses and obtaining small grants from the WEESC project.</p> | <p>Identify strategic partners who can be long term sources of working capital for women. Engage with service providers or market actors (e.g. raw material suppliers, agro-dealers/retailers, financial institutes, etc.) to pilot models for products or services that enable women to access finance or credit using buyer contracts as a guarantee, or value chain financing.</p> | <p>Medium Term-Long Term: H</p> |
| <p>10. Operational: Adjust the training program to be more learner-centric and better aligned with the needs, current level of understanding and experiences of the target groups in each country, and include the use of accelerated digital technology, including online courses and creation of videos for core modules.</p> | <p>Conduct a training needs assessment across two groups (self-employment and wage employment) in different areas and also identify the level of willingness and skill to engage with different medium, particularly, digital platforms.</p> <p>Leverage WRCs and Women’s Rooms to bring small groups together for digital training of those impoverished women who lack the facilities for online learning at home and provide related budget support for connectivity, and where required, devices.</p> | <p>Short Term: H</p> |

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| | <p>Identify strategic partners (e.g. vocational training services providers, knowledge providers and or other businesses who could outsource supply and also train women) who have the incentive to provide training or advisory/mentorship support. Collaboration with local or international service/knowledge providers might solve the certification or validation challenge and ease the way of women to wage-employment.</p> <p>Develop more modular training that includes core foundational or generic modules such as digital skills, book-keeping, management/business planning and advisory. This should be separated from advanced trainings (e.g marketing and those specific to sectors or technical skills such as production or quality control, with more practical examples); mentorship or linkages with experienced businesses/entrepreneurs. WEESC could also consider modules specific to the two WEE pathways (self-employment and employment).</p> | |
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| <p>11. Operational: Develop systems to ensure closer monitoring of training to assess relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of the learning</p> | <p>Consider contracting of specialized instruction design expertise, a blended approach to learning once COVID restrictions are eased and a higher level of resource allocation for training than has been currently allocated in Phase One.</p> <p>Conduct short tracer studies at least 6 months to 1 year after the training is complete with different cohorts to see what skills women have been able to apply in practice (why or why not) and track their progress with (self-) employment pathways in an effort to accelerate the uptake of skills and percentage of women who secure (self-) employment.</p> | <p>Immediate & Ongoing: M</p> |
| <p>12. Strengthen the M&E framework for Phase Two by harmonizing the tracking system of enhanced performance indicators as well as ensuring there are gender-sensitive qualitative indicators also built into WEESC LogFrame.</p> | <p>Designate specific M&E teams or personnel within each country and develop country-specific outputs mapped to the overall Theory of Change.</p> <p>Review the assumptions and indicators and strengthen the measurement around behaviour change and sustainability.</p> <p>Engage the regional UN Women Evaluation Unit in Istanbul to deliver capacity-building exercises for local personnel to further develop M&E competencies in the field and with implementation partners.</p> <p>Explore the use of cloud-based platform(s) for housing data and also presenting results in a user-friendly across multiple countries and partners.</p> | <p>Short Term: H</p> <p>Ongoing: M</p> |
| <p>13. Strengthen the program TOC and interventions to reflect linkage between Outcome 1 and Outcomes 2 and 3. This inter-linkage amongst the outcomes is a core element of the WEESC project design.</p> | <p>Currently, the majority of institutional interventions are geared towards employment, whereas, to date, there has been a greater uptake of women in self-employment, for multiple reasons. These include, but are not limited to,</p> | <p>Immediate: H</p> |

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| | <p>issues related to unpaid care, continued perception of gendered norms which limit women from taking up formal employment and the current COVID-19 context.</p> <p>The project needs to take these into account and develop potential activities to help mitigate these challenges. Alongside policies for employment, the project should also consider what needs to be done to reduce entry and expansion barriers in self-employment. For example, if finance is a key problem, then partnerships could be developed with banks, MFIs, savings and loan groups to introduce alternative financing models into the project. If working capital to buy raw materials is an option, the project could test out value chain financing models.</p> <p>For the employment pathway, in addition to supporting an enabling policy environment, the project should also explore which sectors offer high potential for jobs and based on this landscape assessment, work together with partners (both private and public sector) to enable increased jobs for women in these sectors. These could include such sectors as the green economy (agri-business, waste recycling, renewable energy), the care economy (daycares, elder care centres, women’s shelters), the health and safety sector (health care workers, personal support workers and emergency response workers).</p> <p>Increase engagement of implementing partners to facilitate linkages, particularly between Outcomes 1 and 2.</p> | |
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| <p>14. Operational: Improve the use of the M&E data for decision making purposes, not only for reporting purposes. The project should also revisit how it measures sustainability across different levels and focus more on adoption and behavior change.</p> | <p>Assess effectiveness and analyze (a) the variability of results from target and (b) the attrition rate from access to usage to benefit and the uptake/application (e.g. women applying the skills) and benefit (e.g. women securing jobs or self-employment). There should be a focus on assessing behaviour change and indicator(s) related to sustainability need to be revisited.</p> <p>Develop a clear sustainability and exit strategy, that is, how will these services and functions carry on in the long term without the support of external funding.</p> <p>Review and analyse findings against such indicators. See Figure 12 which illustrates recommendations for a revised TOC for Phase Two.</p> | <p>Immediate & Short Term: M</p> |
| <p>15. Operational: Enhance transparency and accountability for the use of resources (financial, human and material).</p> | <p>Report on resources utilized by all implementing partners broken down by specific budget-line items to more effectively determine more the cost-efficiency of each output/activity in Phase 2.</p> | <p>Ongoing: M</p> |
| <p>16. Operational: Position UN Women & UNDP should act as a role model for other project stakeholders as it relates to disaggregating data by sex and vulnerability.</p> | <p>UN Project Managers ensure disaggregated data by sex, age, minority status, disability, and income via agreements with implementing partners and any consultants hired.</p> <p>Share UN Women's & UNDP's corporate gender policies with all stakeholders, including gender-sensitive procurement policies, in order to contribute to the promotion of women-owned businesses and their legitimate place in the value chain.</p> <p>Encourage project stakeholders to model and promote their own gender-sensitive procurement</p> | <p>Short to Medium Term: M</p> |

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| | <p>policies to enhance their credibility with local governments, civil society and private sector companies working within the rural communities.</p> | |
| <p>17. Operational: Enhance the demand-driven aspect of the training provided to women to improve their business and their readiness for economic activities.</p> | <p>Analyze the demand or market for high-priority those sectors/services/products and the demand-driven opportunities for women in the employment sector.</p> <p>Facilitate linkages so that buyers are connected to these suppliers and employers see the benefit of hiring women. Explore promoting women’s involvement in investing in alternative initiatives such as small-scale renewable energy (solar, biogas, wind turbines), waste recycling operations (paper, plastics, glass, metals, and organic materials for composting, etc.).</p> | <p>Short Term: H</p> |
| <p>18. Operational: Develop pilot activities to demonstrate a shared incentive for the private sector to adopt policies and practices to improve absorption and retention of women at the workplace.</p> | <p>Conduct pilot initiatives with select private sector partners in relevant countries to capture and “demonstrate” the financial and social benefits of adopting the WEPs and resultant changes to corporate policies and practices.</p> <p>These initiatives could potentially include the following activities to be implemented directly with private sector partners (1) convene discussions to understand if companies are having issues with retention, absenteeism and employee turnover and also understand if there is scope for women’s (increased) employment in the organisation and rationale for the companies to hire more women; (2) conduct brief exploratory research to understand if any of the above issues are specific to women; (3) interview current female staff separately to obtain their individual perspectives and identify potential female role model/champions within the company (4) develop models with interested private sector partners to</p> | <p>Short to Medium Term: M</p> |

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| | <p>address above issues that may have been identified and align with international and regional best practice; and (5) share the learning with other private sector organisations and develop a community of practice of private sector partners committed to operationalizing the WEPs in the context of inclusive business models that embrace women’s economic empowerment.</p> <p>Given the current COVID-19 context, partnerships with local companies active in rural areas should be prioritized in Phase 2 by conducting landscape assessments in the 3 countries. There may be an opportunity to prioritize collaboration with local companies engaged in agri-business (i.e. wage employment opportunities) in light of food security issues related to COVID, and also potentially those engaged in the medical supplies sector.</p> <p>Such interventions have been undertaken with strong success by IFC in Asia, Market Development Facility in the Pacific and the Arab Women Enterprise Fund in Jordan and Egypt.</p> | |
| <p>19. Strategic: Develop a specific WEESC Phase Two COVID-19 Action Plan, including priority activities and resource allocation requirements.</p> | <p>The action plan should continue to address the ongoing immediate needs of poor and excluded women and also focus on medium-term strategic policy and institutional initiatives, as well as post-COVID recovery considerations.</p> <p>Consider the creation of a COVID-19 Gender Response Tracker that defines gender-sensitive measures as those that seek to directly address the risks and challenges that women and girls face in the COVID crisis, notably violence against women, unpaid care work and economic insecurity. Measures currently include in the tracker are clustered into 4 categories: Social Protection,</p> | <p>Immediate to Short Term: H</p> |

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| | Labour Markets, VAW, and Economic and Fiscal Policies. | |
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Source: Prepared by the Evaluation Team based on evaluation findings, conclusions and lessons learned.

7.2 Georgia

Table 13 – Georgia Specific Country Recommendations

| GEORGIA: COUNTRY-SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS | ACTIONS TO CONSIDER | TIMEFRAME & RANKING (L, M, H) |
|---|--|------------------------------------|
| <p>1. Strategic: Capitalize on the achievements and results of Phase One and deepen/expand activities in Outcomes 2/3 for improved policymaking and legislation for WEE and recommendations to ensure that the legislation harmonizes with international standards.</p> | <p>Continue providing much needed support to the line Ministries in order to enhance their GE and WEE capacity and help them translate their strategies and action plans into policy documents and standard operating procedures.</p> | <p>Short to Medium Term: M</p> |
| <p>2. Strategic: Accelerate work with municipal decision-makers to raise the awareness of the benefits of GRB and influence the institutionalization of GRB related work</p> | <p>GRB has been positioned as an auxiliary strategy for social mobilization activities in Phase One of the project. It has been successful in this regard, and in Phase Two, the WEESC project should address the current expectations among rural and vulnerable women that their voices will be heard by municipal government as it relates to GRB.</p> <p>Phase Two should expand the interaction with municipal governments to include decision-makers who can drive increased awareness and also ensure commitment to institutionalization of GRB at a municipal level.</p> | <p>Short to Medium Term: M</p> |

Source: Prepared by the Evaluation Team based on evaluation findings, conclusions and lessons learned.

7.3 Armenia

Table 14 - Armenia: Country-Specific Recommendations

| ARMENIA: COUNTRY SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS | ACTIONS TO CONSIDER | TIMEFRAME & RANKING (L, M, H) |
|---|--|-------------------------------|
| <p>1. Strategic: To strengthen the linkages between the grassroots, law and policy, and institutional levels, allocate additional resources to working with local governments on reforming their bylaws and policies to encourage WEE and GE.</p> | <p>Identify further capacity-building (training, mentoring, coaching, etc.) and institutional-strengthening needs related to good governance, including e-governance for transparency.</p> <p>Work with local male leaders and administrators to change their perceptions on women in the public workforce. Identify GEWE champions to change community perceptions as to women’s roles in the economy and the “power of the purse”.</p> | <p>Short-Medium Term: M</p> |
| <p>2. Operational: Encourage local government to embrace e-governance, especially in times of COVID and beyond the pandemic, so as to enhance transparency around GE and WEE.</p> | <p>Consider developing a radio or TV program in Armenian which reaches the rural populations as well to promulgate developments concerning GE & WEE in times of COVID and beyond.</p> | <p>Short Term: M</p> |
| <p>3. Operational: Raise the awareness of local leaders, private sector companies, and the general public at public events or via online media about best practices and innovative approaches to GE and WEE.</p> | <p>Consider the establishment of a new Center for Creative Technology in Azerbaijan and Georgia as pilot projects like the one in Vardenis, Armenia. Assess how each Centre incorporates lessons learned from Phase One and</p> | <p>Medium Term: M</p> |

Source: Prepared by the Evaluation Team based on evaluation findings, conclusions and lessons learned.

7.4 Azerbaijan

Table 15 – Azerbaijan Country-Specific Recommendations

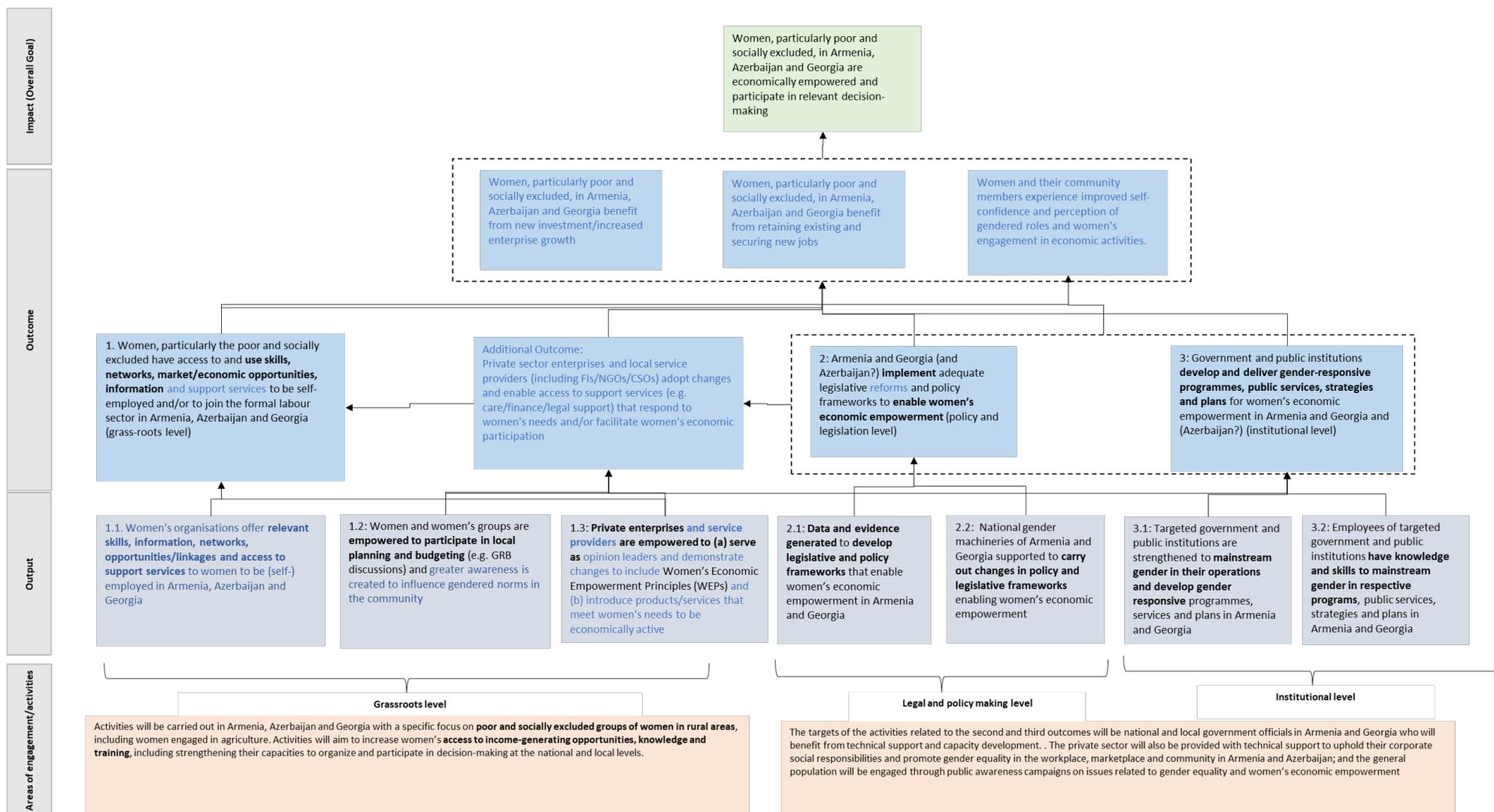
| AZERBAIJAN: COUNTRY SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS | ACTIONS TO CONSIDER | TIMEFRAME & RANKING (L, M, H) |
|---|---|--------------------------------|
| <p>1. Strategic: During Phase Two, explore the integration of Outcomes 2 and/or 3 in Azerbaijan, using a similar approach to collaboration with UNDP Armenia.</p> | <p>Recruit a designated UN Women focal point in country to manage these outcome(s), shares its expertise, and works closely with UNDP alongside a network of public sector stakeholders, and outsourced NGOs, local and/or international WEE experts.</p> <p>Develop gender-responsive entrepreneurship support mechanisms in collaboration with the Ministry of Economy and Industry and National Fund of Assistance for Entrepreneurship.</p> <p>Partner with the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Azerbaijan, to assess and facilitate gender-responsive social protection programming and early childhood care services, given the high unpaid care responsibilities of women that limit their economic engagement.</p> <p>Identify leading gender-responsive businesses in the project regions, as well as women’s business associations.</p> | <p>Immediate-Short Term: H</p> |
| <p>2. Strategic: Prioritize support to the Azerbaijani WRCs to build both governance and funding diversification models and options to lay the foundation for long(er) term sustainability.</p> | <p>Formulate both a capacity building/governance and exit strategy for the existing WRCs in order to develop a financially sustainable model(s) to enable independent operation.</p> <p>Test a number of alternative models such as contribution of a portion of income generated by</p> | <p>Short-Medium Term: H</p> |

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| | <p>women to support the services provided by the WRCs, social enterprise models and cooperative models (of profit sharing), etc.</p> | |
| <p>3. Operational: Engage private sector entities in the implementation of WRC activities, as well as in the design of capacity building and sustainability processes and models.</p> | <p>Use the WRCs to connect women to markets and, in exchange, a portion of the sales commission would support the WRC services.</p> <p>Connect the WRCs to broader women’s business associations or their regional chapters to facilitate potential mentorship and angel investor opportunities.</p> | <p>Short-Medium Term: M</p> |

Source: Prepared by the Evaluation Team based on evaluation findings, conclusions and lessons learned.

Based on multiple lines of evidence, the Evaluation Team has developed a revised the Theory of Change for consideration in Phase Two design to better reflect qualitative indicators and behaviour changes integral to the project’s success. The proposed changes are illustrated in blue text below.

Figure 12 - Proposed Revised Theory of Change



List of Annexes

There are 18 Annexes to this report compiled in separate companion document:

| | |
|----------|--|
| Annex A: | Azerbaijan Learning Brief |
| Annex B: | Armenia Learning Brief |
| Annex C: | Georgia Learning Brief |
| Annex D: | WEESC Partnership Map |
| Annex E: | Results Tracker |
| Annex F: | Evaluation Terms of Reference |
| Annex G: | Bios of Evaluation Team |
| Annex H: | Evaluation Matrix |
| Annex I: | Data Collection Tools: Key Information Interview Questionnaire Guide |
| Annex J: | Data Collection Tools: Focus Group Discussion Guide |
| Annex K: | Data Collection Tool: Survey |
| Annex L: | Documents Reviewed |
| Annex M: | List of People Interviewed |
| Annex N: | Preliminary Findings in Azerbaijan |
| Annex O: | Preliminary Findings in Armenia |
| Annex P: | Preliminary Findings in Georgia |
| Annex Q: | WEESC Project Outputs, Activities and Expenditures to June 2020 |
| Annex R: | Explanation of Proposed Revisions to Theory of Change and Indicators |